

IN BRIEF

2 Covid-infected Tihar inmates die

New Delhi: Two coronavirus positive inmates, including a 41-year-old woman, of the Tihar jail died at a hospital in east Delhi on Thursday, officials said. The deceased were identified as Kamaljeet (75) and Kehkashan, they said. "Murder convict Kamaljeet of central jail number 3, Tihar, tested positive for Covid on April 16. He was admitted to the GTB Hospital on April 21 and died on Thursday. "Kehkashan of central jail number 6, Tihar, was detected Covid-19 positive on April 17 and was admitted to the GTB Hospital on April 22. She also died on Thursday. She was lodged in the jail in cheating cases," a senior jail official said. Six inmates have died due to the coronavirus in Delhi since the pandemic began last year. Four have died this year so far. Two Covid positive inmates of Mandoli Jail died on June 15 and July 4 last year. According to data shared by the prisons department, 303 inmates have tested positive for the coronavirus since March 2021. Of them, 33 recovered, four died while there are 266 active cases. — PTI

6 of family die in gas cylinder explosion

New Delhi: A fire in a transformer in Delhi's Bijwasan area spread to two shanties nearby, leading to a gas cylinder explosion in which six members of a family, including four minors, were killed early Thursday, officials said. The officials said they received a call regarding a fire in a transformer at Valmiki Colony around 12.30 am, following which four fire tenders were rushed to the spot. Later, police received a PCR call regarding a cylinder explosion in Valmiki Colony. According to the officials, the transformer caught fire and flames spread rapidly to two shanties nearby, which led to an explosion in the LPG cylinder. A senior police officer said Kamlesh (37), his wife Budhani (32), their two daughters, 16 and 12, and two sons, 6 years and 3 months, died in the cylinder blast.

17 arrested in city hookah bar bust

New Delhi: The Delhi Police on Thursday busted a hookah bar running in the basement of a property dealer's office in Paschim Vihar area and arrested 17 people, officials said. The government has imposed a lockdown across the city due to the increasing coronavirus cases. The accused violated the DDM guidelines, police said. "Police received a tip-off and conducted a raid at the basement of Gupta Properties, main Sayyed Nangloi Road, Bhaira Enclave, Paschim Vihar where an illegal hookah bar was being run in violation of the lockdown orders implemented in Delhi," additional DCP (Outer) Sudhanshu Dhama said.

DECISION ON FINAL SEMESTER EXAMS SOON, SAYS DU

New Delhi: The Delhi University on Thursday said it will take stock of the exam schedule, amid demands from students asking for exams to be deferred in view of spiking Covid cases in the country. The university is slated to hold online exams for final year undergraduate and postgraduate students between May and June. Students and teachers have been demanding deferment of exams, citing the pandemic situation. In a notification on Thursday, the varsity said it is "concerned for the health and safety of our students which is our priority and would ensure that the interest of the university community is protected at any given time". "The university has been receiving requests related to examination of terminal semester final year students scheduled for May-June 2021. The university would take stock of the situation and would come out with its decision at the earliest for the conduct of May - June 2021 examination (final year semester) in compliance of UGC guidelines and advisory issued by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)," the notification read. The varsity also said the decision regarding mid-term semester/year examination will be taken at a later stage. — PTI

IPL extravaganza goes on as Covid cases soar in Delhi

SANJAY BASAK
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

At a time when Covid-19 continued to devastate the national capital, crematoriums were overwhelmed with bodies piling up, Covid cases touched 30,000, and the death toll rose to over 300 during the last 24 hours, a parallel universe played out in Delhi.

Dressed in shiny, colourful, flashy costumes, and protected by a bio-bubble, the cricketers played two back-to-back IPL matches at the Feroz Shah Kotla Ground, renamed as Arun Jaitley Stadium, on Thursday. The IPL matches played were Mumbai Indians vs Rajasthan Royals and Kolkata Knight Riders vs Delhi Capitals.

The stadium is only 4.5 kilometres away from the Nigambodh Ghat crematorium ground.

Reports quoting municipal data indicated that during the last 10 days there were over 1,400 Covid cremations at the Nigambodh Ghat. In the last 48 hours, over 200 bodies were cremated there.

While the nation reeled under the crisis, which apparently is yet to peak, a foreign agency quoted an IPL official saying that "IPL provides a much needed distraction for all from the doom and gloom around us."

Attempts to contact BCCI vice president Rajiv Shukla failed as he did not respond to messages or calls. Holding the IPL amidst the "gloom and doom" might not appear incongruous for the



Health workers wearing PPE suits sit on a bench during a break from cremation of Covid victims amid the rise in Covid-19 cases across the country on Thursday. — PTI

authorities concerned, but former Australian Women's Cricket captain Belinda Clarke said that "if IPL helps India, it should run. If it is hindering recovery efforts, it shouldn't."

Former Australian player Adam Gilchrist questioned the appropriateness of holding this glitzy event.

He tweeted: "Best wishes to all India. Frightening Covid numbers. #IPL continues. Inappropriate? Or important distraction each night? Whatever your thoughts, prayers are with you."

Even as patients in Delhi continued to die owing to lack of oxygen and hospital beds, testing remained abysmally low. Meanwhile, all seemed to be well for the

privileged few. For the players there were ICU on wheel ambulances on standby, IPL check-in counters at the airport, and testing every 48 hours.

While the infection raged across the national capital, a "safe bio-secure environment" was provided for the IPL players.

However, the organisers' resolve to provide "entertainment" to those gasping for breath seemed to have caused massive outrage on social media.

Sanket Upadhyay, a TV anchor, tweeted: "There would be doctors, medical facilities, and police on duty diverted for these events. @BCCI must ask itself—isn't it criminal to take the resources away from a city struggling with

Covid?"

Footballer Gary Lineker tweeted, "I love the IPL as any cricket fan but it seems so terribly wrong for it to continue given the Covid catastrophe that's currently occurring in India."

Broadcaster Piers Morgan's tweet read, "IPL should not continue given the horrific Covid crisis in India." While a Twitterati, Sandhya Lakshmi, asked: "People are suffering, they are in search of oxygen and beds in hospitals. For whom are you telecasting?"

A tweet supporting the event read, "I am glad for the IPL. It effectively diverts all the people from isolation in my house from their Covid related anxieties."

Delhi govt to procure 67 lakh doses of Covishield from SII

New Delhi, April 29: The Delhi government will procure 67 lakh doses of Covishield vaccine from Serum Institute of India and the first tranche of three lakh doses will be delivered by May 3, official sources said on Thursday.

The Delhi government has also sought a supply schedule from the manufacturer for the remaining doses which are to be delivered over the next three months.

An official source said a purchase order has been issued in the name of Prakash Kumar Singh, Director, Government and Regulatory Affairs at Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII). "The manufacturer must submit a government testing laboratory - Batch release certificate for every batch of vaccine at the time of delivery. In case of failure on part of the supplier to furnish such report, the batch of vaccines will not be accepted," the purchase order read.

It also said samples of supplies from each batch may be chosen at the point of supply or distribution storage points for testing and sent to empanelled laboratories or Government Drugs Testing Laboratory.

"The supplies will be deemed to be completed only upon receipt of the quality certificates from the laboratories. Samples which do not meet quality requirement shall render

Plan ready to vaccinate all adults within 3 months: CM

New Delhi, April 29: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Thursday that a plan had been formulated to vaccinate all adults against coronavirus within the next three months.

Mr Kejriwal said vaccination centres would be set up on a large scale and those eligible must come forward to take the jab.

"Had a meeting with the officials on vaccination drive in Delhi. Prepared a plan to vaccinate all above 18 years in the next 3 months," he tweeted. "We will set up vaccination centres on a large scale. All eligible people must come forward to get vaccinated."

According to officials, orders for 3-lakh vaccine doses have been placed already and it will be placed for the rest of the

relevant batches liable to be rejected," it said.

Earlier in the day, Delhi Health

Minister Satyendar Jain said Delhi "does not have vaccine" doses for the inoculation of people in the age group of 18 to 44 years and purchase orders have been placed with manufacturers for the same.

The minister, however, said preparations to give jabs to this category have been completed.

"At present, we don't



Arvind Kejriwal

doses as soon as possible. "The work for the order and procurement of the vaccine is in progress. The first lot of the vaccine doses will be received soon. Orders for 50-lakh vaccine doses are being placed," an official said.

The second coronavirus wave continues to ravage Delhi, which recorded 368 more deaths and 25,986 infections on Wednesday with a positivity rate of 31.76 per cent. — PTI

have vaccine. We have requested the companies to provide it," Mr Jain told reporters when asked if there were enough vaccine available for the 18-44 age group.

"We will tell you in a day or two," he replied in response to a query about starting the inoculation drive for this category on May 1. Mr Jain also said the manufacturers are yet to provide a schedule of vaccine supply to the city government. — PTI

'Why MP, Maha got more O2 than asked for, but Delhi less'

New Delhi, April 29: The Delhi High Court Friday questioned the Centre as to why various states, including Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, were being allocated more oxygen than they demanded while the national capital was not getting even the quantity necessary for treating Covid patients.

A bench of justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli made it clear that it was by no means interested in securing more oxygen for Delhi than required and that too at the cost of any state or Union Territory.

Senior advocate Rahul Mehra, representing the Delhi government, said that while the national capital's requirement was 700 MT per day, it was allocated 480 and 490 MT and the Centre has not increased it. Mr Mehra and senior advocate Raj Shekhar Rao, who is amicus curiae in the case, informed the court that as per the national allocation plan, Maharashtra demanded 1500 Metric Tonnes (MT) of oxygen per day and was allocated 1661 MT; similarly, Madhya Pradesh demanded 445 MT and it was allocated 543 MT and that the situation was similar for several other states.

The court said that if the information provided was to be accepted, it would appear that the central

SOLICITOR GENERAL Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, said the government will file an affidavit on the court's query and will give the reasons for giving more oxygen to Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, if that is the case

government needed to explain this aspect and granted it a day to respond.

The Centre has to either show some justification for this or "make amends" now that the situation has been brought to its attention, the high court said.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, said the government will file an affidavit on the court's query and will give the reasons for giving more oxygen to Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, if that is the case.

"There are states which received less than what they had asked for: We have been rationalising," he said. During the hearing, when the court asked a senior central government officer as to why Delhi's supply was out of line while MP and Maharashtra were given more oxygen, Mehta said the population of MP was more than the national capital.

He then told the officer, "You cut from MP and give it to Delhi. It would be at the cost of some lives in MP but let us do it for Delhi."

This was objected to by the judges who said, "Don't give it an impression as if we are asking something extra for Delhi. Don't project like this. We don't appreciate this. We are asking this on the basis of facts and figures. You can't be emotional about it. You have to take this head on, you can't duck it."

Delhi government counsel also projected before the court, the position of ICU and non-ICU beds here. Mehra said there are currently 16,272 non-ICU beds and 4,866 ICU beds and they are in the process of adding more beds.

The existing oxygen demand in hospitals is 704 MT per day and after further augmentation, the daily oxygen demand will be around 1000 MT, he said, adding that his grievance was the allocation of 480-490 MT oxygen was far less than Delhi's requirement.

The solicitor general said more tankers are being imported to transport oxygen and it was a matter of few days and once the logistical issues get settled, the Centre will ensure whatever maximum supply is possible will be given. — PTI

L-G seeks report on vaccination drive

New Delhi, April 29: Delhi lieutenant governor (L-G) Anil Baijal sought a report from chief secretary Vijay Dev on Thursday on the city's preparedness for the vaccination of people above 18 years of age against Covid, his first significant move since the GNCTD (Amendment) Act, 2021 that says the Delhi "government" means the LG came into force.

The provisions of the Act came into effect from April 27, according to a notification issued by the ministry of home affairs (MHA).

L-G Baijal's office also



Anil Baijal

created a Twitter handle — @RajNiwasDelhi — saying it will share official announcements, press releases, reactions and other useful information for the residents of the national capital.

About the next phase of

DELHI LIEUTENANT-governor sought a report from chief secretary Vijay Dev on Thursday on the city's preparedness for the vaccination of people above 18 years of age against Covid, his first significant move since the GNCTD Act, 2021

the vaccination drive, the Raj Niwas tweeted: "Hon'ble L-G has sought a report from the chief secretary on the preparedness for the roll out of the vaccination program for people above 18 yrs of

age."

Earlier in the day, health minister Satyendar Jain said the city "does not have vaccines" for the inoculation of persons in the 18-44 age group and purchase orders have been placed with manufacturers for the same.

The minister, however, said preparations to inoculate people in this category have been completed.

"At present, we do not have vaccines. We have requested the companies to provide it," Mr Jain told reporters when asked if there were enough vaccines available for the 18-44 age group. — PTI

2 arrested for selling fire extinguisher as O2 cylinder

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

Two people were arrested here on Thursday for allegedly cheating a woman by selling her a fire extinguisher instead of an oxygen cylinder which she needed for her Covid positive relative, police said.

Ashutosh (19) and Ayush (22), residents of Vikaspuri, were arrested from west Delhi's Uttam Nagar area and five fire extinguishers were seized from them. They were selling each fire extinguisher as oxygen cylinder for ₹10,000, police said.

Deputy commissioner of police (Dwarka) Santosh Kumar Meena said the complainant Geeta Arora, a resident of Shishram Park, Bindapur, alleged

that two people sold her a fire extinguisher in place of an oxygen cylinder.

Her relative was suffering from Covid and was having difficulty in breathing due to low oxygen levels, police said. In a bid to arrange an oxygen cylinder, she came in contact with the accused, who duped her, police said.

When she contacted them and demanded her money back, they stopped receiving her phone calls, the DCP said.

Police registered a case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code at Uttam Nagar Police Station, they said.

On the basis of a tip-off, a joint team of special staff and Uttam Nagar Police Station arrested the accused on Thursday, Meena said.



A relative of critical Covid patient reacts at LNJP hospital as coronavirus cases surge in record numbers across the country in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

Release Remdesivir seized by cops for use in hospitals: HC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

The Delhi High Court on Thursday directed the deputy commissioner (DC) of the AAP government's revenue department to issue orders for the release of Remdesivir, used in the treatment of Covid, as soon as the medicine is seized by the police from hoarders and black-marketeers. A bench of justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli issued the direction to ensure that the seized medicine does not remain as case property, does not lose its effectiveness and can be administered to the patients in need.

The court said once a seizure was made, the investigating officer (IO) shall immediately inform the DC of the same. The IO shall also ascertain that the seized medicine is genuine and ensure that it is kept in a refrigerated environment to maintain its effectiveness till it is released to a hospital or a COVID health centre, the bench said. A



Critical Covid patients receive free oxygen provided by a Gurdwara amid the rise in coronavirus cases across the country in Indirapuram Ghaziabad on Thursday. — PTI

similar direction was issued by the court with regard to the use of oxygen cylinders seized by the police during raids.

The order came after Kanwal Jeet Arora, the member-secretary of the Delhi State Legal Services Authority

(DLSA), told the bench that such seized medicines and oxygen cylinders ought to be put to use, instead of being kept as case property, in the present situation when there is a dearth of the same.

The Delhi government told the court that as on April 27, around 279 vials of Remdesivir were seized by the Delhi Police.

The bench, in its order, also made it clear that Remdesivir or oxygen cylinders ought not to be seized from patients or their attendants, who may have procured it on the black market, as they may have taken such a step "out of sheer desperation and need". The submission by Arora was made during the hearing of several pleas on the oxygen crisis and other issues related to the coronavirus pandemic, which the national capital is grappling with.

SHORT TAKES

No home delivery of liquor in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram: The Kerala Government has decided not to go ahead with its plan to introduce home delivery of liquor through state run Kerala State Beverages Corporation Ltd (BEVCO). Excise minister T.P. Ramakrishnan has reportedly directed BEVCO high-rups to refrain from going ahead with the home delivery plan. With just two days left for the counting of votes for the recently held assembly polls in the state, the ruling front and the minister want the new government to take a call on the issue after it assumes office some time in mid May. The government had closed down bars, beer parlours and liquor outlets recently as part of measures to curb the spike in Covid cases. During the first wave of the pandemic last year the government had introduced online sales of liquor through an exclusive app Bev-Q designed by a private firm for the beverages corporation.

No respite in Covid cases in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: Odisha on Thursday recorded 6,998 fresh Covid-19 cases as the tally surged to 4,35,513. The state also reported 12 deaths due to the disease, catapulting the total number of fatalities in the pandemic to 1027. Out of the 6998 cases, 4,054 were detected in quarantine while 2,944 are local contact cases. Khurda registered the highest 919 cases followed by Cuttack which recorded 517 fresh positives. The other districts which recorded over 400 cases are Sundergarh (474) and Nuapada (420). Mayurbhanj and Sambalpur districts reported 308 and 323 cases, respectively. The districts which reported three-digit Covid-19 cases include Nabarangpur (255), Kalahandi (292), Puri (228), Jajpur (226), Nayagarh (121), Sonepur (131), Rayagada (181), Keonjhar (160) and Ganjam (160).

WB ASKS CENTRE FOR 3.5 CRORE VACCINE DOSES

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, APRIL 29

As West Bengal has witnessed a new record in daily spike at 17,403 cases with 89 more deaths in the fresh wave of Covid-19 pandemic, the Mamata Banerjee government has urged the Centre to immediately send 3.5 crore doses of vaccines for 1.5 crore people aged between 18 and 45 years in the state to kickstart its third phase of vaccination drive for them from May 1. On Thursday evening the state health department informed that the 17,403 fresh cases were detected with the 89 additional deaths in the last 24 hours. Among the new cases, 3,912 were reported from North 24 Parganas, followed by 3901 in Kolkata which however saw 23 deaths, the highest among the districts. The state government informed, "Government of West Bengal has requested government of India to kindly arrange vaccine stocks and supply for the Government sector and the private sector hospitals in West Bengal in the following manner: 1) 2 crore doses for vaccinating 1 crore people in West Bengal in 18-45 year age group through the Government hospitals in WB. 2) 1 crore doses for vaccinating 50 lakh people in West Bengal through private hospitals in WB." It elaborated, "Total 3 crore doses for vaccinating 1.5 crore people in West Bengal in this phase that begins on May 1, 2021."

Odisha to PM: Waive charges for deployment of Central forces

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 29

Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to direct the Union ministry of home affairs (MHA) for waiving of charges towards deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) in the Left-Wing Extremism-affected areas in the state.

As per official sources, MHA has asked Odisha to pay ₹4561.23 crore towards deployment charges of CAPFs up to October 1, 2020.

Though Odisha had earlier in 2015 requested the Centre to reconsider the decision of charging the State government for deployment of Central forces, the then Union home minister through a letter on August 25, 2015 had intimated that there had been no change in the extant policy of the Union government as approved earlier by the Cabinet committee on security.

As such, all states except the few Special Category States-North-East, J&K and Himachal Pradesh, are required to bear full charges for deployment of CAPFs in their respective territories. Further he intimated that due to overall constraint of resources, it was not feasible to exempt the state government from payment of deployment charges, the letter read.

"Left Wing Extremism is a national issue and a grave internal security threat to the integrity of the nation. This major challenge has to be addressed by both the government of India and the state governments jointly. Besides, the government of Odisha has been proactive in spending from its scanty resources in creating and deploying security forces even amidst its tight fiscal situation," the CM's letter read.

Mr Patnaik also said that around 15 battalions of Odisha police have been raised, specifically to combat Left Wing Extremism.

PIL in SC seeks waiver of GST on Covid drugs, kits

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

NGO the Public Policy Advocates on Wednesday moved the Supreme court seeking to exempt levying of Goods and services Tax on the medicines and medical devices including equipment being used for the treatment of Covid patients in the second wave of pandemic.

Seeking exemption of GST on Remdesivir, Tocilizumab, Favipiravir and other similar generic medicines, the petition by the Public Policy Advocates has described as "unjustified" the levy of GST on the medicines essential for the treatment of Covid including medical grade oxygen, oxygen concentrators, ventilators, Bipap Machines, and other Covid patient care support equipment.

The application says "The Right to Health in

Bombay HC asks Maha govt to think of 15-day lockdown

Hospitals should not become Jatugrihas, says HC on fire incidents

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, APRIL 29

The Bombay high court on Thursday asked the Maharashtra government to consider imposing complete lockdown in the state for 15 days.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G.S. Kulkarni was of the opinion that a complete lockdown like last year was necessary in order to successfully contain the spread of Covid situation in the State.

The bench also asked Advocate General (AG) Ashutosh Kumbhakoni if the state believed its current restrictions on the movement of citizens were working. The judges also asked him if people with only urgent business were on roads.

The bench clarified that it was not issuing any mandate, however they were of the opinion that the government should consider a lockdown like last year.



A government run Vaccination Centre wears a deserted look due to shortage of vaccines in Mumbai on Thursday. — PTI

The HC also directed the Maharashtra government to ensure municipal authorities conducted an immediate fire audit of all hospitals, nursing homes and Covid care centres across the state.

Referring to Wednesday's fire in a private hospital in Thane district where four people died, the bench said, "We do not want any more fires in hospitals."

The bench said a patient

"collective failure" and that citizens must also act responsibly.

"You want to have everything. You want Kumbh, you want marriages...are you waiting for the third wave?" it asked.

"At least for 15 days if people stay strictly indoors, like last year, we may expect better results. Please advise your government," the high court told this to the AG.

The HC was hearing a PIL, alleging improper management of Covid treatment in Maharashtra and seeking directions pertaining to shortage of Remdesivir, the key antiviral drug, and oxygen supply.

Advocate General Kumbhakoni on behalf of the state and the senior counsel Anil Sakhere on behalf of BMC told the HC that there was adequate stock of Remdesivir and oxygen for hospitals in Mumbai and a safety audit of medical facilities across the state would be conducted.

does not have time to check if a hospital is fire-compliant or not. "We do not want hospitals turning into Jatugrihas," the HC said, referring to the highly combustible house of lac that Duryodhana had built for the Pandavas in the "Mahabharata".

The HC also said it was not trying to pin the blame for the raging pandemic on the state government or municipal corporation, but it was the society's

Lockdown-like curbs in Maha till May 15

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, APRIL 29

With the rise in coronavirus cases and deaths showing no signs of decline, the Maharashtra government has extended the lockdown-like curbs in the state till May 15. State chief secretary Sitaram Kunte on Thursday issued an order, which said, "Maharashtra is continuing to be threatened with the spread of Covid virus and therefore it is imperative to continue emergency measures to prevent and contain the spread of virus. The Government finds it necessary to continue the enforcement of the current restrictions throughout the state till 15th May to break the chain of transmission effectively."

The strict curbs on movement of people and

a host of other activities have been in force in the state since April 14 and were to end on April 30. Essential services have been exempted from the restrictions.

On April 21, the Maharashtra government had imposed more strict restrictions in the state under the 'Break the Chain' campaign. Under the curbs, all government offices (centre, state, local administrative), except emergency services related to the coronavirus pandemic, will open with only 15 percent attendance.

Restrictions have also been imposed on weddings and only 25 people will be able to attend the ceremony. Under the new restrictions, the wedding ceremony will have to be arranged in a single hall and should be completed in two hours as a single event.



Traffic police personnel take part in a bike rally for Covid-19 awareness in Chennai on Thursday. — PTI

times of pandemic, assumes an ever more crucial significance since affordable health-care and availability of drugs which are critical to fight moderate and severe cases of illness have to be given paramount importance. This would have the effect of preventing black marketing, hoarding of such drugs and other medical equipment, as well as would ensure that the same is available to the

citizens at affordable cost."

The application has been moved by Pritika Kumar — the founder of the Public Policy advocates. The application has been moved in the suo motu matter being heard by the top court relating to the supply of essential medicines, oxygen, manner and method of vaccination, dual pricing of the vaccine and declaration of lockdown.

Covid crisis: Modi to chair council of ministers meeting

New Delhi, April 29: Amid the Covid-19 crisis, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will chair a meeting of the Union Council of Ministers on Friday to discuss the prevailing situation in the country, sources said.

The meeting, to be held virtually on Friday morning, could also be attended by some top government officials besides Union ministers, they said.

Access to medical attention remained scarce and resources stretched to the limit in several areas of the country in the midst of a massive second wave. This will be the first meeting of the council of ministers in the aftermath of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the sources said.

They said during the meeting the ongoing vaccination drive, which has now been opened for those in the 18-45 age group, could be discussed along with a presentation. In the meeting, ministers could be asked reach

▶ **THIS WILL BE** the first meeting of the council of ministers in the aftermath of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the sources said.

▶ **PRIME MINISTER** Modi has held several rounds of meetings with chief ministers and top government officials to deliberate on the Covid-19 situation.

He has also been holding meetings with pharmaceutical industry leaders, oxygen suppliers, heads of the three armed forces and other dignitaries to discuss how to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the meeting, ministers could be asked reach out to people to look into their issues, the sources said. — PTI

Safety Tips for Shopkeepers To Curb Corona

Sh. Manohar Lal
Chief Minister, Haryana

- Maintain Social Distance Between Customers
- Avoid Cash Transactions, Keep options of Online Payments
- Sanitizer Should Be Arranged at The Entrance of Every Shop
- Use Gloves While Delivering Goods To Customers

For Information related to COVID-19
Contact State Helpline Numbers
8558893911 (Gurugram & Faridabad)
& For Other Districts 1075

Information, Public Relations & Languages Department, Haryana | www.pharyana.gov.in | @Cmohry | @DiprHaryana

In MP's tribal dist, villagers set up Covid centre

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, APRIL 29

In an initiative of its kind in the country, people in a Madhya Pradesh village have established a Covid care Centre through crowd-funding to ensure locals infected by coronavirus have access to medical facilities.

Villagers of Lalborra in tribal-dominated district of Balaghat opened the 30-bed hospital in a government girls' college hostel in the area when they failed to arrange a bed in a hospital for a Covid-19 patient of the village.



Covid centre at Lalborra in Balaghat district

"The villagers were moving from one hospital to the other in the district to admit the woman Covid-19 patient. However, she could not be admitted to any Covid hospitals in the dis-

trict due to lack of bed. She was later admitted to a hospital in Indore", a village elder told this newspaper on Thursday.

Later, the villagers decided to open a Covid care

Centre in the area and approached the local administration to make provision of medical staff for the Centre.

"We have approached the local administration to handover us the government girls college hostel in the area to open the Centre. We have raised funds to create basic infrastructure in the Centre with provision of beds, oxygen concentrator machines, PPE kits for the patients as well as the doctors visiting the Centre.

The Centre was opened on April 21", Lalborra gram panchayat sarpanch Anesh Khan told this newspaper.

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr.P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person **Deepak @ Abhishek, S/o Subhash, R/o: Village Kundal Garhi, Sonipat, Haryana** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 406/16 u/s 336/458/341 IPC & 27/54/59 Arms Act, P.S. Bawana, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **Deepak @ Abhishek** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Deepak @ Abhishek** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Deepak @ Abhishek** accused of **FIR No. 406/16 u/s 336/458/341 IPC & 27/54/59 Arms Act, P.S. Bawana, Delhi** is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before **03.06.2021**

By Order
Sh. Vaibhav Mehta
(Ld. MM) Rohini Court
Delhi

DP/978/ON/2021

SEARCH FOR MISSING

General public is hereby informed that a boy **Md Aijaz S/o Md Riyaz, R/o A-474, Gali No. 7, Vijay Colony, Village Bawana, Delhi** and Permanent Address: Chote Sahab Alam Road, PS Sahadatgang, Lucknow, UP has been missing since 20.03.2021. In this regard, **FIR No. 183/2021 dated 10.04.2021 u/s 363 IPC has been registered at P.S. Bawana, Delhi**. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the missing boy but no clue has come to light so far. The description of the missing boy is as under:
Name: Md Aijaz, **Gender:** Male, **Age:** 16 years, **Height:** 5', **Complexion:** Shallow, **Face:** Long, **Built:** Thin, **Wearing:** Blue colour jeans, pink colour shirt and slippers on his feet. If anyone has any information regarding this missing boy, kindly inform SHO/Bawana, Delhi.



Md Aijaz

E-mail : c/cb.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax : 011-24368639

DP/984/ON/2021

SHO
P.S. Bawana, Delhi.
Ph. No. 011-27752534

SHORT TAKES

Japan govt honours
Nripendra Misra

New Delhi: Nripendra Misra, former principal secretary to the Prime Minister, is among this year's foreign recipients of the 2021 Spring Decorations announced by the government of Japan on Thursday. The Japanese embassy said that the former IAS officer will receive the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star in recognition of his contributions to strengthening the economic relationship between Japan and India. Indira Misra, former president of the Ikebana International Gurgaon Chapter, is another Indian recipient of the Spring Decorations honour and will receive the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays in recognition of her contributions to promoting Ikebana in India. The embassy lauded Mr Misra's contribution to the development of the India-Japan relationship from 2014-19. — *PTI*

Cong MP Satav
put on ventilator

Mumbai: Senior Maharashtra Congress leader Rajeev Satav, who had tested coronavirus positive last week, has been put on ventilator support after his health deteriorated. Mr Satav, considered close to former Congress president Rahul Gandhi, is admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) of the Jehangir Hospital in Pune. Maharashtra minister of state for cooperation and social justice Vishwajeet Kadam said that Mr Satav was hospitalised on April 23. "Till April 25, he was responding well to the treatment and was stable. After some complications on April 25, he was admitted to the ICU and was put on ventilator support three days later," Mr Kadam said. A team of doctors is currently monitoring his health and fortunately, Satav is now responding to the treatment, he added.

Medical aid
from abroad

■ **Continued from Page 1**
indication that in the immediate future at least, India will not be able to export vaccines in the significant way in which it had been doing in the past few months since the priority is to vaccinate the country's huge 1.2 billion population as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, Russia dispatched two special flights on Wednesday night carrying equipment and medicines while the US will operate three special flights — two on Friday and the third on Monday carrying urgently-needed supplies for India. The three special flights from the US will supply a total of 28 million litres of oxygen, 2,000 Oxygen concentrators, hundreds of oxygen cylinders and 17 oxygen generation plants. The two flights from Russia carried a total of 20 oxygen generating plants and the anti-Covid drug Favipiravir. Japan too is expected to soon begin the supply of oxygen concentrators, ventilators and other pharmaceutical products to India. Oxygen concentrators are also being sourced by Indian companies from China.

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar also addressed Indian diplomats abroad and briefed them on their role in the current scenario.

The foreign secretary said that apart from the 4.5 lakh doses of the patented Remdesivir that its manufacturing firm Gilead has given India free of cost, New Delhi is also trying to acquire another four lakh doses from the authorised manufacturers of the anti-viral drug in Egypt. Efforts are also on to procure it from other authorised manufacturers in the UAE, Uzbekistan, Israel and closer home in Bangladesh too. Efforts are also on to acquire three lakh doses of another anti-viral drug Favipiravir from Russia and other nations. In addition, yet another anti-Covid drug Tocilizumab is being procured from Germany and Switzerland.

Regarding the travel restrictions that have been imposed by several countries Mr Shringla said these were temporary in nature but emphasised that air cargo connectivity must continue. In response to a question, he said an airline in China (carrying cargo to India) had cancelled the 10 daily flights it operated which had caused a significant impact.

Mr Shringla praised the ready support being extended by foreign nations, many of whom had noted how India too had extended support to them in their hour of need.

Top Ulfa-I chief
killed in Assam

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, APRIL 29

In a major breakthrough on the insurgency front, Assam Police on Thursday shot dead a commander of the banned United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (Ulfa-I) in an encounter in Western Assam's Bongaigaon district. Another Ulfa-I cadre was captured live by the police after the encounter.

This has come days after the banned outfit abducted three employees of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) in Sivasagar district. Two of them have been rescued since.

The Ulfa-I cadre Dwipen Saud who was killed in an encounter at Besimari in Bongaigaon district was newly appointed commander of outfit's Western Command in place of Dhristi Rajkhowa who surrendered before the police a few months back. The surrender of Dhristi Rajkhowa was seen as a

major setback for the Ulfa-I which had lost its strength completely in Western Assam.

Assam Director General of Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta who informed about the encounter in his social media post on twitter said, "Police-Ulfa encounter took place at Besimari (Manikpur PS) in Bongaigaon district just some time back. Ulfa-I commander western command, recently appointed to replace Dhristi Rajkhowa, SS (self-styled) Col Dwipen Saud appears dead with bullet injury. He's being taken to hospital now."

He added, "His gunman Padum Rai is apprehended alive with a weapon. Another weapon and a grenade recovered in the PO (police operation). Further search is on."

Security sources claimed that encounter had no connection with the recent incident of kidnapping of three ONGC employees in Upper Assam.

Char Dham Yatra in
U'khand suspended

Portals of 4 shrines will open as per schedule, says CM

Dehradun, April 29: The Chardham Yatra to the four famous Himalayan shrines in Uttarakhand, which was scheduled to begin next month, has been postponed in view of the massive surge in Covid-19 cases.

Announcing this here on Thursday, Uttarakhand chief minister Tirath Singh Rawat said conducting the yatra amid the raging pandemic is not possible. "Considering the rising cases of corona, it has been decided to suspend the Chardham Yatra," Mr Rawat told reporters.

However, the portals of the four Himalayan temples known as Chardham will open as scheduled, he said.

Only priests will be allowed to perform daily prayers at the shrines and not devotees, the chief minister said. "Though opening on schedule, no

▶ **ONLY PRIESTS** will be allowed to perform daily prayers at the shrines and not devotees

▶ **COVID CASES** hit a new high in the state with 6,054 people testing positive and 108 deaths

pilgrim neither from inside the state nor from outside will be allowed to visit the temples," he said.

Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri are the four famous shrines. Kedarnath is slated to open at 5 am on May 17, Badrinath at 4.15 am on May 18, Yamunotri at 12.15 pm on May 14 and Gangotri on 7.30 am on May 15.

Covid-19 cases have been rising drastically in Uttarakhand as in various other states. They hit a new high in the state on Wednesday with 6,054 peo-

ple testing positive and 108 succumbing to the virus. This is the highest single-day spike in Covid cases and fatalities recorded by the state so far.

The state government had drawn much flak for organising the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar which according to many contributed to the second wave of coronavirus.

Even the Uttarakhand High Court in an oral observation recently had asked the state government to publish the standard operating procedure for Chardham Yatra saying it cannot be allowed to become another Kumbh.

Covid had cast its shadow on the Chardham Yatra which is considered the backbone of the hill economy last year too delaying opening of the temples for pilgrims by several months. — *PTI*

Covid surge
leaves Bihar
choked; 89
die in 24 hrs

Patna, April 29: Bihar on Thursday choked with 89 Covid-19 fatalities and an active caseload of more than one lakh, the first occasion for the pandemic, which began more than a year ago, to assume such alarming proportions in the state.

According to the state health department, 13,089 people tested positive for Covid in Bihar in the last 24 hours, raising the number of active cases to an all time high of 1,00,821.

The state has been reeling under an intense second wave, which has caused its active caseload to rise by more than 50 times in less than a month.

The spurt has also caused the recovery rate to plummet from more than 90 per cent in the beginning of April to 77.27 per cent on the day.

Altogether 2480 people have lost their lives in the state to the dreaded coronavirus, nearly thousand of them dying since April 01.

The total number of people infected has gone up from 2.66 lakh, in the beginning of the month, to 4.54 lakhs on Thursday.

On the brighter side, 3.61 lakh people have also waged successful battles against the dreaded disease. — *PTI*

UP rural polls end, counting on May 2

Lucknow, April 29: Polling for the panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh ended Thursday with an over 60 per cent turnout till 5 pm in the final phase, marred by a group clash in Mathura and the deaths of two workers who fell ill while on poll duty.

Lakhs of candidates were in the fray for over 7.32 lakh seats in gram panchayat wards, 58,176 in gram panchayats, 75,852 in kshetra panchayats and 3,050 in zila panchayats in the state-wide elections, held over four phases amid a surge in Covid-19 cases.

In Thursday's fourth phase alone, over 5.27 lakh

candidates contested for about 2.10 lakh seats in 17 districts. "Polling started in the fourth phase at 7 am and continued till 6 pm. Till 5 pm, about 61.19 per cent votes were cast," a state election commission (SEC) official said. The counting of votes will take place on May 2.

With an hour to go before polls closed, Sambhal topped the list with a turnout of 67 per cent and Banda was the lowest at 51.96 per cent.

In Mathura district's Barsana, eight people were injured when supporters of rival groups exchanged fire, police said. They have arrested six people from

▶ **IN THURSDAY'S** fourth phase alone, over 5.27 lakh candidates contested for about 2.10 lakh seats in 17 districts

Additional superintendent of police (rural) Shrish Chandra said polling was affected for some time at the Nehra village centre before they brought the situation under control. The injured were rushed to hospital, where their condition was stated to be stable.

In Shahjahanpur district, two government employees died after taking ill while on poll duty. Among them, sanitation

worker Sobaran Lal complained of uneasiness and died later in hospital, District Magistrate Indra Vikram Singh said. The family will be given Rs 15 lakh as government assistance.

Another worker posted a video clip on social media as her health deteriorated and she was admitted to a hospital. In Kalan block too, a teacher was taken to hospital after recording a similar video.

The cause of the two deaths is not immediately clear but employee associations have been alleging that several people on poll duty have succumbed to coronavirus. — *PTI*



An elderly voter is carried to a polling booth at Birbhum district's Bandhlodanga for casting vote during the 8th phase of the Assembly elections on Thursday. — *PTI*

Man take wife body on cycle for
cremation as villagers stay away

Jaunpur (UP), April 29: A 70-year-old man was compelled to carry the body of his wife, who died due to Covid-19, for cremation on his bicycle as nobody in his village offered any help fearing they might contract the deadly virus, police said Thursday.

The heart-wrenching ordeal of the frail-looking, bearded man from Ambarpur village in the district, over 200 km from state capital Lucknow, has been captured in two photographs circulating on social media.

While in one photo, Tilakdhari could be seen carrying the body on his bicycle, the other one

▶ **THE POLICE** said Tilakdhari's wife died due to Covid-19 at the district hospital on Apr 26, and her body was sent to his village in an ambulance

shows him sitting helplessly by the roadside with the body sprawling across his fallen bicycle.

The police said Tilakdhari's wife died due to Covid-19 at the district hospital on Apr 26, and her body was sent to his village in an ambulance.

"But the villagers including the elders refused to help him perform the last rites fearing they might also contract

the virus," SHO Madiahun Munna Lal Dhusia told PTI.

"After no one came to help, the old man decided keep his wife's body on his cycle and go for her cremation. However, it was not possible for him to carry the body on a cycle and he kept losing his balance," the SHO said.

He said the police helped him after coming to know about the incident.

Police personnel reached there with an ambulance and material required for conducting the last rites and took the body to Ramghat where the cremation was performed, he said. — *PTI*

Vaccines run short

■ **Continued from Page 1**

start vaccinating the much larger younger age group.

However, the Central government said the total vaccine doses available as of Thursday was 1.27 crore, while the total consumption of vaccines from January 16 to April 29 was 15.11 crores. As per an estimate, so far about 11.5 per cent of the Indian population of 130 crore people have got vaccinated, of which only 2.50 crore people have had both doses.

"More than one crore Covid-19 vaccine doses are still available with the states and Union territories and they will receive over 20 lakh more doses within the next three days," the Union health ministry said. Reacting to media reports quoting Maharashtra government officials that vaccines in the state had "finished" and "adversely impacting the vaccination drive", health ministry officials said a balance of 7,49,960 vaccine doses were still available with Maharashtra for the eligible population groups.

The Delhi government has placed an order of 67 lakh doses of Covishield while Gujarat will receive two crore doses of Covishield and 50 lakh doses of Covaxin. "Had a meeting with officials on the vaccination drive in Delhi. Prepared a plan to vaccinate all above 18 years in the next three months. We will set up vaccination centres on a large scale. All eligible people must come forward to get vaccinated," Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal said.

Criticising the Centre's claims, former finance and home minister P.

Chidambaram said: "Health Minister Harsh Vardhan will be put to test on May 1. His claim and his government's claim that there are sufficient stocks of vaccines with the states will be blown away. No state seems to be ready to open vaccinations to the 18-44 population. Even the CoWin app is not cooperating! If people are turned away from the vaccination centres after May 1 on the ground of 'No Vaccine', will the health minister resign?"

India, meanwhile, continues to break its own records in terms of both Covid mortality and fresh case detections, with over 3.79 lakh new cases and 3,645 deaths recorded in a single day. At the same time, India's recovery rate reached 82.10 per cent, with 2.69 lakh people recovering from the virus. In view of the high cases, Maharashtra government has extended the current lockdown till May 15 in the state. Another badly hit state, Uttar Pradesh, announced a complete shutdown from Friday evening till early Tuesday morning from April 30. It is expected that the Delhi government too may extend its lockdown till May 15.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday held a meeting with Army Chief Gen. M.M. Naravane to discuss initiatives being taken by the Army to help in Covid management. Gen. Naravane informed the PM that the Army's medical staff would be made available to the state governments. He also told the PM that the Army was setting up temporary hospitals in various parts of the country.

FB blocks #ResignModi...

■ **Continued from Page 1**

Union government's response to the ongoing Covid crisis. Media reports further said the Indian government had ordered US social-media companies, including Twitter, to block certain social media posts critical of the government, claiming that Covid-related misinformation risked creating panic and were disrupting efforts to bring the pandemic under control.

A second wave of the Covid pandemic is currently battering India leading to unprecedented deaths due to severe shortage of

hospital beds, oxygen and anti-viral drugs. India is now recording over three-and-a-half lakh fresh Covid cases every day while the death toll has crossed 3,000 for a few days now. Desperate appeals for help have become the norm on social media as people helplessly watch many of their family members and friends die for want of timely medical care. A foreign envoy posted in India had also recently told media outlets that his heart bled seeing scenes of hospitals and people asking for hospital beds on social media.

Exit polls gives Mamata edge

■ **Continued from Page 1**

the exit polls, the ruling LDF is expected to retain the southern state and thus buck the trend of the UDF and LDF alternating in power every five years. Kerala went to the polls on April 6 to elect 140 legislators. According to the C-Voter survey, the LDF may get 71-77 seats and the UDF 62-68 seats. The Axis survey shows 104-120 seats for the LDF and 20-36 seats for the UDF.

The BJP is all set to retain power in Assam, according to all the exit polls. The party is ahead in all exit polls so far even after it faced protests over the CAA and NRC. The C-Voter survey projects 58 to 71 seats for the BJP-led NDA and 53 to 66 seats for the Congress-led UPA. The Axis poll predicts 75-85 seats for the NDA and 40-50 seats for the UPA. Assam has a 126-member Assembly.

The exit poll data shows the NDA winning in the Union territory of Puducherry, with an almost two-thirds majority. The

▶ **IF THE** exit polls predictions hold on counting day, May 2, it will be a big relief for the BJP, with the party making gains in West Bengal, retaining power in Assam and winning Puducherry.

exit polls projected 19 to 23 seats for the NDA, comprising the AINRC, BJP and AIADMK. The Congress and DMK, which constitute the UPA, are projected to win eight to 10 seats.

If the exit polls predictions hold on counting day, May 2, it will be a big relief for the BJP, with the party making gains in West Bengal, retaining power in Assam and winning Puducherry. The Congress will have a lot to worry about as it could not win back power in Assam and in Kerala, that is now the state which party leader Rahul Gandhi represents in the Lok Sabha. Despite that, however, his party could not make a comeback in the southern state.

Param Bir moves
HC against state's
'motivated' probe

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, APRIL 29

Former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh has once again approached the Bombay high court challenging two orders passed on April 1 and 20 by the state government directing a preliminary inquiry against him by IPS officer Sanjay Pandey. He has also requested directions to the CBI to investigate "aspect of criminal conspiracy and malicious attempt to thwart its preliminary inquiry" into the allegation of corruption against former home minister Anil Deshmukh.

Mr Singh has sought an urgent hearing on the petition in which he has contended that the order of April 1 issued by the Maharashtra government directing Maharashtra director-general of police (DGP) Sanjay Pande to initiate preliminary inquiry against him by invoking Section 32 of CrPC in alleged suspicion of violation of service matter under All-India Service (Conduct) Rules, 1968, is ex-facie, illegal, outside the frame of law and therefore cannot sustain in light of the settled principles of law.

He has stated that he "apprehends that the departmental enquiry is motivated and will not be fair and transparent".

Mr Singh also apprehends that coercive steps will be taken against him and he has sought orders for it to be set aside. He has claimed that empowerment of the DGP to conduct the said departmental enquiry u/s 32 of the code of criminal procedure is itself illegal as the said section has no provi-

CBI may confront
ex-top cop with
Deshmukh

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

The CBI is all set to record the statement of former Mumbai police commissioner Parambir Singh in connection with its probe into the alleged corruption case registered against former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh.

"Statement of Singh will be recorded in front of Anil Deshmukh," sources said, adding that the duo will also be confronted with the evidences recently collected by the agency sleuths. The CBI is also probing the role of two other private persons who are close to Deshmukh, they added.

The CBI recently registered a case against Deshmukh over allegations of corruption levelled by former Mumbai police commissioner.

sion to assign the power of departmental enquiry through the DGP of Maharashtra or any other officer of the force.

Mr Singh's lawyer mentioned the petition before a division bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and Manish Pitale and sought an urgent hearing.

Mr Singh had in an eight-page letter to chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on March 20 alleged that Mr Deshmukh met with subordinate police officers including suspended assistant police inspector Sachin Waze in February and asked for collection of ₹100 crore.

THE ASIAN AGE

30 APRIL 2021

Govt needs to provide free vaccination to all in India

The registration for the third phase of the vaccination programme against pandemic Covid-19 has started with some technical glitches in the registration portal that were promptly corrected. As per the government's account, more than 80 lakh people aged between 18 and 45 years registered themselves for the programme that starts on May 1. The government has made it mandatory for anyone to get a jab in the third phase to register with the portal. It has also said there will be no more free vaccination for this group, which makes up almost half of the eligible population.

The government had injected a lot of hope into the people whose lives and livelihoods were severely battered by the onslaught of the microorganism when it launched the world's largest vaccination programme on January 16 this year but most of the steps it has taken after that belied that hope. And worse, the latest decisions reflect poor understanding of the ground situation and a scornful neglect for the idea of universal vaccination against a deadly pandemic. The government has parliamentary clearance for spending money to get every eligible person vaccinated but has now passed that responsibility on to the state governments so far as its most productive section of the population is concerned. Worse, it has made the private sector an integral part of the programme with little regulatory protocols. The government's decision to allow the private manufacturers to fix the price of the vaccine doses, and then merrily grabbing the opportunity to make super profits, truly reflects the callousness with which it plans to wage the war on the pandemic.

No elected central government in the world would dare force the elected bodies below them to compete with private companies for a product such as vaccines. There won't be many countries where the citizen's right to vaccination is linked to the acts of a philanthropist entrepreneur who himself is a beneficiary of governmental largesse.

The coordinates about which the people in the Union government work now defy all sense of democracy and decency and the constitutional principles which bind them to seats of power. The right to get vaccinated against a pandemic is nothing less than the right to life and the government is duty bound to protect it. Introducing a technological interface such as a registration portal is okay as long as it brings efficiency to how the government works; making it a condition to enjoy a fundamental right is not.

The Union government must rework its vaccination policy for the youth. Anything less than a universal vaccination programme for them is akin to discounting their right to life, and is unacceptable. Technology can be a tool for people to access it but it cannot be the sole determinant. Illiterate people have an equal right to the jab, and it is the government's job to ensure it. The financial burden must be borne by the Union government that has sought, and been granted, funds by Parliament for the purpose. Anything less will amount to undermining the survival of the future of the nation. The government can decide.

Stop politics over oxygen

In the dire emergency caused by the coronavirus pandemic liquid medical oxygen has become a crucial national resource. The order to open Vedanta's Sterlite Copper smelter plant on the southern coast of Tamil Nadu and produce oxygen for medical use is a logical step to augment availability. When production is scaled up to around 1,000 MT a day, it can add about 10 per cent to national capacity. To facilitate such production is a national task and all politicians of Tamil Nadu, including the head honchos of the government of the day who opposed the oxygen operations in court, should climb off their hobby horse and cooperate in using that oxygen to help people sickened by the virus to breathe.

An oxygen crisis exists not in terms of production but in transportation as the nation has an inadequate number of tankers. It is a logistical nightmare to be able to rush lifesaving LMO to every nook and corner of the country and oxygen will soon be required everywhere in the face of the bewildering scale and speed of the spread of the disease. To undertake supply on a war footing is the executive's job but it should not be hampered by the play of politics in deciding how much oxygen will go to which state and when. The people are fed up already with political leaders playing havoc with a fair and equitable distribution of oxygen, life-saving drugs, ventilators, hospital and ICU beds, besides vaccines.

The First World has responded to India's crisis by sending oxygen concentrators, non-invasive ventilators and various other medical equipment that can help in the crisis. Political leaders and the executive they give directions to must ensure fair distribution so that patients can be helped in time and the mortality rate kept down. Having lost the battle against a second wave we must first ensure that the gravely ill receive treatment in time. The politics over who is right or wrong can wait and it's time to rein in ill-conceived comments about arresting those who criticise governments or spread rumours about the Covid-19 catastrophe.

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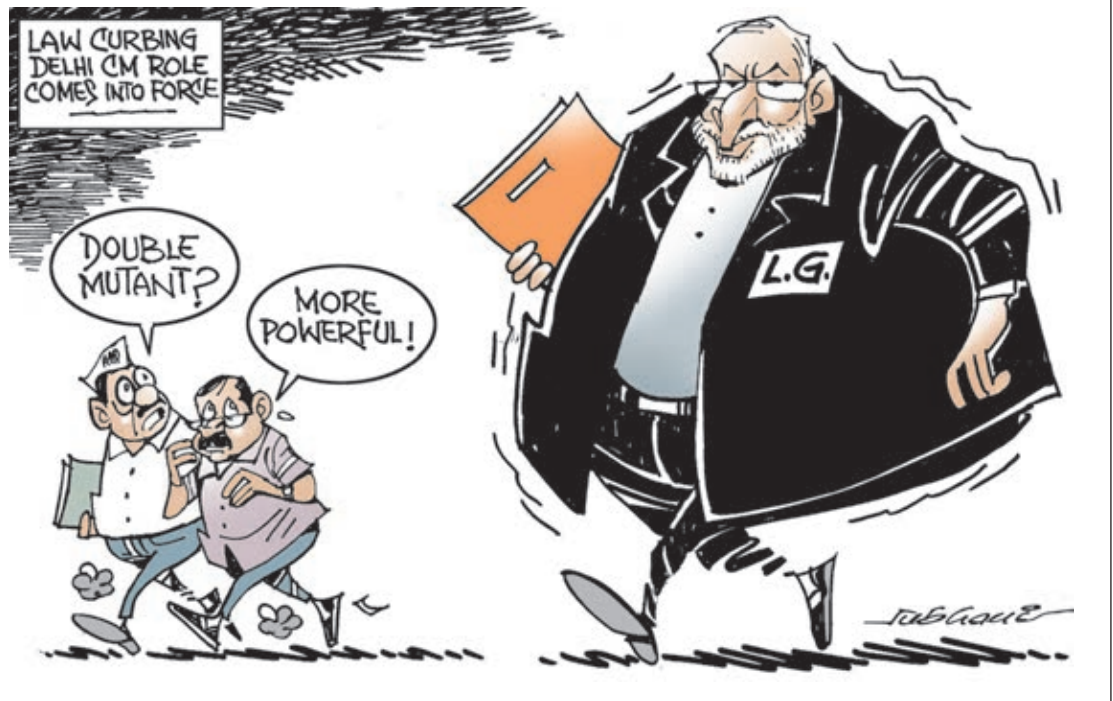
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Subhani



India's grim reality out in the open as myths busted



Karan Thapar

As I See It

It wasn't so long ago that we convinced ourselves we are a superpower or, at least, one that's definitely in the making. We believed the evidence was long and compelling — the world's largest democracy, the sixth biggest economy, a 1.38 billion-strong domestic market, excellence in IT and the West's back office, an unbeatable cricket team, the home of Bollywood, one of the most successful diasporas and, of course, a Prime Minister on first name terms with all the world's top leaders. The RSS was convinced this was because we are a Hindu majority nation. The BJP was more specific. It was because of Narendra Modi.

Well, an invisible virus has punctured the bubble of our pretensions. As Covid-19 increases by nearly 400,000 cases a day — mathematically projected to possibly reach a million a day in two weeks' time — our friends have shut their doors on us. From Paris to Hong Kong, Canberra to Dubai, flights from India have been barred. Meanwhile, our "enemies" are reaching out. China has offered assistance. Charities in Pakistan were the first to write to our PM. Days later Imran Khan tweeted his offer to help. This is, of course, kindness but it's likely to rattle the government.

So what went wrong? There are many answers but the one that concerns me is the argument which suggests that we brought this on ourselves. I'm referring both to our earlier belief that we're something special and have conquered the virus and also our irresponsible refusal to plan and prepare for the

worst. In other words, our judgment. And before I go into detail, let me add it's judgment, more than size and power, that one expects of a superpower. That's where we have failed.

First, after the number of new infections started to remarkably, though inexplicably, shrink from September onwards, we claimed victory. Just as Europe and America were experiencing second or even third waves, far worse than the first, we convinced ourselves that our fate would be different. In January, Prime Minister Modi told the World Economic Forum that India has "defeated" Covid. Three weeks later, on February 21, the BJP passed the following resolution: "It can be said with pride that India not only defeated Covid under the able, sensitive, committed and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but also infused in all its citizens the confidence to build an 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat'".

The party unequivocally hails its leadership for introducing India to the world as a proud and victorious nation in the fight against Covid." In March, the health minister, who is himself a doctor, added his personal touch. He claimed to the Delhi Medical Association that "we are in the endgame of the Covid-19 pandemic in India".

This misplaced, unscientific, irrational and downright foolish conviction that we are special is the cause of the crisis we face today. As a result, we did not plan for a second wave. In fact, we shut down the special facilities created to handle the first. Empowered committees that recommended

enhancing oxygen production in April 2020 were ignored. Even when it was decided to do so, the tenders were not placed for eight months. Time, we felt certain, was on our side. So, of the 162 plants sanctioned by the health ministry, only 33 have been installed. Consequently, today, we're forced to shut down virtually all industrial use of oxygen while we are desperately trying to import 50,000 tonnes from any country willing to sell it quickly.

I'll touch on only one more example of our irresponsible incompetence. We boast of being the vaccine manufacturer of the world. Yet with our eyes wide open, we failed to ensure we can produce enough to vaccinate ourselves. Once again, the explanation is we either didn't bother to plan or weren't capable of doing it intelligently.

Consider this — as far back as May or June last year we knew that if 75 per cent of our people were to be given a two-dose vaccine, we would need two billion jabs. That was elementary maths. We also knew that our existing vaccine production capacity could not produce anywhere near this number in the time-frame that we required. So, what did we do? A superpower would have immediately increased its capacity. Doubled or tripled it, if necessary. We did nothing. We blithely carried on as if there was no looming problem. Now we have a crisis. And, once again, the world we are so eager to impress simply cannot understand how we let this happen.

The picture which the world sees of India is not that of a potential superpower but an inept and flailing Third World country struggling but unable to handle a crisis it has inflicted on itself

Consequently, the picture which the world sees of India is not that of a potential superpower but an inept and flailing Third World country struggling but unable to handle a crisis it has inflicted on itself. Hospitals are paralysed by the lack of beds and oxygen, patients are dying in ambulances and, sometimes, on the streets, pavements and open fields have been converted into crematoria, and everywhere we have helpless, crying, forsaken citizens, with no one to turn to.

This is the grim image the Western press now has of our country. But as far as our government is concerned, it's even worse. Because all of this is compounded by the dawning realisation that the leader they once thought was strong and decisive now appears to have been unconcerned by the challenge he faced or incapable of responding to it. Indeed, his own behaviour suggests he was either ignorant of how bad things could become or unwilling to believe it.

So, today, the world is horrified by what they see of India and deeply dismayed. The bragadocio has been stripped aside. The exposed reality is ugly and impossible to hide.

Finally, there's also how we view ourselves. Our confidence in being special seems to have disappeared. This is not the exclusiveness that we sought. Television and the social media have brought home a different truth. We've been reduced to a nation that's more than frightened, we're in panic. The dream of achieving India's inevitable and irresistible destiny has metamorphosed into a nightmare where we know our own incompetence and irresponsibility is what haunts us. We long to wake up to a bright and beautiful morning. But when will this sleep of torment end?

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

BOWING TO CHINA AID

Modi lovers, hark. Under the present administration, despite all its big talk and outward show of aggression, India now has "no conceptual problem" in procuring oxygen-related equipment and medicines from China. It marks a major shift in policy in 16 years. One recalls the December 2004 tsunami when then PM Manmohan Singh famously said, "we can cope". Of course, with respect to aid from Pakistan, the image-conscious government "has not yet made up our mind".

Priyanka Mathur
Kolkata

GOOD AT SCAPEGOATING

EVEN AS THE NATION'S fresh daily Covid count is exploding, parties are flooding the streets campaigning for the Telangana local body elections. This cruelly adds to the onus of the medical collective that is struggling without rest amidst abject gloom. Not to speak of the personal risk they take as true professionals. We may boast of being a technically developed nation with clever apps, but the mindset stays medieval. Nations that are rushing us supplies of every description must be feeling let down. We seem to locate a scapegoat faster than vaccine and oxygen.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

CURFEW NOT ENOUGH

I UNDERSTAND that the CMs of various states are trying their best to stop the spread of the coronavirus in the country. But lockdowns and curfews will not help bring down the number of Covid-19 patients. People should be made aware as to how dangerous the virus is, and how it can spread from person to person, not only in the neighbourhood but within the family too. Jesus Christ had prophesied: "There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. (Luke 21:11)" Take care, people.

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

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

Mahir Ali



How far is Biden ready to go on guns, minimum wage, healthcare?

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

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

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

When AOC entered the US Congress in 2018, contrary to the primary desires of the Democratic Party establishment — alongside Squad-mates Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayannah Pressley — she came across as a breath of fresh air: a legislator determined to challenge not just the egregious excesses of the Trump

administration but also the unsavoury realities of her own party's inclinations.

She had already done her bit by then for the unsuccessful Bernie Sanders campaign in 2016, and she did it again four years later. Last year's Sanders campaign, although hobbled again by the Democratic establishment, was more successful. At least in the sense that Biden advisers collaborated with Sanders associates in drawing up the election agenda.

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

However, Mr Biden has managed to go reasonably far in his first 100 days — admittedly an arbitrary criterion that has been in vogue since the initial phase of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1933 inauguration. FDR assumed power during the depths of the 1930s depression, and tried to reboot the US economy through an unprecedented injection of govern-

ment resources.

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

For all his flaws, Johnson did manage to legislate some of the most substantial provisions against racial discrimination since Lincoln's Emancipation Act 100 years earlier. Ever since, though, there have been efforts to claw back the advances, and Republican-guided voter suppression reached a new level of sorts in Georgia recently, after the state's voters gave Biden a tentative majority in the US Senate.

The President, meanwhile, has gone further in his stimulus packages than some of his detractors on the left expected, and has facilitated a considerably more substantial role in the Senate for Sanders than anyone might have anticipated. A partial consequence has been that, unlike in 2009 when the advent of Barack

Obama was followed by far too much of the "rescue package" being restricted to the economic culprits on Wall Street, the latest stimulus has sustained poorer households.

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

The Biden administration is also struggling with border immigration measures, and with foreign policy more generally: ties with China and Russia, in particular, remain dismal. The proposed withdrawal from Afghanistan, welcome at many lev-

els, is likely to effectively entail handing back power to the Taliban — without any official recognition of why the invasion 20 years ago was a grievous error.

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

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

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

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

GERMAN WOMAN IN CUSTODY OVER KILLINGS

Potsdam, Germany: An employee at a clinic for disabled people outside Berlin was arrested Thursday on suspicion of killing four people at the centre and wounding a fifth, police said, with the motive still unclear.

The slain victims, two women and two men, were stabbed with a knife late Wednesday at the facility in the city of Potsdam, the daily Bild reported.

Those killed are believed to be patients at the care clinic, local newspaper *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten* reported. Police said earlier the dead were subjected to “intense, extreme violence”, but did not give any details around the circumstances of the killings.

CYPRUS TALKS FOR SETTLEMENT AT UN COLLAPSE

Geneva: Talks with rival Cypriot leaders failed to find common ground that could pave the way towards resolving the decades-old division of Cyprus, the UN chief concluded Thursday (April 29).

The United Nations is trying to mediate a deal for the eastern Mediterranean island, nearly six decades since it first deployed peacekeepers.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres travelled from New York to Geneva to oversee the three days of informal talks in various formats, but said they had not managed to overcome the differences between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot positions.

“The truth is that in the end of our efforts, we have not yet found enough common ground to allow for the resumption of formal negotiations in relation to the settlement of the Cyprus problem,” Guterres told a press conference.

“But I do not give up,” he said.

AMAZON TO RAISE PAY FOR OVER 5 LAKH WORKERS

New York: Amazon said Wednesday that it plans to give more than 5,00,000 of its workers a raise as it seeks to attract new workers.

The online shopping giant, which already pays new hires at least \$15 an hour, said it will start increasing pay between 50 cents an hour to \$3 an hour starting next month.

Those getting raises include warehouse workers, who pack and ship orders, as well as those who work in Amazon’s package sorting centers and other facilities.

Amazon said the pay raise is part of its push to hire more workers. The company has needed more people to get orders to shoppers during the pandemic as Americans increasingly shop online.

It hired 5,00,000 people in 2020 alone, bringing its total workforce to nearly 1.3 million people worldwide.

The pay announcement also comes after a failed union push at an Alabama warehouse, which put a national spotlight on working conditions at Amazon.

POPULATION GREW IN 2020 SAYS CHINA

Beijing: China’s population grew last year, the government said on Thursday, following a report that a census might have found a surprise decline, possibly adding to downward pressure on economic growth.

The National Bureau of Statistics gave no details in its one-sentence statement and said the population figure would be reported later. But the unusual decision to respond to the report by *The Financial Times* reflected the issue’s political sensitivity.

The *Financial Times* said people familiar with China’s 2020 census expect it to show the population, which edged above 1.4 billion in 2019, declined for the first time since famine in 1959-61 killed millions of people.

The ruling Communist Party has enforced birth limits to restrain population growth since 1980, but an outright fall would reduce the flow of workers into the economy when it is trying to shore up growth and reduce poverty.

“According to our understanding, in 2020, China’s population continued to grow,” the NBS said on its website.

China’s population has long been expected to peak and decline in line with trends.



US vice-president Kamala Harris (left) applauds as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (right) and US President Joe Biden (Centre) bump elbows after he addressed a joint session of Congress in the House chamber of the US Capitol in Washington. — AFP

Prez Biden calls white supremacy ‘terrorism’

Says global terror networks have largely moved beyond US

Washington, April 29: In his first joint address to the US Congress, President Joe Biden identified white supremacy as a domestic terror threat that America must remain vigilant against.

While discussing his decision to withdraw American troops from war-torn Afghanistan, Biden noted global terror networks have largely moved beyond the country and that white supremacists posed a bigger threat than foreign actors.

“We won’t ignore what our intelligence agencies have determined to be the most lethal terrorist threat to our homeland today: White supremacy is terrorism,” Biden said in the House chamber, which just three months ago was attacked by the supporters of former president Donald Trump in an effort to overthrow the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.

“White supremacy is terrorism, and we’re not going to ignore that either: My fellow Americans, look, we have to come together to heal the soul of this nation, the president said.

In remarks, Biden acknowledged the January 6 attempted insurrection at the Capitol, saying it was an existential crisis that tested democracy.

“As we gather here tonight, the images of a violent mob assaulting this Capitol desecrating our democracy remain vivid in all our minds. Lives were put at risk many of your lives. Lives were lost. Extraordinary courage was summoned. The insurrection was an existential crisis a test of whether our democracy could survive. It did,” Biden said.

But he underscored that “the struggle is far from over” and that “the question of whether our democracy will long endure is both ancient and urgent.” — PTI

US on the move again, says Biden

Washington, April 29: President Joe Biden triumphantly declared that the United States is “on the move again” in a rousing speech to Congress on Wednesday, calling for trillions of dollars to rebuild the post-pandemic US middle class and give new life to “forgotten” workers.

Lauding the success of mass vaccination against Covid-19, Biden told Congress and the nation on *primetime* television that “in America, we always get up.”

“America is ready for takeoff,” he said. “We are working again, dreaming again, discovering again, leading the world again.”

Biden, who was celebrating the eve of his 100th day in office, called the vaccine rollout one of “the greatest logistical achievements” in US history.

But Biden quickly pivoted to insisting that this

national effort must now focus on rebuilding the economy and fighting inequality with “the largest jobs plan since World War II.”

In a line that could have come from his populist Republican predecessor Donald Trump, Biden said working-class Americans had been ignored, while the top one percent got richer, and that his plans would give them a chance.

“You feel left behind and forgotten in an economy that’s rapidly changing. Let me speak directly to you,” Biden said, before going on to promise Americans “good-paying jobs that can’t be outsourced.”

In every aspect of the primetime television speech, Biden echoed his mantra that “America is back” — both in recovering from the Coronavirus disaster and in putting the turbulence of the Trump era behind. — AFP

U.S. TO MAINTAIN STRONG MILITARY IN INDO-PACIFIC

Washington, April 29: Declaring that “America is rising anew” under his leadership, President Joe Biden has told China that the US will maintain a “strong” military presence in the Indo-Pacific “not to start conflict, but to prevent one” as Beijing became more assertive in the strategically vital region. Using his maiden address to the joint session of Congress on the eve of his 100th day in office to make a strong case for huge new investments and tax reforms to overhaul the US economy and rebuild the middle class, Biden said, “we have acted to restore the people’s faith in our democracy to deliver.”

In his 65-minute address, Biden spent the majority of his time to discuss his economic and infrastructure plans for the nation, his foreign policy vision for America’s role in the world and the Coronavirus pandemic. — PTI

Harris, Pelosi make history at first address to Congress

Washington, April 29: Vice President Kamala Harris and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi have made history as they shared the stage during President Joe Biden’s first joint session to Congress, marking the first time that two women sat behind a US president during an address to Congress.

Harris, 56, who is also the first Indian-American and also the first woman of colour woman to become America’s Vice President, sat behind on

the president’s right side as he delivered his first speech to a joint session of Congress on Wednesday night.

Pelosi, 81, who became the first woman in her role in 2007, sat behind on the President’s left.

Harris entered the House chamber on Wednesday night to a round of applause for Biden’s address to Congress.

When asked about the significance of two women sitting behind the President for the address,

Harris replied, “Normal,” to reporters in the Capitol as she led the Senate delegation to the House chamber.

Asked her view on the historic moment, Pelosi said, “It’s about time.” “It’s pretty exciting. And it’s wonderful to make history. It’s about time,” Pelosi said hours before the speech. Pelosi already knows what it feels like to sit on the rostrum in the House chamber and introduce a president for speeches. — PTI

US advises its citizens to leave India as cases spike

Washington, April 29: The US has advised its citizens not to travel to India or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so and authorised the voluntary departure of family members of its employees in the Indian missions, saying the access to all types of medical care is becoming severely limited in the country amid a massive surge in Covid-19 cases.

The US has put India on Level 4 Travel Advisory, the highest level issued by the Department of State.

The current Level 4 Travel Advisory asks US citizens not to travel to India or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so due to the current health situation in the country.

The Department of State also authorised the voluntary departure of family members of US government employees in Mission India.

US Embassy New Delhi and Consulates General Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai will remain open and continue to provide emergency consular services.

“#India: Access to medical care is severely limited due to Covid-19 cases. US citizens wishing to depart should use available commercial options now. Daily direct flights to the US and flights via Paris and Frankfurt are available,” the State Department tweeted.

In a health alert, the US Embassy in New Delhi said: “Access to all types of medical care is becoming severely limited in India due to the surge in Covid-19 cases.”

“We urge US citizens to enrol in STEP (Smart Traveler Enrollment Programme) at step.state.gov in order to receive critical information from the Embassy related to health and safety in India,” it said.

It asked American citizens to visit the Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare website for the latest information on travel restrictions.

“New cases and deaths

EU inches closer to Covid certificate

Brussels, April 29: The European Parliament on Thursday agreed its position on how a Covid certificate should work, bringing the EU closer to launching a document to open up travel within the bloc.

Europe intends to have a certificate showing the bearer’s vaccination status, Covid test results and/or evidence of having survived the disease up and running in June, in time for the continent’s summer vacation period.

While technical work has been ongoing to ensure the certificate is recognised across all 27 EU member states, final details have to be worked out involving capitals, the European Commission and the parliament.

The first change MEPs have called for to a commission proposal is the

name. Instead of a “digital green certificate” they want to call it an “EU Covid-19 certificate” — to avoid any implication of it becoming a “vaccine passport”.

They said the document should “neither serve as travel document nor become a precondition to exercise the right to free movement” and should only be in use for 12 months.

Stressing that the certificate should not result in discrimination, parliament demanded that Covid-19 tests for travel should be free of charge. The commission has said that this issue should be left up to member states.

The parliament’s negotiation position was announced on Thursday following a vote late Wednesday, with 540 MEPs in favour, 119 against, and 31 abstentions. — AFP

from Covid-19 have risen sharply throughout India to record levels. Covid-19 testing infrastructure is reportedly constrained in many locations,” the mission said in a statement.

A record single-day rise of 3,79,257 Covid-19 infections, 3,645 fatalities on Thursday pushed India’s tally of cases to 1,83,76,524, death toll to 2,04,832.

“Hospitals are reporting shortages of supplies, oxygen, and beds for both Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 related patients. US citizens are reporting being denied admittance to hospitals in some cities due to a lack of space. Some states have enacted curfews and other restrictions that limit movement and the operation of non-essential businesses,” it said. — PTI

Moderna eyes 3 bn vax shots in 2022

Paris, April 29: US pharmaceutical firm Moderna said on Thursday it expects to increase global production of its cutting-edge Covid vaccine to up to three billion doses in 2022.

The company said in a statement that it would make new funding commitments to increase supply at its manufacturing facilities in Europe and the United States.

The investments will double the manufacturing of drug substance at its Swiss partner Lonza and more than double output by Rovi in Spain. Production at Moderna’s US facilities would increase by 50 percent. Reaching the three billion mark will depend on the mix of its mRNA vaccine and potentially lower doses of Moderna’s pediatric vaccine and variant booster shots, the company said.

The company also raised its supply forecast for this year to between 800 million and one bil-

lion doses. ● **THE COMPANY** said in a statement that it would make new funding commitments to increase supply at its manufacturing facilities in Europe and the United States.

The announcement comes as the spread of virus variants in countries like India have raised concerns about the world’s ability to overcome the Coronavirus pandemic.

“As we follow the rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern, we believe that there will continue to be significant need for our mRNA Covid-19 vaccine and our variant booster candidates into 2022 and 2023,” chief executive Stephane Bancel said in the statement.

The messenger mRNA vaccines hack into human cells and effectively turns them into vaccine-making factories. — AFP

United Nations, April 29: India, despite severe constraints and within its own limited resources, has tried to “walk the talk” on vaccine equity and shared Covid-19 vaccines with more than 80 countries, the country told the United Nations.

The UN Department of Global Communications (DGC), which spreads awareness around the world about the work the UN does, has actively encouraged further sharing of vaccine doses from all countries, Counsellor in India’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations A. Amarnath said in the General Assembly’s 43rd Session of Committee on Information.

India urged the Department to also “suitably highlight the efforts of Member States, international organisations, and vaccine producers, who have already done so, especially with those who need it most.” — PTI

Air pollutants in India sees a rise

Birmingham, April 29: Levels of air pollutants in cities in India are on the rise, according to scientists using observations from instruments on satellites that scan the global skies every day.

Researchers used a long record of data gathered by space-based instruments to estimate trends in a range of air pollutants for 2005 to 2018, timed to coincide with well-established air quality policies in the UK and rapid development in India.

The study was led by the University of Birmingham and UCL and included an international team of contributors from Belgium, India,

Jamaica and the UK. The researchers published their findings in the journal *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics*, noting that fine particles (PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2), both hazardous to health, are increasing in Kanpur and Delhi.

Delhi is a fast-growing megacity and Kanpur was ranked by the WHO in 2018 as the most polluted city in the world.

This contrasts with trends in the UK cities London and Birmingham, which show modest but ongoing declines in PM2.5 and NOx, reflecting the success of policies targeting sources that emit these pollutants. — PTI

NUCLEAR | DEAL

Concessions beyond nuclear-specific sanctions may be halted

US may roll back Iran sanctions

Washington, April 29: The Biden administration is considering a near wholesale rollback of some of the most stringent Trump-era sanctions imposed on Iran in a bid to get the Islamic Republic to return to compliance with a landmark 2015 nuclear accord, according to current and former US officials and others familiar with the matter.

As indirect talks continue this week in Vienna to explore the possibility of reviving the nuclear deal, American officials have become increasingly expansive about what they might be prepared to offer Iran, which has been driving a hard line on sanctions relief, demanding that all US penalties be

removed, according to these people.

American officials have refused to discuss which sanctions are being considered for removal. But they have said they are open to lifting any sanctions that are inconsistent with the nuclear deal or that deny Iran the relief it would be entitled to should it return to compliance with the accord.

Because of the complex nature of the sanctions architecture, that could include non-nuclear sanctions, such as those tied to terrorism, missile development and human rights

Biden administration officials say this is necessary because of what they describe as a deliberate attempt by the Trump

administration to stymie any return to the deal. Under the 2015 agreement, the United States was required to lift sanctions tied to Iran’s nuclear program, but not non-nuclear sanctions.

Administration officials deny they will remove all non-nuclear sanctions, but have declined to identify those which they believe Trump improperly imposed on terrorism and other grounds.

“Any return to the JCPOA would require sanctions relief, but we are considering removing only those sanctions that are inconsistent with the JCPOA,” said State Department spokesman Ned Price. “Even if we rejoin the JCPOA — which

remains a hypothetical — we would retain and continue to implement sanctions on Iran for activities not covered by the JCPOA, including Iran’s missile proliferation, support for terrorism, and human rights abuses.”

When President Donald Trump re-imposed sanctions after withdrawing from the deal in 2018, he not only put the nuclear sanctions back in but also added layers of terrorism and other sanctions on many of the same entities. In addition, the Trump administration imposed an array of new sanctions on previously unsanctioned entities.

This has put the current administration in an awkward position: Iran is

demanding the removal of all sanctions.

If the US doesn’t lift at least some of them, Iran says it won’t agree to halt its nuclear activities barred by the deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

But if the Biden administration makes concessions that go beyond the nuclear-specific sanctions, Republican critics and others, including Israel and Gulf Arab states, are likely to seize on them as proof that the administration is caving to Iran. Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has led the charge among Trump alumni to denounce any easing of sanctions. — AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,765.94	0.06
Nifty 50	14,894.90	0.20
S&P 500*	4,189.98	0.16
Dollar (₹)	74.03	0.45
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.21	0.06
Euro (₹)	89.72	0.01
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,472.61	0.13
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.02	1.11
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.059	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.675	0.055

* As of 8:30 PM IST

US economy accelerated at 6.4% rate in Q1

Powered by consumers, the US economy grew at a brisk 6.4 per cent annual rate last quarter a show of strength fuelled by government aid and declining viral cases that could drive further gains, as the nation rebounds with unusual speed from the pandemic recession. The Commerce Department estimated that the nation's GDP accelerated in January-March from a 4.3 per cent annual gain in the final quarter of 2020.

IFC to invest \$40 million in Upgrad



Online up-skilling platform Upgrad has concluded a funding round of \$40 million (about Rs 290 crore) from the World Bank arm IFC, bringing down the promoters' holding in the firm to 75 per cent. It had recently secured a \$120 million funding from Temasek Holdings. The equity infusion of \$160 million in two quick rounds takes the startup closer to unicorn status, valuing the six-year-old company at \$850 million.

Axis board okays another term for Chaudhry

Private sector lender Axis Bank said its board has approved the re-appointment of Amitabh Chaudhry as its managing director and CEO for another three years with effect from January 1, 2022. Prior to joining Axis Bank in January 2019, Chaudhry was MD & CEO of HDFC Standard Life Insurance Company.

BoM net profit rises to ₹165 cr; bad loans down

Bank of Maharashtra reported a more than two-fold rise in its standalone net profit at Rs 165.08 crore in the March 2021 quarter, from Rs 57.57 crore in the year-ago period, mainly due to a decline in gross NPAs. Total income increased to Rs 4,332.99 crore from Rs 3,198.30 crore. The bank's asset quality improved significantly as the gross NPAs dipped to 7.23 per cent of gross advances from 12.81 per cent a year ago.

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■ Q4, FY21 results can be reported till June 30

Companies get more time to file earnings

New Delhi, April 29: The Sebi on Thursday gave 45 days more for companies to file their fourth-quarter results and an additional one-month time to submit their annual results, as the regulator eased compliance requirements amidst the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The move comes after the regulator received representations from listed entities, industry associations and market participants requesting extension of timelines for various filings and relaxation from certain compliance obligations due to the virus situation and restrictions imposed by various state governments.

With respect to quarterly financial results, companies have been given 45 days till June 30, 2021 to file their March quarter results, the Sebi said in a circular.

Under the rules, companies are required to file their financial results within 45 days from the end of a quarter. As per that time frame, the deadline was May 15.

In the case of submitting results for the year ending March 31, the watchdog has extended the time till June 30 from the due date of May 30.

Normally, listed companies are required to file their annual results within 60 days from the end of a financial year.

In addition, a relaxation of one month till June 30 has been given for filing yearly secretarial compliance report.



Along with financial results, the Sebi has given a 45-day relaxation for companies to file their fourth-quarter statement of deviation or variation in use of funds report as well as an additional one-month time to submit their annual report in this regard.

In a separate circular, the regulator has eased compliance requirement for entities that have listed their debt securities or bonds.

Sebi said it has decided to grant relaxation to listed entities that have listed their non-convertible debentures (NCDs), non-convertible redeemable preference shares (NCRPS) and commercial papers (CPs) as well as municipal debt securities, from some compliance requirements.

The regulator has extended the deadline by 45 days till June 30 for submitting half-yearly financial results for NCDs, NCRPS and CPs while it has given another 30 days till June 30, for filing annual earnings.

Also, it has extended timeline by 30 days for fil-

ing annual results for entities that have listed their bonds under the Sebi Municipal Bonds norms.

Listed entities have been permitted to use digital signature certifications for authentication of filings/submissions made to the stock exchanges under the Sebi (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations for all filings until December 31, 2021.

The Sebi also extended timelines for compliance with certain regulatory requirements by trading members, clearing members and depository participants. The deadline for maintaining call recordings of orders or instructions received from clients has been extended till June 30, 2021.

The regulator has given time till June-end to brokers for operating the trading terminals from designated alternate locations. The Sebi has extended time till July 31 for submission of internal audit report and net worth certificate for the second half.

—PTI

'Fight' for chips may drag on till 2023, says Nokia CEO

KATI POHJANPALO
APRIL 29

The global shortage of semiconductors that's plaguing automakers, data centre-owners and electronics manufacturers has turned into a "fight" that risks dragging on until 2023, according to the chief executive of Nokia Oyj.

"There's a fight going on. The shortage in general in the market could continue a year or even two," Pekka Lundmark said in an interview on Thursday. "This is not going to go away anytime soon."

Companies from Apple Inc. to Samsung Electronics Company and Honda Motor Company have flagged the chip supply shortage. Nokia management is spending growing amounts of time trying to address the problem, though the impact on the company's operations is "not material" for now, said Lundmark.

"You have to be in daily contact with your suppliers, make sure you are important to them," he said later in an interview with Anna Edwards on Bloomberg TV. "It is things like how important you are in the big picture, how strong your relationships are and how you manage expectations."

Chip shortage would complicate Lundmark's efforts to get Nokia back in the 5G game.

—Bloomberg

Gold demand jumps 37% in March quarter

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 29

Driven by consumer sentiments, gold demand jumped 37 per cent in the March quarter. However, demand will be dampened in the current quarter despite Akshaya Tritiya and the wedding season falling within the April-June period.

The demand for gold in January-March 2021 was 140 tonnes, up by 37 per cent compared to the low base of 102 tonnes in the same quarter of last year. Historically gold has seen March quarter demand of 160 and 190 tonnes in some of the years.

Jewellery demand was up by 39 per cent at 102.5 tonnes and investment demand by 34 per cent at 37.5 tonnes. Bar and coin demand saw the strongest first quarter since 2015.

"India's Q1 2021 gold



demand rose 37 per cent to 140 tonnes on the back of Covid containment and positive sentiment following the start of the vaccination programme. A combination of softening gold prices, buoying consumer sentiment following sharp pick-up in economic activity and return of social activities like weddings supported a 39 per cent growth in gold jewellery demand at 102.5 tonnes," said P. R. Somasundaram, managing director India, World Gold Council. The average domestic

gold price of Rs 47,131 per 10 gm was 14 per cent higher against the same quarter last year, but was 6 per cent lower than the December quarter. It was 16 per cent lower than the August 2020 peak of Rs 56,000/10gm.

According to WGC, net bullion imports in the March quarter was 301 tonnes against 83.1 tonnes in Q1 2020, an increase of 262 per cent. Part of the imports was also meant for the Akshaya Tritiya and wedding season sales in the June quarter.

However, both these gold-buying events are expected to be lacklustre due to the surge in Covid-19 cases and lock-down and restrictions in some of the key markets.

"The outlook for the coming quarter is, however, cautious. As lock-downs are re-imposed in various regions," added Somasundaram.

HUL reports robust volume growth

New Delhi, April 29: FMCG major Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) on Thursday reported a 13 per cent increase in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,190 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, riding on strong volume growth across categories. HUL had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 1,938 crore in the year-ago quarter.

Consolidated total income stood at Rs 12,542 crore against Rs 12,235 crore a year ago. During the quarter, HUL

said it witnessed an "underlying volume growth of 16 per cent". Home care category saw a growth of 15 per cent driven by a robust recovery in fabric wash, while household care continued its strong performance delivering double-digit growth.

Foods and refreshment segment grew by 36 per cent, the company said, adding, "all our tea brands continue to grow in high double-digits. Ketchups, soups and ice creams also performed well with dou-

ble-digit growths". "Nutrition volumes grew in double digits and we launched Rs 2 sachets in Horlicks and Boost. Our goal remains to drive penetration in this category," HUL said. Beauty and personal care grew by 20 per cent.

For the fiscal 2020-21, consolidated net profit was at Rs 7,999 crore compared to Rs 6,756 crore in 2019-20, a growth of 18 per cent. Consolidated total income was at Rs 47,438 crore versus Rs 40,415 crore. —PTI

Rahul Bajaj steps down as Bajaj Auto chairman

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, APRIL 29

Rahul Bajaj has resigned as chairman of the Pune-headquartered Bajaj Auto, India's second biggest motorcycle maker. He will be replaced by Niraj Bajaj, a non-executive director of the company.

The senior Bajaj will, however, remain associated with the company as chairman emeritus.

Rahul Bajaj will step down as the non-executive director and the chairman of the company with effect from the close of business hours on April 30, 2021, Bajaj Auto said in an exchange filing on Thursday.

Rahul Bajaj had stepped down as non-executive chairman of another group company, Bajaj Finance, in July last year.

A Bajaj Auto statement said, "Rahul Bajaj, the Non-Executive Chairman of the company, who has been at the helm of the



Rahul Bajaj

company since 1972 and of the Bajaj Group of companies for the past five decades, has tendered his resignation considering his age.

"Shri Rahul Bajaj has made a huge contribution to the success of the company and the group over the last five decades. Considering his tremendous experience and in the interest of the company, and to continue to benefit from his experience, knowledge, and wisdom from time to time in an advisory role and as a mentor, the Board of Directors at its meeting held today and as recom-

mended by the Nomination and Remuneration Committee has approved the appointment of Shri Rahul Bajaj as Chairman Emeritus of the Company for a term of five years with effect from May 1, 2021."

Earlier on Thursday, Bajaj Auto said its net profit for the March quarter rose nearly 2 per cent to Rs 1,332 crore compared with Rs 1,310 crore in the same quarter last year. The auto major's revenue too grew 26 per cent to Rs 8,596 crore against Rs 6,815.8 crore year-on-year (YoY).

The company announced a dividend of Rs 140/share.

Bajaj Auto sold 11,69,664 units during the March quarter, 18 per cent more compared to 9,91,961 units sold a year ago.

In FY21, the company reported an 11 per cent decline in profit to Rs 4,555 crore and a 7 per cent fall in revenue to Rs 27,741 crore.

Employee stake in mutual fund schemes to raise accountability

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 29

From July 1, a minimum of 20 per cent of the take home salary of the key employees of the asset management companies (AMCs) will have to be paid in the form of units of mutual fund schemes in which they have a role/oversight.

This has been done to align the interest of the key employees of the AMCs with the unitholders of the mutual fund schemes, a circular issued by the Securities and Exchange Board of India on Wednesday said.

As per the circular, key employees of the AMCs include chief executive officer, chief investment officer, chief risk officer, chief information security officer, chief operation officer, fund managers, compliance officer, sales head, investor relation officers, heads of other departments, dealers of the AMC, fund management team and research team.



"The provisions of this circular shall not be applicable to key employees having role/ oversight only over ETFs, Index Funds, Overnight Funds and existing closed ended schemes," the Sebi said.

Most mutual funds *Financial Chronicle* spoke to said it was too early to comment, as they awaited the detailed guidelines from the regulator.

However, a new generation mutual fund house is already adhering to a similar practice. "Ideally, in the fund management profession, the only way to

instill a sense of accountability is to ensure that the fund management team is investing their own monies along with those of the clients," says PPFAS Mutual Fund.

Key employees of PPFAS MF held 4.865 crore units worth Rs 203.74 crore as on April 28, 2021.

"Having our own skin in the game demonstrates the willingness to link our financial well-being with yours. This also places an implicit onus on us to make optimum use of our time and abilities in order to enhance the scheme's performance and eschew the reckless behaviour that fund managers are sometimes accused of," PPFAS MF says.

The Sebi move was also welcomed by a top private life insurance official, as he said, "Insurance regulators should also make it compulsory for all top executives of any life insurance company to compulsorily buy their traditional products to the extent of 20 per cent of their CTC."

Samsung wrests back smartphone crown



AAKRITI BHALLA &
SUBRAT PATNAIK
APRIL 29

Samsung Electronics Co Ltd reclaimed its crown as the world's biggest smartphone maker from Apple in the first quarter, cornering a fifth of overall global shipments.

China's Xiaomi Corp rounded out the top three positions with its best quarterly performance ever as shipments surged 62 per cent to 49 million phones and its market share rose to 14 per cent, market research firm Canalsys said.

Overall, global shipments surged 27 per cent to 347 million units in the first quarter as the Chinese economy opened up after the pandemic and a swift vaccine rollout in the United States raised hopes of an economic recovery.

South Korea's Samsung shipped 76.5 million smartphones in the quarter to grab a 22 per cent share of the market, Canalsys said. The company on Thursday reported a 66 per cent surge in quarterly profit in its mobiles business, thanks to robust sales of its flagship Galaxy S21 smartphone series.

Canalsys said Apple shipped 52.4 million iPhones in the January-March period, falling to the second spot with a 15 per cent share of the market.

Apple still grabbed record market share in the US, China, India and Japan, Counterpoint analyst Varun Mishra said, adding that the iPhone Pro Max was a top seller in the US.

Smartphone sales have surged over the past year as people worked from home. —Reuters

AWAY | FROM VIRUS

New tourist and remote work visas help UAE

The rich find a haven in Dubai

ZAINAB FATTAH
APRIL 29

The wealthiest home buyers fleeing virus lockdowns for Dubai are still finding bargains aplenty, turning March into the busiest month ever for the emirate's top-end residential properties.

A record 84 properties, each worth 10 million dirhams (\$2.7 million) or more, changed hands last month, according to data from real estate consultant Property Monitor. In total, Dubai's priciest homes fetched 1.7 billion dirhams in March.

The luxury end of the market has come alive in a city that became a haven for wealthy Europeans escaping repeated lockdowns at home and for others drawn by the ease of getting vaccinated from



Covid-19. The Middle East's business and tourism hub provided an additional lure after a property downturn that started six years ago shaved more than a third off values.

"We've seen sentiment shift quite significantly and prices are increasing across the board now," said Taimur Khan, head of research at Knight Frank in Dubai. "On the top end of the market, it's mostly European money

from investors seeking assets in dollar-linked economies."

The UAE introduced new visas for tourists and approved a new remote work visa that enables employees from all over the world to live and operate from the emirates. Buying a property is also one of the fastest ways of getting a residency permit in Dubai.

"Dubai is being seen as a place that's relatively safe and less restrictive than

many others," said Zhann Jochinke, chief operating officer at Property Monitor. "Government initiatives aiming to drive more investments and people into Dubai are also helping improve sentiment on the long term prospects for the market."

Dubai's second-most expensive property was also sold in March. One 100 Palm, a mansion on the artificial island of Palm Jumeirah, fetched 111.25 million dirhams. The buyer is a Swiss family that resides in Monaco and intends to use the villa for short-term rentals, according to Luxhabitat Sotheby's International Realty, which was one of the brokers involved in the deal.

On average, home prices climbed 7.5 per cent since November.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Umpire, referee pull out of IPL

New Delhi: India's top umpire Nitin Menon has pulled out of the ongoing IPL after his family was struck by a couple of Covid-19 cases, while his Australian counterpart Paul Reiffel's attempts at leaving hit a dead end because of his country's suspension of air travel with India. It is learnt that Menon, a resident of Indore, has left the IPL bio-bubble after his wife and mother tested positive for Covid-19. Match referee Manu Nayyar too has left the bio-bubble in Ahmedabad following the death of his mother on Wednesday night. In Reiffel's case, the Australian government's imposition of a travel ban on flights to and from India in the wake of the rising COVID-19 cases here led to him being unable to leave the bubble after initial information suggested that he has made the move. — *PTI*

RR, DC, Sachin in Covid relief cash

New Delhi: IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals on Thursday said it has raised ₹7.5 crore to provide immediate support to people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic through its foundation. Delhi Capitals also on Thursday pledged ₹1.5 crore in support of the national capital's fight against the pandemic. "Players along with the team owners and team management have come forward to raise funds and have been working along with the Rajasthan Royals' philanthropic arm Royal Rajasthan Foundation (RRF) in partnership with the British Asian Trust (BAT)," a release issued by the franchise said. Meanwhile, Sachin Tendulkar donated ₹1 crore to procure oxygen concentrators for Covid-19 patients. The health-care system is crumbling due to the crisis with hospitals struggling to provide oxygen and crucial medicines to the patients. — *PTI*

Hasan, Shaheen skittle Zim for 176

Harare: Pakistan pace pair Hasan Ali and Shaheen Shah Afridi shared eight wickets between them to dismiss Zimbabwe for 176 on the opening day of the first Test in Harare on Thursday. Hasan rocked the top order with figures of 4/53 while Afridi polished off the tail with 4/43 as the home batsmen struggled to cope with the pace generated on a slow pitch at Harare Sports Club. Debutant Roy Kaia stood firm in the post-lunch session, top-scoring with 48 before falling leg-before to Hasan while Donald Tiripano chipped in with 28 and Milton Shumba, also playing in his first Test, scored 27. In the first session Hasan struck twice to give Pakistan an excellent start. — *AFP*

Brief scores: Zimbabwe 176 in 59.1 overs (R. Kaia 48; Shaheen Shah Afridi 4/43, Hasan Ali 4/53) vs Pakistan.

Five up for India women coach job

New Delhi: Former chief selector Hemlata Kala is among five female candidates who have applied to become the Indian women's team's head coach, a position that has been held by men since 2017. Mamatha Maben, Jaya Sharma, Suman Sharma and Nooshin Al Khadeer are the others who have presented their candidature for the job. Among the men, incumbent W.V. Raman has recaptured after his term ended with the home series loss to South Africa in March. — *PTI*

Live on TV

CRICKET

IPL: Punjab Kings vs Royal Challengers Bangalore from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FORMULA ONE

Portuguese Grand Prix: Practice 1 from 3.55 pm, Practice 2 from 7.25 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Southampton vs Leicester City from 12.30 am (Saturday) on Star Sports Select 2, HD

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QUINTESSENCE

Sublime De Kock's unbeaten 70 brings Mumbai back to winning ways

New Delhi, April 29: O opener Quinton de Kock roared back to form with a blistering 50-ball 70 as Mumbai Indians beat Rajasthan Royals by seven wickets in their IPL game here on Thursday.

Put in to bat, Rajasthan rode on 42 by skipper Sanju Samson and Jos Buttler's 41 to post a competitive 171 for four but their efforts was overshadowed by de Kock, who struck six fours and two maximums to complete the task in 18.3 overs at the Arun Jaitley Stadium. Krunal Pandya also played a useful cameo, smashing 39 off 26 balls with the help of two fours and as many sixes.

Mumbai openers Rohit Sharma (14) and de Kock put up 49 for the first wicket. The South African fetched his first boundary, a cover drive, and then launched into left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman (1/37) for a four and a maximum. While Rohit played his trademark pull-shot to get a six in the fifth over.

De Kock hammered Chris Morris (2/33) for another maximum but Rohit perished in the sixth over, giving a dolly to Chetan Sakariya at mid-on.

Leg-spinner Rahul Tewatia (0/30) conceded three boundaries in the seventh over, two by Suryakumar Yadav (16; 3x4) and one by de Kock, as Mumbai got 14 runs.

However, Morris brought back Rajasthan by removing Surya, as Mumbai slipped to 83/2. Krunal joined de Kock, who completed his half-century in 35 balls and then got a life. De Kock and Krunal added 63 runs for the third wicket and brought the side closer to a win. — *PTI*



Quinton de Kock of Mumbai Indians plays a shot against Rajasthan Royals in an IPL match at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi on Thursday. — *PTI*

PUNJAB HAVE TASK CUT OUT AGAINST RCB

Ahmedabad, April 29: Punjab Kings will have to play out of their skins to get their stuttering campaign back on track when they face a high-flying Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League here on Friday.

Smarting from a five-wicket defeat at the hands of Kolkata Knight Riders, it will not be an easy task for a struggling Punjab side to stand up to the challenge thrown by a RCB team, which has been firing on all cylinders.

Following four losses and two wins, Punjab are currently placed sixth in the league table with four points, whereas RCB are second with 10 points from five wins, only behind Chennai Super Kings on net run rate.

Apart from the sole loss against CSK, RCB have emerged as strong contenders for a maiden IPL title, with many of their players striking form as the tournament progresses. In their six games, the K.L. Rahul-led side have gone on to make the three low totals batting first — 106, 120 and 123. — *PTI*

SCORECARD

Rajasthan Royals: Jos Buttler st de Kock b Rahul Chahar 41, Yashasvi Jaiswal c and b Rahul Chahar 32, Sanju Samson b Boult 42, Shivam Dube c and b Bumrah 35, David Miller not out 7, Riyan Parag not out 8. Extras (lb-2, w-3, nb-1) 6. **Total (for 4 wks, in 20 overs) 171.** **FoW:** 66-1, 91-2, 148-3, 158-4.

Bowler: Trent Boult 4-0-37-1, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-15-1, Jayant Yadav 3-0-37-0, Nathan Coulter-Nile 4-0-35-0, Rahul Chahar 4-0-33-2, Krunal Pandya 1-0-12-0.

Mumbai Indians: Rohit Sharma c Chetan Sakariya b Chris Morris 14, Quinton de Kock not out 70, Suryakumar Yadav c Jos Buttler b Chris Morris 16, Krunal

Pandya b Mustafizur 39, Kieron Pollard not out 16. Extras (lb-15, w-2) 17. **Total: (for 3 wks, in 18.3 overs) 172.** **FoW:** 49-1, 83-2, 146-3.

Bowler: Chetan Sakariya 3-0-18-0, Jaydev Unadkat 4-0-33-0, Mustafizur Rahman 3-3-0-37-1, Chris Morris 4-0-33-2, Rahul Tewatia 3-0-30-0, Shivam Dube 1-0-6-0.

VALLADOLID HOLD BILBAO TO STAY SAFE

Madrid, April 29: Valladolid twice came from behind to draw 2-2 with Athletic Bilbao and climb out of the Spanish league's relegation zone.

Shon Weissman scored an 85th-minute equaliser to give the visitors the point that lifted them to 17th place with five rounds left.

Valladolid are tied on 30 points with 18th-place Elche but are ahead on goal difference.

Athletic took the lead through Jon Morcillo in the 14th before Fabián Orellana levelled the match in the 70th and Raúl García put the hosts ahead again in the 76th.

The draw extended Valladolid's winless streak in the league to seven matches.

Athletic were looking to keep the momentum from a win over leaders Atlético Madrid on Sunday. They sit in ninth place and still have an outside chance of qualifying for the Europa League.

The match was originally scheduled to be played two weeks ago. It was postponed because of Athletic's participation in the Copa del Rey final.

Barcelona can take over the league lead for the first time on Thursday with a win against Granada. — *AP*

Portimao (Portugal), April 29: The third instalment of what is shaping up to be one of Formula One's finest title duels in years moves to Portugal's sun-blessed Algarve this weekend with Lewis Hamilton leading Max Verstappen by a single point.

That the seven-time champion tops the nascent drivers' standings is for once a surprise with Red Bull enjoying a rare speed superiority over the Mercedes.

But a Verstappen error contributed to Hamilton's

Mahrez magic lifts Man City past PSG

Paris, April 29: Manchester City are in pole position to reach the Champions League final after coming from behind to beat Paris Saint-Germain 2-1 away in the first leg of their blockbuster semi-final on Wednesday, with Riyad Mahrez curling in the winner from a free-kick.

Marquinhos had powered in a header to give PSG an early lead and the deserved advantage at half-time at the Parc des Princes.

However, City skipper Kevin De Bruyne's cross dropped in to pull City level just after the hour and Mahrez beat Keylor Navas from a 71st-minute free-kick to complete the turnaround, giving Pep Guardiola's side the advantage going into next Tuesday's return in Manchester.

"The last 10 minutes of the first half was good and the second half was excellent in every department. We scored two goals away which is so important, but we have a hard job to do in six days," Guardiola told BT Sport.

"In general, so satisfied for the performance but it is halfway. We still have 90 more minutes to beat them and PSG is a team where anything can happen."

After starting so well, PSG lost their way after half-time and had Idrissa Gana Gueye sent off in the 77th minute as a



Manchester City's Riyad Mahrez (left) celebrates after scoring against Paris Saint-Germain during their Champions League first leg semi-final in Paris on Wednesday. — *AFP*

shocking tackle on Ilkay Gundogan earned the midfielder a straight red card.

Having already failed to win at home to Manchester United, Barcelona and Bayern in this season's Champions League, the Parisians face an uphill struggle in England if they are to reach the final for the second year running.

It is, then, first blood to Emirati-backed City against Qatar-owned PSG in a tie that is also a battle of competing nations. "We conceded two stupid goals," Marquinhos admitted to broadcaster RMC Sport.

Of the return leg, he added: "There is no point in us going there if we

don't believe we can turn it around."

After all the money pumped in by their owners from Abu Dhabi, City are eyeing a first ever Champions League final, and this was their first appearance in the semi-finals since 2016, when they defeated PSG in the last eight.

However, PSG can still

be optimistic about their prospects after sensational away performances against Barcelona and Bayern in the last two rounds.

PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino is hoping to once again get the better of Guardiola, just as he did when his Tottenham side beat City in the quarter-finals in 2019. — *AFP*

IPL POINTS TABLE						
Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
CSK	6	5	1	0	10	+1.475
DC	7	5	2	0	10	+0.466
RCB	6	5	1	0	10	+0.089
MI	6	3	3	0	6	+0.071
KKR	7	2	5	0	4	-0.494
PBKS	6	2	4	0	4	-0.608
RR	6	2	4	0	4	-0.69
SRH	6	1	5	0	2	-0.264

ORANGE CAP		
Shikhar Dhawan, DC	311	
Faf du Plessis, CSK	270	
Prithvi Shaw, DC	269	

PURPLE CAP		
Harshal Patel, RCB	17	
Avesh Khan, DC	13	
Rahul Chahar, MI	11	

Sharp Shaw cuts KKR down to size

Ahmedabad, April 29: Prithvi Shaw's quickfire 82 off just 41 balls helped Delhi Capitals ease past Kolkata Knight Riders by seven wickets in their Indian Premier League match here on Thursday. DC chased down the target in 16.3 overs.

The 21-year-old Shaw smashed 11 fours and three sixes during his blazing knock. He was well-supported by experienced Shikhar Dhawan (46 off 47 balls) and shared 142 run for the first wicket.

Pat Cummins was pick of the bowler for the losing side as he took 3/24.

Asked to bat first, Kolkata Knight Riders made 154 for six against the in-form team from Delhi.

Opener Shubman Gill regained some form with a 38-ball 43 but Knight Riders slipped to 82 for five before Andrew Russell smashed 45 off 27 balls to take them past the 150-mark at the Narendra Modi Stadium here.

Among Delhi Capitals bowlers, the spin duo of Axar Patel (2/32) and Lalit

SCORECARD

Kolkata Knight Riders: Nitish Rana st Pant b Axar 15, Shubman Gill c Steven Smith b Avesh Khan 43, Rahul Tripathi c Lalit Yadav b Stoinis 19, Eoin Morgan c Steven Smith b Lalit Yadav 0, Sunil Narine b Lalit Yadav 0, Andre Russell not out 45, Dinesh Karthik lbw b Axar 14, Pat Cummins not out 11. Extras (lb-6, w-1) 7. **Total (for 6 wks, in 20 overs) 154.** **FoW:** 25-1, 69-2, 74-3, 75-4, 82-5, 109-6.

Bowling: Ishant Sharma 4-0-34-0, Kagiso Rabada 4-0-31-0, Axar Patel 4-0-32-2, Avesh Khan 4-0-31-1, Lalit Yadav 3-0-13-2, Marcus Stoinis 1-0-7-1.

Delhi Capitals: Prithvi Shaw c Rana b Cummins 82, Shikhar Dhawan lbw b Cummins 46, Rishabh Pant c Mavi b Cummins 16, Marcus Stoinis not out 6, Shimron Hetmyer not out 0. Extras (b-1, nb-1, w-4) 6. **Total (for 3 wks, in 16.3 overs) 156.** **FoW:** 1-132, 2-146, 3-150.

Bowling: Shivam Mavi 1-0-25-0, Varun Chakravarty 4-0-34-0, Prasidh Krishna 3-3-0-36-0, Sunil Narine 4-0-36-0, Pat Cummins 4-0-24-3.

Yadav (2/13) snared two wickets each, while Avesh Khan (1/31) captured one. — *PTI*

COVID | EFFECT

FC GOA COACH, FOREIGN STAFF LEAVE INDIA

Margao, April 29: Indian Super League side FC Goa on Thursday allowed their foreign staffers, including Spanish head coach Juan Ferrando and some footballers, to leave the country ahead of their last AFC Champions League match in view of the restrictions being imposed on flights from India globally.

As India grapples with the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, several countries, including Australia, Italy and Germany, have imposed travel bans on India.

The club said that it was a "pre-emptive measure in view of recent policies being taken by European and other countries in regards to travellers from India".

"FC Goa would like to inform that the club's foreign contingent including the Head Coach and foreign staff have been advised to travel back home immediately," a club statement read.

"This comes as a pre-emptive measure in view of recent policies being taken by European and other countries in regards to travellers from India as the nation battles the second wave of Covid-19 which has engulfed the country," it added. — *PTI*

S. KOREA INOCULATES TOKYO-BOUND ATHLETES

Seoul, April 29: South Korea began administering fast-track Covid-19 vaccines on Thursday to athletes, coaches and others expected to attend the Tokyo Olympics.

The Korean Sport and Olympic Committee said the first group of about 100 people received the first doses at a state-run hospital in Seoul at the start of the country's prioritized vaccination program for its Olympic delegation. They will be given second shots in the coming weeks.

A total of 930 athletes, coaches, officials and other support staff will be vaccinated ahead of the Tokyo Games, which is set to open on July 23. Athletes can receive the vaccines if they have already qualified for the Olympics or are in qualifying tournaments, so some may get vaccinated but not attend the games. — *AP*