

SHORT TAKES

DCPCR launches helpline for kids left orphaned

New Delhi: The Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) has launched a helpline number to address the needs of those children who have been left orphaned during the Covid-19 pandemic, a statement said on Friday. The number (+91 9311551393) will also address the concerns of those children whose parents are hospitalised or who are facing any other distress, it added. A panel of counsellors is being constituted to address the anxiety, loneliness and trauma of the children in such situations. DCPCR chairman Anurag Kundu will keep a close watch and ensure that the issues raised by the callers are addressed within 24 hours, the statement said. "Children are the most vulnerable in these testing times as they remain dependent on others to provide for them. The panel is receiving numerous cases wherein a child has lost all sources of support and is in need of immediate care. The commission is committed to resolving all such cases in less than 24 hours," Kundu said. The DCPCR intervenes within 24 hours on all SOS calls on the helpline. These include arranging for medicines, shelter or essential supplies of food, clothing etc. In some cases, the DCPCR has received SOS calls informing it that a child has lost both the parents to Covid-19. In another case, a child lost one parent and the other was in hospital. These situations render the children vulnerable, traumatised and in a state of panic. In another case, the commission received two children who lost both parents within a day. The panel, by coordinating with NGOs, interacted with the children and counselled them. The relatives and neighbours are taking care of the children now, while the commission has been checking on them everyday, it said. In another case, two children lost their father to the viral disease and there was no support for them, the statement said. The commission intervened to support in the process of cremation and provided immediate medical assistance to the children while the relatives arrived in a few hours. The commission ensured both the children were also tested for Covid-19, it said. — PTI

DRDO hands over 75 O2 cylinders to Delhi govt

New Delhi: The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has handed over 75 oxygen cylinders to the Delhi government to help it augment oxygen supplies to various hospitals. Defence minister Rajnath Singh said the DRDO is arranging oxygen cylinders to address requirements of various hospitals. "To meet the urgent requirement of oxygen in various parts of the country, the @DRDO_india is arranging big size oxygen cylinders for fulfilling requirements of different hospitals," Singh tweeted. "In this regard, DRDO has handed over 75 Nos. of such Cylinders to the Delhi Government yesterday," he said. Officials said each of the cylinders handed over to the Delhi government can store 10,000 litres of oxygen. "Forty oxygen cylinders of same capacity are being handed over to the Cabinet Secretariat officials on Friday for utilisation at Sardar Patel Covid care centre at Chhatrapur in Delhi," an official said. — PTI

Water supply to be affected in parts of Delhi today

New Delhi: Drinking water supply will remain affected in parts of Delhi on Saturday as Haryana has released less raw water into the Yamuna, the Delhi Jal Board said on Friday. The supply from Wazirabad, Chandrawal and Okhla water treatment plants has been "adversely" hit due to the reduction in release of raw water into the river and depletion of pond level at Wazirabad pond, a statement said. Water supply in parts of Central Delhi, North Delhi, South Delhi, West Delhi and cantonment areas will remain affected on Saturday. The situation is likely to persist till the pond level improves to normal, the utility said. At present, the pond level at Wazirabad pond is 6672 feet against the normal of 674.5 feet. — PTI

■ CM Kejriwal asked to adopt cooperative attitude, start talking to Centre on Covid reliefs for people of Delhi

Centre has special responsibility towards national capital, says SC

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

The Supreme court on Friday told the Centre that it has special responsibility towards the national capital and exhorted Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal to adopt a cooperative approach in dealing with the unprecedented crisis due to the second surge of Covid-19 pandemic.

Justice D.Y. Chandrachud heading a bench also comprising Justice L.Nageswara Rao and Justice S. Ravindra Bhat reminded the Centre of its "special responsibility" towards Delhi in making the oxygen available as Centre sought to shift the onus on the Kejriwal government for not deploying adequate number of tankers to lift the oxygen allocated to Delhi by the Centre.

Asserting that there was adequate availability of oxygen, solicitor general Tushar Mehta appearing for the Centre told the court that Delhi was unable to lift allocated oxygen as it has deployed insufficient number of oxygen tankers and whatever was available in Delhi was due to the Centre arranging tankers for the national capital. However, Mehta told the court that Delhi is in the process of acquiring more oxygen tankers. At this, the court said that could it tell the patients and their relatives that there was scarcity of oxygen in the national capital due to non-lifting of allocated quota because of the shortage of tankers.

Justice Chandrachud said: "You said that 490 MT of oxygen is supplied to them as against their demand of 700 MT. Why can't you provide the deficit 200 MT. You cannot sit tight and do nothing? My conscience is shaken. We cannot have 500 deaths

■ THE TOP court termed the surge in cases during the second wave of Covid-19 a humanitarian crisis and told the AAP government that it has to cooperate with the Centre to save lives

on our hands. You have to do something urgently and supply a deficit 200 MT oxygen to Delhi." Reminding the Centre of its special responsibility towards the national capital, the court said: "Centre has to push through as it has special responsibility for Delhi."

Besides the Centre, the court also exhorted the Kejriwal government to adopt a cooperative attitude with the Centre in getting essential medicines and oxygen in the face of human crisis and shun politics. "Please adopt a cooperative attitude at the time of a human crisis. Politics is during elections and not at the present situation," the court said.

The top court termed the surge in cases during the second wave of Covid-19 a humanitarian crisis and told the AAP government that it has to cooperate with the Centre to save lives. The Delhi government assured the top court that its suggestion will be followed in letter and spirit and it would cooperate in every possible way with the Centre.

The bench said that it is not adversarial litigation and all parties have to find out a way to deal with rising problems. "You have to convey this message to the highest level. You also please ask your chief secretary to talk to the Centre to deal with your problems," the bench told senior advocate Rahul Mehra, appearing for Delhi. He assured the bench that the government will make every possible effort to tide over the problem.



Relatives mourn the death of a Covid-19 victim at a cremation ground at Ghazipur in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

Delhi sees 375 Covid deaths, over 27K cases; positivity rate 32.69%

New Delhi, April 30: Delhi on Friday recorded 375 deaths due to the coronavirus and 27,047 fresh cases with a positivity rate of 32.69 per cent, according to the latest bulletin issued by the city health department. This is the ninth day on the trot that Delhi has recorded over 300 coronavirus-related deaths.

It had reported 395 deaths, the highest since the pandemic began a year ago, on Thursday; 368 deaths on Wednesday; 381 on Tuesday; 380 on Monday; 350 on Sunday; 357 deaths on Saturday, and 348 on Friday, according to government data.

The national capital had recorded 24,235 cases on Thursday; 25,986 on

L-G Baijal tests Covid positive

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

Delhi lieutenant governor Anil Baijal tested positive for Covid-19 on Friday. He has mild symptoms and has self-isolated himself with immediate effect. In a tweet, he informed that he will continue to function and monitor the situation in Delhi from his residence. "I have tested positive for Covid with mild symptoms.

Have isolated myself since the onset of symptoms and all those who were in contact with me have been tested. Will continue to function and monitor the situation in Delhi from my residence," the L-G tweeted. Meanwhile, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal took to Twitter and prayed for speedy recovery of L-G. "Praying for your speedy recovery and good health, sir."

Wednesday: 24,149 on Tuesday; 20,201 on Monday; 22,933 on Sunday; 24,103 on Saturday; 24,331 on Friday and 26,169 on Thursday. The cumulative case count

stands at 11,49,333, of which over 10,33 lakh have recovered. The death toll due to the viral disease stands at 16,147, the bulletin said. — PTI

Delhi yet to receive vaccines for 18-44 age group, says Kejriwal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said the Delhi government will ensure vaccination to all the citizens above 18 years, and that the government will soon announce the initiation of the drive. He urged people not to queue up at Covid-19 vaccination centres in the national capital beginning Saturday, when the third phase of the inoculation drive to cover all adults in India is scheduled to start.

Kejriwal said that the Delhi government has not yet received the vaccines from the companies, which are to arrive in a day or two, following which the government will begin the drive. He said that around three lakh Covishield vaccines are to be delivered by Saturday or the day after



A tanker supplies medical oxygen for Covid-19 patients at the Rajiv Gandhi super-speciality hospital in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

and thereafter more doses are to arrive.

He said that the government was in constant touch with the companies. He said that the manufacturers of Covishield and Covaxin have been urged to render 67 lakh doses each within three months.

He said that the Delhi government will vaccinate every citizen within three months, requesting people to not be in a rush. The CM assured that everyone is to be inoculated and proper infrastructure has been made for the same. He said that this vaccination

Apollo, Fortis, Max hospitals to vaccinate at select centres

New Delhi, April 30: Three big private hospital chains — Apollo, Fortis and Max — on Friday announced the launch of Covid-19 immunisation drive for the 18-44 age group at limited centres in the country from May 1 while the Delhi government said it will start the vaccination exercise once it receives doses from the manufacturers.

While Apollo Hospitals said jobs will be given at "limited facilities", Max Healthcare announced the drive will begin from "select hospitals in the network in the NCR of Delhi".

Fortis Healthcare, in a statement, said people in the 18-44 age group will be administered Covaxin for ₹1,250, which will include the cost of vaccine and administration charges, at its "centres across north India from tomorrow (Saturday)".

■ FORTIS HEALTHCARE said people in the 18-44 age group will be administered Covaxin for ₹1,250, which will include the cost of vaccine and administration charges, at its "centres across north India from Saturday"

Fortis centres in other cities will commence vaccination as soon as supplies are made available by the authorities, it said.

"Apollo continues to participate in the world's largest preventive vaccination drive. Vaccines available at limited Apollo hospitals for more than 18 (years) from May 1. Pre-Registration mandatory on CoWIN app. Stay safe," the healthcare group tweeted.

It said the vaccination drive will begin with limited quantities and will be

ramped up in the weeks ahead.

"Apollo Hospitals will also be organizing special camps for corporates. The vaccines would be priced as per the guidelines issued by the Central government," its statement read.

Shobana Kamineni, the Executive Vice Chairperson of Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Limited, said, "The government's decision to open up the vaccination programme and permit private hospitals to procure vaccines directly from the manufacturers is a much-required step to counter the Covid-19 threat."

Max Healthcare said all the hospitals in the network will be used to vaccinate the citizens as supplies of vaccine doses smoothen up.

— PTI



Victims of coronavirus at a crematorium in Dwarka area of New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

7 held from Delhi, Roorkee for selling fake Remdesivir vials

New Delhi, April 30: Delhi Police Crime Branch have arrested seven people for allegedly selling fake Remdesivir injections to needy people in the wake of the coronavirus crisis, officials said on Friday. The accused have been identified as Mohammad Shoiab Khan (28), Mohan Kumar Jha (40), Manish Goyal (35), Pushkar Chanderkant Pakhale (32), Sadhna Sharma (40), Vatan Kumar Saini (32) and Aditya Gautam (33), they said.

Police got a tip-off and laid a trap on April 23 near MB Road, Sangam Vihar. Two accused, Khan and Jha, who were indulged in black marketing of fake Remdesivir injections were apprehended. Ten fake injections were recovered from their possession, a senior police officer said.

They disclosed that they were selling the fake injections on a higher price as its demand was shooting up due to the coronavirus crisis. "On their instance, police conducted raids on

Delhi doctor among 3 held for Remdesivir black marketing

New Delhi, April 30: Three people, including a doctor working in a Delhi hospital, have been arrested in Noida for allegedly selling Remdesivir injections at black market rates to needy people amid Covid-19 crisis, officials said.

Deputy commissioner of police (Crime) Abhishek Singh said the accused were held with three vials of Remdesivir by officials of the Crime Branch and

Sector 24 police stations following a tip-off on Thursday.

"Those held have been identified as Mujibur Rahman, Hamza and Dr. Imam, who says he works in the Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital in Delhi. Hamza runs a money transfer shop in Ghaziabad, while Mujibur Rahman works at a pharmacy in Noida," the officer said. — PTI

Sunday at Yamuna Vihar and apprehended Goyal and Pakhale. Twelve fake injections were recovered from their possession.

"On Monday, Sadhna Sharma was also apprehended and 160 vials of fake Remdesivir injections (COVIPRI) were recovered from her possession," deputy commissioner of police (Crime) Monika Bhardwaj said. Later, Saini

was nabbed from Haridwar. On his instance, Gautam, working in the field of pharmacy, was arrested from Roorkee. He had purchased around 2,000 anti-biotic injection vials having identical packing of Remdesivir, and changed their labels at his factory in Kotdwar, with Covipri to sell them as Remdesivir, Bhardwaj said. — PTI

State has failed to protect right to life of citizens: HC

New Delhi, April 30: "The state has failed. We all have failed and the state has failed to protect the right to life of citizens," an anguished Delhi high court said, on Friday, as it was informed about the death of a Covid-19 patient whose family was pleading for an ICU bed for the last three days.

While the proceedings were on, the patient's relative urged the court to request the authorities to arrange for an ICU bed as the patient's vitals were low and he was in the emergency ward of a hospital. However, within minutes he informed the bench that the patient had died. "I have failed. My brother-in-law has expired, so no more efforts are needed," he rued.

However, within minutes he informed the bench that the patient had died. "I have failed. My brother-in-law has expired, so no more efforts are needed," he rued.

A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli then said, "No, the state has failed. We all have failed. We have been informed that the patient has expired. We may record our complete helplessness in the situation. We can only say that the state has failed to protect the right to life of people guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution."

The bench, which has been conducting proceedings on the oxygen crisis, heard the matter for over four hours.

In another instance as well, the Delhi high court said the same thing as a group of lawyers, including Bar Council of Delhi chairman Ramesh Gupta, pleaded for help seeking medical facilities to advocates suffering from Covid-19.

The hearing witnessed breakdown of lawyers, including senior advocate Mr Gupta, who urged the judges to come to their rescue and help

■ WHILE THE proceedings were on, the patient's relative urged the court to request the authorities to arrange for an ICU bed as the patient's vitals were low and he was in the emergency ward of a hospital. However, within minutes he informed the bench that the patient had died. "I have failed. My brother-in-law has expired, so no more efforts are needed," he rued.

them as they were not getting medical treatment.

Mr Gupta, representing the petitioner lawyer, submitted that a private hospital has agreed to give medical treatment to lawyers but it only has oxygen beds and not ICU beds. He urged the court to attach them with a hospital which can provide them critical care in case of need.

He said they do not want money; they only want that in case of any emergency medical help be provided to lawyers and they will collect more funds from their fellow advocates. The bench asked the Delhi government to take instructions on the issue and inform it at 2.30 pm on Friday.

During the hearing, Delhi government standing counsel Santosh Kumar Tripathi also became emotional while informing the court about a lawyer friend's demise due to Covid-19.

Mr Gupta also submitted that there is a hospital in Dwarka, which has been under construction for the last 8 years and is near completion, and urged the court to arrange for 100 oxygen beds for lawyers there. — PTI

tion drive will be massive and requested public cooperation. Mr Kejriwal said that the Delhi government and the Central government are working hand in hand to make this vaccination drive successful.

Addressing a digital press conference, Kejriwal said: "Beginning May 1, the vaccination drive for those between 18-44 years is set to begin. The vaccination drive for those aged 45 and above is already in motion. The procedure for those between 18-44 has garnered an overwhelming response and many people have registered for the same."

He said: "We have not yet received the vaccine, and are in continuous touch with the companies and hope the vaccines will be delivered in a day or two. We've been assured of this."

5 arrested for making forged Covid test reports

New Delhi, April 30: Five people have been arrested for allegedly making forged Covid-19 test reports in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar, police said on Friday. The accused have been identified as Prayanand Sharma (24), Himanshu Sharma (24), Dr Manish Kumar (32), Satender (26) and Nikhil (22), they said.

Admitting to their crime, Himanshu said he along with his cousin Prayanand, used to collect home samples and give them to Manish, working in Genestrings Lab, without making any entry in the records of the laboratory. Manish used to share the results with Prayanand through excel sheets and then Prayanand would print the results on the fake letter head of Genestrings Lab, police said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Anchor Rohit Sardana dies after testing +ve

Noida: Television journalist Rohit Sardana died here of cardiac arrest on Friday, days after he tested positive for Covid, according to his channel *Aaj Tak*. He was 41. Sardana, who was an executive editor and TV news anchor with *Aaj Tak* of the India Today Group, is survived by his wife, two daughters and parents. He was admitted to a private hospital here after he tested positive for coronavirus. His last rites will take place in his hometown of Kurukshetra in Haryana, according to his colleagues. "We are all shocked by the death of our colleague and friend, Rohit Sardana. This incomparable loss cannot be expressed in words. We express our condolences to his family in this hour of grief," *Aaj Tak* tweeted in Hindi. A similar message was posted by India Today channel in English. — *PTI*

Odisha sees highest surge of Covid cases

Bhubaneswar: The Covid-19 single-day count in Odisha breached 8000-mark for the second time in three days when 8,681 people on Friday tested positive for coronavirus infection. As many as Covid-19 14 patients succumbed to the disease in the last 24 hours, taking the total death toll in the pandemic to 1074. On April 27, the state had reported 8,386 Covid-19 cases. Friday's figure is the highest one-day surge since the break of the pandemic in the state. With this, the positive tally in the state surged to 4,44,194 while the death toll stood at 2,043. Odisha currently has 61,698 cases, while 3,80,400 patients have recovered from the disease. Of the new cases reported from 30 districts, 4,948 were detected from various quarantine centres, and the rest 3,733 were detected during contact tracing, said a data released by the state Information and public relations department.

'Emergency financial powers given to Army'

New Delhi: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday granted emergency financial powers to the armed forces that will allow formation commanders to make urgent procurement to set up health facilities for Covid patients. Under these powers, vice chiefs of armed forces will be able to clear procurement proposals, officials said. Mr Singh's office said he invoked special provisions and granted emergency financial powers to the armed forces to empower them to speed up efforts in the nationwide fight against Covid. "These powers will help Formation Commanders to establish and operate quarantine facilities/ hospitals and to undertake procurement/ repair of eqpt/ items/ material/ stores, besides provisioning of various services and works required to support the ongoing effort against Covid," his office tweeted. — *PTI*

MAN CARRY DAD'S BODY ON SCOOTER FOR CREMATION

Bhubaneswar: A youth in Odisha's Bolangir district reportedly carried the body of his coronavirus-infected father on a scooter to a crematorium after relatives and neighbours refused to lend shoulders to the deceased. The deceased identified as Uddhav Behera of Salandi village had tested positive for coronavirus infection some seven days ago and was under home quarantine. Behera's wife had also tested positive for the infection and she is under home isolation now. However, Behera's health condition deteriorated on Thursday morning and he succumbed to the deadly virus the same day. After his death, villagers refused to cooperate in the cremation and lend a shoulder to the deceased out of fear of infection. With no other alternative, Behera's two sons and nephew decided to perform his last rites all by themselves. They wore PPE kits and tied Behera's dead body inside a plastic bag before carrying him to the village crematorium in a scooter. In an identical case, the body of a Covid positive patient was also carried on a bullock cart and cremated after remaining unattended for around nine hours at Tileibani Suguda village in Deogarh district.

Maha will start vaccination 18+ from today: CM

Ready to pay for 12 crore doses, but vaccine not available: Uddhav

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, APRIL 30

Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Friday said that his government has made provisions to pay for 12 crore Covid vaccine doses at one go. However, the supply is limited, Mr Thackeray said in an attempt to shift the blame on the Centre.

In his address to the state, Mr Thackeray announced that vaccination of the age group 18-45 will begin on Saturday in the state. But the inoculation of the said age group will be done as per the availability of vaccines. Claiming that Maharashtra is not getting required vaccine doses despite its readiness to pay for it, Mr Thackeray said, "We have the population of six crore in the age group of 18-45 years. We require 12 crore doses to inoculate all of them. We have kept the financial provision ready despite if the state's



People read a notice that states 'no vaccination for 3 days' as per BMC orders pasted outside a Covid vaccination centre in Mumbai on Friday.

difficult financial situation. But the supply is limited. We received three lakh vaccines today (on Friday) from the Centre for the 18-45 age group. We have been assured 18 lakh more vaccines in the month of May. We just hope that the supply for the people above 45 years continues uninterrupted," he said.

The CM said that his gov-

ernment is in talks with the Serum Institute of India, Bharat Biotech as well as all the possible exporters of Covid vaccines including Russian's Sputnik V. "We have been told that the Russian vaccine will be available in India. But it is still not available. I assure people that we will save each and every life," Mr Thackeray said.

Maha reports 62,919 cases, 828 deaths

Mumbai, April 30: Maharashtra on Friday reported 62,919 fresh Covid cases and 828 deaths, said the state health department. The daily rise in cases was less than Thursday's addition of 66,159, but the number of deaths increased compared to 771 the day before.

The caseload on Friday reached 46,02,472, while the death toll rose to 68,813. Mumbai recorded 3,888 new cases and 89 deaths, raising the overall tally of the city to 6,48,471 and the death toll to 13,125.

As many as 69,710 patients were discharged during the day, taking the number of recoveries in the state to 38,68,976. — *PTI*

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, APRIL 30

Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope on Friday said that the state could see a third wave of Covid cases in July and August this year. He urged the people not to lower their guard. The minister further said that the third wave will pose a massive challenge to the state and the government has already started its preparations to deal with it.

"Epidemiologists have said that Maharashtra could witness a third wave of Covid in July or August. We are trying to be self-sufficient in terms of availability of medical oxygen by then," Mr Tope said after a review meeting with chief minister



Rajesh Tope

Uddhav Thackeray.

Commenting on the current situation in the state, the minister said the Covid cases in Maharashtra are likely to plateau by the end of May. However, the state government is focusing on setting up 125 pressure swing adsorption (PSA) plants (for generating medical oxygen) at the earliest.

Explaining Maharashtra's efforts to vaccinate maximum citizens at

the earliest, Mr Tope said that the state is expected to get 18 lakh jobs in the month of May directly from vaccine manufacturers. Since the supply is limited, the state government will have to reduce the number of vaccine centres. "We will have to ensure that the vaccines are administered on a daily basis. We are planning to set up one vaccination centre per district," Mr Tope said. Indicating that the vaccination of the age group 18-45 will not start soon, the minister said that people should visit vaccination centres only after prior appointment. Maharashtra may start vaccination for the 18-45 age group only in a symbolic way on May 1, as it is the state's foundation day.

West Bengal inches closer to lockdown

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, APRIL 30

West Bengal appears to be heading towards a lockdown again as the Mamata Banerjee government has shut down many public places and also banned social, cultural, and academic assembly with "immediate effect" from Friday evening after the state broke its past records of Covid-19 infection rate and reported a daily spike of 17,411 cases with 96 more deaths, including a two-time TMC MLA.

In the afternoon, state chief secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay said in an order, "All shopping complexes, malls, beauty parlours, cinema halls, restaurants and bars, sports complexes, gyms, spas, and swimming pools shall remain closed (even while home deliveries and online services remain permitted). All social, cultural, academic, entertainment related gatherings and congregations shall remain prohibited.

Bazaars and haats will remain open only during 7.00-10.00 am in the morning and 3.00-5.00 pm in the afternoon (even while essential services like medical shops, medical equipment shops, grocery, etc. will remain outside the confines of the embargo)."

Referring to the Assembly election results on May 2, he stated, "All activities related to counting processes and victory rallies/processions will be guided by the guidelines issued by EC while unnecessary congregations in the neighbourhoods of counting halls will also be discouraged and restricted and will have to abide by the physical distancing norms and other Covid-appropriate behaviour."

"Any violation of these orders will be liable to be proceeded against as per the provisions of the DM Act, 2005, besides, legal actions under IPC and other laws of the land will be applicable. The order will take immediate effect," Mr Bandyopadhyay added.

Bombay HC directs cops to trace out Remdesivir

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, APRIL 30

The Bombay High Court has directed the district superintendent of police, Ahmednagar to trace out the boxes containing Remdesivir injections unloaded by BJP MP Sujay Vikhe Patil at the Shirdi airport and the court has also directed Maharashtra's Principal Secretary Home Department to ensure the preservation of details about the landing of chartered aircraft between April 10 and 25, at Shirdi Airport. The court was hearing a petition seeking registration of FIR against Mr Vikhe Patil for illegally procuring 10,000 vials of Remdesivir injections.

A division bench of Justices Ravindra Ghuge and B.U. Debadwar of Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court also took exception to a press conference held by the Ahmednagar district collector to support BJP MP Dr. Sujay Vikhe Patil in relation to his alleged unauthorised procurement and distribution of Remdesivir drug.

Before issuing direction to district superintendent of police to trace boxes of the Remdesivir procured by Patil, the bench clarified that it is not involving collector Dr Rajendra B Bhosale in the investigation of this matter because the court wouldn't have confidence in him. Dr Bhosale had taken a press conference in which attempted to show that Mr Vikhe Patil legally procured the injections.

HCs should avoid unnecessary 'off-the-cuff' remarks, says SC

New Delhi/Chennai, April 30: The Supreme Court on Friday advised High Courts to avoid unnecessary "off-the-cuff remarks" during hearings, a call that came against the backdrop of stinging observations made by some of them against the Centre and state governments over their handling of the escalating Covid crisis.

The call by the apex court that it expects a "degree of respect and restraint" since the remarks may have serious ramifications also came on a day when the Election Commission of India (ECI) moved the Madras High Court seeking to restrain the media from reporting its strong oral observations on the poll body's role in conducting elections amid the Covid pandemic.

The ECI's plea was, however, rejected by the high court. "Even when we are criticising a judgement of a High Court, we do not say exactly what is in our

▶ **THE CALL** The call by the apex court that it expects a "degree of respect and restraint" since the remarks may have serious ramifications also came on a day when the Election Commission of India (ECI) moved the Madras High Court seeking to restrain the media from reporting its strong oral observations on the poll body's role in conducting elections amid the Covid pandemic.

heart and we exercise a degree of restraint. We would only expect that as freedom has been given to the High Courts to deal with these issues, certain off-the-cuff remarks, which are not necessary may be avoided," said a bench of the top court headed by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud. The bench also comprised Justices L. Nageswara Rao and S. Ravindra Bhat.

The apex court's advice came during hearings on

the Covid-related pleas after solicitor general Tushar Mehta and senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, appearing for the Centre and the Bihar government respectively, said such remarks gave the impression as if authorities were doing nothing.

The high courts of Madras and Delhi have been very critical, making strong observations against the Centre and various authorities for the way they have been handling the severe second wave of Covid.

The Madras High Court had on Monday castigated the ECI over the Covid second wave in the country, holding it 'singularly' responsible for the spread, called it "the most irresponsible institution" and even said its officials may be booked under murder charges.

The ECI allowing political parties to take out rallies and meetings had led to the spread of the pandemic, the court had said.

— *PTI*



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee during a video conference with party workers in Kolkata district on Friday.

— *PTI*

'If exit polls hold true, there will be bloodbath in Cong'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI 30 APRIL

The exit polls of the five states of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry have raised leadership issues afresh. The projected loss in the states of Assam and Kerala that were of keen interest to the leadership put the spotlight back on Rahul Gandhi who was commanding the elections. A party leader said, "if the exit polls hold true on the counting day there could be a blood bath within the party." Even in Kerala, which is the new bastion for the Gandhian scion Rahul Gandhi, exit polls indicate he hasn't been able to carry his party past the gate.

The Assembly elections in the five states were being seen as a test for Rahul Gandhi outside as well as inside the party. The G-23 group of Congress leaders who were seeking in the functioning of the party only to be chastised appear to have been proven correct regarding the organizational infirmities in the party.

Mr Gandhi and his chosen few were running, managing and executing the election campaign in the five states. Seat sharing arrangements were also overseen by new leaders, veteran Congressman and one of the G23 leader Ghulam Nabi Azad out of any parleys. The Change seekers were rarely accommodated as star campaigners in the states. One of the leaders said, "Rahul Gandhi and his deputies took every call, so the success or failure will also be at his doorstep and his men."

Insiders claim that the anger within a sizeable section of the party is also against the general secretary organisation K.C. Venugopal also hails from Kerala. Last year he was chosen for Rajya Sabha from the state of Rajasthan. Many feel that he has not been able to hold the organization together and the exit poll predictions in his home state will create havoc in heavily fractured Kerala Congress. The other two who could be in the line of fire are West Bengal MP and Leader of the Congress party in Lok Sabha Mr. Adhir Ranjan Choudhary as the performance of the party in his home state seems off the mark

■ IL personnel have been deployed for Assembly poll in 5 states

'Covid test must for forces in poll duties'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

The home ministry will arrange for a mandatory corona test of all security personnel deployed on election duties in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Assam. Also, these security personnel will undergo a week's quarantine before being sent to the next "station of deployment."

These are some of the preventive measures being taken by the home ministry to ensure safety of the Central paramilitary personnel.

More than 1 lakh security personnel have been deployed for Assembly elections to the five states and the process will be completed on May 2 with



A Covid patient awaits admission for treatment at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital in Ajmer on Friday.

— *PTI*

the counting. So, as a precautionary measure, the home ministry has decided that a corona test will be conducted on all security personnel who have already completed their election duty. Once the

remaining ones finish their deployment after the counting on May 2, they too would be tested.

In addition, even if security personnel test negative as a "matter of abundant precaution," these person-

nel will be put under a week-long quarantine before being sent for their next posting.

The home ministry will reimburse the entire cost of these tests and the quarantine period during which food, salary, and other facilities will be provided to the security personnel.

"This is an important welfare measure initiated by the home ministry. With corona creating havoc across the country, we need to ensure the safety of our personnel. Home minister Amit Shah has given clear instructions that all costs related to any kind of medical help will be paid by the home ministry," a senior home ministry official remarked.

'Shooter Dadi' dies of Covid-19

New Delhi, April 30: Octogenarian shooter Chandro Tomar, who became the oldest woman sharp shooter in the world after taking up the sport in her 60s, died on Friday after battling Covid-19.

She was 89 and was being treated at a hospital in Meerut since April 26.

"Mera saath chhoot gayi, Chandro kaha chali gayi (She has left me, Chandro where have you gone?)," her sister-in-law Prakash Tomar, who is also one of the oldest female sharp shooters, wrote on her Twitter page.

Tomar, who was nicknamed 'Shooter Dadi', was hospitalised after complaining of difficulty in breathing. Tests revealed she had contracted the highly con-

tagious virus that is causing over 3,000 deaths daily in the country.

Chandro Tomar Hailing from a village in Uttar Pradesh's Baghpat district, Tomar was 60-plus when she picked up the gun for the first time but went on to win many national competitions for veterans, her feats ultimately inspiring the award-winning Bollywood movie 'Saand ki Aankh'. Well-known people from various walks of life condoled her death, including sports minister Kiren Rijiju and actor Bhumi Pednekar, who played her in the biopic. — *PTI*

No accountability even after 2 lakh dead, says Rahul

New Delhi, April 30: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi targeted the central government on Friday, saying over two lakh people have died in the country during the second wave of Covid and still there is zero accountability.

Earlier in the day, Mr Gandhi offered his condolences to all those who have lost their dear ones due to lack of treatment and said prayers and sympathies from every state of the country are with them.

"Over two lakh dead in the fourth week of the second wave of Covid. Zero accountability. The system has made us 'atmanirbhar'," he said in a tweet in Hindi.

"India saw 3,86,452 new infections in a day, the highest single-day rise so far, pushing the total tally to 1,87,62,976, while active cases crossed the 31 lakh mark," Union Health Ministry said. — *PTI*

IMPORTANT NOTICE

It is notified for the information of passengers that the following Special Trains have been cancelled as per following details :-

Train No. & Name	Cancellation Date(s)
05074 Tanakpur - Singrauli Special Express	Upto 31.05.2021
05073 Singrauli - Tanakpur Special Express	Upto 01.06.2021
05076 Tanakpur - Shaktinagar Special Express	Upto 30.05.2021
05075 Shaktinagar - Tanakpur Special Express	Upto 31.05.2021
09009 Mumbai Central - New Delhi Duronto Express	14.05.2021 to till further advice
09010 New Delhi - Mumbai Central Duronto Express	15.05.2021 to till further advice
09025 Bandra Terminus - Amritsar Jn. Clone Express	10.05.2021 to till further advice
09026 Amritsar Jn.- Bandra Terminus Clone Express	12.05.2021 to till further advice
09337 Indore Jn. - Delhi Sarai Rohilla Special Express	20.05.2021 to till further advice
09338 Delhi Sarai Rohilla - Indore Jn. Special Express	20.05.2021 to till further advice

Note: 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.

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SHORT TAKES

Veteran journalist Manohar Andhare passes away at 87

AGE CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 30

Former editor of Nagpur Marathi daily *Yugdharma*, Manohar P. Andhare, died on Friday in Secunderabad. He was 87.



Manohar P. Andhare

Comrade Andhare, as he was popularly known, was secretary-general of the Indian Federation of Working Journalists (IFWJ). He was also a professor of media studies at the Nagpur School of Journalism. He was nominated by the Union government on Journalists' Pension Committee and was national convener of IFWJ committee on Justice U.N. Bachawat Wages Board and served in many other capacities, including as secretary-general of the National Confederation of Newspaper and News Agencies.

An activist against the Emergency (1975-77), Andhare was in vanguard of struggle against press censorship. He was in forefront of the Jayaprakash Narayan movement.

He led many media movements in the Vidarbha region. Andhare was elected IFWJ secretary at the 21st plenum in Ayodhya on June 25, 1984.

He led IFWJ delegations to 16 countries, including Britain, Germany, France and the Netherlands.

Andhare had worked for many Marathi journals and was founder of the Lohia Adhyayan Kendra.

Among Andhare's friends and admirers are Sharad Pawar (NCP), Devendra Fadnis and Nitin Gadkari (BJP).

In his condolence message, Gadkari said he was saddened by the death of the senior journalist.

His son Ajit Andhare works as News Editor in for *Deccan Chronicle*, Hyderabad.

IFWJ has mourned the sad demise of its former secretary-general.

Prez Xi writes to PM Modi

■ Continued from Page 1

Supplies from the United States reached New Delhi on Friday through two special flights that comprised 423 oxygen cylinders with regulators, 210 pulse oximeters, 184,000 Abbott Rapid Diagnostic Test Kits, and 84,000 N-95 face masks. 17 H-size (large) oxygen cylinders and 7,00,000 Abbott Rapid Diagnostic Test Kits.

Chinese ambassador Sun Weidong tweeted: "Chinese President Xi Jinping sends a message of sympathy to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi today. In the communication, President Xi said: 'I am very concerned about the recent situation of Covid-19 pandemic in India. On behalf of the Chinese government and people, as well as in my own name, I would like to express sincere sympathies to the Indian government and people. Humanity is a community with a shared future. Only through solidarity and cooperation can countries around the world ultimately defeat the pandemic'."

The Chinese envoy had earlier tweeted: "Since this April, China has supplied more than 5,000 ventilators, 21,569 oxygen generators, over 21.48 million masks and around 3,800 tons of medicines to India, according to statistics of the General Administration of Customs of China".

As "emergency assistance", Japan announced it would provide 300 oxygen concentrators and 300 ventilators to India. "Japan stands with India, our friend and partner, in her efforts to fight against Covid-19 pandemic through this additional emergency assistance. Japan will continue to extend further support promptly in order to contain the Covid-19 situation," Japan said Friday.

From the UK, 280 oxygen concentrators and 40 ventilators arrived on Friday. From Ireland, 700 oxygen concentrators and 365 ventilators reached New Delhi, while from Romania, 80 oxygen concentrators, 75 oxygen cylinders and 20 high flow humidify oxygen therapy devices landed in the Indian capital.

SpiceXpress, the air cargo arm of SpiceJet, on Friday airlifted 1,100 oxygen concentrators from Singapore to Bengaluru in multiple consignments. The airline had on Thursday airlifted 1,600 oxygen concentrators from the United States and Hong Kong.

T'gana: Drones to deliver vaccines

Conditional approval valid for a period of one year or until further orders

New Delhi, April 30: The civil aviation ministry on Friday permitted the Telangana government to use drones for experimental delivery of vaccines within the visual line of sight.

The ministry's statement does not mention which particular vaccine will be part of this experimental delivery.

The ministry on Twitter said it has granted conditional exemption to the Telangana government from the Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules, 2021, for "conducting experimental delivery of vaccines using drones within the visual line of sight range".

This exemption will be

DRONES FOR SANITISING B'LURU, DELIVERING DRUGS, ESSENTIALS

Bengaluru, April 30: To contain the rising number of coronavirus cases here, drones are to be used to sanitise containment zones as well as deliver medicines and essential goods to the affected people.

An initiative of Bengaluru-Central MP P.C. Mohan and Garuda

valid for a period of one year or until further orders, it noted.

On April 22, the ministry had permitted the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to con-

Aerospace, the drive to sanitise containment zones was kick-started by chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Friday.

Speaking at the launch, the chief minister said, "Like other parts of the country, our state is also facing a situation due to the second wave of the Covid-19."

—PTI

duct a feasibility study on using drones to deliver Covid-19 vaccine.

The cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has crossed 15 crore,

the Union health ministry said on Thursday.

India is struggling with the second wave of the coronavirus as hospitals in several states are reeling under a shortage of medical oxygen and beds.

The Centre's liberalised and accelerated phase-3 strategy of Covid-19 vaccination will be implemented from Saturday. Registration for the new eligible population groups started from Wednesday.

India saw 3,86,452 new coronavirus infections in a span of 24 hours, the highest single-day rise so far, pushing the total tally of Covid-19 cases to 1,87,62,976, while active cases crossed the 31-lakh mark.

—PTI

Amid Covid, Yogi replaces his Team-11 with Team-9

CM's trial to check Covid with babus' help failed: BJP MLA

Lucknow, April 30: Amid a surge in coronavirus cases, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday replaced his Team-11, a group of officials tasked with managing the crises, with a new nine-member set of ministers and bureaucrats.

Opposition parties have been slamming Adityanath and Team-11 for their alleged failure to control the pandemic in the country's most populous state.

The CM was also accused of relying too much on bureaucrats, an allegation levelled also by an MLA from the ruling BJP itself. "Chief minister Adityanath's experiment to control the Covid pandemic with the help of the bureaucracy has failed," Bairaia MLA Surendra Singh told reporters.

Unlike Team-11, the new group called Team-9 also has two ministers. The nine members head their



Yogi Adityanath

own committees or departments involved in fighting the pandemic.

"The CM has constituted a new Team-9 for effective management of Covid-19 and related work. This team will directly report to the CM and carry out important work in different fields, a government spokesperson said.

It will take policy decisions and ensure their implementation, giving reports directly to the chief minister, he said.

The members include the state's medical education minister Suresh Kumar Khanna, whose group will work on vaccinations, and

the availability of hospital beds and human resources. Health minister Hitesh Chandra Awasthi will head the group on testing, increasing health facilities and home isolation of patients.

Chief secretary R.K. Tiwari's team will coordinate with the Centre.

Additional chief secretary (home) will focus on the availability of oxygen. The director-general of police will work on the implementation of Covid-19 restrictions.

ACS (revenue) will oversee management of migrants coming from other states. ACS (Rural Development and Panchayati Raj) is tasked with sanitisation, cleanliness and monitoring of vigilance committees.

Agricultural production commissioner, industrial and infrastructure development commissioner and ACS (information) are other members of the new team.

—PTI

Several states say no stocks for Phase 3 vaccination

New Delhi, April 30: The ambitious Phase 3 vaccination drive in the country amid the raging second wave of Covid-19 across states is most likely to hit a roadblock on May 1 when it is scheduled to begin with vaccination for all adults above 18 years.

Several state governments have said they won't be able to start the vaccination drive for all adults from May 1 due to a shortage in vaccine doses. These states also include the BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa.

Several other states, including Delhi, Odisha, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh,

Delhi, Maharashtra and Punjab, said they do not have adequate doses of vaccine to start vaccinating individuals in the 18-44 age group.

Some states announced phase three of the immunisation drive in selected districts, while some announced vaccination for different age groups also such as those above 35 years.

Over 2.45 crore beneficiaries have registered themselves till Friday morning on the CoWIN platform for the Phase 3 vaccination drive that will start on Saturday.

Registration for the newly eligible population groups

started on Wednesday.

The Centre on Friday said some states, which have already coordinated with manufacturers, will kick off the drive on the designated date. It stressed that any new exercise takes time to pick up pace and this phase three of the vaccination drive too will stabilise over time.

Joint secretary in the Union health ministry Lav Agarwal said the states are coordinating with vaccine manufacturers for procuring the doses and the Centre is providing the required support.

"Vaccination will be launched tomorrow in some states which have

MP loses 42 cops, 334 teachers in 2nd wave

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, APRIL 30

The second wave of Covid-19 that hit Madhya Pradesh a couple of months ago has claimed the lives of at least 334 school teachers in the state.

"We have gathered district-wise data on the death of school teachers in MP till April 20. According to the data, total 334 school teachers died of Covid-19 till April 20 since the second wave of pandemic hit the state two months ago. But, the death toll has almost doubled to 655 in the last ten days as per the latest data compiled by our organisation", MP teachers' Congress spokesman Subhash Saxena told this newspaper. However, the state government has disputed the toll figure of 655.

"It is true that coronavirus has caused the death of some school teachers. But, the casualty figure of 655 appears highly inflated. The department has developed a system to compile data on the deceased staff of schools deployed in Covid



Police personnel pay tribute to police constable Chandra Prakash Chouhan during his funeral ceremony in Bhopal on Friday. He died of Covid infection. —PTI

duty", a senior officer of the state school education department said unwilling to be quoted.

The state government has deployed government school teachers in Covid duty due to shortage of health department staff when the second wave of coronavirus pandemic hit the state a couple of months ago.

Teachers, principals and other staff of government schools in the state have been deployed in various Covid duties such as door-to-door survey to detect suspected cases, collection of samples, supervision of containment zones and

screening of passengers of buses and other vehicles passing through the check posts in district and state borders two months ago.

Around 4,500 teachers and administrative staff of government schools have so far been deployed in Covid duty in the state.

According to reports, 1,809 teachers contracted the virus. Out of them, 334 succumbed to Covid-19 by April 20. "We urge the state government to declare the deceased school teachers as corona warriors and extend the benefit of corona warriors welfare scheme to them," Mr Saxena said.

ED takes over ₹304cr assets of Rose Valley Group

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday took possession of assets worth ₹304 crore in connection with its money laundering case in the alleged Rose Valley Ponzi scam that took place in West Bengal and Odisha.

"Possession has been taken of properties of the Rose Valley group of companies throughout West Bengal, Tripura and Odisha under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). This includes 412 movable properties amounting to ₹47 crore and 426 immovable properties worth ₹257 crore," the agency said.

The Rose Valley group of companies "had collected a huge amount of money from the gullible public by floating various fake and fictitious schemes and defaulted the re-payments". The ED said that the probe found that several properties in West Bengal, Odisha, Tripura, Assam, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and others states were acquired in the name of various companies of the group, by illegally diverting the funds collected from the common public.



Police personnel try to stop members of Kissan Sangharsh Committee from breaking brigades during a protest near Punjab Chief minister Capt. Amarinder Singh's residence in Patiala against the Punjab government over land acquisition for the Delhi-Katra Express Highway on Friday.

—PTI

Delhi deaths still high

■ Continued from Page 1

eight-phase 34-day Assembly election on Thursday, on Friday announced a partial shutdown in the state banning all kinds of gatherings, malls and market complexes, bars and restaurants, beauty parlours, cinema halls, sports facilities, gyms, swimming pools and spas "with immediate effect". The order added that baars/haats would be allowed to function for five hours a day – from 7 am to 10 am and 3 pm to 5 pm. Pharmacies, groceries would stay open while the home delivery of food will be permitted.

Goa too has announced partial a lockdown while nine Haryana districts – including Gurgaon and Faridabad – would face weekend restrictions from 10 pm on Friday to 5 am on Monday. The other districts covered are Panchkula, Sonapat, Rohtak, Karnal, Hisar, Fatehabad and Sirsa. However, a whole lot of activities have been allowed in these places.

Kerala, another poll-going state where the results will also be declared on Sunday despite the election being over on April 6, has now decided to go in for a stricter lockdown from May 4. "Strict restrictions from May 4. Air, rail travellers won't be inconvenienced. Smooth cargo movement will be ensured. Only home delivery and takeaway at restaurants. No interruption in telecom and Internet services. Banks should promote online transactions," Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan tweeted. In Bihar, the summer vacations have been declared in universities and colleges from May 1 to 31

in view of the Covid-19 situation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday held a meeting of the entire council of ministers, where it was said the present pandemic was a "once in a century crisis" that has thrown a big challenge for the world. The PM urged all his ministers to "stay in touch with people of their respective regions, help them and keep getting their feedback". He stressed on the need to ensure that issues at the local level are promptly identified and addressed, a statement from the Central government said.

"Reviewed the Covid-19 situation during the council of ministers meeting. Discussed the various steps being undertaken including coordination with the states, augmenting medical capacities and boosting oxygen availability," the PM said in a tweet.

The press statement added: "The efforts by the Central government in coordination with the states towards building up infrastructure in the form of ramping up hospital beds, PSA oxygen facilities, etc, resolving issues in production, storage and transport of oxygen, tackling matters relating to availability of essential medicines were briefed and the measures being taken to further ramp up their supply and availability were also pointed out."

The government has invoked special provisions and granted emergency financial powers to the armed forces so they can set up Covid quarantine units and do urgent medical tasks without waiting for the government's clearance.

Mamata eyes 'clear majority'

■ Continued from Page 1

in the lead. Some also tried to keep a balance.

The exit polls were done after talking to different people. At the end, the BJP is going to form the next government with a new life, new change and new future for the people of Bengal."

Sanjukta Morcha, a triangular alliance of the Congress, Left parties and the Indian Secular Front, a new outfit of Muslim cleric Abbas Siddiqui, however, believes it should emerge as a "deciding factor" in forming the next government in the state.

Congress Rajya Sabha MP Pradip Bhattacharya said: "The Sanjukta Morcha will get a maximum 45 seats altogether; though it cannot be said right now which party in our alliance will get how many. But we can firmly say we will turn out to be the deciding factor. The government will be formed in whatever direction we will move to."

He added: "The Sanjukta Morcha does not have huge money power like the TMC and BJP. As a result, it could not go in for a massive campaign. Moreover, it was formed very late, which was why we took the field late. Still, we feel we got votes from those people who want peace here. I do not believe in the exit polls because it fails, except some rare occasions. It is done on pen and paper only."

Soli Sorabjee dies of Covid

■ Continued from Page 1

prominent figures from all walks of life.

The CJI said in his nearly 86-year long association with the judicial world, Sorabjee "made immeasurable contribution in enriching the global jurisprudence of human rights and fundamental rights".

"The matters that he had argued before the courts and the judgments that he could secure; the books, essays, papers of international repute and the newspaper articles he had authored; the independent opinions he could tender to the government in his capacity as attorney-general – they all stand testimony to his deep commitment to democratic values," the Chief Justice said.

Sorabjee was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award, in 2002 for his defence of freedom of expression and protection of human rights. He worked on the Citizens' Justice Committee which represented pro bono the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. He was well known as a jazz lover and had been instrumental in organising a number of international jazz festivals in New Delhi and elsewhere.

A prolific writer on protection of human rights and a regular contributor to several Indian newspapers, he was a champion of freedom of speech and expression and defended the freedom of the press in many landmark cases in the Supreme Court.

SC warns govt against action...

■ Continued from Page 1

the Centre and the states.

Describing as "very disturbing" the different pricing for the Centre, states and private hospitals, the court asked, "What happens to the marginalised and SC/ST population? Should they be left to the mercy of private hospitals."

The court asked the Centre why it can't buy vaccines and embark on the lines of the national immunisation programme.

Telling the Centre not to leave vaccine pricing to the manufacturers, the court said, "Don't leave it to the

manufacturers. How will they determine equity? Invoke your powers to see that additional facilities are created for vaccine manufacturing."

The court also observed that AstraZeneca is providing vaccines at far lower price to US citizens than why should we be paying so much.

On the shortage of essential medicines, the court said that under the existing legal regime, India can side-step the patent regime and import Remdesivir from Bangladesh or produce it in India under license from Bangladesh.

The court also expressed

concern over overworked doctors, nurses and other medical staff attending to Covid patients.

The court said that be it government hospitals or private, the doctors and nurses attending Covid patients are reaching a breaking point and must be paid more.

On the conclusion of the four-hour long hearing which commenced at 12 noon and ended at 4.20 PM with half-an-hour break, the court said that it will pass an interim order which will be uploaded on the top court's website on Saturday.

THE ASIAN AGE

1 MAY 2021

How govt's spin is losing us the war against Covid

French queen had said, "If the people can't have bread, let them eat cakes!" This characteristically heartless remark had made Marie Antoinette, the last queen of France, who was sent to the guillotine, an object of hate as the revolution advanced. However, she was just being a lousy member of the decaying order that was dispatched to the dustbin of history. There was no self-serving propaganda about the remark attributed to her.

As the queen assessed the spreading chaos and stood in surly denial, she was just being a member of her vanishing class. But this cannot be said of the ruling establishment in India elected on a popular vote.

They appear to think that only by mounting a massive propaganda counter-offensive against the people can they save themselves since there is a widening gulf between the reality of people's misery on account of the pandemic and the words of self-praise and retribution against opponents they hear from the government's representatives.

The government appears to be engaged in the subversive exercise of bending people's perception of their own painful reality being experienced on a daily basis — no oxygen, no cremation or burial space as dead bodies pile up, no hospital beds, and no one to turn to.

The government appears to be engaged in the subversive exercise of bending people's perception of their own painful reality being experienced on a daily basis

In a matter it took up *suo motu*, the Madras high court pointedly asked this week what the Centre was doing for the past 14 months. The government should have acted in a "planned and informed" manner with the help of "expert advice". The additional solicitor-general weakly responded that Covid's second wave was "unexpected".

And why exactly was that? Empowered committees that recommended enhancing oxygen production in April last year were ignored. A committee of Parliament was similarly ignored through inaction on its proposals. Indeed, newly created facilities to fight Covid last year were wound up. Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed at the World Economic Forum this January

that India had "defeated" Covid. On February 21 this year, the BJP passed a resolution, which noted "with pride" that India had "defeated" Covid "under the able, sensitive, committed and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi". In March this year, Union health minister Harsh Vardhan claimed before the Delhi Medical Association that "we are in the end-game of the Covid-19 pandemic in India".

Within weeks of that remark, India has officially acknowledged crossing four lakh new cases a day and three thousand daily deaths, though the data could be many times higher. And yet, the health minister could summon the fool's courage earlier this week to say that the country was "better prepared" now than a year ago to fight Covid.

Meanwhile, the Indian High Commission in Canberra sent a stinker to the *Australian* which had carried a critical report highlighting the crippling drawbacks, including political hubris and religious promiscuity allowed to the majority community, of India's anti-Covid programme. Threateningly, it complained about the "completely baseless, malicious slanderous" report.

This trajectory of self-defence through sheer propaganda was confirmed when, last Thursday, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, in a virtual meeting with other ambassadors and high commissioners around the world, instructed them that the "one-sided" message in the international media showing the "incompetent" handling of Covid must be "countered".

There is some irony here. The winning of the war through propaganda — instead of action on the ground — has coincided with the reversing of a 16-year-old policy of not accepting foreign aid in coping with calamities.

Biden's century

Like the curate's egg, US President Joe Biden's maiden address to Congress was good in parts. His first 100 days in office, which he completed this week, had more to offer than his speech or the high symbolism of two women, who are next in line should anything befall him, standing masked on either side of his podium. Considering the damage caused to the US by four toxic years of Donald Trump and four grave challenges — the pandemic, a flailing economy, racial injustice and climate change — Mr Biden was destined to be a transformational President who was prepared to act to make change possible.

In many of his actions he has performed like one, particularly in bringing in "big government", at a time of crisis, with US \$4 trillion plans encompassing an US \$1.8 trillion American Family Plan guaranteeing income for families with children and a US \$2.3 trillion for a super ambitious American Jobs Plan. Mr Biden's moves to push on with an aggressive legislative agenda only signify that bipartisanship may be vastly overrated in American politics. Coming as they do in a deeply polarised US, they may add to the divisions though. His proposals, to be backed by the printing of notes, may cast more of a burden to a debt-laden economy but, as he explained, the trickle-down economics of the Reagan and Trump kind will not work, not in post-Covid scenarios.

Mr Biden may have riled opponents more with his clarity on where China and Russia stand and how the US will treat the Indo-Pacific, besides his resolve to pull troops out of the "forgotten war" in Afghanistan. Torn to shreds is the "America First" approach of the peculiar Trump brand of politics as Biden's USA states its ambition to be the world's arsenal of vaccines in the fight against waves of the coronavirus. He may not have been generous enough to acknowledge the Trump government's early work in the hunt for vaccines and advance payments against supplies but his push for vaccination has already seen the inoculation of 200 million Americans, heralding signs that a kind of "normal" is near. Not too many may complain except, of course, the Republicans.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

The Asian Age office is located at:

New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



Can blatant lies save India from Covid-19?



Shobhaa's Take

Dr Zarir Udwadia, one of India's most respected physicians, spoke for 1.4 billion Indians in a no-holds-barred BBC interview recently. He talked calmly, but the anguish was palpable. He didn't mince words. Short of calling the government names for letting us down, he spoke his mind in perfectly articulated, easy-to-understand lingo. He mentioned the "dreadful deficiencies" (understatement, doc!), "complacency" (I call it cruelty), "vaccine desperation" and much more. He also warned it's likely to take 600 days before India can hope to achieve "herd immunity". Gird your loins: we have a long, painful, scary way ahead of us. Who knows how many people reading this column will be alive to greet that wonderful day? Death is a mere six degrees of separation away. India is in mourning; for itself, and all those who couldn't even get a dignified funeral, forget help! Living with death is now the "new normal".

Narendra Taneja (BJP spokesperson) talking to Christiane Amanpour on CNN started the world with the admission that "the responsibility is first and foremost ours", while glibly blaming the EC for allowing elections in five states. Will he retain his job as spokesperson after this trillion-dollar global gaffe? Nine million thronged the Kumbh Mela despite the Covid surge. Whose "responsibility" is that? Maharashtra's CM has warned the third and fourth wave may hit by July-August.

The "numbing of India" was brilliantly and boldly articulated by a quiet hero who is garnering countless fans for obvious reasons. Dr Parakala Prabhakar is the low-key husband of India's finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Frankly, I'd never heard of

him. He was simply not on my radar! But I sat up and paid close attention when I heard his podcast (*Midweek Matters*) last week. He spared nobody, not even the person his wife reports to: the Prime Minister! His address didn't sound phony: *matlab*, he wasn't playing good cop-bad cop. He was speaking for all of us who are in a semi-coma ("numb"), struggling to make sense of the government's criminal negligence for letting the country slide into this Covid abyss.

Arundhati Roy, writing in the *Guardian*, described the government's failures as a "crime against humanity" — which it is! I had used the exact same phrase in my column last fortnight. But who'll catch the criminals? Imagine the irony: it's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's image on the face of that all-important Covid-19 certificate citizens receive after taking the second shot. Why his image? Well, at least one brave dissenter in Bhatinda (74-year-old Prof. Chaman Lal) demanded its removal and vowed not to take the vaccine until then. Seriously: why is the PM's face on the certificate? Did he invent the vaccine? No! His administration "donated" the precious vaccine to 80 countries so he could look better! Faced with an acute vaccine shortage in India, what did he do? He delivered a monologue ("Mann ki Baat") where he passed the buck; to us! It became our problem! As we gasped and choked and people DIED in droves, the government looked the other way and didn't have the basic decency to apologise to its people, forget about providing a contingency plan to save lives. Meanwhile, BJP CMs were issuing the most shocking statements, fudging numbers, downplaying deaths, and the health minister (Dr Harsh Vardhan) had the

temerity to say we are better off this year than we were last year! On what basis, and in what way, *Sirji? Bataao, na?*

Tushar Mehta, India's solicitor-general, admonished panic-stricken citizens: "Let's not be crybabies..." Boo Hoo! Dry those tears, darlings. We're going to be just fine, okay? Give or take a few million who won't make it through the pandemic (predictions of fatalities run into a crore or more), That awful robbed man in Uttar Pradesh (CM Yogi Adityanath) threatened to arrest anyone who dared to criticise his state's Covid management. The same state where a 17-year-old boy had a precious oxygen cylinder meant for his mother snatched out of his hands by cops and given to a VIP. His mother died two hours later. Then there was the chief minister (oops... minister) of Haryana, Manohar Lal Khattar, who callously declared: "The dead won't come back..." No *Sirji*, they won't. But their curses will!

Meanwhile, the bodies are piling up.

Fed up with official apathy, countless citizens' groups started to take over the government's duties by setting up helplines and mobilising resources. But even these Good Samaritans were stymied by roadblocks placed by the administration: the harder they tried to reach out and help, the worse it got. They were told they were "causing confusion". Despite that, people like Harteerath Singh of Hemkunt Foundation performed Herculean service bypassing officialdom and getting oxygen to the needy. "Help India Breathe", pleads Harteerath, who had Covid-19 twice. Citizens like him

The 'numbing of India' was brilliantly articulated by a quiet hero who is garnering countless fans for obvious reasons. Dr Parakala Prabhakar is the low-key husband of India's finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

work selflessly night and day, while the government still lives in denial and focuses on exit polls.

The bodies continue to pile up.

We watched in horror and sorrow as parking lots were converted into makeshift cremation grounds. Images of bodies burnt on footpaths by relatives unable to find a slot in crematoria sent shockwaves. Graveyards ran out of gravediggers. And Delhi resembles a macabre burning ghat. But the IPL bubble stays!

The government, however, still did nothing. Worse, we were subjected to the PM's platitudes. And silence. Home minister Amit Shah may have taken *maun vrat*. We haven't heard his voice recently.

State after state going under a punishing lockdown is now the norm. This time migrant workers acted swiftly, packing trains and buses before they got stuck thousands of miles from home. But Delhi's multi-crore Central Vista project faced no labour shortage: it was declared an "essential service" and will be completed on schedule.

The people of India are the country's real strength, while its biggest tragedy are its politicians. We are stuck with the current lot: heartless, cold and entirely lacking in compassion. There is a brazenness to the BJP that baffles the world. Our Prime Minister should be eating his words uttered last year: all those boasts, all that chest thumping! We've made utter fools of ourselves internationally, and yet we have *net* after *net* cold-bloodedly lying to us. Open your eyes, remove the blindfolds; this period will go down in history as the worst and most shameful indictment of a government that didn't care whether its helpless citizens lived or died gasping for oxygen, while the Great Leader looked the other way. Comfort yourselves. Ignore the corpses. There's hope! Remember: PM Cares! All we can fall back on now are prayers...

Instagram handle: @ShobhaaDe; Twitter: @DeShobhaa

LETTERS

PORIBORTON, AFTER ALL

The political showdown between the BJP and the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal is coming to a close. It has clearly been overshadowed by the second wave of the coronavirus currently sweeping the country, and many are saying that it is the virus that has emerged the winner. The effort that the BJP put into wresting the state away from the Trinamul may thus also come to naught despite the role their huge campaign rallies. But politics of West Bengal will be forever changed by their massive presence in the Opposition.

M.R. Jayanthi
Coimbatore

FAKE VACCINES?

TAMBARAM POLICE on Friday arrested four persons including a young doctor as well as a staff member of the Government Hospital in Tiruvannamalai, for allegedly stocking the drug Remdesivir (used in COVID-19 treatment) to sell at high prices on the black market. They should be handed out exemplary punishment for their nefarious act at a time when the country is shaken by severe second wave of Covid-19 infections. But with the Centre abdicating its responsibility towards its citizens, we fear that it will be repeated, as even vaccines will enter the blackmarket and might also be faked.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

GOODBYE ROHIT

BORN ON September 22, 1979, in Kurukshetra (Haryana), Rohit Sardana extended remarkable contributions to the Zee News channel by hoisting the debate programme, "Taal Thok Ke". He had also worked for ETV Network and All India Radio before joining Aajtak. He had been instrumental in increasing the viewership count of AajTak after having joined in 2017. His programme, "Dangal", will not be forgotten.

Yugal Kishore Sharma
Faridabad

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"Superstition they said provided cures
And now we know it's a deadly disease
Yet belief in miracles endures
We sing their hymns and litanies
We want the lame to walk again
And the blind be made to see
Martyrs court their deaths and then
Find that they have ceased to be."

— From *Jagnu's Paradoxes* by Bachchoo

Should we write English as it's spoken? Or just leave it as it is...

The Inturnashunul Inglish Spelling Kongress has this week voted to propagayt sumthing kold Trudishunul Spelling Rivlzd. They want a noo set of roots to bekum dhu noo norm...

I suppose, gentle reader, you've got the drift and are, like me, a stick-in-the-mud antediluvian dinosaur, then perhaps I ought to spell it out for you:

An outfit called the International English Spelling Congress (IESC) wants to perpetrate a new simplified English spelling. They want to make it as phonic as possible. So, for instance, they want to get rid of the w from wrong. And this in order to make it simpler for the dim to learn.

Patronising or what?

Several names from my beloved city of London will no doubt engage their attentions: names like Knightsbridge, Cheapside, Marylebone and Holborn?

All the common words with redundant unsounded letters such as know, knock and knife or pseudo and psychiatry will be easy to modify. But what will they do with P.G. Wodehouse's characters like Featherstonehaugh, pronounced as "Fanshaw" — and what about our own Willy Dalrymple who told me at the beginning of our friendship that it may be spelt that way but should be pronounced "Drimple"?

Very many English names are notorious for not sounding the way they look. St. John is "sinjin"; in Oxford and Cambridge Magdalene and Magdalen are both "maudlin"; Menzies is, incredibly, pronounced "ming".

Some of these absurdities, *meyrey yaaron* (phonic pronunciation), make one side with the IESC, whoever these bods be — but no! This revision is a foolish idea for two very good reasons. The first, pretty obvious one, (witch enny ful can c) is that

one can't legislate for a change in language, neither in vocabulary nor in spelling. Language evolves through necessity breeding invention, through absorbing words, meanings and nuances from other languages, and through sheer misuse becoming common practice and therefore part of the accepted and official, dictionaryed thing. See? I just invented a verb, meaning to appear in dictionaries. I don't know if any dictionary yet recognises that cool means hot or wicked means desirable or hot means compellingly attractive. When I speak to the young and ask them if they want more spinach, they say "I am good!" — by which they mean "I don't want any" and perhaps even "thank you". If you ask them how they are, they profess their moral rectitude, instead of telling you that they are well.

And then, all and sundry, including the late Princess Diana in a televised interview, use the word hopefully, which used to strictly be an adverb — to mean "I hope that". A sort of "Inshallah".

One accepts it, language changes and evolves through usage and not through committees and self-

appointed sages legislating for it.

One may, in evidence for this argument, cite the cases of Esperanto and Volapuk. These were languages invented to take the place of all others so that humanity could be one huge communicating family. No doubt this would bring a uniformity to our troubled planet, but wouldn't it be the most boring place on earth? (Earth is the planet you fool — *Ed*).

I must confess that when I and some of my friends were sixteen, we embraced this ideal and thought we'd make a start by teaching ourselves Esperanto. I still remember how to ask someone if they spoke it. It's "Chu vi parolas Esperanto?" and I still remember that boys were called knabo, with the k pronounced and girls were called sitabo — I always imagined after our Hindu goddess/princess of the *Ramayana*.

The second reason to reject the attempt to turn English phonic is a bit more subtle, but as readers and writers, gentle reader, of phonic Indian Devnagari scripted languages, you won't find it hard to follow. When I read Hindi in the Devnagari script, or even when it is written in Roman script, I have to

read every letter and absorb its meaning through the sound. I find it impossible to just look at the shape of the word and understand what it is a hundred per cent of the time.

Is that perhaps because the reading brain doesn't just recognise meaning through the sound of a word, but rather through a combination of sound and the shape of the word in sight? I would argue that it does. I may be wrong and only a linguistic psychologist will be able to judge, but I find I can skim a sentence when reading English, but have to sound the words internally and swiftly, even subconsciously, when reading Hindi.

Despite its anti-phonic spelling, English has become the language of many nations — albeit through colonisation and conquest, but it has also become the language of global communications even in a continent like America. I don't just mean that people with the intelligence of Donald Trump can sort of read and even write and say "bigly" and other words like that. I mean that there were contending languages such as Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, German and French. And English won.

SHORT TAKES

INDIAN-AMERICAN COUPLE JAILED FOR MONEY SCAM

Washington: A United States court in Atlanta has sentenced an Indian-American couple for laundering over USD500,000 on behalf of India-based phone scammers.

Chaitali Dave (36) was on Thursday sentenced to 20 months, to be followed by three years of supervised release and ordered to pay USD320,550 in restitution.

Mehulkumar Manubhai Patel (36) was sentenced to 30 months, followed by two years of supervised release and ordered to pay USD259,217 in restitution.

TWO INFLUENCERS ORDERED OFF BALI AFTER MASK JOKE

Denpasar (Indonesia): A US-based YouTuber and a Russian influencer were ordered off Indonesia's resort island of Bali on Friday after recording themselves defying mandatory mask-wearing with some imaginative makeup.

Clips of the video created by Josh Paler Lin and Leia Se and posted two weeks ago show the two duping supermarket guards with a painted surgical mask after they were refused entry because Se was unmasked. "Did you notice like no one's actually looking at you?" Lin exclaimed. "I can't believe it worked!" he said in the video that appears to have been taken down from his social media accounts but has since been reposted elsewhere.

PALESTINIANS DELAY POLLS FOR ISRAEL GUARANTEE

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories: Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas announced on Friday that elections are being postponed until Israel guarantees voting can take place in annexed east Jerusalem, further delaying polls in a society which last voted in 2006.

Addressing a meeting of Palestinian factions, Abbas said he has urged the international community to push Israel to allow campaigning and voting in east Jerusalem, an area annexed by the Jewish state in 1967 which Palestinians claim as their future capital.

But Abbas said the vote could not go ahead because Israel had provided no assurances regarding Jerusalem ahead of the legislative and presidential polls scheduled for May 22 and July 31, respectively.

PENTAGON GEARS UP FOR TALIBAN ON WITHDRAWAL

Washington: The Pentagon is preparing for possible Taliban attacks on US and coalition forces as they withdraw from Afghanistan, a prospect that complicates the outlook for winding down America's longest war.

May 1 was the date all US and other foreign forces were to have departed Afghanistan under a February 2020 deal between the Taliban and the Trump administration.

As part of that agreement, the Taliban halted attacks on US troops, and none has been killed since then. But the Taliban said it will consider the US to be in violation of the agreement for missing the deadline for full withdrawal. Their representatives have been vague about whether they intend to attack starting May 1.

OMAHA STUDENTS FACE ACTION FOR FLOYD DEATH ENACT

Omaha (US): Some Omaha high school students could face discipline for reenacting inside the school building the arrest and killing of George Floyd and then posting a photo of it to social media.

Westside Communities School District spokeswoman Brandi Paul called the image incredibly hurtful.

She told the Omaha World-Herald she could not speak on specific student discipline cases but said the district has policies in place to deal with disruptive behaviour.

Bottom line, if it disrupts that learning environment, there are consequences to those actions, Paul said.

The picture of the reenactment shows a Westside High School student kneeling on the neck of another student mimicking the May 25 killing of Floyd.

Pfizer applies for jabs to kids in EU

Move to offer young access to shot for first time

UK to trial dance party without curbs

London, April 30: Pfizer Inc and BioNTech have submitted a request to the European drug regulator for the approval of their Coronavirus vaccine to be extended to include children 12 to 15 years old, in a move that could offer younger and less at-risk populations in Europe access to the shot for the first time.

In a statement on Friday, the two pharmaceuticals said their submission to the European Medicines Agency is based on an advanced study in more than 2,000 adolescents that showed their vaccine to be safe and effective. The children will continue to be monitored for longer-term protection and safety for another two years.

BioNTech and Pfizer have previously requested their emergency use authorisation with the US Food and Drug Administration also be extended to children 12 to 15 years old. German Health Minister Jens Spahn welcomed the news that the vaccine might soon get the green light for older children.

"This can make a further real difference to our vaccine campaign, if approval is granted," he said on the sidelines of a visit to a vaccine manufacturing plant in the German town of Reinbek. The Covid-19 vaccine made by Pfizer and BioNTech was the first one to be granted a green light by the EMA last December, when it was licenced for anyone 16 and over across the 27-nation EU bloc. — AP

● GERMAN HEALTH MINISTER JENS SPAHN WELCOMED THE NEWS THAT THE VACCINE MIGHT SOON GET THE GREEN LIGHT FOR OLDER CHILDREN.

BIG CHINA FIRMS FINED UNDER ANTI-MONOPOLY LEGISLATION

Beijing, April 30: China fined 11 companies including tech giant Tencent on Friday, taking aim at their acquisitions and joint ventures as authorities target monopolistic practices.

The penalties come weeks after e-commerce giant Alibaba was hit with a \$2.78 billion fine by China's market watchdog when an investigation found it had been abusing its dominant market position.

Twelve tech firms, including giants Tencent, Baidu and ByteDance, also received smaller fines in March for allegedly flouting monopoly rules.

Regulators have in recent months ramped up scrutiny, particularly of the country's high-flying tech firms, telling industry leaders to rectify anti-competitive behaviour.

Beijing has expressed concern over the reach of private companies into the public's daily finances, with financial regulators summoning internet companies with fintech operations this week to warn them against unfair competition.

On Friday China's market watchdog said it had identified nine cases that violated anti-monopoly regulations by creating an "unlawful concentration" of business operations.

The companies were fined 500,000 yuan (\$77,259) each, said the State Administration for Market Regulation.

But the regulator noted the violations did not eliminate or restrict competition.

In one case involving Tencent, the company was found to have failed to declare the acquisition of auto services firm Shanghai Lantu Information Technology.

— AFP

SPAIN STUDIES MIXED USE OF COVID-19 JABS

Madrid, April 30: Spanish health authorities say they have started giving Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine doses to participants in a government-led study involving young people who received a first dose of the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine.

Researchers from Spain's Carlos III Institute want to study the effects of mixing vaccines from different manufacturers as they look for a second dose alternative following very rare brain blood clots linked to the vaccine produced by AstraZeneca.

Experts say the risks of the British-Swedish pharmaceutical company's vaccine are less than the clot risk healthy women face while on birth control. — AP

Navalny foundation lawyer detained

Moscow, April 30: A lawyer representing the anti-corruption foundation of imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was detained in Moscow on Friday morning, his colleague said on social media.

St. Petersburg-based lawyer Ivan Pavlov has been representing Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption after authorities filed a lawsuit to ban the foundation and the politician's network of regional offices as extremist organisations.

Pavlov's colleague, Yevgeny Smirnov, said on Facebook that Pavlov was detained after his hotel room in Moscow was searched. Russia's Federal Security Service, the FSB, was involved, Smirnov said. Pavlov is being accused of disclosing information related to a police investigation, a criminal offense punishable by a fine, community service or arrest of up to three months.

It wasn't immediately clear which case Pavlov's detention was connected to. — AP

INTELLIGENT | VOYAGE

On its journey, vessel will study marine pollution, analyse plastic in the water

First autonomous ship set for maiden voyage

Plymouth, United Kingdom, April 30: The *Mayflower 400* — the world's first intelligent ship — bobs gently in a light swell as it stops its engines in Plymouth Sound, off England's southwest coast, before self-activating a hydrophone designed to listen to whales.

The 50-foot (15-metre) trimaran, which weighs nine tonnes and navigates with complete autonomy, is preparing for a transatlantic voyage.

On its journey the vessel, covered in solar panels, will study marine pollution and analyse plastic in the water, as well as track aquatic mammals.

The British government's "Events Research Programme" as the country looks to ease remaining Covid-19 rules.

Data collected from the events, which require attendees to take a Coronavirus lateral flow test 24 hours prior, will test the safety of large-scale gatherings ahead of government plans to lift nearly all restrictions on June 21.

Circus co-owner DJ Yousef Zahar told the BBC it hoped to return to "pre-Covid conditions". — AFP

FREE RIDES, BEER: INCENTIVES TO U.S. VAX DRIVE

Washington, Apr 30: Free beer, pot and doughnuts. Savings bonds. A chance to win an all-terrain vehicle. Places around the US are offering incentives to try to energise the nation's slowing vaccination drive and get Americans to roll up their sleeves.

These relatively small, mostly corporate, promotion efforts have been accompanied by more serious and far-reaching attempts by officials in cities such as Chicago, which is sending specially equipped buses into neighbourhoods to deliver vaccines.

Detroit is offering \$50 to people who give others a ride to vaccination sites, and starting Monday will send workers to knock on every door in the city to help residents sign up for shots. — AP

RUSSIA PLACES NAVALNY'S ORG IN EXTREMIST LIST

Moscow, April 30: Russia on Friday added Alexei Navalny's political network to its database of terrorist and extremist organisations, as Moscow moves closer to shutting down the jailed opposition politician's movement against President Vladimir Putin.

The network of Navalny's regional offices appeared on a list maintained by Russia's financial monitoring service after Rosfinmonitoring said on Friday it had updated the list. Navalny's network had disbanded Thursday in anticipation of the move.

Organisations on the list include the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda. Being listed bans them in Russia, with members and supporters facing lengthy jail terms. — AFP



An Ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman comforts another at a cemetery in Benei Brak, as people attend the funeral of one of the victims of a stampede, when tens of thousands of people were gathered to celebrate the festival of Lag Baomer at a site in Meron in northern Israel early on Friday. — AFP

45 killed in stampede at Jewish religious pilgrimage in Israel

Jerusalem, April 30: In one of the worst peacetime tragedies in Israel, at least 45 people were crushed to death and about 150 others injured in a stampede overnight at an overcrowded Jewish religious gathering in the country's north attended by tens of thousands of people flouting the Coronavirus-related restrictions.

The mass gathering was organised to celebrate the Lag B'Omer, an annual religious holiday marked with all-night bonfires, prayer and dancing, at Mount Meron. The town is the site of the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, a second-century sage, and is considered to be one of the holiest sites in the Jewish world. Israel recently eased mask-wearing requirements in open

areas and other restrictions after the success of a massive vaccination drive that significantly brought down coronavirus-related cases.

The resulting "normalcy", with limitations, saw rejoicing crowds across Israel on Thursday evening with youngsters, especially school children, coming out in large numbers in open spaces putting bonfires that accompanied the Lag BaOmer festivities. Tens of thousands of ultra-orthodox Jews participated in the tragic event Thursday night at the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, making it the largest event held in Israel since the Coronavirus pandemic broke out last year.

A preliminary police investigation revealed that some of the attendees

slipped on the stairs, creating a "human avalanche" that crushed members of the crowd. A Magen David Adom (MDA) rescue service official confirmed that at least 38 people had been killed with the numbers likely to go even higher. "Our paramedics have treated hundreds of people, including several in serious condition. All the wounded were evacuated to hospital", he said.

Some 150 people were injured in the accident. Zaka, an ambulance service, said the death toll had risen to 45. MDA Director-General Eli Bin told the *Ynet* news site that the wounded were being evacuated to the Ziv hospital in Safed, the Galilee Medical Center in Nahariya, Rambam hospital in

Haifa, Poriya hospital in Tiberias, and Hadassah Ein Kerem hospital in Jerusalem.

Firefighters worked to free the trapped, supported by Israeli Air Force helicopters and rescue services. Police were trying to clear the tens of thousands who attended the event from the area. At around midnight on Thursday, organisers had estimated that some 100,000 people were at the site, with an additional 100,000 expected to arrive by Friday morning, local media reported.

A police official told the local media that dozens of participants in a concert had "slipped," falling on those below them while walking along a slippery walkway and causing a crushing domino effect. — PTI

WOMEN CHARGE 'DR WHO' ACTOR OF SEXUAL ABUSE

London, April 30: Actor-writer-producer Noel Clarke, best known for his work on "Doctor Who", has been accused by 20 women of sexual harassment.

Clarke, who recently won a BAFTA award, has an established history of sexual harassment, bullying, unwanted groping and touching dating back to 2004, according to a report by *The Guardian*. The actor has also been accused of secretly filming the nude auditions of female actors.

The women, who have come forward with the allegations, say he preyed on them at the beginning of their career and they were afraid of speaking the truth for the power he wields in the British film-and-television industry.

Clarke would harass female colleagues with repeated sexual advances, sometimes physically, and if they refused, he would intimidate them into staying silent about his actions. — PTI

Johnson's mobile number available openly for 15 yrs

London, April 30: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has had the same mobile phone number for 15 years and it has been freely available since it was published in a press release in 2006, several UK media reports claimed on Friday. While Downing Street has declined to comment, some media outlets tried dialling the number in question but it appeared to be switched off.

The Opposition Labour Party has said the easy availability of the UK Prime Minister's number had implications for security, lobbying and the risk of blackmail. The think-tank press release in question was related to Johnson's then-job as a shadow higher education minister and member of Parliament for Henley. It invited journalists to contact him for further comment.

Two years later, Johnson went on to become the Mayor of London. The number's availability was first reported by a weekly UK-based celebrity gossip newsletter 'Poppitch'. It



Boris Johnson

comes as questions have been raised in recent weeks over who has access to ministers' personal phone numbers, amid a wider row about lobbying and influence.

It escalated further as text messages between Johnson and vacuum cleaner entrepreneur James Dyson were leaked and purported to show a discussion over tax rules. He has denied any wrongdoing, and said the exchange was to secure ventilators for the National Health Service (NHS) at the peak of the

● THE OPPOSITION Labour Party has said the easy availability of the UK Prime Minister's number had implications for security, lobbying and the risk of blackmail.

Covid-19 pandemic last year.

'The Daily Telegraph' reported earlier in April that Simon Case, the head of the civil service, said the UK prime minister should change phone numbers because his was too widely known.

Last week, 10 Downing Street had denied the prime minister had been advised by senior officials to change his number. Former National Security Adviser Peter Ricketts warned that if the number was widely available it could be used for eavesdropping by hostile states, "and possibly other non-state actors as well, like sophisticated criminal gangs". — PTI



Engineers guide the *Mayflower 400* autonomous trimaran towards Turnchapel Wharf following a sea trial in Plymouth, south west England. — AFP

said. A variety of technology and service providers have contributed to the project

with hundreds of individuals involved from nations including India, Switzerland and the

United States, said Phaneuf.

The project would have cost 10 times the roughly \$1 million (820,000 euros) invested by ProMare without the "global effort", he added.

The non-profit venture will offer the data gathered by the project free of charge. The information could be of particular use to the future of commercial shipping.

The autonomous ship is scheduled to embark on May 15 if weather is favourable and permission is granted by British authorities.

The journey to Plymouth, Massachusetts — the same voyage made

by pilgrims on the original "Mayflower" in 1620 as they sought a new life in America — will take three weeks.

While the Mayflower 400 voyage has been delayed because of the pandemic, Phaneuf said at least no one will fall ill on the trip.

"No one will get bored or tired or sick on this one. So it can take as long as it likes to do science," he said from the British port.

Sitting alongside him were three computer technicians checking the equipment remotely.

Meirwen Jenkin-Rees, a 21-year-old student engineer, checked the ship's engines before it headed out for a sea trial. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,782.36	-1.98
Nifty 50	14,631.10	-1.77
S&P 500*	4,187.15	0.58
Dollar (₹)	74.06	-0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.02	0.18
Euro (₹)	89.60	0.14
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,283▼191	0.41
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.28	1.87
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.030	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.645	0.005

* As of 8:30 PM IST

O2 machines can be imported for personal use

The government said it has included import of oxygen concentrators for personal use, purchased from e-commerce portals through post or courier, in the list of exempted categories, where customs clearance is sought as gifts. The exemption for oxygen concentrators is allowed only for a period till July 31, 2021, for personal use, according to a notification by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade.

IndusInd Bank Q4 net jumps 2-fold to ₹876 cr



IndusInd Bank reported an over two-fold jump in standalone net profit at Rs 876 crore for the March quarter compared with Rs 301.84 crore in the year-ago quarter. Total income was at Rs 9,199.48 crore against Rs 9,158.57 crore. On a full year basis, the net profit fell 36 per cent to Rs 2,836.39 crore in FY21 from Rs 4,417.91 crore in FY20. Gross NPAs rose to 2.67 per cent against 2.45 per cent a year ago.

Forex reserves rise by \$1.70 bn to \$584.10 bn

Foreign exchange reserves rose by \$1.701 billion to \$584.107 billion in the week ended April 23, RBI data showed. In the previous week ended April 16, the reserves had risen by \$1.193 billion to \$582.406 billion. The reserves had touched a record \$590.185 billion in the week ended January 29. Foreign currency assets rose by \$1.062 billion to \$541.647 billion. Gold reserves rose by \$615 million to \$35.969 billion.

Sidbi launches new loan lines for MSMEs

The Small Industries Development Bank of India has launched two loan products at concessional rates for ramping up supply of Covid-related products. This will help augment supply of oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators, oximeters and essential drugs by MSMEs. It said SHWAS and AROG are its two new quick credit delivery schemes, with 100 per cent funding up to Rs 2 crore at interest rate of 4.5-6 per cent.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

■ Full-year net up 35%, revenue down 18%

RIL's Q4 net profit zooms to ₹13.2K cr

New Delhi, April 30: Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries Ltd more than doubled its March quarter net profit on sequential recovery in its consumer businesses of retail and telecom as well as in petrochemicals, as improved spreads offset continued weakness in refining business. Consolidated net profit rose to Rs 13,227 crore in January-March compared with Rs 6,348 crore earned a year back, the company said in a statement on Friday. The fourth quarter net profit included Rs 797 crore exceptional item due to gain on sale of US shale assets.

Revenue was up 13.6 per cent to Rs 1,72,095 crore. While the oil-to-chemical, or O2C, business improved quarter-on-quarter, it was lower than year-ago earnings primarily due to weakness in the refining business because of pandemic impacting fuel demand. This was more than made good by a spurt in consumer-facing businesses of telecom and retail, which now contribute 45 per cent of earnings as compared to 33 per cent a year back.

Jio, the telecom arm, posted a 47.5 per cent rise in net profit to Rs 3,508 crore as it added over 1.54 crore net subscribers. But its per user earning fell to 138 paise from Rs 151 in the previous quarter. It had 42.62 crore subscribers at the end of March.

A record revenue from grocery business and strong growth in consumer



WIPRO UPS IT SERVICES REVENUE GUIDANCE TO 8-10% IN JUNE QTR

New Delhi, April 30: Wipro on Friday revised upwards its IT services revenue outlook to 8-10 per cent sequential growth in the June 2021 quarter, following the completion of its \$1.45 billion buyout of Capco. While announcing its March quarter results earlier this month, Wipro had said it expects to log a sequential growth of 2-4 per cent in its IT services revenues in the June quarter without including revenue

electronics saw pre-tax profit from retail business rise 41 per cent to Rs 3,623 crore. The firm added 826 stores to take the number of stores to 12,711.

While there was a sustained recovery in petchem margins, refineries operated at lower capacity due to the pandemic, pulling down O2C Ebitda by 4.6 per cent to Rs 11,407 crore.

For the full 2020-21 year,

from Capco and Ampion acquisitions.

In March, Wipro had announced the acquisition of London-headquartered Capco in a \$1.45 billion (over Rs 10,500 crore) deal - its largest ever till date.

Wipro said the acquisition of Capco was completed on April 29.

Wipro had logged USD 2,152.4 million in IT services revenue in the March 2021 quarter, a sequential growth of 3.9 per cent.

— PTI

revenue was down 18.3 per cent at Rs 539,238 crore and net profit was up nearly 35 per cent at Rs 53,739 crore.

Mukesh Ambani, RIL chairman and managing director, said: "We have registered robust recovery in O2C and retail segment, and resilient growth in Digital Services business (which includes telecom unit Jio)."

— PTI

AstraZeneca to seek US vaccine clearance

SUZI RING APRIL 30

AstraZeneca Plc remains committed to getting US emergency clearance for its coronavirus vaccine whose public acceptance has been undercut by a series of missteps and potentially serious rare side effects.

The UK drugmaker, which has pledged not to profit from its Covid shot during the pandemic, said it's still seeking an emergency use authorisation in the first half of 2021 and working with US officials on the filing. Astra had said earlier that it would apply for the authorisation by mid-April.

The vaccine, developed with the University of Oxford, sold \$275 million in the first quarter, Astra reported on Friday, a fraction of its \$7.3 billion in revenue. Meanwhile, Pfizer Inc has forecast \$15 billion in 2021 sales from the Covid vaccine made with partner BioNTech SE, while Moderna Inc expects to reap about \$18 billion.

A year after Astra and Oxford announced their partnership, the pharma firm said it has provided more than 300 million doses of the vaccine to 165 countries. But it has yet to gain approval in the US. Backing from the FDA could help with the perception of the vaccine in light of reports of blood clots in some users.

— Bloomberg

Profit-taking halts market's defiant upward momentum

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 30

After four days of gains, the Sensex plunged 983.58 points on profit-taking, limiting the otherwise handsome weekly gains by 1.98 per cent.

Fearing more economic disruptions from lockdowns, mixed results in the May 2 counting of assembly election votes, April auto sales number to be released on May 1 and shortage of vaccine, traders avoided taking risks, even as the global cues were not positive.

The Sensex closed at 48,782.36 while the Fifty-50 fell 263.80 points to close at 14,631.10.

Foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth Rs 3,465.07, making it the biggest single day selling this month. The domestic institutions were net buyers by Rs 1,419.31 crore.

FPIs were net sellers of equities worth Rs 9,659 crore in April, reversing the six-month trend.

Banks and financials were the biggest losers on Friday, as the Nifty Bank Index fell 2.77 per cent, followed by Nifty Auto (1.36 per cent) and Nifty FMCG (1.13 per cent).

Pharma stocks bucked the trend and Nifty Pharma index gained 1.28 per cent. PSU stocks also fared better as Nifty CPSE index closed 1.48 per cent up.

NSE's India VIX index climbed 1.19 per cent to 23.03 indicating more volatility ahead.

"Global cues were weak following a softer-than-expected survey of



AMFI CUTS FEES FOR MF DISTRIBUTORS

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 30

The Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi), the registering body for mutual fund distributors, has reduced by half the ARN (AMFI Registration Number) registration and renewal fees for most distributors, including individual distributors, effective May 1.

"By reducing the ARN and EUN registration and renewal fees, Amfi also wants to encourage new and young individuals across the country to reach out to large base of small savers, especially in the Tier II and III cities and towns, to channelise financial savings into mutual

fund asset class," it said.

Nilesh Shah, chairman, Amfi, said: "We aim to have greater number of small savers to benefit from long-term investment solutions offered by the mutual fund industry. This initiative of reducing the registration and renewal fees would help larger number of individuals from across the country to come into mutual fund distribution fold and contribute to the last mile connectivity."

"The EUN (Employee Unique Identification Number) registration and renewal fees for the employees too have been reduced to Rs 500 from Rs 1,500 and Rs 750 respectively," Amfi said.

China's manufacturing and some earnings disappointments. Nifty witnessed sharp selloff, amidst weak global cues and exit polls of state elections indicating mixed results. Shortage of vaccines dented market sentiments," said Siddhartha

Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

"The market has exhibited a lot of fear before the outcome of the elections," said Shrikant Chouhan, EVP-equity technical research, Kotak Securities.

Tata Power mulls ₹3500-cr IPO of RE arm

BAIJU KALESH & P. R. SANJAI APRIL 30

Tata Power Company, controlled by India's largest conglomerate Tata Group, is weighing an initial public offering for its renewable energy business that could raise about Rs 3,500 crore (\$473 million), according to people familiar with the matter.

The power company has abandoned earlier plans to seek a partner to invest in its green assets via an investment trust, the people

said, asking not to be identified as the information is private. Tata Power will seek approval for the IPO plan from its board, they said. If they approve, the proposed listing in Mumbai could take place this year.

Deliberations are ongoing and details such as the size and timing could change, the people said. A representative for Tata Power couldn't immediately comment.

Tata Power's plan to list its green power business comes as India's renew-

ables sector is forecast to expand rapidly, driven by increasing power demand and decarbonisation efforts. The country is working to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi's target to multiply its renewable power capacity almost five times over the next decade.

The company, including subsidiaries and joint entities, has generating capacity of 12.8 gigawatts, about 30 per cent of which comes from clean energy, according to its website.

— Bloomberg

Core sector growth at 6.8% in March



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 30

The core sector grew by 6.8 per cent in March helped by the low base in the same month last year, but contracted by 7 per cent for the fiscal 2020-21.

The combined index of eight core industries stood at 143.1 in March, rising 6.8 per cent, the highest in 32 months, compared to March 2020 when the index had fallen -8.6 per cent.

"Notwithstanding the base effect led-jump in the core sector growth to a 32-month high 6.8 per cent in March 2021, the pace of expansion was weaker than our forecast of a 10 per cent expansion, with a surprisingly sharp contraction in coal, and milder de-growth in fertilisers, crude oil and petroleum products," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist, Iera.

"We had expected the core sector to expand by around 10 per cent in March 2021, boosted by the low base of the commencement of the nationwide lockdown," she added.

Cement, steel, electricity and natural gas reported robust growth ranging from 12-32 per cent. But coal production declined by 21.9 per cent in March.

The low base of the lockdown will also push up the year-on-year expansion of the index of core industries in April to a sharp 50-70 per cent. In April 2020, the core sector had contracted 37.9 per cent due to the lock-down. Iera expects exceptionally high growth in cement and steel.

"However, there has been a slackening in the sequential momentum in April in electricity demand, vehicle registrations, and generation of GST e-way bills, revealing the impact of the recent surge in Covid infections and localised restrictions," said Nayar.

LIFE-IS-SHORT | DICTUM Going back to the daily grind may prove a tough proposition for many people

Affluent Americans rush to retire in Covid times

ALEXANDRE TANZI & MICHAEL SASSO APRIL 30

After a year of early-morning Zoom calls, the spectre of a deadly virus and soaring stock and real estate values, working American baby boomers plan to get out while the getting's good.

About 2.7 million Americans aged 55 or older are contemplating retirement years earlier than they'd imagined because of the pandemic, government data show. They're more likely to be White, a group that typically has a larger amount of accumulated wealth, and many cite robust retirement accounts and Covid-19 fatigue for their early exit, according to interviews with wealth managers and federal surveys.

Much like the US economy's so-called K-shaped recovery, the

pandemic is treating the affluent differently, empowering them to leave corporate life early. Others who lost jobs had to delay retirement, or grew discouraged and retired before they were ready.

Early retirements, whether desired or forced, will deprive the labour market of some of its most productive workers and have an impact on the economic recovery that is still too early to evaluate. Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell this week cited a "significant number" of people saying they've retired as one reason companies are reporting labour shortages, although it's unclear if they'll eventually rejoin the job market.

In the Minneapolis area, Craig DiLorenzo, 58, is among those who chose to bow out, after a career at industrial



giant 3M Com-pany. Frustrated over 6 a.m. teleconferences, his thoughts turned to spending

more time pursuing his other passions, including volunteering with the Salvation Army. A scare with cancer five years ago made him reconsider his commitment to climbing the corporate ladder, and last year's stuck at home only reinforced those feelings, he said.

"It makes you think, 'Does all this matter as much as you think it does?'" said DiLorenzo, who retired at the end of March.

Financial advisers say they're seeing a new "life-is-short" attitude among clients with enough money socked away to carry them through retirement.

The prospect of going back to the daily grind is going to be "a really tough pill for a lot of people to swallow," said Kenneth Van Leeuwen, founder of financial services firm Van Leeuwen & Co. in Princeton, New Jersey.

One client, an executive whose stock portfolio has performed well, is retiring at 48 as the prospect of having to go back to travelling 10 to 12 nights a month isn't appealing anymore, Van Leeuwen said.

A November study from Pew Research Center found a surge in the number of baby boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, who reported being retired compared to previous years-1.2 million more than the historical annual average.

Other datapoints back up the findings. The number of people expecting to work beyond age 67 fell to a record low of 32.9 per cent last month, according to a New York Federal Reserve survey. And about 2.7 million workers aged 55 and older plan to apply early for Social Security benefits.

— Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

IPL players donate for Covid patients

New Delhi: Rajasthan Royals fast bowler Jaydev Unadkat will donate 10 per cent of his IPL salary to help Covid-19 patients who need essential medical resources as India battles an unprecedented health crisis. "I am contributing 10% of my IPL salary towards providing essential medical resources for those in need. My family will make sure it reaches the right places. Jai Hind!," Unadkat tweeted.

Punjab Kings' West Indian batsman Nicolas Pooran has also decided to donate a part of his IPL salary to India's Covid-19 battle.

Meanwhile, veteran India opener Shikhar Dhawan has donated ₹20 lakh to an NGO for buying oxygen cylinders and concentrators, doing his bit to help the Indian hospitals ravaged by a deadly pandemic. — PTI

Shooter Dadi dies of Coronavirus

New Delhi: Octogenarian shooter Chandro Tomar, who became the oldest woman sharp shooter in the world after taking up the sport in her 60s, died on Friday after battling Covid-19. She was 89 and was being treated at a hospital in Meerut since April 26.

"Mera saath chhoot gaya, Chandro kaha chali gayi (She has left me, Chandro where have you gone?)," her sister-in-law Prakashni Tomar, who is also one of the oldest female sharp shooters, wrote on her Twitter page.

Tomar, who was nicknamed 'Shooter Dadi', was hospitalised after complaining of difficulty in breathing. Tests revealed she had contracted the highly contagious virus that is causing over 3,000 deaths daily in the country. — PTI

Sumo wrestler succumbs to injury

Tokyo: A Japanese sumo wrestler has died a month after falling on his head during a bout in a case that has raised questions about the sport's response to medical emergencies. Hibikiryu, 28, died of acute respiratory failure on Wednesday, the Japan Sumo Association said.

The wrestler, whose real name was Mitsuki Amano, was thrown by his opponent during a bout at a tournament on March 26. Video of the bout showed he fell hard on his head and lay face down for several minutes while sumo officials watched and waited for paramedics to arrive.

The Japan Sumo Association said Friday that was unknown whether Hibikiryu's death was related to his injury. It said details of the injury could not be released. — AP

Barca loss adds twist to title race

Madrid: Barcelona spurned the chance to go top of the table on Thursday as a shock 2-1 defeat by Granada added another twist to La Liga's most unpredictable title race in years. Barca could have taken control at the top by moving a point ahead of Atletico Madrid but Granada came from behind to snatch a stunning win, in what will be a huge boost to the other title contenders.

Lionel Messi scored his 33rd goal of the season to put Barcelona in front but they failed to put the result beyond doubt and Granada hit back, Darwin Machis driving in and Jorge Molina's header completing a remarkable turnaround. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

IPL: Mumbai Indians vs Chennai Super Kings from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FORMULA ONE

Portuguese Grand Prix: Practice 3 from 4.25 pm, Qualifying from 7.25 pm on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Crystal Palace vs Manchester City from 5 pm; Brighton vs Leeds United from 7.30 pm; Chelsea vs Fulham from 10 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

Italian League: Crotone vs Inter Milan from 9.30 pm; AC Milan vs Benevento from 12.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. And Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C - 9, Sector - III, Noida - 201301. Editor - T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep.Rs. 20.00 per copy.

Punjab purr Brrrrar!

Newbie Brar gets big three as Kings crush Kohli and Co.

Ahmedabad, April 30: Skipper K. L. Rahul scored a combative 91 while Harpreet Brar accounted for three key batsmen as Punjab Kings thumped Royal Challengers Bangalore by 34 runs in an IPL match, here on Friday.

Left-arm spinner Brar's 3 for 19 — which included the wickets of Virat Kohli, Glenn Maxwell and AB de Villiers — meant RCB were restricted to 145 for 8 while chasing Punjab's 179 for 5.

Put into bat, Punjab were in a spot of bother at one stage but Rahul's perseverance, power-hitting of Chris Gayle (46) and energy of Brar (25) ensured they had a competitive total on board.

Rahul and Gayle shared a 80-run stand but Punjab's middle order collapsed as Brar, batting at number seven, was the only other batsman to manage a double-digit score.

Rahul and Brar then added 61 runs for the unbeaten eighth wicket to rescue the side after the RCB bowlers had seized the initiative following Gayle's dismissal in the 11th over.

Rahul hit seven fours and five sixes in his 57-ball knock, while Brar took 17 balls for his 25 that had two sixes and a four.

Brar (3/19) then returned with ball in his hand to dismiss key rival batsmen — Virat Kohli (35), Glenn Maxwell (0) and AB de Villiers (3) — as RCB managed 145 for eight.

The win took Punjab (6) to fifth place behind Mumbai Indians (6) in the points table from the sixth place, while RCB (10) remained at number three.

The fiery spells from Riley Meredith (1/29) and Mohammed Shami (1/28) meant that RCB were off to a sedate start as they could score only 36 runs from the Powerplay overs.

The 24-year-old Australian pacer consistently tested the RCB openers and eventually uprooted the stumps of Devdutt Padikkal (7) after being hit for a six on a mis-timed shot by the left-hander.

Kohli, who was hit on his right elbow by compatriot Shami, and Rajat Patidar kept the scoreboard ticking as shot-making was not easy against the disciplined Punjab bowlers.

At half-way mark, RCB



Punjab Kings' Harpreet Brar celebrates the wicket of Glenn Maxwell of Royal Challengers Bangalore in an IPL match in Ahmedabad on Friday. — IPL

SCORECARD

Punjab Kings: K. L. Rahul not out 91, Prabhsimran Singh c Kohli b Jamieson 7, Chris Gayle c de Villiers b Daniel Sams 46, Nicholas Pooran c Shahbaz Ahmed b Jamieson 0, Deepak Hooda c Rajat Patidar b Shahbaz Ahmed 5, Shahrukh Khan b Chahal 0, Harpreet Brar not out 25. Extras (lb-1, w-4) 5. **Total (for 5 wkts, in 20 overs) 179.**

FoW: 19-1, 99-2, 107-3, 117-4, 118-5.

Bowler: Daniel Sams 4-0-24-1, Mohammed Siraj 3-0-24-0, Kyle Jamieson 3-0-32-2, Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-34-1, Harshal Patel 4-0-53-0, Shahbaz Ahmed 2-0-11-1.

Royal Challengers Bangalore: Virat Kohli b Harpreet 35, Devadatta Padikkal b Meredith 7, Rajat Patidar c Pooran b Jordan 31, Glen Maxwell b Harpreet 0, AB de Villiers c KL Rahul b Harpreet 3, Shahbaz Ahmed c Harpreet b Bishnoi 8, Daniel Sams b Bishnoi 3, Kyle Jameson not out 15, Harshal Patel c Ravi Bishnoi b Shami 31, Mohammad Siraj not out 0. Extras (lb 8, w 3) 11. **Total (for 8 wkts, in 20 overs) 145.**

FoW: 1-19, 2-62, 3-62, 4-69, 5-91, 6-96, 7-96, 8-144.

Bowling: Riley Meredith 3.2-0-29-1, Mohammad Shami 3.4-0-28-1, Ravi Bishnoi 4-0-17-2, Harpreet Brar 4-1-19-3, Chris Jordan 4-0-31-1, Deepak Hooda 1-0-13-0.

Ashwin's wife says ten +ve in family

New Delhi, April 30: India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin's wife Prithi Narayanan on Friday said her family has been through a "nightmare of a week" after as many as 10 members of the house tested positive for Covid-19.

Star spinner Ashwin on Sunday decided to take a break from the ongoing IPL to support his family during the pandemic.

Days after her husband's pullout from the lucrative league, Prithi, in a series of tweets, shared the ordeal her family has faced after contracting the highly contagious virus.

"Feeling ok enough to croak a tiny hi to all of you. 6 adults and 4 children ended up testing- the same week, with our kids being the vehicles of transmission — the core of my family, all down with the virus in different homes/hospitals. Nightmare of a week. 1 of 3 parents back home," she tweeted.

"Take the vaccine. Give yourselves and your family the best chance to fight this.

"I guess physical health will recover faster than mental health. Days 5-8 were the absolute worst for me. Everybody was there, offering help yet there's no one with you. Most isolating disease. Please do reach out and seek help.

"The headaches this

virus causes need their own twitter thread."

The 34-year-old Ashwin is contracted with the Delhi Capitals this season and hopes to return to the side "if things go in the right direction".

Ashwin became the first Indian to pull out of the league because of Covid-19 situation in the family.

"I would be taking a break from this year's IPL from tomorrow. My family and extended family are putting up a fight against #COVID19 and I want to support them during these tough times," Ashwin had posted on his Twitter page after DC's game against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday night.

His franchise promised a full support to him.

India is recording over 3.50 lakh cases everyday for the past few days and the health infrastructure is struggling to handle the rise with shortage of oxy-

gen. — PTI

● **Days after her husband's pullout from the lucrative league, Prithi, in a series of tweets, shared the ordeal her family has faced after contracting the highly contagious virus.**

Man Utd hit Roma for a six

Manchester, April 30: Bruno Fernandes and Edinson Cavani each scored twice as Manchester United thrashed an injury-hit Roma 6-2 at Old Trafford to close in on the Europa League final.

United are aiming to get to a final under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer at the fifth time of asking after four semi-final defeats in the past two seasons.

But only a second leg collapse will prevent them from facing Villarreal or Arsenal in Gdansk on May 26 after a stunning second-half performance.

The home side trailed at the break as Lorenzo Pellegrini's penalty and Edin Dzeko's tap-in cancelled out Fernandes's early opener.

But the Italians lost three players to injury before the break and United took full advantage.

Two predatory finishes from Cavani turned the tie around before Fernandes also fired home from the spot.

Paul Pogba and Mason Greenwood rounded off the scoring as United became the first team to score six goals in a European semi-final since Real Madrid in 1964.

With United realistically out of the Premier League title race, but also almost certain to secure a top-four finish, Solskjaer named his strongest



Manchester United's Edinson Cavani (left) shoots past Roma goalkeeper Antonio Mirante to score in the Europa League semifinal first leg match at Old Trafford in Manchester on Thursday. — AFP

VILLARREAL SPARE 10-MAN ARSENAL

Unai Emery won his big reunion with Arsenal but 2-1 might prove a small reward for Villarreal, who failed to take advantage of Dani Ceballos being sent off in a frantic semi-final first leg.

Manu Trigueros and Raul Albiol gave

available side as he aims to end a four-year trophy drought for the United.

Villarreal a dream start and the tie looked to be slipping away from Arsenal when Ceballos was shown a second yellow card early in the second half.

But 10-man Arsenal rallied and grabbed an away goal when Nicolas Pepe converted a penalty in the 73rd minute, before Villarreal's Etienne Capoue also saw red with 10 minutes left to play. — AFP

THE RESULTS

Manchester United 6 (Fernandes 9, 71-pen, Cavani 48, 64, Pogba 75, Greenwood 86)	6
Roma 2 (Pellegrini 15-pen, Dzeko 34)	2
Villarreal 2 (Trigueros 5, Albiol 29)	2
Arsenal 1 (Pepe 73-pen)	1

Olympics could be held without fans

Tokyo, April 30: This summer's virus-postponed Olympics could be held behind closed doors, Tokyo 2020 president Seiko Hashimoto said on Friday, pledging to ensure the Games will be safe.

Former Olympian Hashimoto said the Games could only be a success if organisers "completely protect" athletes and people in Japan, and that she is hopeful people will "be glad" the event went ahead.

Overseas spectators have already been barred from the Games, and this

week a decision on domestic fans was delayed until June, with organisers citing a new wave of infections in Japan.

"There might be a situation where we can't allow any spectators to attend," Hashimoto conceded in an interview.

"The only way that we can call the Games a success is if we completely protect the lives and health of athletes and the people of Japan," Hashimoto said.

Most people in Japan back either a further delay of the Games or an

● **Overseas spectators have already been barred from the Games, and this week a decision on domestic fans was delayed until June, with organisers citing a new wave of infections in Japan.**

outright cancellation, and a recent surge in virus cases has prompted a state of emergency in Tokyo and other parts of the country.

With the medical system already under pressure, Olympic organisers have been criticised for requesting volunteer medical staff for the Games.

Hashimoto said cutting spectators could ease pressure on the medical system.

'BIG RESPONSIBILITY'

The Games have never been cancelled outside of wartime and organisers have made it clear that they see no possibility of either further delay or a

cancellation. In a bid to win public confidence, they have released rule-books mandating daily testing for athletes and limiting their movement.

But there will be no quarantine required for athletes, and vaccines will not be mandatory.

Hashimoto said the rules would continue to be refined, and she felt "a big responsibility to show the Games can be held safely".

"I want to show that clearly as we work towards the Games," she said. — AFP

WBC INDIA CHAMPIONSHIP POSTPONED DUE TO VIRUS

New Delhi, April 30: The World Boxing Council (WBC) India Championship, which was scheduled to take place in Jalandhar on Saturday, has been postponed indefinitely due to the increase in Covid-19 infections in the country.

The first-ever WBC India Championship fight, between women boxers Chandni Mehra and Suman Kumari, was initially scheduled to take place on May 1 at the Great Khali Academy in Jalandhar.

"The event was part of the India Unleashed-Fight Night — the country's first ever Professional USA boxing event, sanctioned by Indian Boxing Council (IBC).

"Unfortunately, due to the growing number of Covid-19 cases across India and guidelines issued by the Indian Government, we have decided to postpone the first-ever WBC India Championship event to a later date," Parm Goraya, CEO of LZ Promotions, which is conducting the event, announced on Friday. — PTI