

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 3 MAY 2021



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## WINDOWS



## 'I'm quitting this space', declares Prashant Kishor

**Kolkata, May 2:** Election strategist Prashant Kishor, who guided the TMC to what is likely to be a spectacular victory, announced Sunday he is "quitting this space", after firing a parting shot at the Election Commission, accusing it of being an "extension of BJP".

"I am quitting this space," he told a news channel after trends showed a landslide victory for the TMC, the party whose election strategy he helped craft for the Assembly elections.

"I have never seen a more partial Election Commission, it did everything to help BJP... from allowing use of religion to scheduling poll and bending rules, EC did everything to help the BJP," he said, calling the poll panel an "extension" of the saffron party.

**Full report on Page 3**

■ Shock defeat for CM in Nandigram, recount sought ■ Bigger Didi role nationally ■ Huge Congress setback

# Mamata scores hat-trick, jolts BJP

**SANJAY BASAK**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 2

Rejecting saffron, West Bengal has turned green yet again.

It was a nail-biting start as the BJP and Trinamul Congress moved neck and neck towards the finishing line as the counting began for the West Bengal elections early on Sunday morning. But by 10 am, the Trinamul Congress led by its firebrand chief Mamata Banerjee had dashed past by trampling all over the so-called formidable lotus brigade.

Confusion and controversy plagued the most-watched electoral battle in Nandigram. The Election Commission, which had

earlier declared Ms Banerjee as the winner by 1,200 votes, later retracted and declared her former aide and BJP candidate Suvendu Adhikari as the winner by a margin of nearly 1,700 votes. Ms Banerjee, while accepting the verdict of the people, intends to move the courts against the Election Commission.

On Sunday evening, the TMC approached the state chief electoral officer and demanded a recount in Nandigram. Sources said that the recount had begun Sunday night, and its outcome would be known by Monday. The TMC also lodged a strong protest against the refusal of the returning officer of



TMC supremo and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee flashes the victory sign in Kolkata on Sunday. — PTI

**It is the victory of the people of Bengal, the victory of democracy. Bengal has saved India today. This landslide victory came after fighting against several odds — the Centre, its machinery, its agencies. This victory has saved humanity.**

— **Mamata Banerjee**  
West Bengal CM

the constituency to order an immediate recount, saying this was "bad in

law and coloured". The Election Commission's role in the West Bengal

election has always been under the spotlight, ranging from its decision to

## Mamata: TMC won 221 seats; Covid to be our top priority

*Nandigram: Didi to move court, alleges some 'cheating, looting'*

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI**  
KOLKATA, MAY 2

Emboldened by the Trinamul Congress' lead in the vote counting of the West Bengal Assembly poll results, chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday rose to her feet, firm on the ground, and claimed her party had won 221 seats, coming to power for the third time running in a "landslide victory" that broke the TMC's record of bagging 211 seats in 2016.

The TMC supremo, however, suffered defeat in Nandigram in a dramatic twist to her protege-turned-adversary Suvendu Adhikari of the BJP by only 1,956 votes only. The close fight saw Ms Banerjee emerging as

having won by 1,200 votes initially. She has vowed to move the courts to challenge her defeat. Late Sunday night, the Election Commission began the process of a recount in Nandigram after the TMC went to the chief electoral officer and complained of "tampering and mismanagement of numbers from EVMs and said the counting was stalled from time to time and was not reported by the poll panel". In a letter to the CEO, the party alleged that valid votes in favour of Ms Banerjee were rejected while some invalid votes for the BJP were counted.

In the evening, Ms Banerjee told the media at her Harish Chatterjee

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## Did TMC turncoats infect BJP with anti-incumbency?

**YOJNA GUSAI**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 2

For West Bengal, the BJP continues to be an "outsider" as Mamata Banerjee-led TMC registered its third consecutive win in the state which had witnessed one of the most acerbic and high-decibel campaigns by both the parties. Though the results indicated consolidation of minority votes in ruling TMC's favour, the BJP, in terms of Assembly constituencies, gained overwhelmingly, with the party bagging more than 70 Assembly seats as compared to its previous tally of mere three seats in the

292-member Assembly. Results proved that a majority of voters refused to ditch the "Daughter of Bengal" for the BJP's promise of turning the state into "Sonar Bangla" and they also refused to accept the saffron party's vision for "Asol Poribortan".

In West Bengal, which has a history of personality driven politics, the BJP's bevy of "star campaigners", including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, failed to overshadow Ms Banerjee's personality and leadership despite anti-incumbency, charges of corruption and deteriorating law and

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WEST BENGAL				292 TOTAL SEATS	147 MAGIC MARK
PARTY	2021 (Seats)	2016 (Seats)	GAIN/LOSS 2016/2021		<b>MAMATA BANERJEE</b> Ms Banerjee rose to her feet, firm on the ground, and claimed the TMC had won 221 seats, coming to power in a 'landslide win'
TMC	209	211	-2		
BJP	81	3	+78		
Left+	0	76	-76		

KERALA				140 TOTAL SEATS	71 MAGIC MARK
PARTY	2021 (Seats)	2016 (Seats)	GAIN/LOSS 2016/2021		<b>PINARAYI VIJAYAN</b> With win, the CM has emerged as the indomitable leader in Kerala, the last bastion of the Communists in the country
LDF	99	91	+8		
UDF	41	47	-6		
BJP	0	1	-1		

ASSAM				126 TOTAL SEATS	64 MAGIC MARK
PARTY	2021 (Seats)	2016 (Seats)	GAIN/LOSS 2016/2021		<b>HIMANTA BISWA SARMA</b> Finance minister and BJP's key strategist Himanta Biswa Sarma won from Jalukbari with a margin of more than 1L votes
BJP+	75	86	-11		
CONG+	49	26	+23		
OTH.s	2	14	-12		

TAMIL NADU				234 TOTAL SEATS	118 MAGIC MARK
PARTY	2021 (Seats)	2016 (Seats)	GAIN/LOSS 2016/2021		<b>M.K. STALIN</b> DMK chief M.K. Stalin set to become the CM for the first time. EPS sweeps to a win in his Edappadi constituency.
AIADMK+	76	136	-60		
DMK+	157	98	+59		
OTH.	1	0	+1		

Congratulations to Mamata Didi for @AITCofficial's win in West Bengal. The Centre will continue to extend all possible support... to fulfil people's aspirations and also to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. — **Narendra Modi, Prime Minister**

## BJP set to form Assam govt for a 2nd term, CAA fails to hurt party

**MANOJ ANAND**  
GUWAHATI, MAY 2

Against all odds, including massive protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies on Sunday won a comfortable majority by securing a sizeable lead against the Congress-led alliance and is all set to form the government in Assam. The BJP and its allies won 75 seats against the Congress and its allies' 49 of Assam's 126 Assembly

seats. At the time of going to the press, the BJP was leading in 56, its allies, Asom Gana Parishad and United People's Party, Liberal, were ahead in 11 and eight seats respectively.

The Congress was leading in 28 seats and its ally All India United Democratic Front in 14. Assam Jatiya Parishad and Rajior Dal, the two parties formed as an outcome of the anti-CAA protests could not manage to win a single seat. However, jailed anti-CAA

activist Akhil Gogoi was leading in Sibsagar seat whereas Assam Congress president Ripun Bora faced a humiliating defeat in Gohpur.

The Congress had taken a strong anti-CAA stance and promised it would not implement the legislation in Assam if it came to power. That was part of the party's five guarantees to voters.

Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal won from Majuli constituency, finance and health

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## DMK storms back to power in TN, Stalin set to be CM

**G. BABU JAYAKUMAR and D. SEKAR**  
CHENNAI, MAY 2

The DMK is set to storm Fort St. George for the sixth time after a long gap of 10 years, with party president M.K. Stalin set to become the chief minister for the first time as the results of the April 6 elections for the Assembly till midnight Sunday indicated a clear victory for the party.

Tamil Nadu governor Banwarilal Purohit is likely to swear in Mr Stalin as chief minister at a simple function inside Raj Bhavan in view of the Covid-19 pandemic, though the party is said to have shown interest in having a gala affair at the University Auditorium.

Throughout Sunday, the DMK and its allies were doing well even as the counting of votes went on with intermit-

## NDA on way to form govt in Puducherry

**Puducherry:** The AINRC-led NDA looked all set to capture power in Puducherry by winning 16 seats of the 30 Assembly seats. The Congress-led front emerged victorious in nine constituencies and the Independents in five as the counting for votes polled in the April 6 elections was still underway. — PTI

tent breaks to sanitise the rooms every two hours since 8 am, when the process began.

The alliance emerged a clear winner as counting progressed, prompting leaders from across the country to send congratulatory messages and by afternoon it became clear

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## Pinarayi bucks trend, scripts Kerala history

*Huge setback for Cong, BJP draws blank*

**GILVESTER ASSARY**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 2

The ruling CPI(M)-led LDF on Monday scripted history in Kerala by bucking the trend of a change in government after every five years. It became the first ruling side to win re-election in the past four decades. It also became the first Left government to repeat victory in the history of the state.

Out of the total 140 seats, the LDF led in 99 seats. Only twice earlier has the

Left got more than 99 seats, and that was in the late 1960s under late E.M.S. Nambudiripad.

While the results of a majority of seats have been declared, counting is still in progress in some constituencies. The Congress-led UDF received a huge setback as it managed to win just 41 seats, which is seven less than its 2016 tally. The BJP, which conducted a high-voltage campaign, bringing in Prime Minister Narendra Modi, home minister Amit

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# Hospitals, embassies send O2 SOS as India reports 4L cases

*Final yr MBBS students, nursing staff may be called for duty ■ Cong youth wing rushes to help NZ high commission, irks govt*

**VINEETA PANDEY**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 2

India continued to struggle to contain Covid-19 as close to 4 lakh fresh cases and over 3,500 deaths were reported on Sunday. Hospitals and patients continue to beg for beds and oxygen while state governments keep urging the Centre to increase their quota and provide more oxygen.

Several hospitals in Delhi and some embassies sent SOS messages for oxygen and Delhi MLAs

and the Congress' youth wing leaders rushed cylinders in time.

"We have arranged five D Type oxygen cylinders for Rainbow Children's Hospital from our Rajghat Response Point. The government's oxygen reserves are extremely limited due to reduced oxygen supply to Delhi, but we are doing everything possible to avert any untoward incident," tweeted Delhi MLA Raghav Chaddha after receiving an SOS message from the hospital that has neo-natal care and prema-

▶ **SEVERAL HOSPITALS in Delhi and some embassies sent SOS messages for oxygen & Delhi MLAs and the Cong's youth wing leaders rushed cylinders in time**

ture babies on oxygen. Later, the hospital got 10 more cylinders from its vendors.

Several diplomatic missions are now reporting Covid infection among their staffers. Slovenia, United States, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan,

Pakistan, Israel, New Zealand and Tanzania are some of the embassies and high commissions that have reported Covid cases. Some have been cured while some are still under treatment. Last week Tanzania lost its defence advisor Col. Moses Beatus Mlula to Covid. He was under treatment at the Base Hospital, Delhi Cantonment.

On Saturday the Philippines embassy and on Sunday the New Zealand high commission were provided oxygen by

Congress workers much to the dislike of the ministry of external affairs as the Opposition slammed MEA for not doing enough for the diplomatic corps. The New Zealand HC had tagged youth Congress leader B.V. Srinivas seeking help.

MEA reacted by saying that the chief of protocol and heads of divisions are in touch with all high commissions, embassies and that the MEA is responding to their medical demands, especially

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Family members of Covid-19 patients wait to fill their empty cylinders with medical oxygen outside an oxygen filling agency in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

## WEATHER

Max: 37°C  
Min: 27°C  
RH: 24%  
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Partly cloudy

## ASTROGUIDE

**Plava:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Chaitra Bahula Saptami till 1.44 pm  
**Star:** Uttarashada till 8.23 am  
**Variyam:** 12.24 pm to 2 pm  
**Durmuhurtam:** 12.38 pm to 1.29 pm; 3.10 pm to 4.01 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 7.30 am to 9 am  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.57 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.38 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 12.46 AM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 11.18 PM**





## SHORT TAKES

## DU defers final year exams amid Covid surge

**New Delhi:** Delhi University has decided to defer final year examinations amid rising COVID-19 cases in the city, officials said on Sunday. The final year and final semester exams were supposed to begin from May 15 but will now begin from June 1. They will be in online mode and held in the open book format. "We held a meeting on Saturday with all the heads of the departments and deans. The meeting was chaired by the vice-chancellor. It was decided that the exams be postponed to June 1," D.S. Rawat, dean of examinations, DU, said. Rawat said that the decision on exams for intermediate semesters will be taken later. Teachers and students have been demanding the deferment of exams and even cancellation. The Delhi University Teachers' Association had written to acting vice-chancellor Prof. P.C. Joshi over the issue. "... the University must take a sensitive view of the situation that students and teachers find themselves in - no one is in a position to write or conduct examinations at this moment. Hence, we request you to consider cancelling examinations for all students and decide upon alternative means to evaluate students. Deadlines for submission of internal assessment must be extended," they had said in a letter dated April 30. — PTI

## 3 arrested for assaulting, robbing man

**New Delhi:** Three men were arrested for allegedly assaulting and robbing a person in south Delhi's Sangam Vihar area, police said on Sunday. The accused have been identified as Sunny (21), Ritik (20) and Mohammad Izaz (18), residents of Sangam Vihar, they said. Police said one Azad was assaulted and robbed of his phone and Rs 1,000 cash around 11.15 pm on April 18 while he was returning home from his brother's house. A case was registered under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code on April 19. Later, he died during treatment on April 25 and section 302 (murder) was also added in the case, a senior police officer said. On April 26, police analysed CCTV footage in which the accused men were seen, they said. "In the evening, one of them was identified as Sunny. Police laid a trap near his house and arrested him. On his instance, his associates Ritik and Izaz were also arrested," deputy commissioner of police (south) Atul Kumar Thakur said. On the instance of Izaz, the robbed mobile phone was recovered. — PTI

■ 20,394 cases in 24 hours with positivity rate of 28.33%, overall death toll stands at 16,966

## Delhi records over 400 deaths for 2nd day in a row

**New Delhi, May 2:** The national capital reported 407 Covid-19 fatalities and 20,394 cases with a positivity rate of 28.33 per cent on Sunday, according to a bulletin issued by the Delhi health department. This is the second consecutive day the capital has recorded over 400 fatalities due to the deadly virus.

It had reported 412 deaths on Saturday, the highest so far; 375 on Friday, 395 on Thursday, 368 on Wednesday; 381 on Tuesday, 380 on Monday, 350 on Sunday, and 357 on Saturday last week, according to government data.

Delhi had recorded 25,219 cases on Saturday, 27,047 on Friday, 24,235 on Thursday, 25,986 on Wednesday, 24,149 on Tuesday, 20,201 on Monday, 22,933 on Sunday, and 24,103 last Saturday. The city has so far recorded 11,94,946 cases, of which over 10.85 lakh have recovered. The death toll due to the viral disease stands at 16,966, the bulletin said.

A total of 71,997 tests, including 17,510 rapid-antigen tests, were conducted in a day. The city currently has 92,290 active cases, it added.

A significant number of 24,444 patients recovered from the virus during the period. Out of the 21,483 Covid beds in various hospitals of the city, only 1,347 are vacant. A total of 50,742 patients are recovering in home isolation, the bulletin said.

According to it, 49,633 vaccine doses were administered in a day and included 28,775 who received the first dose and 20,858 who got the second dose.

The number of containment zones in the city has jumped to 42,098 from 39,556 the previous day.

## Vaccination for 18-45 age group from today

**New Delhi, May 2:** The third and the largest phase of vaccination, under which beneficiaries in the 18-45 age group will be given jabs against coronavirus, will begin here on Monday.

Around 90 lakh people in this category will be eligible for the jabs. Five vaccination booths each have been set up at 77 schools for the inoculation exercise, an official said on Sunday.

The government set up vaccination centres at schools to accommodate a high number of beneficiaries, he said.

At present, jabs are being given to those aged above 45 at around 500 centres in the national capital.

Pre-registration will be mandatory for beneficiaries in the 18-45 age group and there will be no walk-ins for this category for now, the official said. — PTI

The Centre on Sunday moved the Delhi high court seeking recall of its order directing supply of entire allocated oxygen of 490 metric tonnes (MT) to the national capital and warning of contempt action for failure to do so.

The Central government, in its application seeking recall of the high court's May 1 order, said its officials are working hard and such orders would have a demoralising effect on them. — PTI

## Delhi store owner held for selling medical equipment at inflated rate

**New Delhi, May 2:** A medical store owner was arrested for allegedly selling coronavirus-related equipment at prices four times higher than the MRP, police said on Sunday.

The accused has been identified as Sudhir Gahlot, a resident of Mohan Garden, Uttam Nagar, they said.

The Jamia Nagar police station was informed that medical stores are selling equipment used for treatment of Covid patients at exorbitant rates.

▶ A DECOY client reached the medical store to purchase the equipment. The sales executive demanded four times higher rates than the maximum retail price of the equipment.

On Saturday, police were tipped off that the owner of Advanced Medical Home Care was selling the medical equipment at four times higher rates than the MRP, a senior police officer said.

Thereafter, a decoy

client reached the medical store to purchase the equipment. The sales executive demanded four times higher rates than the maximum retail price of the equipment. Meanwhile, a raid was conducted and the accused was apprehended, the officer said.

During the raid, three oxygen flow meters, two water nozzles and 18 oxygen pumps were recovered from his possession, police said, adding he was previously involved in five cases of cheating. — PTI



A temporary Covid care centre being prepared with beds and oxygen support at Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

## Hospitals battle with acute oxygen shortage, send desperate SOS calls

**New Delhi, May 2:** Battling an acute shortage of oxygen, some hospitals in Delhi on Sunday sent out desperate SOS calls to authorities to replenish their dwindling stocks, with one healthcare facility even requesting the government to shift out its patients.

Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital in Malviya Nagar on Sunday sounded an alarm about their depleting stocks around noon, saying 50 people, including four newborns, were "at risk".

The hospital does not have a liquid oxygen storage tank and depends on oxygen cylinders from a private vendor. "It has become a daily fire-fight in the absence of a continuous supply. We require around 125 oxygen cylinders a day," the official

said. The hospital said it received 20 oxygen cylinders around 1:30 pm with the help of government authorities.

Aakash Healthcare in Dwarka appealed to government authorities to shift patients to other facilities "so that they can be saved". "CRY FOR HELP: Received only 5 #oxygen cylinders after running around the entire day, not more than 60 mins left to save lives of more than 250 patients," a tweet posted from the hospital's handle read.

In the evening, Yateesh Wahaal, CEO of Vimhans Hospital in South Delhi, requested "urgent support to save precious lives".

He said the hospital supplier has been changed as per a government order. The new supplier is "refusing to supply and doesn't

have stock for next 7 days to meet our requirement". Around 135 patients are on oxygen support. Of these, 94 are in the ICU, he said.

Sitarum Bhartia Institute of Science and Research also took to social media seeking help from authorities. "Forty-five COVID patients admitted. Need liquid oxygen supply by 5 PM. Help!!" it tweeted.

The Hakim Abdul Hamid Centenary Hospital, where 110 patients are admitted, sounded an alarm about depleting oxygen supplies around 2 pm. "The city government is responsible for this situation. The supplies have become erratic ever since the government has taken over," Dr Sunil Kohli, the head of the department of medicine, said. A tanker carrying oxygen reached the facility around 6 pm. — PTI

## Metro to run at 15-minute frequency

**New Delhi, May 2:** Metro trains will run at a 15-minute frequency in the peak hours during the weekly lockdown, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation said on Sunday.

"Services during morning (7 am to 11 am) and evening (4 pm to 8 pm) peak hours across the network will be available with a frequency of 15 minutes," the DMRC tweeted. For rest of the day, services will be with a frequency of 30 minutes. — PTI

## MHA guidelines soon for setting up micro, mini containment zones

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 2

Union home ministry will soon come out with detailed guidelines for setting up "micro and mini containment zones" in States which are consistently having a double digit positivity rate. Earlier this week Home Ministry had advised States to go in form specific local lockdowns or containment zones where positive rate of Corona patients was high.

Sources said the ministry is in the process of finalising detailed guidelines

which will be shared with all the States and Union Territories. The States will be given a free hand to further change or amend these guidelines according to their local requirements.

Some States like Haryana, Delhi, Maharashtra have already announced weekly lockdowns while others have gone for weekend or night curfews. However, there is a growing sense among all States that they will have to go in for "area specific lockdowns."

Home ministry has roped in experts from different

Ministries, particularly the Health Ministry, to draft a detailed plan which will then be shared with the States.

"These will be like a guide or roadmap for the States so that they have a broad idea of what needs to be done. But they will have the final word on what kind of lockdown they want to put in place keeping in view their local requirements. There are 10 States which are recording a very high positivity rate so some urgent stringent measures have to be taken," a senior official remarked.

## Mamata scores hat-trick, jolts BJP

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countered it by saying "Khela Shesh". However, Ms Banerjee made his words come true, but for the BJP, not the TMC.

The results clearly indicated the so-called anti-incumbency factor against the TMC existed only in the BJP's poll propaganda. This is the third consecutive victory for the TMC supremo.

The West Bengal results could have a major impact on national politics. Following this historic win, Ms Banerjee has emerged as the Opposition's tallest face against the Narendra Modi government. The Opposition parties might now decide to rally behind the Trinamul supremo.

All eyes would be now on the forthcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, where the Yogi Adityanath administration was in the eye of the storm after the spiralling Covid-19 cases and deaths in the state.

In other states, the results were on the expected lines. While the BJP was moving towards retaining Assam, the DMK is all set to trounce the ruling AIADMK in Tamil Nadu and the LDF led by the CPI(M)'s Pinyari Vijayan was set to create history by returning to power in Kerala.

If the collapse of the Left seemed complete in West Bengal, where the Sanjukta Morcha (Left-Congress-Indian Secular Front) was struggling to open its account, the Congress, led by Rahul Gandhi, seemed to be at the political crossroads all over again.

The Congress not merely lost in Assam, but also paid a heavy price for its electoral

miscalculation of aligning with the Left parties as well as the Indian Secular Front in West Bengal. The party also lost in Rahul Gandhi's new home turf, Kerala. The only face-saver for the Congress was its move to hitch a ride on the winning DMK's wagon in Tamil Nadu.

The West Bengal verdict was one against the highly polarised, divisive and communal campaign unleashed by the BJP. The BJP openly played the religion card, talked about Hindu pride, with the home minister even declaring the "Jai Shri Ram" slogan was a "symbol of anti-appeasement politics" and the BJP leaders went around saying "if the TMC returned to power, it would turn Bengal into Pakistan". The PM, addressing rallies, said while referring to Ms Banerjee: "You, get irritated by the chants of Jai Shri Ram, but you'll now have to hear chants of Har Har Mahadev."

The divisive campaign not only led to a complete consolidation of the Muslim vote in the TMC's favour, but, stunning the saffronites, even the majority of Bengali Hindu bhadraloks didn't vote for the BJP. What also offended Bengali sentiments was the PM's taunts against the CM when he mocked her as "Didi o Didi". UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath's harping on "love jihad" and the promise to introduce "anti-Romeo squads" in West Bengal also worked against the saffron party.

The BJP's corruption charges against the Mamata Banerjee government fell by the wayside as the party not

only admitted the allegedly "corrupt" dissident TMC leaders but also gave them tickets.

The final nail on the BJP's Bengal coffin was the rapid rise of Covid cases and deaths. By the time the fourth phase was over, the Covid cases and deaths had spiralled out of control across the country. Bengali voters saw people dying in the thousands due to lack of oxygen and hospital beds. The Centre's failure to provide relief did not sit well with the Bengali electorates. By the end of the fifth phase, the anger had turned towards the Centre. The Bengali middle class, which was initially leaning towards the BJP, began moving away. As a result, Ms Banerjee swept Kolkata, Howrah and many other urban areas. What had also enraged the people of West Bengal was the Election Commission's refusal to club the remaining phases of the election even as Covid-19 cases and deaths shot through the roof.

At the end of the day, even though the BJP could not snatch West Bengal from the TMC, the party managed to emerge as its primary opponent.

The BJP has improved its tally from three to nearly 80 seats. However, the problem with the BJP is that its vote-share compared to that of 2019 has come down, while the TMC's share has gone up by five per cent. As for the CPI(M)-led Left, the less said is better. Its politics of opportunism shown by its alliance with a radical leader, Abbas Siddiqui, and his outfit, Indian Secular Front, had no takers.

## TMC won 221 seats; Covid to be our top priority: Didi

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Street residence in Kalighat: "I had set a target of winning 221 seats since it is 2021. This includes two which will go to the polls in Murshidabad later. But we have already won 221 seats. This is a landslide victory for us. The BJP lost it despite playing dirty politics. It is on the decline. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah repeatedly talked about a 'double engine government'. But I said that I would definitely hit a double century."

She added: "We faced the horror of the Election Commission. We will move the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court so that a lakshman rekha can be drawn against the EC. I thank the people of Bengal. It is their victory. It is a win of unity. Bengal saved India today. I congratulate the people of the country for the victory of Bengal. It is a landslide victory which came after fighting against the Central government, Central agencies and the EC which behaved very rudely with us. There was money power and mafia power at play. The victory in Bengal has saved humanity."

Ms Banerjee elaborated: "Two slogans — Khela Hobe and Joy Bangla — conceptualised by our young minds worked really well. The game was really played. At the end, we won the game. We will distribute 50,000 footballs to poor clubs. My first priority is tackling Covid-19. We are working for it with our officers. We will not hold our oath-taking ceremony on a grand scale despite our land-

slide victory due to Covid-19. It will be a small event. We will inform the date later."

Taking a dig at the BJP, she noted: "No one, other than the people, is suited to make any comment (read: against us) after our landslide victory. People voted for us even during the Covid-19 pandemic. We will give free vaccines to all. I urge the Central government to send free vaccines to all in the country. This will cost the Centre only ₹30,000 crores. Otherwise, I will start my ahimsa (non-violence) movement at the Gandhi statue. All states have congratulated us. No one is happier than me. It was beyond my imagination to get so many seats. I appeal to all not to take out victory rallies now. After the pandemic, we will hold a grand victory rally at Brigade Parade Ground."

On her defeat in Nandigram, Ms Banerjee said: "The EC worked like a BJP spokesperson. When I raised the issue for Nandigram, you did not believe how votes were looted. Three states gave one mandate. But one constituency gave another mandate. Is it possible? It is not. The server was stopped for three hours. Later, it resumed working and results were different. Some sort of cheating and looting are going on. We will file a case in the court and fight it out there. For any struggle, you have to sacrifice something. I struggled for Nandigram because I fought a movement there. It was just a match. Let see what verdict the people of Nandigram give. I accept that."

## Did TMC turncoats infect BJP with anti-incumbency?

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order plaguing the ruling party. The TMC had labelled the BJP as a party of "outsiders" and the latter failed miserably to gauge the mood of Bengalis.

After the results, Mr Modi, who was leading the charge against Ms Banerjee during the campaigning, tweeted: "Congratulations to Mamata Didi for AITC win in West Bengal. The Centre will continue to extend all possible support to the West Bengal government to fulfill people aspirations and also to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic." The PM also thanked people of the state for blessing the BJP, whose "presence has significantly increased" and applauded party cadre for "their spirited effort in the polls."

Defence minister Rajnath Singh and finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman also congratulated Ms Banerjee. BJP state in-charge Kailash Vijayvargiya credited Ms Banerjee for her party's victory.

For the BJP, which had been elated after its performance in the state in 2019 Lok Sabha polls, when it won 18 out of 42 Lok Sabha seats and its vote share grew to 40.25 per cent, the Assembly results were shocking as the party top brass was claiming to bag 200-plus seats.

While the BJP's campaign was high on "Hindutva" and party leaders kept highlighting the TMC's minority appeasement, the issue failed to receive the expected response from the "Bhadralok," which the BJP poll managers had been trying hard to woo.

While it made massive inroads in the rural belt, which the party claimed had been suffering from "TMC's corruption, talabazi and cut-money," the BJP failed to project itself as the "keeper of pride of Bengal" among the majority of voters in the state. Also, the BJP's "Hindutva" failed to impress even

the culturally strong Hindu vote-bank.

Unlike in the Lok Sabha polls, women voters, considered one of the strongest votebanks of Mr Modi's, continued to rally behind Ms Banerjee who almost single-handedly fought one of the fiercest battles against the entire BJP Central leadership.

For BJP poll managers, consolidation of minority votes also dented the poll prospects massively.

"Problem is not with a mode of worship or followers of a particular religion but when people vote as a religious community it defeats the very basic principle of democracy. Is it not happening in Indian democracy?... TMC's victory in WB is a post-truth phenomena... Wake up call: Minority veto in electoral politics will be devastating for our secular democracy," tweeted Rajia Sabha MP and BJP leader Rakesh Sinha.

However, maintaining optimism, Mr Sinha said "Democracy sometimes endorses undemocratic leaders, this happens in politically conservative society. But eventually democracy regains its legitimate space. BJP is the future of Bengal. We will tirelessly continue our mission in Bengal."

Some BJP leaders also felt that the results indicated the BJP "got infected" with anti-incumbency and anger against the TMC and its leaders as more than two dozen of TMC leaders, including sitting MLAs, had joined the saffron fold in the past couple of years.

"While TMC fielded new faces to overcome anti-incumbency, BJP offered TMC leaders who were facing anti-incumbency and people's anger over various issues," said a senior BJP leader. "Also, the results have proved that the Congress and the Left sacrificed themselves to make sure that the BJP does not capture power," added the leader.



**TMC victory in Bengal is a decisive win for the idea of India, an inclusive, pluralist India where your religion or region don't matter. It shows BJP's electoral juggernaut is not invincible. And it reasserts the value of a federal India where States resist the overweening power of the Centre.**

— SHASHI THAROOR  
Congress leader



KERALA HAS BECOME ONLY ASSEMBLY IN INDIA THAT HAS NO REPRESENTATIVE FROM BJP AS THE PARTY LOST SOLE SEAT IT HAD WON IN LAST ELECTION. KERALA HAS ONCE AGAIN BECOME A HARD NUT TO CRACK FOR THE SAFFRON PARTY.

# PK, architect of TMC victory, quits poll management

■ Poll strategist says his organisation IPAC will continue to work ■ Kishor was also poll advisor to DMK in TN

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MAY 2

Political strategist and architect of the TMC victory Prashant Kishor on Sunday dropped a bombshell by announcing that he is quitting and from now on he will not be giving his services as a political strategist to any party. Though his organisation IPAC will still remain. Speaking to a news channel he said I am done with this work...I am taking a break...I won't be working for party A and party B... I am quitting this space." However, he said, "I should hand over the

baton to those who have been working with me, actual work has done by my colleagues and there is no better time than now to hand over the baton to someone."

Prashant has been instrumental in many wins. He was associated with the BJP in 2014 then with JDU RJD Congress in Bihar, Congress in Punjab, Congress and SP in UP and now with TMC in West Bengal. He also managed successful campaigns for YS Jaganmohan Reddy in the 2019 Andhra Pradesh elections and for Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam

Aadmi Party in the 2020 Delhi elections.

For 2021, apart from TMC, Prashant was also the political strategist for DMK chief M.K. Stalin, another fruitful campaign as the party has come back to power defeating the incumbent AIADMK.

He was roped by Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar as an advisor then also by Punjab



Prashant Kishor

WEST BENGAL 292	
PARTY	SEATS
TMC	213
BJP	76
LEFT	0
CONG	0
OTHERS	2

chief minister Amarinder Singh.

Speaking to the media, Prashant dropped hints as to

what he would do next, after spending some time with his family. "Joining politics has always been on the radar. If I decide that, I will have to see what I know and what I don't know. There are many things about politics I don't know. But that decision has not been taken yet."

In December 2020 Prashant had tweeted that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would not even cross double digits in the West Bengal Assembly elections.

"For all the hype amplified by a section of supportive media, in

reality BJP will struggle to cross double digits in West Bengal. PS: Please save this tweet and if BJP does any better I must quit this space," he said in a tweet he had pinned. On Sunday, while speaking on TMC victory, he said the TMC's victory is a message to all opposition parties that "they too can stand up to the BJP and give them a contest".

Now after a successful journey in West Bengal he retires from his current position. While he has no lack of suitors many say and feel that his next stop may just be active politics or a political party.



Activists of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) allied with BJP celebrate after crossing the half way mark during counting day of Assam Assembly Election at AGP head office in Guwahati on Sunday. — PTI

## Assam ally asks BJP to find 'dynamic' CM face

MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, MAY 2

With BJP-led alliance set to form the government for second consecutive term in Assam, the speculation has started over the leadership issue as BIP's new alliance partner and United People's Party Liberal chief Pramod Boro on Sunday asked the BJP leaders to select a "dynamic" leader who can address the burning issues of flood, unemployment and many other issues of the state proactively.

Elated over the victory of his party in the Bodoland Territorial Council area in the assembly polls Mr Boro told this newspaper, "We have promised to bring in development and address the burning issues that forced our youths to take up arms. We have succeeded in bringing all the armed rebel groups of Bodoland areas back to the mainstream. People have expressed confidence by voting us to power in the council and now in assembly polls too."

Expressing his gratitude to the people of Western Assam,



Pramod Boro

Mr Boro while referring that BJP had not declared any chief ministerial candidate for Assam, said, "I would like to request the BJP leadership to select a dynamic leader to lead the party and alliance. The leader who can deliver and work hard to fulfil all the promises that we have given to the people."

Mr Boro, the young new chief of the BTC, and until recently the president of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), the most influential Bodo civil society group has emerged as the new face of the BJP led alliance. Mr Boro's remark is also significant as he became the face of the 2020 Bodo Accord — with Home Minister Amit Shah

describing it as "the final and comprehensive solution" to the Bodo problem — with ABSU being one of its key signatories.

Though, Mr Boro refused to take the name of any leader. He reiterated that it was the internal matter of the BJP.

It is significant that BJP's decision not to name incumbent chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal as party candidate for the top post had triggered a wave of speculation that the saffron party might be thinking of rewarding Himanta Biswa Sarma if it returns to power in Assam.

Assam BJP chief Ranjeet Dass, while clarifying the confusion, had stated that the decision of who would be the chief minister would be taken by the parliamentary board. This had sparked quite a buzz that Mr sarma may be the BJP's pick for Assam. Mr Sarma has handled key portfolios like finance, health, public works under Mr Sonowal. He was the second most powerful person in Tarun Gogoi-led government before he decided to dump the grand old party to join the BJP.

## Sreedharan takes maiden poll fight down to wire, loses

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHURAM, MAY 2

The BJP which was expecting to do well in Kerala assembly elections, faced a humiliating defeat drawing a blank despite metroman E. Sreedharan putting up a good fight in Palakkad.



E. Sreedharan

The biggest setback came in the form of the defeat in party's lone sitting in Nemom in Thiruvananthapuram to CPM. Former Mizoram governor Kummanan Rajashekharan who had the task of retaining the seat won by BJP veteran O. Rajagopal took the fight to the last round but could get past his CPM rival V Sivankutty.

Mr Sreedharan who was tipped to win from Palakkad led in the counting right since morning. The contest went down to the wire with the Metroman losing the battle in the last couple of rounds when votes from Congress and CPM dominated booths were taken up for counting.

The metroman was so sure about his victory that he had opened his office in Palakkad. The BJP too was expecting to get more seats cashing in on Sreedharan's popularity.

It remains to be seen whether the octogenarian metroman will continue to remain in active politics and work in Palakkad. Another big set back was the defeat of BJP state president K. Surendran from Konni and Manjeshwaram.

## UDF's defeat in Kerala setback to 'leader' Rahul

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHURAM, MAY 2

The massive defeat of Congress led UDF in Kerala has come as a major personal setback for Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi who had campaigned aggressively for several days in the state.

In many ways, Rahul-led the campaign of UDF in several districts with the state leaders taking a back seat. AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi had also campaigned extensively in the state.

But the weak Congress organisational machinery could not convert the massive response both leaders evoked in their public meetings and road shows into votes, even in a small scale in many constituencies.

Mr Rahul's entry as candidate from Wayand Lok Sabha constituency in 2019 had galvanised the Congress cadres resulting in near total rout of CPM which managed to win just one out of 20 seats. The state Congress leaders were hoping that Rahul's charisma would work again in Assembly elections.

So despite all opinion polls and exit polls predict-



Rahul Gandhi

► **RAHUL'S ENTRY** as candidate from Wayand Lok Sabha constituency in 2019 had galvanised the Congress cadres resulting in near total rout of CPM which managed to win just one out of 20 seats. The state Congress leaders were hoping that Rahul's charisma would work again in Assembly polls

ing LDF victory, the Congress and the UDF leaders were confident of coming back to power till Monday morning.

However, the huge defeat has shocked most UDF leaders. With the UDF strength now coming down to just 41 seats and the Congress restricted to 25 seats, its going to be tough to deal with a formidable leader like Pinarayi Vijayan who is currently riding a popularity wave.

## Trinamul wins 18 out of 20 seats in Murshidabad Last Cong bastion in Bengal falls

RAJIB CHOWDHURI & PRANMOY BRAH-MACHARI  
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE, MAY 2

Murshidabad, which was the lone stronghold of the Congress under the command of its state chief and MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, has gone into the control of ruling Trinamul Congress finally with chief minister Mamata Banerjee's party winning in as many as 18 out of 20 seats that went to the Assembly Election this time.

Interestingly, the BJP has also won two seats, which were in the Congress list earlier, in the district that is largely dominated by Muslim population. On



TMC supporter celebrates party's victory in front of the party supremo and CM Mamata Banerjee's residence in Kolkata on Sunday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Sunday evening Ms Banerjee pinned hope on her party to win the remaining two seats — Shamshegunj and Jangipur — which would go to polls on May 16.

In the 2016 Assembly polls, the Congress and CPI(M) had won 14 seats and 4 seats respectively. The TMC had only four seats in its tally then. But this time, the

## Violence breaks out in Bengal after result

Kolkata, May 2: With chief minister Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamul Congress (TMC) returning to power with absolute majority for a third term, violence allegedly broke out in several places across West Bengal on Sunday. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader B.L. Santhosh lambasted the ruling party in the state over the violent incidents stating it's a "sign of things to come with possible" TMC victory in the state. He claimed that houses were attacked and offices burnt besides the women workers being beaten up following the violence in Arambagh, Bishnupur, Entally, Howrah and Bolpur.

The TMC has, however, rubbished the charges.

This comes as the BJP despite an aggressive campaigning by Prime Minister, Union home minister Amit Shah and several other party stalwarts failed to establish its political foothold in the TMC-ruled state.

The TMC workers indulged in celebrations following the results despite a ban. — Agencies

## Left suffers unprecedented rout, alliance fails to pay off

Kolkata, May 2: The CPI(M)-led Left Front and the Congress party, which ruled the state for nearly six decades between them, face an unprecedented rout in West Bengal Assembly elections trailing in all 292 seats which went to polls.

An alliance with the newly-formed ISF does not seem to have helped the CPI(M)-led Left Front and the Congress combine.

The Congress, which was the main Opposition party in the outgoing Assembly with 44 seats, had entered into an alliance with the Left Front in the 2016 assembly elections also.

The Left Front, which was in third position in the 2016 election results with 32 seats, had failed to win any of the 42 constituencies in West Bengal in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, while the Congress emerged victorious in two. The CPI(M)-led LF, which ruled the state from 1977 to 2011, is staring at the bleak prospect of going unrepresented in the next West Bengal assembly.

The CPI(M) had fielded a bunch of young candidates, including JNU



West Bengal CM and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee along with her grandniece, Abhishek Banerjee's daughter, addresses media after her party's landslide victory at her residence in Kolkata on Sunday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Students' Union president Aishe Ghosh, Dipshita Dhar and Minakshi Mukherjee, along with veterans like politburo member Md Salim, Sujan Chakraborty and Asok Bhattacharya in a bid to appeal to both the young generation and its traditional voters.

An alliance with Muslim cleric Abbas Siddiqui-led ISF also did not work partly as a sizeable percentage of the Left and Congress' vote

share seemed to have shifted to the TMC to counter the BJP and partly as its supporters used to secular politics did not favour an alliance with a conservative cleric. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had gained from a shift in Left votes towards its candidates, winning 18 seats.

The Congress or the Left Front are yet to come out with any statement on the trends of the election results. — PTI

## With debacles, Cong back to 'introspection' business

ASHHAR KHAN  
NEW DELHI, MAY 2

The disastrous performance of the Congress in the recently concluded Assembly elections has once again raised the issue of the "functioning of the party" and the leadership of Mr Rahul Gandhi. As expected the official response of the Congress is that they have not "succeeded in finding appropriate connect".

Addressing the media communications chief of the Congress Mr Randeep Singh Surjewala said, "We will correct our mistakes. Please wait for a few more days. Next steps now will be taken at organisational level by Congress president and party." Sandeep Dikshit, former Delhi MP, says "We should take heart

from these elections that the BJP is not unbeatable provided the Congress learns lessons of leadership and party management from these election."

Last year 23 leaders of the party wrote to the Congress president Sonia Gandhi demanding sweeping changes in the functioning of the party. In the last two years after every election, including the Lok Sabha election of 2019, a similar response comes. The party is finding it difficult to come up with reasons or introspection

for the losses they have to face. It has been about eight months but the party has no full time president yet. Rahul Gandhi is often asked by his partymen to take over the reigns of the party but no concrete decision is taken. His impression is seen on the workings of the party. He commandeers the elections management, seat management and campaign management. Leaders chosen by him lead the campaigns and election management. On senior Congress leader said, "We have this strange system that no introspection is done in the party ever. That is why we keep losing." Congress was expected to have its plenary session sometime June that would have paved way for a new president.

## REACTIONS

M.K. STALIN  
After DMK's TN victory



I will be truthful to you, I will work for you, my thoughts and deeds would be for the people of this state. (Tamil Nadu).

OMAR ABDULLAH  
Congratulating Mamata



The BJP & a thoroughly partisan Election Commission threw everything including the kitchen sink at you & you prevailed. Heartiest congratulations to you Didi.

SHARAD PAWAR

Hailing Mamata-led TMC win

Congratulations Mamata on your stupendous victory! Let us continue our work towards the welfare of people and tackling Covid collectively.



AKHILESH YADAV

While speaking on TMC win

Congratulations to the conscious public, the combative Mamta Banerjee ji and the dedicated leaders and activists of TMC, who defeated the politics of hate of BJP.

MEHBOOBA MUFTI

Hailing Bengalis for poll result



Kudos to the people of West Bengal for rejecting divisive & Congratulats to Mamata Di.

DEREK O'BRIEN

Overwhelmed by TMC victory

An emotional day after fighting the world's most destructive force, MO-SHA's BJP. Filthy campaign aided by agencies and EC. A momentous day for India and Bengal.

UDDHAV THACKERAY

Applauding Mamata Banerjee



Mamata Banerjee was fighting alone for the self-respect of the Bengali people. Her courage must be appreciated. In the end, she has won. The entire credit for this victory goes to Bengal's tigress.

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2.	DGM(Phy/B/D)	GEN-01	32900-58000	50 yrs	Degree in E&CT/MBA Exp. 15 yrs
3.	DGM (Media)	GEN-01	32900-58000	50 yrs	PG in Arts/Lit./Comm with PG Dip in Mass Comm Exp. 15 yrs
4.	AGM (Admin)	GEN-01	29100-54500	45 yrs	PG in HR Exp. 12 yrs
5.	DM (System)	SC-01	16400-40500	40 yrs	PG in Comp Sc./IT MBA Exp. 6 yrs
6.	Exe. Asst. (Mktg)	GEN-01	10700-23000	35 yrs	Degree/PG in Mktg Exp. 3 yrs
7.	Exe. Asst. (HR/Admin.)	GEN-01	10700-23000	35 yrs	Degree/PG Exp. 3 yrs
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2. For QR, Terms and Conditions, Application form and Remuneration kindly visit our website: www.echs.gov.in	
3. For details please approach or contact ECHS Polyclinic Baramulla at Tele No.: 01952234220. Last date for receipt of application will be 01 June 2021.	
4. Interview date & time will be intimated later.	
5. Candidates will bring original certificates/ degree, photocopy of testimonials/ experiences as applicable and two passport size photographs at the time of interview.	



**6** Congratulations to Bengal chief minister for leading the Trinamul Congress to a decisive and historic electoral win today. I wish you all the very best for your third term in office.

— Amarinder Singh  
Punjab CM



**MOST EXIT POLLS FAIL**

THE TMC REGISTERED A DECISIVE VICTORY IN WEST BENGAL CONTRARY TO RESULTS OF MOST EXIT POLLS WHICH PREDICTED A TIGHT RACE BETWEEN THE BJP AND THE TMC WITH AN EDGE TO THE MAMATA BANERJEE-LED PARTY

**PAGE 4**

**NATION**

## BJP, Cong to share honours in Lok Sabha, Assembly bypolls

**New Delhi, May 2:** The BJP and the Congress on Sunday were set to share the honours in the Lok Sabha and assembly bye-elections in 13 states.

The bypolls were held in four parliamentary constituencies in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and 12 assembly seats spread across 10 states. Except for the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat and the Malappuram Lok Sabha seat in Kerala, where polling was held on April 6, bypolls in rest of the constituencies were conducted on April 17.

In the assembly bypolls, the BJP won or was leading in 5 seats, the Congress four and the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) one seat each.

The results, however, would have no bearing on the immediate future of the respective governments.

In Tamil Nadu, Vijay Vasanth of the Congress was ahead of senior BJP leader and former union minister Pon Radhakrishnan in the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha constituency. The bypoll was necessitated following the death of Vasanth's father and Congress veteran H Vasantha Kumar last year due to Covid-19.

Maddila Gurumoorthy of the YSR Congress Party won the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat in Andhra Pradesh by beating Panabaka Lakshmi of the Telugu Desam by a huge margin of 2,71,592 votes.

BJP's Angadi Mangal Suresh pocketed the Belgaum Lok Sabha constituency with Satish Laxmanarao Jarkiholi of the Congress coming second. The victory margin was 5,240 votes.

A b d u s s a m a d Samadani of the Indian Union Muslim League won the Malappuram Lok Sabha seat in Kerala defeating V P Sanu of the CPI-M by a margin of 1,14,615 votes.

The Congress won two of the three assembly seats in Rajasthan where bypolls were held with BJP emerging victorious in the third.

— PTI



Candidates and their followers waiting for results as officers busy counting of votes of Zila and Gram Panchayat in Prayagraj on Sunday. — PTI

## UP rural polls: Over 3 lakh candidates elected unopposed

**Lucknow, May 2:** Counting of votes began on Sunday for lakhs of panchayat seats in Uttar Pradesh, a process expected to take two days across 829 centres.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, the state election commission said according to information about poll results pouring in from different parts of the state, over 1.12 lakh have emerged victorious for the post of members of village panchayat, 16,510 have won the post of pradhan of village panchayat, while 35,812 candidates have claimed victory on the post of members of kshetra panchayats.

"Counting is going on peacefully, and final results are likely to come by tomorrow (Monday) afternoon," the SEC said.

There were scuffles involving the supporters of candidates in three districts and social distancing to fight the spread of coronavirus went for a toss at several places, reports said.

Over three lakh candidates were declared elected unopposed by the state election com-

mission (SEC), shortly before the counting began.

Eight polling agents were turned away from the counting centre in Kannauj's Chhibramau tehsil after they tested positive for Covid in Rapid Antigen Tests.

Hearing concerns over the counting being held amid a coronavirus surge, the Supreme Court had on Saturday made it clear that candidates and their agents will be allowed to enter the counting centres only if they were Covid-free.

The SEC said they should have tested negative for Covid not earlier than 48 hours before the start of the process, or taken both doses of the vaccine.

Scuffles between the counting staff and candidates' supporters took place in Pilibhit and Firozabad districts, leading to the use of force by police. — PTI

## Congress wins bypoll, Nath influence in MP gets big boost

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY**  
BHOPAL, MAY 2

Congress' victory in the by-elections to Damoh Assembly constituency in Madhya Pradesh, results of which were announced on Sunday, may help former chief minister Kamal Nath stave off dissidence against him in the party.

Mr Nath, who faced dissidence in Congress following the debacle of the party in last year's by-elections to 28 Assembly seats in MP, is set to consolidate his position in the party further with the victory of Congress in Damoh by-elections, party leaders said here.

Mr Nath's rivals in the party have started mounting pressure on the Central leadership of the party to divest him of at least one of the two posts of Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president and Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leadership, which he currently holds, following the development.

Mr Nath has, however, been maintaining that he is not going to leave state politics and will lead the party in the 2023 Assembly elections in the state.

## Corona norms thrown to wind in counting centres, on streets

**SINDHYA SAMUEL & T. SUDHEESH**  
CHENNAI, MAY 2

The counting centres across the state witnessed absolute chaos on Sunday as Covid-19 protocol like social distancing and wearing masks went for a toss with the party cadres, counting staff and even police personnel flouting the safety norms. Members of political parties crowded on main roads and party headquarters to celebrate their victory.

A video, in which around 50 DMK workers without wearing masks celebrating the party's thumping electoral win, invited the wrath of netizens after it went viral online. The DMK cadres were enthusiastic after the initial trends came showing victory of the party alliance.

Amid the rising cases of Covid-19, some of the party headquarters saw crowding and celebrations by bursting crackers and dancing in groups. Many did not even wear masks as they joined mass gatherings and others were seen with masks



DMK Party workers celebrating during the counting of Tamil Nadu Assembly polls result at their party headquarters in Chennai on Sunday. — PTI

below their chin.

DMK president M.K. Stalin had urged the party workers and functionaries to stay at home and celebrate victory there. However, the delirious party workers, including men and women, were seen dancing without maintaining the Covid-19 protocol in front of Anna Arivalayam, the DMK headquarters, in Chennai. As a result of severe criticism from the public, the chief secretary, as directed by the Election Commission (EC), suspended an inspector of police in Teynampet for failing to stop celebra-

tions in front of Anna Arivalayam. Following this, Stalin warned the cadres against holding any celebrations.

The crowds assembled in Chennai counting centres as early as 8 am and stayed there till noon with no physical distancing measures. Masks, shields and gloves were distributed outside the counting centres for each assembly constituency and a majority of the people inside the counting centres adhered to mask-wearing. However, as time passed, party cadres were seen wearing the masks below the chin.

## Complete lockdown in Odisha from May 5-19

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO**  
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 2

Odisha will go under complete lockdown from May 5 morning till 5 AM of May 19 to contain the unprecedented surge in the Covid-19 cases in the state.

The decision was announced by the state chief secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra on Sunday.

The state had earlier imposed complete weekend shutdowns on Saturdays and Sundays. Prior to that, night curfew was declared in the State from 9 am to 5 am.

Several restrictions will be imposed on the regular activities across the state with several establishments and units remaining shut during the 14-day lockdown.

The chief secretary said that during the lockdown period, buses for public transport will remain closed. He added

## Full lockdown in Haryana for a week

**Chandigarh, May 2:** Amid a sharp surge in coronavirus cases, the Haryana government on Sunday announced imposition of a week-long lockdown in the entire state beginning May 3.

Earlier, a weekend curfew was enforced in nine districts — Gurugram, Faridabad, Panchkula, Sonapat, Rohtak, Karnal, Hisar, Sirsa and Fatehabad — from 10 pm on Friday till 5 am on Monday.

"From May 3, there will be a 7-day long lockdown in the entire state," Haryana's home and health minister Anil Vij said in a tweet.

Haryana on Saturday had registered 125 Covid fatalities, taking the death toll in the state to 4,341, while 13,588 fresh infections pushed the tally to 5,01,566. The massive surge in Covid cases in Haryana has also put pressure on the health infrastructure. — PTI

## Patnaik: Journo are Covid warriors

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha CM declares all journalists in state as frontline Covid warriors Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik on Sunday declared working journalists of the state as Frontline Covid Warriors. Approving a proposal to this effect, the chief minister said working journalists are doing a great service to the state by providing seamless news feed, making people aware on issues relating to Covid19 this very trying times and they are a great support for our war against Covid.

that intra-state movement of individuals by road, except for medical reasons or for activities will be permitted under the coronavirus guidelines.

## Pinarayi bucks trend, scripts Kerala history

■ Continued from Page 1 Shah and a dozen Union ministers, drew a blank, losing even the seat that it held in Thiruvananthapuram. "Metro Man" E. Sreedharan, who was inducted into the BJP with a lot of anticipation, managed to come second in Palakkad constituency. BJP state chief K. Surendran, who had fought in two seats, lost in both of them, including Konni, where the Sabarimala temple is located.

State fisheries minister J. Mercykutty Amma of the CPI(M) was one of the prominent Left leaders to be defeated in the election. Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who led from the front as the captain of the LDF in Kerala, won from Dharmadam constituency in Kannur. With this victory, Mr Vijayan has emerged as the indomitable leader of the Left in Kerala, the last bastion of the Communists in the country. After being decimated in West Bengal and Tripura, the Left was desperate to retain Kerala. The Left leadership is showcasing the Kerala victory as the triumph of its alternative model of development and secular politics.

The win also comes in the backdrop of the effective handling of Covid-19 by the state government.

## Hospitals, embassies send O2 SOS as India reports 4 lakh cases

■ Continued from Page 1 those related to Covid. "This includes facilitating their hospital treatment. Given the pandemic situation, all are urged not to hoard essential supplies, including oxygen," MEA said.

Later, the New Zealand high commission said they were trying all sources to arrange for oxygen cylinders urgently and "our appeal has unfortunately been misinterpreted, for which we are sorry."

Given the grim situation and constantly increasing demand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called a meeting to explore ways to increase oxygen supplies. "Considering the requirement of medical oxygen amidst the Covid-19 pandemic situation, the government of India explored the feasibility of conversion of existing nitrogen plants to produce oxygen. Various such potential industries, wherein existing nitrogen plants may be spared for production of oxygen were identified," Prime Minister's Office said in a press note.

The process of converting the existing Pressure Swing Absorption (PSA) nitrogen plants for production of oxygen was discussed. So far 14 industries have been identified where conversion of plants is under progress.

Further, 37 nitrogen plants have been also identified with the help of industry associations.

It was discussed that many industries like steel plants, refineries with petrochemical units, industries using rich combustion process, power plants etc have oxygen plants which produce gaseous oxygen and this can be tapped for medical use. It was discussed to identify industrial units which produce gaseous oxygen of requisite purity, shortlist those which are closer to cities/dense areas/demand centres and establish temporary Covid care centres with oxygenated beds near that source.

"It is expected that around 10,000 oxygenated beds can be made available in a short period of time by making temporary hospitals near such plants. State governments are being encouraged to set up more such facilities with oxygenated beds to deal with the pandemic," PMO statement added. The Centre is also planning to rope in final year students of MBBS and nursing colleges to boost healthcare manpower as the existing lot of doctors, nurses and other workers are now getting exhausted due to high load of daily cases out of which majority are critical.

## BIG WINNERS



**FIRHAD HAKIM**  
(TRINAMUL)  
KOLKATA PORT  
defeats Awadh  
Kishore Gupta

BY  
**68,554**



**OOMMEN CHANDY (INC)**  
PUTHUPALLY  
defeats Jaik C. Thomas

BY  
**8,504**



**MANOJ TIWARY (TMC)**  
SHIBPUR  
defeats BJP's Rathin Chakraborty

BY  
**32,603**



**SARBANANDA SONOWAL (BJP)**  
MAJULI  
defeats Rajib Lochan Pegu

BY  
**43,192**



**UDHAYANIDHI STALIN (DMK)**  
CHEPAUK-THIRUVALLIKENI  
defeats Kassali

BY  
**69,355**



BY  
**5,736**

**PALANISWAMI K. (AIADMK)**  
EDAPPADI  
defeats DMK's T. Sambathkumar

## BIG LOSERS



LOST BY  
**50,080**

**BABUL SUPRIYO (BJP)**  
TOLLYGANJ,  
WEST BENGAL



**KAMAL HAASAN (MNM)**  
COIMBATORE S.

LOST BY  
**1,728**



**AISHE GHOSH (CPM)**  
JAMURIA

LOST BY  
**46,184**

## BJP set to form Assam govt for a 2nd term

■ Continued from Page 1 minister and BJP's key strategist Himanta Biswa Sarma won from Jalukbari with a margin of more than one lakh votes.

Assam BJP president Ranjeet Kumar Dass has won from Patacharkuchi constituency. Mr Dass defeated his nearest rival Santanu Sarma of Congress with a margin of 41,442 votes. Mr Dass, who was elected from Sorbhog in 2011 and 2016, shifted his constituency to

Patacharkuchi in this election.

Proving all pollsters wrong, the NDA ended up sweeping Upper Assam, the epicentre of the anti-CAA movement, while the Congress-led grand alliance and newly floated two regional parties — Rajgor Dal-AJP — failed to make any impact.

If two regional faces, that of chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Mr Himanta Biswa Sarma benefitted the BJP greatly,

the welfare measures, especially cash transfers under the Arunodoi scheme and several other pre-poll sops, were also instrumental in winning over the voters.

The BJP also succeeded in winning over smaller communities like Morans, Mising, Rabha, Deori and preventing a larger Assamese consolidation on the CAA issue. The Assam government, Mr Himanta Biswa Sarma, also gained praise for handling the Covid-19 crisis in the state

last year.

In terms of vote share, the Congress alliance didn't fare badly, securing around 41 percent votes, only a few percentage points behind the NDA.

However, the Congress and AIUDF alliance succeeded in consolidating Muslim votes but failed to make inroad among Assamese, tribal and tea-garden workers vote in Upper Assam. This was evident in the alliance's decent performance in Lower

Assam and Barak Valley but poor display in Upper Assam.

On Sunday morning the Election Commission began counting votes for the 126 assemblies in Assam elections amid a three-tier security arrangement and strict adherence to Covid-19 protocols. Voting for the Assam Assembly elections, which was held in three phases — March 27, April 1, and April 6 — concluded on April 6 with an impressive turnout of 82.04 per cent.



## THE ASIAN AGE

3 MAY 2021

# A resounding mandate against divisive politics

The spectacular Assembly election results for West Bengal and Kerala, and the special features of the state polls for Tamil Nadu and Assam, besides the Union territory of Pondicherry, are likely to be recalled for long.

The results of W. Bengal mark the resounding defeat of the majority communalism brand of politics mounted full-scale with resourcefulness, energy, and the apparent misuse of state institutions, by the rulers at the Centre. But Trinamul Congress leader and chief Mamata Banerjee, fighting with her back to the wall, beat back the challenge from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah with panache and ground connect.

In 2011, Ms Banerjee had become CM by despatching the CPI(M)-led Left Front which had been entrenched for three decades. In 2021, after being the incumbent for 10 years, she sent the politics of majoritarian communalism to the cleaners, leaving a mark on the anti-BJP brand of politics in the country.

In this election, which saw cent per cent polarisation between the TMC and the BJP camps, the CPI(M) and the Congress — which had formed a front against both — were sent crashing. The BJP received a licking — and a downing of its pretensions — that is likely to haunt it for long.

The Congress in particular may have been reduced to a nullity in West Bengal. Such a crushing defeat, combined with its well below par showing in Kerala, may be expected to deepen the inner questionings already existing in the party.

Under the demonstrably capable leadership of chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, the CPI(M)-led ruling Left Front, trounced the Congress-led United Democratic Front, reversing a four-decade old trend of governance alternating between the LDF and the UDF in successive Assembly polls.

Like the W. Bengal result, the Kerala outcome is for the record books, though the former has the added dimension of being dramatic. For Kerala, scholars will have to ascertain whether the result heralds a long-term decline of the Congress in the state although it is well-entrenched in it, or whether the poll verdict is a conspiracy of temporary, local, processes.

The significance of the Assembly poll result for Tamil Nadu lies in the fact that the incumbent AIADMK was dethroned by the challenger DMK, although the former had teamed up with the BJP which rules at the Centre. Mr Modi and Mr Shah made several campaigning forays but this did not cut ice, confirming the West Bengal story. Partnering the DMK, the Congress did well in Tamil Nadu, achieving a high strike rate.

The AIADMK managed to hold its traditional ground in the western part of the state, but that's the best that can be said for its efforts. This is the first election under the new generation leadership of both the Dravidian parties after the demise of the stalwarts, DMK patriarch M. Karunanidhi, and AIADMK icon J. Jayalalithaa.

The BJP retained Assam, where finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma demonstrated his personal popularity and organising skill. This could prove a problem for BJP, making it unsure whether to make him CM by ejecting the current CM Sarbananda Sonowal. The Congress came up short though it mounted a spirited challenge. Teaming up with the AIUDF, with the "Muslim party" tag attaching to it, appears to have helped neither partner, and this could have implications for Congress alliances in the future.

In Puducherry, the BJP rode on the coat-tails of regional party NRC and could be a government partner in yet one more southern geography other than Karnataka.

## Covid SOS: Heed SC warning

The order of the Supreme Court directing state police chiefs not to take action against citizens for posting on social media about "shortage of beds, oxygen shortage, conditions of Covid care centres and hospitals, etc., during pandemic" sends two powerful messages. One, the Supreme Court has chosen to assume the role of the guardian angel of the citizen's fundamental right to speech and expression. Two, by trying to choke information flow, the rulers do not help the cause of fighting a pandemic.

The court was forced to intervene after the Uttar Pradesh government declared that it will slap the draconian National Security Act on people who seek better government service in the face of a deadly pandemic. Chief minister Yogi Adityanath had gone to the extent of declaring that the property of those who publicly air their grievances about governmental shortcomings will be attached.

Pandemics are times when both the government and the people are a stressed lot. The best way to fight a common enemy is to stand together. For a government to treat citizens as an enemy and make attempts to smother their rights does not go with the basic principles of democracy. Any such attempt must be thwarted; the court has done its job.

A pandemic will expose inefficiencies in governance that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. A sensible government can see in it an opportunity to know its weak points and plug them. Attempts to deal with them by misusing legal provisions are definitely not a constructive way to resolve issues. Citing historic events, the Supreme Court reminded governments that free flow of information has helped fight natural calamities and its absence has worsened situations. The government must take the right lessons from the order.

### THE ASIAN AGE

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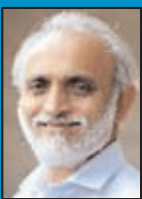
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Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr



## Verdicts in TN, Kerala, Assam show political diversity rules

If anti-incumbency worked in Tamil Nadu, and of course it's the anti-incumbency of a decade, and brought in the Dravida Munnetral Kazhagam (DMK) in the company of the Congress and the Communists back to power, the same rule didn't apply in neighbouring Kerala and in Assam in the Northeast. India is one country, one nation, but the political choices of its people in the states differ, confirming — if confirmation was ever needed — that India refuses to be a "one nation, one party" land. The masterminds behind the "one nation, one party" slogan should know they cannot hope to win across the entire country. Though much effort is being expended by the BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi to increase the domination of the Centre and undermine the powers of the states, the people in the states that had gone to the polls last month in the shadow of Covid-19 have sent a loud and clear message — that each state has its own priorities, and they won't heed the dictat of a pan-Indian nationalist party. It also showed that the BJP's strategy of fighting Assembly elections in the

name of Prime Minister Modi seems to be going awry. It does not seem to strike a chord among voters. The party may have to go beyond its Modi fixation, and evolve state-specific strategies, and also allow for the emergence of leaders with local roots.

Again, each state followed its own peculiar trajectory. From 1977 onwards, Tamil Nadu's politics has been dominated by larger-than-life charismatic leaders like M.G. Ramachandran and J. Jayalalithaa for the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and M. Karunanidhi for the DMK. M.K. Stalin, Karunanidhi's son, has been in politics from the days of the 1975 Emergency and he has been the man behind the throne, though the same cannot be said of Jayalalithaa's lieutenants-turned-successors, Edappadi K. Palaniswami and O. Panneerselvam. Tamil Nadu politics then remains within the Dravidian orbit, but the victories of either of the two Dravidian parties won't be the overwhelming ones that they had been under M.G. Ramachandran and J. Jayalalithaa on the one hand and Karunanidhi on the

other. This time around the two parties remain quite poised, and there will be a credible Opposition in the state Assembly. This became evident even in the 2016 election, the last one fought by Jayalalithaa. The state then settles into a two-party all-Dravidian system, which would also keep the party in power on its toes.

This time around, the DMK and the AIADMK had to fight the election on their own, and not invoke the memory of the dead leaders with their halos. For a long time, M.G. Ramachandran, Jayalalithaa and Karunanidhi had invoked the populism of C.N. Annadurai, the first DMK chief minister. Mr Stalin on the one hand and Mr Palaniswami on the other fought their battle on their own promises. It would be debatable if the AIADMK had paid a price for associating with the north Indian Hindi-based Hindutva BJP, the popular projection of the party by its critics in the state. The fact that the AIADMK has retained a substantial number of seats shows that the people had rejected the party on grounds other than that of its association with the BJP. The BJP has

not been a negative factor in the neighbouring Union territory of Puducherry as well, where it will be part of the new government with the Congress NR. It can be said that the BJP could as well be finding some acceptance in Tamil territory.

The victory of Pinarayi Vijayan's Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala breaks the pattern of 40 years where no party ever retained power for a second term. The reason for his victory seems to be his image of a man-in-charge of things, the man who exudes a sense of leadership though his critics feel that he has a Stalinist grip over his own party, the CPI(M). But more than that, Mr Vijayan has shown he is not old-fashioned hidebound Communist, that he is pragmatic when it comes to handling economic policy, a feature that was displayed by fellow-Marxists Jyoti Basu and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee in West Bengal, before Mamata Banerjee had stormed into power in the state a decade ago.

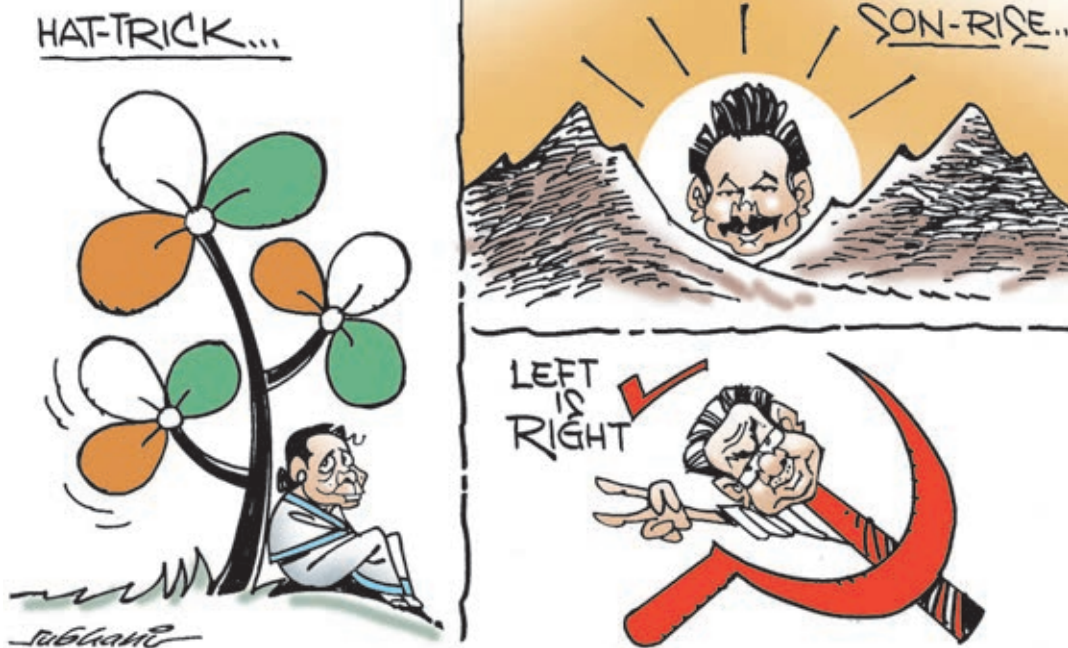
The BJP's victory for a second time in Assam need not raise eyebrows as it has played the Hindu card with greater tact, where the "outsider" was seen to

be the illegal Bangladesh Muslim immigrant, and it had managed the apprehension of the Assamese about Bangladesh Hindu migrants. And it was also the case that in Assam the party had a seasoned local leader, tactician, and manager in Himanta Biswa Sarma, something that it did not have in West Bengal and the other states which had gone to the polls.

The weakness of the Congress in this round of elections has become more conspicuous than ever. The party had hoped to win in Kerala and in Assam, and in both the states it has managed to survive but missed victory by a big margin. This emphasises more than ever that the party appears to be rudderless ever since it had lost the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The critics would of course blame former party president Rahul Gandhi as a sign of his ineffective leadership. It is not yet clear which is the principal weak link in the party — the leadership at the top or the factional feuds in the ranks.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

Subhani



# After Bengal win, Didi to target BJP across India



Shikha Mukerjee

It's a landslide. It's a hat-trick. With a two-thirds majority in her grasp, Trinamul Congress leader and incumbent chief minister Mamata Banerjee has defeated the communally divisive, reactionary, undemocratic, patriarchal and authoritarian assault of the BJP for the conquest of West Bengal in a spectacular victory.

Slim as the margin is, Mamata Banerjee's own defeat from Nandigram is not a catastrophe. With around 214 wins out of 294, West Bengal is open to her to find an alternative, sure seat. In 2011, Ms Banerjee did not fight the Assembly polls; she did so later after coming to power in the state.

She chose to switch from Bhowanipore in Kolkata to Nandigram in East Midnapore to signal that West Bengal was her turf and a defector, even of the size of Suwendu Adhikari, backed by the aura and resources of the Adhikari clan, all of whom are in politics, offered no challenge to her popularity. The choice infused new energy into her party where the defection of mega leaders like Suwendu Adhikari and those who followed was a shock of a magnitude that was seriously demoralising.

The Trinamul Congress' third term victory has established Ms Banerjee as a political force to reckon with. She was challenged by the much-touted invincible vote winning machine of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah and turned it into a dysfunctional apparatus. The BJP's ambition of conquering West Bengal and winning 200 of the state's 294 Assembly seats has turned into a misadventure, conceived in reckless ambition and unfolded as limitless

greed, for more power and territory.

With West Bengal safely secured, it's entirely likely that she will move forward in her declared objective of waging war against the BJP in national politics. The timetable for when and how she launches the counter-offensive is unclear; but it will happen.

Four states and one Union territory went to the polls. In Kerala, the Pinarayi Vijayan-led government of the CPI(M) and Left Democratic Front, in Tamil Nadu the DMK led by M.K. Stalin and in West Bengal, the Trinamul Congress led by Ms Banerjee have won. It was a victory for multi-party politics and the democratic space to nurture diversity, and in West Bengal it was a blow the idea of a "double engine sarkar" that the BJP had sold to voters as the acme of efficiency and good governance. By rejecting it, West Bengal's voters have signalled that too much of the same thing does not cut ice.

West Bengal was the most crucial theatre of the war in which the BJP launched its most determined and resource-intensive effort to install itself in power. Supremely confident of its ability to bamboozle its way to a victory, BJP's unchallenged strategist Amit Shah admitted the party was organisationally weak, and was dependent on defections to meet the deficit in terms of its actual size and strength in the state. It had factored in that it wouldn't appeal to at least 27 per cent of the state's voters who are Muslims.

West Bengal's verdict has made it abundantly clear that without roots, the BJP is a superstructure without a foundation, regardless of the

number of seats that it won this time. The basics of politics everywhere is a connection with the masses that is not limited to playing mindgames, feeding on intangible anxieties and rabble-rousing by making a noise. In West Bengal, the BJP made the mistake in believing its own spiel and imagining that its narrative of a Hindu majority in danger of being swamped by an expanding Muslim minority, however contrary that is to the facts, the unifying power of an alien slogan "Jai Shri Ram" and the lure of a basket of goodies from citizenship for refugees, especially Hindu Matuas, employment and freedom to organise religious festivals, as though there had ever been an impediment, was sufficient to add the heft necessary to give it the votes it needed.

The political landscape of West Bengal has undergone a metamorphosis in this election. The Trinamul Congress now has a single Opposition party in the BJP. It is a warning that politics henceforth will be fought on dangerously polarising lines where religion and identity will be deployed to wreck the consensus, arrived at in 1946-47 by all major political parties, of keeping communalism out of politics in the state.

It will be Ms Banerjee's responsibility to contain the BJP's provocatively divisive politics and then work to defeat it. There is no way in which the Trinamul Congress can achieve this on its own. The tacit support the BJP has garnered since 2016 from voters who earlier chose the Congress or the Left parties is a part of the problem that she must tackle

**With West Bengal safely secured, it's entirely likely that Ms Banerjee will move forward in her declared objective of waging war against the BJP in national politics**

to prevent West Bengal from turning communally volatile and erupting in violence. How she will do this, when the current Congress and CPI(M) leadership is as hostile to her as it is to the BJP, is the difficulty. Not finding a solution endangers the sometimes tense social and religious equations in West Bengal.

This election is an affirmation that India's multi-party democracy, however weakened by the brutalising idea of homogeneity — "one party, one nation" — of the BJP, is alive and well, and able to successfully defend itself. The next step is to take back the political discourse and repair the deep wounds inflicted by the BJP's ambition to dominate by using institutions created by the Constitution for its own purposes.

In this larger fight, Mamata Banerjee will be a key player. How she does so is unknowable at this stage. The imperative to upgrade the fight is the catastrophic mismanagement of the Covid-19 pandemic's surge that is killing thousands of Indians, mainly as the Narendra Modi government failed to create the resources in anticipation of this inevitability. And she has promises to fulfil to voters in West Bengal, as she needs the support of her base to tackle the BJP and its destructive politics on home ground as well as on the national level.

There is an urgency to revamping her government and her party to make it less corrupt and improve delivery to beneficiaries, which was one of the grouses against her and created the space for the BJP to grow by focusing on her shortcomings as chief minister and party leader. With so much to do and an appalling pandemic surge to contain, Ms Banerjee must work at speed and with an efficiency that disarms her critics.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

### LETTERS

#### LEADING FROM FRONT

In unhesitatingly taking on her powerful erstwhile lieutenant of Nandigram who defected to the BJP at the last moment, at his own stronghold, Didi subordinated her personal win to infusing a grand sense of defiance across her party cadre that had to catch the imagination of the electorate. Her admirable dedication has single-handedly triumphed over BJP's strategy predicated purely on excessive ambition. Mamata Banerjee has led by example while her opponents relying on failed rhetoric and subterfuge failed to see that the Indian voter has long come of age.

R. Narayanan  
Navi Mumbai

#### STALIN STORM

TAMIL NADU politics is a different cup of tea altogether. The two Dravidian parties were vying for top honours all these years. Both AIADMK and DMK were sharing power for five-year terms alternately until the sequence was broken by J. Jayalalithaa by winning the 2016 Assembly elections despite the exit polls showing her the door. This time around, Stalin stormed the scene and upset the applecart. He had a strong base and the anti-incumbency factor favoured him from the beginning, capitalising on the lead that the party had registered in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

M.R. Jayanthi  
Coimbatore

#### LDF REWARDED

THE CREDIT FOR the LDF's victory in Kerala, which is significant as it has broken the state's long record of voting out the ruling party, goes to its exemplary work saving lives during the coronavirus pandemic. It also shows that changing the game in south India through polarisation is a tough task. It is interesting that both the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala are going to be ruled by two atheists who have been voted in by a brutal majority of "believers".

D.B. Madan  
New Delhi

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Amit Banerjee (April 29). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.



## SHORT TAKES

TANKER FIRE  
KILLS 7, HURTS  
14 IN KABUL

**Kabul:** A searing blaze that roared through several fuel tankers on the northern edge of the Afghan capital of Kabul killed seven people and injured 14 others, the Interior Ministry said on Sunday.

Investigators were combing through the dozens of tankers that lay in smoldering ruins and a gas station caught in the flames that roared through the area late Saturday, said ministry spokesman Tariq Arian.

There was no immediate indication of whether it was an accident or sabotage. It came on the same day that the US and NATO officially began the final phase of a withdrawal from Afghanistan, ending a nearly 20-year military engagement.

All 2,500-3,500 American soldiers and about 7,000 NATO allied forces will be out of Afghanistan at the latest by Sept 11, the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks in the United States that first brought them into the country. Arian said the fire began when a spark set a fuel tanker ablaze. Several tankers nearby were quickly engulfed, sending giant flames and plumes of smoke into the night sky.

The fire in the northern edge of the city engulfed several homes and a nearby gas station. Several structures were destroyed and electricity to much of Kabul, which usually has only sporadic power, was knocked out. Truck drivers Sunday blocked the road leading to the area demanding the government provide compensation. The wounded were being treated mostly for burns in local hospitals.

GUNMAN KILLS 2  
AT U.S. CASINO,  
SHOT DEAD

**Washington:** A gunman killed two people and seriously wounded another at a casino in the northern US state of Wisconsin on Saturday night before being shot dead by police, authorities said.

Police said they first received a call at 7:28 pm about a shooting at a restaurant at the Oneida Casino/Radisson Hotel and Conference Center complex near Green Bay, which is operated by the Oneida Nation.

"The suspect is deceased, the police have shot the suspect so there's no threat to the public," Lieutenant Kevin Pawlak of the Brown County Sheriff's office told reporters after midnight.

Pawlak said it appeared to be a "targeted event not a random shooting." The intended target was an employee who was not there at the time but the gunman decided to shoot some of their friends or acquaintances, he said.

The FBI were at the scene assisting with the investigation. The seriously wounded victim was airlifted to a Milwaukee hospital, Pawlak said.

FLAGS FLOWN AT  
HALF MAST IN  
ISRAEL MOURNING

**Jerusalem :** Flags were flown at half-mast on Sunday as Israel held a national day of mourning for 45 men and boys killed in a stampede at a packed Jewish festival.

The deadly crush on Friday night at Mount Meron in northern Israel has been described as one of the worst peacetime disasters since the nation's founding in 1948.

At least 16 children and teens figured among those killed. The fatalities included nine foreign nationals from the US, Canada, Argentina and the UK, as well as two French-Israeli brothers, both minors.

The stampede broke out as tens of thousands of mostly ultra-Orthodox Jews thronged the reputed tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai to commemorate the second-century Talmudic sage's death and mark Lag BaOmer holidays.

With the blue-and-white Israeli flag lowered outside public buildings, army bases and overseas embassies, calls for accountability were mounting.

"Take Responsibility," read the headline in Yediot Aharonot daily, listing a range of officials with questions to answer. The pilgrimage site was tightly restricted last year due to the Coronavirus pandemic. There had been warnings about viral transmission again this year. But with Israel having fully inoculated more than half of its 9.3 million residents, police did not stop the massive crowd even as it far exceeded the recommended health guidelines of 10,000 people at outdoor gatherings.

UK in 'last lap' of Covid war,  
claims its foreign secretary

## Daily lateral flow tests to replace isolation of potential patients

**London, May 2:** The UK is very close to turning the corner in its fight against the Coronavirus pandemic and it is important to remain careful in the last lap of the process, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said on Sunday.

The senior Cabinet minister was defending the government's roadmap out of the lockdown, which is now set to ease further on May 17 when greater indoor interactions are expected to be allowed, with June 21 set as the date for a near complete end to lockdown rules.

Some groups and businesses such as restaurants have called for a quicker lifting of restrictions. "I know that people are hankering to go a bit faster but actually we feel vindicated at taking steady steps out of the lockdown is the smart way to go," Raab told 'Sky News'.

"We're very close now to really turning the corner and I think we still need to be careful to go as I said we don't want to see the gains lost and the sacrifices that have been made undone. By the time we get to June 21 almost all social restrictions will be lifted, so there's only a little bit more time to go but it's right we do that in a careful way," the minister said.

"I do think we just need to make sure that in the last lap, if you like, that we are careful and we don't lose the gains we've made," he said. The minister also indicated that the government is looking at certain social distancing and other safeguards that would still be needed after June 21.

"We want to get to a position, at the end of June, where we can get life back as close to normal as possible, but they'll still need to be some safeguards in place," he said.

According to some plans in the works, daily lateral flow tests could be used as an alternative to isolation for those who have been in contact with someone who tests positive for the coronavirus. Currently, these people must quarantine for 10 days but a trial in England will see daily lateral flow tests given to as many as 40,000 people.

Participants in the trial will be sent a week's worth of tests and will be able to go about normal life as long as their daily results are negative. The trial could provide evidence that would reduce the length of time contacts of positive cases need to isolate.

"This new pilot could help shift the dial in our favour by offering a viable alternative to self-isolation for people who are contacts of positive Covid-19 cases, and one that would allow people to carry on going to work and living their lives," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

The trial will begin on May 9 and close contacts of people with Covid-19 will be contacted by phone and sent seven days of the tests if they decide to participate in the study. — PTI



Protesters pass a digital billboard urging people to respect the 1.5 metre social distancing guidelines during a demonstration against Coronavirus related restrictions in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on Sunday. — AP

Brussels police detain 132  
during anti-lockdown party

**Brussels, May 2:** Belgian police arrested 132 people as they used tear gas and water cannon to break up a banned anti-lockdown party in a Brussels park on the weekend, an official report said on Sunday.

One partygoer was knocked out by a water cannon and 14 others were slightly injured — including one struck by a police horse — as riot police brutally dispersed the party on Saturday in scenes echoing a similar gathering in the park a month before.

Five of those arrested were taken into police custody, the police said.

Three officers were hospitalised and a dozen slightly injured during clashes with the protesters.

Between 1,000 to 2,000 mainly young people gathered for the party, which was organised online, to protest against restrictions imposed to fight the spread of Covid-19.

Prime Minister Alexander de Croo had urged the crowds to stay away, and 600 riot police, numerous water cannon and a mounted unit were deployed to the park before the festivities had even begun.

The protesters' music all but drowned out police

demands for mask-wearing and social distancing, and reporters at the Bois de la Cambre park did not hear an order to disperse before the police moved in.

As police cars and armoured trucks with water cannon rolled onto the grass close to the heart of the gathering, the merry-makers chanted: "Freedom, Freedom." Exactly a month previously on April 1, around 2,000 people had gathered in the Bois de la Cambre and several people were hurt, along with officers and horses, in clashes when the police intervened.

— AFP

## ISRAEL

TEMPORARY BAN  
ON TRAVEL TO  
INDIA, 6 NATIONS

**Jerusalem, May 2:** Israel has temporarily barred its citizens from travelling to India and six other countries, citing high Covid-19 infection rates there. A joint press release issued by the Prime Minister's Office and the Health Ministry on Friday said that Israelis will not be allowed to travel to Ukraine, Brazil, Ethiopia, South Africa, India, Mexico and Turkey.

This regulation will come into force on May 3 and will remain in place until May 16. Non-Israelis, however, will be able to travel to these countries.

— PTI

Republicans try  
to find way out  
of political limbo

**Washington, May 2:** Shut out of the White House and desperate to reclaim power in Congress next year, Republicans are locked in an internal battle over their party's direction, and whether to embrace or jettison the divisive politics of Donald Trump.

One hundred days after Trump's turbulent term gave way to Democratic rule in Washington, Republican lawmakers spent part of the last week in closed-door soul searching at their annual retreat in Florida, struggling to tamp down their conference's extremist personalities and high-light conservative policies they believe will resonate with voters.

The party of Abraham Lincoln and Ronald Reagan is scrambling to forge a path out of political limbo in the run up to the 2022 midterm elections and ultimately the next presidential race in 2024.

Even if there is GOP appetite for ditching the rhetoric of nativist grievance and moving on from Trump, many Republicans still see him as their party's de facto leader—although an NBC News poll this week showed Trump's support among Republican voters is slipping.

Trump himself told Fox News last week he is "beyond seriously" considering another White House bid to challenge

President Joe Biden, or another Democrat, in 2024.

Such statements are likely to freeze the primary field until Trump announces his political plans, denying the party opportunities to vet and debate the candidates who would otherwise step forward to challenge Democrats for the White House.

Republican strategists and lawmakers themselves acknowledge the party is grappling with how much distance they need to take from Trump and who can lead them back to power.

"Any party that loses a presidential election goes into the wilderness for a while," Matt Mackowiak, a Republican consultant in Texas, said in a Friday interview.

"When you're in the wilderness you don't have one unified leader," he explained. "But the difference with us is we do have one leader, and it's Trump." The ex-president however is weighed down with baggage. His approval ratings have slid, he faces mounting legal woes, and his former personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani is under federal investigation. "But Trump's agenda was successful," Mackowiak said. "There's an emerging consensus that Trumpism without Trump may give us the best opportunity to win in 2024." — AFP

Iranian FM asks  
Soleimani family  
for 'forgiveness'

**Tehran, May 2:** Iran's foreign minister on Sunday asked the family of Qasem Soleimani for "forgiveness" following his leaked comments that the revered late commander had played too big a role in diplomacy.

Soleimani, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards' foreign operations arm, was killed in a US air strike in neighbouring Iraq last year.

Media outside Iran published the three-hour recording of Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif last Sunday, triggering a heated debate ahead of presidential elections and amid talks with world powers in Vienna to revive a nuclear deal.

"My remarks... do not diminish the status and irreplaceable role of martyr Soleimani," Zarif wrote on Instagram.

"The pure feelings of those who love the great martyr Major General Qasem Soleimani and his family, especially his brave daughter Zeinab -- who is as dear to me as my own children -- have been hurt," Zarif added.

Zeinab Soleimani posted a photo Tuesday on Twitter showing her father's hand shortly after being assassinated, calling it "the cost" paid by those in "the field for the sake of diplomacy".

In the audiotape, Zarif talked about the military having too much influence on diplomacy, and



Mohammad Javad Zarif

mentioned the significant role played by Soleimani.

"In the Islamic republic the military field rules," Zarif said in the recording, quoted by the New York Times. "I have sacrificed diplomacy for the military field rather than the field servicing diplomacy." Zarif has been under fire from conservative politicians and media for the leaked recording, with remarks on Soleimani hitting a nerve. "If I knew a word of them would be published publicly I would not have said them," Zarif said.

"I have forgiven all those I believe accused me ... I hope the great people of Iran, all those who love (Soleimani), and especially the gracious Soleimani family, forgive me as well," he added.

— AFP

NZ resumes Perth travel  
bubble after Covid scare

## NEW ZEALAND

**Wellington , May 2:** New Zealand on Sunday agreed to reopen its travel bubble with Western Australia, 24 hours after grounding flights when three people in Perth tested positive for Covid 19.

Health officials said that following consultation with their Australian counterparts they determined the risk to New Zealand was not significant and flight could resume on Monday.

However, anyone who

has been at "locations of interest" identified by the Western Australian government cannot travel to New Zealand within 14 days of exposure.

"While the public health risk is deemed low, we must all remain vigilant as we enjoy the opportunities quarantine-free travel has given us," the director-general of health, Ashley Bloomfield, said.

It was the second disrup-

tion to the ground-breaking travel bubble between New Zealand and Australia in the two weeks since it opened, ending more than a year since both closed their international borders due to the pandemic. Flights between New Zealand and Western Australia were briefly suspended when the Perth and Peel regions were sent into a three-day lockdown after recording a case of community transmission on April 23. — AFP

Nigeria limits passengers  
from India, Brazil, Turkey

## NIGERIA

**Abuja, May 2:** Nigeria will ban entry to non-Nigerian passengers who have been in Brazil, India or Turkey in the last fortnight due to concerns over the spread of coronavirus in those three nations, health authorities said on Sunday.

The travel ban does not apply to passengers who have transited through

those countries, the presidential steering committee on Covid-19 said in a statement.

"These precautionary measures are a necessary step to minimize the risk of a surge in Covid-19 cases introduced to Nigeria from other countries," the statement said.

Nigerians and permanent residents who have been in those countries in the last 14 days will have to undergo mandatory quarantine for a week in a government-approved facility on arrival, it said.

All passengers arriving in Nigeria will now have to show a negative Covid-19 test taken within 72 hours of travel. — AFP

## SPACE | ODYSSEY

## Crew went to space last Nov. on the first mission to the ISS aboard a vehicle made by SpaceX

## Four ISS astronauts make SpaceX splashdown

**Washington, May 2:** A SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule carrying four astronauts back to Earth splashed down off Florida early Sunday, a NASA livestream showed.

The crew reported they were feeling well after their arrival back on Earth following a nearly six-month mission aboard the International Space Station, NASA said.

The capsule splashed down at 2:56 am (0656 GMT) in the dark in the Gulf of Mexico off Panama City after a six-

and-a-half hour flight from the ISS, night-vision images relayed by NASA's WB-57 high-altitude research aircraft showed.

Teams aboard the Go Navigator recovery ship retrieved the capsule and hoisted it on to the deck about half an hour later. It was the first nighttime splashdown for Nasa since the crew of Apollo 8 arrived in the Pacific Ocean on December 27, 1968.

Commander Michael Hopkins was the first to emerge after the hatch was

opened, doing a little jig as he set foot on deck, followed shortly after by fellow Nasa astronaut Victor Glover.

"On behalf of Crew-1 and our families, we just want to say thank you ... It's amazing what can be accomplished when people come together. Y'all are changing the world. Congratulations. It's great to be back," Hopkins said in a Nasa tweet.

Nasa astronaut Shannon Walker and Japan's Soichi Noguchi were the other two aboard.

The four went to space last November as the crew on the first fully operational mission to the ISS aboard a vehicle made by Elon Musk's SpaceX, which has become NASA's favored commercial transportation partner.

The four crew will now be taken out of the spacecraft and receive medical checks before being flown by helicopter to Pensacola to board a plane for Houston to be reunited with their friends and family, Nasa said.

Seven astronauts

remained on the ISS including a new crew of four who arrived on a different SpaceX craft last week.

"Thanks for your hospitality," Hopkins said earlier as the capsule undocked from the space station for its return journey. "We'll see you back on Earth." Prior to that, two American astronauts made a test mission to the ISS in May and stayed for two months. That was the first launch to the ISS from US soil since the end of the Space Shuttle program in 2011. — AFP



This handout image shows NASA astronauts from left: Shannon Walker, Victor Glover, Mike Hopkins, and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) astronaut Soichi Noguchi, strapped in their seats inside the SpaceX Crew Dragon Resilience spacecraft. — AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,782.36	-1.98
Nifty 50	14,631.10	-1.77
S&P 500*	4,181.17	-0.72
Dollar (₹)	74.06	-0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.02	0.18
Euro (₹)	89.60	0.14
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,283▼191	0.41
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.28	1.87
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.030	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.645	0.005

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

India Inc foreign borrowings jump 24% to \$9.2 bn

India Inc's external commercial borrowings jumped by over 24 per cent to \$9.23 billion in March this year against \$7.44 billion a year ago, RBI data showed. Of the total borrowings, \$5.35 billion came in through external commercial borrowings while the rest of \$3.88 billion came through the automatic route. No money was raised through the rupee denominated bonds, or the masala bonds.

Rabi Sankar appointed RBI deputy governor



The government has appointed RBI executive director T. Rabi Sankar as the fourth deputy governor of the central bank. Sankar fills the vacancy created by the retirement of B.P. Kanungo on April 2. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet cleared his appointment for a three-year tenure. The other three deputy governors are Michael D. Patra, Mukesh Kumar Jain and Rajeshwar Rao.

Franklin investors to get ₹2,489 cr in next tranche

SBI Funds Management will distribute the next tranche of Rs 2,489 crore to unitholders of Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund's six shuttered schemes in this week from Monday. SBI MF has already distributed Rs 12,084 crore to investors. This included Rs 2,962 crore distributed during the week of April 12. The amount to be paid to unitholders will be paid by extinguishing proportionate units at the NAV dated April 30, 2021.

IGST on oxygen concentrators cut to 12%

The government slashed Integrated GST rate on oxygen concentrators for personal use to 12 per cent, from 28 per cent earlier, for two months till June 30. "IGST on Import of Oxygen Concentrators for personal use has been reduced from 28 per cent to 12 per cent to bring IGST rate on such personal imports at par with commercial imports of the same, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) tweeted.

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More time granted to file returns; penalties cut GST compliance rules eased

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 2

The government has reduced the interest on delayed goods and services tax (GST) payments, waived some of the late fees and extended the date of filing in view of the pandemic-related difficulties.

Against the normal 18 per cent rate of interest for delayed tax payments, those having a turnover above Rs 5 crore can pay 9 per cent for the first 15 days from the due date of payment and 18 per cent thereafter. This is for the tax payable for March and April, payable in April



and May, respectively. Late fee will also be waived for 15 days for returns filed in GSTR-3B.

Similarly, businesses having a turnover of up to Rs 5 crore will be charged nil rate of interest for the first 15 days, 9 per cent for the

next 15 days and 18 per cent thereafter. Late fee has been waived for 30 days for GSTR-3B returns.

Those who have opted to pay tax under the composition scheme will have a nil rate for the first 15 days, 9 per cent for the

next 15 days and 18 per cent thereafter.

The government has also extended due date of filing GSTR-1, IFF, GSTR-4 and ITC-04. Due date of filing GSTR-1 and IFF for April has been extended by 15 days, Form GSTR-4 for FY2020-21 has been extended from April 30 to May 31 and furnishing of Form ITC-04 for January-March 2021 quarter has been extended from April 25 to May 31.

For CGST, the government has relaxed the availing of Input Tax Credit and has extended statutory time limits under section 168A of the CGST Act.

Merchandise trade rises in April

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 2

Merchandise exports and imports in April grew year-on-year from the low base of the lockdown-hit month last year as well as from April 2019 levels. However, both exports and imports declined sequentially when compared to March 2021, indicating the impact of the spreading pandemic on trade.

Merchandise exports in April had the low-base advantage. In April, shipments stood at \$30.21 billion— an increase of 197 per cent over \$10.17 billion in April 2020, which was marked by the nationwide lockdown. There was also an increase of 16.03 per cent over the figure of \$26.04 billion in April 2019. However, India broke the month-on-month recovery

that was being accomplished since the lockdown of last year. Exports were down 12.3 per cent from \$34.45 billion in March 2021.

Similarly, month-on-month growth in imports was disrupted in April at \$45.45 billion, which was 6 per cent down from \$48.38 billion in March 2021. However, when compared to April 2020, imports registered a growth of 166 per cent over \$17.09 billion and 7.22 per cent over \$42.39 billion in April 2019.

But, trade deficit widened on a month-on-month basis. In April, the trade deficit stood at \$15.24 billion against \$13.9 billion in March. It was 120 per cent higher than \$6.92 billion in April 2020 and lower by 6.81 per cent over \$16.35 billion in April 2020.

While most of the commodity groups recorded growth over April 2020 due to the base effect, export of commodity groups like tea, leather and leather manufactures, tobacco, ready-made garments of all textiles, petroleum products, coffee, organic and inorganic chemicals, and meat, dairy and poultry products declined when compared to April 2019. Similarly, import of silver, newsprint, cotton raw & waste, pulses, project goods, leather & leather products, transport equipment and machine tools declined over April 2019.

Non-petroleum and non-gems and jewellery exports in April stood at \$23.51 billion, against \$27.42 billion in March, a sequential drop of 14 per cent. While oil imports

grew sequentially, non-oil and non-gems and jewellery imports declined sequentially. In April 2021, oil imports were \$10.8 billion against \$10.27 billion in March. Non-oil import in April was estimated at \$34.65 billion against \$38.11 billion in March. Non-oil, non-gems and jewellery imports were \$26.05 billion in April 2021 against \$29.62 billion in March.

"The recent surge in Covid-19 cases has posed risks to the growth but we remain hopeful of continued recovery during the year. The WTO has also revised its projection upward and expects the global trade volume to increase by 8 per cent in 2021," said Mahesh Desai, chairman, Engineering Export Promotion Council.

Unsold housing stock dips 2% in Q4 to 7.05 lakh units

**New Delhi, May 2:** Unsold housing inventories in primary markets across eight major cities fell marginally by 2 per cent at 7.05 lakh units during January-March as compared to the previous quarter and it will take four years for developers to sell these units at current speed, according to a report.

In its report 'Real Insight', housing brokerage firm PropTiger said nearly 18 per cent of the total unsold inventory falls in the ready-to-move-in category.

As per the data, unsold housing stock declined to 7,05,344 units during the first quarter of 2021 calendar year across eight cities from 7,18,483 units in the previous quarter.

This was because housing sales across eight major cities stood at 66,176 units while new supply was 53,037 during January-March 2021.

"Mumbai and Pune continue to hold the maximum share of unsold stock. Both the cities

together account for 54 per cent of the total available stock, followed by NCR and Bengaluru with 15 per cent and 10 per cent share, respectively," said Mani Rangarajan, COO of Housing.com and PropTiger.

In terms of inventory overhang, Housing.com and PropTiger director-research Ankita Sood said the overall inventory overhang increased to 47 months as of March 2021, as compared to 28 months in March 2020 and 43 months in December 2020. "This implies that with the current sales velocity, it will take nearly four years to absorb the current residential inventory," she said.

Unsold inventories in Ahmedabad and Chennai have risen while the other cities have reported a drop.

Unsold housing stocks in Ahmedabad rose to 42,991 units from 38,614 units in the previous quarter, while in Chennai, the numbers grew to 37,697 units from 36,609

units. In Bengaluru, unsold inventories declined to 69,285 units from 71,198 units.

Delhi NCR has 1,05,279 unsold housing units in January-March 2021 period as against 1,06,689 units in the previous quarter.

In Hyderabad, unsold inventories dropped marginally to 39,191 units from 39,308 units.

Unsold housing stock in Kolkata declined to 28,827 units from 30,210 units.

In Maharashtra's two major markets, Mumbai saw unsold housing stock declining to 2,54,183 units from 2,63,987 units.

Unsold inventories in Pune dipped to 1,27,891 units in the January-March 2021 from 1,31,868 units in the October-December period of last calendar year.

Hyderabad remained the best performing market in January-March with the lowest inventory overhang of 25 months, followed by Kolkata and Bengaluru with 36 and 37 months. —PTI

Poonawalla says will return in a few days

**New Delhi, May 2:** Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla, who has been in the UK on extended stay to evade alleged threats in India over ever-increasing demand for Covid-19 vaccines, has said he will return in a few days.

In an interview to *The Times*, Poonawalla had alleged that he had been receiving threats in India and that he and his family had left the country for London after unprecedented 'pressure and aggression' over the demand of vaccines.

In a late night tweet on Saturday, he said the production of Covishield — the Oxford/ Astra-Zeneca's Covid-19 vaccine that is being produced by Serum Institute in India — was in full swing at SII's facility in Pune. "Pleased to state that COVISHIELD's production is in full swing in Pune. I look forward to reviewing operations upon my return in a few



Adar Poonawalla

days," Poonawalla said.

He, however, did not give a timeline for his return to India. On his stay in the UK, Poonawalla said he "had an excellent meeting" with all partners and stakeholders in that country.

Indian authorities are scrambling for vaccines, medicines and oxygen as the nation faces its worst health crisis. The number of daily coronavirus cases in India slipped slightly, a day after becoming the first in the world to cross the four-lakh mark.

India's new coronavirus cases rose by 3,92,488, while deaths from the

infection jumped by 3,689 over the past 24 hours, according to health ministry data released on Sunday. Total case load now stands at 1.95 crore with 2,15,542 deaths.

"I'm staying here for an extended period because I don't want to go back to that situation," *The Times* cited Poonawalla as saying in an interview published on Saturday.

"I don't want to be in a situation where you are trying to do your job and just because you can't supply the needs of X, Y or Z, you really don't want to guess what they are going to do," he had said, adding, "Everything falls on my shoulders, but I can't do it alone."

In the interview, when asked about the impact of the 'Kumbh Mela' and the Assembly elections on the second wave in India, Poonawalla had said his "head would be chopped off" if he answered on such a "sensitive" matter. —PTI

Vodafone links up with Google Cloud

DEANA KJUKA MAY 2

Vodafone Group PLC and the cloud division of Alphabet Inc's Google are planning to jointly develop data services, the Financial Times reported on Sunday, citing interviews with representatives from both companies.

According to the FT, about 1,000 workers in the UK, Spain and the US will be asked to create

"Nucleus," the new cloud-based storage and analytics portal, which will host Vodafone's data. Nucleus will be able to process around 50 terabytes of data a day within the cloud.

As part of the six-year agreement Vodafone will transfer data from its own servers to Google Cloud.

Vodafone and Google will also invent a system, called Dynamo, that will extract and transport data across

different countries where the telecoms company operates.

The two companies will also in the future seek to sell consultancy services to other multinational businesses seeking to move huge amounts of data to the cloud.

Vodafone's chief technology officer, Johan Wibergh, told the FT that Nucleus will process 5,000 different data feeds. —Bloomberg

FPIs may relook at Indian stocks after election verdict, 2nd wave

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 2

Foreign portfolio investors' (FPIs) reaction to the assembly election results and the government's handling of the second Covid wave hold the key to market movementsthis month.

April saw a highly volatile market in April, with FPIs becoming net sellers by around Rs 10,000 crore and ending the month with a big sell-off on Friday by Rs 3,465.07 crore.

The assembly elections verdict not going in favour of the BJP-led central government may make FPIs

take a relook at their recent investments in India, as they would like political stability rather than uncertainty in any form.

Mamata Banerjee and M. K. Stalin's win could unite opposition parties against the central government, which has fared badly in controlling the pandemic second wave and FPIs could make a quick exit to salvage their profits.

FPIs turned net sellers as the assembly elections verdict was getting nearer and may sell more equity holdings in May, given the fact that the rupee has weakened against the US dollar

and trades in the Rs 74-75 range now. Covid's second wave has slowed economic activity and the focus of all is on saving lives and controlling the pandemic, which could dent corporate profit in the April-June quarter, making FPIs book profit now rather than wait till the first quarter earnings are out.

However, the good news is that mutual funds bought equity assets worth close to Rs 6,000 crore in April, continuing the trend started in March. As per Sebi data, mutual funds were net buyers of equities worth Rs 5,926.26 crore in April.

Tesla's German factory delayed

CHRISTOPH RAUWALD MAY 2

Tesla Inc's factory outside Berlin won't start production before the end of January next year due to delays affecting battery pack production, according to a report by German trade magazine *Automobilwoche*, which cited unidentified sources close



to the company. Tesla's chief executive officer Elon Musk gave the team in charge of the plant six more months to complete the project,

according to the report published on Sunday.

The company is also waiting for permission from local authorities after it changed the original application for the plant. Other projects at the Berlin site—including the paint shop and body stamping lines—are at an advanced stage. —Bloomberg

RED-HOT | METAL

Australian firms can produce a tonne of iron ore for less than \$20 a tonne

Big Mining beats Big Oil in profit as metal flares

THOMAS BIESHEUVEL, JAVIER BLAS & JAMES ATTWOOD MAY 2

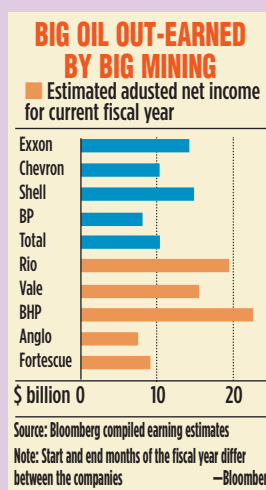
Major oil producers, for decades the natural resource industry's top earners, are being eclipsed by once-smaller mining peers who are churning out record profits thanks to red-hot metals markets. The mining windfall is the latest sign of a boom in iron ore, copper and other metals that's sending an inflationary wave through the global economy, increasing the cost of everything from electrical wires to construction beams.

In the corporate world, the top five iron ore mining companies are on

track to deliver bottom-line profits of \$65 billion combined this year, according to estimates compiled by Bloomberg. That's about 13 per cent more than the five biggest international oil producers, flipping a decades-old hierarchy.

"It's wild," said Mark Hansen, chief executive officer of London-based trading house Concord Resources Ltd. "The value right now has shifted from energy to metals."

"The eye-watering mining profits are mainly a product of iron ore, the world's biggest commodity after oil. The crucial steelmaking ingredient has been trading just a whisker below \$200 a tonne and on par with record prices



from a decade ago, when voracious Chinese demand triggered what became known as the com-

modities supercycle. The largest Australian mining companies can pull a tonne of iron ore from the ground for less than \$20 a tonne.

Copper prices have also jumped near to all-time highs, crossing the \$10,000-a-tonne barrier for the first time in a decade. A basket of base metals, including aluminum, nickel, copper, tin, lead and zinc, is trading at levels only reached twice in modern history: in 2007-08 and 2011.

For the big five iron ore miners—BHP Group, Rio Tinto Group, Vale SA, Anglo American Plc and Fortescue Metals Group Ltd—this fiscal year will be just the second time this century that they'll out-

earn their oil peers, estimates show. It would be only the first time if their oil rivals hadn't been weighed down by huge writedowns in 2020.

During the previous commodity boom, which peaked between 2008 and 2011, Big Oil easily made larger profits than Big Mining. A decade ago, for example, the five energy majors—Exxon Mobil Corp., Chevron Corp., Royal Dutch Shell Plc, Total SE and BP Plc—delivered adjusted earnings that were double those of the big five iron ore miners.

Now, the surge in mining profits is another headache for the large oil companies as they struggle to attract shareholders amid

mounting concern over climate change. While the miners are already returning more cash to investors, the oil producers are only just starting to do so, after some cut dividends last year.

The miners also have a better story to tell: while oil contributes to a warming world, some metals—particularly copper—are key to building a greener future based on electric cars.

The mining windfall matters beyond the natural resources industry. It's an indication that companies across multiple sectors will face rising costs, which at some point could translate into broader inflation. —Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## Rahul diagnosed with appendicitis

**Ahmedabad:** IPL franchise Punjab Kings skipper K.L. Rahul has been diagnosed with acute appendicitis and has flown to Mumbai for surgery and further treatment, which will keep him out of action for at least a week.

It was learnt that Mayank Agarwal will lead the side in Rahul's absence, starting with tonight's match against Delhi Capitals here.

"K L Rahul complained of severe abdomen pain last night and after not responding to medication, he was taken to emergency room for further tests which revealed that he was diagnosed with acute appendicitis," the team said in a statement.

"It will be resolved surgically and for safety measures, he has been transferred to the hospital for the same," it added.

Rahul is expected to be operated on Sunday night at the Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai.

— PTI

## Asiad champ rider Khan passes away

**Jaipur:** The 1982 Asian Games gold medalist rider Colonel Gulam Mohammad Khan (Retired) died on Saturday in Pune. The renowned rider, 74, had joined the Indian Military Academy in 1973.

A year later he was judged the Best Rider of the Academy and awarded Polo and Riding colors. From 1980 to 1990 he captained the ASC team, during which time his team won the National title six times and he became individual National Champion (Eventing) four times. As a member of the team which won the gold medal in Eventing at the 1982 Asian Games in Delhi, Khan gained the individual silver medal riding Goodwill. In the Seoul Asian Games, he was a member of the Dressage and the Eventing teams, winning bronze medals on both teams and gaining the highest place of any Indian rider — he was 4th in the Evening and 9th in the Dressage. — PTI

## Ex-BCCI selector Rungta no more

**New Delhi:** Former BCCI selector and Rajasthan captain Kishan Rungta died of Covid-19 at a hospital in Jaipur. He was 88. The veteran administrator tested positive for the virus last week and died on Saturday. "Former Rajasthan first class cricketer and ex-national selector Kishan Rungta has died of Covid-19," a BCCI source confirmed.

Rungta served as a national selector from Central Zone in 1998. He played 59 first class games between 1953 to 1970, scoring 2717 runs. His late elder brother Purushottam was a BCCI treasurer in the 1970s. The Rungta family dominated Rajasthan cricket for nearly five decades before Lalit Modi beat them in the elections and wrested control in mid 2000s. — PTI

## Axelson pulls out after testing +ve

**Copenhagen:** Badminton world number two Viktor Axelsen was forced to withdraw from Sunday's final of the European Championship in Kiev after testing positive for Covid-19. Axelsen was to face fellow Dane Anders Antonsen, who claimed his first European title with a walkover. "Top seed and defending champion Viktor Axelsen returned a second positive test for Covid-19, ruling him out of contesting the men's singles final of the 2021 European Championships today," Badminton Denmark announced on Sunday. — AFP

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**IPL:** Kolkata Knight Riders vs Royal Challengers Bangalore from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

**Sri Lanka vs Bangladesh second Test:** Day 5 from 10 am on Sony Six, HD

## FOOTBALL

**English Premier League:** West Brom vs Wolves from 10.30 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD; Burnley vs West Ham from 12.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

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## THE JOS MACHINE

## Buttler slams ton as Royals cruise to 55-run win over SRH

**New Delhi, May 2:** Jos Buttler announced his return to form with belligerent maiden T20 hundred as Rajasthan Royals made a mincemeat of an out-of-sorts SunRisers Hyderabad, winning IPL encounter by a whopping 55-run margin.

Opening the innings, Buttler smashed a breather-taking 124 off 64 balls while Sanju Samson was effective in his 48 off 33 deliveries which powered Rajasthan to a commanding 220 for three.

Even a change in captaincy couldn't bring in luck for SRH as they could manage only 165 for eight in their 20 overs.

Chris Morris (3/29) and Mustafizur Rahman (3/20) did the bulk of the work with the ball while Kartik Tyagi (1/32) Rahul Twetia (1/45) picked a wicket apiece.

With the win, the Royals moved up to fifth spot while SRH continued to stay at the bottom, having won only one match all season.

Looking to register their second win of the season, SRH raced to 57 for no loss in the first six overs.

However, Bangladesh pacer Rahman struck right after the first strategic time out, getting rid of Manish Pandey (31). The dangerous Jonny Bairstow (30) and Vijay Shankar (8) soon followed. With the pressure mounting, skipper Kane Williamson (20) went for the big shot only to be caught at deep midwicket by Morris off Tyagi as wickets tumbled at regular intervals.

With 91 needed in the last five overs the lower and middle order struggled. In the end, the top heavy SRH did not have enough fire-power to pull off the mammoth chase.

— PTI



Jos Buttler of Rajasthan Royals celebrates his century against Sunrisers Hyderabad in an Indian Premier League match in New Delhi on Sunday.

— IPL

## SCORECARD

**Rajasthan Royals:** Jos Buttler b Sandeep Sharma 124, Yashasvi Jaiswal lbw b Rashid Khan 12, Sanju Samson c Abdul Samad b Vijay Shankar 48, Riyan Parag not out 15, David Miller not out 7. Extras (lb-5, w-8, nb-1) 14. **Total (for 3 wks, in 20 overs) 220.**

**FoW:** 17-1, 167-2, 209-3.

**Bowler:** Bhuvneshwar Kumar 4-0-37-0, Sandeep Sharma 4-0-50-1, Rashid Khan 4-0-24-1, Khaleel Ahmed 4-0-41-0, Vijay Shankar 3-0-42-1, Mohammad Nabi 1-0-21-0.

**Sunrisers Hyderabad:** Manish Pandey b Mustafizur 31, Jonny Bairstow c Anuj Rawat b

Rahul Tewatia 30, Kane Williamson c Chris Morris b Kartik Tyagi 20, Vijay Shankar c Miller b Chris Morris 8, Kedar Jadhav b Chris Morris 19, Mohammad Nabi c Anuj Rawat b Mustafizur 17, Abdul Samad c Anuj Rawat b Chris Morris 10, Rashid Khan c Chris Morris b Mustafizur 0, Bhuvneshwar Kumar not out 14, Sandeep Sharma not out 8. Extras (lb-1, w-7) 8. **Total (for 8 wks, in 20 overs) 165.**

**FoW:** 57-1, 70-2, 85-3, 105-4, 127-5, 142-6, 142-7, 143-8.

**Bowler:** Kartik Tyagi 4-0-32-1, Mustafizur Rahman 4-0-20-3, Chetan Sakaria 4-0-38-0, Chris Morris 4-0-29-3, Rahul Tewatia 4-0-45-1.

## RCB LOOK TO BOUNCE BACK AGAINST KKR

**Ahmedabad, May 2:** Star-studded Royal Challengers Bangalore would look to get their mojo back when they face struggling Kolkata Knight Riders who need a complete overhaul for their IPL revival here on Sunday.

From leading the table with four wins on the trot, the Virat Kohli-led team has slipped to third spot at the halfway stage after suffering two defeats from their last three matches.

In fact, RCB would have lost three in a row if pacer Mohammed Siraj had not defended 14 runs in the final over against Delhi Capitals' explosive duo of Rishabh Pant and Shimron Hetmyer.

The onus would be on their famed batting lineup of Kohli, AB de Villiers and Glenn Maxwell to start firing once again and put pressure on the KKR batsmen.

Talented opener Devdutt Padikkal would also be keen to get back among runs as he has not clicked after his unbeaten 101 against Rajasthan Royals. — PTI

## HEAD TO HEAD

Matches **27**

KKR **14** RCB **13**

## FOR THE RECORD

● Virat Kohli will become fifth player to complete a double century of matches in IPL history. He has played 199 matches so far for Royal Challengers Bangalore since 2008.

**STATS:** S. PERVEZ QAISER

## Dhawan dhamaka in Delhi's big win

**Ahmedabad, May 2:** Shikhar Dhawan smashed an unbeaten 69 off 47 as Delhi Capitals beat Punjab Kings by seven wickets in an IPL game here on Sunday.

Other opener Prithvi Shaw (39) and Steven Smith (24) also chipped in as DC chased down the target in 17.4 overs.

Asked to bat first, stand-in skipper Mayank Agarwal hit an unbeaten 58-ball 99, while debutant Dawid Malan scored 26 as Punjab posted 166 for six. It was a brilliant display of clean hitting from Agarwal who used the straight bat effectively in his crucial knock comprising eights fours and four sixes.

Delhi Capitals kept things tight in the power-play, conceding 39 runs and sending back Prabhsimran Singh (12) and the mighty Chris Gayle (13). Agarwal, leading the side in the absence of in-form skipper K.L. Rahul, steadied the innings alongside debutant Malan as the two shared a 52-run partnership.

— PTI

## SCORECARD

**Punjab Kings:** Prabhsimran Singh c Steven Smith b Rabada 12, Mayank Agarwal not out 99, Chris Gayle b Rabada 13, Dawid Malan b Axar 26, Deepak Hooda run out (Hetmyer/Axar) 1, Shahrukh Khan c Hetmyer b Avesh Khan 4, Chris Jordan c Lalit Yadav b Rabada 2, Harpreet Brar not out 4. Extras (lb-2, w-3) 5. **Total (for 6 wks, in 20 overs) 166.**

**FoW:** 1-17, 2-35, 3-87, 4-88, 5-129, 6-143.

**Bowler:** Ishant Sharma 4-0-37-0, Marcus Stoinis 1-0-6-0, Kagiso Rabada 4-0-36-3, Avesh Khan 4-0-39-1, Lalit Yadav 3-0-25-0, Axar Patel 4-0-21-1.

**Delhi Capitals:** Prithvi Shaw b Harpreet Brar 39, Shikhar Dhawan not out 69, Steven Smith c Malan b Meredith 25, Rishabh Pant c Agarwal b Jordan 14, Shimron Hetmyer not out 16. Extras (lb-1, w-3) 4. **Total (for 3 wks, in 17.4 overs) 167.**

**FoW:** 1-63, 2-111, 3-147.

**Bowling:** Riley Meredith 3.4-0-36-1, Mohammed Shami 3-0-37-0, Ravi Bishnoi 4-0-42-0, Chris Jordan 2-0-21-1, Harpreet Brar 3-0-19-1, Deepak Hooda 2-0-11-0.

## PURPLE CAP

Harshal Patel, RCB	<b>17</b>
Avesh Khan, DC	<b>14</b>
Chris Morris, RR	<b>14</b>

## ORANGE CAP

Shikhar Dhawan, DC	<b>380</b>
K. L. Rahul, PBKS	<b>331</b>
Faf du Plessis, CSK	<b>320</b>

## IPL POINTS TABLE

Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
DC	8	6	2	0	12	+0.547
CSK	7	5	2	0	10	+1.263
RCB	7	5	2	0	10	-0.171
MI	7	4	3	0	8	+0.062
RR	7	3	4	0	6	-0.190
PBKS	8	3	5	0	6	-0.368
KKR	7	2	5	0	4	-0.494
SRH	7	1	6	0	2	-0.623

## INTER CROWNED SERIE A CHAMPS FOR 19TH TIME

**Milan, May 2:** Inter Milan clinched the Serie A title for the first time since 2010 on Sunday when nearest rivals Atalanta were held 1-1 at Sassuolo.

Antonio Conte's side clinched their 19th 'Scudetto' as the draw leave the 'Nerazzurri' 13 points clear with four games remaining.

Luis Muriel missed a late penalty that could have given Atalanta a win that would have put Inter's celebrations on hold but the second-placed Bergamo side are now 13 points behind Inter.

Inter, who beat Crotone 2-0 on Saturday, needed Atalanta to drop points in Emilia-Romagna to claim the title.

Juventus have been denied a 10th straight league title and are now fighting for a Champions League spot.

Atalanta are equal on 69 points with third-placed AC Milan, who are two points ahead of Napoli.

Juventus are fifth before they play later Sunday at Udinese. In Emilia-Romagna, Robin Gosens scored 10 minutes after Collini's sending off for bringing down Jeremie Boga. — AFP

## Fans protest as United game put off

**London, May 2:** Manchester United's Premier League clash against Liverpool was postponed on Sunday after fans invaded the Old Trafford pitch as part of a protest against United's owners, the Glazer family. "Our match against Liverpool has been postponed due to safety and security considerations around the protest today," United said in a statement.

Manchester City will be crowned English champions for the third time in four seasons if second placed United lose to Liverpool.

But Pep Guardiola's side saw their hopes of a title party put on hold for a while at least after concerning scenes several hours before kick-off at Old Trafford.

Around 200 United fans managed to get onto the pitch in protest at the club's owners.

The Glazer family, already disliked by many United supporters, were widely criticised for their leading role in the failed breakaway European Super League.

A small group of United supporters got into the club's training ground to protest against the Glazers last week, but this was a much more significant incident.

The protestors pushed down security barriers outside Old Trafford and ran onto the pitch.

Fans waved anti-Glazer banners and set off green and yellow flares — the colours of United's



Fans hold up banners as they protest against the Glazer family, the owners of Manchester United, before their Premier League match against Liverpool at Old Trafford in Manchester on Sunday.

— AP

Newton Heath founders. One flare was fired towards a television commentary gantry and small sections of the turf were damaged before order was finally restored.

Both United and Liverpool's players were

in their team hotels when the breach occurred.

When another group of around 30 demonstrators got into the stadium via a different route, there were growing concerns that the match would have to be

postponed for safety reasons.

**ARSENAL CRUISE** Arsenal won for the first time in four games in all competitions thanks to Mohamed Elneny's first Premier League goal and a superb strike from Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

Fourth bottom Newcastle remain nine points clear of the relegation zone with four games left.

Amid growing calls for his dismissal after one of Arsenal's worst seasons in decades, Gunners boss Mikel Arteta knows the only way to silence the critics is to qualify for next season's Champions League by winning the Europa League.

Arteta admits he is prioritising the Europa League, so it was no surprise that only Martin Odegaard, Dani Ceballos and Granit Xhaka kept their places in the team beaten 2-1 by Villarreal in the semi-final first leg on Thursday. — AFP

## THE RESULT

Newcastle **0**  
Arsenal **2**  
(Elneny 6, Aubameyang 66)

postponed for safety reasons.

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## HAZARD STARTS AS REAL EASE PAST OSASUNA

**Madrid, May 2:** Real Madrid held their nerve to beat Osasuna 2-0 in La Liga on Saturday as Eden Hazard made his first start since January, raising the possibility of Zinedine Zidane picking him for Wednesday's Champions League semi-final second leg against Chelsea.

After making a brief cameo off the bench in the first leg last week, Hazard played 72 minutes at Valdebebas and could now face his former club from the start in the pivotal return game at Stamford Bridge.

"He was very good," said Zidane.

Real Madrid have it all to do against Chelsea after drawing the opener 1-1 and they are playing catch-up in La Liga too, after Atletico Madrid had earlier scraped to a 1-0 victory against struggling Elche.

Elche's Fidel Chaves missed a 91st-minute penalty in what could prove a pivotal moment in Spain's thrilling title race, with Atletico maintaining their two-point lead over Real Madrid and stretching the advantage to five over Barcelona. — AFP

## Hami wins, extends lead over Verstappen

**Portimao (Portugal), May 2:** Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton made two typically clinical overtakes to bounce back and win the Portuguese Grand Prix for a 97th career win on Sunday, extending his championship lead over Max Verstappen to eight points in his bid for a record eighth F1 title.

At one point Hamilton slipped to third, but the Mercedes driver slickly moved ahead on Lap 20 of 66 to finish ahead of Red Bull's Verstappen and his Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas.

"That was such a tough race, physically and mentally, keeping everything together," Hamilton said. The British driver start-

ed from second on the grid behind Bottas, who took a bonus point for the fastest lap. Verstappen thought he set the fastest time — on his final lap — but it was deleted because he went wide of track limits.

Hamilton and Verstappen have been in the top two in all three races, with Hamilton winning two of them heading into next Sunday's Spanish GP.

Bottas took pole to deny Hamilton a record-extending 100th, making him the third different pole-sitter so far after Verstappen and Hamilton. He made a clean start to hold off Hamilton and Verstappen but dropped off.

"It was a tricky day



Lewis Hamilton celebrates on the podium after winning the Portuguese GP on Sunday.

— AFP

today, just didn't have the pace," Bottas said.

The safety car came out on Lap 2 for debris on the track as veteran Kimi

Raikkonen lost his front wing and went off into gravel after clipping the left rear tire of his Alfa Romeo teammate Antonio

Giovinazzi. "It was my mistake," Raikkonen said. "I'm just glad I didn't ruin his tire."

When the race resumed on Lap 7, Bottas surprised Hamilton by restarting earlier than he perhaps expected, while Verstappen got in Hamilton's slipstream to move past him into second.

Verstappen couldn't overtake Bottas despite being in the DRS zone, but Hamilton used his to zoom past Verstappen on the outside to reclaim second four laps later, and then set about chasing Bottas, overraking him with another fine move on the outside to stamp his authority on the race. — AP