



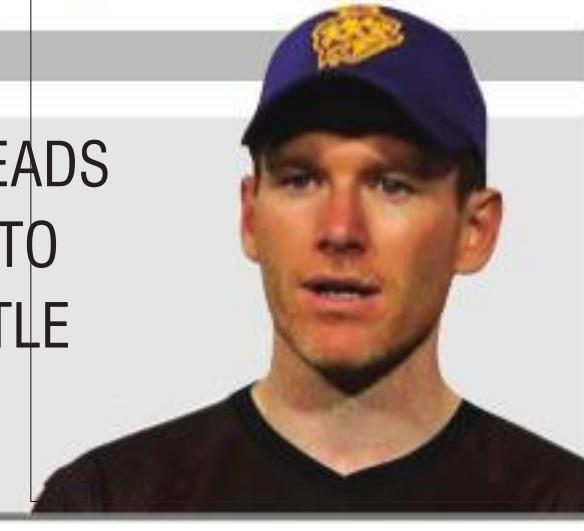
OLYMPIC
CHALLENGE



TIME TO TALK



100 DAYS ON
AND SO FAR,
SO GOOD



MORGAN LEADS
KNIGHTS INTO
FRESH BATTLE

P12

WEATHER

Partly cloudy sky. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 42 and 22 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL	
RELATIVE HUMIDITY	
Max: 69%	Min: 22%
TEMPERATURE	
Max: 42.2°C (+4)	Min: 22.3°C (-2)
SUN RISES 05:42 hrs	SUN SETS 18:55 hrs
MOON RISES 21:40 hrs	MOON SETS 08:14 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Health workers and patients at an Emergency Covid-19 care centre organised by Delhi government at Shahi banquet Hall near LNJP hospital in the capital on Wednesday.

SC orders arrested scribe shifted: The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Uttar Pradesh government to shift journalist Siddique Kappan, suffering from various ailments and arrested last year on way to Hathras where a young Dalit woman had died after being gang raped, to a hospital in Delhi for better medical treatment. The court also directed the state to provide medical treatment to the Kerala-based scribe.

Kotkhai rape case: A court here on Wednesday convicted a 28-year-old man in connection with the rape and murder of a 16-year-old schoolgirl in a forest in Himachal Pradesh's Kotkhai town four years ago. Special Judge Rajeev Bhardwaj held Anil Kumar alias Nilu alias Charani guilty of rape and murder under the Indian Penal Code and relevant provisions of the POCSO Act. The hearing for deciding quantum of his sentence has been scheduled for May 11.

6.4 magnitude quake strikes Assam, 10 aftershocks follow

SNS & PTI
GUWAHATI, 28 APRIL

A series of earthquakes jolted Assam and most of the Northeastern states on Wednesday, causing extensive damage to buildings and forcing people to scamper out of their homes.

There were no immediate reports of deaths directly due to the tremors, but two persons - one each in Kamrup Metropolitan and Nagaon districts - died due to shock and heart attack around the time of the earthquake, the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said.

According to initial reports, 10 people suffered injuries in four districts as the first quake



of 6.4 magnitude struck Tezpur, the headquarters of Sonitpur district, at 7.51 am, the ASDMA said in a statement.

The impact was felt in several Northeastern states, parts of West Bengal, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

The first quake was followed in quick succession by lesser intensity tremors of 4.7, 4, and two 3.6 magnitudes

at 8.03 am, 8.13 am, 8.25 am and 8.44 am, Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC) Deputy Director Sanjay O'Neil Shaw said.

Another earthquake of 3.2 magnitude hit Assam's Nagaon district at 10.05 am. A while later, another jolt of 3.4 magnitude hit Tezpur at 10.39 am, he added. At 12.32 pm, the eighth quake of 2.9 magnitude hit Morigaon. It was followed by three more earthquakes, hitting Sonitpur district again, Shaw said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi telephoned Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal twice to inquire about the destruction caused by the earthquake and assured him all help from the Centre.

"It appears you want people to die," the judge said. Noting that the nation is fac-

ing an unprecedented crisis, the court also appealed to citizens and suppliers not to hoard oxygen cylinders and medicines

to avoid creating an artificial shortage. "People will keep dying and you will keep sitting" a bench of justices Vipin Sanghi

Eighth & last phase of Bengal's ballot battle today

TIRTHANKAR MITRA/
SOMA MOOKHERJEE
KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

Curtains are poised to be rung down tomorrow on the long-drawn-out electoral exercise in Bengal, held amidst a raging second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the eighth and final phase of the Assembly election taking place in 35 constituencies in Kolkata North, parts of Malda, Murshidabad and Birbhum.

In this last phase, the spotlight which ought to have been focussed on contestants has been turned towards Trinamul Congress strongman Anubrata Mondal, a key player in the poll battle, but not as a candidate. Known for his fiery speeches, Mondal, the TMC's district president of Birbhum has been put under surveillance from 5.00 p.m. on



ing what is virtually a struggle for political existence. Apart from some heavyweight ministers, several veteran Congress leaders are also in this poll fray from Malda and Murshidabad. The state agriculture minister Ashish Banerjee is contesting from Rampurhat, state fisheries minister Chandranath Sinha from Bolpur while state women and child empow-

ment minister Sashi Panja is contesting from Shyampur and consumer affairs minister Sadhan Pandey is contesting from Maniktala.

Pandey faces Kalyan Choubey of the BJP and former CPI-M MLA Rupa Bagchi.

Veteran Congress leader Santosh Pathak is contesting from Chowringhee against Trinamul's Nayana Bandopadhyay.

There are two changes in Jorasanko and Cossipore-Belgharia seats for the TMC where sitting MLAs Smita Bakshi and Mala Saha have not been fielded. Former Trinamul Rajya Sabha MP and presently its Hindi cell chairman Vivek Gupta is contesting from Jorasanko in place of Smita Bakshi. In Cossipore-Belgharia, TMC is represented by Atin Ghosh, former Member-Mayor-in-Council in

Kolkata Municipal Corporation who is contesting instead of Mala Saha.

Former deputy mayor, BJP's Meena Devi Purohit is also contesting from Jorasanko. Shivaaji Singh Roy of BJP is contesting against Ghosh.

In English Bazaar, veteran Tri-

nambu leader Krishnendu Narayan Chowdhury is pitted against BJP's Sreeprava Mitra Chowdhury.

Veteran Congress leader Abu Hasem Khan Chowdhury's son Ishu Khan Chowdhury is contesting from Sujapur, Sabina Yashmin who defected to the Trinamul is contesting from Mothabari and veteran BJP leader Sadhin Kumar Sarkar is contesting from Baisnabnagar in Malda. Congress district president Manoj Chakraborty is contesting from Beharampore. Among Congress leaders

who defected to Trinamul are Ashish Marjit, seeking the public mandate from Kharagpur, Humayun Kabir, contesting from Bharatpur and Rabiu Alam Chowdhury, fielded from Rejinagar.

Moinuddin Shams, who once belonged to Forward Bloc and became MLA from Nalhati as a TMC nominee was denied ticket this time. He has returned to the Forward Bloc and is contesting from Nalhati again.

Manirul Islam who defected to Trinamul from the Forward Bloc and then switched loyalty to the BJP has been denied nomination this time. But unlike Shams, he is contesting as an independent candidate from his old constituency, Labhpur, and the votes polled by him may make the difference between victory or defeat for the Trinamul and BJP candidates.

Counting of votes: EC imposes Covid curbs

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Candidates or their agents will not be allowed inside counting halls without a negative coronavirus report or without having both Covid-19 vaccine doses, the Election Commission of India said Wednesday in its guidelines for counting of votes on May 2.

Issued in the wake of scathing criticism from various courts, including Madras and Calcutta High Courts, for failing to ensure Covid-appropriate behaviour during the ongoing elections, the guidelines also bar public gatherings outside venues during the counting process.

Counting of votes for the assembly polls in Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, besides various assembly and Lok Sabha bypolls begins at 8 am on May 2.

"No candidates or agents will be allowed inside the counting hall without undergoing RT-PCR/RAT test or without having two doses of vaccination against Covid-19 and will have to produce negative RT-PCR report or RAT report or vaccination reports within 48 hours of start of counting," the guidelines say.

District election officers will organise Covid tests for candidates and their counting agents.

LGeffectively becomes in-charge of Delhi as MHA notifies Act

'Government' in Delhi now means 'LG', according to the controversial GNCTD (Amendment) Act

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Delhi's lieutenant governor (LG) has become in-charge of the national capital effectively with the Centre notifying a controversial new law making it clear that Delhi's elected government will now have to seek the opinion of the Centre-appointed LG before any executive decision.



The Union ministry of home affairs (MHA)'s notification giving effect to the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Act, 2021 came last night at a time when Delhi has been reeling under a brutal, ferocious Covid storm with its hospitals, crematoriums and graveyards continuing to be overrun by ever-spiralling Covid cases and deaths amid a severe shortage of medical oxygen, ICU beds, ventilators, and key medicines.

The provisions of the GNCTD (Amendment) Act came into effect from 27 April, according to the notification issued by the Centre.

Three key subjects in Delhi — public order, police and land — have already been in the

hands of the Central government with subjects such as health, education, agriculture, forest and transport remaining with the elected Delhi government.

The MHA notification seals the primacy given to the LG, a nominee of the Central government, in the Act. The Delhi government will now have to take permission from the LG before taking any action even over subjects which have been under its domain.

According to the legislation, the "government" in Delhi now means the "Lieutenant Governor". In exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (2) of section 1 of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Act 2021 (15 of 2021), the Central Government hereby appoints the 27th April

2021 as the date on which the provisions of the said Act shall come into force," stated the notification signed by additional secretary in the MHA, Govind Mohan.

The Act has been notified at a time when both the Narendra Modi-led Centre and the Arvind Kejriwal-led Delhi government have drawn fire over their alleged mishandling of the raging new Covid wave that has spiralled into a tsunami amid acute scarcity of oxygen, hospital beds and essential medicines.

When this legislation was passed by Parliament on 22 March and in the Rajya Sabha on 24 March, Delhi CM Kejriwal had termed it as a "sad day for Indian democracy".

"The said bill will promote harmonious relations between

the legislature and the executive, and further define the responsibilities of the elected government and the L-G, in line with the constitutional scheme of governance of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, as interpreted by the Supreme Court," the statement of objects and reasons of the bill stated.

"When a bill has been passed by the legislative assembly, it shall be presented to the lieutenant governor and the lieutenant governor shall declare either that he assents to the bill or that he withholds assent therefrom or that he reserves the bill for the consideration of the President..." the bill said.

The Centre maintained it is in line with the Supreme Court's July 2018 ruling on the ambit of powers of the lieutenant governor and the Delhi government after a series of run-ins between the two.

Union minister G Kishan Reddy had said when the bill was introduced in Parliament that the amendments would lead to transparency and clarity in governance in NCT of Delhi and enhance public accountability.

The minister had said Delhi

is not a full-fledged state and does not have full power and the executive powers of the LG of Delhi are different from the powers of governors of the state.

Explaining the rationale behind the bill, he said the amendments have been brought to remove ambiguities in the existing Act and stressed that changes in the law have been sought in the spirit of what has been said in a top court judgment.

Delhi's ruling Aam Aadmi Party has said it plans to approach the Supreme Court against the legislation, describing it as an "unconstitutional" attempt to make the Delhi government "administratively impotent" by a political party made "electorally impotent" by the people of the national capital.

The Congress, Trinamul, Shiv Sena, DMK and other Opposition parties also termed the bill "unconstitutional" and claimed it will fail judicial scrutiny.

As the city of Delhi, the home of the Central government with inherent problems given the multiplicity of powers, opens a new chapter of governance, the number of Covid

on the number of RT-PCR tests conducted in the last seven days and the reasons for the reduction in the tests. The court was informed that at the time of discharge of COVID-19 patients from hospitals, the process of a no objection certificate by Third Party Administrators (TPA), attached to insurance companies, is taking a long time of 7-8 hours resulting in a delay in discharge and admission of new patients.

"This is wrong. This is a complete non-application of mind. Now people who do not have oxygen will not get Remdesivir either," Justice Prathiba M Singh said when the central government submitted that under the COVID treatment protocol being followed now only patients on oxygen support were being given Remdesivir.

"It appears you want people to die," the judge said.

Noting that the nation is facing an unprecedented crisis, the court also appealed to citizens and suppliers not to hoard oxygen cylinders and medicines to avoid creating an artificial shortage.

The allocation made by the Centre to Delhi is 490 Metric Tonnes per day. Not for a single day, Delhi has been able to get the complete quantity, a bench of justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said, adding that this is primarily because three of the plants are situated in West Bengal and Odisha which are at a distance of 1300-1500 km from here.

Justice Singh also said the court will consider later whether a medical committee should review if the protocols or guidelines for administering Remdesivir need any modification.

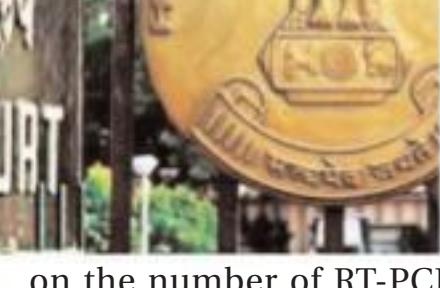
"Don't change the protocol only to reduce the shortage. That is wrong. As a result, doctors are not able to prescribe Remdesivir," the court said and added, "This is complete mismanagement."

The high court is handling multiple petitions relating to the pandemic with various benches conducting marathon hearings.

The bench headed by Justice Sanghi appointed senior advocate Raj Shekhar Rao as amicus curiae to assist the court in dealing with the medical oxygen crisis and other issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It asked him to study the national allocation order on oxygen and give suggestions on optimal usage of tankers and minimisation of turn-around time.

It also asked the Delhi government to place a report



HC unhappy over non-supply of full oxygen quota by Centre to Delhi, Remdesivir protocol 'change'

of its Tuesday's direction, the Delhi government has issued orders relating to the allocation of medical oxygen to hospitals taking into account the requirement for ICU beds and other oxygen beds.

It noted that the government's order mentions the names of oxygen refiller units that would supply the gas cylinders to the hospitals here and directed the state to implement it forthwith.

Following a court's order, some of the refillers were present in the hearing and assured the bench that they will comply with the government's order in letter and spirit and also made some suggestions to streamline the supplies to hospitals and individuals.

One of the suggestions was that few refillers can cater to the needs of oxygen cylinders by individuals who are being treated for COVID-19 at homes and the others can supply to hospitals.

The court said that a meeting should be conducted between Delhi government officers and refillers on the issue today evening and in the meantime, the state shall provide cylinders to individuals.

The court appealed to citizens not to hoard oxygen cylinders and medicines required for COVID-19 patients to avoid creating artificial scarcity and make them available to people in need.

The nation is facing an unprecedented crisis. It is in times like these that we the people need to stand up and showcase our qualities and virtues which all of us have. We appeal to the good sense of people not to resort to black marketing and hoarding of oxygen cylinders, flow meters or medicines and to make them available to the needy. Hoarding of medicines or oxygen leads to artificial scarcity to an extent which may not be safe, the bench said.

Earlier in the hearing, the court observed, All refillers our understanding is that they are hoarding in black. We will do something about it.

To this, some of the refillers assured the court that there was no hoarding at their end and none of the plants were indulging in black marketing.

Apke parivar ko sabki dua laggi (your family will be blessed by everyone). We don't want to take any strict action against anyone. So you all comply with the government's order on refillers, the bench said.

Kejriwal chairs meeting to increase O2 beds, strengthen home isolation system

PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday chaired a meeting to chalk out a plan for increasing oxygen beds and strengthening home isolation system in the national capital

following a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases and deaths.

"Convened a meeting with officials. Discussed the plan to increase oxygen beds in the coming days, and strengthen home isolation system in Delhi. Please take all precautions and stay safe," he tweeted. Delhi logged

a record 381 COVID-19 deaths on Tuesday, while the positivity rate stood at 32.72 per cent. This was the sixth day on the trot that Delhi has recorded over 300 deaths due to coronavirus.

It had reported 380 deaths on Monday, 350 on Sunday, 357 deaths on Saturday, 348 on Friday

and 306 on Thursday, according to government data. The national capital had recorded 20,201 cases on Monday, 22,933 on Sunday, 24,103 on Saturday, 24,331 on Friday, 26,169 on Thursday, and 24,638 on Wednesday. The positivity rate was 35.02 per cent on Monday,

30.21 on Sunday, 32.27 percent on Saturday, 32.43 on Friday, 36.24 on Thursday -- the highest so far -- 31.28 on Wednesday and 32.82 on Tuesday.

The exponential rise in cases have left people scrambling for oxygen and ICU beds in hospitals.

Classified

LEGAL NOTICES

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure) In the Court of Sh. Rajneesh Kumar Gupta District Judge Commercial Court-02 (Central) Room No. 120 Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi CS (Comm) : 1571/2019 ICICI Bank Ltd. —Plaintiff Versus ADR Power Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd & Ors.

Def. 1. ADR Power Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd. (Borrower) Having its Office at MD-39, 2nd Floor, Pitampura, Delhi-110034, Through its Directors, Def. 2. Dinesh Gupta, s/o Sh. Suresh Gupta (CO-Bor.

rower) R/o MD-51, Ground Floor, Pitampura, Delhi-110034, Dist. Noida, Bansal, s/o Gopal Bansal (CO-Borrower & Director), R/o House No. J-9, Naveen Shahdara, New Delhi-110032.

The Defendant Above-named.

Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons, it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 13-05-2021, the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex parte.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 26-03-2021. District Judge Commercial Court-02 (Central) Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi Seal of the Court

COURT NOTICE (U/O 5 Rule 20 CPC) IN THE COURT OF SH. HARSH KUMAR SINGH

Civil Judge (Junior Division), Gurugram Suresh Kumar Versus Meena Kumari ETC CNR No. HRGR02-001965-2022.

Notice to:

Meena Kumari, w/o Pawan Kumar, HN 99, VILL. Badeshwar Distt. Bhilai, HR.

Rs-district_notice&dis-trict=gurugram.

Dated, this day of 22-04-2021.

Civil Judge (Junior Division), Gurugram Seal of the Court

Army's base hospital to have 900 oxygenated beds for Covid patients by mid-June

PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Indian Army's base hospital in Delhi will augment its capacity and will have 900 oxygenated beds for COVID-19 patients by mid-June, said an official statement on Wednesday.

Currently, the base hospital has a total of 340 COVID-19 beds, out of which 250 are oxygenated, it noted.

"This resource was being severely stretched for additional capacities due to exponential rise in COVID cases," the Army's statement noted.

Despite the beds being filled to their capacity, patients over and above this capacity are being treated in the trauma centre after obtaining their willingness to wait

for beds, it stated. It said a plan was quickly put in place to expand the capacity to 650 COVID-19 beds -- of which 450 beds will be oxygenated -- by April 30.

The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) is also being enhanced from 12 beds to 35 beds by April 29, it said.

The next phase of expansion will see the present capacity being augmented to 900 oxygenated beds by the second week of June 2021," it noted.

India saw a record single-day rise of 3,60,960 coronavirus cases, which pushed the total tally to 1,79,97,267, while the death toll crossed two lakh following 3,293 fresh fatalities, according to Union Health Ministry data updated on Wednesday.

This is to request you to direct the forest department to ensure steady supply of firewood to these crematoriums without fail," Prakash said in his letter to Kejriwal.

"Due to increase in number of casualties because of COVID-19 situation is getting worst day-by-day. Moreover there is hardly any facility available for deaths occurring at home," he added.

The mayor said that North MCD had the capacity to cremate 230 bodies till April 15, but within 10-12 days it was raised to 570.

"Three new cremation grounds have been developed besides increasing the capacity of existing ones. Out of total 570, 304 wooden and 54 CNG pyres are fixed for COVID-19 deaths. Rest are for non-COVID deaths.

"We are transforming ourselves as per need of the hour. We developed Covid care facility for about 300 patients in two of the major hospitals -- Hindu Rao Hospital and RPIMT. Third hospital Balak Ram is also being prepared as another facility," he said.

"As you are aware that the number of deaths due to COVID-19 is on the rise and to cremate the bodies in the traditional manner a large amount of wood is required.

Elderly undertrial dies of coronavirus

PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

A 61-year-old undertrial prisoner of Tihar Jail died in a hospital in Delhi five days after he tested positive for COVID-19, officials said on Wednesday.

The deceased has been identified as Mukesh Talwar, a resident of Jain Park, New Delhi, they said. "Talwar, an inmate of central jail number 7 of Tihar, was tested positive on April 22. He was referred to GTB Hospital and admitted there on the same day.

Later, information was received that he has expired in the hospital on Tuesday." Director General (Prisons) Sandeep Goel said. He was admitted in the jail on March 9, in a case registered under the POCSO Act at Bindapur police station, the officials said. On Tuesday, a 43-year-old under-trial prisoner of Tihar Jail also died due to coronavirus.

Mohammed Anish, lodged in prison since December 2019 in a case under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, tested positive for COVID-19 on Monday and was admitted to a jail hospital with mild symptoms.

The high court is handling multiple petitions relating to the pandemic with various benches conducting marathon hearings.

The bench headed by Justice Sanghi appointed senior advocate Raj Shekhar Rao as amicus curiae to assist the court in dealing with the medical oxygen crisis and other issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It asked him to study the national allocation order on oxygen and give suggestions on optimal usage of tankers and minimisation of turn-around time.

It also asked the Delhi government to place a report

Delhi HC raps Centre; says 'it appears you want people to die'



PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday expressed its unhappiness with the Centre over non-supply of the full oxygen quota allocated to the national capital and objected to a "change" in COVID treatment protocol on Remdesivir use, saying "it appears you want people to die".

"This is wrong. This is a complete non-application of mind. Now people who do not have oxygen will not get Remdesivir either," Justice Prathiba M Singh said when the central government submitted that under the COVID treatment protocol being followed now only patients on oxygen support were being given Remdesivir.

"It appears you want people to die," the judge said.

Noting that the nation is facing an unprecedented crisis, the court also appealed to citizens and suppliers not to hoard oxygen cylinders and medicines to avoid creating an artificial shortage.

The bench also asked the Delhi government to examine the suggestion by senior advocate Krishnan Venugopal for taking services of armed forces in this situation as they can set up field hospitals which will help a large number of COVID-19 patients in the national capital, and take appropriate steps.

Venugopal said that there is a large section of medical practitioners, who on account of the pandemic, are confined to their homes

Once again, the failed 'system' fails our citizens
for Modi-mitras' profit...

HITTING OUT AT THE GOVERNMENT OVER THE 'HIGH' COVID VACCINE PRICES

CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, THURSDAY 29 APRIL 2021

03

HP CM says 'no' to oxygen for Delhi, backtracks on decision

Two days after pledging O2 supply to Delhi, Jai Ram says these decisions cannot be taken by the state government on its own as the MHA's permission is required in this regard

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

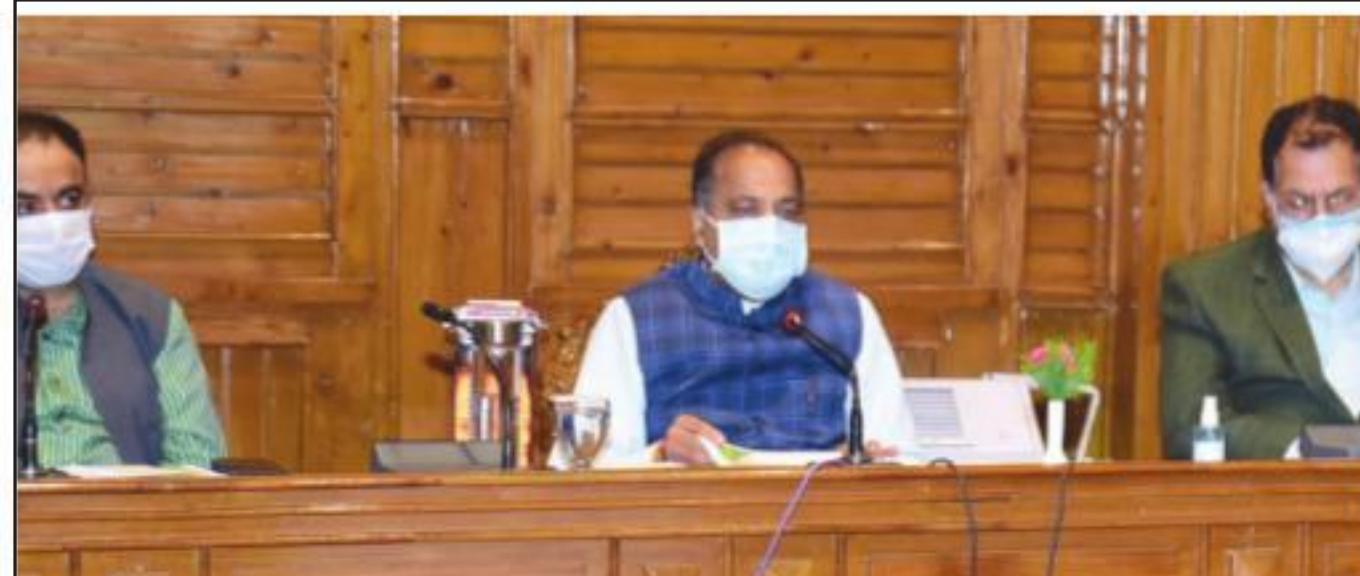
SHIMLA, 28 APRIL

Two days after deciding to help Delhi overcome its acute medical oxygen shortage by agreeing to provide some emergency supplies of this life-saving gas for Covid patients to the national capital from Himachal Pradesh, chief minister Jai Ram Thakur today backtracked from his decision, saying 'no' to oxygen supply to Delhi. Thakur said these decisions cannot be taken by the state government on its own as the permission of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is required for it.

Talking to media persons after reviewing the Covid-19 situation in Shimla district, Thakur said his Delhi counterpart Arvind Kejriwal had requested for oxygen supply from the state and as the subject comes under National Disaster Management Act, the MHA permission was required.

"If the MHA gives permission for oxygen supply, then the state government will act accordingly," the HP CM said.

In a bid to help the national capital in overcoming the oxygen crisis, Thakur had on 26 April agreed to arrange supplies to meet emergency needs of Delhi.



residents.

Thakur made the decision on the request of Delhi CM Kejriwal since the national capital has been facing a severe oxygen crisis leading to even deaths of several Covid patients in some Delhi hospitals.

In a letter written to Kejriwal, Thakur had then said that Himachal was highly concerned about the situation emerging in Delhi and that the hill state will be more than happy to extend all possible help to the Delhi government over the oxygen crisis.

He had also added that the officers of the Delhi government may contact HP's additional director of industries for arranging the supplies of oxygen from the state.

Kejriwal had expressed his

gratitude towards the HP government for the much needed help.

Meanwhile, Thakur today directed the Shimla district administration and health department to increase bed capacity in the district so that there is no dearth of beds for Covid-19 patients, in case there is a sharp surge in coronavirus cases.

"All the people visiting the district from other parts of the country should intimate the concerned authorities through the online portal. Besides, as soon as the person arrives home from other parts of the country, information about the arrival should be passed immediately to ASHA workers and health workers of the respective areas

to ensure effective home quarantine," the HP CM said.

Thakur called for increasing the bed capacity in the district and said 300 additional bed capacity will be created in the new OPD of IGMC in a phased manner.

Besides, 50-bed additional capacity in Ayurvedic Hospital Chotta Shimla, 50-bed additional facility in Civil Hospital Junga,

100-bed additional capacity in Tutikandi Parking will be created.

Efforts must also be made to increase bed capacity in Civil Hospitals at Rohru, Khanari and Theog, the CM said.

Thakur further said that efforts must also be made to create at least 200-bed pre-fabricated additional capacity in

and around Shimla town to meet any eventuality. In addition, matter regarding allowing use of Army Hospital at Shimla would also be taken with the Army authorities so that the bed capacity could be enhanced further.

"Effective mechanisms must be developed to reduce the gap between the first and second dose of vaccine. A special drive must be launched particularly to administer second dose of vaccine to the health workers and frontline workers. Apart from this, the general public must also be motivated to voluntarily come forward for vaccination and also for adopting Covid-19 appropriate behaviour," the CM said.

Thakur called for motivating people for holding simple marriage functions with limited gathering and said time must also be specified for the marriages while granting approval for organising marriages so that the function does not go on for the whole day.

"There is no dearth of oxygen, equipment and medicines in the state and the state government has also taken up the matter of establishing oxygen plants at Rohru and Rampur Hospitals so as to facilitate the people of the area," he added.

Covid surge like a 'tsunami', admin hadn't anticipated it: Haryana CM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 28 APRIL

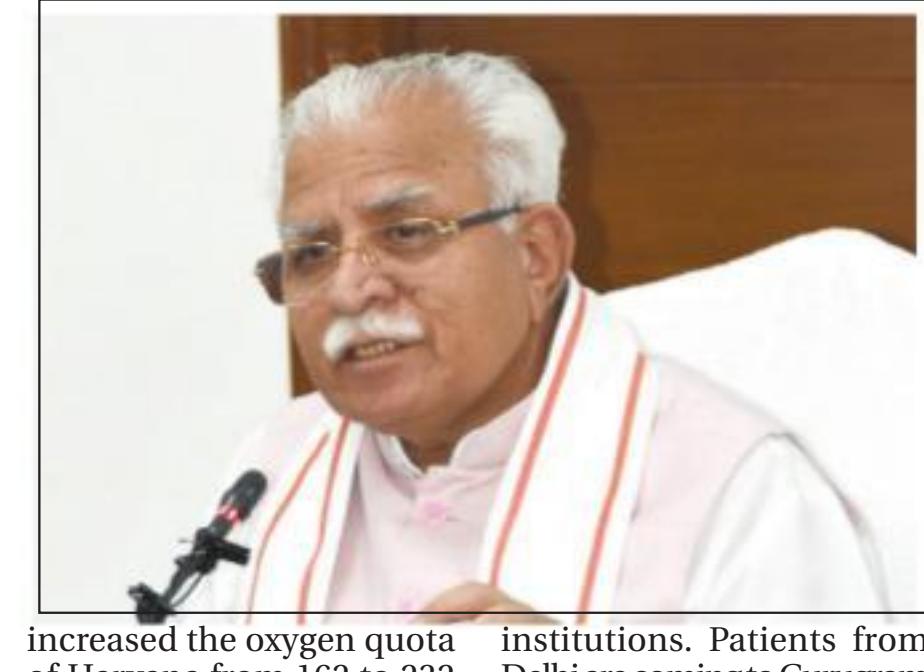
Terming the surge in Covid-19 cases as 'nothing short of a tsunami', Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Wednesday said meeting the demand of medical oxygen is the biggest challenge before the state government.

Addressing a Press conference, the CM said the administration had not anticipated the size and scale of the second Covid-19 wave. He said no one had therefore imagined that there would be such a massive demand for oxygen cylinders. The CM said Covid is not just on the rise, but its graph is surging beyond estimates.

"One can expect a deluge in the rainy season and prepare accordingly, but what has hit us is nothing short of a tsunami," Khattar said adding "yesterday, 11,931 Covid-19 cases were reported in the state, which is four times more than before."

Haryana on Tuesday registered the highest single-day spike in its daily tally of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) at 11,931 fresh cases.

The CM said the transportation of medical oxygen was another area of concern and the state was facing a shortage of tankers to transport the oxygen. After the Centre on Wednesday



increased the oxygen quota of Haryana from 162 to 232 metric tonne (MT), the state government dispatched five tankers to Orissa to fetch the oxygen by road.

The CM said two tankers were being sent to Orissa by air and they will come back by road with the oxygen. Under the revised plan, Haryana was allocated 70 MT of medical oxygen from Orissa. "After we start receiving and supplying 232 MT of oxygen, we will be able to assess the requirement," he said, urging people to come forward and fight the pandemic unitedly.

Haryana's caseload has climbed to 447,754 of which 3,926 people have died, nearly 360,000 have recovered and the active cases are at 84,129, according to the health department's bulletin. Gurugram added the most towards Tuesday's tally with 3,684 cases followed by Faridabad (1,330), Sonipat (940), Karnal (725) and Hisar (642).

Punjab govt to reserve all beds of Medical Colleges for Covid patients



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 28 APRIL

He said if any report of oxygen shortage came to their notice then instantly report it to higher authorities so that steps can be taken.

Reiterating the state government led by Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh to leave no stone unturned to provide health care facilities, the Cabinet minister directed principal secretary medical education and research to reserve 75 beds in Advanced Cancer Center, Bathinda for COVID patients.

He also apprised that beds in medical colleges and hospitals are being increased by more than 900 over the current occupancy. The work of installation of oxygen tanks and generation plants is being expedited throughout the state.

Punjab to regularise all telecom towers installed unauthorisedly

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 28 APRIL

To further strengthen the telecommunication infrastructure in the state as part of its focus on e-governance and e-commerce, the Punjab government has decided to regularise all telecom towers installed unauthorisedly between 5 December, 2013 and 7 December, 2020.

The decision was taken at Wednesday's virtual Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh. The Cabinet decided to extend the scope of provisions in Section 2.0 (I)(a) of the Telecom Guidelines issued on December 7, 2020 for this purpose.

According to a spokesperson of the Chief Minister's Office, the regularisation would be subject to the fulfilment of conditions contained in clause 1.4(I)(a) of the Telecom Guidelines dated 7 December, 2020, along with one-time payment of Rs 20,000.



The scheme is open for six months.

The state telecom guidelines are aligned to the Right of Way Rules 2016 issued by the Indian Government under the Indian Telegraph Act 1885 on 15 November, 2016. The Centre had asked all the states and Union Territories to align their respective Telecom Policies/Guidelines with these Rules.

In another decision, the Punjab Cabinet on Wednesday approved hike in financial assistance under the Ashirwad Scheme from Rs 21,000 to Rs 51,000 per beneficiary, with directions to clear all payment backlog under the scheme. Payment till December 2020 have already been cleared under the scheme, the Cabinet was informed.

The latest increase comes into effect from 1 July, 2021, an official spokesperson said after a virtual meeting of the Cabinet. This is the second hike in the scheme amount by the present government, which had earlier enhanced the assistance from Rs 15,000 to Rs 21,000 soon after it took over in 2017, while renaming the Shagun

scheme as Ashirwad scheme. At that time, the state Cabinet had also decided to make payment directly into the bank accounts of the beneficiaries through the online banking management system, under the scheme implemented by the social justice, empowerment and minorities department.

The CM clarified that the scheme was also applicable to Muslims girls of 18 years or above, along with Scheduled Caste, Christian, Backward Class/Caste, Economically Weaker Section families, and daughters of widows of any caste. Scheduled Caste widows/divorces are also entitled to the benefit at the time of their re-marriage.

Muslim girls were in the list even in 2006, and if they have been inadvertently left out, they should be added, he directed the department. The latest increase will benefit 60,000 beneficiaries, putting an additional burden of 180 crore on the state exchequer, said the spokesperson.

Less than half of the beds in Delhi's ITBP Covid centre taken as O2 supply 'limited'

PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Less than half of the total 500 oxygen beds at the ITBP operated COVID care centre in south Delhi have been occupied till Wednesday as the border guarding force said the capacity to admit coronavirus patients at the facility is "limited" due to supply of oxygen.

The paramilitary force said there is a huge influx of patients demanding admission at the facility and it has requested the Delhi government to increase oxygen supply so that admissions are increased.

As per the latest available data of the Sardar Patel COVID Care Centre (SPCCC) located in the Radha Soami Beas in Chhattarpur area, the facility has taken a total of 228 patients till now since it began operations on April 26. Fifty-two patients were admitted on

Wednesday.

Of the total patients, 156 are male and 72 are female. The total occupied beds, as per the data, are 211 (about 42 per cent of the total). Nine patients have been discharged, three referred to hospitals, while eleven patients have died after admission.

Some patients have been admitted through referrals, officials said. The paramilitary force on Tuesday night had issued a statement and said, "Almost all patients are in need of uninterrupted oxygen."

"The Delhi government has been requested to increase oxygen supply so that admissions are increased," it said.

The statements said, "There is a huge influx of patients demanding admission but our capacity is limited by the supply of oxygen."

"Efforts are on to gradually increase the capacity of the

centre," it said. Officials had said though the Delhi government has not issued any official order doing away with the mandatory process of getting an approval of the district surveillance officer (DSO) for admitting patients at this Centre, some are being allowed in "on the basis of referrals, considering the condition of the patient and following due processes". The facility has been opened in view of Delhi registering a sharp rise in coronavirus cases, a shortage of oxygen beds and its healthcare system not being able to handle the pressure.

The ITBP, a border-guarding force, has been designated by the Union Home Ministry as the nodal agency to run it.

The SPCCC, at present, only has oxygen beds and no ICU and ventilator facilities.

According to the laid out procedure, the SPCCC will have no walk-in admissions and these will be made after approval by DSOs of various Delhi districts.

The ITBP has said that treatment, medicines and food for the patients at this centre will be free of cost.

The cost will be borne by the Delhi government.

As the Centre opened on Monday, a number of patients whose oxygen levels were fluctuating had voluntarily queued up outside the facility with a hope of getting admitted there.

However, they could not get admission and were asked to follow these protocol.

A number of patients were unsuccessful in getting admission on Tuesday too.

ITBP Deputy Inspector General (DIG) D K Goyal had told reporters at the facility on Monday that the standard operating procedures (SOPs) state that patients whose oxygen saturation level is 85 or above will be admitted to the

facility as it is a COVID care centre and not a hospital. The SOPs state that the patients who require intensive or better medical care will be referred to GTB and Safdarjung hospitals from here.

The helpline numbers of the SPCCC are 011-26655547/48/49 and 011-26655949/69.

According to officials, patient details like age, address, contact number, oxygen level, pulse and co-morbid conditions are obtained and after an assessment by a team of doctors, those eligible to get admitted will be communicated through their contact number.

The DSOs are also to be empowered to recommend patients to the SPCCC, according to the SOP.

A team of 50 ITBP and other organisations' doctors, about 80 paramedics and nursing staff, security personnel of the border-guarding force and other

administrative staff have been tasked to run the centre that is expected to add more beds in the coming days.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had declared on April 22 that the SPCCC, which was made operational in July last year and shut in February this year as the number of coronavirus infections declined in the national capital, was being restarted on the Delhi government's request as the cases were rising rapidly once again.

A total of 11,657 COVID-19 patients were treated at this centre between July and February.

Delhi is currently facing a shortage of oxygen beds for serious COVID-19 patients and has almost run out of ICU facilities amid soaring infections.

The city on Tuesday registered a record 381 COVID-19 deaths and over 24,000 fresh cases, with 32.72 per cent positivity rate.

HC directs insurance companies to clear bills quickly to prevent delay in patient discharge

PTI
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Delhi High Court Wednesday said insurance companies cannot take 6-7 hours for approving bills of COVID-19 patients as it delays their discharge from hospitals and those in need for beds.

Justice Prathiba M Singh said if the court comes to know of an insurance company or a third-party administrator (TPA) processing insurance claims taking 6-7 hours for clearing bills, contemptuation would be taken against them.



A few minutes after her order, a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli directed insurance companies and TPAs to ensure that time

taken to grant approvals to bills was reduced to a reasonable amount as there were long queues of people outside hospitals waiting for beds during the massive surge in COVID-19 infections.

Justice Singh said in her order that insurance companies or TPAs should not take more than 30-60 minutes to grant approval to the bills on receiving the requests from hospitals and directed insurance regulator IRDAI to issue instructions in this regard.

The division bench, in its order, said delay in discharging

patients was leading to delay in admitting needy patients and was causing more suffering to them. The direction came after it was informed by some hospitals and lawyers that delay in approvals by insurance companies and TPAs was resulting in delay in discharging patients and admitting new ones. The bench was hearing several pleas with regard to lack of oxygen, medicines, beds and ventilators in the national capital and ramping up of testing.

During the day, Justice Singh ensured that beds were made available to all those petitioners whose pleas were listed before her.

Kaushik
Ganguly tests
Covid positive



KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

National award-winning film director Kaushik Ganguly on Wednesday said he has tested positive for Covid-19 and is currently in home isolation.

Ganguly had recently gone to Bolpur for outdoor shooting for his new project "Kabaddi Kabaddi" and had returned to Kolkata two days back.

"It caught up with me. In spite of taking all precautions while shooting, I've tested positive with mild symptoms," the Nagarjuna directors said on Facebook.

"Currently in home isolation under Dr Rajib Seal. Requesting those who came in touch with me in the last 7 days to get themselves tested. Humanity will win," he said.

The friends and followers of the 52-year-old filmmaker wished him a speedy recovery. The director is known for acclaimed films in Bengali cinema such as *Shabdo*, *Jyeshthoputro*, *Chotoder Chobi*, *Cinemavala* and *Bisorjon* among others.

He had recently completed shooting for his first Hindi work *Manohar Pandey*.

In past one week, actor Jeet, actors Rwidobroto Mukherjee, Subhasree Ganguly and Parno Mittra, were diagnosed with Covid-19. PTI

Covid patients' blood on EC, Centre's hands: TMC

Modi govt has gone back on its promise to vaccinate those above 18, Roy said

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

Trinamool Congress Wednesday hit out at the BJP-led government at the Centre and EC saying they have "the blood of Covid-19 patients on their hands" as they refused to consider the serious threat of coronavirus and contributed to the "super spread" of the pandemic in West Bengal during the month of April.

TMC MP Sougata Roy told reporters here that in April Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah had addressed 50 poll rallies so far with two meetings held on an average daily despite the surge in COVID-19 cases.

As the Election Commission repeatedly refused to accede to TMC's plea to club the last three phases of polling in West Bengal, over 1.4 crore

EC releases 318 companies of central forces

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

The Election Commission of India has released 318 of 1,071 companies present in the state before the crucial eighth phase of the election scheduled on 29 April when 35 Assembly constituencies spanning across four districts will go for polls.

These forces have been sent back from Bengal.

The election and the counting will be conducted with the help of the

people, including polling personnel, will be exposed to the virus in the last two phases on April 26 and 29 alone, he claimed.

The veteran parliamentarian said, "The Centre and the EC have the blood of Covid-19 patients on their hands as they refused to consider the serious threat to the health of the people and stuck to their agenda. The EC has also been censured by Madras High Court."

Continuing his attack, Roy said, "The action of the BJP-led government at the Centre and the EC contributed in the super spread of coronavirus in Bengal in April. The virus was not that active in March, when far lesser number of cases were reported," he said.

As the Election Commission drive and said some private hospitals are now saying that they can only administer the second dose and not the first one.

remaining 753 companies of which 646 companies will be directly used in the last phase when 35 constituencies go to polls and the rest of the forces will be used for other election related duties.

According to the deployment plan laid down by the commission, Birbhum will have the highest deployment of 225 companies of central forces for 11 constituencies. Equally 215 companies of central forces will be used for its 11 constituencies and there will be

He accused the Narendra Modi government of misleading people with regard to vaccination for coronavirus.

"The Modi government has gone back on its promise of giving vaccine to anyone in the age bracket of 18 years and above. It is now saying states can vaccinate people of 45 years and above. What about the vaccination to those aged between 18 and 45 years?"

He also castigated the Modi government for dual pricing of vaccines by the producers.

Roy hit out at the mismanagement in the vaccination

drive and said some private hospitals are now saying that they can only administer the second dose and not the first one.

a deployment of 110 companies for the remaining 6 constituencies of Malda. North Kolkata will have the lowest deployment of 96 companies for the seven constituencies that will go for polls on Thursday.

Though 11,860 booths will be manned by 646 companies with an average of 5.4 companies per booth but individually Murshidabad will have the highest concentration of 5.9 personnel per booth for its 3,796 booths.

"The Modi government's ham-handed vaccination policy has led to such a situation. The Centre should have monitored production of vaccines and distributed it rationally among the states beforehand. The onus is on the Centre," Roy said.

He claimed that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had written to Modi as early as in February urging him to build a stock of vaccines and their adequate distribution among the states, including West Bengal, to ensure a large segment of people get vaccinated.

"But the horble PM did not acknowledge her concern nor give any response as he was apparently busy with other things," Roy said.

Gupta, a former Rajya Sabha MP, said the "outsider"

Jorasanko: TMC faces tough challenge from BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

In the trader dominated Jorasanko constituency, the two main rivals have squared off against each other in what analysts believe could be a cliff hanger.

TMCs bunting and flags match those of the BJPs in number and the busy North Calcutta locality home to some of the city's iconic landmarks ranging from Thakurbari, the palatial home where Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore lived to College Street with its historic buildings, coffee houses and bookshops. The TMC nominated its Hindu cell president and senior leader Vivek Gupta, denying a ticket to its sitting MLA Smita Bakshi, while the BJP reposed faith in its Kolkata Municipal Corporation councillor Meena Devi Purohit.

With a sizeable number of Gujaratis, Biharis and Marwaris living alongside Bengalis, the constituency once an exclusive preserve of Bengali Bhadrakaliks (gentry), is now considered a truly cosmopolitan area. The constituency with some 1,97,906 people as registered electors, has in the last century been a Congress bastion.

The TMC which has been winning the seat since the turn of the century may be facing one of its toughest battles to retain the seat as it could face the brunt of the party's rhetoric against "outsiders", political analysts said.

Gupta, a former Rajya Sabha MP, said the "outsider"

Man dies inside ambulance, kin allege negligence

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
HOOGHLY, 28 APRIL

A senior citizen died in the ambulance waiting for treatment when he was rushed to Arambagh sub-division hospital following acute breathing distress.

Tarapodo Chakraborty, a resident of Jairampur, Ketadai village in Khanakul was taken to the Arambagh sub-division hospital with acute breathing distress. Minakhi Chakraborty, the deceased's daughter alleged that her father had to wait for hours at the emergency gate while she cried and pleaded the doctors and nurses to attend him. Tarapodo was gasping for breath. He wasn't even carried into the hospital on a stretcher, she said. The hospital super Satyajit Sarkar has denied the allegations.

In the sweltering heat, waiting for treatment for over an hour, Minakhi said her father succumbed in the ambulance. I am utterly shocked at the inhuman and negligent attitude of the doctors and nurses, she said.

The alleged negligence also enraged others at the hospital premises who protested against the hospital staff. Police reached the spot and brought the situation under control. Sarkar said the deceased's kin couldn't furnish a Covid-19 report although it was claimed that Tarapodo had contracted the virus. Moreover, he said that instead of availing the medical services at the emergency department they wasted time in front of the super specialty hospital where Covid-19 patients are not admitted.

Centre 'failed' to ensure jab: Left

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

The CPI-M today lambasted the Central government, accusing it of failing to ensure adequate Covid-19 vaccine stock just as people aged 18

years and above today began registering through CoWin website but were met with disappointment.

The central government today opened vaccination programme for people aged 18 years and above.

Birbhum: Leadership void may hurt BJP

DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY
BIRBHUM, 28 APRIL

Birbhum, a Trinamool Congress bastion till a few years ago, has seen BJP grow in clout.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the saffron brigade had taken a lead in five Assembly seats - Suri, Rampurhat, Sainthia, Dubrajpur and Mayureswar after disgruntled Left Front voters shifted allegiance in 2019 Lok Sabha polls after they were stifled from contesting the gram panchayat elections in 2018. TMC had won the Zilla Parishad board uncontested amid flak.

Despite BJP's stunning win in Lok Sabha polls, TMC had gathered its pieces in absence of a dynamic local BJP leadership and now the it is trying to transcend the defeat.

According to the district

TMC leadership, the party is hopeful to retain the minority dominated Muraroi, Nalhati, Labhpur, Naoro, Hasan and Dubrajpur seats.

The state agricultural minister Ashish Banerjee is facing a tough contest from Rampurhat seat and the BJP is set to win this high-profile contest, political observers said they felt.

In another key contest, state fisheries minister Chandranath Singha is facing BJP's Dr Anirban Ganguly in Birbhum Assembly seat.

Ganguly is director of Shyama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation (SPMRF), a think-tank of BJP and is also member of policy research development of BJP.

If BJP assumes power in the state, Ganguly is tipped to be one of the chief ministerial candidates along with few others, sources said.

'Maha may face 3rd wave if vaccination slows'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 28 APRIL

Police personnel conduct a flag march during Covid-induced lockdown in Mumbai on Wednesday. ■ AGENCY

As slowdown in the ongoing vaccination drive in Maharashtra, battling a savage surge in Covid-19 cases, will potentially pave the way for a third wave of the infection in the state, health experts warned on Wednesday.

The warning came on a day when the Maharashtra government said it is not going to start the vaccination drive from 1 May for the 18-44 age group because of unavailability of sufficient doses.

Health minister Rajesh Tope has already expressed concern over the inadequate supply of vaccines for Maharashtra, the state worst-hit by the pandemic, amid reports of a shortage of doses for the existing beneficiaries (45-plus people), putting the inoculation drive on a slow track.

The true curbing of Covid-19 can happen only if two thirds of the population eligible for vaccination is covered under the inoculation drive. "Out of 9 crore people eligible for vaccination in Maharashtra, we have just covered over 1.50 crore so far, which is negligible," said a senior official from state health department.

"Relaxation of measures in December made people careless and this triggered the second wave of Covid-19 from February. We are still suffering from it," he said.

In April so far, the state has added 15,53,922 fresh Covid-19 cases and 11,281 deaths. Tope on Wednesday said,

More countries pitch in with medical relief supplies to India

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

More countries, including Canada, Russia, South Korea and Taiwan, today announced their decision to fund or despatch medical supplies to India to deal with the devastating Covid-19 situation unfolding in the country.

China, meanwhile, said relevant Chinese enterprises with support from the government have sent the first batch of oxygen concentrators to India. (We) reiterate that China is ready to provide support and help to the Indian people at any time as per India's needs, Chinese Ambassador Sun Weidong quoted a Chinese official as saying.

Canada announced that it was providing \$10 million in funding for humanitarian assistance to the Canadian Red Cross to support the Indian Red Cross Society's response to the pandemic.

Canada's contribution will support the procurement of essential supplies and medicines, including oxygen cylinders for clinics and ambulances. Canadians wishing to donate to emergency efforts in India can do so through the Canadian Red Cross.

"Canada stands with the people of India as they go through these difficult times. This funding will help meet some of the most urgent medical needs like purchasing and distributing essential supplies as well as supporting vital blood and ambulance services," Canada's Minister of International Development Karianne Gould said.

Russia said a large batch of assistance, including oxygen concentrators, lung ventilators, anti-Covid drugs and other medical supplies and drugs, would be sent to India on an urgent basis.

South Korea said consultations were underway with the Indian side with regard to dispatching specific medical items, such as oxygen concentrators, to help save lives in India.

Taiwan said it would make a formal announcement about the medical relief material being sent to India once the consignment has been dispatched.

In a tweet, Kolas Yotaka, Taiwan Presidential Office Spokesperson said, "First shipment of oxygen generators from Taiwan to India is leaving this week. We are all in this together."

total 135 vaccination centres functioned on Wednesday.

The 75 centres which remained functional included 32 private centres, as many civic ones and 11 government-run centres.

Of the total 135 centres in

Mumbai, 75 are run by private facilities, 42 by the civic body and 17 by the state government.

The BMC in its list has highlighted that 40 centres will administer vaccines to beneficiaries till the time stocks last.

Alone in shroud, dead get unknown companions for funeral

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 28 APRIL

social duty.

As the pandemic is raging in Nagpur like many other districts in Maharashtra and fatalities rising, people, in general, prefer to avoid attending funerals even in cases where the deceased are not Covid-19 victims.

However, small families are bearing the brunt of this fear psychosis as they struggle to gather people for cre-

mating their near and dear ones.

In this scenario, Eco Friendly Living Foundation (EFLF) run by Vijay Limaye has come forward to help the people in distress in performing the last rites of their near and dear ones.

Members of the EFLF bear the bier of the deceased person to the crematorium and also perform the last rites.

Vijay Limaye of the EFLF told the organisation promotes the cause of eco-friendly cremation in association with the Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC) under which briquettes made from the farm waste and agricultural residue are being used to cremate bodies, in place of wood logs. This project is currently being run in six crematoriums in Nagpur.



Vaccine is the permanent solution and I urge people, especially youth, to consider it as national duty

MADHYA PRADESH HOME MINISTER NAROTTAM MISHRA
URGING PEOPLE NOT TO ATTACK DOCTORS, POLICEMEN IN THE EVENT OF DEATH



People offer prayers outside Sheikh Hamzah Makhdoomi after curfew was imposed amid surge in Covid-19 cases, in Srinagar, on Wednesday. AGENCY

UP panchayat polls: Voting in the fourth and final phase of Uttar Pradesh panchayat elections will be held on Thursday amid Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. Over 5.27 lakh candidates are in the fray for more than 2.10 lakh seats across 17 districts in this round of the election. PTI

Phone-tapping case: CRPF special director general Rashmi Shukla didn't turn up at the cyber department of Mumbai Police on Wednesday for questioning in connection with the alleged illegal phone-tapping case citing pandemic and instead demanded a questionnaire be sent to her so that she could reply, a police official said. PTI

Man gets 20 yr RI for sexual assault: A court in Hyderabad on Wednesday sentenced a 24-year-old man to 20 years' rigorous imprisonment for sexual assault of a 14-year-old girl in September last.

AMU hospital gets O2 supply: Hours after AMU's Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College and Hospital sent out an alert saying it has not received oxygen cylinders for past four days and its own plants were running out of liquid oxygen, it received its supply on Wednesday that will last for next 48 hours.

DRDO conducts maiden trial of Python-5 Air-to-Air Missile

SNS
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Tejas, India's indigenous Light Combat Aircraft, added the fifth generation Python-5 Air-to-Air Missile (AAM) in its air-to-air weapons capability.

Trials were also aimed to validate the enhanced capability of the already integrated Derby Beyond Visual Range (BVR) AAM on Tejas. The test firing at Goa yesterday completed a series of missile trials to validate its performance under extremely challenging scenarios.

Derby missile achieved direct hit on a high-speed maneuvering aerial target and the Python missiles also achieved 100 per cent hits, thereby validating their complete capability.

The trials met all their planned objectives. Prior to these trials, extensive missile carriage flight tests were conducted at Bengaluru to assess integration of the mis-

K'taka minister asks farmer to go and die

BSY apologises, Cong wants Katti to be dropped from Cab

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

Chief minister B S Yediyurappa was forced to apologise today after his food and civil supplies minister, Umesh Katti, placed the government in an embarrassing position.

The minister ticked off a farmer over the phone when he complained that the government had provided less rice under the public distribution system. Even the rice and jowar which was sought to be supplied instead, the farmer said, was not reaching the people. "What should we do until the government supplies Jowar? Should people die?" the irate farmer asked. To which the minister retorted "go and die then. Stop calling me."

The audio clip, which went viral, has given the much-needed opportunity to the Opposition Congress and JD-S to slam the government. Even demanding immediate resignation of the minister, warning of protests otherwise.

The beleaguered chief minister sought to douse



the fire by immediately expressing regret, adding that it was not right for a minister to make such a statement. "I express regret," he said in a statement.

"Arrangements are being made to give five kg of rice to the people in the area who do not need wheat," he said.

The Opposition is having none of that as it claims that the minister had abused a citizen, all because the farmer concerned had asked him why the government had cut the rice quota under PDS.

Congress state chief D K Shivakumar wanted the chief minister to immediately throw the minister out of the Cabinet for making an insensitive statement. Does the government have no shame?", he exclaimed.

Ramakrishna Raju has sought the Prime Minister's intervention. The examinations for Class XII and X are scheduled for 5 May and 6 June, respectively and the state today reported 14,669 new infections in past 24 hours with 71 deaths.

While clarifying that the state government will ensure the safety of every student in the state, Reddy said Class X and XII Board exams were important as the future of the students depend on these certificates.

He pointed out that the Centre has left it to states to decide if they want to conduct the board exams for Class XII, but the chief minister so far refused to relent.

The Opposition TDP, which has been quite vocal with the demand, has threatened to file a case in the High Court and disgruntled YSRCP MP Raghu

JDS leader and former chief minister H D Kumaraswamy, on his part, echoed the sentiment. "The minister is arrogant and inhuman," he said. "The food and civil supplies minister, who is supposed to come to the aid of the starving people in this Covid-19 pandemic, has displayed his mental distortion," he tweeted.

The minister, meanwhile, sought to clarify his position. According to him, he was provoked by the caller. A person claiming to be a farmer, he explained, had called him, asking why the government had reduced allotment of rice to poor families.

"I told him that we had reduced rice supply to two kg from five while providing ragi instead. The farmer wanted to know what the people of north Karnataka would get as they did not eat rice. "I said jowar would be provided in the coming months. But he kept pestering me, asking did the government expect people to die till then. I said it would be a better option. I had to say it as the caller pushed me into it."

The police had allegedly tortured the accused to con-

Kotkhai rape, murder case: CBI court holds Nilu guilty

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 28 APRIL

A CBI court in Shimla on Wednesday pronounced the lone accused Anil Kumar alias Nilu guilty for the rape and murder of a 16-year-old girl in Kotkhai, Himachal Pradesh, in July 2017.

The special CBI judge Rajiv Bhardwaj pronounced the accused guilty under Section 376(2)(i), 376(A), and 302 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 4 of the POCSO Act in a virtual hearing today.

The court will announce quantum of sentence to the lone accused in Kotkhai rape and murder case on 11 May.

The 16-year-old girl, a student of Class 10, had gone missing while returning from school on 4 July 2017 in Kotkhai area of Shimla district and her body was found in the forest on 6 July with multiple injuries on her body.

The gruesome incident had led to wide public outrage in the state, forcing the government to constitute a SIT which had arrested six persons, Ashish Chauhan, Rajender Singh alias Raju, Deepak, Subhash Singh Bisht, Suraj and Lokjan on 12 and 13 July.

The police had allegedly tortured the accused to con-



fess that they were involved in rape and murder which resulted in the death of one of the accused, Suraj on the intervening night of 18-19

July.

The case was then transferred to CBI by HP High Court and the investigating agency arrested Nilu on 15 April 2018 on the basis of DNA evidence.

Eight members of SIT were arrested for the custodial death of Suraj for which trial is going on in a CBI court at Chandigarh.

The girl's parents weren't convinced with CBI probe after two experts at Gujarat-based forensic science lab told a CBI court in Chandigarh that as per their observation, the crime was committed by more than one person.

The girl's parents had moved HP High Court seeking re-investigation or judicial probe but the CBI reiterated that only Nilu was involved in the crime and there was no need for re-investigation.

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL - II DELHI - 4TH FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET NEW DELHI - 110001
Notice under Section 194 of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1963 read with Rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules), 1993 in the matter of O.A. NO. 2526/2020 DRTR-II.
D-1, Narula Corporate Relocation Pvt Ltd ... Applicant
Versus JENDER SHARMA AND ANR. Defendants
D-1, Narula Corporate Relocation Pvt Ltd through its Director Mr. Rajat Narula Office At # 324 Gufa Plaza, DLF Phase-6, Gurugram, Haryana-122002
Anil Kumar, Sector 59, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201302
Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance before the Tribunal on 14.05.2021 at 10.30A.M. Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose, (i) the Advocate/Litigants shall download the Cisco Webex application software; (ii) Meeting ID and Password for the next date of hearing will be issued by Registrars Recovery Officer/land Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date of DRTR Official Portal i.e. drtr.gov.in under the Public Notice Head; (iii) in any emergency que that, the Advocate/Litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No. 23748469 Given under my hand and seal of the Tribunals on 25th March, 2021.

By Order of the Tribunal

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL - III DELHI - 4TH FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET NEW DELHI - 110001
Notice under Section 194 of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1963 read with Rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules), 1993 in the matter of O.A. NO. 2526/2020 DRTR-III.
D-1, Narula Corporate Relocation Pvt Ltd, FT-183, 3rd Floor, Anupam Plaza, IIT Crossing, Hauzkhaz, New Delhi-110016
Rajat Narula, Sector 59, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201302
DFL-Magniplex DLF Phase-6, Gurugram Haryana-122002
Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance before the Tribunal on 14.05.2021 at 10.30A.M. Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose, (i) the Advocate/Litigants shall download the Cisco Webex application software; (ii) Meeting ID and Password for the next date of hearing will be issued by Registrars Recovery Officer/land Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date of DRTR Official Portal i.e. drtr.gov.in under the Public Notice Head; (iii) in any emergency que that, the Advocate/Litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No. 23748469 Given under my hand and seal of the Tribunals on 25th March, 2021.

By Order of the Tribunal

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL - IV DELHI - 4TH FLOOR JEEVAN TARA BUILDING, PARLIAMENT STREET NEW DELHI - 110001
OA. No. 600/2016 Baru of Baroda (Applicant) VS M/s Apple Commodities LTD (Respondent)
1,M/s Apple Computer India Ltd, FT-183, 3rd Floor, Anupam Plaza, IIT Crossing, Hauzkhaz, New Delhi-110016
2,M/s Apple Computer India Ltd, FT-183, 3rd Floor, Anupam Plaza, IIT Crossing, Hauzkhaz, New Delhi-110016
3,Rajat Narula, Sector 59, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201302
4,Mr. Ashok Garg, Director M/s Apple Commodities Ltd, 8-16, Sector-2, Noida-201303
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By Order of this tribunal,
Seal
For order of this tribunal,
Mr. Amit K. Dar, Ld. Registrar DR-T, New Delhi Phone No: 011-23748473 email : drt1@delhi-dls.nic.in

SEARCH OF MISSING

General public is hereby informed that one (depicted in the photo), **Namely: Priyanka, D/o: Sh. Vijay Kumar, R/o: B-155, Galli No. 02, New Ashok Nagar, Delhi, Aged: 24 years, has been missing from her house in the area of P.S. New Ashok Nagar, Delhi since 23.03.2021 at 10.00 AM. In this regard a case vide DD No. 069A, Dated 24.03.2021, has been registered at P.S. New Ashok Nagar, Delhi. Her physical description is as under:**



Height: 5'2" Feet, Complexion: Fair, Face: Round, Built: Thin, Clothing: Unknown and Brown Colour Chappie in feet.

Any person is having any information/clue about this missing girl, may inform SHO, New Ashok Nagar, Delhi at E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.nic.in or website : http://cbi.nic.in Tele No.: 011-24368638 or 24368641

S.H.O.
P.S. New Ashok Nagar, Delhi
Ph: 011-22610839, 22610954

DP/457/ED/2021.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This is notified for the information of rail passengers that Railways have decided to change the timings of Train No. 02963 Hazrat Nizamuddin - Udaipur City Special Express at following stations w.e.f. 01.05.2021 as per the details given below:-

Revised Timings of 02963 Hazrat Nizamuddin - Udaipur City Special Express

STATIONS	Train No. 02963
Existing Timings	Revised Timings
ARR. DEP.	ARR. DEP.
Hazrat Nizamuddin	-- 16:40 -- 18:25
Ballabgarh	17:01 17:03 18:46 18:48
Kosi Kalan	17:50 17:51 19:50 19:51
Mathura Jn.	18:49 18:54 20:25 20:30
Bharatpur Jn.	19:17 19:19 20:48 20:50
Bayana Jn.	19:44 19:46 21:14 21:16
Hindauna City	20:06 20:08 21:36 21:38
Shri Mahabir Ji	20:17 20:19 21:48 21:50
Gangapur City	20:47 20:49 22:18 22:20
Sawai Madhopur	21:24 21:26 23:03 23:05
Kota Jn.	22:39 22:59 00:25 00:45
Bundi	23:47 23:49 01:38 01:40
Chittaurgarh	02:45 03:00 04:40 04:55
Kapan	03:42 03:43 05:37 05:38
Mavli Jn.	04:10 04:12 06:04 06:06
Rana Pratap Nagar	04:46 04:48 06:47 06:49
Udaipur City	05:20 -- 07:20 --

The above Special Train will have the reserved accommodation only.

For any kind information passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.

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

RailMadad Helpline No. 139 Visit RailMadad website: www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in & Download Railmadad app.

Please join us on <img alt="

Offshore assistance

The chief regret must be that it took a few vital days for President Joe Biden's America to respond to India's double whammy, specifically a potentially mortal shortage of medical oxygen and vaccines against Covid. After the criticism over Washington's initial silence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr Biden achieved a remarkable measure of diplomatic forward movement on Monday, first with their telephone call and followed by America's pledge on "steadfast support for the people of India", affected by the surge in Covid cases. The situation today is far worse and, therefore, more chilling than what it was exactly a year ago. The afflictions have hit a record high both in terms of case-count and deaths each day. On the anvil is a swathe of US emergency assistance, notably oxygen-related supplies, vaccine materials and therapeutics, according to a White House statement. The fact that it was issued soon after the Modi-Biden phone call makes it pretty obvious that medical assistance was at the core of the interaction. "India was there for us, we will be there for them," President Biden is reported to have tweeted. It bears recall that the United States had been criticised by India for its feet-dragging in responding. It had even ignored a request for lifting the freeze on the export of raw materials linked to the manufacture of vaccines. Additionally, the US Surgeon-General Vivek Murthy revealed on Twitter that America plans to share AstraZeneca doses with the world. "Global pandemics require global cooperation," is at the core of his message.

There is a diplomatic background to the Modi-Biden phone call. It happened in the immediate aftermath of the US National Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan's telephone conversation with his counterpart, Ajit Doval. "Just as India sent assistance to the United States as our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic, the United States is determined to help India in its time of need," was Mr Sullivan's message. The Prime Minister's telephone interaction with President Biden can now be rated as the high watermark of bilateral relations. The latter conveyed solidarity with India and affirmed that the United States was determined to support India's efforts by quickly deploying resources such as therapeutics, ventilators and identifying sources of raw materials for the manufacture of Covishield vaccines. Mr Modi has pledged India's commitment to contain the pandemic through what they call Vaccine Maitri, and its participation in Covax and the Quad Vaccine initiatives. The situation is grave with a deadly resurgence of Covid, dearth of medical oxygen and vaccines, not to forget the chaotic election campaigns by the political class. A nation on the edge will need many helping hands.

Time to talk

The French government on Tuesday launched a series of potentially seminal public debates on the role of religion in contemporary French society. The junior minister responsible for citizenship, Marlène Schiappa, kicked off the initiative with a high-level conference in Paris. Intellectuals, lawyers, and social analysts have been asked to spearhead the effort which will involve round-table discussions and working groups on topics such as freedom of expression and research, youth, and social cohesion. The initiative, which envisages a series of discussion groups aimed at encouraging a broad public debate on the contentious relationship between faith and state, is timely. Especially, given the ongoing controversy over the French state's commitment to the liberal European ideal and its interface with the Islamic notion of what is construed as offensive to a majority of Muslims. The government is keen, it says, to involve young people in the debate, and to create a climate in which the sensitive subject of religious affiliation in a secular republic can be analysed calmly. The consultation, which is expected to last till the end of the year, is coping criticism and praise in equal measure.

There are those who say the debate is a waste of time and energy, since the gulf separating the supporters of complete religious freedom from those who flag the threat of "Islamic separatism" in France, is unbridgeable. The Left-Green stand is that religion, in this case Islam, is being used as a political weapon by the Right and the Republicans to stigmatise practicing Muslims. The allegedly exclusionary character of the legislation on religious separation which has survived a first parliamentary reading and is currently on the way to being adopted as law is flagged by critics as an illustration of this phenomenon. Then there are those who dismiss the government move as a publicity stunt aimed at distracting from the real issues and setting the media narrative. But there are voices being raised in support. Mario Stasi of the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism is convinced that talking is better than some of the alternatives. "If we can shift the debate away from the gutter of hatred and insult on social media, and put different points of view side by side, and look at them seriously with a view to producing concrete proposals," he says, "then I see nothing but advantages in the idea of this national consultation." The fact remains there is no running away from this debate.

Casting aspersions on intentionality is a mug's game and unprovable to boot. Paris needs to be applauded for recognising there is a clear and present danger to both the idea of France, as it were, and the sizable minority of its citizens for whom their religious identity as Muslims is important. That the government has chosen to address the issue head-on and by involving the citizenry is far better than brushing difficult but necessary dialogue under the carpet which has been the default response of other democracies the world over that

Olympic challenge

Despite the grim situation that is becoming grimmer by the day, it is amazing that the President of the Tokyo Olympic organising committee Seiko Hashimoto sticks to the position that cancelling the event amid the virus surge is not being considered. It appears that any kind of countermeasures to stem the resurgence of the virus are unlikely to work in such a short time



When the world is battling with the ways to arrest the rapid surge in the various variants of Covid-19, and the picture in India is becoming grimmer by the day, Japan's Prime Minister is determined to hold the Olympics starting in July despite the fact that he declared another round of emergency in four prefectures - Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Hyogo - effective from 25 April until 11 May to contain a fourth wave of the virus. It makes absolutely no sense to go ahead to hold the event.

Japan had already passed through two states of emergency and three waves of the pandemic, though the casualties it reported pale in comparison to many countries, including India. The declaration of emergency for the third time followed the fourth wave that was triggered by deadlier and more contagious variants of the virus. Japan seems to have learnt no lesson from its past mistakes.

As expected, there were mixed reactions from the people engaged in sectors that came under the purview of the emergency declaration. In particular, people engaged in restaurants, tourism and other related industries were unhappy. The people will not be able to enjoy the Golden Week holiday period that falls within the 17 days when the emergency will be in place. While some felt the period was "too short" to stem the surge, others felt it was "reasonable".

Despite the grim situation that is becoming grimmer by the day, it is amazing that the President of the Tokyo Olympic organising committee Seiko Hashimoto sticks to the position that cancelling the event amid the virus surge is not being considered. It appears that any kind of counter-

measures to stem the resurgence of the virus are unlikely to work in such a short time. There are many questions that remain unanswered such as whether spectators will be allowed at the games' venues at all. The issue of vaccinating the people is also unlikely to start before the end of the Golden Week. Most people across the country are not in favour of hosting the Games, despite the government and organising committee's efforts to convince the public. Amazingly, amid so many uncertainties, Suga backs the organising committee's decision and pledges the games will be "safe and secure".

The latest virus emergency could also dampen the country's economic recovery by further weakening consumption. The Daiwa Institute of Research has projected that a month-long state of emergency could trigger a loss in gross domestic product of up to ₹600 billion (\$5.6 billion). Due to the impact of the emergency measures, the economy will possibly see negative growth in the current quarter. Many analysts had expected the economy to rebound in the April-June period from a downturn in the previous quarter, when the second state of emergency was in place in parts of the country including Tokyo, Osaka and other urban areas. Under that emergency, the food services industry, including restaurants and bars that had been asked to close early, had been hit hard. With the third round of emergency, economists are pessimistic and forecast a

contraction in the world's third-largest economy.

After alcohol-serving establishments and major commercial facilities such as departmental stores, shopping malls and amusement parks are closed temporarily, the more comprehensive third emergency is estimated to reduce the country's GDP by ₹600 billion per month. Suga however feels that the impact on the economy will not be so big but analysts rubbish this claim. It is also feared that if the resurgence of the virus is not stemmed after the emergency ends, thereby necessitating Suga to expand the emergency nationwide, the economy could face considerable damage.

While the accommodation and food services industries have already suffered significant dips in sales as a result of the pandemic and subsequent crisis measures, damage from the fresh emergency could be more evident in other sectors such as retail and entertainment service providers. The economy is going to be severely impacted and the recovery will be forced to slow down further.

Health experts doubt if a new state of emergency would be effective, saying that the 17 days allotted to the emergency period is too short to gauge whether the curbs have worked when the steps are due to be lifted. They warn against lifting the steps if the hospital care situation has not improved by the time the curbs expire. Given the enormity of the situation and with new variants adding to the crisis, Suga sticking to the decision to go ahead with the Olympics could leave a more damaging impact on the nation. Suga need not stand for glory the event could bring but his priority needs to be on the well-being of the people. He should announce cancellation of the event forthwith.



RAJARAM PANDA
The writer is Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, New Delhi

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

A disquieting legacy

SIR, Please refer to your report 'Leaving with satisfaction, did my best: CJI Bobde' (24 April). Chief Justice S A Bobde retired on Friday completing his 17-month tenure overshadowed by the Covid-19 crisis. So his legacy is more of a tenure where what could ~ and should ~ have been done overwhelms what was done. On the administrative side, he retires perhaps being the only Chief Justice to have not made a single recommendation of a judge to be appointed to the Supreme Court.

In November 2019, when he took over, CJI Bobde inherited almost a full court from his predecessor but the collegium headed him and failed to make any progress. In his effort to bring consensus, Justice Bobde tried, even in his last weeks in office, by calling a collegium meeting even as at least two of his colleagues are learnt to have expressed their reservations. However, despite the collegium conundrum in his tenure, he did spark a serious ~ and much-needed ~ conversation on appointing India's first woman Chief Justice.

From the bench, in the very first month of his tenure, CJI Bobde made determined efforts to resolve the most contested cases on matters of faith.

In January last year, he formed a nine-judge Constitution bench to hear the Sabarimala issue, along with other cases of perceived religious discrimination against Muslim and Parsi women. Initially, as the pandemic began, CJI Bobde-led benches made crucial interventions.

The court, on its own motion, passed directions to the government to ensure the supply of mid-day meals



to children as schools were closed and called for the

AD HOC DECISIONS

SIR, Since March 2020, most non-government societies including different housing societies have stopped holding mandatory annual general meetings. Periodic lockdowns, Government restrictions on organizational meetings, and absence of any specific guidelines from the respective Registrar/Director of societies are understood to be reasons for not taking any meaningful initiatives by most housing societies for holding AGMs.

But existing managements of such housing societies are taking many ad hoc decisions without proper authorisation by the members. Covid-related internal restrictions within the housing societies are such decision areas. Without taking general consent of the members, many housing society managements have become self-appointed guardians.

Draconian restrictions are being imposed under the pretext of the pandemic. Such restrictions often concern engagement of support hands by individual households, viz, domestic help, cleaners, cooks etc. As a result, these helpers also suffer financially.

Under these circumstances, it is high time that respective Registrars/Directors of Societies issue directions to housing societies to hold AGMs virtually over numerous available platforms - Google meet, Zoom, etc.

Yours, etc., Kunal Kanti Konar, Kolkata, 26 April.

Bobde also leaves behind a disquieting perception that the highest court has been, a little too often, ready to give an overarching executive the benefit of doubt. When the pandemic struck and the lockdown distress spread across the country, citizens turned to the SC to intervene and ask questions of the government.

As they are doing now while they wait for a hospital bed or an oxygen cylinder, given the pandemic situation. Such fundamental rights also lie at the heart of the key constitutional challenges waiting to be heard, be it the change in status of Jammu and Kashmir or the electoral bonds case or the Citizenship Amendment Act. There can be no greater

marker than this of the apex court as the last bastion of the citizens' rights and freedoms, especially when framed against the power of the state.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das, Kolkata, 25 April.

SECOND DOSE

SIR, A private hospital adjacent to EM Bypass where I took my first dose of Covaxin called me over telephone to inform that the second dose, although due, would not be given due to shortage and change in protocol.

The hospital also registered my name de novo for a slot available 74 days after the first jab. Thus the whole vaccination drive turned into a farce. However, I visited the hospital and found that the vaccination programme was in progress.

After a lot of ruckus created by a group of people like us whose second dose was due, the authority was compelled to vaccinate us on schedule.

Second dose should have been kept in stock exclusively for us. It seems that government has no control over these private facilities. The Clinical establishment regulatory commission may take suo motu cognizance and act.

Yours, etc., Subid Dey, Kolkata, 25 April.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Why is Common Sense not Common?

As vaccines begin to roll out, there is increasing awareness that vaccines are not the silver bullets to kill the pandemic. First, there are lots of people who do not like vaccinations. Moreover, if COVID-19 resides within one part of your community, you might still get infected even with the vaccine shot. Second, the available vaccines are being very unfairly distributed. As public health expert Gavin Yamey observed in Nature magazine: "As I write this, 191 million vaccination shots against COVID-19 have been administered; more than three quarters were given in just 10 nations that account for 60% of the global gross domestic product. In some 130 nations with 2.5 billion people, not a single shot has been administered. High-income countries represent only 16% of the world's population, but they have purchased more than half of all Covid-19 vaccine doses."

Third, we don't even know whether there will be a Next Normal, since so many things are changing so fast that conventional knowledge is having trouble coping with change. The New Normal is super-fast change, with Covid-19 mutating as fast as vaccines are being innovated. Given all such complexity, let's draw some simple common sense lessons on what to do next. First, change has happened so fast that even experts are likely to be

wrong. Relying on medical expertise alone means shutting down the economy, and that has indeed very tough costs. To be fair, there is so much distrust and fake news that no one knows who to believe anymore.

Second, in a chaotic transition with no agreement, we have to focus not on the "best", but on what is practical and achievable. The best cannot be the enemy of the good. Third, common sense tells you that in a crisis, cooperation is the only practical way out of the mess. But there are lots of people who think that demonizing and fighting each other on the basis of fundamental beliefs and values is what matters. That cannot be right, because if small fights escalate to nuclear war, there will be no one left. We have to accept that we live in one over-crowded planet in which we have to live with people we do not like, whether we like it or not. Migration is like shuffling deckchairs on the Titanic. As someone trained to think logically and rationally, the US elections woke me up to the fact that no amount of facts and rational arguments can convince Trump supporters to accept the evidence that the majority won. We need to accept that there will always be a wide range of opinions on everything, so deciding issues democratically will be a noisy affair. Since public opinions are very polarized, it would make sense to start the process of building social consensus on what we think the post-pandemic economy and social system should look like. Common sense tells us that top-down solutions where a small group decides how the present is being shared (as we see, unequally) will not do.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das, Kolkata, 25 April.

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Yours, etc., Subid Dey, Kolkata, 25 April.

DEBAPRIYA MUKHERJEE

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that the veneer of civilization is very thin. We did not have knowledge, resources and technologies to deal with such a devastating pandemic. More than 3.1 million people worldwide have died from Covid-19 and more than 146 million cases have been recorded till date. This pandemic is a crisis but this is only the beginning. The other viruses of animal origin are just around the corner.

A future pandemic could be worse than the ongoing crisis because we are pushing nature to its limits by destroying and degrading amazingly diverse ecosystems, like tropical forests, rivers, lakes, mountains, coral reefs and many more and ultimately removing natural buffers and expanding the interface between wildlife and people where pandemics emerge.

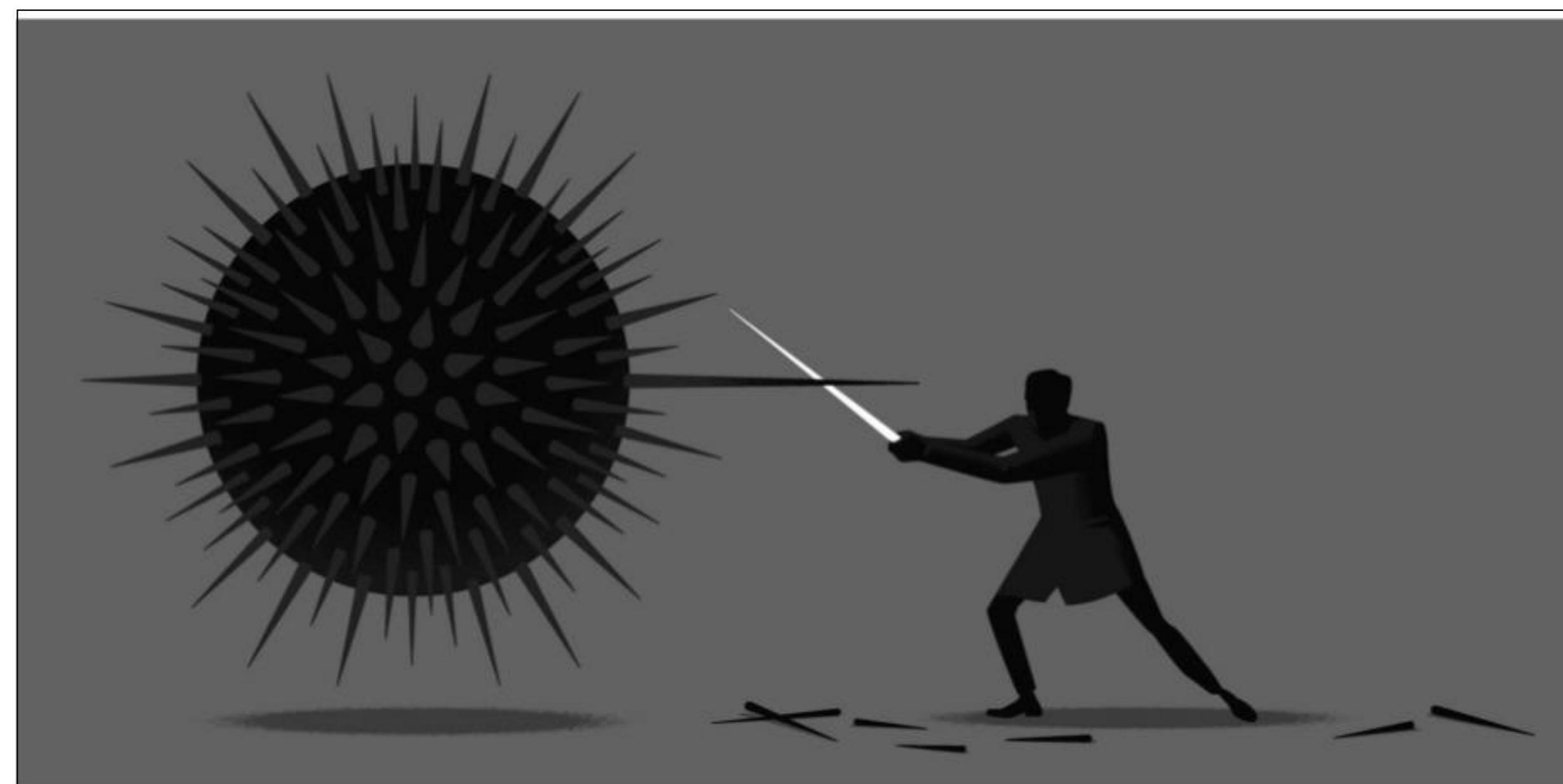
This unsustainable exploitation of the environment due to human induced land-use change, intensive agriculture and animal-based food systems, growing trade in and farming of wildlife species and their consumption leads to instabilities in ecosystems and host microorganism dynamics. Increased intimate contact between wildlife, livestock and people potentially leads to many zoonotic diseases emerging either directly or indirectly. These problems are not restricted to any single species and the viability of even highly resilient natural populations of animals are now at risk.

A majority of emerging viruses come from wildlife but we cannot blame wild creatures because behaviour of humans to fulfill their greed by destroying natural resources at a dizzying pace invites these viruses into our living room. Among all human activities, deforestation is likely the single biggest source of new zoonotic diseases. As forests become increasingly fragmented, the chance of humans and their livestock coming into contact with wildlife and contracting viruses increases.

Nipah virus first spread in Indonesia when forests were burned for agriculture. Fruit bats fled to orchards, passing the disease to pigs and pig farmers. It is widely assumed that a pathogen in a bat jumped to another animal to a human in China and then hopped onto the "globalization express", causing extraordinary suffering and trillions of dollars in damage. This happened after several decades of other pandemics - with bats or civets in the case of Ebola and SARS-CoV-1 and most likely chimpanzees in the case of H.I.V.

Arrogance and a luxurious lifestyle compels us to assume that humans are superior to the rest of living beings on earth and there is no need to maintain relationship with

'One Health' approach vital to combating pandemics



the wild. In this context it must be mentioned that forests, freshwater systems, oceans, grasslands and the biodiversity within us literally give us the clean air, clean water, climate-stabilizing buffers and healthy food, as well as natural protection from viruses. Despite realizing this truth, we have been unable to stop exploitation in the name of so-called development.

Though upon occurrence of this pandemic, huge moneys are being spent on treatment of Covid-19 patients and development of vaccines, governments and politicians irrespective of political affiliation have placed little emphasis on stopping this unsustainable exploitation.

Otherwise, how can multinational companies continuously undertake large-scale logging or mining in the world's remaining great forests and construct hydropower projects on rivers? These MNCs need to pay for the pandemic risks associated with these activities. Perhaps some of these projects should not be undertaken at all. In this context it is pertinent to mention that halting these practices is the only sustainable vaccine against the next pandemic.

The "One Health" approach resembles other public health initiatives that attempt to break down disciplinary or sectoral silos, such as whole-of-government or health-in-all-policy approaches, or more recent calls for prioritizing eco-health or planetary health. It differs, however, by focusing on how competing inter-

ests such as agricultural productivity, farm livelihoods, animal health and the health of populations far removed from the farm must be balanced over a long period. This poses difficult governance and implementation challenges as the spectre of an imminent health catastrophe is seldom present at the pre-epidemic stage when action is most crucial.

To strengthen its integrative approach to "One Health", one of the important tasks is to collect data systematically on the occurrence of infectious diseases, and related behaviours in both humans and animals. This can contribute to developing models to estimate the probability of the emergence of a new zoonotic agent. Such systematic monitoring also facilitates the tracking of the spread of infection while providing early warning to human and animal health officials for response measures.

Next is the challenge of coordination and active collaboration required between various agencies for a unified, timely response. This is not only required at the local level but also for global response efforts to minimize the likelihood of pandemic potential.

Another challenging action is to understand the differing regulatory

environments that govern the live animal markets as a crucial first step in assessing the role of local or national-level institutions in minimizing zoonotic disease risk. In addition to this, health equity concerns must be integrated for framing the policy for improving protection of vulnerable populations in current and future infectious disease outbreaks, both through attention to the socio-historical conditions and recognition of the knowledge and capabilities to prevent or mitigate the harm arising from such outbreaks.

Though the "One Health" approach is considered crucial to address governance challenges of zoonotic diseases, its implementation in practice remains quite limited. It is time for international law to catch up with global reality. But global health scholars can neither simply focus on the health sector nor limit their work to scientific and technological improvement. All of us will have to realize that food, trade, human rights, humanitarian relief and the environment are critically important in improving health and reducing health inequalities.

The writer is former Senior Scientist, Central Pollution Control Board.

100 days on and so far, so good

MAHIR ALI

It is somewhat disconcerting to find myself almost in agreement with US Senator Lindsey Graham, a particularly odious representative of the Republican leadership that propped up the Trump presidency for four years, and seems determined to perpetuate its sordid legacy.

But he was on the ball when he told Fox News Sunday: "AOC said his first 100 days exceeded her expectations. That's all you need to know."

Of course, what he meant by "That's all you need to know" is vastly different from the way many others would interpret New York congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's statement last Friday that the Biden administration has "definitely exceeded the expectations that progressives had".

When AOC entered the US Congress in 2018, contrary to the primary desires of the Democratic Party establishment — alongside Squad-mates Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayanna Pressley — she came across as a breath of fresh air: a legislator determined to challenge not just the egregious excesses of the Trump administration but also the unsavoury realities of her own party's inclinations.

She had already done her bit by then for the unsuccessful Bernie Sanders campaign in 2016, and she



did it again four years later. Last year's Sanders campaign, although hobbled again by the Democratic establishment, was more successful. At least in the sense that Biden advisers collaborated with Sanders associates in drawing up the election agenda.

Nonetheless, in the run-up to last November's election, it was logical to assume that, if elected, Joe Biden would go his own way — striving for bipartisanship, as was his wont during three decades in the Senate, and quite possibly achieving very little.

However, Biden has managed to go reasonably far in his first 100 days — admittedly an arbitrary criterion

that has been in vogue since the initial phase of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1933 inauguration. FDR assumed power during the depths of the 1930s depression, and tried to reboot the US economy through an unprecedented injection of government resources.

It was a partial success — it actually took a world war to resurrect the US economy. Biden's efforts in the wake of Covid-19 have been compared with FDR's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, thwarted in large part by Johnson's Vietnam woes.

For all his flaws, Johnson did manage to legislate some of the most substantial provisions against racial

discrimination since Lincoln's Emancipation Act 100 years earlier. Ever since, though, there have been efforts to claw back the advances, and Republican-guided voter suppression reached a new level of sorts in Georgia recently, after the state's voters gave Biden a tentative majority in the US Senate.

The president, meanwhile, has gone further in his stimulus packages than some of his detractors on the left expected, and has facilitated a considerably more substantial role in the Senate for Sanders than anyone might have anticipated. A partial consequence has been that, unlike in 2009 when the advent of Barack Obama was followed by far too much of the 'rescue package' being restricted to the economic culprits on Wall Street, the latest stimulus has sustained poorer households.

These are temporary measures, though. There is the prospect of a massive infrastructure package that would also seek to redress, in some measure, America's reliance on fossil fuels. Biden recently presided over a virtual global summit ostensibly aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions more sharply than spelt out in the Paris agreement of 2015, but it has been pointed out that whereas the current administration is willing to pursue its goal through concrete measures, it has no objection to the

rest of the world chasing the task through market mechanisms, which have hitherto proved grossly inadequate.

The Biden administration is also struggling with border immigration measures, and with foreign policy more generally: ties with China and Russia, in particular, remain dismal. The proposed withdrawal from Afghanistan, welcome at many levels, is likely to effectively entail handing back power to the Taliban — without any official recognition of why the invasion 20 years ago was a grievous error.

But let's put foreign policy aside, even though US neocolonialism is an intrinsic part of America's post-war identity, not least in its Latin American 'backyard'. However even domestically, there's little hope of instituting a minimum wage of only \$15, let alone the kind of universal healthcare that is routine in comparable nations, or the kind of gun control that might reduce the regular mass shootings.

These three straightforward objectives are not even on Biden's agenda. And some of the items on his wish list face resistance not just from mindless Republicans but also from Democratic senators such as Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema.

Yes, Joe Biden has exceeded expectations in his first 100 days, but where he will — or can — go from here remains an open question.

Dawn/ANN.

NO 28898

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

A few weeks ago we published an appeal from Captain Gilroy, I.M.S., as Surgeon Superintendent and Secretary to the Mayo Hospital, for the additional public financial support of which that institution stands sorely in need. As Captain Gilroy said, it has found necessary already, for want of money, to close on dispensary connected with the Hospital; and other serious retrenchments, which will be misfortunes for the public, can only be averted if more donors and subscribers will come to the rescue. As already pointed out, this is the oldest Hospital in Calcutta, having been in existence, though it has changed its habitation, since 1792; and the total yearly number of patients who receive treatment through its agency is well over 130,000. Like other institutions, the Mayo Hospital has felt the pinch of hard times and Captain Gilroy had to appeal for at least a lakh of rupees for repairs to buildings and to meet the ever-increasing expenses. From the first subscription list now published it will be seen that a number of generous contributors have come forward. The total, however, is a long way off the lakh that is needed, and the appeal to the charitable public is still urgent. It is to be wished that some of our wealthy Indian merchants are being made to relieve the financial wants of a hospital which affords treatment for a very large number of Indian patients.

NEWS ITEMS

ELECTORAL ROLLS IN BOMBAY

Bombay, Apr 28

The Government of Bombay has forwarded a letter to the president of the Corporation suggesting that the qualification to vote in Municipal elections should be the same as the qualification to vote for the Legislative Council. After pointing out the changes that have taken place under the Reforms, under which an electoral roll on the basis of rental of rupees ten a month has been prepared for the local Legislative Council, the Government expresses the opinion that if a person is fit to vote for the Council he should also be fit to vote for the Municipality, and suggests that it will be an obvious advantage to have only one electoral roll both for the Legislative Council and Corporation.

RAILWAY EARNINGS SHORT OF ESTIMATE

Simla, April 28

The total approximate gross earnings of the State Railways from April 1 to 18 amounted to Rs 3.72 crores. The budget estimate for the current year was framed in anticipation of total gross earnings of Rs 87 crores, and the results of the first two weeks, given above, have fallen short of the estimate for that period by Rs 31.89 lakhs. Unfavourable results in the last week have been evident on all lines, and is particularly due to less booking of jute from Bengal, and to restricted bookings connected with the strike on the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway. The coaching traffic on the Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railway metre gauge has also been below normal.

BOY'S ATTEMPT TO FIRE CUTTACK COLLEGE

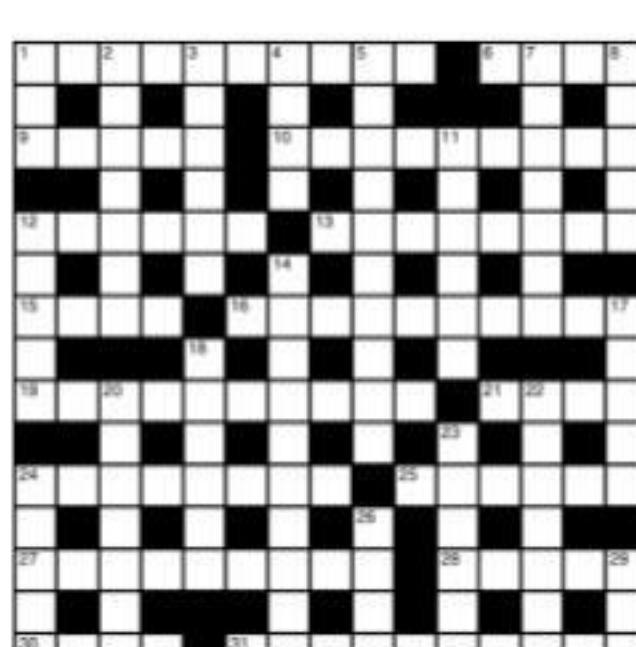
The case against the college student caught in the college premises with inflammable articles in his possession was heard today. Professor A.C. Ganguly, Superintendent of the college hostel, said that the bottle of kerosene was inside the principal's room attached to the office, and it was not certain when the bottle was brought out. The boy of the accused stated that the boy had an acute attack of cholera some years ago, since when he had shown signs of insanity. He was under medical treatment for one month. Questioned by the court witness said he had no information of his son's joining the non-cooperation movement. His son was a volunteer with Mr. Gandhi while he was here. The case was adjourned to May 4 for argument.

FRACAS IN FARIDPUR BAZAR

Faridpur, Apr 28

Yesterday morning a quarrel took place over a bargain between a constable and a Mahomedan stall keeper in the local bazar which culminated in a free fight between the constables and several stall keepers. As a protest against the conduct of the constables the shops of the bazar were kept closed the whole of yesterday. No complaint has as yet been filed in the courts. The manager of Maharaja Tagore who has proprietary rights over the bazar has been telegraphed to but he has not yet arrived. The Naib, who lives a few miles from the town, arrived here. Yesterday evening a meeting was held in the bazar when a non-official committee of inquiry was fixed to collect evidence and report on yesterday's occurrence.

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

1 Abreast of method for FA Cup draw? (4,2,4)
6 Create an impression in France and Switzerland (4)
9 Club's record number of points at start of season (5)
10 Regularly lobby meeting with passion (9)
12 Waited in line by indicated entrance for audience (6)
13 Plane's speed cuts journeys to new destination (8)
15 Unveiled female personal assistant (4)
16 Dodgy case edited names author recognised? (10)
19 Writer left out correcting fluid having erased last name (4,3)

21 Members of Black Sabbath joined famous group (4)
24 Foreign Office certain about government leader being detained by undesirable elements (8)
25 Promote potential partner's report on latest developments (6)
27 Setter not being edited is extremely bad (9)
28 Peripheral characters killed in outstanding film (5)
30 Call by Labour unseating new Liberal peer (4)
31 Servant emptied heaviest containers brought round to supply what's lacking (4,3)

1 Complaint letters periodically dispatched from island (3)
2 Drop key objective following board's conclusion (7)
3 Smashed gun having incurred fine (6)
4 TV programme broadcast about hospital (4)
5 Blue bottle getting passed around (10)
7 Article about list circulating in plant (7)
8 Manual workers describing case for historians? (5)
11 Master trained pupils of similar ability (6)
12 University dons question answer following drink (5)

14 Demoralised person in divorce case losing right to support daughter (10)
17 Put on period drama here? (5)
18 Pet butterfly? (6)
20 The new girl ordered sandwiches containing less fat (7)
22 Relevance of reporter's exposé ... (7)
23 ... leads to some papers linking burnt remains in prominent story (6)
24 Group assembled for collective action in favour of church (5)
26 Short month in which temperature rises a degree (4)
29 Be critical of backing tipster's favourite (3)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



We are organising resources on a war footing
and hope to help in abating this crisis.

S S KIM, HMIL MD & CEO

ON MEASURES TAKEN BY HYUNDAI TO HELP THE COUNTRY

THUMBNAILS

Vedanta move: Vedanta is all set to drive the next phase of sustainable growth in the iron and steel sector with the strategic elevation of two industry veterans. Sauvik Mazumdar, chief executive officer of Vedanta iron and ferro alloys business, has been appointed as CEO of Vedanta's iron and steel sector, while N L Vhatte, who was director, Vedanta – value added business, will take up the role of CEO- ESL Steel, said a Press release. **SNS**

Glenmark nasal spray: Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Limited is concluding the final, national phase of its marketing approval application process to enable launch of its innovative nasal spray in 17 countries in the European Union. Ryaltris, will shortly be available in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, and the UK, said a company release. This marks Glenmark's first innovative product approval in the European Union, it added. **SNS**

5G smartphone: Samsung on Wednesday announced the launch of Galaxy M42 5G, its first mid-segment 5G device. Galaxy M42 5G is also the first Galaxy M smartphone to feature Samsung Pay, Samsung's mobile payment service, the company said. The phone has been priced at Rs 21,999 for 6GB + 128 GB variant and Rs 23,999 for 8GB + 128 GB variant, it added. **SNS**

Hospital directory: Truecaller on Wednesday launched a Covid hospital directory for users in India. The directory is built right into the app and can be accessed from either the menu or the dialer. The directory includes telephone numbers and addresses of covid designated hospitals from multiple states across the country, sourced from official government databases, said a Press release from the company. **SNS**

Aptech fined: Sebi has slapped a fine of Rs 1 crore on Aptech Ltd for violating insider trading norms back in 2016. An investigation was conducted by the regulator to ascertain whether there was any disclosure lapses and violation of PIT (Prohibition of Insider Trading) norms by Aptech during the period from August to September 2016. Aptech had made an announcement on 7 September 2016, saying that it has forayed into the pre-school segment. **PTI**

LSAT date: In response to the postponement of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) Class XII examinations, LSAC Global is announcing that the June administration of the 2021 LSAT—India will be delivered over multiple days and slots starting 29 May 2021, according to release. **SNS**

Economy projected to grow by 11 per cent this fiscal: ADB

However, the recent surge in Covid-19 cases may put this economic recovery at risk

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

ADB today said the Indian economy is projected to grow by 11 per cent in the current financial year on the back of the strong vaccination programme, but cautioned that second wave of Covid is worrying.

"India's economy is expected to grow 11 per cent in financial year (FY) 2021, which ends on 31 March 2022, amid a strong vaccine drive. However, the recent surge in Covid-19 cases may put this recovery at risk," said the Asian Development Outlook (ADO).

Continued economic recovery boosted by increased public investment, vaccine rollout and a surge in domestic demand will trigger this strong rebound, ADB said.

The predictions are based on assumption that there is extensive vaccine deployment across the country and the second wave of coronavirus is contained.

According to ADB's flagship

publication Asian Development Outlook, "the second wave of Covid-19 cases is worrying, especially if vaccine rollout falters or fails to contain it."

Another risk is the further tightening of global financial conditions, which would apply pressure on India's market interest rates and therefore affect economic normalisation, the report added.

Going further, ADB forecasts India's economic growth to moderate to 7 per cent in FY2022, on account of disap-

pearance of base effect. The economy is expected to have contracted by 8 per cent in FY2020, in line with the government's second advance estimate, it said.

ADB country director for India Takeo Konishi said India's economy faced its worst contraction in FY2020 due to the Covid-19 shock.

"With large government stimulus and the ongoing vaccination drive, we expect economic activity will continue to pick up from the third quarter of FY2020 and



TAKEO KONISHI
ADB COUNTRY DIRECTOR
FOR INDIA

rebound strongly in the current fiscal year with an uptick in domestic demand, especially in urban services," said Konishi.

The government's boost to public investment through its infrastructure push, incentives for manufacturing, and continued support to boost rural incomes will support India's accelerated recovery, Konishi said.

The Manila-headquartered multilateral funding agency expects India's economic activity to continue to normalize and recover owing to government measures in the past one year including "large stimulus in FY2020" and a steep increase in capital expenditure budget in FY2021.

Increased government expenditure on healthcare, water, and sanitation will strengthen the country's resilience against future pandemics, said the report, adding private investment is expected to pick up on improving sentiment and risk appetite, as well as accommodative credit conditions.

"The government's push to

the manufacturing sector through the production-linked incentive scheme will expand domestic production and help integrate domestic manufacturing with global supply chains," it said.

ADO expects inflation to moderate to 5.2 per cent FY2021, having risen to 6.2 per cent in FY2020. Good harvests and supply chain recovery is expected to contain domestic food inflation, it said.

S&P forecast: S&P Global Ratings on Wednesday said the second wave of Covid infections poses downside risks to India's GDP and heightens the possibility of business disruptions. The second wave brings in uncertainty and a drawn-out Covid outbreak will impede India's recovery, it said.

"This may prompt us to revise our base-case assumption of 11 percent growth over fiscal 2021-2022, particularly if the government is forced to reimpose broad containment measures," S&P said in a statement.

not answered.

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman late on Tuesday hinted at talks to sell a minority stake in the Saudi national oil company to a foreign investor. "I don't want to give any promises but there's a discussion for the acquisition of 1 per cent," he said in a television interview. He did not give details of the deal or the parties involved but added that it would be "very important in strengthening Aramco's sales in the country where this company resides".

Financial Times said talk about the transfer of share ownership could be referring to the Reliance deal, but that it was more likely to be related to separate discussions with Chinese and other investors about stake sales in Saudi Aramco.

A stake in Reliance's O2C business would give Aramco an entry into one of the world's fastest-growing fuel markets. It would also give a ready-made market for 5 lakh barrels per day of Arabian crude and offering a potentially bigger downstream role in the future.

RIL, Saudi Aramco discuss 'cash & share' stake deal: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries is reported to have held talks with Saudi Aramco on a cash and share deal for sale of a 20 per cent stake in its oil refining and petrochemical arm.

Ambani had in August 2019 announced talks for the sale of a 20 per cent stake in the oil-to-chemicals (O2C) business, which comprises its twin oil refineries at Jamnagar in Gujarat and petrochemical assets, to the world's largest oil exporter.

The deal was to conclude by March 2020, but has been delayed for reasons not disclosed by either company.

Financial Times quoting sources reported that the talks have been revived in recent weeks. Aramco is weighing paying for the stake with its shares initially and then staggered cash payments over several years, it said, adding the proportion of shares versus cash was still up for debate and terms had yet to be finalised.

An email sent to Reliance Industries for comments was

Covid-19: Maruti advances shutdown for maintenance

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The country's top car maker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) today said it has decided to advance maintenance shutdown at its two Haryana-based manufacturing plants by a month amid a surge in the Covid-19 cases across the country.

The auto major was supposed to take the shutdown at its two plants in Gurugram and Manesar in June, but due to the tsunami of Covid-19 cases, it decided to take it one month earlier to save oxygen for medical needs.

MSI noted that as part of the car manufacturing process, it uses a small amount of oxygen in its factories, while relatively much larger quantities are used by

the manufacturers of components.

"In the current situation, we believe that all available oxygen should be used to save lives. Accordingly, Maruti Suzuki has decided to advance its maintenance shutdown, originally scheduled for June to 1st to 9th May," it said in a regulatory filing.

Production in all factories will be closed for maintenance during this period, MSI said.

"The company has been informed that Suzuki Motor Gujarat has taken the same decision for its factory," it added.

With the rise in Covid-19 cases, the demand for oxygen for treatment purposes has gone up manifold, leading to shortages across the hospitals.

Already, the government

has barred the use of liquid oxygen for any non-medical purpose and asked manufacturing units to maximise its production and make it available to the government for medical use.

Maruti Suzuki usually shuts its two plants at Gurugram and Manesar in Haryana twice a year, in June and December.

The two plants have a production capacity of over 15 lakh units per annum.

Besides, Suzuki's Gujarat-based plant, which manufactures cars on a contract basis for MSI, has an annual production capacity of 7.5 lakh units.

With the second wave of Covid-19 hitting hard, automakers have been trying hard to carry on with the production activities.

Niti Aayog's recipe for EV growth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

NITI SUGGESTIONS



► The government should provide incentives on electric vehicle (EV) purchase over and above the existing subsidy under FAME-II scheme.

► It further pitched for creation of non-financial incentives, including priority lanes and exclusive parking for EVs in commercial complexes.

scheme.

► The Aayog also recommended providing interest subvention on loan taken for EV purchase.

► It further pitched for creation of non-financial incentives, including priority lanes and exclusive parking for EVs in commercial complexes.

The Aayog also recom-

mended providing interest subvention on loan taken for EV purchase.

It also said green zones should be demarcated within cities that permit only EVs, and heavy taxes should be charged on conventional fuel vehicles.

"Green corridors should be earmarked on which only e-buses are provided permit to operate," the Aayog said,

adding that a national-level policy should be formulated for incentivising distribution utilities on investing in development of EV charging infrastructure.

In addition to this, the government has notified the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan 2020, which seeks to enhance national energy security, mitigate adverse environmental impacts from road transport vehicles and boost domestic manufacturing capabilities for EVs.

In addition to this, the government has notified the FAME-II scheme to stimulate the country's EV market, de-licensed the charging infrastructure business, and specified guidelines and standards for charging infrastructure for electric vehicles.

ONGC wants foreign partners for new fields

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

India's flagship oil and gas producer ONGC today said it is seeking foreign partners for yet-to-be-developed fields in lesser prospective areas, but is shackled by uneconomic gas prices and tax structure.

Reacting to a report on the petroleum ministry asking Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) to sell stake in producing oil fields to private firms, get foreign partners in KG basin gas fields, monetise existing infrastructure and hew off drilling and other services into a separate company to raise production, the state-owned firm said the ongoing discussions with the administrative ministry were neither new nor intended to limit its role or growth.

"ONGC is also looking into strategic relationships and close alliances with key international players through

(overseas arm) ONGC Videsh," the company said in a statement.

"Intention is to invite foreign participation to explore Category-II and Category-III basins which match size and scale of expectations and portfolio of these large players."

Indian sedimentary basin is divided into three categories - Category-I includes producing basins such as Krishna Godavari, Mumbai Offshore, Assam and Rajasthan; Category-II basins are less prospective and contain contingent resources to be developed and produced (example Kutch, Mahanadi, Andaman-Nicobar, Saurashtra-Vindhyans); Category-III are ones with only prospective resources to be explored and discovered (example Kerala-Konkan, Ganga Punjab, Bengal-Purnea, Narmada, Himalayan Foreland etc).

It was reported on 25 April

that Amar Nath, additional secretary (exploration) in ministry of petroleum and natural gas, had on 1 April written to ONGC chairman and managing director Subhash Kumar, giving a seven-point action plan, "ONGC Way Forward" that would help the firm raise oil and gas production by one-third by 2023-24.

It identified maturing fields such as Panna-Mukta and Ratna and R-Series in western offshore and onshore fields like Gandhar in Gujarat for sale of stake to private firms, as well as gas-rich block KG-

DWN-98/2 and recently brought into production Ashokenagar block in West Bengal for foreign partner participation.

All the fields identified by the ministry letter are in Category-I basins and are producing. But ONGC wants foreign firms to share exploration risk.

ONGC in the statement said: "The ongoing discussions are neither new nor intended to limit role or growth of ONGC. In fact during the ongoing discussions there has been an opportunity for ONGC to raise issues which are critical for ONGC to achieve the objectives of delivering value to all stakeholders," it said.

"Despite uneconomical gas prices, ONGC has been aggressively pursuing its deep-water projects in the east coast and a couple of shallow water projects in the west coast."

ONGC also has a plan of acquiring much larger acreage through open acreage licensing policy (OALP).

"There are certain issues around structure where decisive steps can be evaluated only once the industry is completely under GST regime," it said.

Oil is out of the goods and services tax (GST) regime and operators have to pay state VATs with no set-off, all services.

"Requirement and opportunity for ONGC is to play an even more pronounced role in improving energy security of the country. ONGC feels confident and comfortable that the ongoing discussions within ONGC and with its stakeholders will help deliver greater value to all stakeholders, and make ONGC a much stronger commercial organisation, at par with the best in the world," the statement said.

Zomato files papers for ₹8,250 cr IPO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL



► The initial public offer (IPO) comprises fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 7,500 crore and offer for sale to the tune of Rs 750 crore by Info Edge (India) Ltd.

► Proceeds from the fresh issue would be used towards funding organic and inorganic growth initiatives and general corporate purposes.

► The equity shares of the company will be listed on BSE and NSE.

Info Edge said it will sell stake worth Rs 750 crore in the IPO of its investee company Zomato.

In a regulatory filing, Info Edge said Zomato is proposing an IPO of its equity shares, comprising a fresh issue of equity shares by Zomato Ltd and an offer for sale by Info Edge (India) Ltd.

The board of directors of the company considered and have given their approval to the company to participate in the said offer for sale of up to such number of shares of Zomato Ltd as would aggregate up to Rs 7,500 million...."

In February, Zomato had raised \$250 million (over Rs 1,800 crore) in funding from Tiger Global, Kora and others, valuing the online food ordering platform at \$5.4 billion.

Equity indices up for 3rd straight session

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 28 APRIL

The Sensex soared 790 points while the Nifty vaulted above the 14,350-mark today as markets maintained their winning streak for the third session on the trot amid robust corporate results.

Strengthening rupee and short-covering ahead of F&O expiry also fuelled the rally, traders said, even as the Covid-19 situation remained an overhang.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 789.70 points or 1.61 per cent to finish at 49,733.84 points.



If the U.S. shuns a mutually respectful dialogue on the basis of a balance of interests, we would live in conditions of a Cold War or worse.

ASSERTING THE U.S. SHOULD STOP POSTURING LIKE A SOVEREIGN RALLYING ITS ALLIES AGAINST RUSSIA AND CHINA

RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SERGEY LAVROV

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, THURSDAY 29 APRIL 2021

09

Myanmar unity govt will not talk until prisoners released

But the junta has already declined to accept proposals to resolve the crisis that followed its coup

AGENCIES

YANGON, 28 APRIL

Myanmar's pro-democracy government, which includes members of parliament ousted by the military coup, has told Southeast Asia's regional bloc that it will not engage in talks until the junta releases all political prisoners. The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) has been trying to find a path for Myanmar out of a bloody crisis triggered by the 1 February coup and has called for an end to violence and talks between all sides. But the junta has already declined to accept proposals to resolve the crisis that emerged from an Asean summit last weekend that was attended by Myanmar's Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, but no-



General view of the ASEAN leaders' meeting at the ASEAN secretariat building in Indonesia.

launched as Suu Kyi's government was preparing for a second term after sweeping a November election.

The military said it had to seize power because its complaints of fraud in the election were not being addressed by an election commission that deemed the vote fair.

Pro-democracy protests have taken place in cities and towns across the country since the coup. The military has cracked down with lethal force on the protesters, killing more than 750 people, an activist group says. Alarmed by the turmoil in one of its members, Asean held a meeting on Saturday in the Indonesian capital with the leader of the junta in a bid to press him to end the crisis. Asean did not invite a representative of Suu Kyi's ousted government. ASEAN leaders said after the meeting they had reached a

"five-point consensus" on steps to end violence and promote dialogue between the rival Myanmar sides.

The junta later said it would give "careful consideration" to Asean's suggestions, which included appointing an envoy to visit Myanmar, "when the situation returns to stability" and provided that Asean's recommendations facilitated the junta's own roadmap and served the country's interests. Activists had earlier criticized the plan, saying it helped to legitimize the junta and fell far short of their demands.

In particular, it did not call for the release of Suu Kyi, 75, and other political prisoners. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners advocacy group says more than 3,400 people have been detained for opposing the coup.

Lankan President meets Chinese defence minister; says visit to boost bilateral ties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

COLOMBO, 28 APRIL

Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Wednesday said he had a "fruitful discussion" with Chinese Defence Minister Gen. Wei Fenghe here and emphasised that the high-level visit will further strengthen bilat-

eral ties. Wei arrived here on a two-day visit for bilateral talks with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda.

"Had a fruitful discussion with China's defence minister General Wei Fenghe this morning. This visit will further strengthen the ties between the two countries," the president

tweeted along with photographs of their meeting.

The Sri Lankan president and the Chinese defence minister were donning face masks.

Wei was received at the Colombo international airport by Sri Lanka Army's Commander Gen. Shavendra Silva. The Chinese defence minister will hold bilateral talks with President Gotabaya's brother and Prime Minister Mahinda.

In October last year, Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs of the ruling Communist Party of China Yang Jiechi visited Colombo.

The Chinese Defence Minister's visit assumes significance in the backdrop of a pub-

lic diplomacy campaign launched by the Chinese embassy on the Chinese-built Port City in Colombo.

Last week, Sri Lanka's Supreme Court heard petitions on the constitutionality of the administrative body of the Port City built on reclaimed sea.

The Port City commission bill was challenged by the Opposition parties and civil society groups over its constitutionality. They want the bill to be subject to a referendum and a special two-thirds mandate in Parliament.

The five-member bench of the Supreme Court handed over its determination to Parliament Speaker Mahinda

Yapa Abeywardena after a 5-day hearing. It will be announced in Parliament next week, officials said.

The \$1.4 billion project, which has been exempted from a series of local laws, has come under severe criticism from the Opposition parties, civil society groups and labour unions which allege that the project violated the country's sovereignty, the Constitution and labour rights.

The Colombo Port City project, expected to play a key role in China's ambitious 'Maritime Silk Road' project in India's backyard, is said to be the single largest private sector development ever in the island nation.

Turkish jets, troops hit PKK targets in new Iraq incursion

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANKARA, 28 APRIL

Turkish warplanes were continuing on Wednesday to strike suspected Kurdish militant targets in northern Iraq, while commando troops were conducting a search and sweep operation, Turkey's defence ministry said, as the military pressed ahead with its latest incursion into the neighbouring region.

Turkey's military on Friday launched a new ground and air offensive against militants of the banned Kurdistan Work-

ers' Party, or PKK, which maintain bases in northern Iraq and have used the territory for attacks against Turkey.

Turkey has conducted numerous cross-border aerial and ground operations against the PKK over the past decades and the latest offensive was centered in northern Iraq's Metina and Avashin-Basyan regions.

A defence ministry statement said the operation was continuing as planned, with suspected PKK targets being struck from both the air and from the ground.

Melting glaciers threaten China's plan to dam the Brahmaputra in Tibet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BEIJING, 28 APRIL

Melting glaciers and barrier lakes could threaten China's plan to build the world's biggest hydroelectric dam over the Brahmaputra River in Tibet close to the Arunachal Pradesh border, a media report said on Wednesday.

The proposed dam which one Chinese official said has "no parallel in history" will be built in Medog county, where the Brahmaputra Grand Canyon is located. Medog is the last county in Tibet which is located close to the Arunachal Pradesh border.

The plan to build the megadam, which is part of China's 14th five-year plan beginning from this year, was approved by China's Parliament, the National People's Congress in March this year.

But the engineers are concerned about the threats posed by landslides and bar-

rrier lakes to the dam, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

But an icy obstacle could put a halt to much of the plan. In 2018, a landslide caused by a melting glacier blocked the Yarlung Tsangpo, the upper stream of the Brahmaputra River at the

Sedongpu Basin in Milin county," it said. It formed a lake containing about 600 million cubic metres of water. With the river spilling over the top at present, the dam could collapse at any time, it said.

The Sedongpu lake sits just a few dozen kilometres upstream from the planned construction site of the super hydropower plant. With so much water hanging overhead, no construction workers can move in to clear the ground, it said.

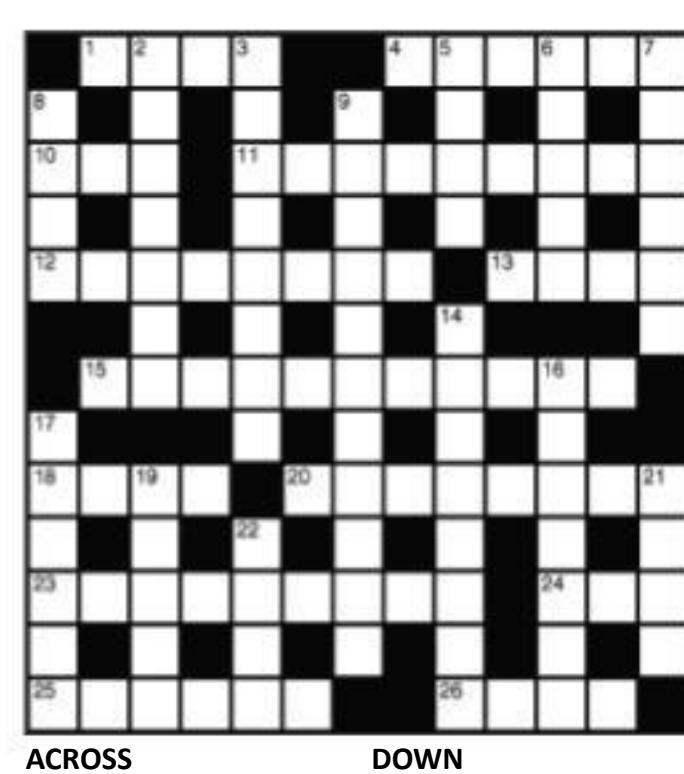
To build the big dam, they must get rid of the small dam formed by the landslide first, the report said.

India and Bangladesh, the lower riparian states, have raised concerns over China's plan to build the massive dam on Brahmaputra River. But China has downplayed such anxieties saying it would keep their interests in mind.

As a lower riparian state with considerable established user rights to the waters of the trans-border rivers, the Indian government has consistently conveyed its views and concerns to the Chinese authorities and has urged them to ensure that the interests of downstream states are not harmed by any actions in upstream areas.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Run away (4)
- Ill humour (6)
- Male sheep (3)
- Irregular fighter (9)
- Photos, drawings, etc (8)
- Minor disagreement (11)
- Ladder step (4)
- Increase (8)
- Curry (9)
- Floor covering (3)
- Religious ministers (6)
- Large jug (4)

DOWN

- Bed and board, 13 letters
- Cavalier, 16 letters
- Also, 18 letters
- Mango, 20 letters
- Profane, 21 letters
- Saffron, 22 letters
- Tun, 23 letters
- Uterio, 8 letters
- Witty remarks (8)
- Grassy plain (7)
- Effrontery (5)
- Border (4)
- Stopper (4)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Surprise, 13 letters
- Reliant, 14 letters
- Modern, 15 letters
- Camp, 16 letters
- Venus, 17 letters
- Noon, 19 letters
- Eight, 7 letters
- Badly-off, 12 letters
- Matske, 13 letters
- Acne, 3 letters
- Salt and pepper, 4 letters
- Uterior, 5 letters
- Tight, 6 letters

DOWN

- Stretches, 1 letter
- Modern, 14 letters
- Reliant, 15 letters
- Acne, 3 letters
- Modern, 16 letters
- Camp, 17 letters
- Venus, 19 letters
- Noon, 19 letters
- Eight, 7 letters
- Badly-off, 12 letters
- Matske, 13 letters
- Acne, 3 letters
- Salt and pepper, 4 letters
- Uterior, 5 letters
- Tight, 6 letters

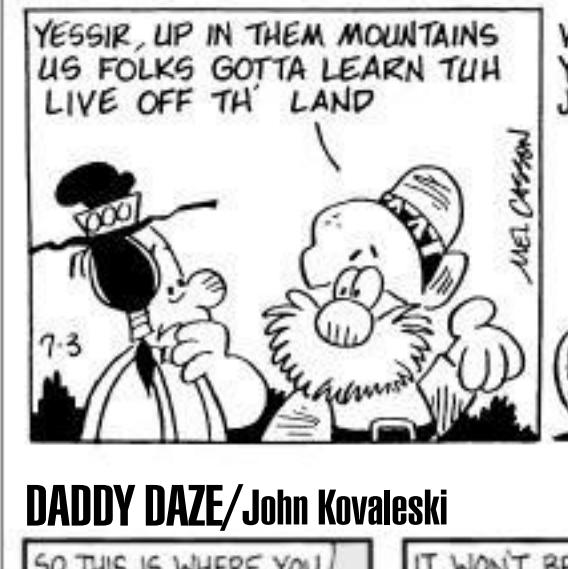
By arrangement with The Independent

Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

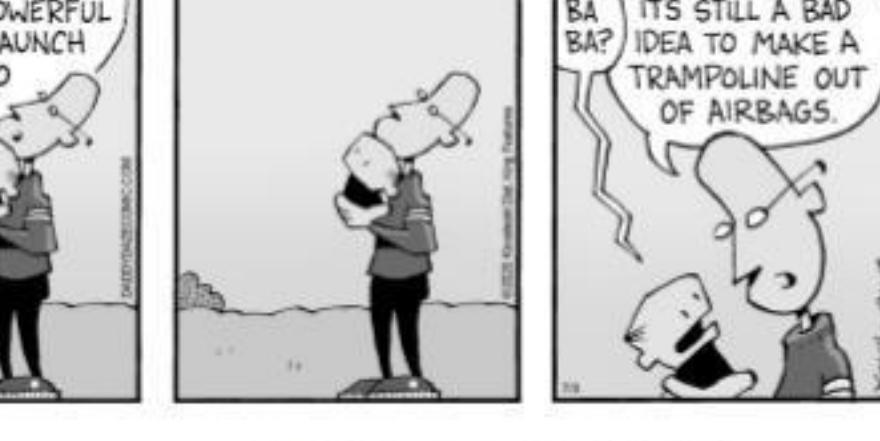
BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



NEED TO KNOW

HOSPITALS

- AIMS 26588500, 26588900
- Moolchand Medcity (formerly Hospital) 42000000 & 24-hour Chemist Shop 42000447
- Vidyasagar Institute for Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences 26924300, 26924304
- Batra Hospital & Medical Research Centre 29051280, 29958747
- Deen Dayal Upadhyay 25496320, 25494403
- Guru Tegh Bahadur 23717473, 23253250

RAILWAY INQUIRY

- General Inquiry 139
- Toll Free Nos. 180012511
- SMS Inquiry Nos. 57886, 54959, 5676747

ROADWAYS INQUIRY

- ISBT (General Inquiry): 23868836, 23865181
- INDIGO AIRLINES New Delhi City Office 43513185, Call Centre 09910383838, 18001803838, Reservation 43513186; Indigo Airlines 23717473, 23253250

SCRABBLE BRAND

O	V	S	I	E	L	
						4th Letter Double
G	T	W	E	O	R	U
						Triple Word Score
T	N	T	I	Y	I	R
						5th Letter Triple
R	N	E	I	C	C	T

PAR SCORE 145-155

by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL

TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION BY JUDD

RACK 1 = 66 RACK 2 = 67 RACK 3 = 83 RACK 4 = 57 JUDGES TOTAL: 273

PAN SCORE: 195-190

JUDGES TOTAL: 273

PAR SCORE: 145-155

by JUDD

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PAN SCORE: 195-190

by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL

TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN



Indian aid and ingenuity has been a support to other countries throughout this immensely difficult time. As India has helped others, so now must we help India...we will win this battle together

PRINCE CHARLES
IN COVID-AID APPEAL

WEATHER

CITY	MAX	MIN
SINGAPORE	29°C	25°C
HONG KONG	26°C	20°C
TOKYO	18°C	12°C
LONDON	11°C	9°C
DUBAI	34°C	30°C
SAN FRANCISCO	13°C	9°C
NEW YORK	10°C	7°C
MOSCOW	08°C	05°C

S= sunny, CL= clear, H= hazy, R= rainy...

THUMBNAILS



Villagers wait to get their second doses of Sinopharm vaccines, outside Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on Wednesday. IANS

Fire at Latvian building: Eight people, some of them foreign nationals, died early Wednesday in a fire at a building housing a hostel that was apparently operating illegally in the center of Riga, the Latvian capital. Firefighters evacuated a further 24 from the premises. AP

UK aid budget cuts: The British government faced mounting criticism on Wednesday over its planned cuts to overseas aid spending as leaked details point to big reductions in funding for water, sanitation and hygiene projects as well as girls' education. PTI

China school attack: Sixteen children and two teachers were injured in a knife attack on a kindergarten school in China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on Wednesday, police said. The suspect has been arrested and all the injured have been sent to hospital. PTI

To boost Indo-Pacific ties, Oz to spend \$747mn on def bases

MELBOURNE, 28 APRIL

Australia will invest 747 million dollars in upgrading four key military training areas and ranges in the Northern Territory to defend the country's interests and support greater engagement with the Indo-Pacific neighbours and allies, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced on Wednesday, amid China's increasing assertiveness in the region.

Morrison announced the multi-million dollar investment stating that the objective was to pursue peace rather than sending any message to China.

The multi-million investment would upgrade four key training areas and ranges in the Northern Territory to enable the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to conduct simulated training exercises and remain battle-ready.

Essential upgrades will be made to four key military training areas and weapon ranges in the Northern Territory, including Robertson Barracks, Kangaroo Flats, Mount Buny and Bradshaw.

"These defence training areas and facilities will support greater engagement with our Indo-Pacific neighbours and our allies, and to conduct small and large scale military exercises across a number of different scenarios," Morrison said.

This investment will deliver a jobs boom for the Northern Territory, he said, adding We continue to invest more than 270 billion dollars in defence capability across Australia over the next decade, ensuring we have a capable defence force to meet a changing global environment while backing thousands of ADF men and women with the newest technology and training." AP

US rushing aid to India to combat Covid: Biden

Admin had earlier come under criticism for not releasing surplus vaccines to India



Multiple funeral pyres burn at a ground that has been converted into a crematorium in New Delhi.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, 28 APRIL

The US is rushing a whole series of help, including life-saving drugs and machinery, that India needs to combat the massive surge in Covid cases, President Joe Biden has said, as he again recalled New Delhi's assistance to America when it was in a "bind" due to the pandemic.

Biden spoke at length with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday and conveyed solidarity with India in its fight against the viral disease. "We are sending immediately a whole series of help that he needs, including providing for those Remdesivir and other drugs that are able to deal with this," Biden told reporters on Tuesday.

"We are sending the actual mechanical parts that are needed for the machinery they have to build a vaccine, and that is being done as well," he said. The president said he had discussed with Prime Minister Modi when the US would be able to send actual vaccines to India.

The Biden administration has come under criticism from several quarters, including from members and supporters of the Democratic Party, for not releasing surplus vaccines to India when the country is experiencing its worst-ever public health crisis. "The problem is right now, we have to make sure we have other vaccines like Novavax and others coming on probably, and I think we will be in a position to be able to share vaccines as well as know-how with other countries who are in real need," Biden said.

I might add when we were in a bind in the very beginning, India helped us."

Indo-American NGO raises \$4.7 mn to ship 2,184 O2 concentrators: An Indian-American non-profit body has raised nearly \$4.7 million through social media towards Covid relief efforts in India as the country battles a severe second wave of the pandemic. "This is a collective effort that can save lives, defeat hunger, assure distressed people, and help India in its decisive fight against Covid," said Sewa International USA said. On Tuesday, Sewa collected a shipment of 2,184 oxygen concentrators to be sent to India. PTI

Texas Indo-American Foundation shipping 50 ventilators to India: The US India Chamber of Commerce Foundation and its partner organisations are shipping 50 ventilators to India, besides other medical supplies. The foundation made arrangements to ship 20 ventilators on Tuesday. It will send 30 more in the next few days. These ventilators will be released to the Indian Red Cross Society in New Delhi for distribution to hospitals and field teams in hard-hit areas, the USICOC said. PTI

UK sends 400 oxygen concentrators to India: Britain has confirmed that following the first tranche of vital medical equipment a further 400 oxygen concentrators will be sent to India over the course of Wednesday and Thursday to help the country. PM Boris Johnson opened the weekly Prime Minister's Questions session of Parliament with a message of solidarity with India and highlighted that discussions remain ongoing with the Indian government to establish further requirements. PTI

We can to help them curb their new wave of cases," he added. Congressman Brad Sherman, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said.

Congressman Michael Waltz Press said India was an essential ally in America's global competition with China. "Its strength is important to stability in Asia and the United States. We must do what

S Korea to send medical items to help India: South Korea says it will provide India with oxygen concentrators, Covid diagnostic kits and other aid items to help the South Asian nation with the world's worst surge in infections. Health official Yoon Taeho said the government will also allow irregular flights to bring back South Korean nationals from India. PTI

SAVING JAB



A visitor receives a dose of vaccine in a vaccination centre located at a shopping mall in Almaty, Kazakhstan on Wednesday.

EU lawmakers clear post-Brexit trade treaty, hold out hope of new, positive era

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BRUSSELS, 28 APRIL

European Union leaders, their British counterparts and European businesses expressed hope on Wednesday that the final ratification of the post-Brexit trade deal will open a new, positive era of cooperation despite the many divisive topics remaining between the former partners.

After European lawmakers overwhelmingly ratified the agreement ensuring that free trade continues between the two sides without tariffs and quotas, UK Prime minister Boris Johnson said the vote marked the final step in a

long journey, providing stability to our new relationship with the EU as vital trading partners, close allies and sovereign equals." European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said the accord's faithful implementation is essential" while EU Council chief Charles Michel welcomed the beginning of a new era."

Relations between the EU and the U.K. have been strained since a Brexit transition period ended on Jan. 1. The two sides have argued so far this year over issues ranging from violations of the so-called Northern Ireland protocol, vaccine supplies to the full diplomatic recognition of the

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON, 28 APRIL

The leader of Northern Ireland was fighting Wednesday to keep her job as members of her party tried to oust her over her handling of the fallout from Brexit and other issues. Northern Ireland Assembly lawmakers from the Democratic Unionist Party have been asked to

EU in Britain. EU lawmakers approved the final ratification of the deal nearly five years after

sign a letter of no-confidence in party leader Arlene Foster.

It is unclear how many have signed, and the DUP said it would not comment on internal party matters. The move against Foster, who has led the party since 2015, is the latest sign of how Britain's economic split from the European Union at the end of 2020 has shaken the political balance in Northern Ireland.

Britain decided to leave the bloc. The deal, which was finalized on Christmas Eve, had

Northern Ireland leader faces party revolt over Brexit fallout

Post-Brexit trade rules have imposed customs and border checks on some goods moving between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The arrangement was designed to avoid checks between Northern Ireland and Ireland, an EU member, because an open Irish border has helped underpin the peace process that ended decades of violence in Northern Ireland. The new arrangements have angered Northern Ireland's British unionists, who say the new checks amount to a border in the Irish Sea and weaken ties with the rest of the U.K. Tensions over the new rules were a contributing factor to a week of street violence in Northern Ireland cities earlier this month that saw youths pelt police with bricks and petrol bombs.

already been ratified by the U.K. Parliament and conditionally came into force pending the European Parliament's approval, which marks the final legal hurdle. Lawmakers

at the European Parliament voted 660-5 with 32 abstentions to endorse the free trade agreement. Voting took place Tuesday but results were not announced until Wednesday morning. EU legislators said in a resolution accompanying their consent that the UK's withdrawal from the EU was a historic mistake, as no third country can enjoy the same benefits as an EU member.

In a debate ahead of ratification vote, many EU lawmakers rue Britain's departure but insisted that approving the text was the best option to avoid economic disruptions and ensure the integrity of the EU's single market.

World

BioNTech chief: Europe will reach herd immunity by Aug

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BERLIN, 28 APRIL

Europe can achieve herd immunity against the coronavirus within the next four months, the head of German pharmaceutical company BioNTech, which developed the first widely approved Covid vaccine with U.S. partner Pfizer, said Wednesday.

While the exact threshold required to reach that critical level of immunization remains a matter of debate, experts say a level above 70 per cent would significantly disrupt transmission of the coronavirus within a population.

Addressing a press conference, Trudeau said that Minister of Foreign Affairs Marc Garneau had direct conversations with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar about how Canada can best help, including the donation of extra medical supplies.

We are ready to provide 10 million dollars through the Canadian Red Cross to the Indian Red Cross, the Prime Minister said. This will support everything from ambulant services to buying more Personal Protective Equipment locally, he said.

If you want to donate to the emergency efforts on the ground, go to redcross.ca. As a world, we are in this fight together, Trudeau said.

About the talks between the Foreign Affairs Ministers of both the countries, he said: We are there to support in any ways we can, and those conversations are very much ongoing. It's something that Canadians are extremely concerned about as we see the terrible and tragic images coming out of India.

We know that we need to be there for our friends. And indeed, we need to be there for everyone around the world because we don't get through this pandemic anywhere until we get through it everywhere, Trudeau said.

S Korea to send medical items to help India: South Korea says it will provide India with oxygen concentrators, Covid diagnostic kits and other aid items to help the South Asian nation with the world's worst surge in infections. Health official Yoon Taeho said the government will also allow irregular flights to bring back South Korean nationals from India. PTI

UK study: Single vaccine dose cuts transmission by half

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, 28 APRIL

A single dose of either the Oxford/AstraZeneca or Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines have been found to cut Covid transmission rates by up to half, according to a new Public Health England (PHE) study on Wednesday.

Those given a first dose of either of the two vaccines currently being administered by the National Health Service (NHS) and who became infected with SARS-CoV-2 the coronavirus which causes Covid three weeks later were between 38 and 49 per cent less likely to pass the virus on than unvaccinated people.

The PHE also found that protection against Covid was seen from about 14 days after vaccination, with similar levels of protection regarded as secondary cases of coronavirus if they tested positive two to 14 days after the initial household case. Most of the people in the study were under the age of 60.

less of age of cases or contacts. A new study shows one dose of the vaccine can cut the risk of household transmission by up to 50 per cent. This is further evidence that the vaccine protects you and those around you. When you get the call, get the jab, said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

The study, which is yet to be fully peer-reviewed, included more than 57,000 contacts from 24,000 households in which there was a lab-confirmed coronavirus case that had received a vaccination, compared with nearly 1 million contacts of unvaccinated cases.

Contacts were defined as secondary cases of coronavirus if they tested positive two to 14 days after the initial household case. Most of the people in the study were under the age of 60.

good immune response against almost all of them in the lab. In cases where the immune response was weaker, it remained sufficient, he said, without providing exact figures.

Asked about the new variant first detected in India, Sahin said the vaccine's effectiveness against it was still being investigated.

But the Indian variant has mutations that we have previously investigated and against which our vaccine also works, so I am confident there, too, he said.

Russia expels Baltic nations' envoys in quid pro quo response

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MOSCOW, 28 APRIL

Russia on Wednesday ordered a total of seven diplomats from three Baltic nations and Slovakia to leave in a quid pro quo response to the countries' expulsion of Russian Embassy workers.

The Russian Foreign Ministry summoned their ambassadors to order three diplomats from Slovakia, two from Lithuania, one from Estonia and one more from Latvia to leave Moscow in a week.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's comments followed Ukrainian officials Wednesday that Moscow would not accept their push to revise a peace deal for eastern Ukraine.

Fighting between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists erupted in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, called Donbas, shortly after Moscow's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. More than 14,000 people have been killed during the seven-year conflict.

Russia responded Wednesday by ordering three Slovak Embassy workers to leave in a week. Earlier this month, Poland also expelled three Russian diplomats in a show of support for the USA, which ordered 10 Russian diplomats out as part of sanctions against Russia for interfering in the 2020 U.S. presidential election and for involvement in the SolarWind hack of federal agencies.

Pope Francis responded on Wednesday to reports of poor governance and moral failings in the Ecuadorian diocese of Riobamba by not only accepting the resignation of the retiring bishop but that of his heir apparent as well.

Francis on Wednesday accepted the resignations of Bishop Julio Parrilla Diaz, who turned 75 last month, and his deputy, Monsignor Gerardo Miguel Nieves Loja, 53. Nieves had been named coadjutor bishop for Riobamba last year and was due to be consecrated bishop in February, to take over when Parrilla retired at 75. But Nieves offered his resignation to Francis a week before the ceremony.

Parrilla confirmed Nieves' resignation in a February 19 letter to his flock, reported by the Spanish-language Catholic agency Religion Digital. In it, Parrilla said he understood Nieves' decision and noted that 500 people had signed a letter in support of him.

The resignation came weeks after a longtime Spanish missionary in Riobamba, Julia Serrano, publicly blasted the governance of the dioceses under Parrilla and questioned the moral quality of his presumed successor. In a January essay published in the Catholic blog Redes Christianas, Serrano wrote that the faithful had to pay for sacraments in the diocese, and that her letters to the Vatican denouncing such practices had fallen on deaf ears.

AP

Reining in the police

A major cause for overflowing dockets in courts is the tendency of police forces to slap cases on flimsy grounds, argues ASHOK KAPUR

It has taken all the authority and credibility at the command of a former Chief Justice of India, no less, to warn the nation about the "ramshackle" state of the Judiciary in the country today. The warning could not have come a day too soon, considering that the ever-mounting problem of judicial arrears is now the staple of national media reporting on the dismal state of justice system under arguably the finest Constitution in the democratic world. It is a highly embarrassing paradox.

The courts in India are clogged and their dockets are overflowing. More than 60,000 cases are pending in the Supreme Court, a quarter of a million in the various High Courts and several million in the lower courts. The problem is persisting for years, and aggravating by the day. The victim is the hapless litigant who is losing faith in the "system". A recent survey by a reputed institution to ascertain public opinion on the general state of affairs came up with a startling finding. It should make every right thinking Indian sit up and take notice. More than half the respondents have switched their loyalties from democracy and the rule of law, to a "spell" of military rule. Apparently, the common man feels that drastic ills need drastic remedies - a frightening remedy indeed.

To be fair to the Judiciary, it cannot be blamed entirely for overflowing dockets. The Executive and the Legislature must also share the responsibility for this state of affairs. The Government is the biggest litigant, not with so many civil as criminal cases being filed. The Executive is responsible for the mess primarily because it is not able to control its prosecution agency - the police force. The latter does what it pleases, without any check or accountability. As a result, it is arresting people at will, slapping cases against citizens on flimsy grounds and, every so often, abusing authority under a plethora of criminal laws to cook up petty misdemeanours - largely bailable - into non-bailable offences. Per force, pun intended, the accused has to rush to the savior of the last resort - the independent courts of law for relief and shelter.

Today, the police department has become the most valued "client" of the Judiciary, in a manner of speaking. It is bringing in maximum "business". In a shocking revelation, the National Commission on Constitutional Reforms set up by the Government of India in 2002 recorded that 80 per cent of the arrests being made by the Police were "unnecessary". It was headed by a distinguished former Chief Justice of India, and mainly comprised former judges of the Apex Court. Their findings can be taken as the most authentic assessment of the problem facing the Judiciary, in so far as criminal case load is concerned. In other words, four-fifths of the "unnecessary" criminal cases foisted by the police would have resulted in the independent courts throwing out these cases eventually or imposing fines. Imagine the precious time of the Judiciary lost in the bargain!

To be fair to the Executive, it did try to bring about reforms in the criminal justice system, so as to reduce the unnecessary burden on the Judiciary which would have partly solved the problem of arrears. Independent India's first National Police Commission was set up. It was flawed even to



begin with. Nominally headed by a retired civilian, it comprised mostly police officers, an academic and a former judge of the High Court who had no experience of the way police function, or having any working knowledge of the Criminal Code of India. It was serviced by the police directorate themselves. Thus, police which is a part of the problem was attempted to be made part of the solution.

The outcome was predictable. It was a largely self-serving report. What was shocking was the innocence betrayed by the police officers who authored the report, about the Constitution of India. Several years before the Report was submitted, the Apex Court in the celebrated case of Keshavananda Bharti had outlined the 'basic structure' of the Constitution. It had categorically ruled that it is inviolable - even the Parliament could not tinker with it. One of the 'basic features' was the 'separation of powers' between the Executive and the Judiciary. Thus, the members of the Executive shall not be entrusted with judicial functions nor shall members of the Judiciary be entrusted with administrative func-

tions. The authors of the Report made recommendations, some of which were outright unconstitutional.

To cite just one example, allegations against the police force in the districts all over India would be investigated by a committee headed by the District Judge, a plain violation of the basic structure - 'separation of powers'. And the committee would be serviced by the local Deputy Superintendent of Police. In other words, the accused would be, in effect, the investigator. One of the mandates of the Police Commission was to study the magisterial control of police force, a basic postulate of democracy and the rule of law. The Commission ended up by so diluting the role of the magistracy as to reduce it to just a nominal one. Such a report was bound to be rejected by the Government, and it was justifiably trashed.

The police continue merrily to misuse their powers of arrest for their often dubious motives. Whenever questioned, they conveniently shift the blame on the political executive - that they have done so under political pressure. This is a patently lame excuse.

Another mandate of the Police Commission was to suggest ways to eliminate this "pressure". Their findings only corroborated what is common knowledge, and known to all except the police. The Commission studied the problem in depth, and recorded that a number of retiring police officers "hobnobbed" with ruling politicians, in the expectation of post-retirement 'rewards' for 'loyal service'. Fully aware of the clout wielded by the police, the Commission themselves recommended a law be framed which will bar police officers from post-retirement sinecures.

As the entire Report was shelved by the then Government, the aforesaid most worthwhile recommendation was also shelved. Apparently, it was so done under police pressure, it can be said with the advantage of hindsight. After the Report was shelved, some retiring senior police officers continued with their old habits and maintained their cozy liaison with the ruling politicians, to mutual benefit. In return for tailoring their investigation and crime detection to please ruling politicians, they were generously rewarded

with the highest prize - post-retirement - that could be offered by the political bosses - Governorship. The Police Commission recommendation was observed more in the breach than compliance.

Time was, not long ago, under the previous Government that most of the Raj Bhavans in India were under police occupation, so to say. False and frivolous criminal cases continue to be filed, adding to the workload of the judiciary. One such recent case is that filed against a girl who is barely out of her teens. She has been charged with "sedition", a very serious offence punishable with life imprisonment. The most lethal weapon found in her armoury was a 'toolkit'. It is long-settled law that sedition implies a call to overthrow a duly elected Government by violent means, or through armed insurrection. That the arrest and the consequent prosecution were publicly justified by a Commissioner of Police of the Capital, only showcases the rot in the "system". Something is utterly rotten in the State of Denmark, as the great Bard would have said.

The Judiciary is equally concerned with the question of Police Reforms, which goes to its credit. Accordingly, it entertained a PIL by a handful of retired Police officers led by a DGP. The Police officers petitioned the Hon'ble Court to issue directions to the Government to implement the Police Commission report. Secondly, to amend the Police Act, 1861 as it was a "colonial" piece of legislation, brought in by the British in the wake of Indian Mutiny of 1857.

There is another manifestation how the Police are pressurizing even the Law Ministry to tinker with the Criminal Code. It authorizes the police to arrest a person after a formal complaint is voluntarily filed with them in the form of an FIR. They can do so only if the FIR discloses the commission of a serious offence, punishable with imprisonment for two years or more. In other less serious cases, they have to take the prior permission of a magistrate. The apex court, in a landmark judgment quarter of a century ago had distinguished between the power of arrest granted by law and the exercise thereof in actual practice. It had explicitly cautioned the police to arrest and seek the custody of an accused in "heinous" offences only, generally those cases where the imprisonment prescribed is seven years or more. But Apex Court directions are no issue, as far as sections of police are concerned.

Witness the ongoing shenanigans of the Bombay police. Incidentally, it is under a Police Commissioner system, if at all it can be called a "system". It is a typical case of the way police are functioning in the country. An editor of a national news channel is arrested by sending dozens of heavily armed policemen to his residence. His main "offence" was that he manipulated viewership figures in favour of his own channel, to increase revenue. He was incarcerated with common criminals, and denied bail - he had to rush to the Supreme Court to regain his freedom. Along with him, several of his senior colleagues were "summoned" from time to time to the police station for questioning.

The entire case is a shocking travesty of law. Assuming the editor concerned did manipulate the market figures, one does not have to be a law graduate to appreciate that it is a civil, not a criminal case. The police has no jurisdiction in civil cases. That the police are continuing with their brazen breach of basic norms of democracy points to a dismal state of affairs in the department. The police generally, under a Commissioner "system", are virtually accountable to no civil authority. The basic scheme of the

Criminal Code is that the head of the district police reports to the head of civil magistracy, and is accountable to him. But increasingly in metropolitan cities, the police have virtually broken free from civilian control and now report directly to the state Home Minister who, incidentally, is also a politician, as in the present case.

Recently, the Supreme Court, in another commendable initiative has directed the Executive to take meaningful steps to enforce some police accountability. It has directed the installation of CCTV cameras in all the police stations across the country. The Hon'ble Court has underestimated the resourcefulness of the police force. In Tamil Nadu, police stations are fitted with such cameras already. The Court has underestimated that the force is nothing if not tech-savvy. Always ahead of the latest technology, like a smart modern force. In a recent case, when policemen in a police station were mercilessly thrashing a father and son, in a manner a sane man would not treat a wild animal, the CBI discovered that the police had quietly slipped in an 'auto-delete' device in the CCTV!

To revert to the issue of overall arrears, the Executive will first have to carry out root and branch reforms, beginning with the Criminal Code. At present, around 400 offences are listed in the Penal Code for which various punishments are prescribed, ranging from fines to death penalty. Offences punishable with imprisonment for 2 years or more are cognizable, i.e. police can arrest without court permission. All other minor offences are non-cognizable, i.e. police cannot arrest without court permission. Of the total offences listed, around 40 per cent are cognizable. If meaningful police reforms are to be carried out, and police powers of arbitrary arrests curbed, the list of cognizable offences needs to be pruned drastically.

While there is justification for treating serious offences as cognizable, there is little justification for so treating minor offences. No doubt, many such minor offences are bailable by the police themselves. In reality, these are deadly weapons with the police to extort money from the accused before he is released on a personal bond or bail. It is a bitter experience all over the country. According to the Supreme Court itself: "the power of arrest is one of the lucrative sources of police corruption".

In a complete reversal of modern democratic jurisprudence, in 2009, a little-noticed tampering of the Criminal Code occurred. The power of arrest by the police without warrant was expanded beyond Constitutional limits. The relevant section has now been amended to read that a police officer can arrest without warrant "if he is satisfied that such arrest is necessary for proper investigation of the offence". This turns democratic jurisprudence on its head. In plain words, arrest will no longer be a part of the investigation, as is the position now but henceforth investigation will be a part of the arrest. It is in violation of the Supreme Court observations: "The attitude to arrest first and then proceed with the rest is despicable... a handy tool to the police officers who act with oblique motives". A recipe for a Police State.

Undeniably, the problem of mounting arrears is acute, and will require concerted action on the part of all the three organs of the State. But the first responsibility rests on the Executive, to reduce the workload on the Judiciary by enforcing checks on its police force and enforcing in-house accountability. The Courts can then concentrate on civil and serious criminal cases.

The writer is a retired IAS officer.

Putting the brakes on delay

Setting a timeline for appointment of judges will help fill vacancies faster, says LOKENDRA MALIK

A few days ago, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court of India comprising Chief Justice S. A. Bobde, Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Justice Surya Kant laid down a timeline for the Central Government to make judges' appointments in the High Courts within a prescribed time. This order is likely to avoid the problem of delay in judicial appointments. It will also be a milestone to protect the independence of the judiciary and strengthening the primacy of the Supreme Court collegium headed by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) to appoint the judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court in the country.

Before this order, the Central Government had made it almost routine to delay judicial appointments recommended by the Supreme Court collegium. Now, it will be difficult for the Government to continue this practice as the timeline fixed by the Supreme Court becomes the law of the land as per Article 141 of the Constitution, and the Government will be duty-bound to follow it as per Article 144 of the Constitution.

After three landmark judgments of the Supreme Court on the issue of judges' appointments delivered in

1993, 1999, and 2015 respectively, the Supreme Court collegium headed by the Chief Justice of India and consisting of his two senior-most colleagues has the conclusive power to recommend the names of High Court judges in the country. As per this practice, the Central Government is bound to act on the recommendation of the Supreme Court collegium.

The High Court collegium headed by the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court and consisting of the two senior-most judges of the High Court initiates the process to appoint a judge of the High Court and sends its recommendations to the Union Law Minister, concerned State Government, and the Supreme Court collegium for further process. Finally, the recommendations made by the High Court collegium reach the Supreme Court collegium, and if it approves the recommendation of a person to be appointed as a High Court judge, the recommendation is sent to the Central Government to issue the formal warrant of appointment as per the constitutional provisions.

If the Supreme Court collegium reiterates its recommendation, the Central Government will have no option but to appoint him/her as a judge of the High Court. However, as

no timeline was prescribed in any judgment of the Supreme Court, the government had some scope to delay the appointment process to complete certain formalities. This lacuna provided an opportunity to the government to delay appointments of some persons who did not fall in line with its ideology or thinking. Since 2014, the government has used this power badly and delayed the appointments of several persons and this has undermined judicial authority and independence. The delay in appointment affects the seniority of the judges in their careers, particularly for their elevation to the Supreme Court.

Admittedly, around 416 vacancies of judges are lying in the different High Courts in the country as of now. Due to this, many High Courts are facing huge arrears of cases. As per the data submitted to the Supreme Court, 45 recommendations for High Court judges' appointments are pending with the Central Government for more than six months. Surprisingly, six names reiterated by the Supreme Court collegium a second time are also awaiting appointment. In addition to this, 196 recommendations are under process with the Central Government for judges' appointment to different High Courts in the country. Around 220 recommendations for existing vacancies need to be made by the High Court collegiums soon. The Chief Justices of the respective High Courts need to initiate the process to fill up these vacancies.

In M/S PLR Projects Pvt. Ltd. v.

Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd. & Ors, the issue of vacancies of judges in the High Courts came up before the Supreme Court when it was hearing a petition seeking transfer of a case from the High Court of Orissa due to the lawyers' strike there. In this case, the Court observed that the High Courts are in crisis as there are almost 40 per cent vacancies and many of the larger High Courts are working at under 50 per cent of their sanctioned strength. The Court rejected the contention that laying down a timeline would be contrary to certain observations made in the *Third judge case*, saying the observations referred to deal with the judicial review of a particular appointment and not such aspects of the appointment process as today.

Finally, the Court gave the following directions to expedite the appointment process of the High Court judges: (1) the Intelligence Bureau should submit its report/inputs within 4-6 weeks from the date of recommendation of the High Court collegium to the Central Government. (2) it would be desirable that the Central Government forward the file(s) recommendations to the Supreme Court within 8 to 12 weeks from the date of receipt of views from the State Government and the report/input from the IB. (3) it would be for the Government to thereafter proceed to make the appointment immediately on the aforesaid consideration and undoubtedly if Government has any reservations on the suitability of a person or in the public interest, within the same time it may

be sent back to the Supreme Court Collegium with the specific reasons for reservation recorded. If the Supreme Court Collegium after consideration of the aforesaid inputs still reiterates the recommendation(s) unanimously (Cl. 24.1), such appointment should be processed and appointment should be made within three to four weeks.

The Court also observed that the Chief Justice of India must send the recommendations/advice to the Union Law Minister within four weeks and the latter must put up the proposal to the Prime Minister within three weeks for the advice of the President of India. (Clause 24 and 24.1 of the MOP). The Court has laid down these directions to expedite the appointment process of the High Court judges in the country. It was much required given the state of vacancies and arrears of cases in the High Courts. People need timely justice and both the judiciary as well as the executive should help people to get speedy justice.

Now, these directions must be incorporated by the Central Government in the Memorandum of Procedure dealing with the judges' appointments. The timeline will also minimize the executive's interference in judicial appointments. It will also strengthen the primacy of the Supreme Court collegium in judicial appointments. However, the collegium should also bring some more transparency and accountability in its decision-making process.

The writer is an Advocate, Supreme Court of India.



THE INDOPHILE

Jamaican sprinter Yohan Blake (photo, left) has sent his love to India as the country battles a lethal second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. "Just want to take this time to send my love to India. I am begging everyone please do what you can to stay safe," the cricket fan tweeted.

For more updates

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THUMBNAILS

Special flight: A chartered flight to bring back Australian cricketers after the Indian Premier League in India is under consideration, the country's players' union said, though sport minister Richard Colbeck made it clear it had not been officially approved.

Duo's distress: Sprinters Hima Das and Dutee Chand could miss the Olympic qualifying World Athletics Relays in Poland on 1 May and 2 May as the Indian team's connecting flight to Amsterdam has been suspended following the spike in the country's Covid-19 case load.

Alternative plan: The Covid-19 situation has fuelled curiosity about the International Cricket Council's contingency plan for the Twenty20 World Cup to be held in India in October-November. It could be shifted to the United Arab Emirates if things do not improve.

Patel best: Royal Challengers Bangalore fast bowler Harshal Patel took his wickets tally for the season up to 17 in their one-run win over Delhi Capitals at Ahmedabad in the Indian Premier League on Tuesday. Shikhar Dhawan holds the Orange Cap with 265 runs.

New plan: The Wimbledon championships will be a 14-day tournament from 2022, with matches set to be played on the Middle Sunday, traditionally a day off at the grasscourt Grand Slam. The first Sunday has organisers working to get the courts back into top shape.

Vaccine boost: China's Sinovac will donate 50,000 doses of its Covid-19 vaccine to South American soccer confederation Conmebol in a bid to protect players for tournaments. The jabs will be used to inoculate players ahead of the Copa America in June.

Kroenke's promise: Arsenal owner Stan Kroenke said he was "100 per cent committed" to the club and would not be selling it, amid interest from the founder of Spotify. Fans want him to leave as he was one of the instigators of the European Super League project.

New order: Europe's most successful women's soccer team have hired a woman as their coach for the first time with Lyon's appointment of Sonia Bompastor to replace Jean-Luc Vasseur. The seven-time European champions on Tuesday parted ways with Vasseur.

Olympic push: Local organisers and the International Olympic Committee pushed ahead on Wednesday with plans to open the postponed Tokyo Olympics in just under three months, unveiling the latest set of rule books to show how the event could be held.

Oz plan: Australian athletes going to Tokyo for the Olympics later this year will be given priority access to Covid-19 vaccinations, the government said on Tuesday. More than 2,000 athletes, coaches and officials will receive their shots before they travel.

Pre-tax loss: Liverpool reported a £46 million pre-tax loss for the financial year ending May 2020, figures that suggest why the club's owners were prepared to join the failed European Super League plan. The Reds pulled out following a furious, widespread public backlash.

Asian Boxing C'ships: In the wake of international travel restrictions to India, the Boxing Federation of India (BFI), in consultation with Asian Boxing Confederation (ASBC), has decided to conduct the upcoming 2021 edition of the ASBC Asian Elite Men and Women Boxing Championships in Dubai.

Zoya banned

DUBAI, 28 APRIL

I have total control in team and selection matters: Babar Azam

AGENCIES
KARACHI, 28 APRIL

Pakistan's top batsman Babar Azam on Wednesday dismissed criticism that he was a powerless captain, who took dictation from head coach, Misbah-ul-Haq.

The top ODI batsman frequently faces accusations of being a captain without authority and recently former skipper Shoaib Malik in tweets inferred that Babar was not taking independent decisions.

Some other former captains and players have also advised Babar to be more authoritative as captain.

Babar said in a virtual press conference that the debate over whether he was a captain with authority should end now.

"I don't understand but frequently it is said in press conferences and in the media that I don't have authority and don't

take independent decisions," Babar said.

"I want to make it clear once and for all that I have total control and say in team selection and other matters. I handle everything on the field and I decide the playing eleven with the management giving their input. I know what my responsibilities are as captain," he said.

Babar also made it clear he had no issues with the head coach and whether Pakistan needed a white ball coach was the domain of PCB.

"The team management is fully supporting every player, so I am happy," he said.

The Pakistan captain also said that the two-Test series that starts in Harare against Zimbabwe

from Thursday would not be an easy assignment for his team.

He said they would more or less go with the same combination that was played in the home series against South Africa.

Babar said that Zimbabwe might be below the Test rankings but no team could be taken lightly at the top level and that the African nation would have the advantage of playing at home.

The Test batsman also said he was not worried about the frequent middle order failures in the white ball series.

Asked about the absence of seasoned leg-spinner Yasir Shah from the series due to an injury, Babar said experience is always missed but Pakistan had other good spinners in Nauman Ali Nawaz and Zahid Mahmood.

Yasir since his debut in 2014 has missed a series only once when Pakistan played an lone test in Ireland and a two-Test series in England in 2018.

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Knight Riders pitted against Delhi Capitals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AHMEDABAD, 28 APRIL

Kolkata Knight Riders' floundering batting will be put to the test once again as they look to build a winning momentum against Delhi Capitals in their Indian Premier League match here tomorrow.

KKR's batting woes begin at the top with Shubman Gill continuing his poor run -- 89 runs in six matches. While their bowling, especially the spin duo of Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy, has been excellent in restricting rivals, KKR's top-order batting has hurt them badly.

Chasing 124 against Punjab Kings in their previous match, KKR were 17 for three inside three overs before skipper Eoin Morgan led from the front to snap their four-match losing streak.

Against a DC batting line-up boasting the tournament's leading scorer Shikhar Dhawan (265 runs), Prithvi Shaw, Steve Smith and Rishabh Pant, KKR cannot afford any more slip-ups. Morgan will have to fix the Gill problem. With scores of 15, 33, 21, 0, 11 and 9, the opener has failed to impress, extending his

poor run of form from the England Test series.

It would not be a bad ploy to drop Gill down the order and bring Narine back to open with Rahul Tripathi, which was suggested by Sunil Gavaskar. Top-order changes may be the way forward as Morgan, Andre Russell and Dinesh Karthik look to have found their mojo in the mid-

ball thriller. After Ravichandran Ashwin's withdrawal, DC's bowling got a boost from Ishant Sharma, who dismissed Devdutt Padikkal with a peach of a delivery. KKR will find the going tough versus Ishant Sharma, Kagiso Rabada and Avesh Khan, with the spin duo of Amit Mishra and Axar Patel also looking to make an impact.

Match starts at 7.30 pm

Kohli all praise for de Villiers

AHMEDABAD, 28 APRIL

Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Virat Kohli last night acknowledged AB de Villiers's ability after the South African batsman had hammered an unbeaten 75 off 42 balls to help RCB edge past Delhi Capitals.

"AB doesn't like me saying this, but he hasn't played competitive cricket for five months, but if you look at him bat it doesn't feel like he doesn't play international cricket anymore. Hats off to him, keeps doing it again and again for us," said Kohli after the match.

He called his shot against

Kagiso Rabada over mid-wicket the best of his innings. "The shot over extra-cover was certainly one of the best shots, but the one over midwicket off KG was my best one. I don't often get him away, but I'm happy I managed to get him away for that one," he added.

Coach Ricky Ponting compared DC captain with former Australian stumper Adam Gilchrist. Ponting said the left-hander would get past MS Dhoni's record of six Test centuries. The attacking left-hander already has two Test ones, made in England and Australia. AGENCIES

Pandey, Warner half centuries take SRH to 171/3 vs CSK

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Sunrisers Hyderabad rode on contrasting half-centuries from Manish Pandey and skipper David Warner along with a cameo from Kane Williamson to post 171 for 3 in 20 overs against Chennai Super Kings in an IPL match here on Wednesday.

Warner (57 off 55 balls) and Pandey (61 off 46 balls) added 106 runs for the second wicket at the Kotla but it was Williamson's 26 not out off 10 balls and Kedar Jadhav's 12 off 4 balls which ensured a com-

petitive total for SRH.

Lungi Ngidi was the best bowler for CSK, returning figures of 2 for 35 from 4 overs while Sam Curran (1/30) got the other wicket.

Warner, who passed 10,000 T20 runs during the course of his innings, appeared frustrated at times at the inability to force the pace on a track where ball was not always coming onto the bat.

He hit Moeen Ali for a huge six early in his innings but could not get the big hits on a consistent basis.

Ngidi dismissed Pandey for 61 thanks to an incredible effort by Faf du Plessis at wide long-on, with a diving effort.

Jonny Bairstow (7) fell early, looking to run down the pitch

against Sam Curran and failed to control a pull shot which was caught by Deepak Chahar. He couldn't capitalise after a let-off in the first over when Dhoni could not hold on to a nick.

SCOREBOARD

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD INNINGS		
David Warner c Jadeja b Ngidi	57	
J Bairstow t c Chahar b Curran	7	
M Pandey c du Plessis b Ngidi	61	
Kane Williamson not out	26	
Kedar Jadhav not out	12	
Extras: (lb 2, w 6)	8	
TOTAL: (20 Ov, RR: 8.55)	171/3	
BOWLING: D Chahar 3,021.0		
S Curran 4,030.1, S Thakur 4,044.0		
M Ali 2,016.0, L Ngidi 4,035.2		
R Jadeja 3,023.0		

Pulisic strikes, Benzema equalises as Madrid and Chelsea draw in CL semis

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MADRID, 28 APRIL

With a dominant start and a milestone goal by Christian Pulisic (in photo, left), Chelsea showed their strength against Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-finals.

Chelsea took control early in Tuesday's first leg to hold the Spanish powerhouse to a 1-1 away draw, with Pulisic becoming the first US international to score in the tournament's last four. He also surpassed DaMarcus Beasley to become the top American scorer in Champions League history with five goals.

A red-hot Karim Benzema equalised for a lacklustre Madrid squad on a rainy night at the Alfredo Di Stefano Stadium in the first Cham-

pions League match since the controversial Super League folded last week amid widespread criticism.

The largely closed breakaway competition would have had Real Madrid as one of its leaders, and Chelsea also was among its founding members before dropping the idea along with the other English clubs.

Madrid didn't officially back out of the Super League but had downplayed the possibility of retaliation by Uefa in its Champions League matches. There were no refereeing controversies in Tuesday's match.

The second leg is on 5 May in London. Manchester City host Paris Saint-Germain in the other semi-final on Wednesday.

Chelsea got off to a fast start and had chances to add to their lead after Pulisic had opened the scoring with a nice finish in the 14th minute off a high pass by Antonio Rudiger inside the area.

Pulisic calmly got past goal keeper Thibaut Courtois before hitting the net past the Madrid defenders trying to block his shot at the goal line.

"It was a great finish, great composure," Chelsea captain Cesar Azpilicueta said of the 22-year-old Pulisic, who has been thriving after being marred by injuries early in the season. "He's an amazing player, he's a young player, he's growing and improving. I'm very pleased with his goal because he's an important player for the team."

Benzema's goal came a few minutes after he had clipped the post with a long-range shot. The French striker controlled a loose ball with his head before turning and firing a volley into the top of the net for his 13th goal in his last 14 matches. It was Benzema's 16th goal in his last 17 home games with Madrid.

Chelsea gave little space to Madrid and were the more dangerous team early on at the Di Stefano in Madrid's training complex. The hosts struggled defensively with their set-up of three central defenders. "We started the game very, very well - very aggressively, with a lot of quality," Chelsea coach Thomas Tuchel said. "We deserved to win the first half. We had a lot of chances. We should have scored at least one more when the chances and half-chances were there."