# THE ASIAN AGE

**NEW DELHI FRIDAY 16 APRIL 2021** 

NATION 4

China felt it could push us with tech advantage, says CDS Bipin Rawat



SPORT 8

Rajasthan Royals' Chris Morris hit quickfire 36 to lead victory against Delhi **DELHI AGE** 9

Ranveer Singh's upcoming film, a remake of 2015 hit Tamil film, lands in trouble

■ Home delivery for restaurants, essential services exempted

Weekend curfew in Delhi:

Malls, gyms will be shut



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**Bollywood actress Rakul Preet** Singh at Juhu In Mumbai on Thursday. — P

### **Myanmar anti-coup** leader held, firing on doctors' protest

Yangon: Myanmar security forces on Thursday arrested one of the main leaders of the campaign against military rule, Wai Moe Naing, after ramming him with a car as he led a motorbike protest rally. Wai Moe Naing, a 25-year-old Muslim, has emerged as one of the most high-profile leaders of Opposition. Meanwhile, military opened fire on protesting healthcare workers Thursday, killing at least one bystander as the demonstrators fled for safety to a nearby mosque.

More on Page 6

#### N. Delhi riots: Umar **Khalid granted bail**

New Delhi: Activist and former student leader Umar Khalid was granted bail by a Delhi court today in a case linked to the riots in parts of the capital last year. But he will remain in jail due to charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in another case related to ■ More on Page 2

### **Cops face probe for**

framing Isro scientist

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday ordered the CBI probe into the involvement of Kerala police officers in framing Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) scientist Nambi Naravanan in an alleged espionage case more than two decades ago. ■ More on Page 4



No need. I am going to a safe place... my leader's election rally!



Max: 38°C Min: 22°C **RH:** 22% **Rain: 20%** 

Forecast: Mostly cloudy

Plava: Uttarayana **Tithi:** Chaitra Shuddha Chaviti till 6.04 pm Star: Rohini 11.38 pm Varjyam: 2.36 pm to 4.24 pm; 5.54 am to 7.42 am

Durmuhurtam: 8.32 am to 9.22 am; 12.40 pm to 1.30 pm Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12

**SUNSET TODAY 6.47 PM SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.53 AM** MOONRISE TOMORROW 9.08 PM

**MOONSET TODAY 10.37 AM** 

## EC: No clubbing of last 3 poll phases in Bengal

'Lack of another 1,500 companies of Central forces'

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI** and PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE,

Undeterred by the exponential rise in daily cases of the coronavirus disease across the country and West Bengal, the Election Commission of India (EC) ruled out a possibility of clubbing the remaining phases of the ongoing Assembly elections in the state due to lack of availability of another 1,500 companies of the Central paramilitary forces.

"There is no such plan of clubbing" the three poll phases, the Election phases, the Election Commission said after Chief Election Commissioner Chandra took stock of the ground reality from various poll observers deputed in the state and chief electoral officer West Bengal Ariz Aftab in a video con-

At the meeting, opinions were also sought from them about the deployment and distribution of the Central forces in case of clubbing the last three poll phases after the state recorded daily new Covid-19 cases at 6,769 till Thursday with 22 fresh deaths in the last 24 hours,

sources said. This time, election to the West Bengal Assembly is being held in eight phases. Polling for four phases have ended and the fifth phase will be held on Saturday. Polling for the sixth, seventh and the eighth phase will be held on April 22, April 26 and April 29, respectively.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday evening also appealed to the EC to club the "remaining phases" of the polls into one, within few hours of the central poll panel's decision to go



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Baneriee during a roadshow amid the rise in Covid-19 cases across the - PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY country in Kolkata.

▶ THE STATE recorded daily new Covid-19 cases at 6,769 till Thursday with 22 fresh deaths in the last 24 hours

**THIS TIME**, election to the West Bengal Assembly is being held in 8 phases

**POLLING FOR four phas**es have ended and the fifth phase will be held on Saturday

ahead with the existing poll schedule even after the deadly virus claimed a Congress candidate's life and infected two others, including one from the Trinamul Congress in the state. She also stressing that her party had opposed the prolonged eight-phase poll schedule. The TMC supremo tweet-

ed, "Amid an ongoing pandemic, we firmly opposed @ECISVEEP's decision to conduct WB polls in 8 phases. Now, in view of the huge surge in #Covid-19 cases, I urge the ECI to consider holding the remaining phases in ONE go. This will protect the people from further exposure to #Covid-19."

Ms Banerjee's plea to the EC's move came a day after Mr Aftab called an Turn to Page 4

### **EC slaps 24-hr** campaign ban on Bengal BJP **chief Ghosh**

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI** KOLKATA, APRIL 15

Continuing to act tough against the West Bengal BJP leaders for their recent threats amid the Assembly Election, the Election Commission on Wednesday banned the poll campaign of their state party chief Dilip Ghosh for 24 hours and served a show-cause notice to state general secretary Sayantan Basu over their violations of the model code of conduct.

Mr Ghosh is the second leader of the saffron party after its Habra candidate Rahul Sinha to face a ban. He was earlier asked by the EC in a show-cause notice to explain his threat "repeat Shitalkuchistyle killings at many places" in the remaining phases of the polls. Scrutinising

Midnapore BJP MP's reply the EC however observed

Turn to Page 4

#### Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced a curfew this coming weekend and the closure of malls, gymnasiums and auditoriums till April 30 as part of sweeping restrictions to break the chain of the Covid-19 infection in the city. According to an official order, the weekend curfew will be effective from 10 pm on April 16 (Friday) to 5 am on April

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on

19 (Monday), even as gymnasiums, auditoriums, malls, spas, entertainment parks and assembly halls will remain closed in the national capital till April Cinema halls will func-

tion with only 30 per cent capacity. However, offi-cials said a decision to extend the weekend curfew will be taken after reviewing the Covid-19 situation next week. There will be no in-house dining in restaurants, the chief minister said at an online press conference a day after the city recorded the biggest single-day jump of 17,282 Covid-19 cases.

However, the restaurants will be allowed to operate home-delivery and take-away services, he said, adding that bars will be remain closed till April 30. The chief minister made these announcements after he met Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal. He said the essential services and weddings will not be affected by the weekend curfew and passes will be provided to those attending weddings. In its order, the Delhi

Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) said during the weekend curfew, the movement of people for wedding-related (up

■CJI regrets women lawyers decline judgeship



### Centre steps in as states gasp to fill oxygen stock

Govt to import 50K MT oxygen as cases cross 2L **Neet postponed,** 

new date not clear

New Delhi: The Neet-PG

medical entrance exams

scheduled for Sundayhave been postponed

"in light of the surge in

Covid-19 cases", Union

Thursday evening. Dr Vardhan said that a

which will decide the

1.7 lakh medical aspi-

new date for the exam -

careers of an estimated

rants — will be declared

Vardhan tweeted

health minister Dr Harsh

VINEETA PANDEY NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

With several states reporting shortage of medical Oxygen in view of rising Covid-19 cases, an inter-ministerial empowered group of central government officers on Thursday initiated actions to address shortage and panic. The government has decided to import 50,000 MT of medical Oxygen to address the immediate shortage as the empowered group initiated mapping of 12 high burden states to Oxygen sources. Reliance Industries and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited have diverted Oxygen from their refineries to the government **Turn to Page 4** hospitals, free of cost.

India on Thursday registered over two lakh fresh cases of Covid-19 with over 1,

038 deaths. Maharashtra alone accounts for 43.54% of the total active caseload of the country. According to Union health ministry officials, Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh are among the states where double mutant strain — coded as B.1.617 — of the Covid virus has been found. Experts believe this double mutant variant could be the main reason for rapid spread of Covid under the new wave. "It is reasonable to say that the variant (double mutation) is of concern because it has been found in a significant number of people. And it is not just because has

been found
Turn to Page 2

### India, France sign pact on Gaganyaan

New Delhi, April 15: Space agencies of India and France on Thursday signed an agreement for cooperation for the country's first human space mission Gaganyaan, the space agency CNES said.

The agreement was announced during French Foreign Affairs minister Jean-Yves Le Drian visit to the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) headquarters.
ISRO has asked CNES to

prepare Gaganyaan missions and to serve as its single European contact in this domain. "Under the terms of the agreement, CNES will train India's flight physicians and CAPCOM mission control teams in France at the CADMOS centre for the development of microgravity applications and space operations at CNES in Toulouse and at the European Astronaut Centre (EAC) in Cologne, Germany," the CNES said. The agreement provides

for the CNES to support implementation of a scientific experiment plan on validation missions. exchange information on food packaging and the nutrition programme, and above all the use by Indian astronauts of French equipment, consumables and medical instruments.

French equipment developed by CNES, tested and still operating aboard the International Station will thus be made available to Indian crews. Thomas Pesquet, who is set to make his second flight to the International Space Station on April 22 for the Alpha mission, had previously tested these devices on his first

### Time has come for woman Chief Justice of India: Bobde **PARMOD KUMAR** Chief justices of high

NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

The Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde on Thursday batted for more women judges in higher judiciary saying that time has come for a woman Chief Justice of India. However, CJI Bobde regretted that the women lawyers when offered judgeship decline it citing domestic and parental responsibilities.

"Time has come for a woman Chief Justice of India" said CJI Bobde pointing out that the chief iustices of high courts have told him that when women lawyers are asked to come on the bench they deny saying they have domestic and parental responsibili-

Chief Justice Bobde head-



ing a bench also comprising Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Justice Surya Kant said this in the course of the hearing of a petition seeking the appointment of ad-hoc judges to address the issue of a large number of vacancies in the high courts across the country. The hearing was on a PIL filed by NGO Lok Prahari

courts have told him that when women lawyers are asked to come on the bench they deny saying they have domestic and parental responsibilities. — S.A. bobde, CJİ 🤳



represented by its general secretary S.N. Shukla who appeared in person. On the conclusion of the hearing court reserved the orders. The Supreme Court Women Lawyers Association (SCWLA) had urged the top court to consider appointing experi-

women lawyers Turn to Page 4

enced

## Rajnath asks IAF to be ready for threats in future AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 15 Defence minister Rajnath

Singh on Thursday asked top Indian Air Force commanders to draw up long term plans and strategies for capability enhancement to counter future threats. Defence minister on Thursday addressed the biannual Commanders' Conference (AFCC-21) Headquarters.

Mr Singh appreciated the critical focus of IAF towards reorienting for the future. He congratulated IAF for ensuring a timely and befitting response to the sudden developments against China in Eastern

Referring to changing international geopolitics, Mr Singh observed that the perceptible shift of focus from Trans-Atlantic to Trans-Pacific has become more obvious in the recent past. "Changing dimensions of war would now include advanced technologies, asymmetric capabilities and info-dominance, and it was very important that the IAF's preparations for the future must include the aspects," said Mr Singh.

Reiterating the Prime Minister's vision of "Self Reliance", the defence minister stressed on the need to promote Atmanirbharta in Defence Infrastructure. He added



defence Rajnath Singh and Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria at the Air Force Commanders' Conference in New Delhi on Thursday.

that the IAF's order for LCA would result in a substantial boost to the domestic defence industry and will be a game changer from the indigenisation perspective. He urged the commanders to continue their efforts for achieving even greater results in the field of indigenous defence production and aircraft maintenance. He added that national security and economic development are complementary aspects of national policy. The IAF's support for the indigenous industry would result in development of MSMEs in this field which will simultaneously serve the cause of self-reliance and socio-economic development of the country.

### ■ US moves in retaliation for Kremlin's occupation of Crimea, Afghan role US expels 10 diplomats, imposes tough curbs on Russia MEANWHILE, US

Washington, April 15: The US on Thursday announced the expulsion 10 Russian diplomats and slapped sanctions on over 30 individuals and key financial institutions as it held Moscow accountable for interference in last year's presidential election and the hacking of American federal

agencies. The sanctions are also meant to impose a penalty over Russia's continued

occupation of Crimea, which it infiltrated and annexed from Ukraine seven years ago, and for reportedly offering bounties for attacks against US and coalition military personnel in strife-torn Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, US secretary of state Antony Blinken made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on Thursday to sell Afghan leaders and a wary public

secretary of state Antony Blinken made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on Thursday to sell Afghan leaders and a wary public on Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all US troops from the country by Sept. 11

on President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all American troops from the country and end America's longest war. In a communication to

Congress, President Joe Biden said that he has determined that specified harmful Russian activities — in particular, efforts to undermine the conduct of free and fair democratic elections and democratic institutions in the US and its allies and partners; constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national securi-

ty, foreign policy, and economy of the US. Russia has denied any involvement in US elections or on offering the bounties. Moscow has also said that it has nothing to do with the SolarWinds computer attack. The Biden administration rolled out the sanctions in an executive order in coordination with the state department and the treasury department.

■ More on Page 6



### IN BRIEF

#### 2 women arrested for assaulting cop

New Delhi: Eight people, including two women, have been arrested for allegedly assaulting a head constable of the Delhi Police here, officials said on Thursday. The accused have been identified as Rekha Devi (46), Binita (30), Mohan Jha (55), Vikash Jha (24), Pappu Jha (32), Manish Jha (28), Aakash Kumar Jha (20) and

Dhanander Pratap Singh (20), they said. On Wednesday, a woman approached the Khyala police station, alleging that she was being harassed and assaulted by her neighbours, police said. Following the complaint, head constable Ramchander along with subinspector Chhote Lal reached the spot. The woman told the policeman that a couple - Rekha and Mohan Jha - had assaulted her, a senior police officer said. Police said a quarre had erupted the previous night between the woman and the couple over the

issue of filling a gas cylinder. When the couple saw the woman with the two policemen, they got annoyed, called more people and head constable, police said.

#### **Gym owner booked** for assaulting police

New Delhi: Delhi Police have registered FIR against a gym owner and his associates a day after a video surfaced online purportedly showing an on-duty policeman being assaulted by them. The policeman was assaulted on April 1 in Uttam Nagar area. Police said that the video purportedly shows the policeman, identified as Sushil, being abused and assaulted by a man along with his accomplice. Another policeman can also seen trying to stop the gym owner in the video. Sushil, presently posted at the Baba Haridas Nagar police station, was earlier posted as the PSO to a person named Sanjay Gupta, a property dealer by

### **30 shanties gutted in** fire in Paschimpuri

profession.

New Delhi: Around 30 shanties were gutted after a major fire broke out in a slum cluster in Shaheed **Bhagat Singh Camp of west** Delhi's Paschimpuri, a Delhi Fire Services official said on Thursday. No injuries were reported in the incident that occurred on Wednesday night, the official said. According to the fire department official, a call about the blaze was received at around 9.55 pm and 25 fire tenders were pressed into action. The fire engulfed around 30 shanties including pucca structures spread across 1,500 square yards, he said. Two more tenders were rushed to the spot later and the fire was doused while the "cooling process" continued at least till 1:30 am, he added. - PTI

### **'HARYANA NOT TAKING STEPS TO LOWER AMMONIA'**

New Delhi: The Delhi government has told the Supreme Court that Haryana has not taken any concrete step to address its grievance over discharge of untreated pollutants causing rise in ammonia level in the Yamuna and release of insufficient water which led to reduction in supply in some areas here. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has filed its rejoinder affidavit in the apex court in response to the reply of Haryana and its Department of Irrigation and Water Resources. A bench headed by chief Justice S A Bobde, on March 26, had directed the Haryana government and others to continue with the status quo on supply of Yamuna water to Delhi, making it clear that it should not be reduced to the national capital which is facing a shortage. The AAP government, which had moved the top court in January this year, through Delhi Jal Board (DJB), has sought directions to Haryana to cease the discharge of untreated pollutants into the Yamuna and release sufficient water to the national capital which is facing potential crisis. The rejoinder affidavit, filed through DJB's

## **Covid: Delhi surpasses Mumbai as worst-hit city**

City sees 16,699 new cases, 112 deaths in 24 hours

#### **New Delhi, April 15:** Battling the fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic, Delhi recorded over 16,699 cases of Covid-19 on Thursday to become the worst-affected city in the country, leaving financial capital Mumbai far behind

in the daily tally.

Mumbai's single-day
peak so far is 11,163, registered on April 4, according

to official figures.

Delhi recorded 17,282
fresh cases of Covid-19 on Wednesday, the highest single-day surge in the national capital since the onset of the pandemic, while over 100 fatalities were reported, according to data shared by the health department.

The unprecedented surge in cases, especially in the last few days, has also left doctors and medical experts baffled with some conjecturing that the virus has mutated and assumed many different strains, some of which are far more transmissible than others. Richa Sareen, a consultant at the Pulmonology and Critical Care Medicine at Fortis hospital here, said, "Given the pace of spread, it definitely seems there is a different variant in circulation and it is more infectious than the previous

one."
She said the younger population is getting more infected as the elderly have mostly got vaccinated and also because the older population is more at home but the vounger demographic segment is going out and meeting others or

**Shortage of** 

hospital beds

triggers flurry

beds, they said.

the Delhi.

even

Manish Sisodia in their tweets to draw attention

to their plight. The Delhi

Corona app allows people

to check the availability

of beds in hospitals in

"Any hospitals in #Delhi where beds are

available? Asking for a

friend. His wife has been

calling up hospitals and

apps/website show available beds, the hospitals

are saying no vacancy"

These frantic messages

for help came a day after

the Delhi government released a list of banquet

halls, schools and sports

complexes attached to

different hospitals to

increase the number of

beds for coronavirus

tweeted @vibhurishi.

though the

### Sisodia: Class 9, 11 exams in govt schools cancelled

New Delhi, April 15: Class government schools have been cancelled in view of the spike in Covid cases and the assessment criterion decided by the CBSE for class 10 students will be adopted for these two classes, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said on

Thursday. Mr Sisodia announced this during a live interaction with students on suggestions for the assessment criteria for class 10 board exams which were cancelled on Wednesday by the CBSE.

Considering marks of mid-term exams, evalua-tion of worksheets, open book exams and viva voices were among the sugges-

socialising, partying, or travelling, which increases

A senior doctor at the

Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, which

has been turned into a

fully Covid hospital again,

said there has been a mas-

sive surge in the number of

patients at the facility in

the last few days.

Delhi chief minister
Arvind Kejriwal, on

including a weekend cur-

few and the closure of

malls, gyms, spas, and

auditoriums, in a bid to

break the chain of Covid

Arvind

Thursday,

government-run

announced

restrictions,

the chance of infection.

infections in the city.
The 16,699 new cases came out of 82,569 tests done on Wednesday, relatively less than the over 1.08 lakh examinations

tions received by Mr

Sisodia regarding assess-

have been cancelled. Whatever criteria the

board decides for evalua-

tion of class 10 students, we will adopt the same for

class 9 and 11 too," he said.

tions received from the stu-

dents to higher authorities

including the CBSE," he

Asked about class 12

exams, Mr Sisodia said, "I

still feel the exams should

be cancelled but the CBSE

has said that it will review

the situation on June 1. 1

request the students to be

patient and not let it affect

added.

"I will convey the sugges-

'The class 9 and 11 exams in government schools

ment for class 10 exams.

done on the previous day. As per the latest bulletin. the positivity rate stands at 20.22 per cent, the highest till date in Delhi, while the death toll recorded so far is 11.652. The highest single day spike in Delhi till the third wave of the pandemic — 8,593 cases — was reported on November 11 in 2020, while on November 18, the city had recorded 131 Covid deaths, the highest single-day

### Woman sets self ablaze after testing +ve in Noida

**Noida, April 15:** A 52-yearold woman allegedly doused herself with kerosene and self-immolated at her home in Noida on Thursday, four days after testing positive for Covid, police said.

The link between her testing positive for coronavirus and taking the extreme step is inconclusive, a senior police official said, citing interaction with her family.

The woman lived with her husband, a retired air force official, two daughters and a son at their house in a gated society in Badalpur area, the police said.

"Police were alerted this morning that the woman, aged around 52 years, died after immolating herself using kerosene oil around 4 am. She had tested positive for Covid on April 11," additional deputy com-missioner of police (Central Noida and

Crime) Elamaran G. said. "The family told the police that she was upset over her Covid test result but it remains inconclusive if she took the extreme step because of that," the officer told PTI.

The body was disposed by a team of medical experts and no post-mortem examination was done, the police said.



Family members, wearing PPE kits, wait during cremation of a Covid victim at the

### 50 people can offer namaz 5 times a day at Nizamuddin: HC

New Delhi, Apr 15: The Delhi High Court on Thursday allowed 50 peo-ple to offer namaz five times a day at the Nizamuddin Markaz

mosque during Ramzan.
Justice Prathiba M.
Singh directed the station
house officer of
Nizamuddin police station to permit entry of 50 people five times a day to offer namaz only on the first floor of the Masjid Bangley Wali.

The court declined to increase the number of people or allow use of other floors of the mosque for offering prayers as sought by senior advocate Ramesh Gupta on behalf of the Delhi Waqf Board, but allowed them to move an application before the SHO for the same.

The court said the SHO may decide any such application moved by the Board in accordance with the law. It also said that its order would be subject to any notification issued by Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) in view of the increasing number of Covid cases in the national capital, which recorded the biggest single-day jump of 17,282 Covid cases Meanehile, Tablighi Jamaat Thursday wel-comed the Delhi High

THE COURT said the SHO may decide any such application moved by the Board in accordance with the law. It also said that its order would be subject to any notification issued by the DDMA in view of the increasing number of Covid cases in Delhi.

Court order granting permission to 50 people to offer namaz five times a day at Nizamuddin Markaz during Ramzan.

Tablighi spokesman Jishan Ali said they will follow all coronavirus-related guidelines.

"We welcome the court's order. We will follow the guidelines issued regarding the Covid in order to fight and defeat this pandemic," Ali said.

The Delhi High Court Thursday allowed 50 people to offer namaz five times a day at Nizamuddin Markaz during Ramzan, saying there is no direction in the Delhi Disaster Authority (DDMA) notification to close down places of worship.

The court also noted that there was no clear stand of the Central government as to whether religious congregations or gatherings were permitted in other places of worship. — PTI

### Ghaziabad and Noida extend night curfew hours

Ghaziabad/Noida April 15: Amid an alarming surge in Covid-19 cases, the Uttar Pradesh govern-ment on Thursday extended the night curfew hours in 10 worsthit districts, including Ghaziabad and Gautam Budh Nagar, and also deferred the state board exams till May 15.

District administra-tions of Ghaziabad and GB Nagar said that they have extended the timing of night restrictions, which will be now from 8pm to 7am, till

further orders.
Earlier, the night restrictions were from 10pm to 5am till April 17 in the two districts.

Gautam Buddh Nagar on Thursday recorded 489 new Covid-19 cases, its highest single-day spike, which pushed the tally to 28,928 in the district, according to official data.

One death linked to Covid-19 took the toll in the district to 98, it stat-

The number of active adjoining Delhi in western Uttar Pradesh, has reached 2,334 from 2,027 tne previous aay according to the figures released by the UP health department for a 24-hour period.

### Couples, wedding planners, brace to tackle city curfew a scaled down presence in

of SOS tweets New Delhi, April 15: The restrictions announced by New Delhi, April 15: A the Delhi government, including issuing passes to man desperate to find a hospital bed for his "extremely weak" 60-year-old mother, another looking for anti-viral those attending marriages, amid a surge in Covid cases evoked a mixed response from wedding drug Remdevisir and a planners and to-be married couples, with some woman looking for a plassaying their job will become "trickier". ma donor for a friend's uncle fighting for his life Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on — the grim Covid situa-

tion in Delhi triggered a flurry of SOS posts on announced Twitter on Thursday.
Some claimed that while the Delhi Corona restrictions, including a weekend curfew and the closure of malls, gymnasiums, spas app showed that beds are available in certain hosand auditoriums, in a bid pitals in the city, the situto break the chain of the ation on the ground is Covid infection in city. The city government said different. Hospitals are

not admitting patients as essential services and weddings will not be affected they have run out of Many even tagged Arvind Kejriwal and his

**CM ON Thursday** announced sweeping restrictions, including a weekend curfew and the closure of malls, gymnasiums, spas and auditoriums, in a bid to break the chain of the coronavirus infection

> by the weekend curfew and passes will be provided to those attending weddings. The government's curbs come after the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) on April 10 ordered the prohibition of all types of gatherings, a maximum of 50 people at weddings and 20 at funerals, running of public transport at half of their seating capacity and Singh said.

government offices. Wedding planners and

hotel owners said with the restrictions and guidelines in place, their jobs have become "trickier". Shakti Singh of Madam

Planners said a cap of 50 people, which included the staff and the guests, was already a difficult situation to begin with.

"We don't think e-passes are the best solution to it, unless they are being managed on priority and at the micro-level.

"As wedding planners, our job only gets trickier to sound and follow government guidelines without anyone being hassled," Mr

### **HC dismisses bail plea of man** who pointed gun at policeman

#### AGE CORRESPONDENT **NEW DELHI, APRIL 15**

The Delhi High Court Thursday dismissed the bail plea of the accused who allegedly pointed a pistol at a police head constable during the communal violence in the north-east area here in February last year, saying the video clips have shaken the court's conscience that how could he take law and order in his hands.

Kait said whether or not

police official or any person present in the public with his open-air pistol shots, it is hard to believe that he had no knowledge that his act may harm anyone present at the

Moreover, it is not the

#### Umar Khalid gets bail in riots case The applicant has merespiracy alleged against the applicant in the matly been roped in the mat-

Delhi court on Thursday granted bail to former JNU student Umar Khalid in a case related to the communal violence in in northeast Delhi February last year saying he was not physically present at the scene of crime on the date of incident.

"The applicant (Khalid) is not visible in any CCTV footage/viral video(s) pertaining to the scene of crime on the date of incident. There is no identification of the applicant either through independent public witness or any police witness of he being present at the scene of



**Umar Khalid** 

crime on the date of incident," additional sessions judge Vinod Yadav noted in the order.

The court further said that even the CDR location of the mobile phone of applicant was not found at the scene of crime on the

ter on basis of his own disclosure statement, fourth disclosure statement of co-accused Tahir Hussain and disclosure statement of co-accused Khalid Saifi, it said, adding that no recovery of any sort has been effected from the applicant pursuant to his disclosure statement.

The court rejected prosecution's argument that Khalid had been in regular contact/touch with coaccused Tahir Hussain and Khalid Saifi over mobile phone and said that "prima facie that does not in any way go on to

ter."
The FIR in the present case was registered on the statement of constable Sangram Singh, where he stated that on February 24, 2020 at about 2 pm, a large crowd gathered on the

road in a locality in the

northeast Delhi and started pelting stones in which he and other police officials got injured as they were thrashed by the mob. They set the vehicles in a parking area nearby on fire, including his motorcycle of the complainant was also burnt by the riot-

ers, he said said.

Justice Suresh Kumar the accused Shahrukh Pathan had the intention to kill the complainant case of the petitioner (Pathan) that he was not involved in the alleged incident, the high court said. The high court also added that in their opinion, the trial court has rightly held that the petitioner is alleged to have participated in riots and his picture speaks a volume about his involve-

### **Vehicle scrapping guidelines** of AAP govt challenged in HC

New Delhi, April 15: A Delhi, 2018. PIL in the Delhi High Court has challenged the government's guidelines for scrapping motor vehicles claiming the requirements for a license under these norms would oust small and marginal scrap deal-

"The impugned guidelines are heavily tilted against small and semiformal automobile scrappers who have been engaged in the business for generations," the

petition has contended. The plea by Delhi resident Inderiit Singh has claimed that such small time scrap dealers were not heard before issuing the guidelines for scrapping of Motor Vehicles of

The petition, filed through advocates Sahil Bhalaik, Tushar Giri and Sewa Singh, has claimed that the scrap industry created plenty of job opportunities and the guidelines were issued without considering the feasibility and practicality of organising this sector and without seeking

The plea has also contended that the 2018 guidelines are "unconstitutional, arbitrary and unfair" and also contrary to the Motor Vehicles Act as only the Centre has the power to make rules prescribing the manner of recycling of vehicles and parts thereof.

public opinion.

in a certain number of people but we know that these particular mutations have (also) got physiological effects on our context," Principal scientific adviser to Prime Minister Mr K. Raghavan told a

media house in an inter-

The maximum consumption of medical oxygen is by Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, followed by Puniab. Chhattisgarh. Rajasthan. These states are also reporting a large number of daily cases. According to officials, India's daily production capacity of medical Oxygen (7127 MT) and stock (50,000 MT) is "comfortably more" than the daily consumption (3842 THE MAXIMUM consumption of medical oxygen is by Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, followed by Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Rajasthan.

MT) at present. Union health ministry officials said with increasing cases, the medical Oxygen consumption will need to keep pace with the requirements of the states. For this, the current Oxygen stocks in the country, including the industrial Oxygen stocks with the manufacturing plants, is more than 50,000 MTs. Along with the ramped up production of the Oxygen manufacturing units and

the surplus stocks avail-

ty of Oxygen is sufficient. At the same time, States have also been asked to make rational use of medical Oxygen and ensure there is no wastage of oxy-

In a bid to help out the distressed Maharashtra government, Mr Mukesh Ambani led Reliance Industries has started sending Oxygen from its petroleum refinery in Gujarat's Jamnagar to help the state government combat the immediate shortage of Oxygen. To begin with Maharashtra will get 100 tons of Oxygen gas from Reliance free of cost as the company is diverting some its Oxygen streams meant for petroleum coke gasification units after making it suitable for medical use. Besides Bharat

Limited has built up a stockpile of 20 tons of Oxygen at its Kochi refinerv in Kerala which it is supplying to government hospitals free of cost.

Officials said the challenge presently is to move oxygen from States with less necessity to states with increased necessity. "Mapping of the surplus sources with States that have greater need for oxygen, such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, etc is being finalised, in consultation with the manufacturers, States and other stakeholders. This has been undertaken through coordinated planning between the Government of India and State Governments to map their requirements up to

Centre steps in as states gasp to fill oxygen stock available sources and stocks of oxygen in the country," said an official.

Orders have also been given by PESO (Petroleum and Safety Organisation) for conversion of argon and nitrogen tankers for use as oxygen tankers due to which the fleet available transportation of ers has been tankers enhanced. Free movement of oxygen tankers inter-

state has been facilitated. Union health ministry has also placed orders for purchase of one lakh oxygen cylinders and PSA plants sanctioned under PM-CARES Fund are being closely reviewed for early completion of 100 per cent the plants to enhance self-generation of oxygen in hospitals especially in remote areas.



chief engineer M.K. Hans. has termed the entire reply

of Haryana and its depart-

ment concerned as an exer-





#### **Weekend shutdown** in 10 dists of Odisha

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha government on Thursday evening decided to clamp stricter restrictions in the form of night curfew across the state and weekend shutdowns in 10 districts bordering Chhattisgarh to contain the Covid-19 spread. As per the latest announcement, the state government decided to clamp night curfew in urban areas of 20 districts including the twin cities of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar which will come into force from Friday. The restrictions will be

clamped from 9 pm to 5 am, informed state chief secretary Suresh Mohapatra in a specialised televised address. According to Mr Mohapatra, the state government revised the timings of night curfew which is already in force in 10 districts of the state sharing borders with Chhattisgarh. At present, night curfew is in force in 10 districts - Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Bargarh, Balangir, Nuapada, Kalahandi, Nabarang-pur, Koraput and Malkangiri from 10 pm to 5 am.

#### ₹3,000 relief for HP staff on Covid duty

Shimla: Amid the state econ-

omy once again taking a hit due to the Covid pandemic, the Himachal Pradesh government on Thursday announced relief measures for the tourism, transport and education sectors. An ex gratia of ₹3,000 each was announced for all government Class III and IV employees, directly involved in the service of Covid patients an official spokesperson said Presiding over a Himacha Day function at Padhar in Mandi district on Thursday, CM Jai Ram Thakur said all private schools, hotels, lodges and other tourism units would be exempted from paying demand charges for two months, which could be paid in instalments later without late charges. He also announced a subvention scheme for the tourism industry for three

#### **ASI** monuments closed till May 15

months till June. - PTI

New Delhi: All Centrally-protected monuments, museums and sites under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have been closed with immediate effect till May 15 due to the surge in coronavirus cases in the country, the Union culture ministry said on Thursday. An order to this effect was issued by the ASI and it was tweeted by culture minister Prahlad Patel on Thursday evening. "Due to the prevailing Covid situation, it has been decided to close all Centrally-protected monuments, sites and museums under the ASI with immediate effect and till May 15 or until further orders," the Archaeological Survey of India said. These include 3,693 monuments and 50 museums. - PTI

### **MP BYELECTIONS: CONG CANDIDATE TESTS COVID +VE**

AGE CORRESPONDENT

Campaigning for April 17 byelections to Damoh Assembly constituency in Madhva Pradesh, which has remained low key all through due to the coronavirus pandemic, ended on Thursday afternoon. The usual din and bustle of electioneering was missing in the constituency with the traditional rivals the ruling BJP and Opposition Congress, seen

avoiding big rallies and public meetings to protect their leaders and workers from contracting the virus. Both the parties were seen organ-

ising mass contact programmes to drum up support for their respective candidates. The rival parties had to contend with only a couple of election rallies each led by their respective star campaigners. While senior BJP leaders such as chief minister Shivrai Singh

Chouhan, Union minister Prallhad Patel and Rajya Sabha member Jyotiraditya Scindia held election rallies on different days to canvass for their party candidate Rahul Singh Lodhi, former chief minister Kamal Nath led a rally of Congress on Wednesday in Damoh to seek votes for his party candidate Ajey Tondon. Mr Tondon tested positive for coronavirus on Thursday.

## Neet postponed amid spike in Covid cases: Vardhan

Haryana govt cancels Class 10 board exams ■ UP schools shut till May 15

Lucknow, April 15: In view of a spike in the number of Covid-19 cases, the National Eligibility-Cum-Entrance Test (postgraduate), which was scheduled to be held on April 18, has been post-poned, Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said on Thursday.

The decision was taken keeping the well-being of the young medical students in mind, he added.

"In light of the surge in #COVID19 cases, GoI has to postpone #NEETPG2021 which was earlier sched-

uled to be held on Apr 18. Next date to be decided later. Decision has been taken keeping wellbeing of our young medical students in mind," Mr Vardhan said in a tweet.

Neet PG examination is for doctors seeking admission in MS, MD courses. The examination was earlier scheduled to be held in January but was post-poned because of the pan-

Earlier, a group of doctors moved the Supreme Court seeking the postponement of the examination before the Centre announced its decision. In

their plea, the doctors said that the candidates who would be appearing in the exam are doctors treating Covid-19 patients daily. The petition also mentioned that when the exam in January got cancelled, the pandemic situation of the country was not this

Meanwhile, the Haryana government has cancelled the Class 10 board exams which were to be conducted by the state board of school education and decided to postpone the exams of Class 12 amid the pandemic.

The state government's

decision comes a day after the CBSE cancelled the Class 10 exam and postponed the Class 12 examination due to the rising number of Covid-19 cases. The Uttar Pradesh gov-

ernment, too, shut all schools till May 15 and postponed exams for board classes as the state reported its highest-single day spike in coronavirus cases since the outbreak of the pandemic last year.

The state on Thursday reported 104 deaths and 22,439 fresh cases, pushing the fatality count to 9,480 and the total infection number to 7,66,360. -PTI

### MP mantri's comment on Covid deaths triggers row

CHOUDHUY BHOPAL, APRIL 15

An "uncharitable" comment by a minister in the Shivraj government on spiraling C o v i d - 1 9

deaths in Madhya Pradesh has sparked a huge row with Opposition

Congress calling it "shockingly insensitive". State animal husbandry minister Prem Singh Patel while seeking to downplay the sudden spurt in fatalities due to coronavirus infections in MP said, "People get old, thay have to die."

they have to die. He was speaking to reporters in Barwani in

MP late on Thursday.
"Deaths are occurring. Nobody can stop death. People get old, they have to die," Mr Patel said.

The minister's comment comes at a time when the pandemic situation has worsened in the state with hospitals running out of beds for coronavirus patients and mortuaries and crematories overflow-ing with bodies of the Covid-19 victims.

He also blamed the family members of the Covid-19 victims for the failure of the government to show the real figures of deaths due to the virus

### **JD-U & RJD shut offices** as cases surge in Bihar

Patna, April 15: Considering the rapid increase in coronavirus cases in Bihar as in other parts of the country, major politi-cal parties in Bihar including the ruling JD(U) and main opposition RJD have closed

their party offices. While JD(U) shut its state headquarters here from Thursday till April 20, the RJD locked its office from April 15 till further orders seeing the sharp increase in Covid-19 cases.

Both the parties have put up notices to this effect on the main gates of their state headquar-

Marg in the heart of the city.
Other major political parties including BJP,

Congress and CPI(ML) are operating their offices with strict instructions to abide by Covid-19 protocol. Bihar Congress presi

dent Madan Jha, who is himself recuperating at home after testing posi-tive, said, "We will take a call on closing office after consulting party leaders on Friday

Bihar is witnessing a substantial increase of the number of Covid incidences daily. — *PTI* 

"The families of the Covid-19 victims take away the bodies for cre-mation without informing the local administration that they died of coronavirus. This is the reason why the government is not able to give the real picture on deaths due to the virus," he added. Congress

The Thursday took strong exception to the minister's remarks on Covid-19 deaths, describing it "irresponsible and shockingly

"Mr Patel's insensitive

remarks on the tragic deaths signify that he does not qualify to be a minister. He should be asked to step down from his post. If he does not resign, then chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan should not hesitate to sack him' Congress spokesman here Durgesh Sharma said.

MP on Thursday recorded 53 deaths due to coronavirus taking the death toll to 4365.

The state on Thursday reported 10,166 fresh posiof cases to 3,73,518.

### **Odisha bypoll** adjourned after death of **Cong nominee**

Nagar cremation ground in Jammu on Thursday,

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 15

Hours after the returning officer adjourned the election process for Pipili Assembly bypolls following the death of Congress candidate Ajit Mangaraj, state chief electoral officer (CEO) Sushil Lohani on Thursday said the Election Commission of India (ECI) will announce the next poll date.

Byelection for the Pipili constituency was scheduled for April 17. The Congress candidate Ajit Mangaraj, 52, got infected with the Covid-19 during the campaign and succumbed to the disease on Wednesday evening at a private hos-

"As per section 52 (1), (c) of Representation of People's Act, the returning officer has adjourned the Pipili bypoll yesterday and the matter has been notified to the Election Commission of India (ECI)," said the CEO Mr Lohani.

Election Commission of India will issue a fresh notification for the by-polls. As per provision of the law, the Congress party will be given a chance to announce a new candidate. The entire schedule for Pipili bypoll will be announced by ECI,"

he added. According to the CEO, the party will get seven days to ensure that their candidate files nomination soon after a fresh notification is issued by ECI. As per past experiences, 15-days' time will be allotted to complete necessary election formalities, he said.

SRINAGAR, APRIL 15

The Jammu and Kashmir

deferred "Darbar" move,

the biannual shifting of

the civil secretariat or

the seat of the govern-

ment and other offices

Jammu to summer capi-

tal Srinagar, in view of the surge in Covid-19

winter capital

"Darbar" was

### Man held with 400 vials of 'Remdesivir'

Health workers, wearing protective suits, carry the body of a woman who died of Covid-19 for cremation at Shakti

Indore, April 15: A man claimed that the injecassociated with the pharma industry was arrested on Thursday for allegedly selling fake Remdesivir injections in Madhya Pradesh's Indore city, the

Acting on a tip-off, the police arrested Vinay Trivedi for alleged black marketing of injections labelled as remdesivir, deputy inspector general (DIG) Manish Kapooria told reporters.

At least 16 packets, carrying 25 yials each of the suspected anti-viral drug. were seized from the accused's possession, the official said.

During interrogation, the accused claimed that he had procured the injections from a company in Himachal Pradesh, but failed to produce any documents to support his claim, Mr Kapooria said. accused also

tions that he had brought were part of a drug trial and were not tested so far on patients, the DIG said. "We will get these injections tested in a laboratory, but a drug inspector, prima facie, doubted their

authenticity," he said. A criminal case has been registered and a detailed probe will be conducted to trace the source of the drug and ascertain if the accused had sold the injections locally, the official said.

Meanwhile, the crime branch's additional superintendent of police (ASP) Guruprasad Parashar said the police had received information that Trivedi is associated with the pharma industry and also owns a pharma unit in the neighbouring Pithampur industrial town. These facts are being verified.

## 'Declare Covid as natural calamity'

Uddhav writes to Modi, expresses possibility Maha caseload to double by April-end

BHAGWAN PARAB AND SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, APRIL 15

Maharashtra chief minis-ter Uddhav Thackeray has demand-



coronavirus pandemic be announced as a national calamity so that the state can utilise the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) to provide financial assistance to the affected people. In a letter written to

Prime Minister Narendra Moai, Mr Thackeray expressed the possibility that the caseload of active Covid-19 patients, which is presently 5.64 lakh in Maharashtra, is likely to double by the end of April by reaching up to 11.9 lakh. To ensure prompt treatment of these patients, the Centre should allow air transportation of medical oxygen, he said.

#### **Cong seeks special package** for dabbawalas, cab drivers SONU SHRIVASTAVA government.

MUMBAI, APRIL 15

Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole on Thursday sought a relief package for taxi drivers. flower vendors, salon workers and Mumbai's dabbawala among others. Mr Patole wrote a letter in this regard to Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackerav stating that these secof the society should be incorporated in the relief package which has been announced by the state

"The medical oxygen requirement Maharashtra at present is 1,200 metric tonnes, but the

Two days ago, Maha-

rashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray had announced several sops from monetary reliefs to free distribution of food grains for the vulnerable sections including registered auto drivers, construction workers and hawkers. In addition to this, financial assistance will be provided to the economically weaker sections below the poverty line families, women, senior citi-

demand is likely to rise by 2,000 MT by April-end. The Centre has allowed to procure oxygen from steel

zens, widows, disabled

and tribal communities.

plants in eastern and southern parts of the country. But to save time, it needs to be airlifted under the national disaster management act," said Mr Thackeray in his letter.

According to state officials, the state needs the permission from the Centre to use the SDRF, which was constituted under the Central Disaster Management Act, 2005. Hence, the State Government has sought the nod from the Centre to use its funds to help the pandemic-hit people.

By notifying the coron avirus pandemic as natural calamity would allow the state to pay a daily grant of ₹100 and ₹60 to adults and children respectively during the lockdown period to those registered under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana and Priority Household ration card holders, said Thackeray.

### MHA orders 50% attendance, staggered timing at its offices

of Covid-19 cases in Delhi, the Union home ministry on Thursday said its officers up to the level of under secretary can work from home and only 50 per cent staff need to attend office.

In an office memorandum, the MHA said all officers who attend the office can stagger timings with entry into the office spread between 9 am to 10 am with corresponding office exit timings and those living in containment zones be exempted from attending office.

New Delhi, April 15: In view of the "unprecedented rise in the numbers of Covid-19 cases in Delhi, it has been decided to take measures to prevent its spread," the home ministry said.

physical attendance in per cent of the actual overall strength.

The MHA said officers of the level of under secretary or equivalent and below be allowed to work from home and their office be restricted to 50

Rosters for their attendance will be prepared by concerned divisional heads. wing Individual wing heads can, however, call for of the more than 50 per cent

physical attendance of any of the categories of officials in their wings, if required on administrative grounds.

All officers of the level of deputy secretary, equivalent and above are to attend office on regu-

"All officers who attend office can stagger timings with entry into the office spread between 9 am to 10 am with corresponding office exit timings. This will also avoid rush in commuting, as also in lifts and corridors. Roster system by divisional or wing heads to take care of this aspect," the MHA said. — PTI

### govt, says 'tika utsav' just a sham

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi once again lashed out at the BJP-

led Central government over the Covid-19 "mismanagement"

He alleged that the "tika ustav" was just another sham by the government and further that there are no beds ventilators or vaccines available. Through his official Twitter handle, he tweeted, "There are no tests, no beds in hospitals. There are no ventilators, no oxygen. There are no vaccines also. The utsav is a pretense.

Mr Gandhi's attack comes in the wake of reporting an unprecedented increase in Covid-19 cases with over 200,000 cases being reported on Thursday, the biggest single-day hike since the beginning of the pandemic.

Mr Gandhi has been actively using social media and other platforms to highlight the 'deficiencies' of the central government in managing the outcome of

#### Rahul slams IEW OKHLA INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY **roiga E-TENDER NOTICE** E-Tender are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lunknow for the following jobs against which bids can

be uploaded and same shall be opened / downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on NOIDA Authority's official website www.noidaauthorityonline.com & http://etender.up.nic.in Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/ amendments & corrigendum etc.

Name of Work Job No. Amount No 19/Manager A. M. C. of various Rs. 19,62,110/-System/ model of Kyocera Mita Kyoceraand Konica Minolta konica/ make photocopier AMC/2020-21 machines

Which can be uploaded by date 22.04.2021 upto 5.00 PM. Prequalification shall be opened/downloaded on date 23.04.2021 Manager (System)

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SEARCH FOR KIDNAPPED

### General Public is hereby informed that a girl namely Subi, D/o Sh. Hira Lal, R/o



Subi

H.No. 51, Gol Baithak, Gali No. 6, Rahul ka Makaan, Old Seelampur Gandhi Nagar, Delhi, Age: 17 years, Height: 5', Complexion: Fair, Built: Thin, Face: Round, Identification Mark: Scar mark on forehead, Wearing: Cream Colour Kurta, Black Pajami, Black Chunni and Sandle in her feet has been kidnapped from jurisdiction of P.S. Gandhi Nagar since 26.09.2016. In this regard a FIR No. 442/16, u/s 363 IPS dated 26.09.2016. has been registered at P.S. Gandhi Nagar, Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing girl but no clue has come to light so far. if any one having any information about this girl please inform undersigned.

E-mail: cic@cbi.gov.nic.in Ph.: 011-24368638,24368641 Fax: 011-24368639

DP/424/SHD/2021

PS Gandhi Nagar, Delhi Ph.: 011-22072761, 7065036024



scheduled to close in Jammu later this month

ing cases of Covid in J&K, the government has taken few important decisions ensuring safety of employees...•Darbar move deferred because of

and reopen in Srinagar

But now the secretariat

on May 10.

Thursday.

& Jammu •Office functioning not to be affected because of e-office," he tweeted.

will function at both He added, "Secretaries Jammu and Srinagar "in an equitable manner", will function from both J&K's lieutenant-goverlocations in an equitable nor Manoj Sinha said on manner Office functioning will not be affected as "In view of sharply risfiles to move electronicalbetween

J&K defers shifting of 'Darbar' to Srinagar

Secretariats in e-Office." J&K's chief secretary, B.V.R. Subrahmanyam, had earlier this month announced that the bi-COVID •Secretariat to annual shifting of capital function in both Srinagar from Jammu to Srinagar

will take place on April 30 and that all government offices will resume functioning from the summer capital on May

He had, however, also said that this time the government has taken switch to paperless office by rolling out e-office in the moving departments and as such, most of the official record has been uploaded to the e-office, and training of employees has begun.

**EC** notice to BJP

neta for hate speech

New Delhi: The Election Commission issued a notice to West Bengal BJP leader Sayantan Basu for his alleged "inflammatory" remark during a speech and asked him to explain his stand within 24 hours. The notice said the poll panel had received a complaint against Basu over his speech in North 24 Parganas' Baranagar. "(Barely audible) I, Sayantan Basu, am here to tell you that don't try to play too much. We will play the game of Shitalkuchi. They killed 18 years old Ananda Barman...He was the brother of the BJP's Shakti Pramukh. We did not have to wait for long...(Barely audible) Four of them were shown the way to heaven. "There was a dialogue in the film 'Sholay' you know - if you kill one we will kill four of you. Shitalkuchi witnessed it — if you kill one we will kill four of you...," the EC notice said, quoting portions of his

#### **Boat with 8 Pakis,** 30 kg heroin seized

New Delhi: The Indian Coast Guard along with the Gujarat anti-terrorist squad apprehended a fishing boat, carrying eight Pakistani nationals and 30 kg of heroin, near Kutch district's Jakhau coast on Thursday, an official statement said. On Tuesday, an input was received regarding suspected narcotics trafficking by a Pakistani boat off the Indo-Pak notional international maritime boundary line (IMBL), the statement issued by the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) said. "On receipt of input, a coordinated operation was launched swiftly by the ICG in association with ATS (anti-terrorism squad) of Gujarat," it said. The suspected Pakistani boat was sighted inside Indian waters

#### Ram temple funds: 15K cheques bounce

on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday,

and it was intercepted by the ICG, the statement said

Ayodhya: About 15,000 bank cheques with a face value of ₹22 crore, collected by the Vishva Hindu Parishad for the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, have bounced. According to an audit report of Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra. a trust set up by the Centre for the construction of the

temple, said the cheques bounced due to lack of funds in bank accounts or some technical error Trust member Dr Anil Mishra said banks are working to solve the issue of technical errors and they are asking people to make donations again. Among the cheques, around 2.000 were collected from Ayodhya. The VHP had collected donations during a countrywide campaign between January 15 and February 17. — PTI

### **BJP LEADER'S ELECTION AS MLA REJECTED BY HC**

Imphal: The high court of Manipur on Thursday declared the election of BJP leader's Okram Henry Singh as a member of the state assembly as null and void for submitting an incomplete affidavit during the submission of nomination paper before the poll in 2017. Justice M.V. Muralidaran also declared that Yumkham Erabot Singh, who was defeated by Henry, duly elected from the Wangkhei constituency. Henry had won from Wangkhei in 2017 on Congress ticket by a margin of 4,336 votes defeating Erabot of the BJP. He switched to the saffron party in 2020. Henry, however, currently is not a member of the assembly as he had resigned as MLA while ioining the BJP in August 2020 and made a minister the next month. Erabot, in an election petition, had alleged that Henry submitted an incomplete affidavit in 2017, and praved for declaring his election as null and void. In the verdict, the court said that Henry was supposed to provide in the

affidavit details of the name

ents, and those of his pend-

ing criminal cases and edu-

cational qualification.

of his spouse and depend-

### ■ India stood firm in preventing a change of status quo on northern borders, says Gen. Rawat

## China felt it could push us with tech advantage: CDS

stood firm in preventing a change of status quo on the northern borders and the country proved it will not get pushed under any pressure, Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat said on Thursday, referring to the border standoff with China in eastern Ladakh.

In his address at the Raisina Dialogue here, Gen. Rawat said China felt that it will be able to compel nations to give in to its demands by doing a little bit of "shove and push" as it has superior armed forces because of techno-

logical advantage. "But, I think India stood firm on the northern borders and we have proven that we will not get pushed," he said at the vir-

Staff (CDS) said India was able to get support of the international community by standing firm in preventing the attempt of changing the status quo in the region.

"They tried to ensure that they can change the status quo by the use of disruptive technologies without using force... They thought that India, as a nation, will succumb to the pressures that they have been putting on us because of the technological advantage that they have," he said, adding that did not happen.

Gen. Rawat said the international community came to India's support to say that "yes there is an international base-rule

They (China) have been able to create disruptive technologies which can paralyse systems of the adversary, and therefore, they feel that just by doing a little bit of shove and push, they will be able to compel nations to give in to their demands - Bipin Rawat,

Chief of Defence Staff

order which every nation must follow. That is what we have been able to achieve.

India and China are locked in a military standoff in multiple friction points in eastern Ladakh since early May last year has significantly strained bilateral ties.

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, India and China com-

withdrawal troops and weapons from the North and South banks lake Pangong February.

The two sides are now engaged in talks to extend the disengagement process to the remaining friction points.

"They feel that they have arrived and they have a superior armed force because of the technologihave," Gen. Rawat said.

"They have been able to create disruptive technologies which can paralyse systems of the adversary, and therefore, they feel that just by doing a little bit of shove and push, they will be able to compel nations to give in to their demands,"

Referring to modernisation of the armed forces, Gen. Rawat described the F-35 fighter jets of the US as a state of the art platform but added that he was not sure whether the US will share the technology with India. 'What they have offered us is a lower version in the

F-series," he said. At the conference, Chief Staff, Joint Staff of Japan Self Defence Forces, Gen. Koji Yamazaki said

laterally change the international order, and that it is necessary for cooperation among like-minded countries in areas of disruptive technologies and counter

the "grey zone tactics". He said China does not recognise the legitimate interests of Japan and other countries in the region and such an approach will heighten tension, adding rules-based order is necessary for stability in the Indo-Pacific

Gen. Yamazaki also noted that any probable contingency in Taiwan directly impacts the defence of Japan.

Chief of Defence Force of Australia General Angus Campbell said the "grey zone tactics" are a way to

"We see this in the South China Sea. It is very challenging to respond without breaching the line that leads to open conflict," he said. Gen. Rawat said geopolitics, coupled with geoeconomics, is seeking to reshape the rules that gov-ern the world order and that China is attempting to

convey a message that it is

"my way or no way." There are some nations which follow international order. There are others which depend on their own law and make their own rules and regulations, try and change the status quo. These kinds of things do lead to conflict situations and that is what we are witnessing on our northern borders," he

### **NIA charges** 18 over 2019 killing of 5 J'khand cops

Ranchi, April 15: The NIA Thursday filed a second supplementary chargesheet before a special court here against 18 people over a deadly attack on police by out-lawed CPI (Maoist) cadres in June 2019 in which five policemen were killed, officials said. They have been charged under sections of the IPC, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention)

Act, the Arms Act and the Explosive Substances Act, they said. The case pertains to the deadly attack on a police patrol party by the cadres of CPI (Maoist) on June 14, 2019 at Kukru Haat in Jharkhand's Saraikela-Kharsawan district in

which the jawans were killed and their arms and ammunition looted. Earlier, the state police had filed a charge-sheet

against 11 accused.
The NIA took over the probe in December last year. The chargesheet names Sunil Mardi, Budhram Shriram Manjhi, Naresh Lohar, Alamgir Ansari, Lakhan Sardar, Joshep Annem Hassa Purti, Tabarak Ansari, Mangal Topno, and Soyna Singh Sardar. Other named are:

Jitrai Munda, воуда Pahan, Rakesh Munda Pramanik, Amit Munda and Anal Da, an NIA official said, adding that all 18 are residents of Jharkhand. Anal Da, the central committee member and secretary of Bihar Jharkhand special area committee of CPI (Maoist), in collusion with other leaders of the outlawed group, had conspired the attack, according to the NIA



A devotee carries her new born baby as others stand in a queue to enter Kalighat Kali temple in Kolkata on Thursday on the occasion of "Bengali New Year" amid rise in Covid-19 cases across the country.

#### **NIA arrests Lashkar** recruiter in Kashmir **Srinagar, April 15:** A tact with him over social school teacher, who was a media platforms and he media platforms and he recruiter for proscribed Pakistan-based terrorist introducing her to LeT members based in Pakistan, in pursuance of organisation Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), was arrested from his resia conspiracy to radi-calise, motivate and dence in north Kashmir on Thursday, the National recruit youths for violent Investigation Agency Jihad' (holy war) on (NIA) said. India, he said. Altaf Ahmad Rather, a resident of Jammu and

Kashmir's Bandipora district, was wanted in a case registered in West tion with the LeT. Bengal last year following the arrest of a woman, Tania Parveen, for her association with the ter-

the NIA said. Investigation Indian Penal Code, the revealed that Rather is a Unlawful teacher Bandipora and was a sympathiser of the LeT. Parveen had come in con-

ror group, a spokesman of

The spokesman said Parveen was arrested by the West Bengal Police last year for her associa-An FIR was registered against her at the Badurai police station in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district under various sections of the

(Prevention) Act and and Technology Act, he said.

Activities

### **Indo-Pacific is 'epicentre** of strategic race': Oz PM

New Delhi, April 15: The Indo-Pacific region has become the epicentre of strategic competition and like-minded nations need to act more consistently and cohesively to protect their shared interests in the face of multiple challenges, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison

said on Thursday. In an address at the Raisina Dialogue, he said the coronavirus pandemic has provided a fresh perspective in creating new opportunities to build a durable strategic balance in the Indo-pacific region.

Without mentioning any country, the Australian prime minister also referred to the growing tensions over territorial claims and the unprecedented pace of military modernisation in the region. "Democratic sov-



ereign nations are being threatened and coerced by Cyber attacks are becoming more sophisticated. including from state-sponsored actors," he said at

Morrison said.

interference. the virtual conference. "Economic coercion is

being employed as a tool of statecraft. Liberal rules and norms are under assault and there is a great polarisation that our world is at risk of moving towards," Mr

He said a polarisation is

authoritarian regimes and liberal democracies, adding that a liberal democracy and a liberal set of values underpin the global order that has delivered so much to the world. He said like-minded nations need to act more consistently and cohesiveprotecting

shared interests. "The Indo-Pacific is the region that will shape our prosperity, our security and our destiny, individually and collectively,' Morrison said.

"The Indo-Pacific is the epicentre of strategic competition," he added. The evolving situation in

the Indo-Pacific region in the wake of China's increasing military muscleflexing has become a major talking point among leading global powers.

### Isro espionage case: SC orders CBI probe against Kerala cops

PARMOD KUMAR

The Supreme Court on Thursday ordered the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to probe the involvement of three Kerala police officers in framing Isro scientist Nambi Narayanan in the 1994 espionage The Isro scientist had been acquitted and was eventually awarded ₹50 lakh compensation by the top court.

A bench of Justices A.M. Khanwilkar, Dinesh Maheshwari Krishna Murari asked the acting CBI director to take charge of the case and treat the inquiry report given by the Justice D.K. Jain panel as a preliminary inquiry report for further investigations.

investigating agency to file a status report within three months and the report should be kept confidential and not made public. While the court observed that the police

officials involved in the framing Nambi Narayanan have been identified and the report brings out acts of omission and commission, the CBI told the court that something serious has happened. On April 5, the Centre

moved the top court seeking urgent hearing and consideration of the panel's report terming it as a "national issue".

The espionage case, which had hit the headlines in 1994, pertained to allegations of transfer of certain confidential doc-

countries by two scientists and four others, including two Maldivian women. The scientist was arrested during the Congress regime in Kerala.

Justice Jain committee had one representative each from the Centre and the Kerala government The court had appoint-

ed the panel on September 14, 2018 while directing the Kerala government to cough up ₹50 lakh compensation for compelling Narayanan to undergo humiliation".

Besides awarding compensation of ₹50 lakhs, the top court in 2018 had said that Nambi Narayan could proceed with the civil suit he had filed for compensation.

## EC: No clubbing of polls

■ Continued from Page 1 all-party meeting, to be attended by one representative each from 10 political parties, at 2 pm on Friday to discuss the compliance Covid-19 guidelines in light of the fresh wave.

All political parties in West Bengal have been asked to send only one representative each for the meeting. The meeting will discuss matters related to campaigning for the remaining phases of the

Among the deceased, was a Congress candidate

Haque Biswas (51), alias Montu, who was infected by Covid-19 two days ago. He was brought from Basumati Hospital in Jangipur of the district on Wednesday night to a private hospital off EM Bypass in Kolkata. He died there at around 5 am on Thursday becoming the first poll candidate to fall prey to the virus.

State Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said. "I spoke to him two days ago. I was scheduled to address a rally in his support in Shamshergunj. at Shamshergunj in But Covid-19 snatched his

life so early." Besides Sanjkuta Morcha candidate from the RSP at Jangipur: Pradip Nandy tested covid positive. Admitted at the Covid Berhampore Hospital, his condition is stated to be critical. In the TMC, Goalpokhar candidate Golam Rabbani has

Covid-19. Mr Chowdhury added, "I request everybody, including the EC, with folded hands to check this pandemic during the polls. The Congress will abide by any decision for the

also been infected by

### Time has come for woman Chief Justice of India: Bobde

■ Continued from Page 1 from the Supreme Court as judges of high courts -

a step to increase the number of women judges. Telling the advocate Sneha Kalita appearing for SCWLA that they have the best interest of women in mind, CJI Bobde however said that they need

'capable candidates". The hearing also saw CJI Bobde disclosing that some of the complaints

against judges are "shockingly false", pointing out that they have to be given security of tenure and cannot be made vulnerable like this, Picking from what CJI

Bobde said, Justice Kaul said that the complaints crop up only when someone is appointed a judge. In the matter relating to a PIL by NGO Lok Prahari, attorney-general Venugopal told the bench

that the decision on the collegium recommending 10 names for appointment as high court judges would be communicated to 5the top court in three months time.

At this, the court asked the Centre to furnish the time line to act on the collegiums recommendations particularly the time taken by the ministry of law and justice to clear the names recommended by the collegium.

### Weekend curfew imposed in Delhi

■ Continued from Page 1 to 50 people) and funeralrelated (up to 20 people) gatherings will be gatherings will be allowed. People going to airports, railway stations and ISBTs will be allowed to proceed on the production of valid tickets.

However, those going for vaccination will required to apply for a cur-few pass. Mediapersons have been exempted from the weekend curfew. People dealing in food, weekend groceries, fruits, vegetables and dairy products will also have to seek a curfew pass for their movement.

CM Kejriwal said that the reason behind the weekend curfew was that

on these days, people often indulged in recreation and other such activities that could be "curtailed" and "curbed" without much inconvenience to them. 'Therefore, the weekend curfew is being imposed to break the chain (of Covid-19) and prevent contact among people.

"But we will not allow any inconvenience to those involved in essential services like going to hospitals, railway stations or airports and also weddings. We will issue passes for their movement quickly and without harassment," he said.

The DDMA said public transport such as the metro, buses, autorickshaws and taxis will be allowed to function within the stipulated time for the transportation of only those who have been exempted from the weekend curfew. The government has already imposed a night curfew in the city from 10 pm to 5 am till April 30 in a bid to check the spread of coronavirus.

Mr Kejriwal also said there is no shortage of hospital beds in Delhi and over 5,000 are still available for Covid-19 patients. Efforts to increase the number of beds on a large scale will be made, he said and appealed to people not to "insist" on beds in par-

ticular hospitals. Only one weekly market in a zone will be allowed to open per day and steps will be taken to control the crowds in those, Mr Kejriwal said. The government scaled down the occupancy of restaurants and cinema halls to 50 per cent of their seating capacity last week in view of the rising number of Covid-19 cases. Kejriwal said the number of cases is rising every day in Delhi and the restrictions were needed to check the spread of the virus.

The government will also ensure a strict enforcement of Covid-appropriate behaviour such as wearing masks, he said, noting that many people are still not following it.

### 24-hr campaign ban on Dilip Ghosh

■ Continued from Page 1 that he "made highly provocative and inciteful remarks which could adversely impact law &

force and imposes a ban of

24 hours" from 7 pm on

order thereby adversely affecting the election process. It "sternly warns" Mr Ghosh "and advises him to desist from using such statement while making public utterances during the period when Model Code of Conduct is in

Thursday to 7 pm on Friday during which he 'shall not be allowed to Mr Basu has been asked

by the EC to explain in the next 24 hours about his threat at a BJP rally in Baranagar of North 24 Parganas. "I, Sayantan Basu, am here to tell you that don't try to play too much. We will play the game of Shitalkuchi. They killed 18-year-old Ananda Burman, a first time voter, in the morning. He was

the brother of the BJP's Shakti Pramukh. We did not have to wait forlong... Four of them were shown the way to heaven. There was a dialogue in the film Sholev you know — if you kill one we will kill four of Shitalkuchi witnessed it — if you kill one we will kill four of you...,' he had said.

Meanwhile Mr Sinha, after the 48-hour ban by the EC on his campaign for his controversial comments on the Shitalkuchi

firing ended, again called for firing by the central paramilitary forces in face of an attack.

He said, "Shooting will follow if the central forces

are attacked again. At least that is what the EC representative is saying. Special police observer Vivek Dubey already stated that fire would be opened for attack on the forces. He echoed me only. Firing should be carried out if forces come under attack.



### THE ASIAN AGE

16 APRIL 2021

### Biden's Afghan exit will hurt India, aid Pakistan

S president Joe Biden's decision to go beyond his predecessor Donald Trump's deadline of May 1 this year for all US forces to pull out of Afghanistan is not unexpected. The Americans people have been long fed up with their longest war which has cost trillions of dollars and 2000 soldiers. The US got Osama bin Laden (hiding in Pakistan with the support of the Army) and that's when the grudge match really ended.

The nation-building project in Afghanistan, beloved of many US Democrats and just a few Republicans too may be, was not going anywhere. So, there appeared no point hanging in there. There were no strategic dimensions to remaining engaged in Afghanistan either. In the current US assessment, if the Taliban were to once again be back in the saddle in Kabul as is more than likely, there is little chance they will seek to cross the oceans and attack the American mainland as the al-Qaeda under bin-Laden had done. America currently has more pressing strategic concerns than Afghanistan — namely China, Russia, Iran, climate change, the

India may be required to do much diplomatic footwork, especially in relation to the

When Mr Biden was vice-president to President Barack Obama, he was among those whose advice was to retain a small counter-terrorism force in Afghanistan. That advice is now evidently deemed obsolete. But why did the Biden administration not adhere to the Trump deadline? Nothing would have been lost by doing so.

Taliban

Taliban

The reasons appear mainly to do with optics. tics. Besides, extending the deadline entails no extra costs for America

From the Taliban perspective, with Pakistan's help if they have held on for so long after being ousted from power in 2001, what is a few months more? The Taliban know they have nothing to lose. In fact, the extra four months may work to the Taliban's advantage as it give them more time to launch more vicious attacks, one of whose (intended) outcomes may be to push domestic Afghan factions into submission before the much-touted "interim" government is brought into some kind of shape through talks. That shape is overwhelmingly likely to be

the one that the Taliban want.

The US was desperately after a "responsible" withdrawal. Historically, the Americans wanted to look good in comparison to the Soviet Union, the withdrawal of whose troops from Afghanistan in the late 1980s was widely deemed ignominious. But the Afghans aren't likely to be fooled by appearances. The interna-

The US pullout, which hardly offers America any political gains in the region, may be expected to make the position of Pakistan, China and, to some extent, even Russia, firmer than hitherto. India, in contrast, may be required to do much diplomatic footwork, especially in relation to the Taliban. Historically, after the Taliban interregnum India had aligned its position with that of the government in Kabul. It may be obliged to stick to that broad line even after the return of the Taliban, no matter in what form. New Delhi has a difficult task on its hands

### Let all follow CBSE's example

With the daily caseload of Covid-19 infections crossing two lakhs, an unprecedented and alarming milestone as yet, on Thursday, the country needs to pull up its socks and fight the virus with all available tools. Precious time has already been lost in augmenting the healthcare system or streamlining the inoculation programme by ensuring adequate availability of vaccine. Any fresh move could take time. In the meanwhile, the government must take whatever steps it can, expeditiously. One major step has been taken when the Central Board of Secondary Education put off the Class 12 examinations and scrapped the ones in Class 10. The government must now see to it that the other national and well as state boards follow suit and eliminate the chances of the pandemic spreading through examination halls.

The government must also target the other potential superspreader events such as religious, political and social gatherings. West Bengal has four more phases of the polling, and electioneering is in full swing with mammoth rallies. The government must check with the Election Commission how it may be possible to curtail electioneering. India has some religious festivals every season; the Kumbh Mela in which millions of devotes attend is under way. Healthcare experts have been demanding restrictions on it but none has been imposed yet. The government must, in consultation with the state government in Uttarakhand and the organisers of the festival, explore the possibility of cutting the duration of the festivities hort and impose stricter controls on the attendees entered into the annual fasting period, which normally ends with a community feast every day and with grand gatherings at the end of the month. The government must consult the community leaders and see how the events do not end up spreading the virus. The absence of a concerted, coordinated and result-oriented approach could land the nation in a larger mess than what it had found itself in when the virus came with the first wave.

### THE ASIAN AGE

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## Covid: Who'll pay price for irresponsible netas?



Karan Thapar

**As I See It** 

politicians all make mistakes. Though they may atone for them later, usually in defeat, they're almost always disinclined to apologise. But I'm not put off by that. If you want them to take decisions, some are bound to be wrong. That's a fact of life. But what irks me is irresponsibility. In particular, refusing to take tough decisions because it does not politically suit them to do so. For this there can be no excuse and little forgive-

Faced with the raging second surge of Covid-19, which is relentlessly soaring at nearly 200,000 cases a day, our politicians have behaved irresponsibly. Worse, they continue to do so. Undeterred by criticism from the media and grave warnings from doctors and public health experts, they are now

What am I referring to? The electoral rallies with several lakh people that were held till very recently in Kerala, Assam and Tamil Nadu and which will continue to dominate the political horizon in West Bengal for the rest of this month. But I am also talking of the Shahi Snans, which have started in Haridwar and will continue for another two weeks. Like the political rallies, these religious baths will attract hundreds of thousands of people, if not millions, and there will be no social distancing and precious little mask wearing.

The rallies and snans could easily become super-spreader events. Some perhaps already have. Others are likely to follow. But even if by some miracle that doesn't happen, is it worth the risk? That may sound like

a rhetorical question but, quite frankly, it is not.

So why are they permitted? Let's take the political rallies first. They are an easy, simple and time-tested way of attracting large crowds and addressing them at one go. They also attract television attention and newspaper coverage. Therefore, they get talked about and that, it's hoped, will create political momentum. This is why politicians are so reluctant to abjure them.

In comparison, virtual campaigning is more difficult, the response isn't easy to assess, and it doesn't create any buzz. Therefore, citing the excuse of democracy, our politicians have continued to physically campaign as if the Covid-19 pandemic belongs to another and far-off world.

In fact, when questioned they've either been defiant, or they have blamed the Election Commission. This is what Hemanta this month: "There is no Covid in Assam ... there is no need to wear a mask in Assam. Why wear masks unnecessarily and create a panic?". Incidentally, he is the state's health minis-

Days later, at a press conference in West Bengal, Union home minister Amit Shah was asked how he justified massive political rallies when the virus was surging past 100,000 cases a day. (Since then, it's crossed a yet higher peak of nearly 200,000 a day.) Without a blush or a moment's hesitation, he said the question should be asked of the Election Commission. It has set the rules and guidelines and his rallies are fully in accord with them. Sadly, I don't recall any journalist asking Mr Shah if this is an adequate answer from the nation's home minister or simply an irresponsible attempt to pass the

A day later the commission spoke out but almost sotto voce and certainly ineffectively. As a national newspaper put it, the commission "will not hes-itate in banning rallies and meetings if precautions are not adhered to". Not surprisingly, they weren't, and equally unsurprisingly the commission retreated to its earlier convenient silence. And so the irresponsibility continues.

Now, let's come to the shahi snans. When Tirath Singh Rawat took over as minister Uttarakhand, he dispensed with his predecessor's insistence on a prior Covid test before participating in a snan. "Nobody will be stopped in the name of Covid-19 as we are sure that faith in God will overcome the fear of the virus", he glibly though very confidently told another national newspaper. Days later he tested positive.

Meanwhile, one newspaper, quoting govern-ment officials, said one crore people were expected to visit Haridwar on April 14, which was Baisakhi, whilst two crore more were anticinated between Anril and 14.

Photographs WhatsApp clips showed that in fact happened. I fear they could soon realise the truth of the old cliche "God helps those who help themselves".

The government will tell you that banning or even restraining the longawaited and deeply loved

The government will tell you that banning or even restraining the long-awaited and deeply loved religious events is hard to do. Of course it is. It could make governments unpopular. But then who said being PM during the worst crisis of the century is easy?

religious events is hard to do. Of course it is. It could make governments unpopular. In a democra-

cy, no one wants that. But then who said that being Prime Minister or chief minister during the worst health crisis in a century is easy? Yet, if British PM Boris Johnson could enforce stringent curbs over Christmas and Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel during Easter, do Prime Minister Modi and CM Rawat lack the strength to behave similarly? If Mr Johnson and Ms Merkel can take unpopularity on the chin, are our netas made of weaker stuff? Or could it be that our lot have deliberately chosen not to act because not only is it easi-

> Finally, just one question remains: how heavy a price will we pay for this irresponsibility? We know the damage the rallies and snans could do can only be estimated two weeks later. That's not too far away. But chances are... it won't be the politicians who will suffer. It will be the poor people of India. The former will bask in their electoral triumphs or boast of dministrative expertise. The latter could end up infected, with sickness and possibly worse

er not to do so but that

will also ensure that they

remain the darling of the

to follow. And then? Before you answer, remember, this is India. I doubt if anyone will hold the errant politicians to account. They come from all our politi cal parties and they'll all get away with it. But it's likely to be very different for the majority, who are poor. If they get infected, fall ill and even die, who will care for and mourn them? They've paid the price of political incompetence for generations, possibly centuries. And as they've always done, they'll pick themselves up, place their faith in God and carry on. I doubt if this time will be any dif-

> The writer is a television commentator and anchor

#### **TEST THE PILGRIMS**

Faith and devotion cannot and must not be allowed to endanger public health as it has been done by allowing lakhs of pilgrims to congregate for the Haridwar Kumbh. The government of Uttarakhand must be severely censured for permitting the event to be held in the prevailing conditions. Cutting short the Kumbh will not solve anything now as the damage has already been done. The only thing to be done now is not allow anybody out of the site with a negative test report.

> **Anthony Henriques** Mumbai

#### **DON'T SCRAP EXAMS**

THIS REFERS TO "CBSE examinations for Class 12 postponed, Class cancelled" (April Undeniably, examinations are not the be all and end all of life. Postponing of Class 12 examinations in the light of a raging pandemic is understandable but calling off the 10th Boards is befuddling. Why two different yard-sticks? Students who were nonchacloud nine while students who toiled throughout the year are feeling distraught. According unfair advantage to one set of students and depriving another from reaping dividends of their hard work is

Deepak Singhal

#### **TAKE A WALK**

THIS IS WITH reference to the recently-published report about the role of brisk walks in fighting Covid-19. Walking 30 minutes a day, five days a week, can reduce severity of the infection. Physical inactivity may land you in IČU and people who regularly exercise had the best chance of beating Covid-19. This is a wake-up call for all of us in terms of understanding the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

Anushka Panwar

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



### Ramping security or building trust: How best to tame **India's Maoists?**

he audacious ambush by Naxals in the Bijapur badlands of the Chhattisgarh state, killing 22 Special Forces policemen and injuring 30 others on April 3, 2021, brought forth the discomforting reality of India's inadequate preparedness in dealing with its most serious internal security affliction, namely, the Naxal-Maoist challenge. That these avoidable casualties are attributed to an operation which was mounted by our own forces to nab the charismatic voung Naxal leader, Madvi Hidma, in the Tekulguda region of Bastar — a hotbed of Naxal activities since decades — makes this tragic incident all the more embarrassing for those

who conceived and mounted it.
The video released by the Naxals, of the release ceremony of police commando, Rakeshwar Singh Minhas, captured by them in this botched-up police operation with a large turnout of cheering local villagers should warn the Indian state to streamline its strategy to combat Left Wing Extremism (LWE) the generic and official name for the Naxal-Maoist insurgency.

Though some in the security establishment have felt that over the years the Maoist-Naxal threat has reduced considerably with the "Red Corridor"

shrinking gradually, the official statistics of India's ministry of home affairs do not convey the same improvement in the internal security operations to counter LWE. MHA figures reveal that only 46 districts are now seriously affected by LWE while 90 districts over 11 states are covered under the special security-related expenditure scheme of the government. The official MHA website also conveys that between 2004 and 2019, 8,197 civilians have been killed by the Naxals, mostly tribals, after brutal tortures as they were branded as "police informers". In addition, between 2018 and November 2020, 460 Naxals were eliminated whilst 161 security forces personnel lost their

lives in the same period.

During the past 15 years or so, the deadly dimensions of Naxal-related violence have manifested many times, surprising our security forces dealing with the Naxal insurgency, primarily in states like Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Odisha, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkand and Bihar. It cannot be ever forgotten how in one of the largest Naxal attacks on security forces personnel, Maoists had killed 75 CRPF personnel in Dantewada district on April 6, 2010. Similarly, on May 25, 2013, 25 senior Congress leaders including former Union Minister Vidya Charan Shukla were massacred in Darbha Valley in Chhattisgarh. The Naxals have successfully snatched weapons from security personnel after killing them, continue employing high-intensity IEDs at will in various innovative ambushes and even managed to hijack a train! The list of Naxal successes is, unfortunately, rather exhaustive.

It will be prudent for India's security establishment to factor in the reality that the burgeoning Maoist-Naxal threat has a distinct external dimension with the wily Chinese supplying arms and ammunition to the Naxals through the "Red Corridor" via our North-East and the Nepal border. These insurgents derive their inspiration from the late Chinese Communist supremo, Mao Zedong, who had once declared that "revolutionary warfare is never confined within the bounds of military action because the purpose is to destroy an existing society and its institutions and replace them with a completely new structure". It is not surprising thus that the Naxal movement, which emerged from the cauldron of agrarian unrest in an unknown West Bengal village of Naxalbari has, over the years, acquired a separatist

and a grave violent orientation. Though, unquestionably, govern-

ments at the Centre and states have brought in some improvements in the fight to counter LWE, yet the recurrence of deadly incidents, occurring off and on, should propel the Centre to conceive and implement a National Strategy. Basic factors, including shameful economic and social disparities that exist in our nation, may give rise to rural and urban unrest but remain largely unaddressed in most of the states. Some well-meaning people have argued that a major root cause of growing Naxalism has been the willful reluctance of the states and the Centre to not promulgate the Ninth and Fifth Schedules of the Constitution which enforces relevant land laws and which will benefit the tribals and poor inhabiting the forests. However, to merely attribute the spread of LWE to poverty and lack of development will be a rather simplistic formulation.

As the Centre and state governments reach out to the poor and hapless to alleviate their sufferings, Naxal leadership must be contacted to give up their armed struggles, embrace the amnesty announced by the governments and join the national mainstream. In the past, unfortunately, it has been experi-

enced that the LWE leadership has not only refused the administration's peace and rehabilitation efforts, but also deliberately targeted developmental activities of the government in the remote areas. Schools, hospitals, post offices and even the labour force engaged in some construction works

have been violently attacked. With alacrity, the Centre will have to re-energise its security strategies to combat the Naxals. Better training, modern light equipment and weaponry for the police and the central forces earmarked for these operations have to ensured. Above all, ground-level intelligence structure using locals needs to be re-invigorated. High-tech gadgetry including sophisticated communication and monitoring equipment, helicopters and drones need to be extensively fielded. The Indian Army must train police and paramilitary commandos in special operations and leadership skills at the combat levels. Finally, synergy between the Centre and states machinery to effectively combat the highly motivated Naxals is paramount.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, was founder of the Defence Intelligence Agency and deputy chief of the Integrated Defence Staff













IN BRIEF

#### **Taiwan transport** minister resigns

Taipei, April 15: Taiwan's government on Thursday said it had accepted the resignation of its transport minister follo-

wing a train crash earlier this month that killed 49 people, the island's deadliest in decades. The April 2 crash was caused by a railway maintenance truck that slid down an embank-

ment and onto the track moments before a high-speed train passed by. The accident, which left more than 200 injured, plunged Taiwan into mourning.

### Lawmaker

### caught naked

Ottawa, April 15: A Canadian Parliament member was caught stark naked in a virtual meeting of the House of Commons. William Amos, who has represented the Quebec district of Pontiac since 2015, appeared on the screens of his fellow lawmakers completely naked Wednesday.

A screenshot obtained by The Canadian Press shows Amos standing behind a desk between the Quebec and Canadian flags, his private parts hidden by what appears to be a mobile phone in one hand.

### Xi to attend

#### climate summit

Beijing, April 15: Chinese President Xi Jinping will join an online French-German climate summit "at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron", Beijing's foreign ministry said Thursday.

The virtual discussions with the key European Union nations—to be held on Friday — come as US envoy John Kerry is in China for environ-

Kerry is not expected to meet with Xi, on a trip which has so far taken place behind closed

#### **Russia threatens Ukraine: Kiev**

Kiev, April 15: Ukraine's foreign minister said Thursday that Russia was flagrantly threatening Ukraine with destruction, as Western countries raise the alarm over an escalation of the separatist conflict.

Foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba said during a press conference that Russian pundits and officials are "openly threatening Ukraine with war and the destruction of Ukrainian statehood." "We condemn Russia's aggravation of the security situation, Moscow's actions and statements aimed at escalating military tensions.

#### U.S. to sell F-35s to the UAE

**Washington, April 15:** President Joe Biden's administration indicated Wednesday it was moving forward with a \$23 billion sale of F-35 fighter-jets to the UAE but was considering restrictions and would not deliver them soon. The State Department shortly after Biden's inauguration in January ordered a review of the massive arms package, which was approved by former president

Donald Trump.
Responding to a lawsuit seeking to block the sale, the State Department said it planned a "robust and sustained dialogue" with the UAE.

### **CHAUVIN WON'T TESTIFY AT FLOYD TRIAL**

Minneapolis, April 15: The defence at the murder trial of former Officer Derek Chauvin in the death of George Floyd wrapped up its case Thursday without putting Chauvin on the stand, presenting two days of testimony to the prosecu-

tion's two weeks. Chauvin informed the court that he would not testify, saying he would invoke his Fifth Amendment right not to take the stand. "Is this your decision not to testify?" Judge Peter Cahill asked. "It is, your honour," Chauvin said.

Some prosecution rebuttal testimony was expected to follow Thursday. Closing arguments are set for Monday, after which the racially diverse jury will begin deliberating at the barbed-wire-ringed courthouse, with Minneapolis on edge against a repeat of the protests and violence that broke out

last spring over Floyd's death. The question of whether Chauvin would testify was the subject of weeks of speculation. The risks were high: Testifying could have opened him up to devastating cross-examination, with prosecutors replaying the video of the arrest and forcing Chauvin to explain why he kept pressing down

### WHO: Europe surpasses 1 million Covid-19 deaths

**Geneva, April 15:** A top official from the World Health Organisation says Europe has surpassed 1 million deaths from Covid-19 and the situation remains serious, with about 1.6 million new cases reported each week in the

region.
Addressing recent concerns about vaccines, Dr Hans Kluge also said the risk of people suffering blood clots is far higher for people with Covid-19 than people who receive AstraZeneca's Coronavirus vaccine.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to Greece, Kluge did point to early signs that transmission may be slowing across several countries and cited declining incidence among the oldest people.

He said the proportion of Covid-19 deaths among people over 80, who have been prioritised for vaccines, had dropped to nearly 30% the lowest level in the pandemic. For now, the risk of suf-

fering blood clots is much higher for someone with Covid-19 than for someone who has taken the Astra-Zeneca vaccine, he said. Let there be no doubt

**LEATHER LINING** 

**BRAND SORRY** 

**IN GANESHA BAG:** 

**London, April 15:** A global fashion brand known for its bedazzled ha-

ndbags issued an apolo-

gy and ceased the prod-

uction of a Ganesha clutch bag with leather lining after protests by In-

dian diaspora groups in

Judith Leiber said that

it would replace the lin-

ing with synthetic after

concerns were raised about the use of leather

alongside the image of a

Hindu deity. "We are deeply sorry to hear that our Ganesh bag has caused offence to the

Hindu community," said

Lela Katsune, President

**COPS CHARGE** 

MAN WITH AXE

London, April 15: British police say they have charged a London man

who was spotted carry-

ing an axe near Buckin-

The city's Metropolitan Police force said private

security guards working

on The Mall, a main

road outside the palace,

detained a suspect Tue-

sday evening after they were alerted to reports

of a man carrying what

appeared to be an axe.

Police said 46-year-old

Vladyslav Dryhval was charged Thursday with possessing an offensive

weapon and possessing a

Dryhval was remanded

into custody and was due to appear at Westmi-

nster Magistrates' Court

Thursday. Police said

there were no reports of

injuries and that it was

not being treated as terrorism-related. Bucking-

ham Palace is Queen Elizabeth II's official Lon-

don residence, though

the monarch has stayed

at Windsor Castle dur-

ing the pandemic. -AP

bladed article.

**NEAR QUEEN** 

**RESIDENCE** 

gham Palace

of Judith Couture.

the United Kingdom.

team up on drug **Zurich, April 15:** Novartis announced Thursday it will join forces with fel- 2021.

low Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche to produce tocilizumab, a drug being tested for its effectiveness against Covid-19-linked pneumonia.

Novartis, Roche

It is the third time Novartis has made its production capacities available to a competitor during the Coronavirus pan-demic, as several laboratories strike unprecedented partnerships to fight the global crisis.

Novartis is already collaborating with BioNTech and CureVac in producing Covid-19 vaccines.

The new tocilizumab deal will see Roche's manufacturing expertise transferred to the Novartis Drug Substance Singapo-

talisation and preventing

about it, the AstraZeneca deaths, he added, saying vaccine is effective in reducing Covid-19 hospi-

"Novartis is fully committed to collaborating with Roche in offering our proven biologics production capabilities," said Steffen Lang, the firm's technical operations

"As one of the world's largest producers of medicines, Novartis can mobilise its manufacturing capabilities on multiple fronts." Sold as Actemra or RoActemra depending on the market, tocilizum-ab is a treatment for rheumatoid arthritis which is also being tested in clinical trials investigating its safety and efficacy against Covid-19-associated pneumonia.

WHO recommends its use for all eligible adults.

### French nationals in Pak told to leave

Islamabad, April 15: The French embassy here on Thursday advised all French nationals in Pakistan to temporarily leave the country after violent protests by a radical reli-gious group that has now been banned by the gov-

rnment.
The Tehreek-i-Labaik
Pakistan (TLP) took to
streets on Monday to launch violent protests to force the government to expel the French ambassador over blasphemous caricatures published last year. Though no French citizen was reportedly targeted so far but the embassy has urged all the French citizens to leave Pakistan, apparently as a precautionary measure.

Due to the serious threats to French interests in Pakistan, French nationals and French companies are advised to temporarily leave the country, the embassy said in an email

THE TEHREEK-I-LABAIK Pakistan took to streets on Monday to launch violent protests to force the government to expel the French ambassador over blasphemous caricatures published last year.

Pakistan. It said that the departures will be carried out by existing commercial airlines.

Interior minister Sheikh Rashid announced on Wednesday to ban the TLP and officials said that Prime Minister Imran Khan and his cabinet endorsed the summary by the interior ministry to outlaw the group.

The trouble began after police arrested the TLP chief Saad Rizvi on Monday ahead of the April 20 deadline by the group to expel the French



during a demonstration against the military coup in Mogok in Myanmar.

The country has been in turmoil since the military seized power from civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi ousted Myanmar ambason Feb. 1, triggering a massador to Britain has sive uprising that the appealed to the British government to help him as he faced eviction from his junta has sought to quell using lethal force.

But protesters have con-London residence. tinued taking to the stre-Kyaw Zwar Minn had to ets, this week using the spend a night in his car Myanmar New Year holilast week after his countrday of Thingyan as their y's military attache barred latest rallying point as the normal festivities have him from the embassy in central London. been cancelled. He told reporters from

In Myanmar's secondlargest city Mandalay, a demonstration by medical workers Thursday turned violent when soldiers opened fire, sending them running to the mosque. They were shooting eve-

rywhere... they were targeting the Sule mosque compound because people in there were hiding protesters," said an eyewitness.

A 30-year-old man who lived in the compound was shot dead, and at least two others were injured, said a London, April 15: The go today and intends to what kind of help he wantstay despite orders from his former staff that he has to move out. The former diplomat had

called for the release of former elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was detained after the military took power in a coup

This photo taken and received from an anonymous source via Facebook on Thursday shows protesters marching

Myanmar troops shoot

at health staff, 1 killed

on Feb. 1.

Asked what he would do over the next few days, he replied: Who can tell? The last time they seized the embassy without warning, so I need to be careful. He did not elaborate on

ed from the British gov-

Britain Secretary Dominic Raab said last week he condemned the bullying actions of the Myanmar military regime in London.

More than 700 people in Myanmar have been killed in a brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protesters and others opposed to February's

unded. "The man who died was shot from the back and it penetrated through his chest." he said.

behind the padlocked gat-

es of his residence in nor-

thwest London on Thurs-

day that he is not going to

A medic who participated in the protest said he saw the arrest of six nurses and doctors during the crackdown. "We lost contact with some medical team members as well," he

care workers have been at the forefront of a nationwide civil disobedience movement, refusing to return to work under a military regime. Their absence has left many of the country's hospitals unstaffed during the pandemic.

Civil servants from other sectors have followed suit, the country's banks, schools, railway operations,

and businesses to a halt.
The junta has tried to force people back to work, and on Thursday, state-run media reported that at least 20 doctors participating in the movement will be charged for attempting to "deteriorate peace and

### Time to end the forever war: Biden

Washington, April 15: President Joe Biden said on Wednesday US troops will be withdrawn from Afghanistan starting May 1 to end America's longest war, rejecting calls for them to stay to ensure a peaceful resolution to that nation's grinding internal conflict.

Foreign troops under Nato command will also withdraw Afghanistan in coordination with the US pull-out, Nato allies agreed. The withdrawal of foreign troops will be completed

by September 11.

Around 7,000 non-US forces from mainly Nato countries, also from Australia, New Zealand and Georgia, outnumber the 2,500 US troops in Afghanistan, but they still rely on American air support, planning and leader-ship. "While our military contribution will reduce, we will continue to support the stability of Afghanistan through our

### India, Pak among nations that have stake in stable Afghanistan troops from Afghanistan by September 11. The US currently has a

**Washington, April 15:** US President Joe Biden has said India, Pakistan, Russia, China, and Turkey have a significant stake in the stable future of Afghanistan and these regional stakeholders should do more to bring peace in this war-torn country, from where he will withdraw all American

troops by September 11. "We will ask other countries in the region to do support

bilateral partnership and in concert with our other nations," Australian Prime Minister Scott nations," Morrison said.

Mr Biden acknowledged US objectives in Afghanistan had become "increasingly unclear" over

**COVID** I CURBS Harry lost honorary titles when he gave up royal duties last year

Philip funeral: Seniors to skip uniforms

Afghanistan, especially Pakistan, as well as Russia, China, India, and Turkey. They all have a significant stake in the stable future of Afghanistan," Biden said in a nationally televised speech from the White

House on Wednesday. In less than 100 days after taking over as the president of the US on January 20, Biden announced to begin to withdraw all American

the past decade and set a deadline for withdrawing all US troops remaining in Afghanistan by September 11, exactly 20 years after al Qaeda's attacks on the United States that triggered the war.
But by pulling out with-

out a clear victory over the Taliban and other radicals in Afghanistan, the United States opens itself to criticism that a withdrawal represents a de facto admission of failure for American military

little over 2,500 troops,

which is far less than the

100,000-plus during the

Barack Obama adminis-

White House press secretary Jen Psaki told

reporters that there is no

military solution to the

Afghanistan, rather a diplomatic solution is

situation

tration.

current

required.

### Blinken in Kabul to sell Biden troop withdrawal plan

**Kabul, April 15:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on Thursday to sell Afghan leaders and a wary public on President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all American troops from the country and end America's long-

Blinken sought to assure senior Afghan politicians that the United States remains committed to the country despite Biden's announcement a day earlier that the 2,500 US soldiers remaining in the country would be coming home by the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that led to the US invasion in 2001. "I wanted to demonstra-

te with my visit the ongoing to commitment of the United States to the Islamic Republic and the people of Afghanistan," Blinken told Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as they met at the presidential palace in Kabul.

"The partnership is changing, but the partnership itself is enduring." 'We respect the decision and are adjusting our priorities," Ghani told Blinken, expressing gratitude for the sacrifices of US troops. Later, in a meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the National Reconciliation Council, Blinken repeated his message, saying that "we have a new chapter, but it is a new chapter that we're writing together."

"We are grateful to your people, your country, your administration," Abdull-

### **OZ TO WITHDRAW LAST 80 TROOPS IN SEPTEMBER**

**Canberra, April 15:** Australia would complete its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in Sep. in line with the United States and other allies, the PM said Thursday.

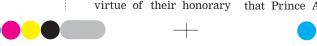
Australia's contribution to the Nato-led mission had once exceeded 15,000 personnel, but only 80 remain. "In line with the United States and other allies and partners, the last remaining Australian troops will depart Afghanistan in Sep.," PM Scott Morrison said, without nominating a day.

"The decision represents a significant milestone in Australia's military history," he added. President Joe Biden plans to withdraw the last 2,500 US troops from Afghanistan before the 20th anniversary of the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the US that

triggered the campaign.

ah said. Nato immediate-

ly followed Biden's lead on Wednesday, saying its roughly 7,000 non-American forces in Afghanistan would be departing within a few months, ending the foreign military presence that had been a fact of life for a generation of Afghans already reeling from more than 40 years



sion means Prince Harry

won't risk being the only

member of the royal fami-

grandfather, who died last

Members of the royal

family often wear uni-

forms to public events by

week at the age of 99.

London, April 15: Senior roles with the British royals must wear civilian clothes to Prince Philip's Royal Air Force. But Harry lost his honorary funeral, defusing potential tensions over who would military titles when he be allowed to don military decided to give up frontuniforms. Queen Elizabeth II's deci-

line royal duties last year. As a result, protocol suggests that Harry, an army veteran who served two tours of duty in Afghanistan, may only wear a suit with medals at royal ly not in uniform during Saturday's funeral for his functions, Britain's *Press* 

Association reported. The decision also sidesteps another potential controversy after reports that Prince Andrew considered wearing an admiral's uniform to his father's funeral. Andrew retains his military titles even though he was forced to step away from royal duties after a disastrous interview with the BBC about his acquaintance with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The funeral is scheduled to take place Saturday at Windsor Castle, with attendance limited to 30 because of Coronavirus restrictions. Philip, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh, served in the

and maintained close ties to the armed forces throughout his life. Military personnel will have a large role in honouring him Saturday despite the attendance limit. Members of the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the Royal Air Force and the British Army plan to take part in the funeral procession. Philip's coffin will be carried to St. George's Chapel specially adapted Land Rover, which he designed himself.

Military personnel rehearsed for the event Royal Navy for 12 years Wednesday at Army Training Centre Pirbright, near London. One of the four Royal Marine buglers who will play "The Last Post" at the service said it was an "honour and privilege" to perform the role. "It's incredibly important. We feel nervous," Sgt Bugler Jamie Ritchie. "We feel the pressure, but we're channelling that and we're using that and we're going to deliver an outstanding

<b>INDICATORS</b>		%
Sensex	48,803.68	0.53
Nifty 50	14,581.50	0.53
S&P 500*	4,160.59	0.87
Dollar (₹)	74.91	0.21
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.34	0.12
Euro (₹)	89.76	0.09
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,301▲159	0.003
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.62	0.06
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.126	-0.03
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.588	-0.048
* As of 8:30 PM IST		

### **WPI** inflation spikes to 7.39% in March

The wholesale price-based inflation shot up to over 8-year high of 7.39 per cent in March on rising crude oil and metal prices. The low base of March last year, when the data was computed with a low response rate due to the lockdown, contributed to the spike in inflation in March 2021. The WPI inflation was 4.17 per cent in February 2021 and 0.42 per cent in March 2020. This is the third month of uptick seen in Wholesale Price Index-based inflation.

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**■** UAE Exchange, Repco among applicants

## 8 apply for SFBs, universal banks

MUMBAI, APRIL 15

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday said that four applicants each have applied for 'on-tap' licences to start universal banks and small finance banks under the private sector. The four that have applied for universal bank licences are Abu Dhabibased remittance house UAE Exchange, government-owned multi state cooperative named Repco Bank, Flipkart co-founder Sachin Bansal-led NBFC MFI called Chaitanya India Fin Credit Pvt Ltd and ex-Citi Banker Pankaj Vaish & others.

This is not the first time that UAE Exchange is attempting a banking foray. It had applied for a universal banking licence in June 2017 as well.

Applicants for small finance banks are VSoft Technologies Private Limited—a provider of banking and payment solutions to financial institutions— Calicut City Service Cooperative Šank Limited, Akhil Kumar Gupta and Dvara Kshetriya Gramin



Financial Services Private

Set up in 2002, Calicut City Service Co-operative Bank caters to customers in the city of Kozhikode in Kerala. In March 31, 2019 the cooperative bank had 1.48 lakh members. It has 24 branches across the city. Dvara Kshetriya Gramin Financial Services, incorporated in 2008, by Dvara Trust provides financial services in rural areas. Details about Akhil Kumar Gupta were not available.

The applications will now be evaluated by the standing external advisory committee, set up by the RBI last month, under former deputy governor Shyamala Gopinath.

In the last round, the RBI gave two universal banking licences in April 2014 to

IDFC First Bank and Bandhan Bank. It gave 10 SFB licences in 2018, incluing to Janalakshmi, Ujjivan, RGVN (North East), among others.

The RBI had issued guidelines for on-tap licensing of universal banks in the private sector on August 1, 2016 and of SFBs on December 5, 2019.

By the 2016 guidelines, entities seeking universal bank licences must be indi-viduals/entities with at least 10 years senior-level experience in banking and finance, private companies or groups with at least 10 years of good track record. Groups or companies seeking licences must have assets of Rs 5,000 crore and their non-financial busi nesses don't account for 40

### CITIBANK TO EXIT CONSUMER BANKING BUSINESS IN INDIA

**Mumbai, April 15:** US banking major Citibank on Thursday announced it will exit the consumer banking business in India as part of global strategy. The business comprises credit cards, retail banking, home loans and wealth management.

The bank has 35 branches in the country and employs about 4,000 people in the consumer banking business.

On Thursday, the bank announced exiting from the consumer banking businesses in 13 coun-tries, with its global CEO

Jane Fraser attributing the decision to an absence of scale to compete in these geographies.

per cent of these assets.

Contours of the exit were not immediately known. Citi had entered India in 1902 and started the consumer banking business in 1985. —*PTI* business in 1985.

### Farm jobs increase by 9 mn in FY21

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 15

Employment in agriculture went up by 9 million in March 2021, a year after the pandemic struck the nation. Rural India has seen a churn as people who lost nonfarm jobs have gone for farm jobs, finds private think-tank CMIE.

As people lost jobs, they moved from one kind of job to another in hunt for a new occupation. Large numbers eventually migrated to agriculture. As a result, employment in agriculture at the last count, in March 2021, was higher by 8 per cent compared to year-ago numbers.

Over 6 million salaried jobs were lost in rural India in 2020-21 and most of these would have migra-ted to farming. Rural India also saw nearly 3 million business persons being ren dered unemployed.

However, productivity of this additional employment is low. Agricultural output is estimated to have increased by 2-3 per cent in almost each of the four quarters of 2020-21. The 8 per cent increase in labour implies a sharp fall in labour productivity.
"We believe that this

huge influx of labour into agriculture during 2020-21 is largely disguised unemployment. It hides the greater employment challenge in March 2021 than the 5.4 million net jobs lost at the end of March 2021," said Mahesh Vyas, CEO, CMIE.

### Travel M&A begins: Flipkart to buy Cleartrip in distress sale

**Ecleartrip** 

CHENNAI, APRIL 15

Marking the beginning of mergers & acquisitions in the pandemic-hit travel sector, Flipkart is acquiring online travel aggregator Cleartrip in a distress

The e-commernce major on Thursday announced its decision to buy 100 per cent of Cleartrip's shareholding. The deal could be a mix of cash and equity and will see Cleartrip valued at \$40 million.

Cleartrip had raised \$75 million so far and was reportedly valued at \$300 million in 2016. Concur Technologies, DAG Ventures and Gund Investment are the key investors of

Cleartrip, which reported revenues of Rs 319 crore and loss of Rs 14 crore in

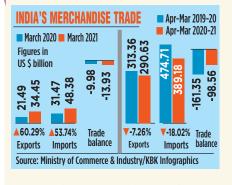
FY20, according to Tofler. Cleartrip will continue to operate as a separate brand, retaining all employees while working closely with Flipkart to

further develop technology solutions to make travel simple for customers. Cleartrip, founded in 2006, has been competing with MakeMyTrip, Yatra,

Most of the online travel aggregators have been suffering losses even before pandemic due to heavy competition and thin margins. The pandemic fur-ther hit the travel as well as hospitality industry badly. According to HVS Anarock, these industries will increasingly witness mergers and acquisition in 2021 owing to the financial stress.

"The Flipkart Group is committed to transforming customer experiences through digital commerce. This investment will help strengthen our wide range of offerings for customers," said Kalyan Krishnamurthy, CEO, Flipkart Group.

### **BUSINESS**



#### WIPRO Q4 NET PROFIT UP 27.7%

New Delhi, April 15: Wipro on Thursday posted a 27.7 per cent jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,972 crore for the March 2021 quarter, and exuded confidence of sustaining strong growth momentum in the coming quarters. Wipro had posted a net profit (attributable to equity holders) of Rs 2,326.1 crore a year ago, as per Ind-AS.

### AMBANI SENDS OXYGEN TO MAHA

April 15: Mukesh

Ambani is diverting

oxygen produced at his

refineries to help India

Its revenue from operations rose by 3.4

per cent to Rs 16,245.4 crore from Rs 15,711 crore in the same period last fis-

cal. Wipro-which gets a bulk of its

topline from IT services—said it expects

revenues from that unit to be in the

range of \$2,195 to \$2,238 million in the June 2021 quarter. This translates into a sequential growth of 2-4 per cent. — *PTI* 



battle a savage coron-avirus outbreak that's mukesh Ambani paralysed the commer-cial capital. Reliance Industries Ltd, has started supplying oxygen from Jamnagar to Maharashtra at no cost, a company official said. Maharashtra will get 100 tonnes of the gas from Reliance, Eknath Shinde, urban development minister, said in a tweet. RIL is diverting some oxygen streams meant for its petcoke gasification units after making it suitable for medical use, the official said.

—Debjit Chakraborty/Bloomberg

### GAMES

SHORT TAKES

### **Chess wizard** Anand bereaved

Chennai: Five-time world chess champion Viswanathan Anand's father. K Viswanathan, died here on Thursday following brief illness. He was 92 and breathed his last at a city hospital, family

sources said. A former General Manager of the Southern Railway, Viswanathan is survived by two sons and a

Anand's wife Aruna described him as a great support to the celebrated chess player. "He was a great support to Anand. He witnessed all of Anand's world championship victories," Aruna said.

"A simple man, he made sure his son had the right values. He took great pride in his achievements,' she added. - PTI

#### **Djokovic bows out** of Monte Carlo

Monte Carlo: World number one Novak Djokovic crashed out of the Monte Carlo Masters in the last 16 on Thursday following a shock 6-4, 7-5 defeat by Britain's Dan Evans. Djokovic, the Monte Carlo champion in 2013 and 2015, was broken five times by the 33rd-ranked Evans and suffered his first loss of the year. having won the Australian Open for the ninth time in February. "To be honest this has been one of the worst matches from my side I can recall in the last few vears," said Diokovic, "I felt awful on the court overall Nothing worked. Just one of those days." - AFP

#### **Aditi gets off to** season's best start

Kapolei, US: Indian golfer Aditi Ashok carded three birdies in her first five holes to get off to her best start of the 2021 LPGA season with a 3-under 69 in the first round of the Lotte Championship. Aditi, playing her fifth event of the year, was under 70 for the first time this year and that should augur well for the 23-year-old from Bengaluru, who

has made the cut in all four previous starts this year. Teeing off from the tenth, she birdied the 10th, 13th and 14th and turned in 3-under. Aditi was four shots behind co-leader Britanny Altomare and Filipina Yuka Saso (64). — *PTI* 

### Olympics could be cancelled Hardik promoted **Tokyo, April 15:** A senior will go ahead safely, but Japanese politician said Nikai said Thursday that Record numbers of cases Japanese politician said cancelling the Tokyo

avirus remains a possibility on Thursday, as a surge in cases renews concerns about the Games with less sion network. We need to cancel it than 100 days to go. Toshiro Nikai, the ruling without hesitation Democratic

Party's number two, said the Olympics must be can-"without hesitacelled tion" if the virus situation

toric postponement, the 2020 Olympics remain beset by pandemic prob-lems, with parts of the torch relay forced behind closed doors and public support consistently low.
Organisers and Olympic

is too severe. A year after their his-

officials insist the Games

all options were on the Olympics over the corontable. "We need to make a decision depending on the situation at the time," he told the private TBS televi-

they're no longer possible," added Nikai, who is the LDP's secretary gener-

Asked if he considered cancellation an option, Nikai said: "Yes of course. infection spreads because of the Olympics, I don't know what the Olympics is for."

He added however that he sees the Games as an "opportunity", and it was "important for Japan to foster excitement with

Toshiro Nikai, the ruling Liberal **Democratic Party's** number two, said the Olympics must be cancelled "without hesitation" if the virus situation

is too severe. support from the public". "We definitely want to

make a success. In order to do so, there are various issues to solve. It's important to solve them one by 'MIGHT BE NO

The comments were quickly dismissed by an unnamed LDP official, who told the Jiji news agency: "The Games will not be cancelled." Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said she had "been

told that the comment meant it is an option". "I take it as a message of strong encouragement that we contain the coron avirus by all means," she

Japan's vaccine minister meanwhile mooted the possibility of a total bar on spectators at the Games.

We'll hold the Olympics in a form that is feasible," the Asahi newspaper quoted Taro Kono as saying. 'There might be no spec-

tators. Nikai's remarks come with fresh worries in Japan about what experts have called a fourth wave

have been reported in Osaka in recent days, and the government has been forced to authorise new restrictions just weeks after lifting a virus state of emergency.

Compounding the prob lem is the comparatively slow roll-out of the vaccine in Japan, which has so far only approved the Pfizer/BioNTech version.

Around 1.1 million people in the country of 126 million have received a first dose of vaccine so far, with the roll-out only expanding to the elderly this week. Despite the problems, Olympic organisers insist the Games can be held safely and have released virus rulebooks to allay public

## in BCCI contracts

New Delhi, April 15: The star trio of India captain Virat Kohli, his white-ball deputy Rohit Sharma and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah retained their top bracket BCCI contracts, worth ₹7 crore each, while all-rounder Pandya earned a promo-

plagued season. A total of 28 cricketers were awarded central contracts in four categories on Thursday.

tion despite an injury-

At this moment in Indian cricket, there are only three certainties across formats and the scenario hasn't changed with Kohli, Rohit and Bumrah being the elite of elites.

All-rounder Pandya is one of the notable promotions to Grade A, which is worth ₹5 crore, despite the fact that he endured a back injury which has prevented him from bowling for much of the last year. He was in Grade B last

"Hardik is very much in line to play Test matches in England and will be one of the most important players after our A+ cricketers when we play the T20 World Cup. So Hardik's promotion is about what he brings to the team. That's what the selectors have factored in," a senior BCCI official said on conditions of anonymity.

LIST OF BCCI'S ANNUAL CONTRACTS

GRADE A+ (₹7 crore): Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Jasprit

GRADE A (₹5 crore): R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Shikhar Dhawan, K.L Rahul, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, Rishabh Pant Hardik Pandya.

Wriddhiman Saha, Umesh Yadav, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Shardul Thakur, Mayank

GRADE C (₹1 crore): Kuldeep Yadav, Navdeep Saini, Deepak Chahar, Shubman Gill, Hanuma Vihari, Axar Patel, Shreyas Iyer, Washington Sundar

Mohammed Siraj.

Rookies Shubman Gill and Mohammed Siraj have got their maiden central contracts worth ₹1 crore in Grade C while Shardul Thakur has been elevated to group B. The trio has been rewarded for lionhearted performances during India's historic Test triumph in Australia

this year. Among the demotions, Bhuvneshwar pacer Kumar has dropped to Grade B, which is worth ₹3 crore, while Kedar Jadhav has been dropped for good.

## Foden fires Man City into semis

**April 15:** Manchester City set up a blockbuster Champions League semifinal against Paris Saint-Germain as Phil Foden's second-half winner sealed a 2-1 victory at Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday to send the Premier League leaders through 4-2 on aggregate.

England midfielder Jude Dortmund an early lead, but a second 1 12 but a second-half Riyad Mahrez penalty and Foden's powerful strike moved City into the last four of Europe's top club competition for the second

Having also scored the 90th-minute winner to give City a 2-1 victory in last week's first leg in Manchester, England Manchester, international Foden again broke Dortmund hearts.

"We are finally in the semi-finals and we're really happy," Guardiola told Sky with his team bidding to win four titles this sea-"The guys deserve it

incredible. Guardiola was full of praise for Mauricio Pochettino's PSG after Mauricio they reached the last four by squeezing past holders Bayern Munich on away

because what they have

achieved this season is

THE RESULTS **Borussia Dortmund** 

(Bellingham 15)
Manchester City (Mahrez 55-pen, Foden (Manchester City win 4-2 on aggregate)

Real Madrid (Real Madrid win 3-1 on aggregate)

"We saw yesterday how strong they (PSG) are, Neymar is an excellent player and they have eliminated the world's best

team," said Guardiola.

"It's time to celebrate

and drink a lot of wine, then prepare to face Chelsea (in the FA Cup semi-finals on Saturday) City had bowed out at the quarter-final stage in each of the last three seasons, and had to come from behind at Signal Iduna Dortmund as shrugged off their indifferent Bundesliga form to take the lead on 15 min-

Four days after scoring his first Bundesliga goal, Bellingham also hit the back of the net for the first time in the Champions -AFP



Manchester City's Phil Foden (right) celebrates after scoring against Borussia Dortmund in their Champions League quarterfinal second leg match in Dortmund, western Germany, on Wednesday.

### **SARITA FIGHTS BACK TO KEEP ASIAN TITLE**

Almaty, April Scripting a sensational comeback, an aggressive Sarita Mor reeled off nine straight points in the summit clash to retain her Asian Championship title in 59kg while Seema Bisla (50kg) and Pooja (76kg) settled for bronze medals here on Thursday. Sarita, who won gold at

the 2020 championship, lagged 1-7 after a botched up challenge but turned it around with a tremendous fight back against Shoovdor Mongolia's Baatariay. Attempting a move at 1-3 on the edge of the mat,

Sarita lost her balance,

allowing her rival to get

one point. However, the Mongolian's coach challenged the call to get her ward four points. From there on, there was no stopping Sarita. She effected a take-down, following it up with an

expose and then one more take down on the edge of the circle to make it 7-7.

At that juncture, time running out fast, the Mongolian camp challenged the call and lost that to give an extra point to Sarita, who won 10-7.

### **ALL-WIN DAY FOR INDIAN BOXERS AT YOUTH WORLDS**

New Delhi, April 15: It was a second successive all win day for Indian boxers at the youth world championships in Kielce, Poland with two from the women's contingent advancing to the quarterfinals after clinching dominating triumphs.

Poonam (57kg) and Vinka (60kg) won their bouts comprehensively to make the last-eight stage on Wednesday While Poonam defeated Hungary's Beata Varga, Vinka sailed past Bosnia and Herzegovina's

Tara Bohatiuk In the men's draw, Asian youth silver-medallist Ankit Narwal (64kg) advanced to the second round after a comprehensive 5-0 win over Slovakia's

Miroslav Herceg. In the 91kg category, Vishal Gupta notched up a comfortable unanimous victory over Bulgaria's Georgi Stoev to enter the round of 16. Also entering the pre-quarters was Vikas (52kg) after getting the better of Bulgaria's Yasen Radev 5-0.

• RAJASTHAN ROYALS • ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE • SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

THE ASIAN AGE, FRIDAY, 16 APRIL 2021, NEW DELHI

### ORANGE Nitish Rana, KKR Sanju Samson, RR Manish

Pandey, SRH **PURPLE** Harshal Patel, RCB **Andre** Russell, KKR

### Off the field

**Avesh** 

Khan, DC



Chris Lynn of Mumbai Indians winds down by surfing in Chenna

#### Kohli rebuked for breaching code

Royal Challengers Banga-lore captain Virat Kohli has been reprimanded for breaching the IPL's Code of Conduct after he was seen kicking a chair in frustration following his dismissal in the game against Sunrisers Hyderabad here. Kohli was not at his fluent best in the game on Wednesday which RCB won the by six runs.

Kohli admitted to the Level 1 offence 2.2 of the IPL's Code of Conduct. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding,' said the IPL in a statement.

Vengalil Narayan Kutty was the match referee in the game while Nitin Menon and Ulhas Gandhe were the on-field

#### Shams, back-up for **Covid-stricken Axar**

Delhi Capitals on Thursday roped in young Mumbai left-arm spinner Shams Mulani as IPL's first short term Covid-19 replacement as he was brought in for Axar patel, who is yet to recover from the dreaded virus and is still in a medical care facility.

DC also has substituted injured captain Shreyas Iyer with Karnataka off-spinner Aniruddha Joshi. However, the media release issued by the IPL doesn't have any details about paceman Anrich Nortje's RT-PCR result, which is believed to be positive.

DC have brought in Shams Mulani as a short-term Covid-19 replacement for Axar Patel," the release stated.

#### Umps got no-ball right: SRH coach

Sunrisers Hyderabad coach Trevor Bayliss has said the umpires got it right by calling Harshal Patel's waist-high full toss a no-ball in the final over before RCB clinched the game by six runs in the IPL here.

SRH skipper David Warner was not happy with that call. 'He (Warner) was a little animated because we weren't playing very good cricket and we lost," Bayliss said refer-ring to Warner.

I think the umpires got it right. There was a bit of conjecture over obviously the second high no-ball, but the first one was not directed at the batter's body, so that wasn't a

warning," Bayliss said.

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## RAJASTUN DELHI

### Miller, Morris shine as Royals turn tables on Capitals

Mumbai, April 15: David Miller's combative 43-ball 62 and Chris Morris' time-ly onslaught (36 not out) powered Rajasthan Royals to a dramatic three-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in their IPL match here on Thursday.

Opting to bowl, RR pacer Jaydev Unadkat took three wickets for 15 runs to restrict the Capitals to

Miller then anchored the Royals' chase but it was Morris whose blitzkrieg took Royals home with two balls to spare. It is Royals' first win of the season.

The Royals were 17 for 3 in the fourth over and 42 for 5 at the halfway mark. They needed 58 from the last five overs and 12 from the final over.

Morris ended the run chase with a six off Tom

Royals' run chase was, however, in tatters as soon as it started. Chris Woakes removed openers Manan Vohra (9) and Jos Buttler (1) in a space of three balls in the third

In the next over, Kagiso Rabada dismissed the dangerous Royals captain Sanju Samson — the only centurion so far this season — with Shikhar Dhawan taking the catch at the slip.
Shivam Dube (2) per-

ished while playing an unnecessary uppish shot at a length ball off Avesh Khan with Dhawan taking his 78th catch of the IPL.

The same pair worked in tandem two overs later with Dhawan taking his third catch of the day after Riyan Parag (2) had miscued an Avesh Khan delivery.

The Royals were 52 for 5 at the halfway mark and by then the asking rate has gone up to nearly 10 an over.

But, Miller and Rahul Tewatia (19) kept the Royals in the hunt with a 48-run stand for the sixth wicket before Rabada came back to give the much-needed breakthrough for the Capitals.

Earlier, a brilliant threewicket burst from pacer Jaydev Unadkat helped RR restrict DC to 147 for 8.



David Miller of Rajasthan Royals plays a shot during the IPL match against Delhi Capitals at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Thursday.

Shaw, Shikhar Dhawan and Ajinkya Rahane to trigger DC's top-order collapse from which they

never recovered fully. ded with nine fours, was not enough as DC could ost a modest total after being put in to bat.

DC made a disastrous Unadkat (3/15 off 4

overs) dismissed Prithvi Unadkat dismissing the opening duo of Shaw (2) and Dhawan (9) cheaply.

Shaw was the first to go in the second over, caught at backward point before Captain Rishabh Pant's blistering 32-ball 51, stud-blistering a ramp shot with RR captain and wicketkeeper Sanju Samson taking a stunning diving catch to his right.

Ajinkya Rahane's (8) start as they were two underwhelming IPL form wickets down for 16 runs continued as he offered an in the fourth over with easy caught and bowled chance to Unadkat with a slow ball that clocked just 110km per hour.

DC were 36 for 3 at the end of power-play but the slump continued as Marcus Stonis (0), foxed by a Mustafizur Rahman (2/29) delivery, checked his shot at the last minute offer a running catch to

Jos Buttler. The run rate started increasing once captain Pant came to the crease but still DC were 57 for 4 at

#### **SCORECARD**

Delhi Capitals: Prithvi Shaw c Miller b Jaydev Unadkat 2, Dhawan c Sanju Samson b Jaydev Unadkat 9, Ajinkya Rahane c & b Jaydev Unadkat 8, Rishabh Pant run out 51, Marcus Stoinis c Jos Buttler b Mustafizur Rahman O, Lalit Yadav c Rahul Tewatia b Chris Morris 20, Tom Curran b Mustafizur Rahman 21, Chris Woakes not out 15, Ravichandran Ashwin run out 7, Kagiso Rabada not out 9. Extras (W-5) 5. Total (for 8 wickets in 20

FoW: 5-1, 16-2, 36-3, 37-4, 88-5, 100-6, 128-7, 136-8. **Bowling:** Chetan Sakariya 4-0-33-0, Jaydev Unadkat 4-0-15-3, Chris Morris 3-0-27-1, Mustafizur Rahman 4-0-29-2, Riyan Parag 2-0-16-0, Rahul Tewatia 3-0-

Rajasthan Royals: Jos Buttler c Rishabh Pant b Chris Woakes 2, Manan Vohra c Kagiso Rabada b Chris Woakes 9, Sanju Samson c Shikhar Dhawan b Kagiso Rabada 4, Shivam Dube c Shikhar Dhawan b Avesh Khan 2, David Miller c Lalit Yadav b Avesh Khan 62, Riyan Parag c Shikhar Dhawan b Avesh Khan 2, Rahul Tewatia c Lalit Yadav b Kagiso Rabada 19, Chris Morris not out 36, Jaydev Unadkat not out 11. Extras (W-1, LB-2) 3. **Total (for 7** wickets in 19.4 overs) 150. FoW: 13-1, 13-2, 17-3, 36-4, 42-5, 90/6, 104/7. Bowling: Chris Woakes 4-0-22-2, Avesh Khan 4-0-32-3, Kagiso Rabada 4-0-Ravichandran Ashwin 3-0-14-0, Tom Curran 3.4-0-35-0, Marcus

the halfway mark. Once he had a full measure of the pitch, Pant opened up and hit four boundaries, three of which were consecutive, to take 20 runs from the 11th over bowled

Stoinis 1-0-15-0.

by Rahul Tewatia. Pant reached his fifty off 30 balls in the 12th over, with a iour oii wiustaiizui but he was run out the next over with bowler Riyan Parag's crashing onto the stumps.

#### **Points** +0.175 0 2 +0.225+0.2002 +0.0520 0 2 +0.0000 2 0 0 - 0.400 - 0.779

POINTS TABLE

## Dhoni & Co. look for winning ways

**Mumbai, April 15:** Chennai Super Kings would look for inspiration from skipper Maĥendra Singh Dĥoni and a much-improved bowling effort when they take on a power-packed Punjab Kings in the IPL here on Friday.

The two sides experienced contrasting fortunes in their respective tourna-

ment opener:
While CSK lost by seven wickets against Delhi Capitals, Punjab Kings eked out a four-run win over Rajasthan Royals in a

high-scoring thriller. With the dew playing a crucial role at Wankhede, the side winning the toss would want to bowl first.

In their first match here, CSK posted a competitive 188 for seven, riding on fine contributions from Suresh Raina (54), Moeen Ali (36), Sam Curran (34), Ravindra Jadeja (26) and Ambati

Rayudu (23).

Despite failures from the opening duo of Rituraj Gaikwad and Faf du Plessis besides skipper Dhoni, CSK managed to put up a decent total on the board.

But the Chennai outfit's bowling unit looked completely out of sorts and clueless against the DC opening duo of Shikhar Dhawan and Prithvi Shaw, who were ominous from the word go and stitched a 138-run stand to take the game away from CSK.

The likes of Deepak Chahar, Sam Curran, Shardul Thakur, Jadeja and Moeen Ali all went for big runs and looked rusty. And come Friday, the

onus would be on master tactician Dhoni to inspire his teammates to lift their eriormance and Punjab a run for their money. But for that to happen, the CSK skipper himself needs to lead from the front after failing to score against DC.

Punjab Kings, on the other hand, had a narrow escape against RR the other despite posting a mammoth 221 for 6 on the board. Opening the bat-ting, KL Rahul played a captain's knock of 91 off just 50 balls. He was ably

### Live on TV

Chennai Super Kings vs Punjab Kings from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD1

### **HEAD to HEAD**

Matches CSK 14 PK

TIE Punjab Kings beat Chennai Super

Kings in Super over after match ended in a tie at Chennai in 2010. **FOR THE RECORD** 

Lokesh Rahul who scored 4933 runs in 140 innings of 153 matches, needs 67 runs to become the 11th Indian and 70th batsman overall to score 5000 runs in Twenty-20 match-

Faf du Plessis who scored 5930 runs in 224 innings of 240 matches, needs 70 runs to become the sixth South African and 45th batsman overall to score 6000 runs in Twenty-

**LAST YEAR'S MATCHES** 

• Chennai Super Kings beat Punjab Kings by 10 wickets at Dubai. • Chennai Super Kings defeated Punjab Kings by 9 wickets at Abu

**STATS:** S. PERVEZ QAISER supported by big-hitting

Chris Gayle (40 off 28) and Deepak Hooda (64 off 28). For Punjab Kings and Rahul, batting is not at all area of concern as they showed with their performance in the opener, but just like CSK, the bowling unit remains a major worry. RR skipper Sanju Samson almost single-handedly took the game away from Punjab Kings rith his whirlwind 63-ball 119-run knock in their opener, but fell short just

by four runs in the end. Young Arshdeep Singh (3/35) eventually emerged às Púnjab's saviour. Besides Arshdeep, veter-

an Mohammad Shami (2/33) too had a decent outting with the ball but the performance of Jhye Richardson (1/55) Riley Meredith (1/49) should be a concern for Punjab.



Suresh Raina chat during a training session.

### Maxwell showing a lot of maturity, says Katich

Chennai, April 15: Glenn Maxwell is proving to be a multi-utility player for Challengers Bangalore besides showing ominous form with the bat early in the IPL, feels head coach Simon

The 32-year-old, who was snapped by RCB for ₹14.25 crore, already has justified the faith shown in him by playing two match-winning knocks in their back-to-back wins this season.

The Australian is also looking to shed the perennial under-performer tag in the IPL.

"He's shown a lot of maturity, particularly today (against SRH on Wednesday), when wick-



Glenn Maxwell

ets were falling around him... He summed up the conditions really well, and took the game deep, that's credit to him for his experience for summing it up and then executing right at the end when we needed some quick runs," said Katich. In the IPL 2020 held in

endured a dismal run with then Kings XI Punjab, scoring 108 runs from 13 matches at 15.42.

He failed to hit a single six and also struggled to get the team over the line on many a times as the Punjab franchise finally gave up on the Aussie ahead of this year's auction.

"He's been magnificent. He's had a big role for us, first in the field helping Virat out there with field positioning to have the right guys in the right places at the right time. He has really embraced it," Katich said in a video posted on their website. -PTI

## **SIRAJ HEAPS PRAISES**

Chennai, April 15: Royal Challengers Bangalore pacer Mohammad Siraj feels that spin bowling all-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed has justified his selection in the playing eleven, following a match-winning performance against Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL here.

Ahmed picked up three wickets in an over to stage a remarkable turnaround for RCB on Wednesday night as the team defended 149 for 8 for their second win in as many games. Ahmed even came out to bat at number three ahead

of Glenn Maxwell and AB de Villiers, a reflection Virat Kohli's faith in the ability of the left-hander. Both Shahbaz Ahmed and Rajat Patidar (who played the last game as Devdutt Padikkal was unavailable)

have been brilliant in the practice games," Siraj said in the post-match press conference. "Shahbaz, as an all-rounder, gives us that extra option with his left-arm spin. The wicket was slow and

turning also. Shahbaz Ahmed fitted into it for this game and did the job for us," he added. "We had overs left of Washington Sundar too. But Virat bhai thought with two right-handers at the

crease, a left-arm spinner could be brought. "He created a chance with Manish Pandey in his first over, and that's why he bowled another, and that changed the game for us," said Siraj. -PTI

Chennai Super Kings captain M. S. Dhoni (left) and

## IPL '21 is bang on track with a hugely local flavour



Hemant Kenkre **Silly Point** 

xpect the unexpected' is an epi-gram commonly used when it comes to describing the vagaries in the game of cricket. As the Indian Premier League (IPL) keeps its trickle on sluggish pitches like the ones seen in Chennai, the results are far from what a fan would expect. Who, for that matter, would have imagined the kind of turnaround wins by holders Mumbai Indians (MI) and pretenders Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) in their last match-

Neither would Punjab Kings (PBKS) fans have

Arshdeep Singh to bowl the last, crucial over with other experienced bowlers around. The 22-year old Sikh kept the faith his skipper had in him and stopped a rampaging Sanju Samson from crossing the line for Rajasthan Royals (RR) in a close game which Punjab won by 4 runs.

wanted their skipper Lokesh Rahul to ask

The contrasting stories that the IPL has had so far has brought into the limeight a new lot of heroes – the uncapped players. Some of whom are not

even on the fringe of national selection. When a Harshal Patel and Shahbaz Ahmed turned around two matches for RCB and were featured prominently in the news the next day, the search engines must have been on overdrive. Ditto with Rahul Tripathi, Avesh Khan, Chetan Sakariya who played pivotal roles for their teams in the past week of the As predicted in my last

column, the 2021 edition IPL was going to be one where newer, local talent would be wanting to make

their mark, which is exactly what has happened in the tournament so far. The uncapped players, that have shown tremendous resilience, particularly in challenging circumstances, have reposed the faith that IPL talent scouts had in them to play the most prized Twenty20 tournament in the world. Players, considered also rans and the bits-andpieces type (with due apologies to them) are now standing up and being

With six of the eight teams being led by Indians

(Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad being the exceptions) the IPL now has a more domestic flavour. Finally, after 13 years, team planners have realised that the value of going local is reaping more rewards than punting on international stars. And, it does not disturb the bank balance. To watch a Sanju Samson lead RR with two international captains, Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes (now injured) in the team is a delight. Likewise when Rishab Pant goes out for the toss for Delhi Capitals instead of the experienced

Ajinkya Rahane. IPL 2021 is bang on track with a hugely local flavour which warms the cockles of ones heart. With relatively unknown (and uncapped players) making headlines, local is now getting 'hyper-local' which is a great sign for Indian cricket. This, coupled with the uncertainties of the game, promises a much more exciting tournament than previous editions. are now eagerly watching and waiting for more 'local' twists in the

Australian Steve Smith or