

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SATURDAY 17 APRIL 2021



SPORT | 8

Chahar stars as CSK beat Punjab Kings by 6 wickets to register first win in IPL



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Prince Philip's funeral is at Windsor today: William & Harry won't be side by side

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TED Talks postponed, Covid second wave causes delay in Shah Rukh Khan's return



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RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17

Vol. 28 No. 60 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00

WINDOWS



US actor Johnny Depp poses during the photocall of the film *Minamata* at the BCN Film Fest in Barcelona on Friday. — AFP

AIUDF candidates fly back to Assam fearing lockdown

Guwahati: The candidates of All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), who had been moved to Jaipur due to horse-trading fears, on Friday came back to Assam, fearing an impending lockdown like situation which may not allow them to return back to state even at the time of counting of votes on May 2. It is significant that 17 candidates were shifted to Fairmont Hotel in Jaipur exactly a week ago. They were expected to be in Jaipur till around May 2, when the results are scheduled to be declared. **Full report on Page 3**

8 dead in shooting at US FedEx facility

Indianapolis: A gunman killed eight people and wounded several others before apparently taking his own life in a late-night attack at a FedEx facility near the Indianapolis airport, the police said, in the latest in a spate of mass shootings in the United States after a relative lull during the pandemic. — AP **Full report on Page 6**

IMD: Monsoon to be normal this yr

New Delhi: The Southwest monsoon, which brings nearly 75 per cent of rainfall to the country, is expected to be normal this year, the IMD said. The long period average will be 98 per cent with an error margin of plus and minus 5 per cent. — PTI **Graphic, report on Page 2**

COUNTERPOINT



Don't vote for him, father... he is not wearing a mask!

WEATHER

Max: 34°C
Min: 21°C
RH: 31%
Rain: 10%

Forecast: Mostly sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Shuddha Panchami till 8.30 pm
Star: Mrigasira till 2.31 am
Variyam: 5.54 am to 7.42 am
Durmuhurtam: 6.02 am to 7.42 am
Rahukalam: 9 to 10.30 am
SUNSET TODAY 6.48 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.53 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 9.08 AM
MOONSET TODAY 11.32 PM

■ 1,185 die in 24 hrs ■ Covaxin output doubled ■ ICSE, ISC exams deferred

PM reviews oxygen crisis as cases touch new high: 2.17L

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

As the daily fresh Covid-19 cases went over 2.17 lakhs and the death toll reached 1,185, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday chaired a comprehensive review meeting to ensure adequate medical grade oxygen supply in the country. The meeting took place a day after India decided to import 50,000 metric tonnes of medical oxygen to reduce the shortage of supplies. Union minister Prakash Javadekar and Karnataka CM B.S. Yediyurappa were, meanwhile, among those who tested positive on Friday. Mr Yediyurappa has in fact tested positive for the second time in eight months and has been hospitalised.

In the wake of the nationwide surge in Covid-19 cases, the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations



Migrant workers stand in a queue to board an outstation train to go their native place at Panvel Railway Station in Navi Mumbai on Friday. — PTI

on Friday deferred the ICSE Class 10 and ISC Class 12 examinations till further notice. This comes two days after similar action by the CBSE board. During Friday's meeting, the PM reviewed in detail the current oxygen supply situation and projected use in the coming 15 days across 12 high-burden states — Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh,

Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. The PM was informed that 4,880 MT, 5,619 MT and 6,593 MT have been allocated to these 12 states for meeting their projected demand as on April 20, April 25 and April 30 respectively. The PM suggested an increase

■ Turn to Page 4

SII chief urges Biden to lift US ban on vaccine raw materials

Mumbai: Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla on Friday said the US needs to lift its embargo on raw material exports to help ramp up vaccine production.

He had earlier admitted that SII has been facing problems in sending out required number of batches of vaccines due to the bureaucratic and government-related hurdles. Tagging the twitter handle of the US President, Mr Poonawalla said in a tweet, "Respected @POTUS, if we are to truly unite in beating this virus, on behalf of the vaccine industry outside the U.S., I humbly request you to lift the embargo of raw material exports out of the U.S. so that vaccine production can ramp up. Your administration has the details." **■ More on Page 4**

Sisodia to be nodal minister for Delhi Covid management

New Delhi: Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia was on Friday appointed the nodal minister for Covid-19 management in the national capital, according to an order. Mr Sisodia will be responsible for inter-ministerial coordination till further orders, it said. Delhi recorded 16,699 cases and 112 fatalities on Thursday, according to health department. — PTI **■ More on Page 2**

Weekend curbs clarified: Food, ATMs, essentials, pharma open

Delhi govt: E-passes for night curfew to remain valid

SUNIL THAPLIYAL
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Clearing the confusion over the weekend curfew restrictions, the Delhi government on Friday said those who have a valid night curfew e-pass are not required to obtain a separate pass for the weekend curfew. Amid a surge in Covid-19 cases, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had Thursday announced a curfew from

this weekend and the closure of malls, gyms and auditoriums till April 30 as part of sweeping restrictions to break the chain of the infection. During this weekend curfew in the city, shopping malls, auditoriums, restaurants, gyms and spas remain shut till further orders, while cinema theatres will be allowed to screen movies with 30 per cent of their seating capacities on weekdays.

Dine-in facilities at all restaurants and eateries in the city will be barred, but home delivery of food shall be allowed, on the condition of strict adherence to Covid-19 protocols.

"The e-pass possessed by a person for movement connected to essential goods and services during night curfew shall also be valid for weekend curfew period," read a statement **■ Turn to Page 4**

UK home secy clears Nirav extradition, but can appeal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Britain's home secretary Priti Patel has approved the extradition to India of fugitive diamondaire Nirav Modi, wanted in a ₹13,500-crore bank fraud case. However, Nirav Modi has the option of legally challenging it within 28 days before the UK high court, sources said. "The process may take months or even years, as in the case of liquor baron Vijay Mallya.

A source said: "On February 25, the Westminster magistrates'



court had allowed Modi's extradition. The findings of the court were sent to the UK home office, which has cleared the extradition". Nirav Modi is wanted by the Indian courts for fraud and money laundering in the ₹13,500-crore Punjab National Bank loan scam.

Both the CBI and the ED are probing the multi-crore PNB scam.

While clearing his extradition to India, a UK judge in February dismissed arguments like his mental health worsening during the pandemic and on poor Indian prison conditions. "I do not accept Nirav Modi was involved in a legitimate business. I find no genuine transactions and believe there is a process of dishonesty. Many of these are a matter for trial in India. I am satisfied again there is evidence he could be convicted. Prima facie there is a case of money laundering", the judge ruled.



CRPF commando Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, who was released by Maoists after being captured during an encounter in Chhattisgarh, being welcomed by his family on his arrival in Jammu on Friday. — PTI

45 seats to vote in Bengal Phase 5 today



Security personnel on patrol on Friday near a polling station at Salt Lake (Bidhannagar), an upscale suburb of Kolkata, which will go to the polls along with 44 other constituencies in the fifth

phase of Assembly elections in West Bengal on Saturday. The security measures have been stepped up due to the violence in the previous phase. **■ Report on Page 3** — PTI

■ Mamata to EC: Stop BJP bringing in 'outsiders'
■ 'Silence period' extended to 72 hrs last 3 phases

EC curbs on rallies, limits time for Bengal campaign

Kolkata/New Delhi, April 16: Against the backdrop of "unprecedented public health concerns", the Election Commission on Friday invoked its constitutional powers to put in place restrictions on campaigning by political parties, including curtailing its time, for the West Bengal Assembly elections.

In an order, the poll panel curtailed the time for campaign up to 7 pm. Earlier it was up to 10 pm. "No rallies, public meetings, street plays, nukkad sabhas, shall be allowed on any day during the days of campaign between 7 pm and 10 am with effect from 7 pm of April 16," the order said.

It also extended the silence period from 48 hours to 72 hours in each of the remaining three of the eight phases of the West Bengal polls to be held on April 22, 26 and 29. The fifth phase is on Saturday.

During the silence period, which is usually for 48 hours before voting day, parties and candidates cannot hold rallies and meetings.

"The silence period for rallies, public meetings, street plays, nukkad sabhas, bike rallies or any gathering for campaigning purposes shall be extended to 72 hours before the end of the poll for Phase 6, Phase 7 and Phase 8 in West Bengal," the Election Commission order said.

"Thereby, for these phases, the campaign shall end at 6.30 pm on April 19; on April 23; and on April 26 respectively," it said.

The poll panel observed that it has noted several instances of election meetings and campaigns **■ Turn to Page 4**



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee at a rally in Nabaddwip, Nadia district, on Friday. — PTI

TMC hits back as Left calls Mamata 'fascist, intolerant'

SANJAY BASAK
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

The fifth phase of the West Bengal polls will be held on Saturday amidst the shrill campaign unleashed by the Left parties to project Trinamul boss and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee as "fascist and intolerant".

In fact, after the April 10 Sitalkuchi incident in which four people died in CISF firing at a polling booth, CPI(M) leaders have pursued the BJP line and accused Ms Banerjee of "provoking" the violence. "The CPI(M) leaders and their social media warriors went on wilfully to reinforce the 'provocation' narrative that was circulated by the BJP", says Prof Aditya Nigam in his blog Kafilal.online.

CPI(M) mouthpiece *Ganashakti* has relentlessly targeted Ms Banerjee and repeatedly equated her with the BJP.

■ AFTER THE April 10 Sitalkuchi incident in which four people died in CISF firing at a polling booth, CPI(M) leaders have pursued the BJP line and accused Ms Banerjee of "provoking" the violence

Some articles have openly talked about Ms Banerjee's "fascist regime". Even CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury has described her as "fascist and intolerant". Reacting strongly, TMC Rajya Sabha MP Sukhendu Sekhar Roy said: "Each and every milestone of the CPI(M)'s 34-year rule is drenched in blood." He also claimed it was "not Mamata Banerjee, but the CPI(M), which helped the BJP make inroads into Bengal".

In an article "Census of Political Murders in West Bengal during CPI-M rule-1977-2009" published **■ Turn to Page 4**

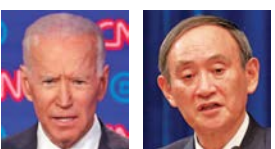
Biden meets Japan PM Suga, to fix date for 'in-person' Quad summit with Modi

Washington, April 16: President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide are likely to announce on Friday the next in-person meeting of the Quad leaders, which also include Prime Ministers of India and Australia, according to a senior US official.

Mr Suga, who arrived in Washington on Thursday night, is scheduled to meet Mr Biden at the White House on Friday.

This would be Biden's first in-person bilateral meeting with a foreign leader amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

We view the Quad, even



though it's an unofficial gathering, as a huge part of the architecture of the Indo-Pacific going forward, said the senior administration official on the eve of the historic visit.

Confirming that Mr Biden and Mr Suga would hold a discussion on the Quad, the senior administration official said that the two leaders are likely to discuss and announce when they may have the

next four-person meeting. I think the two leaders are going to review the progress to date on this and underscore future plans of what we want to do in the Quad going forward, the official said ahead of the US-Japan bilateral.

Quad is the grouping of India, the US, Japan and Australia.

On March 12, leaders of the four Quad countries — PM Narendra Modi, his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison, US President Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Suga — held their first virtual summit. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

4 held for duping by promising government jobs

New Delhi: A 25-year-old man and his three associates have been arrested for allegedly duping people by promising them government jobs, police said on Friday. The main accused has been identified as Rahul Srivastava, they said. Srivastava arranged data of potential targets from employment website and social media platforms and provided them to his associates — Arjun Gill (25), Javed (24) and Manish (20), police said. The trio posed as registered recruiters from the Ministry of Labour and Employment and lured victims to make online transactions, police said. Investigations disclosed that ₹78.38 lakh was received via Paytm from September 2019 to October 2020. This amount was subsequently transferred (by the accused) to IDBI bank account opened in the name of "Education Planet", police said. The matter came to light on March 23 after a woman approached the police with her complaint at Parliament Street police station in which she alleged that she had been duped. The woman told the police that she received a call in October last year from a person named Dixit Raj, who introduced himself as a registered recruiter from the Ministry of Labour and Employment, officials said. According to her complaint, the accused lured her with an offer to appear for a job interview for the post of unit administrator and assured her employment. She was duped of ₹3,43,626 via online transactions on the pretext of registration or other excuses, police said.

— PTI

6 wanted criminals arrested after raids in 3 states

New Delhi: The Delhi Police has arrested six wanted criminals of Kala Jathedi-Lawrence Bishnoi gang from three different states, officials said on Friday. The accused have been identified as Ankit alias Ankit Lagarpur (23), Ravi alias Ravi Jagsi (29), Rajan alias Rajan Jaat (24), Sumit alias Cheeta alias Sumit Bichpadi (24), Amit alias Chhota (35), Sudhir Mann (29), they said. According to police, they were carrying a cumulative reward of ₹3,50,000 from Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Chandigarh. "Different teams were formed and dispatched after comprehensive briefing. The teams raided three different locations in three states and arrested the accused persons," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Manishi Chandra said. The first team arrested three persons Rajan, Amit and Sumit from a hideout in Navi Mumbai. The second team busted the Rajasthan module and arrested Ankit and Sudhir Mann when they had come to Delhi to receive a consignment of firearms, the DCP said. The third team busted the Gujarat module with the arrest of Ravi from Ahmadabad, he said. The accused were recently involved in gruesome crimes acting on the directions of gang leaders operating from three different countries, police said.

— PTI

'Country lacks specialists in rheumatology'

New Delhi: Noting that rheumatic diseases can not only cause pain and disability but shorten the lifespan of both men and women, renowned rheumatologists from all over India have expressed their concern on the lack of specialists treating rheumatic diseases that affect one-fourth of Indians. The experts gathered at the inauguration of the Rheumatology Week, a virtual week-long initiative by Indian Rheumatology Association (IRA) in association with Integrated Health and Wellbeing (IHW) Council, focuses on making people aware about three major rheumatologic diseases i.e., Rheumatoid Arthritis, Ankylosing Spondylitis & Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE), available in 7 regional languages — Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam, Gujarati, Bangla and Odia to begin with.

Kejriwal holds review meeting, asks officials to increase strength of oxygen beds
Delhi records 19,486 Covid cases, 141 deathsAGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal convened a review meeting on Friday on the situation of coronavirus in Delhi. Several steps taken by the Delhi government to improve the health infrastructure of Delhi were discussed, along with increasing the bed capacity and several other infrastructural requirements in the national capital.

Delhi on Friday recorded the biggest single-day jump of 19,486 fresh Covid-19 cases and 141 deaths due to the disease, according to data shared by the health department. This is the fifth record daily rise in cases in the national capital in the last six days.

The positivity rate fell marginally to 19.69 per cent from Thursday's 20.22 per cent, the highest so far. With the fresh cases, the national capital's cumulative tally has risen to 8,03,623. The death toll stands at 11,793, according to the latest bulletin.

Kejriwal directed officials to create more Covid facilities and to increase the strength of oxygen beds across Delhi. He also directed the officials to ensure real-time availability of beds of the Delhi Corona app and that the information on the number of beds is exact.

He said that there should be multiple assistance numbers in the hospitals and nodal persons should be appointed at every helpline number so that no urgent calls should be missed or turned down. He also said that the health teams must reach out to every patient in home isolation and provide oximeters, the general public should receive every assistance while they are in home isolation.

Deputy CM and nodal minister Manish Sisodia, health minister Satyendar Jain, additional chief secretary, and health secretary were also present in

THIS IS the fifth record daily rise in cases in the national capital in the last six days. The positivity rate fell marginally to 19.69 per cent from Thursday's 20.22 per cent, the highest so far. With the fresh cases, the national capital's cumulative tally has risen to 8,03,623. The death toll stands at 11,793, according to the latest bulletin.

the meeting along with health officials. Kejriwal said that the focus of the Delhi government is towards increasing the bed capacity, which will ensure adequate treatment for the people who require urgent assistance. In the meeting, bed management was discussed in detail. CM directed the officials to create more Covid facilities and to increase the strength of oxygen beds across Delhi. He said that the Delhi government should provide oxygen beds to every patient who is in need, for which more Covid facilities and hospital beds are required.

Kejriwal said the bed availability on the Delhi Corona app should be updated regularly. He said that all the hospitals must be directed to ensure an adequate flow of information on the real-time availability of beds. He told the officials to ensure that this data is updated every day and the information should be exact.

Kejriwal said that all the helpline numbers of the hospitals, which are also mentioned on the Delhi Corona app, should remain fully functional. The hospitals must be directed to make people available 24x7 for providing assistance through the helpline numbers.

"Not only one, but there should be multiple assistance numbers in the hospitals and nodal persons should be appointed at every helpline number. No urgent calls should be missed and turned down."



Relatives console a family member of a Covid-19 victim at Nigam Bodh Ghat crematorium in New Delhi on Friday.

— PTI

JNU advises hostel residents to return to native places

New Delhi, April 16: Amid a steep rise in Covid-19 cases in the national capital, the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on Friday advised its hostel residents that if feasible, they return to their native places.

According to an advisory issued by the varsity, there are 64 Covid-19 positive cases on the JNU campus at present. The university has reported 322 cases and five deaths since the outbreak of the infection in

March last year.

"The predicament of students and research scholars to pursue and complete their academic assignments is understandable. However, the library, hostel messes and eateries in the campus may be super spreaders," the advisory said.

"Therefore, it is advisable, where feasible, for students to leave for their native places in order to stay safe."

— PTI

Public, pvt sector labs to be linked for faster test results

New Delhi, April 16: The Delhi government has issued an order for linking of public and private sector diagnostic labs to ensure timely processing of samples for Covid-19 test, the authorities said on Friday. The order comes amid an unprecedented surge in coronavirus cases in the national capital.

A total of 98,957 tests 64,939 RT-PCR and 34,018

rapid antigen were conducted in the city on Thursday, it showed.

The bulletin said that an "order has been issued regarding linkage of public and private sector labs with each district of the NCT of Delhi to ensure adequate number of slots available in labs to get their samples processed within a stipulated time frame."

— PTI

People to face arrests, trials for breaching curfew: Top cop

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

People venturing out of homes without valid reasons during the weekend curfew will face arrest and prosecution for violating anti-Covid regulations, Delhi Police warned on Friday.

The warning was sounded out after Delhi Police commissioner S. N. Shrivastava directed all DCPs to implement strictly the weekend restrictions imposed by the Delhi government to curb the rapid spread of infection in the national capital.

If anyone is found moving without a valid emergency or movement pass for essential services or goods, they would be stopped and cases will be registered against them and they may also face arrests, said senior Delhi police officers on Friday.

Anyone coming out of their homes will definitely be checked by police personnel and questioned, they said.

Strong dust storm hits Delhi, air quality dips
Woman killed, minor daughter hurt as tin sheet falls on them

New Delhi, April 16: A 37-year-old woman died while her minor daughter and another man were injured after a tin sheet allegedly fell on them in southwest Delhi's Palam area on Friday during a dust storm, police said.

The deceased has been identified as Sonu Kataria, they said, adding that her nine-year-old daughter Nikita also sustained injuries and is stated to be in a critical condition. The man, who was riding a cycle and passing by, sustained minor injuries, they said.

A strong dust storm barrelled through the national capital on Friday, affecting visibility and air quality, according to India Meteorological Department (IMD).

During the storm, a tin sheet fell on the road from the fourth floor of a building at Palam village, leaving three people injured, including the mother-daughter duo who were walking on the road, a senior police officer said.

The tin sheet slit the

'Strong evidence' Covid-19 spreads through air: Study

New Delhi, April 16: There is consistent and strong evidence to prove that the SARS-CoV-2 virus, behind the Covid-19 pandemic, is predominantly transmitted through the air, according to a new assessment published on Friday in The Lancet journal.

The analysis by six experts from the UK, the US, and Canada says public health measures that fail to treat the virus as predominantly airborne leave people unprotected and allow the virus to spread.

"The evidence supporting airborne transmission is overwhelming and evidence supporting large droplet transmission is almost non-existent," said Jose-Luis Jimenez from the University of Colorado Boulder in the US.

"It is urgent that the World Health Organisation and other public health agencies adapt their description of transmission to the scientific evidence so that the focus of mitigation is put on reducing airborne transmission," Mr Jimenez said.

The team, led by researchers at the University of Oxford in the UK, reviewed published research and identified 10 lines of evidence to support the predominance of the airborne route.

The researchers highlighted the super-spreader events such as last year's Skagit Choir outbreak in the US, in which 53 people became infected from a single infected case.

Studies have confirmed these events cannot be adequately explained by close contact or touching shared surfaces or objects, the researchers said in their assessment.

They noted that trans-

mission rates of SARS-CoV-2 are much higher indoors than outdoors and that transmission is greatly reduced by indoor ventilation.

The team cited previous studies estimating that silent—asymptomatic or presymptomatic—transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from people who are not coughing or sneezing accounts for at least 40 per cent of all transmission.

This silent transmission is a key way Covid-19 has spread around the world, "supporting a predominantly airborne mode of transmission," according to the assessment.

The researchers also highlighted work demonstrating long-range transmission of the virus between people in adjacent rooms in hotels, who were never in each other's presence. On the contrary, the team found little to no evidence that the virus spreads easily via large droplets, which fall quickly through the air and contaminate surfaces.

"We were able to identify and interpret highly complex and specialist papers on the dynamics of fluid flows and the isolation of live virus," said study lead author Trish Greenhalgh.

"While some individual papers were assessed as weak, overall the evidence base for airborne transmission is extensive and robust," Ms Greenhalgh added.

She noted that there should be no further delay in implementing measures around the world to protect against such transmission. The assessment has serious implications for public health measures designed to mitigate the pandemic, the researchers said.

— PTI

Monsoon to be 'normal', claims IMD

New Delhi, April 16: The Southwest monsoon, which brings nearly 75 per cent of rainfall to the country, is expected to be normal this year, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday.

The Long Period Average (LPA) will be 98 per cent with an error margin of plus and minus 5 per cent, said M. Rajeevan, secretary of the ministry of earth sciences.

Rainfall in Odisha, Jharkhand, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya is likely to be below normal, but normal or above normal in the rest of the country, he said while releasing the first Long Range Forecast for the four-month rainfall period from June to September. "The monsoon will be 98 per cent of the LPA, which is normal rainfall. It is a really good news for the country and will help India have a good agriculture output," Rajeevan said at a virtual press conference.

— PTI

Army jawan robbed, thrown out of moving auto

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

An Army jawan was robbed and thrown out of moving auto in southeast Delhi's New Friends Colony. The police said the 24-year-old man, Tanwar Raj Singh, boarded a shared auto at Sarai Kale Khan to go to Kashmir Gate. Preliminary investigation revealed that three men, including the auto driver, beat him up with sticks before pushing him off. They robbed his bag containing his uniform and pistol along with 10 live cartridges.

The police said the incident took place on April 13 when Singh, a native of Rajasthan's Kota, came to Delhi and was going to

Punjab where he was posted.

"Around 1 am, he reached Sarai Kale Khan in a bus. He was looking for an auto-rickshaw to go to Kashmir Gate from where he was supposed to board another bus for Punjab. In his complaint, he stated that two men were already sitting in the auto, posing as other passengers," a senior police officer said.

The complainant alleged that a few minutes later, the driver went down a dusty road along the Yamuna but he thought it may be a short cut. After around one kilometer, the men allegedly overpowered him and asked him to hand over his belongings. "He resisted and they

started beating him with sticks. They dumped him when they saw his injuries and robbed his trolley bag containing his ID card, shoes and uniform, 7.56 pistol along with 10 live cartridges," an officer said.

The police said Singh had another bag and phone in his hand and his purse was in his pocket, which the accused did not rob. The trolley bag was in the back of the auto.

DCP (Southeast) R P Meena said the incident took place on the Yamuna bank near Ashram loop road. "The jawan made a PCR call from his phone and we have lodged an FIR and have collected vital leads. The culprits will be nabbed soon," he said.

Girl rescued from UP, 1 held

New Delhi, April 16: The police have rescued a 16-year-old girl from Uttar Pradesh's Firozabad district a week after she was kidnapped allegedly by her neighbour here, officials said on Friday.

The 40-year-old accused has been arrested. The accused, who is a labourer, allegedly took the girl along with him to his native place in Firozabad after promising to marry her, police said.

The matter came to light on April 7 after the victim's family, who reside in north-east Delhi's

Bhajanpura, informed the police about their missing child. A case of kidnapping was registered.

During the probe, the police found that the girl's neighbour was also missing, a senior official said.

A team was sent to the village of the accused but it was found that he had not been there for the past one year. "Our team stayed in Firozabad and conducted several raids. On Thursday, we rescued the girl and apprehended the accused," the officer added.

— PTI



Street vendors collect their goods during stormy weather outside Jama Masjid in New Delhi on Friday.

— PTI

woman's throat leading to her death while her daughter is in a serious condition. The minor girl and the man were taken to a nearby hospital for treatment, the officer said.

Visibility at Palam dropped from 3,000 metres to 500 metres due to the dust storm. At Safdarjung,

it was reduced from 2,200 metres to 1,500 metres, an IMD official said. Very light rain has been recorded in some areas of the city, the official said. Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 40 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperature settled at 20.2 degrees Celsius.

— PTI

NORTH DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER
City-Sadar Pahar Ganj Zone,
Old Hindu College Building, Kashmere Gate, Delhi-110006
No. AO/C/SPZ/Ward-88/2021/D-57 Date : 13.04.2021

PUBLIC NOTICE FOR AUCTION

The unclaimed goods removed from public places including roads, streets and footpaths during the course of encroachment removal actions in City-SP Zone under the provision of DMG Act, 1957 shall be auctioned to public on 15.05.2021 at 11:30 AM at Licensing Store, City Zone situated at Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg in front of G.B. Pant Hospital on the reserved price @ Rs. 18,02,935/-. The goods/articles can be inspected on any working day with the permission of Administrative Officer/City-SP Zone. The terms and conditions of the auction shall be announced on the spot before the commencement at the auction. Decision of the Auction Board shall be final.

Take Notice also that:

1. Every intending bidder shall have to deposit a sum of Rs.10,000/- on account of earnest money before that auction. The earnest money will be refunded to the unsuccessful bidders after the auction is over.
2. The highest bidder whose bid is accepted shall have to deposit the entire amount of bid immediately at the fall of hammer.
3. The goods will be auctioned on "as is where is basis". The Chairman of the Auction Board reserves the right to cancel any or all the bids without assigning any reasons.
4. The successful bidders shall have to remove the goods within two days after the auction is over. The MCD will not take any responsibility for which and ward of the auctioned goods.

RO No. 04/DPI/North/2021-22 Administrative Officer

SHORT TAKES

Place progress report into Bengal firing: HC

Kolkata: The Calcutta High Court on Friday directed the state CID to place before it a report on the progress of investigation into the firing by CISF personnel at Sitalkuchi which resulted in the death of four persons during the fourth phase of West Bengal Assembly elections. Hearing two PILs seeking a judicial probe into the incident, a division bench comprising Chief justice T.B. N. Radhakrishnan and Justice Arijit Banerjee directed the CID to place the report by May 5, when the petitions, being heard jointly, will be taken up for hearing again. Advocate general for the state, the additional solicitor general appearing for the CISF and the counsel for the Election Commission of India submitted before the court that two FIRs have been lodged one at the instance of an officer of the CISF and another at the instance of an individual in with the death of the four persons at Sitalkuchi in Cooch Behar district on April 10. — *PTI*

K'taka CM Covid +ve for 2nd time

Bengaluru: Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Friday tested positive for Covid for the second time in eight months, and has been shifted to a private hospital for treatment. The 78-year-old Mr Yediyurappa was earlier hospitalised on August 2, 2020 after he tested positive for coronavirus. "Upon having mild fever, today I got tested for Covid-19 and my report has come out positive. Although I am doing fine, I am being hospitalised based on the advice of doctors," he tweeted. He requested all those who had come in contact with him recently to be observant and exercise self-quarantine. — *PTI*

3 dead as limestone mound caves

Koraput: Three women died and another suffered grievous injuries when a huge mound of limestone caved in while they were digging a portion of it at Podaguda in Odisha's Koraput district on Friday. However, identities of the deceased were not ascertained till the last reports came in. Reportedly, the four women were collecting the limestone by digging the mound for their household purpose when the mishap took place. On receiving information, police and district officials reached the spot for an inquiry. Meanwhile, the injured woman was rushed to Pottangi Community Health Centre (CHC) for treatment.

SHAH CALLS RAHUL 'TOURIST POLITICIAN'

Tehatta (WB): Union home minister Amit Shah Friday accused West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee of denying citizenship to Dalit Matua and Namsudra communities as her "vote bank would not like it". Reaching out to the two numerically strong communities which can influence the outcome of assembly elections in many seats, Mr Shah said a ₹100 crore fund will be created for their welfare if the BJP is voted to power in the state. He also mocked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, calling him a "tourist politician". "These Matua and Namsudra families are living here for 50-70 years, for three generations. But Didi says they will not get citizenship, why? Because her vote bank would not like it," he told an election rally in Tehatta in Nadia district. Taking a swipe at Rahul Gandhi who addressed his first two election rallies on Wednesday after keeping off the campaign in the state where his party is contesting in alliance with the Left while fighting against it in Kerala, Shah branded him a "tourist politician". "A tourist politician arrived in Bengal after almost the entire poll got over and questioned our DNA. BJP's DNA is development, nationalism and Atmanirbhar Bharat," he said. Flaying "dynasty politics" in the TMC, Shah said while the BJP wants to implement the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme for farmers in Bengal, "Didi only wants Bhaipo (nepew) Samman Nidhi". — *PTI*

Didi: BJP responsible for Covid-19 surge in Bengal

Urges EC to prevent entry of 'outsiders; during campaigning

Nabadwip/Jagatdal/Noapara (WB), April 16: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee Friday squarely blamed BJP for exacerbating the Covid situation in the state and said she will call upon the Election Commission to stop the saffron party from bringing in "outsiders" during campaigning for the ongoing assembly election.

Addressing an election meeting here, Ms Banerjee said the BJP brought people from "worst-hit" states like Gujarat for erecting marquees for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's poll rallies.

"I will tell the EC to stop the inflow of outsiders from states like Gujarat who are responsible for the Covid spread in Bengal."

"We have nothing to say if the PM or other leaders come for campaigning... But why should BJP bring people from worst-affected states to set up podiums and pandals for the rallies," she said.

Local labourers and decorators can be engaged for the purpose after necessary Covid tests, Ms Banerjee said.

At another meeting at Jagatdal, the TMC supremo said that Covid test of those coming from outside, the decorators and workers should be made mandatory.

She claimed that the Covid situation in states like Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat was far worse than Bengal. "In UP they (the BJP government of that state) have built walls around cremation sites to secretly burn bodies. The situation in Gujarat is alarming. A Bengali lady professor died there of coronavirus due to lack of treatment."

She also alleged that untrained non-medical persons were administering "so-called vaccines from BJP party offices in Gujarat".

Blaming the BJP of trying to stop her from canvassing by "targeting her leg", Ms Banerjee said she has been able to overcome the situation with the blessings of the people. "The injury has healed 75 per cent," she said. — *PTI*

Murshidabad's Left candidate Pradip Nandi dies of Covid

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BERHAMPUR APRIL 16

Another Sanjukta morcha candidate died due to coronavirus in Murshidabad. He was the Jangipur Assembly Sanjukta morcha RSP candidate, Pradip Nandi, (72) died at the Berhampur Covid hospital on Friday evening.

RSP Murshidabad district secretary Bishwanath Banerjee said, "Veteran left-front and RSP leader Mr Nandi was contesting from Jangipur Assembly and he was admitted at Berhampur Covid hospital since April 3 after he was tested positive during his election campaign. It may be noted that his contestant Trinamul Congress candidate and present MLA Zakir Hussain was also injured in a bomb explosion and was admitted at SSKM hospital Kolkata."

On Thursday, Samsergunj Assembly Congress candidate Rejaul Hoque alias Mantu Biswas died in covid 19.

As a result, two candidates succumbed to death for two consecutive days in the Jangipur subdivision in Murshidabad. The Murshidabad district magistrate and the district election officer Shared Dwivedy said that due to the death of an election candidate of Jangipur Assembly countermanded, which will be scheduled on April 26. Coronavirus pandemic situation turned as a super spreader in West Bengal.



A policeman asks people to wear protective face masks as coronavirus cases surge across the country in Kolkata on Friday. — *PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY*

BJP claims Mamata was planning a rally with 'dead bodies'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

In another audio clip released by the BJP, purportedly of TMC supremo and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and her party candidate from Sitalkuchi and district president of Cooch Behar Partha Pratim Roy, where Ms Banerjee can be heard asking Mr Roy to take out a procession with the bodies of those killed after the CRPF tried to contain an angry mob, target the CRPF, and frame two state police officers, the BJP on Friday, accused the TMC supremo of having a "criminal bent of mind" and spreading fear among the minorities.

Four people had died during the fourth phase of polling in Sitalkuchi's booth number 126 after the Central forces tried to control a mob, which had gathered with sticks and weapons and started assaulting polling staff and police personnel.

BJP president JP Nadda tweeted, "TMC signifies culture culture—of feasting on death for petty political gains. TMC should be

BENGAL FIRING

FOUR PEOPLE had died during the fourth phase of polling in Sitalkuchi's booth number 126 after the Central forces tried to control a mob, which had gathered with sticks and weapons and started assaulting polling staff and police personnel

ashamed of itself."

BJP's IT cell head and co-incharge of the state, Amit Malviya, who released the audio clip and held a press conference in Kolkata, said, "Ordinarily, any chief minister should have stood by those who were enforcing law but here you have Mamata Banerjee who wants to take out a procession of dead bodies so that she can use them for political gains and communalise the elections and create unrest."

The BJP leader said Ms Banerjee can be heard telling her party candidate that she will act against the CRPF who are deployed to make sure that free and fair polls are conducted.

'EC won't hold remaining four phases of Bengal polls in a day'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Major redeployment of security forces at short notice is one of the key reason why the EC is not able to hold remaining four phases of Bengal in a single day as has been demanded by some political parties. Sources said home ministry has done a detailed assessment and is of the view that deployment of security forces in Bengal had been done according to polling over a period of eight phases and it would be a "logistical nightmare" now to change that schedule.

Some parties like TMC has suggested that after the fifth phase on April 17, the remaining three phases of elections should be held together in a single day on April 24 in view of the rising corona cases in West Bengal.

However, home ministry officials argue that in view of the heavy security deployment changing the pattern now would be a "logistical nightmare" as massive mobilisation would have to be done which in turn could impact impartial elections.

AIUDF candidates fly back to Assam over Covid fears

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, APRIL 16

The candidates of All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), who had been moved to Jaipur due to horse-trading fears, on Friday came back to Assam, fearing an impending lockdown like situation which may not allow them to return back to the state even at the time of counting of votes on May 2.

It is significant that 17 candidates were shifted to Fairmont hotel in Jaipur exactly a week ago. They were expected to be in Jaipur till around May 2, when the results are scheduled to be declared. The Congress party was bearing the expenses of their stay in Jaipur.

Informing that the AIUDF candidates were worried about rising cases of Covid, sources in the party said that some of them expressed fear that if they catch Covid, it would be highly challenging for them to be part of the counting of votes in their

Assam sees 1 more death, 499 cases

Guwahati: Assam's Covid death toll rose to 1,123 after one more person succumbed to the disease on Thursday, while 499 new infections took the caseload to 2,22,367, the NHM said in a bulletin. The fresh fatality was reported from Kamrup Metropolitan district. The NHM said that 1,347 more Covid patients have died till now, but the state government's Death Audit Board has not included them in the tally of deaths caused by Covid as they had other ailments too. — *PTI*

respective constituency. "Some of them were of the view that their presence on the ground was necessary for the selection of counting agents and other representatives at each and every counting tables," said a functionary of the party while informing that the candidates visited

Aditya Thackeray to lead Shiv Sena in BMC polls

SONU SHRIVATAVA
MUMBAI, APRIL 16

In a bid to attract the youth and new voters, the Shiv Sena would contest the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) election under the leadership of Aditya Thackeray. After the West Bengal election, the BJP the principal opposition party in Maharashtra, would be focusing on the BMC election to be held in early 2022.

The fight would be tough between the Shiv Sena and the Hip. In 2017, the BJP won 82 seats, which was just 32 seats away from the majority figure of 114 out of 227 seats of BMC. The BJP was in the second position on 42 seats in the last BMC election. The BJP is trying hard to win these seats in order to upset Shiv Sena, which has been ruling the municipal corporation for almost 20 years.

According to a Shiv Sena insider, the party is doing microscopic planning at the ward level by



Aditya Thackeray

assigning the seats to senior leaders, party deputy leaders and office-bearers. The party is preparing for 227 seats, as it is yet to be decided whether there would be an alliance of three parties-Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress-or two parties-Shiv Sena and NCP.

"The Yuva Sena chief is himself holding a ward wise meeting with corporators and assistant municipal commissioners to get the public works done," the sources said. So far, Aditya Thackeray has completed 17 wards meetings. The civic body has 24 wards consisting of 227 corporation seats.

"The party is also taking feedback over the sitting corporators and candidates from Gat Pramukh (group head), who are constantly in touch with the voters," a party functionary said.

Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot at his residence in Jaipur before proceeding to the airport.

The AIUDF general secretary Aminul Islam, a candidate from the Mankachar constituency had earlier said, "We have taken some time off. Of course, the risk of horse-trading in Assam is high."

Congress chief whip in Rajasthan Mahesh Joshi and party legislator Rafeek Khan were given the responsibility to ensure that the Assam Assembly election contestants are not approached by unknown persons during their stay in the five-star hotel in Rajasthan.

The AIUDF candidates who were shifted to Jaipur included Samsul Huda, Hafiz Bashir Ahmed, Minakshi Rahman, Nijanur Rahman, Phanidhar Talukdar, Rajib Ahmed, Aminul Islam, Hafiz Rafiqul Islam, Suzam Uddin Laskar, Nizamuddin Choudhury, Nazrul Hoque, Aminul Islam, Ashraf Hussain and Karim Uddin Barbhuiya.

BJP panch among 3 held in J&K for extortion

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR APRIL 16

A deputy village headman belonging to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is among three persons arrested by the police from Jammu and Kashmir's Sopore area on charges of extortion. The police said that a manhunt has been launched for a BJP Sarpanch of the BJP who is also involved in the offence.

The police in a statement here said that acting on a complaint received from a resident of Panzipora area of Sopore, about 50-km northwest of capital Srinagar, the trio was arrested and booked under Section 450 and 506 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 7/25 of the Arms Act.

As per the complaint lodged by one Mudasir Ahmed Sheikh, three unknown persons in the dead of the night barged into his in-law's house in Hamadani Colony of Nadihal area brandishing weapons and then asked for a huge sum of money to be "dropped at" in south Kashmir. They also forcibly took two mobile phones from the family members and threatened them with dire consequences if they reported the incident to the police or informed anyone else about it.

The police said on the basis of the preliminary investigation and technical evidence, Bharatiya Janata Party Panch Merajuddin Rather, a resident of Minipora Krankshoon, Sopore, was cracked to the concerned police station for questioning.

India, Afghan target Pak for aiding terrorism

India: Political settlement in Afghanistan must be inclusive

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Both India and Afghanistan on Friday launched a strong and thinly-veiled criticism of Pakistan for destabilising and promoting terrorism in Afghanistan through the Taliban which is widely considered Islamabad's proxy. External affairs minister S. Jaishankar said some of the neighbours of Afghanistan have played a "very negative role" there in the previous years while Afghan

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Reacting to the announcement of the USA to pull out its troops completely from Afghanistan by September 11 this year, India said it was "deeply concerned about the increase in violence and targeted killings in

National Security Advisor

Afghanistan" and "called for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire", adding that "an Afghan peace process should be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled" and that "any political settlement must be inclusive and should preserve the socio-economic & political gains of the past 19 years".

Hamdullah Mohib hinted at the "direct involve-

ment of a neighbour" in destabilising his country, adding that Afghan "nationalist forces are very angry" and have a "huge problem with the said neighbour" which could result in a "huge blowback effect" against this neighbour. The Afghan National Security Advisor also said that "the Taliban can't take power by force", adding that he had "spoken" to his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval on Friday morning.

Participating in the ongoing Raisina Dialogue conference in Virtual for-

mat at a discussion on the situation in Afghanistan titled "Junction Kabul: The Road to Peace", Afghan National Security Advisor Mr Mohib blasted the Taliban, saying, "Afghans have found no change in (the attitude of) the Taliban. They (the Taliban) have lost the nationalist narrative. The Taliban are losing on every front. ... They cannot force themselves on the Afghan people." He added that if the Taliban launched an attack to take over by force, "it would be another miscalculation" by it.

Setback to Kerala govt, HC quashes FIR against ED

AGE CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 16

In a major setback to the CPM led LDF government in Kerala, the Kerala high court, on Friday, quashed the cases filed by the crime branch against the officials of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with the allegations levelled by the prime accused in a gold smuggling case.

The HC annulled the FIRs filed by the crime branch pertaining to the claims made by key accused Swapna Suresh and Sandeep Nair that the ED officials had forced them to give statements against chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

Both the accused had earlier alleged that the ED officials had applied pressure on them to

THE HC annulled the FIRs filed by the crime branch pertaining to the claims made by key accused Swapna Suresh and Sandeep Nair that the ED officials had forced them to give statements against chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan

BOTH ACCUSED had earlier alleged that the ED officials had applied pressure on them to name top CPM leaders, including the chief minister, in the gold smuggling and money laundering cases.

The HC directed the crime branch to hand over the details of the probe carried out so far

in a sealed envelope. It directed that any further action would be taken by the trial court in the case only after the examination of the documents.

Earlier, the ED had submitted an affidavit in the high court stating that the crime branch had registered a case against the investigating officials with the ulterior motive of sabotaging the probe. This was done because they feared that the involvement of important people would come out in the public domain.

The affidavit had sought the scrapping of the case registered by the crime branch against the ED. It pointed out that the FIR interfered with the discharge official duties of the ED as part of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

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SHORT TAKES

UGC TO VARSITIES:
INCLUDE NCC AS
ELECTIVE COURSEPAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

The University Grants Commission (UGC) in an advisory to the vice-chancellors of universities has asked them to include National Cadet Corps (NCC) training as an elective subject. UGC said that this will be a part of the Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS), under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. UGC had received a letter from Directorate General, NCC last month proposing to include NCC as an elective subject in Indian Universities. It said that all students who enrol as NCC cadets will immensely benefit by obtaining academic credit for NCC training in addition to acquiring NCC 'B' and 'C' certificates. "More students as cadets will be able to avail employment incentives and benefits offered under various Central and State Govt Schemes to NCC cadet." The decision to include NCC as an elective course has been made after a study carried out by the NCC director-general. NCC has developed the NCC General Elective Credit Course design that is uniform and universally implementable, which is in conformity with UGC policy on Choice Based Credit System.

Chabahar project

■ **Continued from Page 1**
for everybody. Chabahar is not against China, not against Gwadar. Chabahar is a place where we can all come together to help Afghanistan. India is playing an active role in Chabahar. The Chinese are interested in playing a role elsewhere in Iran and also in Chabahar."

It may be recalled India had just last month suggested the inclusion of Chabahar in the International North-South Transit Corridor route. This is an important initiative taken by India, Russia and Iran to promote transportation cooperation and to enhance connectivity with Central Asian countries. INSTC is the "shortest multimodal transportation route linking the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf via Iran to Russia and North Europe".

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar had said last month: "The INSTC is an important trade corridor project, wherein India is partnering with 12 countries to establish an economic corridor for the benefit of our peoples. We also welcome the interest of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan to join the multilateral corridor project. Establishing an eastern corridor through Afghanistan would maximise its potential. India has proposed the inclusion of Chabahar in the INSTC route."

It may be recalled that in a major boost to Indian strategic interests last December, India had announced that "besides Uzbekistan, other Central Asian countries have also shown interest in using Chabahar port".

Woman cop held
for 'glorifying
terrorism' in J&KYUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, APRIL 16

The Jammu and Kashmir police have arrested a woman special police officer (SPO) after dismissing her from services on charge of glorifying terrorism and disrupting a search operation launched by security forces to track down militants in a village of southern Kulgam district earlier this week.

Thirty-one-year-old Saima Akhtar has also been accused of uploading a video clip on social media "for dissemination with the intent of disrupting the search operation".

The police said that Akhtar, who is a resident of Frisal village of Kulgam, has been booked under Section 13 of the harsh Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Section 353 of the IPC which entail imprisonment up to seven and two years if proved guilty, respectively. It said that an FIR was lodged against her at Yaripora police station earlier.

Former chief minister and president of People's Democratic Party (PDP) Mehbooba Mufti while reacting to Akhtar's arrest said in a tweet "Saima Akhtar from Kulgam has been slapped with UAPA for raising legitimate questions about searching her home repeatedly without any reasons. Saima's ailing mother understandably exacerbated her worries. When it comes to cruelty even women aren't spared in Naya Kashmir".

The woman can be heard in the video shout-

▶ **THIRTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD SAIMA Akhtar** has also been accused of uploading a video clip on social media 'for dissemination with the intent of disrupting the search operation'.

▶ **MEHBOOBA MUFTI** said in a tweet 'Saima Akhtar from Kulgam has been slapped with UAPA for raising legitimate questions about searching her home repeatedly without any reasons'

ing at security personnel and saying "Kashmir is ours...where have you come from. You come here again and again to harass us and our neighbours. Go and search the houses where militants are hiding. There are no militants here. If you are adamant on searching our house you can't do it with your shoes on...I will not allow you to enter our home with shoes on. We're not afraid of anyone".

She also cautions the security forces about her mother being sick. "My Mom is unwell. I will see you if something untoward happens". While cursing the members of the search party, she says, "you may be struck by cancer" and then reiterates "You're troubling our neighbours again and again too. We're not among those who would be scared of you. You may do whatever you want to".

A statement issued by the police here said that the search operation was launched "on a specific input regarding the presence of terrorists in Karewa Mohalla".

SC issues norms for cheque
bounce cases' early disposalPARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

The Supreme Court Friday came out with a slew of directions to ensure speedy disposal of cheque bounce cases and asked the Centre to amend laws to ensure clubbing of trials in cases which are lodged within one year against a person relating to the same transaction.

The apex court directed all the high courts across the country to issue guidelines for trial courts to deal with cheque bounce cases.

The top court also recommended to the government to make "suitable amendments" in the Negotiable Instruments Act to ensure that trials in cheque bounce cases lodged in 12 months against a person can be clubbed together into one

consolidated case

Issuing a slew of directions on expediting trial in cheque bounce cases that are piling up by day and clogging the justice delivery system, Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde heading a five-judge constitution bench also comprising Justices L. Nageswara Rao, B.R. Gaval, A.S. Bopanna, and Ravindra Bhat said, "We recommend that suitable amendments be made to the Negotiable Instrument Act for the provision of one trial against a person for multiple offences under Section 138 of the Act committed within a period of 12 months, notwithstanding the restriction in Section 219 of the Code."

The court said that such a course would reduce the burden on the docket of the criminal courts.

CBI ex-chief Ranjit Sinha dies at 68

Sinha was said to be confirmed Covid +ve on Thursday

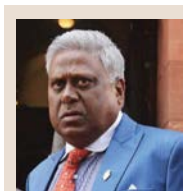
AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Former CBI director Ranjit Sinha passed away in Delhi on Friday morning at the age of 68.

Though there has been no official word on the reason for his death yet, it is understood that he tested positive for Covid-19 infection on Thursday night and breathed his last at 4.30 am on Friday.

Sinha, a 1974-batch IPS officer of Bihar cadre who had cracked the coveted UPSC examination at the age of 21, headed the CBI for a controversial two-year term in 2012 as its 26th chief during which the agency earned the sobriquet of "caged parrot".

The scathing remarks by Justice RM Lodha were a result of Sinha's nine-page affidavit to the Supreme Court giving details of his meetings with the then law minister Ashwani Kumar and other senior officers during which changes were made in the coal scam probe report submitted to the apex court.



Ranjit Sinha

▶ **IT IS** understood that Ranjit Sinha tested positive for Covid-19 infection on Thursday and breathed his last at 4.30 am Friday.

▶ **A 1974-batch IPS officer** of Bihar cadre, Sinha had cracked the coveted UPSC examination at the age of 21

"Whatever the Supreme Court says is correct," was his response to the reporters after the controversy.

Towards the fag end of his tenure, another controversy stuck him. A purported visitors' diary with names of persons under the CBI scanner in coal and 2G scam surfaced in 2014. It showed that these people were allegedly frequenting his residence.

Sinha held several senior posts, including that of the CBI director and the director-general of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).

The Supreme Court directed the then CBI chief to recuse himself from the 2G scam probe on PIL alleging that Sinha met accused at his residence.

15-day-old infant dies
of Covid-19 in Surat

Ahmedabad/Surat: A 15-day-old baby girl, who was born to a Covid-19 patient, succumbed to the infection at a hospital in Gujarat's Surat city. The infant was born with the infection on April 1, as her mother had also contracted the disease, said Dinesh Navadiya, the trustee of Diamond Hospital said.

While the child's mother was shifted to another hospital, the newborn was under intensive treatment and was also administered remdesivir injection when her condition started deteriorating, he said. The baby breathed her last Thursday night.

— PTI

Odisha demands 25L
doses of vaccines

Bhubaneswar: In order to expedite inoculation programme, the Odisha government has demanded at least 25 lakh doses of vaccine in a single lot from the Centre. According to state health minister Naba Kishore Das, short supply in vaccines from the Centre has affected progress of the immunisation drive.

In a letter to the Centre on Thursday, Mr Das has said the state is prepared to administer three lakh doses daily, but it is not getting allocated the required number of shots. He also said the state had received 50,79,650 doses of vaccines as of April 14.

Centre ropes in PSUs
to ramp up jab rollout

New Delhi: The production of indigenously developed Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin will be ramped up significantly and increased to 10 crore doses per month by September, the department of biotechnology said. Covaxin's production will be doubled by May-June and the department has roped in three public sector companies to increase the capacity of vaccine production, it said. Few weeks ago, inter-ministerial teams had visited the sites of two main vaccine manufacturers in India to get their inputs on how production can be ramped up.

— PTI

Andhra CM
writes to PM,
urges to send
60L jab doses

Amaravati, April 16: The Andhra Pradesh government on Friday announced it has no stock of Covid vaccine even as chief minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy wrote another letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, requesting that 60 lakh doses be immediately sent to the state.

On Friday, only about 4,300 doses of the coronavirus vaccine could be administered, the lowest in a day so far, before the stocks completely dried up.

The CM thanked the Prime Minister for sending 6.4 lakh doses of the vaccine to AP (on April 12 and 13) in response to his letter on April 9.

"I request you, sir, to instruct the officials concerned of Health Ministry to supply 60 lakh doses of Covid vaccine to my state to ensure that all the population above 45 years is vaccinated for the first dose in the next three weeks," he said in the letter; the second he sent to the PM in a week.

Mr Jagan said 6,28,961 people were vaccinated in Andhra Pradesh on April 14, "the highest single day Covid vaccination numbers by any state in the country".

"We have not only established our capability of vaccinating over six lakh people per day, but also set up a model for all the states to emulate.

— PTI

Pak asks India to appoint
lawyer to defend Jadhav

Islamabad, April 16: Pakistan on Friday again urged India to appoint a lawyer to represent death row convict Kulbhushan Jadhav to implement the verdict of the International Court of Justice.

The Islamabad high court, while hearing the case on Thursday, asked the foreign office (FO) to approach India about appointing a counsel and clarifying the issue of jurisdiction of the case being heard by the court.

FO spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudhry, addressing a weekly briefing, said: We once again urge India to cooperate with the Pakistani courts by inter-alia appointing a lawyer in the Kulbhushan Jadhav case so that full effect could be given to the ICJ



Kulbhushan Jadhav

judgment in the case.

Jadhav, the 50-year-old retired Indian Navy officer, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism in April 2017.

India approached the ICJ against Pakistan for denial of consular access to Jadhav and challenging the death sentence.

The Hague-based ICJ ruled in July 2019 that Pakistan must undertake

an "effective review and reconsideration" of the conviction and sentence of Jadhav and also to grant consular access to India without further delay.

The ICJ, in its 2019 verdict, had asked Pakistan to provide a proper forum for appeal against the sentence given to Jadhav by a military court.

Asked about backchannel contacts with India, Mr Chaudhry said states have ways and means to communicate with other states which remain available even during wars.

He said Pakistan never shied away from talks with India and has always underscored the need for a 'meaningful dialogue' and peaceful resolution of all disputes, including J&K issue.

— PTI

TMC hits back

■ **Continued from Page 1**

Left-leaning weekly Mainstream, it was stated: "CPI-M adheres to the cult of violence. Its character is anything between a fascist party and a Mafia. In fact, by their public activities, the CPI-M activists lean more towards a mafia organisation."

The 2010 article written by D. Bandhopadhyay said: "Devoid of any high ideology and believing in the cult of violence, the CPI-M used murder as a political instrument since 1978 in an organised manner." The writer continued: "In 1997, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, in reply to an Assembly question, stated that between 1977 and 1996, 28,000 political murders were committed... It meant on average 25.7 murders were effected in a month. It meant the daily rate of murder was four. That is to say, one political murder took place every six hours for the entire 19 years between 1977 and 1996..." He also wrote of the Marichjhapi massacre, murders of monks and nuns of the Ananda Marg groups, the Bantala rape-murder case, the Suchapur mass murders, and Singur, Nandigram, among others.

Speaking to this newspaper, Mr Roy claimed between 1977 and 2011, "there were at least 53,000 political murders". He spoke of the 2001 Chhoto Angaria massacre, in which 11 TMC workers were allegedly burnt alive by CPI(M) workers. He referred to the killings of landless labourers allegedly by CPI(M) cadres near Nanoor in Birbhum district in

2000. Mr Roy reminded everyone of the killings of nine people by CPI(M) workers at Netai in Birbhum in 2011. It may be recalled that three years after the killings, then CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee admitted the Netai incident was a "grave mistake" committed by party workers.

Mr Roy pointed out that history shows there's "no difference between a fascist and a Communist regime". On the issue of suppressing freedom of expression, Mr Roy reminded that in 1993, then information and culture minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had dismantled the Press Corner in Writers Buildings, claiming it was a "potential security threat" to chief minister Jyoti Basu.

Countering the CPI(M) propaganda blitz that it was Ms Banerjee who had helped the BJP make inroads in West Bengal Mr Roy recalled the famous Shahid Minar rally in the mid-1980s where Jyoti Basu and BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee, along with others, held each other's hands in a "spirit of camaraderie". He also wanted to know why Jyoti Basu "did nothing to stop L.K. Advani's rath yatra as it entered West Bengal in 1993?" He pointed out: "The moment it crossed over from Bengal to Bihar, it was (Bihar) chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav who stopped the rath in its tracks." Mr Roy added that in each and every no-confidence motion against the Congress, "the Left had joined hands with the BJP".

EC curbs on Bengal rallies

■ **Continued from Page 1**

"wherein norms of social distancing, wearing of masks have been flouted in blatant" in disregard of the commission's guidelines.

The Trinamul Congress said the remaining three phases should be clubbed into one to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The EC order curtailing campaigning indicates that this demand has been turned down.

The EC said it will be the responsibility of the organisers of public meetings, rallies, to provide masks and sanitisers to every person attending these events at their cost "which shall be added and counted within limits of prescribed expenditure". The letter said star campaigners, political leaders, candidates and aspiring policymakers will demonstrate by their personal example and nudge all supporters in the beginning of the rally, meeting and any other event during campaign to wear masks, use sanitisers and maintain social distancing. District election officers and returning officers will be free to cancel public meetings and rallies if any violations are observed.

Earlier, campaigning at Nabadwip, chief minister Mamata Banerjee had said on Friday she would call upon the Election Commission to stop the BJP from bringing "outsiders" during campaigning, squarely blaming the saffron party for exacerbating the Covid-19 situation in the state.

Ms Banerjee, during a public meeting in Nadia district, said the BJP had brought people from "worst-hit" states like Gujarat to erect marquees for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's poll rallies.

"I will tell the EC to stop the inflow of outsiders from states like Gujarat who are responsible for the Covid-19 spread in Bengal. We have nothing to say if the PM or other leaders come for campaigning... Why should the BJP bring people from worst-affected states to set up the podiums and pandals for their rallies?" she said.

Ms Banerjee said local labourers and decorators could be engaged for the purpose after necessary Covid tests. Referring to her injury, the chief minister said the BJP wanted to stop her from canvassing by "targeting her leg", but she has managed to come out triumphant. "They had targeted my leg, but I proved them wrong with the blessings of people. The injury has healed 75 per cent," she said.

She said the Covid-19 surge could have been under check had Prime Minister Narendra Modi ensured vaccination for every citizen. "The virus had become weak in the last five-six months. But the PM did not take steps to vaccinate every citizen. He did not even respond to my suggestion for free vaccination for people of the state for political reasons."

West Bengal on Thursday recorded the highest single-day spike of 6,769 coronavirus cases and reported at least 22 more fatalities.

— PTI

PM reviews oxygen crisis

■ **Continued from Page 1**

in the oxygen production capacity of each plant. The use of surplus stocks of oxygen in steel plants for medical use was also discussed.

The PM urged officials to ensure seamless and free movement of tankers carrying oxygen throughout the country. The government has exempted all inter-state movement of oxygen tankers from registration of permits to enable easier movement. The PM was told that states and transporters had been asked to ensure tankers move around the clock, with drivers working in shifts to ensure a faster turnaround, and adequate capacity to meet the surge in demand. Cylinder filling plants will also be permitted to operate for 24 hours, with the necessary safeguards. The government is allowing industrial cylinders to be used for

medical oxygen after due purging. Similarly, nitrogen and argon tankers will be automatically allowed to be converted to oxygen tankers to overcome the potential shortage of tankers.

The Centre has also decided to double the production of indigenously-made Covaxin by May-June and nearly 10 crore Covaxin doses will be produced per month by September. The Union ministry of science and technology said the capacities of Bharat Biotech Ltd in Hyderabad as well as other public sector units are being upgraded and financial aid is being provided as a grant to the tune of around ₹65 crores to Bharat Biotech's new Bengaluru facility, which is being repurposed to increase the capacity of vaccine production. Besides, three PSUs are also being supported to hike the capacity of vaccine production.

These are Haffkine Biopharmaceutical Corporation Ltd, Mumbai, which will be able to produce 20 million doses per month; Indian Immunologicals Ltd, Hyderabad, and Bharat Immunologicals and Biologicals Ltd based in UP's Bulandshahr.

Union home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla and health secretary Rajesh Bhushan reviewed the Covid-19 situation in Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh. The two states, along with Maharashtra, are the three states that have over one lakh active cases.

The three states have been advised to increase the number of isolation beds, oxygen beds, ventilators/ICU beds, ambulance fleet as per needs, plan for adequate oxygen supply; and focus on mortality reduction by early identification of positive cases and adherence to national treatment protocols.

Weekend curbs in Delhi clarified

■ **Continued from Page 1**

issued by the DDMA on Friday. A notice on the Delhi government website also said: "If you already hold a night-curfew ePass, you DO NOT have to re-apply for the weekend curfew. Your pass shall automatically be considered valid during the weekend (in daytime)."

Shops dealing with foods, groceries, fruits and vegetables, dairy and milk booths, meat and fish, pharmaceuticals,

medicines and medical equipment; banks, insurance offices and ATMs; the print and electronic media; telecommunications, Internet services, broadcasting and cable services, IT and IT-enabled services will be open. The delivery of all essential goods, including food, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, through e-commerce is allowed. Those providing essential services will need to produce e-passes upon request.

Power generation, distribution staff, people associated with cold storage services, private security services shall be allowed. No restrictions will be imposed on all persons who are going for Covid vaccinations.

Cinema halls will open with one-third of their seating capacity on all weekdays, but remain shut on the weekends, according to an order issued by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority.

THE ASIAN AGE

17 APRIL 2021

Bengal: EC misses chance to curb Covid during vote

Evidently, bureaucratic woodenness has triumphed over plain common sense. It is open to question, however, whether the victory has not been that of politics in dismissing the plea of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee for collapsing the remaining four phases of the Assembly election into one. The CM's urging came in the wake of the surging Covid-19 cases in the country.

As much as the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar, which the chief minister of Uttarakhand shows no inclination to cancel as he aspires to religious merit and evidently also political dividends that may flow from it, the Election Commission of India appears in no mood to cancel polling schedules more appropriate for normal times.

It is another matter that eight phases of polling in a not very large state wasn't exactly normal to start with, and has been a matter of criticism by all parties in the fray other than the BJP. The dissenters see in the eight-phase polling programme the hand of political considerations writ large.

It is another matter that eight phases of polling in a not very large state wasn't exactly normal to start with, and has been a matter of criticism by all parties in the fray other than the BJP

Ms Banerjee tweeted her pleading. The EC has not designed to reply because the suggestion was not made on official paper. It must look deep within itself and reflect if officially turning a deaf ear would have been its way if the prod had come from those on high in New Delhi. No prizes for guessing the right answer. The record of the EC in recent years has been a subject of adverse comment.

In a fiercely noisy election campaign in which bad language and worse sentiments have won the day so far, Ms Banerjee's suggestion was frankly a breath of fresh air. It was out of the box. It was genuinely constructive. It would have cut the time and scope for any potential violence. More importantly, it would have helped cut the transmissibility of the new mutants of the Covid-19 virus by checking poll-time crowds.

In fact, it is reasonable to wonder why the EC itself did not initiate such a splendid idea, find ways to overcome legal hurdles, if any, and help all parties reach a consensus on practicalities, urging them not to be politically short-sighted or naïve but look for what's good for the general public.

It is a pity that the Commission chose not to offer to reply. It gave out snippets of its thinking through the media. One, it was said that the proposal was made on social media, as though that makes it irrelevant. Two, it was explained by "sources" that there were legal difficulties since nominations were over. This hardly seems tenable since the issue at stake was polling, not nominations or withdrawals. Three, the point was also made that 150 companies of central paramilitary forces — or 15,000 soldiers — would be hard to find suddenly.

This does appear lame — even tawdry. Those numbers can be got together with the snapping of the finger if there is political will. The real point, however, is that the country is not at war with one half of the state of West Bengal where polling (for 159 seats) are due to be held by the end of the month. Remember, for comparison, that the US has only 3,000 soldiers in war-ravaged Afghanistan for counter-terrorism duties, and this has been the case for nearly a year.

The EC could have done better. It has missed the chance to reach for higher goals and distinguish itself.

Recovery vs inflation

Even though the year 2020 was lost because of the once-in-hundred years pandemic, people had harboured a glimmer of hope that 2021 would be better. While January and February did seem so, people's complacency brought back the coronavirus in full strength. As if the Covid-19 pandemic were not enough, economic data suggests a difficult time ahead. Wholesale Price Index (WPI) numbers that were released on Thursday showed that the rise in wholesale prices has touched an eight-year high at 7.39 per cent in March.

While it is true that WPI or wholesale inflation numbers are no longer used by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to determine lending rates, the retail inflation is better at 5.52 per cent. Though it is still within the inflation mandate of four per cent (plus or minus two per cent) given to the RBI, it could shoot up if supply constraints emerge because of local lockdowns.

The rising inflation and contracting industrial production present the most difficult conundrum for the Narendra Modi government. Since May 2014, the government has been careful not to stoke inflationary pressures in any manner, even if it meant sacrificing economic growth for some time. In its first term, it stopped raising the minimum support price for farmers, which was one of the key reasons for higher inflation during the UPA-2 government. Even during the lockdown, the government let most people fend for themselves without opting for unorthodox policies.

One of the tools that RBI employs to tame inflation is the higher interest rate. However, it cannot drop its accommodative monetary policy, if it has to spur economic growth at least back to the pre-Covid levels. The government and RBI have a difficult choice to make between taming inflation and boosting economic growth. Good luck, finance minister and RBI governor!

THE ASIAN AGE

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Printer & Publisher: K. SUBHAKAR

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:

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

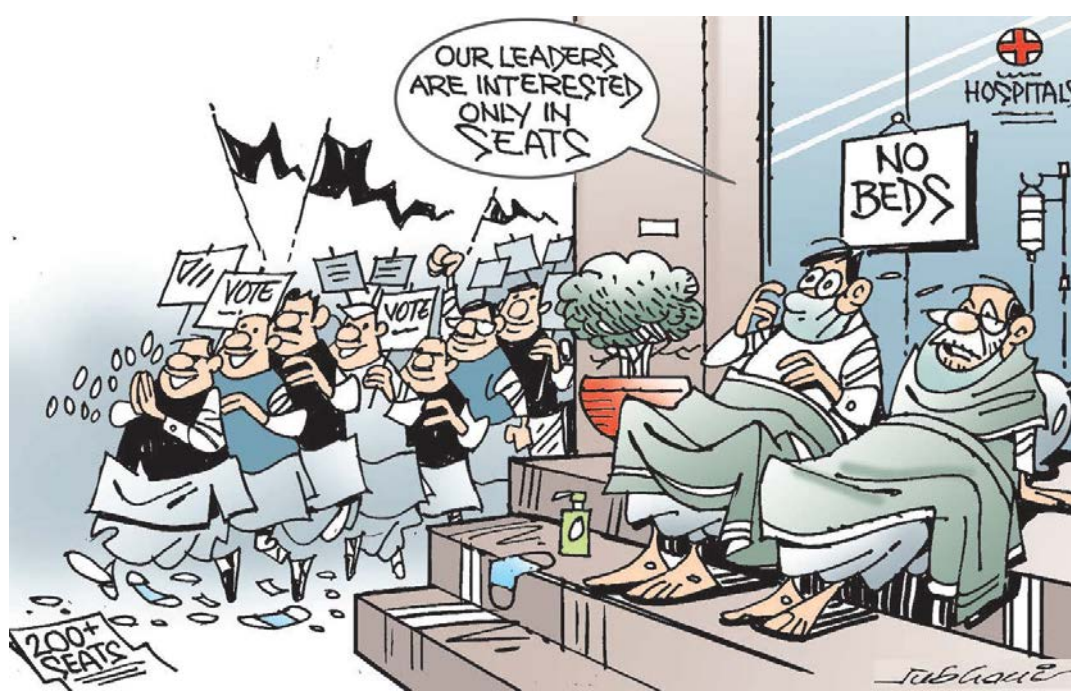
Published and Printed on behalf of and for

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

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

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



Kal Ho Na Ho: Inept govt messes up war on Covid



Shobhaa's Take

I read an interesting article in an American magazine, which talked about a Covid-19 condition known as "Mental Mist" — it sounds dreamy and poetic but in reality it's a lot harsher. Almost everyone in my immediate circle has been infected by the virus now. All of us know at least five others who are coping the best that they can, and perhaps only "mental mist" will see through this terrible second surge. Scientists and researchers aren't making things any better by warning us there are likely to be many more waves: the third one is already upon us! Here in Mumbai, we are dealing with CM Uddhav Thackeray's version of the latest lockdown, euphemistically called a "janata curfew" (borrowed from the PM's description last year). It's the same old lockdown with a more "user friendly" tag. We need all the "mental mist" we can get to help us cope once again with what is already a monumental tragedy. He has shrugged off all responsibility for the alarming numbers, declaring: "Now preventing the infection is very difficult, therefore strict enforcement is very important." No kidding, Sirji... You can happily police citizens but not admit and take responsibility for administrative failures earlier! Where were you for three critical weeks?

The second surge across Mumbai and Maharashtra is a different beast. We still don't know how different. Is it a mutant? If so, which strain? Will those of us who have taken the job be protected against this new strain? I think not! I know two people who contracted the virus nearly a month after their first jab — so much for "protection".

Seventeen lakh Mumbai-kars got the vaccine over a six-week period, if one accepts these numbers. There's now a severe shortage of just about everything, vaccines included. Senior citizens trudged miles to get their jabs only to come home disappointed. Two of my girlfriends are recovering in a South Mumbai hospital. A third is critical in a suburban hospital. We don't have enough oxygen and patients are dying, literally gasping for breath. The numbers trotted out by the authorities are grossly understated, and the reason is trite: "We don't want mass panic." But the dead are piling up, and how long can the awful truth be buried or burnt?

While the second wave was creeping up on Mumbai, our *netas* were busy with just one thing: dealing with a corrupt cop! All energy invested in "fixing" Sachin Waze and Anil Deshmukh (NCP home minister, who quit). Devendra Fadnavis' relentless pressure on Uddhav Thackeray's rickety alliance to come clean (ha!) on the "Antilia" bomb scare ensured very little other work got done at the BMC and Mantralaya. Even those efficient bureaucrats who had done such a hands-on job to contain Covid last year sat tight for the past month, unable to act, since the CM was only worried about hanging on to his job. Without authorisation, with nobody to sign files, even the municipal commissioner (J.S. Chahal) had no choice but to wait it out, till we hit the emergency button! Our hearts go out to dedicated BMC staffers soldiering on regardless: thank you for your selfless service!

The migrant exodus has started, with no "rules" in place. Hardly anyone has

People who track government mess-ups blame the bureaucrats, specially the three musketeers who advise the PM

the all-important Covid-negative certificate, while bus operators are offering a package deal that comes with a fake cert (300 bucks). Frankly, irate citizens are asking: "Why the hell should we abide by lockdown rules when even the PM isn't bothering? Look at those mammoth-sized political rallies!" And look at the sadhus taking a holy dip at the Kumbh: 40 lakhs jumping into the river in the first *snan*. Read the asinine remarks of Uttarakhand's CM (Tirath Singh Rawat), who defended the complete flouting of Covid protocols at Haridwar: "The devotees have Ma Ganga's blessings." The videos of deliriously high Naga sadhus in their birthday suits dancing and singing their way to the ghats went viral, perhaps for the wrong reasons, even as news of Yogi Adityanath testing positive made the news. Rawat Saab nonchalantly claimed: "All Central government guidelines are followed at Kumbh, be it social distancing or other norms, everything is in place." The numbers of those who tested positive shot up from 1,863 to 10,770 at last count; one shudders to think what will follow when the sadhus and pilgrims go back where they came from. I am sending an SOS to Ma Ganga: Extra blessings desperately needed!

When citizens see the rule of law being selectively implemented, they lose all respect for authority. That's what's happening now in Mumbai, where a group of cops celebrate a colleague's birthday in style, lockdown be damned. A police van was used to transport *khaana peena* to the thana, where the happy bunch let their hair down and some took their shirts off! Alcohol was retrieved from the

celebration site, but so far no action has been taken against those naughty chaps: *theek hai "pawri ho rahi hai", boss!*

People who track government mess-ups blame the bureaucrats, specially the three musketeers who advise the PM. While he was busy investing all his time and energy in the West Bengal elections, our bright chaps goofed up with the entire vaccine rollout plan: the complicated international contracts and the crucial numbers involved. By trying to drive a hard bargain, we actually lost out! Apparently, when things started to slide in the second surge, the bureaucrats panicked and did what babus always do: opted for the CYA approach. Right now, chaos reigns and nobody knows where the buck stops. How on earth are we going to contain the second wave, when we do not have enough vaccines for our people? So much money and prestige lost — why? Because those "babu bullies" got the maths wrong, leading to a cancellation of major contracts and embarrassment in the international media. Several scathing articles have appeared since the debacle, mocking our earlier boasts of "Bending it like Beckham" (in the context of the economy). Too bad the Sensex tanked, based on the disastrous Covid forecasts.

No, we are not prepared to fight this war, regardless of what the government is claiming. Lies and more lies are being thrown at us daily. Like that fake video showing a deserted Haridwar and asking: What crowds? Where crowds? This clumsy attempt at shielding the government's monumental failure at tackling a national crisis is being seen as a crime against humanity. Such negligence! Such heartlessness!

Dealing with Covid is a lot easier than dealing with our callous *netas*.

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

BANGLA SNUBS INDIA

Bangladesh foreign minister A.K. Abdul Momen's reaction to Amit Shah's infiltration complaints is measured, but a slap on the face of the Indian home minister. For those who missed it, he said Mr Shah's knowledge about the neighbouring country is "very limited". No one dies of hunger in Bangladesh now. There is no "*monga*" (seasonal pverty) either. Bangladesh is ahead of India on employment and availability of toilets. Over one lakh people of India work in Bangladesh, and "we do not need to go to India".

Bidyut K. Chatterjee
Faridabad

STAR CAMPAIGNER

WAS THE PRIME Minister elected to govern the country or act as star pracharak of a political party? At a time when the second wave of the coronavirus was knocking the doors, he was busy campaigning just to win a state election. The BJP may win West Bengal, but at what cost? Today or tomorrow, the lakhs of deaths and a broken economy will haunt him. Also, what good is campaigning when it is plainly on display that in so doing the party is neglecting the electorate's life, health and well-being and putting it second to its vote. After all, performance and sincerity speak louder than a thousand words.

Syed Abdul Momin
Navi Mumbai

SELF-ISOLATE

THE SECOND WAVE of the coronavirus, which is far more lethal than the first one, is creating havoc in the country. Hence, we must strictly follow the Covid protocol. The virus that causes Covid-19 can spread from person to person even before the symptoms start. So, if someone in your family starts to feel even slightly ill, run down, tired or achy, it is important to stay at home and practice self-isolation. If more symptoms develop, like a fever, cough or shortness of breath, call your doctor.

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

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

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"The day dawns
Your Yoni yawns
The lingam says 'good morning';
The night has gone
But the game's still on —
That apple came with no warning."

— From **The Pirhana Purana** by Bachchoo

Racism exists in Britain, but it's not always 'institutional'

There were two "incidents" in my years at Cambridge University which I could possibly label "racist". On my first day, in conversation with my tutor, Meredith Dewey, he used an unfamiliar word. He asked if my room was comfortable and said: "The New Block has central heating, so we put all the wogs there."

I hadn't heard the "W" word before. I later asked my neighbour, Beresford, what it meant, and he said it was the abbreviation for "Worthy Oriental Gentleman". The insult, I realised was in the implicit patronisation. I am certain Dewey meant no offence. He was not a racist, but it was an imperial term he'd been brought up with and hadn't thought about. Not very many people, 40 or more years on, dare publicly pro-

nounce the word. Like the "N" word or the "P" word (used for all Asians), it's taboo.

That was verbal. The real incident of race discrimination I faced at university was in my second year when we had to live out of college in "digs". I applied for several and was turned away from many because the landladies didn't accept any "wogs" in their rooms.

One got over it. London was another fettle of kitsch. Yes, there were the same elements of race-based abusive words and the refusal by landlords to rent out their bed-sitters and bartenders refusing to serve you in pubs. There were assaults, certainly through racist motives, some serious, as the time in 1973 when a petrol bomb was thrown into the ground floor of the building where I had a flat on the second and had to leap out of the window of a burning building.

Even so, these may have been racist, but couldn't be strictly classed as "institutional racism". My first experience of the meaning of that phrase was when I got a teaching job at a school which had been established as an amalgamation of three schools — Henry

Thornton, which was a grammar school, all white except for two Indian doctors' sons, Tennyson and Aristotle. The Tennysonians and Aristotelians were 90 per cent black with 10 per cent of white working-class boys. The amalgamated school was graded into 10 levels in each academic year. The division seemed institutionally pernicious as the top two grades were exclusively white and the bottom four almost uniformly black with the middle grades layered in a climbing graph of racial composition. There were no declared or transparent criteria for the classification. Of course, the school protested that the divisions were based on academic tests. After six months in the school, I was convinced they were not. It was an institutionally race-biased division.

Living and working in London and being a member of a radical political group, I was soon made aware that the police in every major city systematically picked on West Indians walking the streets and searched them, or invaded their gatherings, calling them drug raids.

It was not till the 1980s when, after the riots of black youngsters in Brixton in

London, in Liverpool and Birmingham and the murder of a teenager called Stephen Lawrence by racist thugs, that Westminster set up independent enquiries into the causes and possible remedies of what was clearly an urban war between the police and blacks.

One of the enquiries by an impartial member of the judiciary, characterised the police forces as "institutionally racist". Since that term entered the public vocabulary, it has been used to characterise very many institutions of Britain.

In the long shadow of the Back Lives Matter movement, BoJo's government recruited a Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. The commissioners were eleven people. Ten of them from Asian and black communities and were representatives of several professions. They produced a 258-page report which, when it was published on April Fool's day brought a tsunami of criticism. Not from the right-leaning press in Britain, which accepted and boasted about the report's contention that Britain had no institutions which could be, on statistical evidence, condemned as "institutionally racist".

The report was cautious in several ways but raised a storm of protest from black academics, writers, activists and liberal newspapers, some of whom questioned the "findings" and others who condemned it as a Tory government whitewash. I was made aware, gentle reader, of several of these objections. They were in the main not backed by statistical counter arguments to the report's findings, but assessments of the "mood" and the feelings of those who would speak for the black communities — if there is indeed still such a single entity.

Some of the negative reaction to the report, which said for instance that the Chinese, Asian and female black students excelled in schools and left white and black working-class boys scoring the worst in exams and meritocratic progress. The report concluded that this was not endemic institutional racism in the educational system but was attributable to vast social factors.

I admit I haven't read the report but will do. The fact that I know two of the commissioners and respect the acumen, honesty and view of at least one of them, inclines me at this point to sit on the fence. Ouch!

IN BRIEF

Iran enriches uranium to 60%

Dubai: Iran began enriching uranium on Friday to its highest level ever, edging closer to weapons-grade levels to pressure talks in Vienna aimed at restoring its nuclear deal with world powers after an attack on its main atomic site. A top official said only a few grams an hour of uranium gas would be enriched up to 60 per cent purity — triple the level it once did but at a rate far slower than what Tehran could produce. International inspectors already said Iran planned to do so above-ground at its Natanz nuclear site, not deep within its underground halls hardened to withstand airstrikes.

Hackers held over Covid-19 scam

Surabaya, Indonesia: Two Indonesian hackers have been arrested over an international scam in which \$60 million was stolen from a Covid-19 aid programme helping Americans left jobless by the pandemic, authorities said. Text messages were sent to 20 million Americans directing them to more than a dozen fake US government websites, police in the Southeast Asian nation said late Thursday. Thousands of victims supplied personal information, including social security numbers, to the fake sites in the hopes of securing \$2,000 offered under a real assistance programme for the unemployed, authorities said.

French mosque subsidy dropped

Strasbourg, France: A controversial plan to use public money for building a mosque in Strasbourg stalled on Friday after the Turkish backers of the project dropped their request for a subsidy. The pullback came after Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin accused the eastern French city, led by Green mayor Jeanne Barseghian, of supporting “foreign meddling” on French soil with a planned subsidy for the mosque. The public money, 2.5 million euros (nearly \$3 million), was to go to the Milli Gorus Islamic Confederation (CMIG), a pan-European movement for the Turkish diaspora.

Indian's body found in NY river

New York: The body of a 31-year-old Indian-origin mathematician working with cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence was found floating in the Hudson River here, according to a media report which said he was battling apparent mental illness. Shuvro Biswas' body was found floating in the Hudson River on Monday, the New York Post reported. Police sources said that there were no immediate apparent signs of foul play. Shuvro's brother said that he and his family were gutted by the news, noting that they had tried in vain to help Shuvro as he battled apparent mental illness. “We're all extremely devastated,” Biprojit Biswas, 34, was quoted by the newspaper as saying. “He's a really good guy. He's brilliant,” he said.

PAK SUSPENDS SOCIAL MEDIA OVER PROTESTS

Islamabad, April 16: Pakistan on Friday temporarily suspended the services of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp to stop their use to organise demonstrations following violent protests by a radical religious group that has now been banned by the government. The government banned Tehreek-i-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) on Thursday following three days of violent protest by it to force the government to expel the French ambassador over a blasphemous caricature published in France last year. The TLP had launched the country-wide protest on Monday after the arrest of its chief Saad Hussain Rizvi.

The TLP supporters clashed with the law enforcement agencies in several towns and cities earlier this week, leaving seven persons dead and over 300 policemen injured. To stop the protests after Friday prayers, the Interior Ministry directed the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to suspend social media services for four hours from 11 am to 3 pm.

WHO worried as Covid cases double in just two months

Global health authority finds countries that avoid first outbreak are vulnerable

Geneva, April 16: The head of the World Health Organisation said Coronavirus cases are continuing to rise globally at worrying rates and noted that the number of new cases confirmed per week has nearly doubled during the past two months.

At a press briefing on Friday, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the number of new cases is approaching the highest rate of infection that we have seen so far in the pandemic.

Tedros said some countries that had been able to avoid widespread Covid-19 outbreaks are now seeing steep increases, citing Papua New Guinea as an example.

Until the beginning of this year, Papua New Guinea had reported less than 900 cases and nine

● **PAPUA NEW GUINEA** is a perfect example of why vaccine equity is so important, Tedros said.

deaths, Tedros said. The country has now identified more than 9,000 cases and 83 deaths, half of which were reported in the last month.

Papua New Guinea is a perfect example of why vaccine equity is so important, Tedros said, adding that the Pacific island nation has relied on vaccine donations from Australia and the UN-backed Covax initiative.

To date, Covax has shipped about 40 million vaccines to more than 100 countries, or enough to protect about 0.25 per cent of the world's population.

— AP

Pfizer plans third jab in 6-12 months

Washington, April 16: The head of Pfizer said in an interview aired on Thursday that people will “likely” need a third dose of his company's Covid-19 shot within six to 12 months of vaccination, while elsewhere defending the relatively higher cost of the jab. CEO Albert Bourla also said annual vaccinations against the Coronavirus may well be required.

“We need to see what would be the sequence, and for how often we need to do that, that remains to be seen,” Bourla said in an interview recorded on April 1.

“A likely scenario is that there will be likely a need

for a third dose, somewhere between six and 12 months and then from there, there will be an annual revaccination, but all of that needs to be confirmed,” he said, adding that variants will play a “key role.” It is extremely important to suppress the pool of people that can be susceptible to the virus,” he said.

Researchers currently don't know how long vaccines provide protection against the Coronavirus.

Pfizer published a study earlier this month that said its jab is more than 91 per cent effective at protecting against the Coronavirus.

— AFP

EU UNLIKELY TO RENEW ASTRA ORDERS: FRANCE

Paris, April 16: The European Union is very unlikely to renew its Covid-19 vaccine contracts with pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, a French minister said on Friday.

Denmark this week banned the use of AstraZeneca jabs over blood clot concerns, just as the EU said it was expecting 50 million Pfizer vaccine doses earlier than expected.

No final EU decision had been taken, French Industry Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher told RMC radio, but “it is highly probable” that no further AstraZeneca doses would be ordered.

— AFP



Police and crime scene investigators work at the site of a mass shooting at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis, Indiana on Friday. — AFP

8 dead at FedEx facility, gunman shoots himself

Indianapolis, April 16: A gunman killed eight people and wounded several others before apparently taking his own life in a late-night attack at a FedEx facility near the Indianapolis airport, police said, in the latest in a sate of mass shootings in the United States after a relative lull during the pandemic.

Five people were hospitalised after the Thursday night shooting, according to police. One of them had critical injuries, police spokesperson Genae Cook said. Another two people were treated and released at the scene.

FedEx said people who worked for the company were among the dead. A witness said that he was working inside the building when he heard several gunshots in rapid succession. “I see a man come out with a rifle in his hand and he starts firing and he starts yelling stuff that I could not understand,” Levi Miller told WTHR-TV. “What I ended up doing was ducking down to make sure he did not see me because I thought he would see me and he would shoot me.”

It was the latest in a recent string of mass shootings across the US. Last

INDIAN AMONG THOSE INJURED IN SHOOTING

New York, April 16: An Indian-origin man has said his niece was among those who were injured in a mass shooting incident at the FedEx facility in the US city of Indianapolis that left 8 people dead, according to a media report.

The Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) said at least eight people died and several others were wounded during the shooting on Thursday night. The girl, who was not named, was sitting in her car in the driver's seat when the gunfire erupted, her uncle Parminder Singh told local WTTV. “She called as I was asleep at home. She said there was a shooting in the FedEx. So we just drove from Brownsburg,” said Singh. She was wounded, he said.

— PTI

month, eight people were fatally shot at massage businesses across the Atlanta area, and 10 died in gunfire at a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado.

— AP

Jimmy Lai, 4 other activists imprisoned

Hong Kong, April 16: Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai was jailed for 14 months on Friday along with four other veteran democracy activists for their roles in protests that helped trigger a sweeping crackdown on dissent by China.

Lai was given two jail terms for separate rallies in August 2019, at the peak of a democracy uprising that paralysed the financial hub for months.

The jail terms were the first ever for the 73-year-old millionaire, who has spent decades using his media empire to support democracy in Hong Kong, a campaign that has seen him denounced by China as a “traitor”.

The sentences on Friday were the latest in a relentless and successful campaign by China since the protests to silence dissent.

Lai and four other campaigners were initially sentenced for leading a rally that organisers said attracted up to 1.7 million people.

Nine of Hong Kong's most prominent democracy campaigners had been found guilty of organising and participating in it.

Many of them have



Jimmy Lai

spent decades advocating non-violence in their ultimately fruitless campaign for universal suffrage.

Among the other defendants was Martin Lee, 82, a respected barrister known as the “father of democracy” in Hong Kong, who was once chosen by Beijing to help write the city's mini-constitution.

They also included Margaret Ng, a 73-year-old barrister and former opposition lawmaker.

Lee and Ng were given prison terms, but their sentences were suspended.

The rallies in 2019 often descended into clashes between riot police and a knot of hardcore participants, and posed the most concerted challenge to China's rule since the former British colony's 1997 handover.

— AFP

First Friday of Ramzan



Palestinians take part in the first Friday prayers of Ramzan at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site, in Old City of Jerusalem, on Friday. — AFP

Ousted Myanmar MPs to form shadow government

Yangon, April 16: A “parliament” working in hiding to oust Myanmar's junta from power announced a new shadow government on Friday, with deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi at its helm alongside ethnic minority politicians.

The country has been in turmoil since the military detained Suu Kyi and seized power, triggering a massive uprising that the junta has sought to quell with lethal force.

Besides demanding a return to democracy, protesters are also increasingly calling for more of a governing role for the country's minority groups — which have long seen their voices marginalised by the ethnic Bamar majority.

The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) — a group of lawmakers mostly from Suu Kyi's party attempting to govern underground via a shadow parliament — on Friday announced its leaders.

Helming the so-called “National Unity Government” is Suu Kyi, in her position as state counsellor; and President Win Myint. Both are under house arrest and facing a barrage of charges from the junta.

They are flanked by a vice president who is ethnic Karen, said Min Ko Naing, a prominent democracy leader, in an address on the CRPH's official Facebook page.

“We have organised a government which has the largest number of ethnic minority groups,” he said. While Myanmar has

● **BESIDES ETHNIC Karen and Kachin leaders, the CRPH's list of appointed ministers also included prominent politicians from the Chin, Shanni, Mon, Karenni and Ta'ang minority groups.**

more than 130 official ethnic minority groups, the country's political fate has long been tightly controlled by the Bamar majority — first under a nearly five-decade junta regime which forced a so-called “Bamarisation” on minorities; and then under Suu Kyi's administration.

Besides ethnic Karen and Kachin leaders, the CRPH's list of appointed ministers also included prominent politicians from the Chin, Shanni, Mon, Karenni and Ta'ang minority groups.

They were chosen based on results from the 2020 election, input from a nationwide anti-coup protest movement, and ethnic minority groups — including armed rebels in the country's border territories, said Min Ko Naing.

“We have to pull it from the root... we must try to eradicate it,” he said, referring to the junta as he raised a three-finger salute — the symbol of resistance.

— AFP

AUSSIE JUDGE RULES GOOGLE MISLED USERS

Canberra, April 16: Google broke Australian law by misleading users about personal location data collected through Android mobile devices, a judge found on Friday.

The Federal Court decision was a partial win for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, the nation's fair trade watchdog, which has been prosecuting Google for broader alleged breaches of consumer law since October 2019.

Justice Thomas Thawley found that Google misled Android mobile device users about personal location data collected between January 2017 and December 2018.

This is an important victory for consumers, especially anyone concerned about their privacy online, as the court's decision sends a strong message to Google and others that big businesses must not mislead their customers, Commission Chair Rod Sims said in a statement.

— PTI

ROYAL | FUNERAL

Congregation at Prince Philip's funeral to wear masks

Cousin to walk between William, Harry

London, April 16: The much-talked-about feud between the brothers, Princes William and Harry, was thrown into focus again as the running order for their grandfather Prince Philip's funeral on Saturday confirmed that they would not be walking side by side in the procession.

The cousin of the royals, Peter Phillips the son of Queen Elizabeth II's daughter Princess Anne, will walk in between as they follow the specially-designed Land Rover which will carry the coffin of Prince Philip the Duke

of Edinburgh through Windsor Castle.

There have been widespread reports of an estrangement between 38-year-old William, the second in line to the British throne, and his younger brother Harry, 36, ever since he stepped back from frontline royal duties and relocated to the US with wife Meghan Markle.

Details of the ceremonial funeral released by Buckingham Palace on Thursday confirmed the others in the procession to St George's Chapel as all four children of the late royal: Prince Charles the Prince

● **THE FUNERAL Service will be conducted by the Dean of Windsor.**

of Wales, Princess Anne the Princess Royal, Prince Andrew the Duke of York, and Prince Edward the Earl of Wessex and Forfar.

The congregation will wear masks for the Service and members of the Royal Family will wear Day Dress or Morning Coat with medals, the palace statement said, in reference to the scaled-back arrangements in keeping with the Covid-19

lockdown restrictions.

During the Service, a small choir of four will sing pieces of music chosen by the Duke of Edinburgh. The choir will be located in the Nave, away from the seated congregation, and in line with public health guidelines there will be no congregational singing.

The Funeral Service will be conducted by the Dean of Windsor, and is expected to last for approximately 50 minutes, it said.

The Queen will travel in the State Bentley in the procession, behind the family members on foot,

before entering by a side door to the chapel. Inside, she will be seated by herself under the social distancing guidelines.

The ceremony, which was originally designed for a gathering of 800, will have just 30 guests comprising close family and the other guests on the limited guest list include Prince Charles' wife Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, Prince William's wife Kate Middleton, all of Prince Philip's grandchildren and their spouses, and the children of the Queen's sister Princess Margaret.

— PTI

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,832.03	0.06
Nifty 50	14,617.90	0.25
S&P 500*	4,180.11	0.23
Dollar (₹)	74.35	0.76
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.46	0.85
Euro (₹)	89.06	0.77
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,431.9	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.82	0.18
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.088	-0.02
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.578	0.048

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Mindtree Q4 net profit climbs 54% to ₹317 cr

IT firm Mindtree said its consolidated net profit rose by 53.9 per cent to Rs 317.3 crore in the March quarter, against Rs 206.2 crore in the year-ago quarter, on the back of strong operational efficiency, and it expressed confidence in logging double-digit growth in FY22. Its revenue grew 2.9 per cent to Rs 2,109.3 crore from Rs 2,050.5 crore. In dollar terms, the net profit was up 53.4 per cent at \$43.3 million, while revenue was up by 3.5 per cent at \$288.2 million.

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

■ Little gain seen to elders from the move Plan to open NPS to 65+ gets split views

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 16

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) is contemplating hiking the maximum age of entry for the National Pension System (NPS) from 65 years to 70 years.

The Pension fund regulator is also thinking of allowing NPS subscribers who join after the age of 60 years to continue their NPS accounts till the age of 75. However, for others, the age of maturity will remain 70 years.

Financial planners are, however, divided over the benefits of people entering NPS at the end of their life, as they would have a limited time-frame to accumulate a decent corpus through this investment. Moreover, with 40 per cent of the total corpus mandatorily going towards buying annuities, their overall returns would be limited.

According to some experts, senior citizens would be better off investing their surplus in a mix of debt instruments, such as Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana, post office Senior Citizen Savings Scheme, fixed deposits, debentures, bonds and debt mutual funds.

Says Arnav Pandya, a certified financial planner: "It would have been positive if existing subscribers were given the option to contribute in NPS for a longer time. But the accumulation period is being increased for new sub-



scribers. Senior citizens who can invest in NPS for around 15-20 years can look at subscribing in NPS but those who have a lesser time horizon should refrain from NPS.

"This is because under NPS, 40 per cent of the corpus needs to be converted into annuity, which reduces the rate of return that a person would earn on their corpus, as you are forced to go to an insurance company and buy annuities. Also, if you are a senior citizen, you will invest only in debt, which would limit the scope of appreciation as compared to when you invest in equities. You are better off on your own investing in a range of debt instruments that give you a higher rate of return."

"So, for older people starting NPS just because the investment age is raised would not be the right strategy, as you need to give time for the corpus to accumulate. Such investors can look at a mixture of debt mutual funds, debentures, bonds, special deposits of banks and

financial institutions."

But Supratim Bandyopadhyay, chairman, PFRDA, says around 15,000 people above the age of 60 joined the NPS since the entry age limit was raised from 60 to 65 three years ago.

According to the chief executive officer of a pension fund house, "Senior citizens can earn decent returns, avail tax benefits and protect their capital by investing in NPS."

Sachin Shetty, a mutual fund and insurance distributor, said, "Life expectancy is rising and so are expenses. So far NPS has performed well. If a person is 60 years or more but is ready to hold money for the long term i.e. 10 years or more, then he should definitely invest in NPS to create a good corpus to meet rising expenses. However, since NPS is prone to market fluctuations, those with high investible surplus could diversify by investing a part of their surplus in Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana which is fetching over 7 per cent return."

Catch-22: More customers mean less revenue for e-pharmacies

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 16

Similar to other online services, e-pharmacies too have seen increased customer acceptance during the pandemic but their revenues have declined during the period. This, despite a four-to-five-fold growth in traffic witnessed by them.

E-pharmacies became more popular during the lockdown as many first-time buyers used them for buying both prescription and OTC drugs. These customers are sticking to e-pharmacy purchases even after the pandemic.

The average traffic per day had surged four-five times during the lockdown period, according to brokerage Motilal Oswal. In addition, customer conversion went up from 12-15 per cent pre-lockdown to 20-22 per cent after lockdown. But the average



order value came down drastically from Rs 3,500 to Rs 800 post-lockdown. As a result, average revenues of e-pharmacy players declined during the pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, 70 per cent of e-pharmacy business used to come from chronic therapies, such as diabetes, blood pressure and cholesterol. That trend shifted heavily towards Covid essentials post-lockdown and simultaneously chronic therapies' contribution came down to 40-45 per cent of

total online revenues. This led to a decline in average revenues. While private label and substitution can improve profitability, substitution of prescribed brand for private label is a costly affair with slim chances of success.

"Currently all e-pharmacy players are burning cash and to breakeven at the Ebitda level, they need to have an average order value of Rs 3,000-3,500 and cut operational costs drastically, which is possible only with an omni-channel model," says Kartik Anantharaman, director of e-pharmacy and private label business at Medlife. According to him, the omni-channel model involves online players working with offline players, eliminating competition between the two and enabling collaboration by complementing each other's strengths. The omni-channel format also provides operating leverage, as e-pharmacy players can easily service more orders per day. Further, profitability is also dependent on the mix of bulk purchases and just-in-time purchases. To become profitable, the bulk purchases have to be at least 70 per cent and for this, companies need better clarity on demand and the prescription patterns of doctors.

The road to profitability looks quite long for e-pharmacies now.

CHINA'S Q1 GDP SURGES TO 18.3%

K.J.M. VARMA BEIJING, APRIL 16

China's economy grew a record 18.3 per cent in the first quarter of 2021, riding on strong domestic and foreign demand and aided by recovery from a low base in early 2020, statistics released on Friday showed. The gross domestic product (GDP) reached 24.93 trillion yuan (about \$3.82 trillion) in Q1. This is the highest quarterly growth rate since China first began publishing GDP data in 1993. —PTI

Honda Cars recalls 78,000 units of select models

New Delhi, April 16: Honda Cars India Ltd (HCIL) on Friday announced the recall of 77,954 units of select models to replace faulty fuel pumps in an exercise it started last year. The fuel pumps, it said, may contain defective impellers that could over time result in engine stopping or not starting.

The recall impacts the Amaze, 4th generation City, WR-V, Jazz, Civic, BR-V, and CRV, manufactured between January 2019 and September 2020.

HCIL said 36,086 units of Amaze made during Jan-

MARUTI HIKES PRICES BY UP TO ₹22,500

New Delhi, April 16: Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Friday said it has hiked prices of most of its models by up to Rs 22,500 with immediate effect to partially offset

the impact of the rise in input costs. Barring Celerio and Swift, all the models will be covered under the price increase exercise, MSI said in a regulatory filing. —PTI

Aug. 2019 and 20,248 units of the 4th Gen City produced during Jan.-Sept. 2019 have been recalled. Similarly, 7,871 units of WR-V and 6,235 units of Jazz made during Jan.-

Aug. 2019; 5,170 units of Civic made in Jan.-Sept. 2019; 1,737 units of BR-V made in Jan.-Oct. 2019, and 607 units of CRV made during Jan. 2019 and Sept. 2020 are part of the recall. —PTI

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Vihari out on duck in county debut

Nottingham: India's Test specialist Hanuma Vihari had a forgettable English county debut for Warwickshire, failing to trouble the scorers against Nottinghamshire here. Vihari, who is set to play a minimum three games for the Birmingham-based county, struggled a lot while facing England international Stuart Broad during his agonising 40-minute stay in the middle. Vihari came in to bat in the second over of the Warwickshire first innings after Notts were bowled out for 273 in 88 overs. During fielding, Vihari bowled an over for 11 runs and also took a catch off his skipper Will Rhodes' bowling to dismiss Steven Mullaney. — PTI

Harman recovers from Coronavirus

New Delhi: Indian women's T20 captain Harmanpreet Kaur on Friday announced that she has recovered from Covid-19. Harmanpreet had tested positive and made it public on March 30. After more than two weeks, her RT-PCR report has come negative.

"Happy to inform you all that I have tested -ve & I'm feeling better. My only message to y'all is to take care & be extra careful. The virus is real & it's dangerous. Follow all the protocols set up by the authorities. Wishing strength to the ones who are in the middle of the fight," Harmanpreet tweeted. — PTI

Coleman to miss Oly despite ban cut

Geneva: World 100 metres champion Christian Coleman's two-year ban for missing three doping tests has been reduced by six months to 18 months, the Court of Arbitration for Sport said on Friday. The 25-year-old American will still miss the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics this year as his ban runs until November 14. Coleman will, however, be eligible to defend his world indoor and outdoor titles next year. CAS "partially upheld" the Athletics Integrity Unit's ruling but found Coleman's "degree of negligence to be lower". — AFP

Roma, Man U in Europa last four

Paris, April 16: Roma lined up a blockbuster Europa League semifinal clash with Manchester United on Thursday after holding Ajax to a 1-1 draw to go through to the Last Four 3-2 on aggregate.

Edin Dzeko's strike 18 minutes from time ensured the draw and passage for Paulo Fonseca's side, who were on the back foot for most of the match, and a showdown with United who strolled into the semis 4-0 after a 2-0 win over Granada at Old Trafford. The other semifinal will see Arsenal face Villarreal, coached by former Gunners boss Unai Emery.

Italy's only remaining representative in Europe came into the clash at the Stadio Olimpico with a slender lead but two away goals from last week's first leg in Amsterdam.

Their European campaign looked in danger when Ajax teen Brian Brobbey was introduced for Antony at the break and the striker made an instant impact, racing onto Perr Schuurs pass three minutes after the restart and nipped the ball

past an onrushing Pau Lopez.

However after Dusan Tadic's strike for the away side six minutes later was ruled out for a foul on Henrikh Mkhitaryan in the build up, Dzeko tipped the tie in Roma's favour.

Meanwhile, United had few problems against Granada, who had a mountain to climb after losing the first leg 2-0 in Spain.

Edinson Cavani opened the scoring after just five minutes to put United ahead but Jesus Vallejo's last-minute own goal sealed the win for United, who could yet have an all-English final with Arsenal.

The Gunners will face Villarreal in a fortnight after thumping Slavia Prague 4-0 to go through 5-1 on aggregate.

Behind on away goals thanks to Tomas Holes' stoppage-time leveller at the Emirates Stadium last week, Arsenal ended Slavia's 23-match unbeaten run thanks to a six-minute blitz from Nicolas Pepe, Alexandre Lacazette and Bukayo Saka in the first half. — AFP



Manchester United's Alex Telles looks on as his teammate Paul Pogba (right) vies with Granada's Kennedy (left) during their UEFA Europa League quarterfinal second leg match at Old Trafford stadium in Manchester on Thursday. — AFP

Tsitsipas strolls into semifinals

Monaco, April 16: Stefanos Tsitsipas advanced to the semifinals of the Monte Carlo Masters on Friday when his quarterfinal opponent Alejandro Davidovich Fokina withdrew after losing the first set 7-5.

Tsitsipas, the World No.5, will play his sixth Masters 1000 semifinal on Saturday, and his first in the principality, against Belgian David Goffin or Englishman Dan Evans, the conqueror of Novak Djokovic.

Struggling with an injury to his left thigh, Spaniard Davidovich tried an underarm serve when facing set point. Tsitsipas pounced to hit a winning backhand return.

Until he was hurt, Davidovich gave his Greek opponent problems.



Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece plays a return during his quarterfinal match against Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina on Day Seven of the Monte-Carlo ATP Masters Series tournament in Monaco on Friday. — AFP

But at 3-3, Davidovich called for the doctor to treat his left thigh. He immediately managed the first break of the match, as

Tsitsipas began to show signs of irritation, to the point of receiving a warning for swearing. Tsitsipas immediately

broke back and as Davidovich struggled, broke again to end the set and the match.

Earlier, Novak Djokovic crashed out of the Monte Carlo Masters on Thursday following an "awful performance" in a 6-4, 7-5 defeat by Dan Evans, while 11-time champion Rafael Nadal powered into the quarter-finals.

Nadal required just 55 minutes to demolish Bulgarian 14th seed Grigor Dimitrov 6-1, 6-1.

The third-ranked Spaniard is the highest seed left in the draw following Djokovic's loss and the withdrawal of Daniil Medvedev after he tested positive for Covid-19.

Rafael Nadal will meet Russian sixth seed Andrey Rublev. — AFP

VALTERRI, HAMI BURN RUBBER IN IMOLA PRACTICE

Imola (Italy), April 16: Mercedes drivers Valtteri Bottas and Lewis Hamilton steered their way through two red flags on Friday to the best times of the first practice session for the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix.

Bottas was quickest round the legendary Imola circuit but was less than one-tenth of a second faster than his teammate.

Similarly there was a cigarette paper between Hamilton, who won the opening race in Bahrain, and Red Bull's Max Verstappen, the young pretender to the Briton's world crown.

Verstappen was second in Bahrain and Bottas third. — AFP

MAIDEN GOLD MEDALS FOR VINESH AND ANSHU

Almaty (Kazakhstan), April 16: Dominating the proceedings in a depleted field, Olympic-bound wrestlers Vinesh Phogat and Anshu Malik won their maiden Asian Championship titles after comfortable triumphs in their respective summit clashes here on Friday.

There was no stopping Vinesh in the absence of the Chinese and Japanese rivals as she cruised to the title without losing a point in the 53kg category.

Vinesh has notched up seven podium finishes at the Asian meet over the years, including three silver medals before this edition.

Also standing on top of the podium was Divya Kakran (72kg) while Sakshi Malik (65kg) settled for a silver medal.

India has a rich haul of seven medals from the women's event as the country won four gold, a silver and two bronze medals in this edition. Sarita Mor (59kg) had won gold while Seema Bisla (50kg) and Pooja (76kg) settled for bronze medals. — PTI

