

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 11 APRIL 2021



## NATION | 4

**Narendra Singh Tomar urges farmers to end stir as corona cases rise**



## WORLD | 6

**China fines Jack Ma's Alibaba record \$2.8 billion after monopoly probe**

## TABLOID | 16

**Makers of movie *Goodbye* starring Rashmika Mandana have hired Chandivali studio**



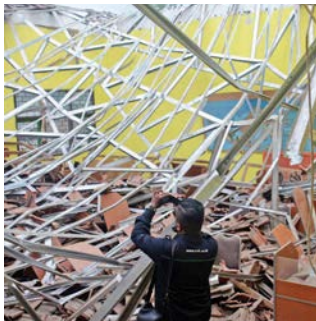
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### WINDOWS

**Indonesia quake leaves 8 dead**



A local journalist films the damage to a class room at a school following an earthquake in Malang, East Java, Indonesia, on Saturday. A 6 magnitude quake killed eight people, injured 23 others and damaged more than 300 buildings. — AP

### Low-key funeral for Prince Philip to be held April 17

**London:** Prince Philip, the late husband to the UK's Queen Elizabeth II, will be laid to rest on Saturday next week, in a ceremony that will be colorful and steeped in tradition, but low key by royal standards. Philip, who was officially the Duke of Edinburgh, died peacefully at Windsor Castle on Friday morning at the age of 99. He was the nation's longest-serving consort — a term given to the spouse of a reigning monarch — and they had been married for 73 years.

### Odisha to free zoo pangolins into forest

**Bhubaneswar:** The Odisha government has decided to set some pangolins from Nandankanan Zoological Park free in jungles with tracking devices embedded in them to study their behaviour. The exercise is aimed at finding ways for breeding of the animal. ■ **More on Page 4**

### 24-year-old stabs stepmom to death

**New Delhi:** A 24-year-old man allegedly stabbed his stepmother to death here after she refused to give him money on Saturday, police said. Shakeela was found dead inside her house in Rohini's Sector-26 area and Mohd Mustafa has been apprehended, they said.

### COUNTERPOINT



**It is risky to send children to school!**

### WEATHER

**Max:** 38°C  
**Min:** 22°C  
**RH:** 14%  
**Rain:** 0%

**Forecast:** Sunny

### ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Phalguna Bahula  
**Amavasya** all day  
**Star:** Uttarabhadra till 8.57 am  
**Variyam:** 4.48 pm to 5.38 pm  
**Durmuhurtam:** 4.48 pm to 5.38 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 4.30 pm to 6 pm

**SUNSET TODAY 6.44 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.59 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 6.14 PM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 6.09 AM**

## WB: 4 dead in CISF firing, EC says 'self-defence'

*Recourse to open fire by CISF personnel became absolutely necessary in order to save lives of voters: EC*

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI**  
KOLKATA, APRIL 10

The fourth phase of Assembly elections in West Bengal witnessed unprecedented bloodbath on Saturday when the Central paramilitary forces gunned down four Trinamul Congress workers during an attack on a polling booth while ruling party workers allegedly shot dead a first-time voter outside a booth during a clash. Both incidents took place in Cooch Behar of North Bengal, the BJP's stronghold.

The Election Commission said that the CISF had to fire in order to save lives of voters who came to vote, put in place certain restrictions, including extending the "silence period" from 48 hours to 72 hours for the fifth phase of polling West Bengal. It also barred the entry of politicians in Cooch Behar district for the next 72 hours to prevent any possible law and order flare-up.

The shocking incident took place at around 10.30 am when a group of TMC workers stormed a polling booth (No. 126) at Amtali Madhyamik Shiksha Kendra in Shitalkuchi Assembly constituency. Facing their attack, Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) troopers, who were guarding the booth, fired on the mob and shot dead four persons — Hamidul Haque, Monirul Haque, Samiul Mian and Amjad Hossain — while injuring three others.

According to the CISF, the mob of around 150 first manhandled the polling staff at the booth. Sources said they were not "armed", but some were

carrying bamboo sticks.

"The CISF booth commander tried to pacify the miscreants but the mob entered the polling booth and beat up the other polling staff on duty. Few miscreants tried to snatch the weapons of CISF personnel deployed there. As a result, CISF personnel fired two rounds in the air but the mob did not pay any heed to the warning. In the meantime, a quick response team of the CISF and police also reached the spot. The mob further started advancing aggressively towards CISF personnel. Therefore, sensing imminent danger to their life, they fired seven more rounds towards the advancing mob of miscreants. While the above incident was going on, more police parties also arrived at the booth. It is reported that in self-defence they have also fired a few rounds," the CISF said.

Polling was stopped immediately by the EC.

The CISF's justification of "self-defence" was supported by the district police and administration in its preliminary report to the EC which, issuing the CISF a clean chit later, said, "Recourse to open fire by CISF personnel became absolutely necessary in order to save lives of voters lined up at the polling booth, those of other polling personnel and their own lives as mob had attempted to snatch their weapons."

The TMC, however, described the shooting as "cold-blooded murder" of its workers in its complaint to Chief Electoral Officer West Bengal Ariz Aftab. Spewing venom against the Central forces

■ **Turn to Page 4**



A security person helps a senior citizen to cast her vote during the 4th phase of West Bengal Assembly polls in Howrah district on Saturday. — PTI

### ■ Modi warns Mamata, says TMC hooliganism will not be allowed

## Shah responsible for WB violence: Didi

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI**  
KOLKATA, APRIL 10

Enraged by the killing of four Trinamul Congress workers by Central paramilitary forces in Cooch Behar during the fourth phase of Assembly election in West Bengal on Saturday, chief minister Mamata Banerjee accused Union home minister Amit Shah of being a "conspirator" of the shooting and demanded his resignation.

Erupting in fury, Ms Banerjee told a TMC rally in North 24 Parganas, "A dangerous incident has left me in pain. The Central forces gunned

**The Central forces gunned down four persons at Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar... Central forces are not my enemy. But the way it killed four voters standing in the queue only proved the Union home minister's conspiracy that has been on. Mr Shah, you must resign as you are the conspirator.**

— **Mamata Banerjee**

**Didi and her goons have been panicked to see the support of the people for the BJP. Seeing herself losing the chair, Didi has stooped to such a low level! But I want to make it clear to the TMC, Didi and her goons that their muscle-flexing will not be allowed in Bengal.**

— **Narendra Modi**

down four persons at Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar. Another death also hap-

pened in the morning. From the very first day I have been vocal. Central

## Delhi bans political, sports gatherings

*Full lockdown in Maha soon as India records 1.45L cases of Covid-19*

**AGE CORRESPONDENTS with agency inputs**  
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, APRIL 10

In view of rising Covid-19 cases, Delhi government Saturday announced a slew of curbs on social, political, sports, entertainment, academic, cultural, religious activities, while Maharashtra seemed all set for a harsher and longer lockdown, the date and time for which is yet to be finalised.

An order issued by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) prohibited all types of gatherings, reduced the size of weddings and funerals, cut seating in public transport and restaurants to half and scaled down presence in



Mumbai roads wear deserted looks as weekend lockdown (8 pm on Friday till 7 am on Monday) comes into effect. — **RAJESH JADHAV**

government offices. It, however, allowed students of class IX-XII to be called to schools for guidance by teachers. Except this, all Delhi government and private schools will remain

closed till April 30, the order said.

Funerals will be allowed to be attended by 20 persons only while gatherings for marriages will have an upper limit of 50 persons.

Restaurants and bars are allowed up to 50 per cent of their seating capacity, stated the order.

The Delhi Metro will run at 50 per cent of coach capacity. The DTC and Cluster buses too will run at half their capacity, stipulated the order.

A negative RT-PCR report, not older than 72 hours prior to undertaking a journey, will be compulsory for persons arriving from Maharashtra to Delhi by air. Those found without a negative report will have to remain quarantined for 14 days, the order said.

Delhi on Saturday had 7,897 new Covid-19 cases and 39 deaths. The city's positivity rate is over 10 per cent. In order to meet

■ **Turn to Page 4**

## Tripura: Newly-formed TIPRA beats BJP, sweeps council polls

**Agartala, April 10:** The newly-formed TIPRA, led by former state Congress president Pradyot Kishore Deb Barman, swept the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) elections on Saturday, winning 18 of the 28 seats that went to the polls, official sources said.

The Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance (TIPRA) secured 18 seats, the BJP won nine seats and one seat was bagged by an Independent candidate, they said.

In the 30-member tribal council, elections were held in 28 seats on Tuesday. Representatives in the remaining two seats



Pradyot Kishore Deb Barman

will be nominated by the governor on the advice of the state government.

The TTAADC area is two-third of the state territory, and is the home to the tribals, who constitute one-third of Tripura's population.

Mr Deb Barman urged his supporters to maintain

peace as celebrations broke out with the newly-formed party getting an absolute majority in the elections.

"We have to maintain unity. I appeal to the people to refrain from attacking the party office and houses of the supporters of IPFT, BJP, CPI(M) and Congress. They too are our people and we do not want to fight among ourselves. If we want unity then we have to maintain peace. They too will join our party after the elections," he said.

A victory rally will be organised on Monday at the tribal council headquarters in Khumlung, ■ **Turn to Page 4**

## Defiant Iran tests advanced N-centrifuges

**Tehran, April 10:** Iran said on Saturday that it has begun mechanical tests on its newest advanced nuclear centrifuge, even as the five world powers that remain in a foundering 2015 nuclear deal with Iran attempt to bring the US back into the agreement.

Iran's IR-9 centrifuge, when operational, would have the ability to separate uranium isotopes more quickly than the current centrifuges being used, thereby enriching uranium at a faster pace. The announcement carried on state TV came on Iran's 15th annual "Nuclear Day."

The IR-9's output is 50 times quicker than the first Iranian centrifuge, the IR-1. The country also announced it had



President Hassan Rouhani (second right) listens to head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Ali Akbar Salehi while visiting an exhibition of Iran's new nuclear achievements in Tehran on Saturday. — AP

launched a chain of 164 IR-6 centrifuges on Saturday, and is also developing IR-8 centrifuges.

Since January, Iran has begun enriching uranium at up to 20% purity, a tech-

nical step away from weapons-grade levels, though Iran's leadership insists the country has no desire to develop a nuclear weapon.

Former US President

Donald Trump pulled the US out of the nuclear accord in 2018, accusing Iran of failing to live up to the agreement, opting for what he called a maximum-pressure campaign of stepped-up US sanctions and other tough actions.

Iran responded by intensifying its enrichment of uranium and building centrifuges in plain violation of the accord, while insisting that its nuclear development is for civilian not military purposes.

Israel maintains Iran still maintains the ambition of developing nuclear weapons, pointing to Tehran's ballistic missile program and research into other technologies.

Iran denies it is pursuing nuclear weapons, and says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes. — AP

### HOSTAGE DRAMA

**Did a 'swap deal' facilitate jawan's release from Maoists?**

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY**  
RAIPUR, APRIL 10

Did a "swap deal" between Chhattisgarh police and Maoists secure the release of CoBRA commando Rakeshwar Singh Manhas from Naxal custody?

A "mystery man" who accompanied the team of emissaries to the jan adalat (kangaroo court) set up by the Maoists in the forested hamlet of Tumla to take custody of the commando on April 8 is now at the centre of a raging debate over whether the jawan's release was indeed unconditional, as claimed by the Chhattisgarh police.

A "local villager" was seen in the company of the team of emissaries who included four "official interlocutors" and seven local scribes that visited Tumla on the fateful day to hold talks with Maoists to secure the release of Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, the jawan of 210 CoBRA battalion.

"A man, identified as Kunjam Sukha, was accompanying the journalists who were travelling with us (four 'official emissaries'). We dropped him in Tumla where Maoists were conducting the 'jan adalat'", Talem Boraiya, one of the four "official interlocutors" told this newspaper on phone from Awapalli in south Bastar district of Bijapur on Saturday.

Mr Boraiya, a local Gond tribe leader, however said he has no knowledge about the purpose behind the tribal being

■ **Turn to Page 4**

### Shikhar-Shaw help Delhi beat Chennai



Shikhar Dhawan of Delhi Capitals plays a shot during Match 2 of the Indian Premier League 2021 between Chennai Super Kings and the Delhi Capitals, at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, on Saturday. Prithvi Shaw and Shikhar Dhawan scored half-centuries to help their team defeat Chennai by 7 wickets. — PTI

■ **Report on Page 7**



## SHORT TAKES

## Delhi riots: Bail to 2 men in murder, conspiracy case

**New Delhi:** The Delhi High Court has granted bail to two persons, facing prosecution in a case of murder and criminal conspiracy relating to last year's northeast Delhi riots. Justice Suresh Kumar Kait noted that the accused Pradeep Rai and Aman Kashyap are in judicial custody and the trial shall take substantial time. However, without commenting on the merit of the case, the court said it was of the opinion that the two men deserve bail. The high court directed that the two accused be released on bail on furnishing a personal bond of ₹20,000 each with one surety of like amount. It directed them not to directly or indirectly influence any prosecution witnesses. The two men are accused in an FIR lodged at Dayalpur police station in northeast Delhi for offences of murder, rioting and criminal conspiracy under the IPC. The counsel of the accused submitted that one of the eyewitnesses in the case is an eyewitness in multiple FIRs lodged at Dayalpur police station relating to the riots incident that took place on February 25, last year. He said the incidents took place in Gali no. 10 and 3 and there is a distance of around 500-700 metres between them and therefore, he seemed to be a planted witness. The high court had directed the prosecution to verify as to how the concerned witness had witnessed the incidents which took place in different lanes. — PTI

## Ban on 8 e-waste generating units

**New Delhi:** The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has sealed eight illegal e-waste generating units in the national capital, an official statement said on Saturday. Most of the units were operating in Seelampur, Mustafabad, Dilshad Garden, Shastri Park, and Bhagirathi Park among other areas, the DPCC said. "Eight units were sealed on Wednesday in a joint inspection carried out by a team of the DPCC, East Delhi Municipal Corporation, and SDM, Seelampur," read the statement. DPCC, which has started a drive against illegal e-waste generating units, said such units would be shut without any reference, and a heavy penalty will be imposed for causing environmental damages. More such drives would be undertaken in the identified areas, it warned. — PTI

## Labourer dies after fall from bridge

**New Delhi:** A 40-year-old labourer died after he fell from an under-construction bridge near Jasola in south-east Delhi's Sarita Vihar area, police said on Saturday. The deceased was identified as Panne Lal. He was a resident of Sanjay Camp in Okhla, they said. On Friday night, police received information that a man had fallen from the bridge near Jasola, police said. The man was taken to Apollo Hospital by police and he died on Saturday morning during the course of treatment, a senior police officer said. "During inquiry, negligent conduct by the contractor of the bridge was found. He did not cover the stairs of the bridge with fencing or barricade and neither did he deploy any guard there for the safety of people," the officer said. Police said that a case has been registered against the contractor and an investigation is underway. — PTI

## Mercury rises to 37.2° C in Delhi

**New Delhi:** Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 37.2 degrees Celsius, a notch above the normal, on Saturday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The minimum temperature was recorded at 17.1, three notches below the normal, it said. On Sunday, the national capital is expected to have a "mainly clear sky" with the minimum and maximum temperature hovering around 17 and 38 degrees Celsius, respectively. Delhi's air quality was recorded in the 'moderate' category. The air quality index (AQI) was 181 at 4 pm, according to the real-time data of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). — PTI

# Delhi government issues new Covid guidelines, stricter curbs

## Ban on political, sports gatherings; Metro, buses to operate at 50%

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

Prohibition of all types of gatherings, reduced size of weddings and funerals, running of public transport at half seating capacity and scaled down presence in government offices were some of the restrictions imposed by the Delhi government on Saturday amid a surge in Covid-19 cases here.

An order issued by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), however, allowed students of class IX-XII to be called to schools for guidance by teachers. Except this, all Delhi government and private schools will remain closed till April 30, it said.

The Directorate of Education (DoE) said that the order issued by it on Friday suspending all academic and examination activities "stands".

A negative RT-PCR report, not older than 72 hours prior to undertaking a journey, will be compulsory for persons arriving from Maharashtra to Delhi by air. Those found without a negative report will have to remain quarantine for 14 days, the order said.

The Covid-19 situation in Delhi has been assessed and it has been observed that there has been a persistent rise in cases during the recent past and therefore, it has become necessary to take certain emergency measures to prevent and contain the spread of the virus in the interest of public health, it stated.

The prohibited activities specified in the order came into force with immediate effect and will continue till April 30 or till further orders.

All schools, colleges, educational, training, coaching institutions will remain closed, the order stated. However, students of classes IX to XII may be called to school only for academic guidance and support for exams, practicals, internal assessment and project works. This will be done with the consent of parents and by following the prescribed standard operating procedure issued by the Directorate of Education, it said.

All social, political, sports, entertainment, academic, cultural or religious, festival related and other gatherings and congregations will be prohibited, the order said.

It said all swimming pools, except those being used for training of sport persons for participation in national and international events, will be closed.

Funerals will be allowed to be attended by 20 persons only while gatherings for marriages will have an upper limit of 50 persons.

Previously, up to 200 and 100 persons were allowed in open and closed venues, respectively, for wedding ceremonies. Up to 50 persons were allowed at funeral gatherings.

Restaurants and bars are allowed up to 50 per cent of their seating capacity, stated the order.

The Delhi Metro will run at 50 per cent of coach capacity. The DTC and Cluster buses too will run at half their capacity, stipulated the order.

Currently, public buses are allowed to run with full seating capacity although passengers beyond number of seats are not allowed. In metro trains passengers can sit on alternate seats only.

Stadiums can organise sports events but spectators will not be allowed. Cinemas, theaters, multiplexes will be permitted to open with up to 50 per cent of their seating capacity, the order said.



A health worker collects a nasal sample for Covid-19 test in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

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## 5 held for kidnapping 'maulana' in Delhi

**New Delhi, April 10:** Five men were arrested for allegedly kidnapping a 'maulana' of a madrasa in southeast Delhi's Shaheen Bagh and demanding a ransom of Rs 25 lakh for his release, police said on Saturday.

The victim, Mohd Munzir Alam, was later rescued, they said.

According to a complaint filed by the victim's brother, he received a call from Alam's phone and the caller demanded Rs 25 lakh for his release.

One of the main accused, Sadaqat (23), was a former student of the victim and had been depositing money with him since the last five years to open a shop. He had deposited Rs 20 lakh and when he asked Alam for his money, the victim allegedly refused to return the amount, police said.

## Man stabs stepmother to death in Delhi's Rohini

**New Delhi, April 10:** A 24-year-old man allegedly stabbed his stepmother to death here after she refused to give him money on Saturday, police said.

Shakeela was found dead inside her house in Rohini's Sector-26 area and Mohd Mustafa has been apprehended, they said.

The woman has five stepchildren. Two of them lived with her in Rohini, while the others stayed with their father Mohd Murtaza, who owns

Sadaqat planned to kidnap Alam. So, he roped in his brother Manzar Alam (18) and friends — Shamim (26), Nabi Hasan (23), Firdos (22) — for the crime. According to the plan, he rented a house in Shaheen Bagh with his associates and asked Alam to visit the house to perform certain rituals. On April 5, when the victim came to the house, Sadaqat confined him with iron chains, according to police.

Our team got a tip-off that Sadaqat was hiding at his mother-in-law's house in Noida. A raid was conducted and the suspect was apprehended. Further, on his instance, a raid was conducted in Delhi's Abul Fazal area from where Alam was rescued, said Shibesh Singh, Additional Commissioner of Police (Crime). — PTI

a puncture repair shop, in Bahadurgarh, police said. Murtaza's second wife is in Bihar, they said.

On Saturday morning, both of them had a fight after she refused to give him some money, he said.

During the fight, Mustafa allegedly picked up a weapon and stabbed her, police said, adding that he is being questioned.

Police said a case of murder has been registered and further investigation is underway. — PTI

## PM should discuss development schemes with Kejriwal: Sisodia

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is the only leader with a vision for development, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi should discuss with him schemes to improve the lives of common people, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said on Saturday.

Addressing a press conference here, Sisodia claimed that all political parties were promising to follow the "Kejriwal model" of governance in states where elections are being held.

"Kejriwal is the only leader who has a vision for the country. He understands the problems faced by common people



Delhi deputy CM and AAP leader Manish Sisodia at a press conference in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

and their needs and the way for development. He has the capability of taking the country in the right direction. Other parties are following his policies. What he promises, he does,"

Sisodia said.

"I hope the prime minister will take opinions from Kejriwal. Every 15 days, Arvind Kejriwal should be called for 'chai' (tea) to discuss what model can be followed for the country's development and which schemes can be implemented for the betterment of the people," he added.

The deputy chief minister claimed that Delhi has become a laboratory for developing various policies of development.

"Whether it is giving 200 units free electricity or free bus rides for women, all political parties are promising these schemes in other states where elections are being held," he added.

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

Delhi recorded 7,897 fresh cases of Covid-19 on Saturday while 39 more people died due to the infection, taking the death toll to 11,235, according to the city health department.

The positivity rate also mounted to 10.21 per cent, breaching the 10 per cent mark for the first time this year.

A total of 77,374 tests, including 43,473 RT-PCR tests and 33,901 rapid antigen tests, were conducted a day ago on Friday, according to the latest health bulletin. The number of cumulative cases on Saturday stood at 7,14,423. The number of active cases rose to 28,773 from 26,631 a day before. The number of people under home isolation increased to 15,266 from 13,188 on Friday while the number of containment zones mounted to 5,236 on Saturday from 4,768 a day before, the bulletin said.

Amid escalating cases of Covid-19 in Delhi, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday said lockdown is "not an option" but some restrictions will be put in place in the national capital which is reeling under the fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

The chief minister said this during an interaction with reporters after visiting the LNJP Hospital — the mainstay of Delhi's fight against Covid-19 — to review its preparedness. "Lockdown is not an



People at a government healthcare centre in New Delhi during a nationwide inoculation drive against the coronavirus on Saturday. — PTI

option. However, we will be putting some restrictions in place to contain the spread of the virus. We will release the restrictions in the coming few days. Covid centres are being rebuilt and some have already started functioning," he was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the chief minister's office.

Mr Kejriwal said the administration and hospitals are working to contain the fourth wave of the pandemic in the city. "We are currently in a comfortable position with reference to beds and ventilators. We will, to the best of our abilities, ensure that the people of Delhi stay safe. At present 1,500 beds out of 2,000 are reserved for Covid-19 patients and the number might be increased according to the requirement in the future," he added.

Coronavirus cases in Delhi have mounted at a very rapid rate in the last

few days and the number of deaths too has risen. "The last few days have seen a rise in the number of corona cases in the entire country, including Delhi. We need to simultaneously spearhead an aggressive vaccination campaign and also put in place measures that can effectively contain the spread of the virus along with making the hospital management equally effective," Mr Kejriwal said. This is the fourth wave of Covid-19 in Delhi. The last wave was in November after which the new cases had become so few in Delhi that "the health system and agencies began to lax," he was quoted as saying in the statement.

"It is imperative that they gain their momentum again and begin to function in the same efficient manner that they did, which helped contain the spread of the virus," the chief minister said.

## FCI wheat procurement row: BJP MLAs sit on dharna outside Kejriwal's residence

**New Delhi, April 10:** Delhi BJP MLAs staged a dharna outside Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence here on Saturday after they failed to meet him to discuss procurement of wheat from farmers in the national capital.

Leader of Opposition in Delhi assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri claimed that the farmers in Delhi are "unhappy" with "bad" farm policies of the Arvind Kejriwal government.

The protesters alleged that the "failure" of the Delhi government to verify the documents of farmers had forced them to sell their produce at Rs 1,600 per quintal, which was below the minimum support price (MSP) offered by the Centre.



BJP MLAs and farmers stage protest at CM Arvind Kejriwal's residence in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

"Kejriwal had claimed that his government had implemented the Swaminathan Committee report in the city and the

## Engg graduate held for kidnapping 7-month-old boy

**New Delhi, April 10:** An engineering graduate was arrested for allegedly kidnapping his landlord's seven-month-old child for a ransom of ₹40 lakh in outer Delhi's Rahnola area so that he could move in with his girlfriend, police said on Saturday.

The accused has been identified as Priyanshu Kumar (24), they said.

The infant was later rescued and reunited with his parents, police said.

According to police, Kumar went to his landlord's house on Friday and told them that he wanted to play with the child. Since the child was sleeping, his mother told Kumar to come later, but he insisted to stay back.

When the infant's mother went out of the room to collect his clothes, the accused left the house with the baby. She immediately informed her husband about the incident.

"The child's father later got a call from Kumar, asking him to pay Rs 40 lakh if he wanted his child back," a senior police officer said.

A case was registered and multiple teams were formed to trace the accused, said Parvinder Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer).

During investigation, the escape route of the accused from his house was tracked and it was found that he had taken the child towards Uttam Nagar terminal on foot covering a distance of about four kilometres. From there, he booked a tax using app-based service and landed in Ghaziabad, he said.

The police team decided to keep the accused engaged by luring him with token ransom amounts and keep him involved through chats and calls, the DCP said.

The police team finally planned to intercept the accused at Lajwanti Chowk. After more than four hours of chase, the team was able to intercept the car and the kidnapped child was rescued from Pankha Road towards Uttam Nagar Terminal. The accused, however, managed to run away, leaving the taxi behind, Singh said.

The accused was later nabbed from Uttam Nagar area.

During interrogation, he disclosed that he was in relationship with a girl from Kanpur and needed money to fulfil her demands. He wanted money to settle down with her. As he did not have a job, he thought of kidnapping the infant, the officer added. — PTI

## Man arrested for cheating with fake online job ads

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

A 48-year-old man was arrested from Kolkata for allegedly duping people by posting fake job advertisements online for work abroad, Delhi police said on Saturday.

The accused, identified as Samir Arvind Parekh, a resident of Guwahati in Assam, confessed to have cheated over 25 persons with the promise of securing jobs abroad, they said.

The police said the accused and his associate contacted victims online and promised to provide them employment abroad. On this assurance, the accused and his associate got the victims to deposit money on the pretext of a registration fee, medical examination and interview.

The matter came to notice after one of the victims approached her with a complaint.

In her complaint, the woman alleged that she runs a home food delivery service from Chattarpur in collaboration with her business partner.

During the first week of March, she saw an advertisement posted online for a chef's job abroad and contacted the person concerned, who offered her \$2,000 salary to work as a chef at a restaurant in USA.

She and her business partner deposited ₹ 36,000 each as registration fee for the same. Later when they tried contacting the same person, the phone number

was found to be switched off. Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said, A case was registered and during the probe, we found that all the contact numbers were taken on fake addresses. Bank statements of the beneficiary accounts were obtained and analysed, which revealed many other victims were also cheated by the fraudster for jobs in USA and Canada.

With the help of technical details, the accused was identified and a police team was sent to Kasba area of Kolkata where Parekh was arrested on April 7 after several raids, he said.

The accused has been involved in various cases of job fraud. He works as a labour contractor and got ideas to cheat people on the pretext of providing them jobs abroad, the DCP said.

Four ATM debit cards, a forged Aadhar card, PAN card and a smartphone were recovered from the accused, police said, adding further investigation is underway.

declared by the central government is Rs 1,975 per quintal and the 50 per cent bonus comes to Rs 987.50 per quintal and this should be paid to the farmers immediately," he said.

The delegation, led by Bidhuri, later presented a memorandum to Kejriwal which stated that the Food Corporation of India (FCI) had started procurement of wheat at Rs 1,975 per quintal in Delhi from April 6.

"This procurement was done based on verified documents of farmers. However, on April 7, the city government stopped verifying the documents and so FCI could not make any further procurement which was unfortunate," Bidhuri claimed.

— PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## EC orders repolling in 4 Assam booths

**Guwahati:** The ECI on Saturday ordered repolling in four polling booths of Assam. Repolling will be held at the polling stations in Ratabari, Sonai and Hafilong constituencies on April 20, the ECI said in a letter addressed to the CEO, Assam. "EC declares void, the votes cast at these polling stations on April 1," it said. All the three constituencies went to polls in the second phase of Assam Assembly elections on April 1. The ECI order said, repolling will be held at Ratabari (SC) constituency's polling station number 149 at Indira M.V. School, after an EVM was found in a car belonging to the wife of a BJP candidate. A magisterial probe was ordered by Karimganj district deputy commissioner and Returning Officer to enquire as to why a polling team in Assam carried a polled EVM in a vehicle owned by the wife of BJP candidate and sitting MLA Krishnendu Paul. — PTI

## GMC polls postponed due to coronavirus

**Ahmedabad:** The Gujarat State Election Commission (SEC) on Saturday decided to postpone the elections to the Gandhinagar Municipal Corporation, scheduled to be held on April 18, due to the rise in Covid cases, an official statement said. The elections are postponed for an indefinite period following a request made by the main political parties including the BJP, the Congress and the AAP, and many social groups, it said. "Taking in view the grave situation caused by the pandemic, to maintain public health and to ensure that voting is done in a free and fair environment, the State Election Commission (SEC) has decided to postpone this election till further orders," the SEC said. As per the earlier programme, the elections were scheduled to be held on April 18 and the counting of votes was to be taken up on April 20. — PTI

## Odisha bypoll: Cong candidate Covid +ve

**Bhubaneswar:** Ajit Mangaraj, the Congress candidate for the upcoming by-election to the Pipili Assembly constituency in Odisha, has tested positive for Covid-19. Confirming the development, Mangaraj on his official Facebook page wrote, "I have been undergoing treatment after got diagnosed with Covid-19." The Congress candidate further appealed not to spread any rumours and work united so that the party performs well in the upcoming by-polls. All the major political parties, including BJP, BJD and the Congress, have intensified campaigning for the crucial Pipili by-poll scheduled to be held on April 17. The by-poll has been necessitated following the demise of BJD MLA Pradeep Maharathy in October last year. He had won the seat by a margin of over 15,787 votes in 2019.

## KERALA RECORDS 74.06% POLLING IN APRIL 6 POLL

**Thiruvananthapuram:** Kerala recorded 74.06 per cent polling in the April 6 elections to the 140 seats in the state Assembly. Of the 2,03,27,893 electors who cast their franchise, 1,04,68,936 are women, 98,58,842 men and 115 others, according to the figures released by the Election commission on Saturday. There are a total of 2.74 crore voters in the state. The election to the 140 assembly seats was "absolutely peaceful, free and fair", chief electoral officer Teeka Ram Meena had said. Out of the 957 candidates, prominent contestants included chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, 11 of his cabinet colleagues, leader of opposition in the assembly, Ramesh Chennithala, senior Congress leader Oommen Chandy, former Union minister, K.J. Alphonse, 'Metroman' E. Sreedharan, BJP state president K. Surendran and a galaxy of nine film and television personalities. The state witnessed a never before fierce battle between the LDF, UDF and the BJP-NDA, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and CPI(M) general secretary, Sitaram Yechury, among others, hitting the campaign trail. — PTI

## BENGAL VOTES

'PM Modi, Mamata equally popular' in Bengal: PK in purported clip released by BJP  
New audio clip, barbs keep poll pot boilingAGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 10

In the electoral battle for West Bengal, leaked audio clips purportedly between chief minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's election strategist Prashant Kishor and some journalists ended up creating a major embarrassment for the ruling party with the BJP claiming that the TMC has conceded that the BJP is winning.

As BJP leaders latched onto the leaked audio clips and tried to pull down the TMC, Mr Kishor dared the BJP to release the full chat on ClubHouse, a social media platform, and reiterated that the saffron party will not get more than 100 Assembly seats in the elections, for which the fourth phase of polling took place on Saturday.

In several excerpts of the conversation that were shared by the BJP's IT cell head and co-incharge of the state, Amit Malviya, Mr Kishor is purportedly heard saying that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "as popular as" Ms Banerjee in the state, that there is anti-incumbency sentiment against the TMC, and that "polarisation is a reality."

He also allegedly said that the Scheduled Caste votes are a factor in the elections and about the BJP's election machinery. Mr Kishor is also heard saying that Dalits and the Matua communities voting for the BJP is a very important factor.

The chat session took

## Not violated model code in attacking CAPF: Didi

**New Delhi, April 10:** Defending her remarks, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee is learnt to have told the EC on Saturday that she has the highest regard for Central armed police forces, but there have been serious allegations of CAPF intimidating voters and influencing the electorate to cast their vote for a particular political party.

Responding to a notice issued by the poll panel on Thursday seeking explanation over her "prima facie completely false, provocative and intemperate statements" against the central armed police forces deputed on election duty in the state, the TMC chief denied the contents

place on ClubHouse late on Friday and the BJP shared the audio on Saturday.

When asked why Mr Modi is popular in West Bengal, Mr Kishor is allegedly heard saying: "There's a cult around Modi across the country. There is a certain percentage of people who see God in Modi. In Bengal, the Hindi-speaking population is the core of Modi's support base. The anti-incumbency is against the state government, not the Centre." "Modi is also popular because Bengal has not yet had a taste of BJP. That's a factor. People think that the BJP will do

of the EC communication. Ms Banerjee also urged the poll watchdog to rescind its notice, contending she has not violated the model code or the various sections of the IPC. She claimed that a girl was allegedly molested by an unidentified CRPF personnel in the early hours of April 6 at Ramnagar, under Tarakeshwar police station and the matter was reported to the police which lodged an FIR. The TMC had complained with the state chief electoral officer. But till date, no tangible action has been taken nor an advisory or instruction issued by EC to the Central forces in this regard, she claimed. — PTI

something that they haven't seen in the past 30 years. There's anger towards the Trinamul Congress, that's also a factor," he added.

Responding to the BJP's claims, Mr Kishor took to Twitter to say that the BJP released only a selective part of it.

"I am glad BJP is taking my chat more seriously than the words of their own leaders! They should show courage & share the full chat instead of getting excited with selective use of parts of it. I have said this before & repeating again, BJP will not CROSS 100 in WB. Period," Mr Kishor tweeted.



A security person keeps vigil as a woman leaves after casting her vote at a polling station during the 4th phase of Assembly elections at Bhargar in South 24 Parganas district on Saturday. — PTI

## Bengal clash: CPM demands inquiry

**New Delhi, April 10:** The CPI(M) has demanded a high-level inquiry into the death of four persons in West Bengal allegedly due to firing by CISF personnel on Saturday. The incident took place in Cooch Behar district's Sitalkuchi area when polling for the fourth phase of West Bengal Assembly election was underway, a senior police officer said. According to police, four persons were killed as CISF personnel allegedly opened fire after coming under attack from locals, who "attempted to snatch their rifles". — PTI

## More forces rushed to Bengal

**New Delhi, April 10:** The Election Commission (EC) Saturday directed the Union home ministry to

deploy 71 additional companies of Central Armed Police forces (CAPFs) in West Bengal for the conduct of the remaining four phases of polls, official sources said.

The order comes in the backdrop of multiple incidents of poll violence in the state, including the one on Saturday in Cooch Behar where police said four people were killed in firing by CISF personnel, who had retaliated after allegedly being attacked.

## EC BANS ENTRY OF POLITICIANS

**New Delhi, April 10:** The EC on Saturday put in place certain restrictions, including extending the "silence period" from 48 hours to 72 hours, for the fifth phase of polling Bengal after violence in Cooch Behar.

It also barred the entry of politicians in Cooch Behar district for the next 72 hours to prevent any possible law and order flare-up.

The decision came after four people were killed in

Senior officials said the ministry of home affairs (MHA) to rush in and

the district as Central forces opened fire allegedly when they were attacked by locals who "attempted to snatch their rifles".

"The EC further directs that the silence period for phase 5 shall be extended to 72 hours and no campaigning shall be permitted during 72 hours before the close of the poll in order to ensure the conduct of free, fair and peaceful elections," an EC order said. — PTI

ministry of home affairs (MHA) to rush in and

deploy the fresh companies "immediately".

Till now, a total of 1,000 companies were earmarked for the conduct of elections in the state that has 294 Assembly seats.

The new companies are drawn from the BSF (33), ITBP (13), CRPF (12), SSB (9) and CISF (4).

A CAPF company has an operational strength of about 85 personnel. West Bengal voted in its fourth phase of polls Saturday as part of the eight-phase polling. The next phase of polls is scheduled on April 17 followed by April 22, 26 and 29. — PTI

## Sources say 'attack on CISF QRT, injury to child'

## What triggered Bengal poll clash?

**New Delhi, April 10:** A CISF quick reaction team allegedly coming under attack during a security patrol and injury to a child in the commotion are stated to have triggered the violence at a polling booth in West Bengal's Cooch Behar district which left four people dead on Saturday, official sources said.

They said it all started around 9:35 am when a CISF team, led by an inspector-rank officer, was inspecting the Jor Patki area of Sitalkuchi constituency jointly with the local police with an aim to "clear the elements which were resisting" the voters from reaching the polling booth no 126 at



People cast their votes at Behala in Kolkata on Saturday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Amtali Madhyamik Shiksha Kendra and other locations nearby.

The security personnel intervened to stop this crowd of about 50-60 people, and in this commo-

tion a child fell down. After this, some "miscreants" attacked the four-wheeler carrying the CISF quick reaction team (QRT) and the personnel on-board, the sources

said. "The QRT reacted in self-defence and fired six rounds in air to disperse the mob. Later, a deputy commandant rank officer and in-charge of the CISF unit (567/Charlie Company) reached the spot and pacified the mob. He later left," a senior officer said. About an hour later, the officials said, a group of about 150 people reached the polling booth no 186 in the vicinity, and "manhandled the polling staff". The crowd allegedly beat up a homeguard jawan and an ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) worker and also tried to snatch the weapon of the on-duty CISF personnel when they intervened, they said. — PTI

## EC frets as star campaigners, leaders don't wear face masks

**New Delhi, April 10:** Amid rising coronavirus cases, the Election Commission on Friday flagged instances of star campaigners and political leaders not wearing masks while campaigning, and asked them to follow in all seriousness the guidelines on Covid-appropriate behaviour issued by it last year.

In a letter to leaders of all recognised political parties, the poll panel said, "It is widely known that in the recent weeks, Covid cases are being reported in larger numbers. However, instances of election meetings/campaigns have come to the notice of the commission, where norms of social distancing, wearing of masks have been flouted in disregard to the commission's guidelines."

▶ **THE LETTER** pointed out instances of star campaigners and political leaders or candidates not observing Covid protocols, "including non-wearing of masks themselves at stage or while campaigning"

The letter pointed out instances of star campaigners and political leaders or candidates not observing Covid-19 protocols, "including non-wearing of masks themselves at stage or while campaigning". "By doing so, the political parties and candidates are exposing themselves as well as the public attending such election meetings to the grave danger of the infection," the letter said.

In cases of breach, the Election Commission

(EC) said it will "not hesitate in banning public meetings, rallies of defaulting candidates, star campaigners or political leaders without any further reference."

On Thursday, the Delhi High Court had sought the commission's and the central government's response on use of masks during poll campaigns.

While three phase polls in Assam and single phase elections in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry are over, five of the eight phases are yet to be held in West Bengal.

The poll panel said it has taken "serious view of the laxity" in following norms, particularly not wearing masks and not maintaining social distancing by political leaders on dais or stage.

— PTI

## Patnaik asks ministers to list their five achievements

**Bhubaneswar, April 10:** Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik on Saturday asked his council of ministers to apprise him of at least five important achievements made by their respective departments.

Mr Patnaik, in a letter to the ministers, said he will review the performance of each department from May 15 to 25, just days before his government completes two years of its current tenure.

A statement issued by the chief minister's Office said that Patnaik sought to know if the departments have been able to fulfil the promises made by the BJD during the 2019 polls.

Each of the 21 ministers will have to share details of "Mo Sarkar" implementation, and how it benefited people at large, the statement said.

Launched in 2019, the BJD's "Mo sarkar" (my government) initiative attempts to bring in professionalism and behavioural change in public offices by seeking direct feedback from citizens.

Contending that people have the "final say" in a democracy, Mr Patnaik said accountability towards them tops the agenda of his party.

"We have to give them an account of the work carried out by our government. We need to show them how far we have succeeded in fulfilling the responsibility they assigned to us," the CM added. — PTI

## SUMMER SPECIAL TRAINS

Northern Railway will run following summer special express trains as per the programme mentioned below:-

04074 New Delhi - Darbhanga Jn. Special Express Train		2 Trip	
STATIONS ↓		Train No. 04074	
		Arr.	Dep.
New Delhi		--	23:15
Kanpur Central		05:25	05:30
Aishbagh		06:50	07:00
Badshahnagar		07:25	07:28
Gorakhpur		11:45	11:55
Deoria Sadar		12:55	12:57
Siwan Jn.		13:58	14:00
Chhapra		15:15	15:25
Sonpur Jn.		16:30	16:35
Hajipur Jn.		16:50	16:55
Muzaffarpur Jn.		17:45	17:50
Samastipur		19:10	19:40
Darbhanga Jn.		21:00	--

Days of Run: 04074 Ex New Delhi from 11.04.2021 (Sunday) & 15.04.2021 (Thursday)

Accommodation: Sleeper, Reserved 2<sup>nd</sup> seating, Chair Car

04076 New Delhi - Darbhanga Jn. Special Express Train		1 Trip	
STATIONS ↓		Train No. 04076	
		Arr.	Dep.
New Delhi		--	23:15
Kanpur Central		05:25	05:30
Aishbagh		06:50	07:00
Badshahnagar		07:25	07:28
Gorakhpur		11:45	11:55
Deoria Sadar		12:55	12:57
Siwan Jn.		13:58	14:00
Chhapra		15:15	15:25
Sonpur Jn.		16:30	16:35
Hajipur Jn.		16:50	16:55
Muzaffarpur Jn.		17:45	17:50
Samastipur		19:10	19:40
Darbhanga Jn.		21:00	--

Days of Run: 04076 Ex New Delhi from 13.04.2021 (Tuesday)

Accommodation: Sleeper, Reserved 2<sup>nd</sup> seating

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.

For any kind of information such as detailed Time-Table and Stations enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <http://www.enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

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## SHORT TAKES

## Ujjain temple priest dies of Covid-19

**Bhopal:** A priest of the famous Mahakaleswar temple in Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday died of Covid-19, prompting the authorities of the ancient shrine to start 11-day special puja for protection of the servitors and the devotees from the coronavirus. Chandra Mohan, who was admitted in the local hospital in Ujjain following infection by the virus a few days ago, succumbed on Saturday. Two other priests of the temple have tested positive for coronavirus and have been admitted to the local hospital. "An 11-day Maharuhrabishek puja has begun in the temple amid chanting of 'Maharutjunjay mantra for the protection of servitors of the temple as well as the devotees from the pandemic', temple authorities said. The temple was closed for six months following the breaking of the pandemic in March last year.

## 45 silver ingots found in Puri mutt

**Puri:** A day after a trust appointed by the commissioner of endowment took over possession of centuries-old Emar Mutt in Odisha's Puri, 45 silver ingots were recovered from there. Each ingot weighs 30 kg. Source said that the silver ingots were found from Room 4. On Friday, the trust had taken over the charge of the mutt from the 'tainted' Mahant Rajgopal Das, who was arrested earlier and sent to jail in connection with a silver ingot theft case in 2011. The trust members took the possession and estimated the cost of valuables, including gold and silver items belonging to the religious body. The incident reminds of the findings of "hidden treasure" from the mutt in the year 2011 when the officials had stumbled upon 522 silver ingots weighing about 18 tonnes and valued to be over ₹100 crore.

## 4 J&amp;K cops injured in stone-pelting

**Ramban/Jammu:** Four policemen were injured in heavy stone-pelting during an anti-drug drive in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district on Saturday, officials said. One stone-pelter was arrested and the rest are being identified by the police, they said. A police party reached Maitra area in the district after receiving input about the presence of some drug addicts and dealers there. A heavy stone pelting started in Shiekh Mohalla at a police party in which four policemen suffered injuries, the officials said. A case was registered at Ramban police station in connection with the matter. — PTI

## Shah responsible for WB violence

■ **Continued from Page 1** they commit?" Puncturing the Trinamul Congress supremo's claim, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was also in the state for poll campaign in two districts, referred to Ms Banerjee's alleged provocation to attack the Central forces and warned her and her party workers against hooliganism. He mourned the loss of lives and urged the Election Commission for strong punishment for the accused of the killings.

Addressing a BJP rally in Siliguri of North Bengal, Mr Modi said, "What happened in Coochbehar is very sad. I mourn the loss of lives in the killings. My condolences with their families. Didi and her goons have been panicked to see the support of the people for the BJP. Seeing herself losing the chair, Didi has stooped to such a low level! But I want to make it clear to the TMC, Didi and her goons that their muscle-flexing will not be allowed in Bengal. I request the Election Commission to take stringent action on the accused of the incident." He however told Ms Banerjee, "But your tricks to provoke the people in attacking the Central forces on poll-duty and obstruct the polling process will not be able to save you. Your violence after a decade-long misdeed cannot save you. People are casting their votes in large numbers for BJP. North Bengal has shown it."

Standing by the Central forces for their role in the poll duty, Mr Modi observed that the TMC chief, not the forces, has become the biggest trouble in the polls.

## Mob beats Bihar cop to death during raid in Bengal

## He was leading raid linked to motorcycle theft case

**Kishanganj/Isampur, April 10:** A police officer from Bihar was allegedly beaten to death by a mob during a raid in West Bengal's Uttar Dinajpur district in the early hours of Saturday, officials said.

The incident happened in Pantapada village in the Goalpokhar police station area of the district after midnight when Ashwini Kumar, the station house officer of Kishanganj police station in Bihar, was leading a raid in connection with a motorcycle theft case, they said.

Kumar was in the village with a police team to apprehend the accused in the case that was registered in the Kishanganj police station, they said.

However, he was surrounded by a mob and allegedly thrashed, officials said.

Later, a team of police personnel from the Panjipara outpost rescued him and took him to the Isampur Sadar Hospital where doctors declared him brought dead, they

■ **THE WEST** Bengal police has arrested three persons in connection with the incident. They have been identified as Firoze Alam, Abuzar Alam and Sahinur Khatoon

said. The West Bengal police has arrested three persons in connection with the incident. They have been identified as Firoze Alam, Abuzar Alam and Sahinur Khatoon, officials said.

Uttar Dinajpur in West Bengal and Kishanganj in Bihar share a border.

The body of the police officer was taken to the Kishanganj police lines during the day, following a post-mortem in Isampur.

However, Kumar's family refused to take the body after he was accorded gun salute at the police lines, alleging a conspiracy.

They questioned the role of other police personnel in the team when Kumar was being thrashed by the mob.

The family also sought

to known that why the West Bengal Police was not given any prior information about the raid.

The fiasco over the body went on for an hour, following which Kishanganj district magistrate Aditya Prakash and inspector-general of Purnea Range Suresh

Kumar Chowdhury along with other top officials held a meeting with Kumar's family, assuring them of an SIT probe into the incident, the police said.

They then took the body to Kumar's native place in Janki Nagar in Purnea.

West Bengal's director-general of police P. Nirajayan spoke to Bihar DGP S.K. Singhal and assured him full cooperation on the matter, official sources said.

In a statement, the Bihar police said that it is looking into providing a job to Kumar's kin.

Kumar joined the Bihar Police in 1994 and was transferred to Kishanganj a year ago, officials said.

— PTI

## End stir, Tomar urges farmers as Covid cases spike

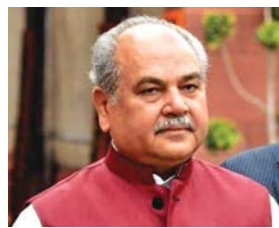
**New Delhi, April 10:** Amid a spike in Covid-19 cases, Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar Saturday appealed to the farmers protesting at Delhi borders to call off their long-running agitation, saying the government is ready for a discussion whenever they come with a concrete proposal.

Thousands of farmers have been protesting against the three new agri-marketing laws for nearly five months now, braving the raging pandemic. There has been no headway in the logjam over the issue since January 22, when the 11th and the last round of formal talks happened between the Central government and the protesting farmer unions.

Mr Tomar expressed concerns about the farmers' health and wellbeing as India witnessed a record surge of over 1.45 lakh coronavirus cases on Saturday.

"Now in the second wave of pandemic, the entire nation and the world is following Covid-19 protocols. Even protesting farmers should follow the protocols. Their life is important for us," Mr Tomar said.

In the current Covid-19



Narendra Singh Tomar

situation, I urge them (agitating farmers) to call off their protest. The government is ready for a discussion whenever they come with a proposal," he told reporters.

Stating that there is no "dissatisfaction" among the farming community across the country over the new farm laws, the minister said many farm bodies in fact are in the favour these legislations, while some are opposing them. "Ours is a democratic country, be it farmers or citizens, if they have any doubt, the government believes it is its responsibility to clear doubts and find a solution," he said.

The minister said the three laws were not drafted all of a sudden, but there was a long discussion in the past and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken it forward, he said. — PTI

## 'Swap deal' led to jawan's release?

■ **Continued from Page 1** sent along with them to Tumla with "instructions" to drop him at the appointed place.

Dharampal Saini, another "official emissary", told this newspaper that at the "jan adalat" the tribal who accompanied them narrated his ordeal after being "captured" by the security forces during the April 3 encounter. The "jan adalat" took place nearly 15 from Jonaguda, one of the three sites that witnessed fierce encounters between rebels and security forces on April 3 leading

to the killing of 23 jawans. Sources said Mr Kunjam was "held" in Tiklagudam village by CoBRA commandos during the Maoist ambush on security forces in Terram area on April 3 and was used as a "shield" to come out of the attack site safely.

Bastar inspector general of police Sunderraj P. however, has denied any "swap deal" with the Maoists to secure the release of the jawan.

"No arrested Maoists have been released to secure release of abducted CoBRA jawan. No one

has been arrested in connection with the Tiklagudam encounter case so far. A few villagers accompanied jawans after the encounter up to the base camp and returned back to their villages in due course of time. Sukka Kunjam of Tiklagudam... might be one such villager who accompanied police up to the base camp and he is believed to have safely returned to the village," he said.

"Further details would be shared after gathering more information in this regard," he added.

## TIPRA sweeps Tripura tribal poll

■ **Continued from Page 1** about 25 km from Agartala, Deb Barman announced.

"Do not fight among yourself, this has continued for 70 years and let the whole India see how Tipraha maintains unity even after winning the election," he told his supporters.

Mr Deb Barman, who was the state unit president of Congress, quit the party in September 2019, citing differences with the high command. A month later, he announced the name of his new outfit — TIPRA, which was initially a social organisation but in 2020, was turned into a political party.

CPI(M) leader Radhacharan Debbarma said it was the victory of the people.

"We accept that we lost this election. Why we have lost the election will be discussed and reviewed later by the party. But at present, we can say that it is the victory of the people," he said.

"People made a promise to each other that they want to defeat the present government, which is what we believe was responsible for the defeat of the BJP," said Debbarma, the former chief executive member (CEM) of the ITADC.

The CPI(M)-led Left Front, which governed the TTAADC for the last twenty years before the April 6 elections, could not win a single seat.

The elections were largely being seen as a bipolar contest between Deb Barman's new party and

the BJP-IPFT alliance, while the Left Front, which is yet to recover from its defeat in the state elections in 2018, being considered a fringe player.

BJP state spokesperson Subrata Chakraborty said that the party contested in 14 seats and won in nine.

The Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), the ally of the ruling BJP in the state, which contested in 17 seats also could not win in a single seat.

The Congress fielded candidates in all the seats but also drew a blank.

Former chief minister Samir Ranjan Barman congratulated Deb Barman and his party for the landslide victory.

"This is the beginning of the end of the BJP rule in Tripura," the veteran Congressman said. — PTI

■ **BJP** says govt must come up with plan to help weaker sections

## Thackeray hints at longer lockdown, key meet today

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA**  
MUMBAI, APRIL 10

The Maharashtra government is in favour of "stricter-lockdown" for eight to 14 days in order to break the chain of coronavirus, but the Opposition party BJP demanded that the government should come up with a comprehensive plan to deal with the problems of weaker sections. The demand was made in all parties meeting, which was convened by Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday evening to decide whether to go for "stricter-lockdown" in the state in order to contain the spread of Coronavirus.

However, the meeting remained inconclusive. The chief minister will hold a meeting on Sunday with the task force of senior doctors which has been formed to control Covid situation.

A senior state government officer, who is familiar with the development, said, "The chief minister has asked us to come up with a comprehensive plan to deal with daily earners, who are going to be affected the most by the stricter lockdown. The plan can be prepared within the next few days. However, the call for stricter lockdown would be taken very soon as the situation is very grim in Maharashtra."

Maharashtra on Saturday reported 55,411 new cases rising to a total number of active cases 5,36,682.

An official communication from chief minister's office said, "If we have to stop the coronavirus's infection, we will have to impose strict restriction for some time."

A senior bureaucrat said that everyone agreed in the meeting that Covid situation is becoming very grim day by day, therefore, stricter lockdown is needed. However, what would be the form of stricter lockdown would be decided soon.

Deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar said he would hold a meeting on Monday to work out a financial package for the sections of people whose livelihood bear the impact.

Opposing the lockdown, BJP leader Devendra Fadnis said it will infuriate common people who are already facing the tough financial situation. "Strict restrictions are needed, but complete lockdown will destroy people's livelihood. The government also needs to streamline the management of Covid cases."



Bandra-Worli Sea Link wears a deserted look as Maharashtra government announced weekend lockdown due to surge in Covid-19 cases on Saturday. — PTI

## Won't let SII vaccines leave Maha, warns farmers' neta

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
MUMBAI, APRIL 10

With several vaccination centres in Maharashtra shut due to shortage of vaccines, former MP and farmers' leader Raju Shetti has threatened to stop Serum Institute India's supply of Covid-19 vaccines to other states.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union health minister Harsh Vardhan, Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana head Raju Shetti has stated that if supply of vaccines is not increased for Maharashtra within a week, we will start stopping vehicles transporting vaccines to other states from the Serum Institute of India (SII).

Mahashtra, the worst Covid-hit in the country, is facing acute shortage of Covid vaccines, due to which the vaccination drive has come to a halt at several places in the state.

## India fastest nation to give 100m vaccine doses: Govt

**New Delhi, April 10:** With the total number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country crossing 10 crore, the Union health ministry on Saturday said that India is the fastest nation to administer 100 million doses in 85 days.

The US took 89 days to administer 10 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccine, while China took 102 days to cross the same number, it said. The Prime Minister's Office also tweeted a chart showing India as the fastest country to reach this vaccination milestone.

In terms of the number of daily doses administered globally, India continues to remain at the top with an average of 38.93,288 doses administered per day, the ministry said earlier during the day.

The cumulative number of COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in the country stands at 10,12,84,282 as per the provisional report at 7.30 pm, it said.

— PTI

## Assam stares at shortage of jab, stock for 2-3 days left

**MANOJ ANAND**  
GUWAHATI, APRIL 10

Amidst the growing number of Covid positive cases, the Assam government has issued guidelines for the upcoming festive season of the state with a focus on social distancing, hand sanitisation and strict use of masks. The guidelines underlined the norms of public gathering to be followed during the Bohag Bihu festival which is going to start from April 14.

Though the state government has also been asking the eligible persons to take the vaccine, Assam is also staring at a shortage of Covid-19 vaccine, with officials confirming that the existing stock would be exhausted in two to three days. The state had

around 2.70 lakh doses of vaccine on Saturday morning.

"The Central government has said that a consignment of vaccines will be sent by April 12. Though there is no confirmation yet, we are hopeful," sources in the state health department said while confirming that in some districts they are providing vaccines only to those who are eligible for a second dose of vaccine. "The Dibrugarh joint director health has stopped vaccination of first dose from Saturday through a notification," sources said.

Meanwhile, the state government has asked the health officials to focus simultaneously on the three Ts — testing, tracing and treatment — while

ramping up the vaccination for eligible beneficiaries as part of its Covid management strategy.

The guidelines for the Bihu festival further said that event organisers will have to seek prior permission from the district administrations and the programmes will have to conclude by 11 pm. All the organizers and volunteers will have to get tested three days prior to the event and after the event.

All participants should be screened for symptoms.

While everyone must follow Covid appropriate behaviour, including mandatory use of masks and hand sanitisation at the entry points, the event site must be sanitised twice daily, once before the crowd gathers and again after the crowd leaves.

## Odisha to study pangolin behaviour

**AKSHAYA KUMAR**  
**SAHOO**  
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 10

The Odisha government has decided to set some pangolins from Nandanakanan Zoological Park free in jungles with tracking devices embedded in them to study their behaviour. The exercise is aimed at finding ways for breeding the animal. The pangolin is facing extinction, largely due to increased poaching activities.

Bhubaneswar-based

Nandankanan Zoo, which had started a captive breeding research centre in its premises in 2008 with six pangolins now, boasts a population of 26 of them. Of the 26 pangolins, 5-6 will be roped in for the research on which sophisticated infrared transmitting devices will be installed to track their habitat, movement, food habits and reproductive behaviour.

All in all, the ambitious project aims to provide more security and safety



to exotic animal by gathering more intricate information about their behavioural traits.

Odisha PCCF-Wildlife (principal chief conservator of forest) Sashi Paul said the department was in contact with some foreign experts to obtain specialised transmitters. "We

hope to get the transmitters this year after which we can launch our programme," said Mr Paul.

The pangolin is the most illegally traded mammal in the world.

Primarily a nocturnal and solitary animal, the pangolin is also called scaly anteater because of its preferred diet. It is increasingly becoming victims of illegal wildlife crime — mainly in China and in growing amounts in Africa — for their meat and hides.

## Lockdown in Maha

■ **Continued from Page 1** the increased demand for manpower, the Delhi government has directed hospitals to engage 4th and 5th year MBBS students, interns and BDS doctors.

Maharashtra on Saturday reported 55,411 fresh Covid-19 cases with 309 deaths. Out of this, Mumbai had 9,327 new cases and 50 deaths.

India reported over 1.45 lakh fresh cases with 794 deaths in 24 hours on Saturday. Among the latest to catch infection in Maharashtra is RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat. The rising cases have put substantial pressure on the health infrastructure of the country with several states reporting shortage of Remdesivir, Oxygen and hospital beds. As state governments scramble to test and treat Covid patients, there were also reports of shortage of RT-PCR kits in some places.

In a crackdown on black-marketeers and hoarders, Maharashtra on Saturday arrested four persons for selling 40 Remdesivir injections in black market from Pimpri Chhindwara.



## THE ASIAN AGE

11 APRIL 2021



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Off the beaten track

### Indian subnationalism past its expiry date?

Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu — all awaiting new governments in early May this year — are the last bastions of strong linguistic and cultural regionalism which have resisted the mainstreaming of politics under BJP's "one country one party" theology. Assam capitulated in 2016 and is expected to remain within the BJP's fold in May this year.

It is not as if other Indian states have no binding cultural roots. Punjab, for instance, is actively demonstrating its independence of spirit and community strength via the ongoing anti-farm bill agitation.

Smaller states in the North-East have a similar ethos. Sikkim, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and Nagaland — all have a strong preference for self-rule by locals per local culture and customs, although they are not averse to partaking of the bountiful central endowments, showered on them annually, in exchange for remaining politically aligned with the ruling party in Delhi — a domestic version of the subsidiarity which Imperial China demands from its subalterns in Southeast Asia.

Jammu and Kashmir — another border state previously (now a Union territory) with a strong cultural identity, including its delectable *wazwan* — erred in confusing notional constitutional autonomy with the freedom to act independently. The result was that the BJP — never one to shrink from radical political disruption — took the unprecedented step of reordering the constitutional relationship making its subsidiarity nature both de facto and de jure in 2019.

The BJP has a stunning record in mainstreaming border areas. Assam is the best example of deep mainstreaming per the prevailing political philosophy in the heart of India, spreading out in a 1,000-kilometre radius around Nagpur. A dispassionate observer could reasonably conclude that regionalism is past its expiry date in India.

Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, represent exemplar benchmarks for regionalism with deep political, social, linguistic and cultural roots. Not surprisingly, all three are coastal states with thriving, historical, global commercial links. All three are unlikely to roll over and succumb to the centralisation of politics, which the BJP represents. But of the three, West Bengal appears the most vulnerable.

"Didi", alias Mamata Banerjee, diehard, street fighter and firebrand politician, the presiding deity of the All-India Trinamul Congress (AITC), has ruled Kolkata now for a decade and the political stress shows. Not for nothing, has the redoubtable political spinner, Prashant Kishor, who now advises her, rebranded her moniker "Didi" — meaning sister, who, per mainstream Indian tradition, leaves the family to start another — into "Banglar meye" — daughter of Bengal — implying a familial obligation on all Bengalis to support her.

The idea is to "other" the BJP as a modern-day East India Company. Any Bengali voting for becomes a default "Mir Jafar", whose chicanery smoothed the way for the defeat of Siraj-ud Daulah, the then Nawab of Bengal, at Plassey and the subsequent ingress of the British into India in 1757.

This strategy is rich in irony. Didi projects herself as the great assimilator of a heterogeneous, cultured, secular Bengal spanning all religions. She paid monthly stipends to mullahs from 2012 and to Hindu priests from this year — a caricature of even-handed "ersatz secularism" and a gesture which, perversely, benefits upper castes only because dalits and tribal folk do not perform such services. More gratifying, the liberalism does not include "foreigners" like "Gujaratis" — thereby labelling all Gujaratis as "Non-Resident Indians".

Didi herself, was a political disrupter, a decade back, cutting through the three-and-a-half-decade old Communist gridlock on Bengal by consolidating the have-not votes. Over the past decade, she has systematically sandpapered the Red remnants into a bright Blue — the AITC colour code. Her strategic depth is substantial — gender is a trump card, "secularism" is another, her deliberate "ordinariness" is another, although the levers of power have unveiled authoritarian streaks in governance, to match those of the BJP.

The BJP increased its vote share from 4.1 per cent in 2011 to 10.2 per cent in the 2016 Assembly elections and an exaggerated 40.6 per cent in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal. All this despite its strategic disdain for seeking Muslim votes to win an election — its defiant signature tune. If votes were polled the way stocks are chosen — on trailing growth trends — the BJP should be able to encroach on the disempowered dalit and tribal vote banks, reducing the 2016 vote share of the AITC (44.9 per cent) CPI(M) (20 per cent) and the INC (12.3 per cent) to, at the very least, force Didi into uncomfortable coalitions with other parties for survival.

Should the AITC, Congress and the Communists have come together to fight these elections? Yes, of course. But the Indian political class favours the hubris of exclusive control over a party, even with just one bird in hand, rather than collaborating to go after the many other birds in the bush — a doomed strategy, as illustrated by the decline of the once storied Indian National Congress.

Meanwhile, in Kerala — the template of secular democracy — the Left Democratic Front is expected to retain power, not least because of its performance during the pandemic and despite the perceived personal pull of BJP's "metro-man" — E. Sreedharan. Looking ahead, Kerala could well become the crucible for a new version of the Left movement in India — less pedantically ideological, less anti-wealth and more pro-poor for delivering shared growth and equity.

Tamil Nadu remains the most insulated from the assault of the "Northern invaders" for the moment. Time will tell whether, despite the passing of stalwart leaders — Jayalalithaa and Karunanidhi — credible substitutes emerge which are able to keep their Northern gates firmly shut.

As things stand, ironically, by the first week of May 2021, the BJP's political empire could replicate that of the last Great Mughal, Emperor Aurangzeb. Only Didi stands, like a diminutive David, between the Goliath BJP and the fulfillment of that aspiration.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

Subhani



## The long view from New Delhi



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

The persisting stand-off with China must make India rethink its relationship structures both in the Asian and global context.

How is India geo-strategically placed currently? On its northern borders it confronts an aggressive China. On its western borders it is currently in a state of a partial thaw qua Pakistan. A melt that can again go back to a state of deep freeze at any point of time. On the east the strains with regard to the economic blockade of Nepal in 2015 still continue to linger. Bhutan is caught in the Sino-Indian cleft stick. Bangladesh, though reaffirming the centrality of India to its external environment, is both conscious of and eager to leverage the rise of China. Myanmar is in the throes of violent convulsions following a military coup d'état on February 1, 2021, that is having reverberations across the Indo-Burmese border as well.

Down south, the Rajapaksa administration in Sri Lanka still continues to bend to the Chinese wind. Relations with Maldives have definitely improved after Ibrahim Mohamed Solih ascended to office in September 2018. His predecessor President Abdulla Yameen foreign policy was most eloquently summed up by current Maldivian foreign minister Abdulla Shahid in the following sentence, "The mistake President Yameen made was to play India against China and China against India. That is a childish way of dealing with international relations; it will blow up in your own face."

However, Maldives' debt to China that ranges from 1 to 3 billion USD should worry India, too, for Maldives' GDP is only 5.46 billion USD in 2021. Things could easily go the Hambantota way. On balance it does not seem to be a very happy situation

for India overall.

However, it is the reinvigorated "great game" in Afghanistan that could once again have a profound impact on the future of the region. As the Americans desperately attempt to sever the two-decade-old umbilical chord in Afghanistan, a deep void may open up in that country once more. Pakistan, Iran, Turkey China and Russia view this vacuum from their own strategic perch. India should also seriously evaluate what its hard strategic interests are in Afghanistan and then proceed accordingly.

Further west, the Saudi Arabia-UAE-Israel triangle is not going to have a free run of the Middle East and Gulf region as it did under the Trump Administration. President Joe Biden is seeking to pick up the threads of the Donald Trump aborted Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) colloquially referred to as the Iran Nuclear deal once again in Vienna through the E3+2 process.

The JCPOA signed on July 14, 2015, was further endorsed by the UN Security vide Council Resolution 2231, adopted on July 20, 2015. President Trump unilaterally walked out of this arrangement on the 8th of May 2018 and reinstated sanctions against Iran.

The irony is that none of the Second Nuclear Age powers are party to the current process as they were not to the previous one either.

For India, the Iran situation is further compounded by the epic 25-year Sino-Iranian Strategic Partnership agreement signed on the 27th of March 2021 that envisages a range of investments by China into Iran in fields ranging from oil to agriculture. Interestingly, Iran metaphorically booted India out of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway link in the

July of 2020, citing a lack of interest by the Indian side. If the Iran nuclear deal gets reinstated it would further expand Iranian influence in the Middle East.

Iran has been the biggest gainer of the ill-conceived American intervention in Iraq and the subsequent developments in the region post 2003. The US invasion of Iraq allowed Iran to create the Shia crescent encompassing Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, and embracing the Shia populaces in each of these countries. Anchored by Tehran, it spawns major surrogate satellites such as Hezbollah, Hamas, Houthis, and southern Iraqi militias. A rejuvenated Iran in partnership with China having its own strategic interests in Afghanistan and profoundly averse to the growing Saudi-UAE-Israel-India bonhomie would be something New Delhi should watch closely.

India's great power relationships are also far from rock steady. With Russia warming up to both Beijing and even Pakistan and the United States also requiring Pakistan's help qua the Taliban to action the Doha deal signed between the US on February 29, 2020, things look rather messy for India.

What then are India's options to protect its broader strategic interests, namely, keep the Chinese at bay, guarantee that the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) in the Indo-Pacific open, not allow Afghanistan to become Pakistan's strategic depth, insulate India's energy security from the evolving dynamic in the Middle East and ensure that the "great powers" while acting in their own interests do not end up acting against

India's interests?

One option that needs to be focussed upon among myriad others is to reengage with the European continent across the spectrum. This essentially from a strategic perspective entails an assignation with Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Arrangement) Conceivable as a cold war construct in April 1949 to keep the Soviet Union at bay, Nato, over the years, has evolved both in its role and character.

An engagement does not mean that India should become a Nato adjunct or be designated as a Non-Nato ally by the United States. What it would mean is that India would be able to have access to both political and the military-to-military relationship with 30 odd European nations. Europe remains the neglected template that can still be leveraged by India to further its interests

The experience and evolution of the Nato alliance over the past seven decades could provide interesting institutional pointers to New Delhi if it were to consider at some point in time in the future the possibility of turning the "Quad" between US, Japan, Australia and India into the linchpin of a broader Asian Nato.

Moreover, India's engagement with Nato would also be a salutary signal to even Russia that, while India values the "special relationship of the erstwhile years", it would not be averse to exploring alternative avenues, including alliance arrangements, if Russia's relationships with China or Pakistan start becoming too close for comfort.

To the Chinese, the message would also be clear that its belligerence would only expand the hub and spoke US-anchored security architecture in Asia currently from Japan all the way downwards to Australia into a more multilateral framework with Nato as the foundational template. It is an idea whose time may have come.

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal. Twitter handle @manishtewari

LETTERS

PRINCE OF NOWHERE

Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who passed away at 99, was the ultimate outsider. Though his ancestry spanned all of royal Europe, he wasn't an Englishman in any real sense. He was born in Corfu but grew up outside Paris speaking French. Ethnically he was mostly German although he considered himself Danish. His uncle was king of Greece before he was overthrown, and his grandfather the king of Denmark, while on his mother's side, he was related to Queen Victoria. He served valourously in the Second World War but couldn't give his chosen family name, Mountbatten, to any of his four children. In the end, he cuts a tragic figure in history.

Siddhartha Robin Kolkata

YOGI'S BLINDSPOT

HOW CAN Yogi Adityanath issue such a self-defeating statement that he will open anti-Romeo squads in West Bengal should the people vote the BJP to power? To begin with, by and large, the people there are not overly bothered by "Romeos". Add to this the nuisance value that these squads will present. But perhaps, these realities have fallen on the blindspot of the Uttar Pradesh chief minister. Nonetheless, if he thinks this promise will garner his party votes in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections, he is sadly mistaken.

Priyanka Mathur New Delhi

NO MORE OPTICS

THE CLOSURE OF vaccination centres in populous states like Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha, where hospitals had to refuse people turning up for vaccination, is disturbing. There were also reports of shortage of Remdesivir, used to treat Covid patients in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. The Prime Minister's proposal to vaccinate as many people as possible during the "Tika Utsav" from April 11 to 14 could lose its credibility if the Centre does not address the vaccine shortage at once. It looks like optics and lip service will not be able to help the BJP government anymore.

N.J. Ravi Chander Bengaluru

MISSING WARMTH

THE HISTORIC TIES between India and Russia have sentimental value for the people and governments of both countries. The postponement of the annual India-Russia Summit last year and the Russian effort to sideline India in the Afghan peace process is not in tune with the spirit of this bilateral relationship. The recent stopover of foreign minister Lavrov of Russia in New Delhi en route to Islamabad falls short of evoking the usual sense of nostalgia that has been a defining character of our friendship. The upcoming annual summit between the leaders of the two countries is expected to infuse new energy into the bilateral ties.

Nitesh Mandwariya Neemuch (MP)

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



INDIAN TOP 10  
BESTSELLERS

## NON-FICTION

1 **BORN A MUSLIM: SOME TRUTHS ABOUT ISLAM IN INDIA**  
Ghazala Wahab  
Aleph, ₹999

2 **THE CODE BREAKER**  
Walter Isaacson  
Simon & Schuster, ₹899

3 **GHALIB: A WILDERNESS AT MY DOORSTEP: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY**  
Mehr Afshan Farooqi  
Allen Lane, ₹799

4 **ALL ROADS LEAD NORTH — NEPAL'S TURN TO CHINA**  
Amish Raj Mulmi  
Context Westland, ₹799

5 **REMNANTS OF A SEPARATION**  
Aanchal Malhotra  
HarperCollins, ₹599

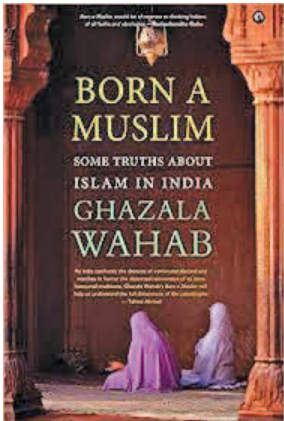
6 **INDUS BASIN UNINTERRUPTED**  
Uttam Kumar Sinha  
Penguin Vintage, ₹799

7 **THE FRONTIER GANDHI**  
Abdul Ghaffar Khan,  
Imtiaz Ahmad Sahibzada  
(Translator)  
Roli Books, ₹695

8 **THE MYSTERY OF THE PARSEE LAWYER**  
Shrabani Basu  
Bloomsbury, ₹699

9 **MIDNIGHT'S BORDERS**  
Suchitra Vijayan  
Westland, ₹699

10 **RAJ & NORAH**  
Peter R. Kohli  
& Shaina Kohli Russo  
HarperCollins, ₹699



## FICTION

1 **THE LAST QUEEN**  
Chitra Banerjee  
Divakaruni  
HarperCollins, ₹599

2 **KLARA AND THE SUN**  
Kazuo Ishiguro  
Faber & Faber, ₹699

3 **SHUGGIE BAIN**  
Douglas Stuart  
Picador, ₹499

4 **THE DISCOMFORT OF EVENING**  
Marieke Lucas Rijneveld  
Faber & Faber, ₹499

5 **JUNGLENAMA: A STORY OF THE SUNDARBAN**  
Amitav Ghosh  
HarperCollins, ₹699

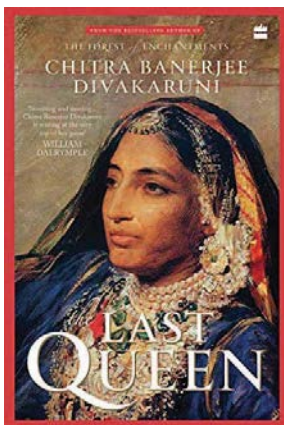
6 **SHUGGIE BAIN**  
Douglas Stuart  
Picador, ₹499

7 **TAKEDOWN**  
Brad Thor  
Emily Bestler Books—  
Atria, ₹599

8 **MURDER AT THE MUSHAIRA**  
Raza Mir  
Aleph, ₹799

9 **THE BEGUM AND THE DASTAN**  
Tarana Husain Khan  
Tranquebar, ₹499

10 **A TIME FOR MERCY**  
John Grisham  
Hodder & Stoughton  
₹699



Bahrison's, New Delhi

# Onus on the moderate Muslim to reclaim Islam's heterodox legacy



Sucheta Dasgupta

review

Had it not been for the bitterly-wrought Partition, Sufism, which had its origins in the Arabian peninsula during the Prophet's lifetime but flourished in India in the 13th and 14th centuries, would have emerged as the signature model of inclusive and, as it happens, syncretic Islam. It would have acted as the counterweight to the Saudi-born fundamentalist Wahhabism. And it would have been, largely, an Indian contribution. This is the thesis of Ghazala Wahab's timely book that is simultaneously a ready-reckoner for Islam as well as an appeal to moderate Muslims to reclaim their faith.

Wahab's urgent intervention pertains to the current moral crisis afflicting Muslims who number over 1.9 billion and form about 25 per cent of the globe. Written in crisp prose filtered through a lens of empathy and humour, her quest to examine Islam draws equally on scripture, memoir and reportage. She interviews the who's who of Muslim India from politicians and bureaucrats to seminary heads and theologians. But she also has her ear to the ground, and is careful to catch every dilemma and strand of opinion of the common man and woman, be they a humble tradesman, the "new Muslim" or the successful professional, a dadi at Shaheen Bagh or a young student at the madrassa.

So far, the discourse on the Islamic question has been chiefly contained in the West, conducted as it has been by the likes of Susan Okin ("Feminism and Multiculturalism: Some

Tensions"), Ayaan Hirsi Ali (maker of *Submission*, belonging to the alt-right camp), Irshad Manji (founder of the Muslim refusenik movement), Ameena Wadud and "ex-Muslim" Sarah Haider. Barring Hasan Suroor's important 2019 work, however, this is the first book coming out of India capturing this discourse as it plays out in this country. The last fact makes it all the more accessible to the lay reader.

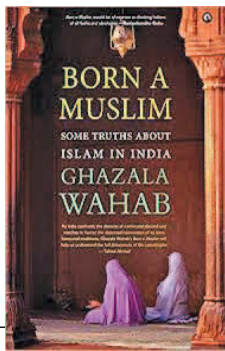
The reader, for instance, may be aware that much of the problems of the moderate Indian Muslim stems from their religious obligation to follow the Muslim orthodoxy, the ulema. But did they know that, as a phenomenon, the overarching influence of the mullahs is fairly recent? It began only after the collapse of the Mughal empire, before which the influence of the Sufis who were championed by the emperor was more widespread.

The predominant view about Sufism is that it exists outside Islam as a cult born out of the admixture of Hinduism with the Prophet's faith. But this is self-serving propaganda spread by two sources, the prejudiced West which failed to reconcile the sophistication of Sufi writings with what, in its view, was a "desert religion", and the Islamic orthodoxy itself. The origin of Sufism much predated its presence in India. Hazrat Rabia of Basra died in AD 801.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (AD 1058-1111) was the first scholar to lend theological heft to Sufi mysticism, marrying it with Sharia. While Golden Age (Abbasid) philosophers like Averroes and Avicenna were

among the first Muslim rationalists, it was Ghazali who arguably laid the foundation of Islamic heterodoxy. He said that as long as one believed in Allah and Muhammad, Islam could be practised in different ways. Nevertheless, this ruled out the philosophy of atheism. Neither of the Abrahamic religions is known to accommodate it.

Until a generation ago, there were two kinds of Muslims in India, the Communists and the conformists, Wahab says. The conformists were the regular moderate Muslims. If sceptic, they were careful to hide their worldview from the ulema. For them, the personal was not political. The Communists, on the other hand, identified as agnostic. They were, at best, cultural Muslims. While they had been drawn to this ideology because it resonated with the Islamic ideals of equality and justice, since they did not identify as true-blue Musalman, within their community, their voices went unheard. Nor did they themselves find it important to address the dogma and bigotry from within by say, reforming the clergy. Thus Wahab illustrates the failure of Left politics to address the fundamental reality of identity as well as



**BORN A MUSLIM: SOME TRUTHS ABOUT ISLAM IN INDIA**  
By GHAZALA WAHAB  
Aleph, ₹999

the Islamic problem.

Now, if Wahab is critical of Hindutva and Saudi preponderance on the clergy, she is equally irked by the Congress governments' minority politics.

Citing Wajahat Habibullah's 2016 article, she mentions M.J. Akbar's role in the passage of the Rajiv Gandhi government's infamous 1986 Muslim women's bill. It was Akbar who had prevailed on Rajiv Gandhi to contest the Shah Bano judgment, saying that if he did not, it would appear that the Prime Minister did not regard the Muslim community as his own. Akbar was subsequently seen expanding this point in a Doordarshan debate against Arif Mohammad Khan.

The Hadith is contextual, writes the author, as is the Quran. The custodians of the faith need to move with the times in order to prevent the religion from atrophying. But what if one differs from the holy book in one's analysis of context? Is it not bowing to stereotype to regard the status of women as subhuman in tribal Arabia before the arrival of the Prophet? If so, what of the example of Khadija, the Prophet's first wife? Should have the Prophet's wives and honest, thereby more capable, women, rather than the already less powerful slave women, been robbed of their agency to operate in the cause of good via physical encumbrance only so as to distinguish one group from the other? Is covering up also either a moral or an ultimately effective way to combat sexist aggression? There are no easy answers. These are some areas that the book does not go into.

Elsewhere, the author does write that the opportunity for freethinking is limited when exercised from within the Islamic faith. Liberal Islam may indeed be an oxymoron, by that token. All the same, it is interesting to note how key definitions from other faiths sit perfectly inside it. The author's own liberal rational-

ism is the Buddhist way of the instinct- and deed-driven mahayana, while the orthodoxy's essentialism would be the intellect-driven hinayana way. Quite startlingly, the Hindu dichotomy of *dvaita-advaita* (dual and singular manifestations of God) also exists within Islam because the Naqshbandiyah order of Sufism rejects the Chishti and other silsila on the ground that the identification of the self with Allah is subjective and does not produce any objective manifestation, hence leading to idolatry.

The author's caveat is that the moderate Muslim even today has no voice or traction within the larger Muslim society. They are caught between the Hindu right wing that regards them as exceptional and thus invisibilises them and the Muslim right wing which disparages them for their apologetism. She exhorts these people to give up their conformism and take responsibility for their beliefs. Simultaneously, she notes a rise of Muslim exceptionalism and reverse identity politics among community members in reaction to Hindutva, as evidenced in the *La ilah ila Allah* sloganeering during the 2019 CAA protests.

*"Young working professionals are overnight discovering headscarves. The more one points to the headscarf as a symbol of Islamic patriarchy or women's oppression, the more professional women turn up in one to register their protest." (p. 367)*

Such an assertion of identity leads to the closedness of the mind in a way that runs contrary to freedom and modernism, she surmises.

Clearly a gap exists between expressions of Muslim identity and its spirit of fearless large-heartedness. It is this gap that the book strives to fill. And in so doing it perhaps becomes the vehicle through which the writer bears her own shahadah to her Muslim heritage.

## Urgent, cogent, matter-of-fact ready-reckoner on the C-virus



Ranjona Banerji

review

If you had to read just one book to explain the coronavirus pandemic that stopped the world in 2020, Anirban Mahapatra's Covid-19 should be it.

Written by a scientist for the lay reader, Covid-19 charts a fascinating course, from the life of a virus to its growth and spread, and animal and human responses to viruses. Mahapatra is a microbiologist who writes on science. I came across him on Twitter (@bhalomanush) as someone who explains fascinating inside stories of science without talking down or pontificating. That same easy tone makes this book easy to read even as it is filled with fact and explanation.

Covid-19 however does not just tackle the coronavirus pandemic from only the scientific perspective. Rather, it looks at historic, social and psychological angles as well. Earlier pandemics, how they affected humanity and the natural world, the way we responded and continue to respond to this "new normal" all come under consideration.

But it is the science that is the most gripping. What a virus actually is, how it expands its own lifecycle and propagation, how it jumps from life form to life form: in clear language and perspective we learn about the possible "RNA World" of almost billion years ago, the way evolution left the virus behind and yet how it continues to have such a devastating effect. We are fascinated with dinosaurs because of their size and ferocity. But down here at the micro level, one coronavirus can be far more dangerous than a few *Tyrannosaurus rexes*!

One of the biggest achievements of this book is the lucid, non-judgmental manner in which Mahapatra debunks all the various swirls of misinformation around Covid-19 and its spread. For instance, terms like "herd immunity" which are thrown about with that peculiar conviction that is born from incomplete understanding. He uses science and reason rather than anger, sarcasm and frustration to zap all the WhatsApp wisdom people are still fed with. How viruses spread, how they adapt themselves, how the human body fights them, why science finds it easy to find vaccines for some viruses and not others, most notably HIV-AIDs. We also learn how doctors and scientists grappled with existing medicines and the hope that some of them would work against Covid-19, and which worked, and which didn't and why.

The issue of vaccines is also tackled, with explanations on how and why the vaccine process was and could be fast-tracked for this pandemic. From the Black Plague to Spanish Flu to Covid-19, we have made enormous progress. What path did all the vaccines on offer take to completion and why are they so different from each other? Why should we trust them? All this is painstakingly and clearly explained.

Interwoven into this is the politics of the virus, how different governments and countries responded and how some policies worked better than others. We learn how human behaviour past and present, how climate change and the environment all make life easier for rampaging viruses. The fact that the mental health impact of the virus has yet to be assessed and understood.

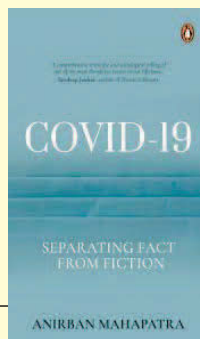
Published in 2021, barring the impact of large-scale vaccination, this is a very up-to-date book. It ends however with the large implications of this pandemic. Scientists have long warned us that one was overdue, but we did not take those warnings seriously enough. This bizarre year should at least teach us that we need to be ready. Mahapatra says over and again that this virus is going nowhere. Humanity has to be prepared, socially, culturally, politically and medically to deal with it.

Already today we see cases rising again all over the world. Masks and distancing will still be needed. The prospect of lockdowns in some parts of the world loom again. In his words, "We are a vulnerable species and for all our control of the planet, we are subject to its vagaries. Climate change, the emergence and resurgence of infectious diseases, deforestation and the rapid loss of species, overconsumption and socioeconomic inequities can no longer be pushed under the carpet".

This is a clearly etched warning of what happens when we are nonchalant, uncaring or just plain stupid.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough for anyone who is interested in viruses, the pandemic and our future.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on media affairs, politics and social trends. She tweets at @ranjona.



**COVID-19: SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION**  
By ANIRBAN MAHAPATRA  
Penguin, ₹599

## WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT RAPE

**New Delhi:** What happens after rape? As the world moves on after expressing outrage, what happens to the survivors who are left to fend for themselves in a hostile society and a nonchalant judicial system?

In *After I Was Raped*, we meet five individuals — a four-year-old girl, two dalit women, an eight-month-old infant and a young professional. Through extensive interviews with them and their families and communities at large, Urmi Bhattacheryya reveals the stories of these survivors of sexual violence, as they recount how their lives and relationships have changed in the aftermath of assault. Shamed, ostracised and weighed down

## AFTER I WAS RAPED

By URMI BHATTACHERYYA  
Pan Macmillan  
India, ₹399

by guilt and depression, they continue to brave the most challenging realities.

This book picks up where most news reports about survivors leave off — enters bedrooms and courtrooms, and picks up the threads of their lives today, years after their rape, and in the midst of their continuing wait for justice. Thus its sensitive portrayal of the lives of these little-known survivors raises difficult but important questions. Urmi Bhattacheryya is an independent journalist based in New Delhi. She worked as Gender Editor at *The Quint* and won the UNFPA Laadli Award for Gender Sensitivity for her reporting on child sexual abuse in 2020.

*After I Was Raped* (Pan Macmillan India, ₹399) is releasing on April 22, 2021.



**FAST FACT:** Philosopher **Julia Galef** is one of the most exciting new voices not just in American rationalism but in American writing. Her book, *The Scout Mindset* (2021), explores two different modes of thinking, the 'soldier' and the 'scout' mindset. Drawing on stories from Warren Buffett's investing strategies to reddit threads and modern partisan politics, Galef explores why our brains try to deceive us and reveals how we can overcome biases.



## A decent sort of madness



Sridhar Balan

review

The publishing business involves putting a book out there after a careful scrutiny of its contents and being convinced of a readership. Publishers back their books with a firm conviction and some books do cause them a great deal of happiness to publish and can raise a chuckle or two while the text is being read. *The White Umbrella* is one such book. It has the additional caveat of being published for a restricted market, South Asia only, which would also mean a restricted print run. The book may not make it to an all-time bestseller list but we are glad the publisher decided to include it in its list.

While the author Brian Sewell has been a renowned art critic for *The Guardian*, he is equally famous for being a confirmed animal lover.

*The White Umbrella* tells us about the extraordinary adventures of an eccentric Englishman and his donkey who decide to make an overland journey from Peshawar to London. The circumstances through which this came about are also extraordinary. Mr B a wiry man in his fifties was in Peshawar to make a documentary film on the ancient history of northern Pakistan along with a television crew from London. The crew consisting of a director and cameraman along with a young odd job person called Dominic were finding the filming a very tiresome process. Mr B a histo-

ry buff was actually interested in finding some traces of Alexander the Great's historic march from Macedonia to Pakistan over two thousand years ago while the crew was more interested less in history and more in the sights and sounds of contemporary Peshawar. Within two days of arrival, the crew was not on talking terms with its presenter Mr B an epithet they applied to him to show their frosty relationship, and in the ensuing two weeks, the relationship had reached breaking point. Something had to "give" and it did.

One early evening when the dense rush hour traffic was moving at a snail's pace on a busy Peshawar road, Mr B suddenly opened the door and leaped down on to the road and sprinted away dodging cars lorries, buses and motorcycles. This was extreme behaviour even for an eccentric Englishman, and the astonished crew stopped their white Land Rover and sprinted after him. It was the young and more agile Dominic who first caught up with him and by the time the slightly corpulent director and cameraman catch up with them, they find Mr B with his arm around a very young donkey dabbling with his handkerchief at four deep wounds on her back caused by a wicker saddle to carry heavy loads. Mr B was furious and declared that the donkey was far too young, less than six months old and far too young to carry loads. The crew tried its

best to wean Mr B away from the donkey and get into the car. They had to drive to Islamabad and catch a flight to London the next day. A fierce argument ensued with Mr B determined not to leave the donkey and the crew particularly the director losing his temper. The director's threat to leave Mr B and make his find his own way home, is answered by 'please do. I will walk home with the donkey'. Finding Mr B adamant, the crew leaves him with Dominic returning to the car to fetch Mr B's knapsack and his umbrella. Now, no picture of an Englishman is complete without his 'broily' and this was no ordinary umbrella. It was of strong white canvas on a frame of metal ribs with a stock that could double as a heavy walking stick. It had been specially designed for him by James Smith and Sons (and grandsons, great-grandsons and more and more, from their first

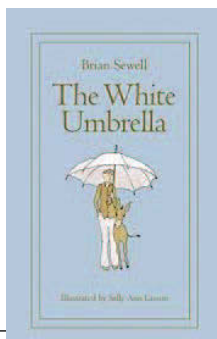
umbrella in 1830). Dominic left Mr B and the donkey reluctantly with a hug but not before telling Mr B that he would inform the Foreign Office "and Mrs B of course".

Christening the donkey "Pavlova" after the famous ballerina on account of its long legs, Mr B and his ward do not quite walk all the way home. They travel by a variety of transport, trucks, buses and train through Quetta, Afghanistan, Persia, Turkey and the Balkans. Among the extraordinary people they meet, two truly stand out. One is Laetitia, the British Ambassador's wife in Istanbul who befriends Mr B, and personally escorts him across the Greek border and puts him on a train to Thessaloniki. We are not quite told Laetitia's country of origin but she was a true representative of her majesty's service.

The other is Hector, in a Rolls Royce Silver Shadow, who stops to give him a lift and states the donkey was the main reason for him to do so. Hector is a bibliophile and collector of manuscripts and old books, and drives him across Belgrade and into France but not before spending a night in a medieval monastery. At Calais, they smuggle Pavlova across the Channel by a generous dose of sleeping pills and by unscrewing the front seat of the car and making her sleep in its well.

They finally reach Mr B's home in Wimbledon, greeted rapturously by Mr B's dogs and perhaps less ardently by Mrs B who had long realised that animals always came first in their home.

The writer is a senior publishing industry professional who has worked with OUP and has been a senior consultant with Ratna Sagar Books



**THE WHITE UMBRELLA — THE ENGLISHMAN AND THE DONKEY OF PESHAWAR**

By BRIAN SEWELL  
Simon & Schuster,  
Speaking Tiger  
(South Asian rights), ₹299



## IN BRIEF

**B'desh mosque attacked, 12 hurt**

**Dhaka, April 10:** Activists of a hardline Islamist group attacked devotees inside a mosque in northern Bangladesh, injuring at least 12 persons, according to a media report.

The incident took place on Friday at the mosque in the Gaibandha district when self-proclaimed Hefazat-e-Islam activists snatched the mic from the Imam and preached about the organisation, Dhaka Tribune reported.

They attacked the devotees who tried to intervene, Imam Motlob Uddin said.

**Blasphemy: 2 Pak nurses booked**

**Lahore, April 10:** Two Christian nurses have been booked under blasphemy charges in Pakistan's Punjab province following a complaint by hospital authorities, police said, as people staged demonstrations against the duo demanding strict action against them.

An FIR has been registered against the two, Mariyum Lal and Newish Arooj, working in District Headquarters Hospital, Faisalabad, on Friday on the complaint filed by Deputy Medical Superintendent Dr Mohammad Ali.

**Indonesia quake kills 7 in Java**

**Malang, April 10:** A strong earthquake killed at least seven people, injured 12 others and damaged more than 300 buildings on Indonesia's main island of Java and shook the tourist hotspot of Bali, officials said Saturday. No tsunami warnings were posted. The US Geological Survey said the magnitude 6.0 quake struck off the island's southern coast at 0700 GMT. It was centred 28 miles south of Sumberpucung town of Malang District in East Java province, at a depth of 82 kilometres. Rahmat Triyono, head of earthquake and tsunami centre, said the tremor did not have the potential to cause a tsunami.

# IMF, WB urged to ensure timely vaccine delivery

**Jt. ministerial panel asserts virus effects will be felt for years**

**Washington, April 10:** Asserting that the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic will be felt for years, a joint ministerial committee of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank has urged the two global financial bodies to ensure timely delivery of safe and effective vaccines across all countries.

"Timely delivery of safe and effective vaccines across all countries is critical to ending the pandemic, especially as new variants emerge. Developing countries need to strengthen their readiness for vaccination campaigns and develop coordinated strategies to reach vulnerable populations," the Development Committee said in a communiqué after the Spring Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank here on Friday.

The panel noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented public health, economic and social crisis, threatening the lives and livelihoods of millions.

The economic shock is increasing poverty, worsening inequalities and reversing development gains. As the global economy begins a gradual recovery, uncertainty surrounds near- and medium-term prospects, it said.

According to Johns Hopkins University, the deadly Coronavirus pandemic that is likely to have originated from the Chinese city of Wuhan in 2019 has so far infected 134,545,099 people and claimed 2,914,590 lives globally. "We call for sustained, differentiated, and targeted financial and technical support for an adequate policy response, strong coordination across bilateral and multilateral organisations, and further support to the private sector. We urge the World Bank Group (WBG) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in line with their respective mandates, to work closely together and with other partners to contain the impacts of the pandemic," the communiqué said.



A French gendarmier officer scans the QR code of a driver at an exit of the A10 motorway linking Paris and Bordeaux, during the lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in Virsac, southwestern France, on Friday. — AFP

tions, and further support to the private sector. We urge the World Bank Group (WBG) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in line with their respective mandates, to work closely together and with other partners to contain the impacts of the pandemic," the communiqué said.

The committee called for redoubling the efforts to support manufacturing capacity for vaccines and the pandemic-related medical supplies in developing countries.

"The pandemic has triggered far-reaching consequences, and we must strengthen global preparedness for future pandemics, and at the same time make progress in building robust health systems with universal coverage," it said.

— PTI

## Vaccine shortage hit poor countries

**London, April 10:** As many as 60 countries, including some of the world's poorest, might be stalled at the first shots of their Coronavirus vaccinations because nearly all deliveries through the global programme intended to help them are blocked until as late as June.

COVAX, the global initiative to provide vaccines to countries lacking the clout to negotiate for scarce supplies on their own, has in the past week shipped more than 25,000 doses to low-income countries only twice on any given day. Deliveries have all but halted since Monday.

During the past two weeks, according to data compiled daily by Unicef, fewer than 2 million COVAX doses in total were cleared for shipment to 92 countries in the developing world — the same amount injected in Britain alone. On Friday, the head of the World Health Organisation slammed the "shocking imbalance" in global Covid-19 vaccination.

WHO DG Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that only one in 500 in poorer countries had got a dose against one in four people in rich countries. — AP

## Pentagon chief to visit Israel amid Iran talks

**Jerusalem, April 10:** US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin is due to arrive in Jerusalem on Sunday, the highest ranked member of President Joe Biden's administration to visit Israel. The two-day visit comes as the Biden administration attempts to return to an Iran nuclear deal abandoned by its predecessor — a deal Israel opposes.

Austin is expected to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defence Minister Benny Gantz and armed forces chief Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi. The trip will also include a tour of the Nevatim air force base and visits to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and to a Jerusalem memorial to fallen soldiers. Austin arrives days after representatives of the remaining parties to the troubled 2015 nuclear deal launched talks in Vienna on bringing the United States back into it.

Then president Donald Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018. The Vi-

enna talks are focused not only on lifting crippling economic sanctions Trump reimposed, but also on bringing Iran back into compliance after it responded by suspending several of its own commitments. All sides said the talks, in which Washington is not participating directly but has the European Union as intermediary, had got off to a good start.

Israel opposes the US attempt to rejoin the accord. Speaking last week, Netanyahu said Israel would not be bound by its terms. "An agreement with Iran that would pave the way to nuclear weapons — weapons that threaten our extinction — would not compel us in any way," Netanyahu said in a speech on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day. Iran and Israel have both recently attacked each other's commercial shipping, reports say.

Austin will also visit Germany, the United Kingdom and Belgium on his tour, according to the Pentagon. — AFP

## COMPETITION CHARGE: ALIBABA FINED \$2.8 BN

**Beijing, April 10:** China's antitrust regulators on Saturday slapped a record fine of \$2.78 billion on Alibaba Group, the world's biggest e-commerce company, for abusing its dominant market position as Beijing tightened the screws on the country's tech giants. Closing a months-long investigation that began last Christmas eve, China's State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) slapped a fine of 18.23 billion yuan (\$2.78 billion) on Alibaba, headed by the country's top billionaire Jack Ma, setting a precedent for the ruling Communist Party to use the anti-monopoly rules to regulate tech giants.

The SAMR said that it had made an administrative penalty decision under China's anti-monopoly law, ordering Alibaba Group to stop illegal activities and imposing a fine of 4 per cent on its 2019 domestic sales of 455.71 billion yuan, totalling 18.23 billion yuan. The market regulator alleged that Alibaba has been abusing its market dominance since 2015. — PTI

## N. Ireland riots: 14 cops hurt

**Belfast, April 10:** Irish prime minister Micheal Martin warned against a "spiral back" into sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland on Saturday, after a week-long streak of unrest continued with 14 police injured in the latest night of clashes.

Disorder sparked in pockets of Belfast — the regional capital of the British province — on Friday night with petrol bombs and masonry thrown at officers, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

said. A car was also "hijacked and set on fire and pushed towards police lines", as the total number of officers injured in recent disorder reached 88.

Elsewhere, police clashed with a crowd of 40 in the northern town of Coleraine and a man was charged with "possessing petrol bombs in suspicious circumstances" following disorder in Newtownabbey, a suburb north of Belfast. Saturday marks the 23rd anniversary of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which wound down the three-decades-long sectarian conflict over British rule in Northern Ireland which claimed 3,500 lives.

"We owe it to the agreement generation and indeed future generations not to spiral back to that dark place of sectarian murders and political discord," Martin said in a statement.

Irish foreign minister Simon Coveney said it "has been a difficult and worrying week." — AFP

## GAMES

## SHORT TAKES

**IOA to supervise Taekwondo trials**

**New Delhi:** The selection trials for the national Taekwondo squad which will take part in the Asian Olympic Qualifiers will be conducted by the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) instead of the Sports Authority of India (SAI). The decision has been taken to ensure a free and transparent selection trial since Taekwondo Federation of India is not a recognised National Sporting Federation (NSF). SAI was earlier supposed to hold the selections from April 15 to 17. All necessary support including financial assistance will be provided by SAI. — PTI

**Marquez to return for Portuguese GP**

**Paris:** Six-time MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez says he has finally recovered from the injuries that wiped out all of last season and will return at the Portuguese Grand Prix on Sunday week.

"See you in Portimao next week," the Spaniard, who rides for Honda, posted on Instagram on Saturday.

Marquez fractured his right arm when he fell in the first Grand Prix of last season, an injury that required three bouts of surgery, the last in December.

He returned to training at the beginning of February but was unable to line up for the first two races of the new campaign in Qatar. — AFP

**Young carries Hawks past Bulls**

**Los Angeles:** Trae Young bounced back from a subpar outing to score 42 points as the Atlanta Hawks overcame Zach LaVine's 50-point performance with a 120-108 win over the Chicago Bulls on Friday in Atlanta.

The second meeting of the season between the two teams played out similar to their first game in December when Hawks top scorer Young and Bulls all-star LaVine carried their respective offences in Atlanta's 124-104 win. Young, who was coming off a poor shooting night on Wednesday against Memphis when he shot just six-of-12 from the floor, rattetted up the intensity against the Bulls. — AFP

# Dallas double shocks Man City

**Pep and Co. suffer fourth defeat of English Premier League season at Etihad**

**Manchester, April 10:** Manchester City suffered just a fourth Premier League defeat of the season as 10-man Leeds United shocked the run-away leaders thanks to Stuart Dallas's double in a 2-1 win at the Etihad on Saturday.

Dallas opened the scoring three minutes before half-time, but hope of a famous win for Marcelo Bielsa's men seemed to have disappeared when captain Liam Cooper was shown a straight red card in first-half stoppage time.

The visitors withstood a City bombardment until Ferran Torres equalised 14 minutes from time.

But Leeds still summoned the energy to pose a threat on the counter-attack and gained their reward when Dallas slotted below Ederson.

Bielsa's first win in five meetings against Pep Guardiola propels Leeds to ninth in their first season back in the English top flight for 16 years.

Guardiola paid for heavily rotating his side with Wednesday's Champions League quarter-final, second leg, against Borussia Dortmund clearly his priority.

City still enjoy a 14-point lead at the top of the Premier League and need just 11 points from their remaining six matches to guarantee a third title in four years.



Leeds United's Stuart Dallas (centre) celebrates with teammates Raphinha (left) and Luke Ayling after scoring against Manchester City in their English Premier League match at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester on Saturday. Leeds won 2-1. — AP

But Manchester United could close the gap to eight points should the Red Devils win their two games in hand, the first of which is away to Tottenham on Sunday.

A two-minute silence

was held before kick-off in honour of Prince Philip, who died aged 99 on Friday.

Once the action got underway, City noticeably missed Kevin De Bruyne, Ilkay Gundogan, Riyad

THE RESULT	
Manchester City (Torres 76)	1
Leeds (Dallas 42, 90+1)	2

Mahrez, Phil Foden and Ruben Dias, who were among the stars left on the bench by Guardiola.

Raheem Sterling's presence in what was largely a second string side is a reflection of how the England international has fallen down the pecking order in the past few weeks.

Sterling did not even get on as a substitute in the first leg against Dortmund and did little to further his case for selection in midweek by slicing a great chance wide from Fernandinho's cut-back.

Leeds had wasted a number of promising attacks with their final ball, but found the finishing touch on 43 minutes.

Patrick Bamford teed up Dallas to strike low in off the inside the post.

The visitors' joy was short-lived. Just four minutes later they were a man down.

— AFP

## Anshu, Sonam seal Tokyo spots

**■ Door shut on Sakshi Malik**

**Almaty (Kazakhstan), April 10:** India's young wrestlers Anshu Malik and Sonam Malik produced impressive performances in the Asian Olympic Qualifiers here on Saturday to qualify for the Tokyo Games.

Anshu, 19, and Sonam, 18, making a steady transition from the junior to the senior circuit, joined senior pro Vinesh Phogat (53kg) in making the Olympics cut. India now have three women wrestlers, who will now fight for glory at the Summer Games. Vinesh had qualified through the 2019 World Championship.

Overall, India now have seven wrestlers who have qualified for the upcoming Games. Among men, Bajrang Punia (65kg), Ravi Dahiya (57kg) and Deepak Punia (86kg) have qualified in the men's free style event.

While Anshu was dominant in 57kg competition, Sonam's resilience eventually helped her secure the quota and shut the door on Rio Olympic medalist Sakshi Malik.

Sonam announced her arrival by defeating Sakshi four times in recent trials, making the 62kg category her own.

Such was Anshu's domi-

● **India now have three women wrestlers, who will fight for glory at the Summer Olympics. Vinesh had qualified through the 2019 World Championship.**

nance that she conceded only two points en route the final, winning all her three bouts by technical superiority.

She began by beating Korean Jieun Um, then outsmarted Kazak wrestler Emma Tissina and in the semifinal she beat Uzbekistan's Shokhida Akhmedova.

Sonam edged China's Jia Long 5-2 before winning by technical superiority against Hsin Ping Pai of Taipei. In the semifinal, she trailed 0-6 against Kazakhstan's Ayatulya Kassymova but reeled of nine points in a row to secure herself the quota.

"She has shown that she is ready for the senior circuit. People had said that she is still at the cadet level but the consistent victories against Sakshi has boosted her confidence," Sonam's personal coach Ajmer Malik said.

— PTI

## BADOSA STUNS BARTY IN CHARLESTON QUARTERS

**Miami, April 10:** World number one Ashleigh Barty crashed out of the Charleston WTA quarter-finals on Friday, beaten in straight sets by 71st-ranked Spaniard Paula Badosa.

Badosa fired seven aces — three more than Barty — and saved 12 of 14 break points she faced on the way to a 6-4, 6-3 victory.

It's the biggest win of Badosa's career; the Spaniard having notched her first top-20 victory when she beat fifth-seeded Belinda Bencic in the 2nd round.

"I'm still a little bit shocked," Badosa admitted, adding that when Barty's final forehand reeled out of court "I was, like, 'What just happened?'"

"But I'm quite happy with my match, the way that I managed my nerves. It was quite important because sometimes these matches are tough to close."

In the semifinals Badosa will face Russian Veronika Kudermetova, who defeated American Sloane Stephens in straight sets, 6-3, 6-4. — AFP



Off the field



Mumbai batsman Suryakumar Yadav enjoys a day off at the beach in Chennai. — Twitter

Morgan backs under-fire Narine

Kolkata Knight Riders skipper Eoin Morgan on Saturday backed under-fire all-rounder Sunil Narine to deliver in the ongoing IPL and said the Trinidadian is no different from their latest acquisition, Shakib-Al-Hasan. Narine faces some heat as KKR seemed to have got his back-up in the form of Bangladesh's star all-rounder Shakib. "Shakib and Sunil are no different. Sunil believes in himself and in the team to go and get through and win that situation," Morgan said.

Rohit bats for rhino conservation

Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma wore shoes highlighting the "Great One-Horned Rhinoceros" during the IPL opener against RCB to help build awareness for the need to conserve the endangered species. This IPL, Rohit has taken a unique approach to speak about up a cause that he has long supported the conservation of the Great One-Horned Rhinoceros or the Indian Rhino. The swashbuckling batsman sported a unique design of his IPL cricket shoes which showcased the endangered species on them.



Rohit Sharma's shoes display 'save the rhino' campaign.

Covid certificate must at W'khede

The Mumbai Cricket Association has asked its Apex Council members to produce a COVID-19 negative certificate in order to enter the Wankhede stadium, which will host 10 matches. "As per BCCI's protocol, all the officials who would be attending matches are required to produce a Negative report of RT-PCR test conducted within 48 hours of the match day," MCA secretary Sanjay Naik, wrote in a note.

We missed a sixth bowler, says Lynn

Mumbai Indians opener Chris Lynn feels that his team perhaps missed a trick by not having a sixth bowling option against RCB. When asked why Hardik Pandya was not bowling, Lynn indicated that the all-rounder might be carrying a shoulder niggle apart from his workload management. "I exactly don't know perhaps he is carrying a shoulder niggle. Obviously when he bowls, he brings in a different dimension to our side."

SHAW AND AWE!

Prithvi, Dhawan on fire as Delhi gun down CSK for 7-wkt win

Mumbai, April 10: Prithvi Shaw smashed a hapless Chennai Super Kings attack into submission with a brilliant 72 off 38 balls as Delhi Capitals romped home by seven wickets in an IPL match here on Saturday. Shaw, who has been in sublime form of late found a perfect ally in veteran Shikhar Dhawan (85 off 54 balls), as they added 138 for the opening stand while cruising to the target of 189 in 18.4 overs. Shaw's innings had nine boundaries and three sixes while Dhawan was equally attractive in his strokeplay with 10 fours and 2 sixes. The CSK attack had no answers as they literally took control of the chase within the Powerplay overs with both Sam Curran (0/24 in 2 overs) and Shardul Thakur (2/53 in 3.4 overs) being carted all over the park. Earlier, Suresh Raina announced his IPL comeback with a blazing 36-ball 54 and powered Chennai Super Kings to a solid 188 for seven. Sam Curran smashed away to 34 off only 15 balls to prop up the CSK innings towards the end. Curran hit four fours and two sixes. The last five overs yielded 52 runs for CSK, thanks to Curran's power-packed innings. Asked to bat first by Rishabh Pant, Ruturaj Gaikwad got CSK off the mark with a pleasing drive through the off side between point and cover, two deliveries after being beaten all ends up by a Chris Woakes outswinger. Last season's runners-up Delhi Capitals didn't have to wait long for their first breakthrough as Avesh Khan (2/23 in 4 overs) had Faf du Plessis trapped in front of the wicket in the second over. In the first ball of the third over, Woakes had Gaikwad caught in the slip cordon as CSK slipped to seven for two. The English pacer drew Gaikwad into a push with a ball that moved a slightly on pitching. In came Raina — he had missed the last IPL owing to personal reasons — and in the company of Moeen



Delhi Capitals opener Prithvi Shaw en route to his 72 against Chennai Super Kings in an IPL match in Mumbai on Saturday. Delhi won by seven wickets. — IPL

Ali, the seasoned campaigner revived CSK's innings and looked to put up a challenging total against a strong DC batting line-up at the Wankhede Stadium. During his 24-ball 36, Moeen struck four boundaries and two sixes, playing a fine helping hand to Raina. Experienced off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin cut short Moeen's innings when the all-rounder got himself into an uncomfortable position while going for a reverse sweep, the ensuing top-edge ending in a good catch by Shikhar Dhawan, who ran

backwards from short third man to hold on to the ball. Ambati Rayudu came in and straightaway got into the act, hitting a couple of sixes and a four to race away to 23 off 16 balls before Tom Curran ended his stay in the middle. Meanwhile Raina went

about his task in a manner that did not give the impression that he was coming back to top-flight after a long hiatus. Raina got himself going with a four off Woakes and then worked Ashwin for two successive boundaries, not afraid to dance down the wicket against the wily spinner's flight. Using his feet well, the veteran southpaw hoicked leg-spinner Amit Mishra for two and also got a maximum against Ashwin. It was no different with Marcus Stoinis as Raina pulled the Australian medium pacer for another six before being run-out following a mix-up with Ravindra Jadeja.

SCORECARD

**Chennai Super Kings:** Ruturaj Gaikwad c Dhawan b Woakes 5, Faf du Plessis lbw b Avesh Khan 0, Moeen Ali c Dhawan b Ashwin 36, Suresh Raina run out (Woakes/Pant) 54, Ambati Rayudu c Dhawan b Curran 23, Ravindra Jadeja (not out) 26, MS Dhoni b Avesh Khan 0, Sam Curran b Woakes 34. Extras (lb 7, nb 1, w 2) 10. Total (20 overs) 188/7. FoW: 1-7, 2-7, 3-60, 4-123, 5-137, 6-137, 7-188. **Bowling:** Chris Woakes 3-0-18-2, Avesh Khan 4-0-23-2, R. Ashwin 4-0-47-1, Tom Curran 4-0-40-1, Amit Mishra 3-0-27-0, Marcus Stoinis 2-0-26-0. **Delhi Capitals:** Prithvi Shaw c Ali b Bravo 72, Shikhar Dhawan lbw b Thakur 85, Rishabh Pant (not out) 15, Marcus Stoinis c Curran b Thakur 14, Shimron Hetmyer (not out) 0. Extras (nb 1, w 3) 4. Total (in 18.4 overs) 190/3. FoW: 1-138, 2-167, 3-186. **Bowling:** Deepak Chahar 4-0-36-0, Sam Curran 2-0-24-0, Shardul Thakur 3.4-0-53-2, Ravindra Jadeja 2-0-16-0, Moeen Ali 3-0-33-0, Dwayne Bravo 4-0-28-1.



AB de Villiers' 48 off 27 balls helped RCB chase down Mumbai's target on Friday. — IPL

ABD intimidates opponents: Virat

Chennai, April 10: Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Virat Kohli was all praise for Harshal Patel's match-winning bowling performance here on Friday, terming him their designated death bowler in this edition of the IPL. Harshal's 5 for 27 was the reason RCB were able to restrict MI to 159 for nine in the IPL opener, which is something that even losing captain Rohit Sharma admitted. "We brought Harshal in a trade from Delhi. He is relishing the responsibility and is clear with his plans. He was the difference today. He is going to be our death bowler. As a captain you want players with clarity, and he has that," Kohli said at the post-match press conference. About AB de Villiers' 48 off 27 balls, Kohli said that the South African still intimidates the opposition. "The opposition gets nervous about AB. We have depth in the batting which we want to utilize. AB is probably the only one in the team who is so versatile. And he does it on slow wickets what not many can do."

**The opposition gets nervous about AB. We have depth in the batting which we want to utilize. AB is probably the only one in the team who is so versatile.** — VIRAT KOHLI RCB skipper

MI captain Rohit wouldn't mind losing another opening game as long as his team goes on to win the tournament, but admitted that they were 20 runs short. "Winning the championship is important, I guess, not the first game. It was a great fight and we didn't let it go easily. Although the score wasn't something we were happy with. We were 20 short," Rohit said after his team's ninth opening round loss. "We made some mistakes, those are bound to happen. We need to move on. When you look at the situation with four overs left they had AB and Christian, that's why we went with Bumrah and Boult to try and get them out. "Definitely not an easy pitch to bat on, the odd ball was gripping," he said. The MI captain was all praise for de Villiers. "De Villiers batted really well and got them home. We haven't had much time together as a group and it was totally opposite in Dubai, where we began preparations a month before," Rohit said. The MI skipper didn't want to give any excuses for the defeat. "... But that's how the IPL has been played over the years, you just got to get in the game as quickly as possible. It can be difficult for teams that have great home records, but that is what sport is, you've got to go away and win. We are fortunate that we're even on the park."

Harshal revels in role as death over specialist

Chennai, April 10: Harshal Patel was told well in advance that he will be death overs' "pointman" for Royal Challengers Bangalore, a role he played to perfection in the IPL opener against Mumbai Indians. Harshal's career-best 5 for 27 was one of the two match-winning performances for RCB with the other coming from AB de Villiers. "When I was traded from Delhi Capitals, I was told what role I will play for the franchise," the Haryana pacer said at the post-match press conference on Friday.

He was brilliant at the death and just like skipper Virat Kohli said, Harshal also knew that he is expected to perform the tough job for which he had planned meticulously. "There were clear instructions that I will be bowling in the last two overs (he bowled 18th and 20th). That gave me a lot of clarity. It helped me prepare certain plans against batters and kept my preparations concise."

Harshal said that change of pace and the slow yorkers have been his biggest strength. "The ball started reversing at one stage. It was important to bowl the Yorkers and slower balls," he said. According to Harshal, he has been bowling those slower yorkers that got rid of Ishan Kishan and Marco Jansen, for almost two seasons now. "Just that when you don't get wickets of slow yorkers, people don't tend to see that. I always had the yorker but earlier couldn't take it into the game."



Sunrisers Hyderabad players during a training session in Chennai. — SRH

KKR OPEN CAMPAIGN AGAINST SUNRISERS

AGE CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 10

It will be a battle of equals when Sunrisers Hyderabad open their IPL14 campaign against Kolkata Knight Riders here at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Sunday. Knight Riders had missed the playoffs cut narrowly on net run-rate in 2020, while Sunrisers went down to Delhi Capitals in the Qualifier 2.

Both teams would fancy their chances this edition although they don't seem to have balance in the squad to go all the way. In batting, Sunrisers are heavily dependent on their overseas trio of skipper David Warner, opener Jonny Bairstow and Kane Williamson. The addition of Jason Roy has added teeth to their batting order. English opener Roy who

HEAD to HEAD

Matches	19
KKR 12 SRH 7	

**LAST YEAR'S MATCHES**  
● KKR defeated Sunrisers by seven wickets at Abu Dhabi  
● KKR beat Sunrisers in a Super Over at Abu Dhabi

FOR THE RECORD

● David Warner who has scored 912 runs at an average of 45.60 in 23 innings for Delhi Daredevils and Sunrisers Hyderabad is the second highest run-getter against KKR.  
● Andre Russell who has made 1,459 runs at an average of 31.04 in 57 innings, needs 41 runs to become the fourth batsman to score over 1,500 runs for Kolkata Knight Riders.

**STATS:** S. PERVEZ QAISER

Bhuvneshwar Kumar will make them a formidable bowling unit. In their 19 previous meetings, Hyderabad have lost 12 but they would be hoping that season 14 would be different. The Caribbean duo of Sunil Narine and Kieron Pollard have to fire for KKR to do well. They both had a disappointing season in 2020. While opener

Live on TV

Sunrisers Hyderabad vs Kolkata Knight Riders from 7:30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD1

Shubman Gill was KKR top-scorer with 440 runs in 14 innings last season, Eoin Morgan's deputy Dinesh Karthik had a disappointing outing in the UAE with an average of 14. Morgan, however, believes Karthik is not only important in the brilliant department but also for his support off the field. "DK offers a lot with the bat and behind the stumps. He has been in fine form, and he is always one of those players who if you watch him train and particularly bat, he times the ball beautifully and hits the ball well."