

NEW DELHI THURSDAY 22 APRIL 2021

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Despite corona crisis in country, Salman's *Radhe* will be released on Eid

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SHORT TAKES

Pvt schools asked to suspend online teaching, learning

New Delhi: All online and semi-online teaching and learning activities shall remain suspended during the summer vacation from April 20 to June 9, the Delhi government directed private schools on Wednesday. The Directorate of Education (DoE) had on Monday advanced summer vacations in view of the deteriorating Covid-19 situation. The vacation, which was scheduled from May 11 to June 3, has now been rescheduled from April 20 to June 9. "It has been brought to the notice of this directorate that despite the summer vacation which has been advanced due to surge in Covid 10 cases, the regular online learning method continues to be adopted in one way or the other by some private schools," the DoE said in an official order. — PTI

Noida records 4 deaths, 536 Covid cases in a day

Noida: Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddh Nagar on Wednesday recorded four more fatalities linked to Covid-19 pushing the death toll to 118 while the district added 536 new coronavirus cases that took its infection tally to 32,133, official data showed. The district's active caseload reached 4,009, the 10th highest in the state, from 3,765 the previous day, according to the figures released by the Uttar Pradesh Health Department for a 24-hour period. During the same period, 288 patients got discharged which took the overall recoveries in the district to 28,006, the fifth highest in the state, it showed. Gautam Buddh Nagar now has a death toll of 118 with a mortality rate of 0.36 per cent. The recovery rate of patients reached 87.15 per cent. Meanwhile, the number of active Covid cases in UP reached 2,42,265 from 2,23,544 on Tuesday while the overall recoveries climbed to 6,89,900. — PTI

Basketball coach arrested for molesting student

New Delhi: A 57-year-old basketball coach was arrested for allegedly molesting his minor student in south Delhi's Hauz Khas area, police said on Wednesday. On April 10, a 17-year-old girl, along with her parents, approached Hauz Khas police station and levelled allegations of molestation against one person who was her basketball coach in Siri Fort sports complex, a senior police officer said. The victim further alleged that when she reached Siri Fort at 6.15 am on that day, after warming up, her trainer molested her. She came home and narrated the entire incident to her parents, the officer said. A case was registered under relevant sections of the IPC and POCSO Act. The accused was arrested on the same day and sent to judicial custody, police said.

SC to hear 'urgent matters' only through video-conferencing

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

With surge in Covid cases assuming alarming proportion in the national capital, the Supreme Court has decided to hear urgent matters only from Thursday (April 22, 2021) onwards while adjourning all other matter listed for hearing tomorrow (Thursday).

Saying that only urgent matters which brook no delay will be taken up for hearing, a circular issued by the top court has said, "Only urgent matters will be listed for hearing w.e.f. 22.04.2021" and "The Regular Courts and the Registrar Courts shall not sit from 22.04.2021 onwards till further orders..."

The circular uploaded on top court website late on Wednesday evening says the application for the mentioning of the fresh matters for urgent listing by the advocate-on-record or the petitioner in person shall be made on five days - Monday to Friday - by 01.00 P.M. and by 11.30 A.M. on Saturday.

The application for men-

tioning for an urgent listing of fresh matters will be accompanied with synopsis giving grounds of urgency and the same will not exceed one page. It will be processed for listing on the next to next working day, subject to availability of concerned bench and approval of the competent authority.

The application will be sent by email id mention.sc@sci.nic.in. The same is the procedure for the listing of the applications in already pending matters for an urgent hearing. The appli-

cation in the pending matters or in disposed of matters will be sent on email id mention.sc@sci.nic.in.

The circular says the matters for urgent mentioning shall be as per the guidelines laid down in the circular of 23.01.2019. It also annexed the list of 15 kind of matters in that circular that will be entertained for urgent hearing, including those related to death penalty, imminent demolition of property or eviction, anticipatory bail, admissions in educational institutions, elections where the last date for nomination, withdrawal, election is to expire, auction or sealing of premises in case of bank default and medical termination of pregnancy.

The 2019 circular also lists 16 matters that shall not be entertained for the urgent hearing.

Four top court benches will hear on Thursday urgent matters listed before the benches headed by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, Justice Uday Umesh Lalit, Justice A.M. Khanwilkar, Justice Surya Kant.



A deserted look of Laxmi Nagar market due to the lockdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus in New Delhi on Tuesday. — G.N Jha

Migrants hoping to leave for home turn up at night shelters

New Delhi, April 21: The migrant workers leaving Delhi amid the ongoing six-day lockdown imposed by the city government have started turning up at the night shelters of the DUSIB, seeking food and rest before managing to catch buses and trains to their native places, officials said on Wednesday.

The Delhi government on Tuesday announced various measures, including provisions of food, shelter and medicines for the migrant workers, many of whom have been trying to leave Delhi, fearing an extended lockdown. The government has provided stay and food facilities to the migrant workers at the 205 night shelters run by the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board

(DUSIB) across the city, the officials said. "Some migrant workers turned up at the shelter homes, especially those closer to the ISBTs and railway stations, for food and rest. Their number is, however, far too less compared to the exodus when the lockdown was imposed in March 2020," a DUSIB official said.

Lieutenant Governor (LG) Anil Baijal and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal have appealed to the migrants to stay back in the national capital and said the city government will provide food, shelter and medicines to them.

However, the migrants are turning up at the inter-state bus terminals and railway stations, hoping to leave Delhi.

The lockdown imposed in the national capital on

Monday will be in force till 5 am on April 26.

The city government, in a bid to help the construction workers registered with its welfare board, has proposed to provide a financial assistance of ₹5,000 each to them.

A committee of top officers of the Delhi government has been formed to ensure the implementation of the welfare and relief measures for migrant workers, daily wagers and construction workers.

The principal secretary (home) and the special commissioner of police have been appointed as the nodal officers to coordinate and supervise matters related to the welfare, provisions of basic amenities and movement of the migrant workers. — PTI

■ No of active cases reduced to 85,364 from 85,575 day before

Delhi records over 24K Covid cases, 249 deaths in 24 hours

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

Delhi logged 24,638 fresh Covid-19 cases and 249 deaths due to the viral disease on Wednesday as the positivity rate stood at 31.28 per cent, meaning almost every third sample turned out to be positive, amid a growing clamour for oxygen and hospital beds in the city.

Only 18 ICU beds for COVID patients were available in hospitals across Delhi at 11 pm, according to government data.

On Tuesday, the city had registered a record 28,395 cases and 277 fatalities, the highest since the outbreak of the pandemic. The positivity rate was 32.82 per cent, also the highest so far.

The city has reported over 1,350 deaths due to the deadly virus in the last seven days.

On Monday, Delhi had recorded 23,686 cases with a positivity rate of 26.12 per cent and 240 fatalities.

The national capital witnessed 25,462 cases with a positivity rate of 29.74 per cent on Sunday. On Saturday, 24,375 Covid-19 cases and 167 deaths were reported in the city.

It witnessed 161 deaths on Sunday, 167 on Saturday, 141 on Friday and 112 on Thursday.

With the fresh cases, Delhi's Covid-19 tally has risen to 9,30,179 and the death toll stands at 12,887, according to the latest health bulletin.



Medics push a stalled ambulance carrying a Covid-19 patient outside Lok Nayak Jaiprakash Narayan Hospital in New Delhi on Wednesday. (below) Relatives of a Covid-19 victim outside LNJP Hospital on Wednesday. — PTI

A total of 78,768 tests, including 45,088 RT-PCR tests, were conducted the previous day, the bulletin said. So far, over 8.31 lakh patients have recovered from the disease in Delhi, it added. The number of active cases in the city has reduced to 85,364 from 85,575 the day before, the bulletin stated.

The number of people under home isolation has increased to 42,768 from 40,124 on Tuesday, while that of containment zones has mounted to 19,624 from 17,151 the day before, it said.



Haryana blocked oxygen supply to Delhi: Sisodia

State govt vehemently denies charge, Haryana minister Anil Vij says Delhi govt 'looted' tanker

New Delhi/Chandigarh, April 21: Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia accused the Haryana government on Wednesday of blocking medical oxygen supply to Delhi, where several hospitals scrambled to save lives of coronavirus patients amid its shortage for the second consecutive day.

The Haryana government vehemently refuted the allegations, underlining that no one in the administration had hampered anything. Addressing a press conference, Sisodia said the AAP government had been demanding that the Centre increase Delhi's quota of oxygen from 378 metric tonnes to 700 metric tonnes.

The central government, which decides the quota of oxygen for states, is yet to take a step in this direction, the deputy chief minister said.

"We again demand that the Centre increase our oxygen quota to 700 MT in view of the increased consumption. Patients from several states, including Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, are admitted



People carry empty Oxygen cylinders for free refilling provided by Residence Welfare Association (RWA) of Turkman Gate in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

in city hospitals," Sisodia said.

He claimed that an official of the Haryana government stopped oxygen supply from a plant in Faridabad.

Sisodia said a similar incident occurred in Uttar Pradesh a day ago and it led to a crisis in some hospitals, adding the oxygen supply had been restored now.

He demanded that states should get their allotted share of oxygen without others interfering into it. Reacting to it, Haryana

chief secretary Vijai Vardhan told PTI: "No supply has been stopped to Delhi. This is not true."

Earlier in the day, Haryana health minister Anil Vij alleged that a tanker carrying medical oxygen for Covid patients in hospitals, which was going from Panipat to Faridabad, was "looted" by the Delhi government and said all oxygen tankers will now move with police escort.

Several hospitals in Delhi alleged that the Haryana government was



Anil Vij



Manish Sisodia

not allowing vendors to supply oxygen to them and there was only limited stock left as hundreds of coronavirus patients battled for their life in these facilities.

"The vendor, as per its representative, is not being allowed by the Haryana government to supply oxygen cylinders and liquid oxygen to Sir Ganga Ram City Hospital, Pusa Road. Supply left is sufficient only for five hours," the official said.

A spokesperson of St Stephen's Hospital said: "The Haryana government has not been allowing our vendor to supply oxygen to us. Of the 350 patients in the hospital,

around 200 are on oxygen support," he alleged.

Manipal Hospitals CEO Pramod Alagharu said their supplier was willing to supply oxygen from its Faridabad unit.

"However, an officer has taken control over the plant. We have only 12 hrs of supplies left," he said.

Faridabad deputy commissioner Garima Mittal denied the allegations. "There is absolutely nothing like that. Some storage tankers of the company were reaching Faridabad plant from Meerut and once they reach as usual, they will fill and supply," Mittal told PTI.

From the Faridabad

The AAP government had been demanding that the Centre increase Delhi's quota of oxygen from 378 metric tonnes to 700 metric tonnes. The central government, which decides the quota of oxygen for states, is yet to take a step in this direction.

— Manish Sisodia, Delhi Dy CM

plant, the supplies go to 32 hospitals, out of which 25 are in Delhi, Vardhan said, adding that the supply would reach in routine.

Some major government and private hospitals in Delhi received a fresh stock of medical oxygen in the early hours of Wednesday, averting a crisis just in time, according to officials. This stock should last till 9 am on Thursday, an official said.

Covid task force chief in AIIMS urges for more doctors

New Delhi, April 21: The head of the medicine department at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here has requested his colleagues from other departments to provide 80 per cent of the resident doctors and faculty members for Covid-19 management.

In an urgent request, Dr Naveet Wig, who is also the chairperson of the hospital's Covid-19 Task Force, said in view of an alarming rise in the number of patients suffering from the disease and the opening of multiple Covid-19 facilities in the hospital, the need of manpower has increased multi-fold.

"To meet this demand, as directed by the director, you are requested to provide 80 per cent of your residents and 80 per cent of your faculty members for Covid-19 management," the request stated. "Please provide the names of residents and faculty members urgently from your department to finalise the roster at the earliest," it added. — PTI

Cops save lives by arranging oxygen for hospitals, providing green corridors

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21

From arranging oxygen cylinders to providing green corridors to facilitate movement of oxygen tankers, supplying food to admitting covid-positive patients to hospitals, the Delhi Police personnel have saved lives of hundreds of patients by going beyond the call of their duty to serve public.

Since the last two days, the police have been flooded with requests by the city hospitals to arrange oxygen cylinders amid shortage of supply during the ongoing pandemic.

On Wednesday, lives of 32 covid-19 patients were saved after Delhi Police managed to arrange 11 oxygen cylinders for Amarleela Hospital in west Delhi's Janakpuri after they got a distress call around 9 am saying oxygen stock at the facility was nearly exhausted. "Police contacted local

Since the last two days, the police have been flooded with requests by the city hospitals to arrange oxygen cylinders amid shortage of supply during the ongoing pandemic

oxygen suppliers and succeeded in finding medical oxygen. Eleven cylinders were arranged for the hospital from three different locations — Kirti Nagar, Gole Market and Mayapuri," additional deputy commissioner of police (west) Prashant Gautam said.

In another instance, a green corridor was provided to facilitate movement of a truck carrying oxygen containers from Singhu border to Jaipur Golden Hospital in Rohini which was running out of supply.

"A green corridor was established for quick movement of the oxygen tanker. Under police

escort provided by Alipur police station, the oxygen tanker was escorted to Jaipur Golden Hospital and it was ensured that the oxygen truck safely reached the hospital in minimum possible time," said Rajiv Ranjan Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North).

Again lives of 130 patients were at risk due to shortage of oxygen supply at Santom Hospital. The Medical Superintendent of facility approached Rohini district police which then managed to arrange oxygen cylinders and created green corridor for the ambulance which was carrying oxygen cylinders for the critically ill covid-19 patients at the facility.

Life of another Covid-19 patient in isolation in southwest Delhi's Vasant Vihar was saved on Wednesday after police managed to arrange oxygen cylinder within minutes of receiving informa-

tion, police said. On Tuesday, the Jangpura police post of southeast district came to the rescue of covid-19 patients by arranging 10 oxygen cylinders for Holi Family Hospital and five oxygen cylinders for Jeevan Hospital.

In northwest Delhi's Trinagar, the police came to the rescue of a 51-year-old covid positive man on Tuesday night after his wife requested police to arrange an oxygen cylinder for her husband whose oxygen level fell below 50 and could not be admitted to hospital due to shortage of bed.

In another instance, a 71-year-old Covid-19 positive woman in Bharat Nagar area was admitted to Deep Chand Bandhu Hospital by beat constable Harkesh after an information was received that her health condition was deteriorating. She lives alone here as her son is in Singapore, the officer said.

SHORT TAKES

**Bengal Cong chief
Adhir tests positive**

New Delhi: Congress leaders Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and Shashi Tharoor tested positive for the coronavirus infection. Mr Chowdhury, the Congress leader in the Lok Sabha, said he will continue to campaign for the West Bengal polls through virtual mode. "I have been tested covid positive, requesting all who came in contact with me for the last 7 days must comply with covid protocols, I will be continuing my campaign through the virtual platform," Adhir said on Twitter. Congress MP Tharoor also confirmed that he has tested positive for the infection. After waiting two days for a test appointment and another day & a half for the results, I finally have confirmation: I'm #Covid positive. Hoping to deal with it in a positive frame of mind, with rest, steam & plenty of fluids. My sister & 85 year old mother are in the same boat, he tweeted. — PTI

**Panchayat polls
put off in Bihar**

Patna: The state election commission on Wednesday decided to postpone issuing notification for the panchayat polls for now in view of the raging coronavirus cases in Bihar. Preparations were underway to issue order for the panchayat elections by the end of April. Considering Covid-19 surge it has been decided to put off announcement of polls for the rural bodies for now, a statement of the state election office said. "Further decision will be taken upon reviewing the situation after 15 days," the statement said. Many staff of the state election office have also tested positive for the disease. Election process for panchayats has to be completed by June 15 when the term of the three-tier local bodies end. The elections will be held for 2.58 lakh posts under Panchayati Raj Institutions. — PTI

**Odisha cancels
Class 10 exams**

Bhubaneswar: Under mounting pressures from parents and students, the Odisha government cancelled the annual high school certificate examinations. The announcement was made by school and mass education minister Samir Ranjan Dash in the morning. The cancellation move came just a day after the state government faced a backlash from Class 10 students for delay in taking a final decision with regard to holding the examinations. "After reaching a conclusive decision following detailed discussions with all stakeholders, we are cancelling the annual Class 10 examinations in view of the worsening pandemic situation," the minister told the media. — PTI

**BENGALI POET
SHANKHA GHOSH
DIES DUE TO COVID**

Kolkata: Noted Bengali poet Shankha Ghosh died on Wednesday morning while he was in isolation at his residence after testing positive for Covid-19, his family said. Ghosh, 89, was found to be Covid-positive on April 14. He was in home isolation on the advice of doctors, according to health department sources. Ghosh, who suffered from several comorbidities, was hospitalised a few months ago due to deterioration of his health condition. Considered to be having authority on Rabindranath Tagore, Ghosh is known for *Adim Lata* — *Gulmoma* and *Murkha Baro Samajik Nay*, among other books. Ghosh, known for being vocal on various social and political issues, was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2011 and conferred the prestigious Jnanpith Award in 2016. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1977 for his book *Babarer Prarthana*. His works have been translated into several languages, including English and Hindi. Ghosh is survived by his daughters Semanti and Srabanti, and wife Pratima. Literature Subodh Sarkar said Covid snatched away Ghosh when he was needed the most as "the state was faced with the threat of fascism". "He was soft-spoken but his pen was razor-sharp, always speaking against intolerance. He used to be a participant in all conventions and movements for free and liberal thinking," Sarkar said. — PTI

Hike of Covishield price invites Opp. wrath

Cong demands one nation, one price for vaccines, Stalin slams Centre for differential pricing

**AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, APRIL 21**

The Congress and its ally DMK on Wednesday lashed at the differential pricing for Covid vaccines, saying it was discriminatory and will benefit only a "few big industrialists" while common people will suffer.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took to Twitter to alleged injustice on the part of the Central government and compared the new vaccine policy to demonetisation.

"Disaster of the country, opportunity for friends of Modi. Injustice of the central government," he said in a tweet using the hashtag "#VaccineDiscrimination" and shared the statement of Serum Institute announcing a price of ₹400 per vaccine dose to states and ₹600 to private hospitals.

"The Central government's vaccine strategy is no less than the demonetisation. The common people will stand in queues, will suffer loss of wealth, health and life and in the end only a few big industrialists will benefit," Mr Gandhi said in another tweet.

Addressing a press conference, Congress's senior spokesperson Ajay Maken said it is unfortunate that the Centre is getting the vaccine at ₹150, but it is not being made available at the same price to states.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh tweeted, "The Central government will continue to pay ₹150 per dose for Covishield. The state governments will now be charged ₹400 a dose. This is not cooperative federalism. This will bleed dry the already reeling state finances. Atrocious! We demand One Nation, One Price for Centre and states."

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi also hit out at the Centre for not taking constructive suggestions from Opposition parties but ridiculing them.

Free vaccine for all above 18 in 5 states

Guwahati/Lucknow/Bhopal, April 21: Three BJP-ruled states of Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh and Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh and Kerala Wednesday announced all adults above the age of 18 years would be provided free Covid-19 vaccination in the state from May 1.

Donations received last year for Covid management will be utilised for the purpose, Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Uttar Pradesh government has also decided to administer vaccine free of cost to all those above 18 years of age from May 1. The decision was taken at a cabinet meeting chaired by chief minister Yogi Adityanath.

Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel also announced to provide vaccination free of cost to all above 18 years of age and urged the Centre to make sufficient quantities of vaccine available to the state. — PTI

Speaking to a news agency, she said that the export of six crore vaccines between January and March 2021 was a huge public relations exercise and during this same period, Indian citizens received only three to four crore doses.

DMK president M.K. Stalin also expressed concern over the "differential pricing" for Covishield vaccines, calling it "discriminatory" and urged the union government to ensure common prices for all.

Mr Stalin expressed "shock" and concern over SII fixing ₹400 per for its vaccine for state governments and wondered if states, including Tamil Nadu, can shoulder the 'burden' amid existing financial constraints.



Covid-19 patients at Zakir Hussain Municipal Hospital after medical oxygen gas leaked out from a storage unit in Nashik on Wednesday, leading to interruption in supply of oxygen to the patients. At least 22 patients died due to the leakage. — PTI

94 bodies cremated in Bhopal, official Covid toll 3

**RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, APRIL 21**

Gross discrepancies between the official data on Covid deaths in Bhopal and the records of the crematoriums here has come to the fore, giving rise to suspicion on a bid by the state government to cover up the deaths due to Coronavirus.

In Bhabhada Ghat crematorium in Bhopal, around 70-80 bodies were being cremated with Corona protocol every day for the past three weeks, but the official toll due to Coronavirus never reached the double figure in Bhopal during the period.

"Of the 113 bodies cremated in Bhabhada Ghat crematorium on Tuesday, 94 were cremated with corona protocol", Mamtesh Sharma, secretary of Bhabhada crematorium told this newspaper on Wednesday.

However, the Covid bul-

MADHYA PRADESH recorded 13,107 fresh Coronavirus positive cases taking the tally of cases to 4,468.91. The state recorded 75 deaths.

letin issued by MP health department on Tuesday stated that three people died of Covid-19 on the day. Similarly, of the 108 bodies cremated in the crematorium on Wednesday till six in the evening, 93 were cremated with corona protocol.

However, the official bulletin issued by the state health department on Wednesday confirmed only five deaths due to Covid-19 on the day.

On April 19, of the 95 bodies cremated in the crematorium, 83 were cremated with corona protocol. The official toll was five.

On April 18, total 77 bodies were cremated in the crematorium. Of them, 68 were cremated with corona protocol. But, the offi-

cial toll was three. The records of Bhabhada Ghat crematorium showed that a total of 762 bodies were cremated from April 1-17. Of them, 628 were cremated with corona protocol.

However, the official death toll due to Coronavirus in Bhopal during the period has been put at less than 70.

Health department officials, however, said there were many suspected cases of Covid deaths. Such bodies were cremated with corona protocol in the interest of the safety of the kin of the deceased as well as the people involved in cremations.

But the deaths were recorded as Covid deaths after their reports were found positive.

On Wednesday, Madhya Pradesh recorded 13,107 fresh Coronavirus positive cases taking the tally of cases to 4,468.91.

The state recorded 75 deaths on Wednesday taking the death toll to 4,788.

Indrani among 38 Byculla jail inmates found +ve for Covid

**SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, APRIL 21**

A day after the Bombay High Court heard a suo moto (on its own) public interest litigation on increasing number of Covid cases in Maharashtra prisons 38 inmates of Byculla jail, including former INX Media chief Indrani Mukerjea, have been tested positive for the virus. Same day 58 people at Panvel's old age home have also been found Covid positive.

Byculla prison is situated in the heart of the city where maximum inmates are females. Last year Indrani had applied for temporary bail for 45 days on the ground that there is a high risk of contracting Coronavirus in Byculla prison where she has been kept.

Special CBI judge J.C. Jagdale on July 15 last year had rejected her bail plea.

BJP MP held for role in Pune gangster's car rally

**SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, APRIL 21**



Sanjay Kakade

A HUGE car rally was taken out from Taloja Central Prison in Navi Mumbai to Marne's house in Kothrud in Pune, via Pune Mumbai Expressway. Hundreds of high-end cars were part of the rally, which was taken out after Marne was released from Taloja prison

The Pune police Wednesday arrested former BJP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Kakade on the charge of playing a key role in organising a rally for Gajanan alias Gaja Marne, a criminal in police records. Hundreds of Marne's supporters took part in the vehicle rally from Taloja jail in Navi Mumbai to Pune on February 15 following his acquittal in a murder case.

Pune city police Commissioner Amitabh Gupta said Kakade had been arrested for planning the rally.

A huge car rally was taken out from Taloja Central Prison in Navi Mumbai to 54-year-old Marne's house in Kothrud in Pune, via Pune Mumbai Expressway. Hundreds of high-end cars were part of the rally, which was taken out after notorious

gangster Gaja Marne was released from Taloja prison in the second week of February after his acquittal in two murder cases.

The rally created a major controversy, several offences have since been registered against Marne and his aides in connection to the celebratory procession.

The particular offence against Marne, in which Kakade has been arrested, pertains to conspiring to arrange the car rally and then spreading its images and videos on social media platforms with a motive to terrorise people.

The offence, in this case, is registered at

■ Mindtree co-founder Bagchi ₹340cr to set up hospital Bizmen open coffers to fight Covid

**AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 21**

As Odisha government battles to cope with the Covid-19 blues, top Odia entrepreneurs, including software major Mindtree's co-founder Subroto Bagchi and managing director (MD) and chief executive officer (CEO) of Orissa Stevedores Limited (OSL), Mahimananda Mishra have come out in a big way to extend their cooperation to the state government to meet the healthcare and other challenges.

Mr Bagchi, who is also heading the state govern-

ment's Skill Development Authority as its chairman, has donated Rs 340 crore for setting up a state-of-the-art hospital. Reciprocating his generosity, the state cabinet has approved a proposal to provide 20 acres of land for the hospital project. The 600-bed hospital, apart from providing palliative or integrated and people-centred health services, will have 500 beds for cancer treatments.

Business leader Mahimananda Mishra, promoter of Gopalpur port and many other ventures has turned a Good Samaritan for thousands of common people and

his own employees during the current Covid-19 crisis by extending essential supports ranging from healthcare services to education requirements of children. Spending crores of rupees, Mr Mishra has ensured that the livelihoods of thousands of employees as well as workers in port cities of Paradip, Gopalpur and other operational areas are not affected by the Covid-19 crisis.

"During this pandemic period, we worked with state government agencies to reach out to the distressed people in our projects areas in Paradip in Jagatsinghpur and

Gopalpur in Ganjam districts," Mr Mishra told this newspaper.

Mr Mishra has collaborated with private healthcare service providers to ensure that the pandemic-affected employees and their family members avail themselves the requisite medical attention free of cost under the proper monitoring of doctors and nurses.

He added that the OSL group along with volunteers provided thousands of PPE kits, multivitamin supplements, immunity-boosting pills, distribution of foods and refreshments during the nightmarish lockdowns and shutdowns.

Tears, anger at Nashik hospital, kin seek answers

Nashik (Maharashtra), April 21: Family members could not contain their tears as well as anger as they mourned the death of their kin following the disruption of oxygen supply at the Zakir Hussain municipal hospital here.

Some of the 22 Covid-19 patients who died in the tragedy were recovering and about to get discharge, their relatives told mediapersons.

As the news spread, family members rushed to the ward where Covid-19 patients on ventilator were undergoing treatment.

There were heart-wrenching scenes as patients' condition became critical and doctors and nurses could not do anything in the absence of oxygen supply, one witness said.

The brother of 42-year-old Pramod Walukar could not stop his tears.

"My brother was about to get discharge in the next two days as his condition was improving. Today when I brought him tiffin, he said he would eat later.

"Immediately after our conversation the hospital ran out of oxygen and within two hours my brother was dead," he said. The relative of another victim said the hospital management was callous and must be held responsible.

A woman, whose mother Leela Shelar (60) died during the incident, said had her mother received good treatment, she would have survived.

Another woman, who also lost her mother, said her condition was improving. "But the oxygen supply got disrupted and she died gasping for breath," she said, sobbing.

"My grandmother died before my eyes... The hos-

pital management is responsible for this," said a man.

One relative claimed that there was no oxygen supply for almost two hours and had the hospital stocked some oxygen cylinders, lives could have been saved.

A woman said her mother could not get a hospital bed for two days, and when it became available, she lost her life for lack of oxygen.

As angry and weeping relatives demanded answers, hospital authorities had to ask the police to restrict the entry into the Covid-19 ward.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi condoled the death of patients at a Nashik hospital and urged the Maharashtra government to provide all assistance to the affected. "The news of patients' death at Nashik's Zakir Hussain Hospital is extremely tragic. My heartfelt condolences to the aggrieved families.

"I appeal to the state government and party workers to provide all possible assistance," Mr Gandhi tweeted.

At least 22 Covid patients on ventilator support died due to the interrupted supply of medical oxygen caused by leakage of gas from a storage plant, officials said.

Chief minister Uddhav Thackeray announced financial assistance of Rs five lakh each to the families of the 22 patients. President Ram Nath Kovind said he is deeply distressed by the unfortunate incident.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over the death of at least 22 patients at a Nashik hospital after the oxygen supply was interrupted due to a leakage in the storage plant. — PTI

Mystery shrouds Remdesivir 'theft' from MP hospital

**AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, APRIL 21**

Mystery shrouds the recent alleged theft of 853 Remdesivir vials from a government hospital here with the bulk of 'stolen' life saving drug 'resurfacing' in its store room.

The development that came to light late on Tuesday has uncovered a racket involved in the illegal supply of the life saving drug from the hospital to some influential people to treat their kin or acquaintances admitted in Covid hospitals in and outside Madhya Pradesh, a member of the crime branch team that is probing into the incident told this newspaper.

As many as 17 boxes containing 853 vials of Remdesivir were found stolen from the Central store room of government-run Hamidia hospital here on the intervening night of April 16-17.

Around 70 per cent of the 'stolen' Remdesivir vials, however, were found in the Central store room of the hospital late on Tuesday,

leaving the probe team puzzled.

Sources said the discrepancies in the records of availability of Remdesivir in Central store room and the requisition of the life saving drug by the doctors in the hospital, spotted by the probe team during course of investigation has given rise to suspicion that a racket was operating in the hospital to make the drug 'disappear'.

The probe team also suspected it was an "insider's job". "The mismatch of the two records has suggested that there was no theft of the vials, but they were issued by the staff", crime branch additional superintendent of police Gopal Singh Dhakad said.

The probe team has also "interrogated" hospital superintendent I.D. Chourasia.

Incidentally, hours after Dr Chourasia's interrogation by police, around 450 of 853 "stolen" vials of Remdesivir were found in the Central store room of the hospital, leading to uncovering of the racket.

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED



Rukshaar

General Public is hereby informed that a girl namely **Rukshaar**, D/o Jafir Alam, R/o D-1386, JJ Colony, Bawana, Delhi, Age: 17 years, Height: 5', Complexion: Fair, Face: Long, Build: Thin, Wearing: Light Green ColourJeans Pant, Grey Colour Chunnii and Grey Colour Slipper in her feet has been missing/ kidnapped from her home since **03.04.2021**. In this regard a case **FIR No. 161/21, u/s 363 IPC** dated **05.04.2021** has been registered at **P.S. Narela Industrial Area, 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** **SHO**
Fax : **011-24368639** **P.S. Narela Industrial Area, Delhi**
DP/955/ON/2021 **Ph.: 011-27787593, 7065036324**

A majority of the candidates fielded by the Left are under 40. Mr Banerjee felt that the Bengali youths were responding to this red young cadre, who are expected to come up with fresh ideas and a new vision. Yet it is a long way to go. A CPI(M) central committee member speaking on the issue argued that the "paradigm shift is not going to produce an instant result." For him, "the process to infuse fresh blood in an ageing Goliath has begun. This is the first step. It's still a long journey ahead."

THE ASIAN AGE

22 APRIL 2021

Does road to Indo-Pak peace run through UAE?

There has been a flicker of interest in India-Pakistan relations in the region since late February when a military-to-military agreement between the two sides materialised. It spelt out that the ceasefire agreement of 2003 will be seriously adhered to. In the last five years or so, this agreement has been observed mainly in the breach by Pakistan, provoking retaliatory fire by India.

This has been especially the case since the Indian Air Force struck terrorist bases across the LOC in Balakot in response to the February 2019 Pulwama terrorist attack. With New Delhi ending J&K's autonomy and special status in August that year, high-intensity ceasefire violations by Pakistan became a practically daily affair. Throughout this period, India resisted suggestions by former US President Donald Trump to broker talks with Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. New Delhi stuck to its view that "terror and talks can't go together".

In recent weeks, however, there is a sudden buzz in India-Pakistan relations, which became the more noticeable after their militaries agreed to stop cross-border firings. Pakistan Army chief General Javed Qamar Bajwa and Prime Minister Imran Khan made conciliatory noises and dilated on the virtues of peace. Prime Minister Narendra Modi made solicitous enquiries during a recent illness of Mr Khan. The optics looked satisfactory. There was a Pakistan cabinet committee recommendation to import cement and sugar from India, though this was subsequently quashed with the usual suspects thumping their chest over Kashmir.

And yet, something does seem to be cooking. The UAE ambassador to America, Yousef al-Otaida, disclosed recently that his country had done some groundwork to facilitate India and Pakistan reach a level of "functional" relationship. This appears to be a hint that the defence ministry agreement of February was preceded by security and intelligence dialogues in third-country locations at UAE's behest. External affairs minister S. Jaishankar indeed hosted UAE foreign minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan a day after the February 25 agreement.

And now there is fresh twist to the story. Last Sunday, Mr Jaishankar's bilateral visit to the UAE overlapped with that of his Pakistan counterpart, Shah Mehmood Qureshi. India has made no comment on this. New Delhi's long-standing view is that Kashmir is strictly a "bilateral" issue between India and Pakistan. The two countries denied their foreign ministers met. This does indeed appear to be the case. Still, the episode begs the question: Did Mr Jaishankar and Mr Qureshi have to be in UAE on the same day? Is this a logistical coincidence of a somewhat unusual kind?

At this stage it cannot be ruled out that the UAE has just played host to what's called undeclared "proximity talks" at the foreign minister level between India and Pakistan in which the UAE carried messages back and forth. The entire thing will have to be deniable if the talks do not go far. More, since the new element in the region is the sensitivity around the Afghanistan issue, the UAE could be acting at the behest of the United States. The US can't afford even accidental sabre-rattling between India and Pakistan when delicate negotiations are on, and may have sought help from an old ally that has good ties with India and Pakistan.

Justice for George Floyd

In a landmark judgment, the former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was convicted of two counts of murder and one of manslaughter for putting such a brutal knee hold for nine minutes on the neck of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, that he choked to death. As the arraigned cop faces a decades-long prison term even as three fellow officers stand dismissed, there is general rejoicing over what the verdict means towards correcting systemic fault in the treatment of black people in the United States.

US President Joe Biden was optimistic that the "world is going to change". Whether the milestone in rendering justice expands into a genuine reform to correct systemic faults in the treatment of black, minorities and people of colour in a pluralistic society remains to be seen, but there is no doubt this is a seminal moment in the history of US policing.

A Black man as innocent as being on a trip to the grocery store can be in danger of being pulled up in his car and shot or mistreated by policemen as George Floyd was when accused of using a counterfeit note to buy cigarettes. In death, he became a symbol of retributive justice against a discriminatory system loaded against people of colour other than white or Hispanic in the US.

It was fortuitous that teenager Darnella Frazier filmed the whole episode on her phone and shared it with a shocked nation and world which saw a helpless man plead that he was unable to breathe because of the chokehold. The horrendous event, described as "a stain on the soul of our nation" by Biden, spawned the powerful Black Lives Matter movement.

Law enforcement may face numerous challenges but no police force can be above being held to account as is too often the case when it comes to police excesses in dehumanising ordinary people in the guise of controlling or arresting them. The verdict is an inflection point in race relations in the US even as it represents a moment when police forces around the world must stop to think and resolve to behave more humanely.

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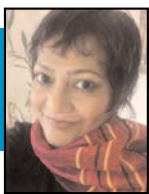
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Subhani



Lessons not learnt after a year of battling Covid



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

The fear is back. The images on television, the gut-wrenching stories of death, devastation, despair and a gnawing sense of helplessness evoke an eerie feeling of déjà vu – one has been down this road before.

New Delhi's cremation and burial grounds are changing. Nigambodh Ghat, one of the largest cremation grounds in the city, has stepped up its capacity from 36 to 63 pyres to accommodate the swelling numbers of the dead.

More than one year into the coronavirus pandemic, ordinary Indians are once again flooding the social media to save the lives of their loved ones. They are turning to strangers for help as they grapple with acute shortages of medical oxygen, ventilators, and hospital beds that offer intensive care for Covid-19 patients.

Once again, we are locked down. And migrant workers are leaving out of fear of being abandoned.

How did we get here? What does this tell us about our pandemic preparedness and the lessons not learnt?

The oxygen crisis comes as Delhi, and the country, faces a terrifying spike in new coronavirus infections and deaths, signalling a second wave of Covid-19. India now has the world's fastest-growing Covid-19 caseload, adding more than 250,000 new infections every day for the past week or so.

The total tally of Covid-19 cases in the country has crossed 15 million; the death toll is over 1,80,530 and there is worrying news about new mutants of the virus, including B.1.167, an Indian-origin double mutant strain of the coronavirus that some experts say could be behind the dramatic surge in new infections.

Arguably, this year, some of us are a little better prepared. Some of the

recent steps taken by the government are steps forward. We have the vaccine – three, in fact now, to combat the new coronavirus. The Centre has just given the green signal for vaccinations to be open to all above 18 from May 1. We have a little better health infrastructure in some parts of the country, and we are better equipped in areas like personal protective equipment, compared to the early days of the pandemic last year.

As Gautam Menon, professor in the departments of physics and biology at Ashoka University, who has a long-standing interest in the modelling of infectious diseases, puts it: "Opening up vaccines is a genuine step forward, supporting Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech in ramping up production is a good idea and expanding vaccinations to anyone above 18 is a good step."

But many of us remain ill-prepared. On many fronts, we don't seem to have learnt any lessons. The second wave is hammering us because both the political class and the people lowered their guard.

We forgot that mixed messaging never works in public health. While official advisories continue to extol the virtues of Covid-appropriate behaviour, large religious gatherings like the Kumbh Mela and multi-phase state elections were allowed. Politicians, cutting across party lines, have been addressing huge rallies. Ministers without masks have addressed crowds. Ordinary people took the cue. Late last year, when infections were going down, there were parties, weddings, birthday celebrations.

Now, the virus has struck back with a vengeance.

We never learnt things can get progressively worse in a pandemic, that we can't afford to assume a best-case scenario and go slow on contingency planning, and most important, that openness and data transparency are musts. Take the case of medical oxygen, critical for Covid-19 patients whose condition becomes serious. As is amply clear, India is ill-prepared on this front. Faced with a sharp spike in Covid cases and the soaring demand for medical oxygen, the Centre has banned the supply of oxygen for industrial purposes except in nine specified areas.

But what was the extent of preparations for this eventuality over the past year? In October, the government took a decision to install oxygen-generating plants on-site in 162 government hospitals across India to support Covid-19 treatment. Funds were sanctioned early this year but according to one recent media report, only 33 such plants have come up so far. Meanwhile, states jostle for depleting medical oxygen reserves.

The oxygen crisis is not just about increasing capacity but also transport. Availability of oxygen is also about enough cryogenic (tank) trucks, cylinders, refilling facilities and so on. But India is ill-equipped on this front too. Saket Tiku, All India Industrial Gas Manufacturers Association president, says that while it is possible to ramp up oxygen output, there is the issue about not having an adequate number of trucks for oxygen transportation.

Take the issue of genomic sequencing and information about the new mutants. There is not enough data on the subject in the public domain and we don't know how many samples in India have shown the so-called double mutation (B.1.617).

The second wave is hammering us because both the political class and the people lowered their guard. We forgot that mixed messaging never works in public health.

Recent media reports suggest that the double mutant was first detected last October through genome sequencing of a virus sample. However, the genome sequencing exercise has been running at a slow pace. Not enough resources appear to have been invested in it. The sluggish pace could be due to complacency because of the steadily falling Covid-19 curve at the end of 2020.

As Prof. Menon points out: "Getting adequate genomic sequencing in place was actually crucial and should have been well in place by December."

There are other lessons we have not learnt. Last year, migrant workers walked down highways in a desperate attempt to get back to their villages hundreds of miles away as the nationwide lockdown kicked in.

As Covid cases spike, and several states announce a slew of restrictions including night curfews and weekend lockdowns, migrant workers are, once again, starting at an uncertain future.

A parliamentary standing committee report has recommended that the government should ensure a decent minimum wage, food security and safe living conditions to all workers employed in both the formal and informal sector by including them in health services, cash transfers and other social programmes. The committee also suggested the launch of a national database on migrant workers as it will help in the identification of migrant workers and in delivering ration and other benefits to them.

Nothing much has moved on the ground till date.

And migrant workers are boarding buses and trains to get back to their villages.

Much of this could have been avoided. There must be mechanisms which enable the government to listen to and incorporate independent voices in its decision making.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

PM'S LAME ADDRESS

The PM's clarion call to the people to desist from free mingling during the course of his televised address to the nation is far from reassuring. His warning that lockdowns are a last resort shows that his government's helplessness in the face of the surging pandemic. Yet he and his ministers have continued with election rallies in states like West Bengal. Invoking Ramnavami and Ramzan to urge people to follow Covid protocol, therefore, does not cut ice. Why did his government not call a janata curfew on Holi? By all accounts, the address was nothing to write home about.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

LATE AWAKENING

AFTER HIS "toofani daur" (stormy run) in the election-bound states and particularly in West Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called the second Covid wave a "toofan" (storm) that has swept the country and asked citizens not to lose heart. People wonder how the lockdown was the first resort last year and the last one this year. Even so, elections and power-grabbing seem to have kept him more occupied. After one year of the pandemic, we have not built infrastructure. It took eight months to invite bids for over 150 oxygen generation plants costing just ₹200 crores. Six months later, most still aren't up and running.

Bidyut K. Chatterjee
Faridabad

GOODBYE, SANKHA

THE PASSING AWAY of celebrated Bengali poet Sankha Ghosh (89), a recipient of the Padma Bhushan, Sahitya Akademi Award, Rabindra Award, Saraswati Award and Jnanpith Award, due to Covid-19 today, 21 April, is shocking. Sankha Ghosh belonged to the era of Bengali poets after Jibanananda Das. Ghosh had also spent several years teaching in Delhi University, University of Iowa and Visva Bharati. He always spoke against intolerance. RIP.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Private sector specialists will helm Modi's reforms push

In September last year, the Modi sarkar gave the go-ahead to its most ambitious bid to reform the bureaucracy — a national capacity building programme. Finally, the programme has got underway with the creation of the Capacity Building Commission (CBC) under the National Programme for Civil Service Capacity Building aka "Mission Karmayogi".

And given the government's recent obsession with domain experts from the private sector, the man appointed to head the new CBC is no babu, but Adil Zainulbhai, the chief of the Quality Council of India (QCI), which is an autonomous body under the department of industrial policy and promotion. He is a former chairman of McKinsey India and a known supporter of the Prime Minister. The CBC will have two members — Ramaswami Balasubramaniam and Praveen Pardeshi — with only

the latter being an IAS officer (of the 1985 batch).

For those who look for patterns in these things, consider that Zainulbhai's appointment came on the same day as the announcement that Mallika Srinivasan will be the chairperson of the Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB), the first time that a private sector specialist has been appointed as the head of the board that is responsible for the appointment of top management posts in the Central Public Sector Enterprises.

Looking back further, there was another clue when in February Prime Minister Narendra Modi attacked the IAS in the Parliament, no less. The message then is clear — the government has firmly announced its intention of bringing in more domain knowledge specialists than continue to depend on the "heaven-born" who are generalists by training. They will no doubt put up some resistance, but Mr Modi is

bent upon breaching this wall and bring in much-needed reforms.

HC STAYS APPOINTMENT OF FORMER TN CHIEF SECY

Former Tamil Nadu chief secretary Girija Vaidhyathan faces uncertain days ahead. Slated to join the National Green Tribunal (NGT) as an expert member, the appointment has been put on hold by the Madras high court.

The court has granted an interim stay on her appointment stating that she did not meet the minimum eligibility criterion of possessing five years of experience in handling environmental issues. The court was acting in response to a petition filed by a group of environmental conservation activists, which argues for cancellation and nullification of the December 12 notification about Vaidhyathan's appointment.

Sources point out that Vaidhyathan was appointed an

expert member of the NGT along with her 1987 batch colleague K. Satyagopal, who retired as additional chief secretary and commissioner of revenue administration. Ms Vaidhyathan's argument that she had held various administrative positions related to the environment clearly did not cut much ice with the court. The court will continue hearing the case.

MAHARASHTRA BABUS SEEK CENTRAL DEPUTATION

The fierce face-off between the ruling Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government and the Opposition BJP has led to many "blue-eyed" officers seen as close to former chief minister Devendra Fadnis seeking the "cooler climes" of a Central deputation. Sources say that several IAS and IPS officers who wielded clout in the tenure of Mr Fadnis are on deputation to the Centre.

Sources say that GST Commissioner Sanjeev Kumar, a

1993-batch IAS officer, has taken over as chairman of the Airports Authority of India, while Best general manager S.K. Bagde has been appointed an additional secretary in the ministry of housing and urban development. While Mr Bagde had completed his tenure, Sanjeev Kumar was GST commissioner for only a year and four months. Similarly, former DGP S.K. Jaiswal has taken over as DG of CISF while former state intelligence commissioner Rashmi Shukla has now gone to the CRPF. Another senior IPS officer, Manoj Kumar Sharma, who was in the Maharashtra State Security Corporation, has taken up a Central deputation.

While it would be erroneous to see political colour in what should be seen as routine assignments, few observers are willing to buy this line.

Share a babu experience! Follow dillipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

IN BRIEF

Varsity staffer killed in Nigeria

Kaduna, Nigeria, April 21: Gunmen have attacked a private university in Nigeria's northern Kaduna state, killing one staff member and kidnapping some students, police and officials said Wednesday.

It was not immediately clear how many students had been abducted from Greenfield University during the Tuesday night attack and one official said they were still conducting a headcount.

Two officials at the university told AFP at least 20 students were still missing though it was unclear how many had been taken by gunmen or may have fled the attack.

Queen's 95th b'day low-key

London, April 21: Queen Elizabeth II is marking her 95th birthday in a low-key fashion at Windsor Castle, just days after the funeral of her husband, Prince Philip.

Some members of the royal family are expected to be with the queen on Wednesday. Her birthday falls within the two-week royal mourning period for Philip that is being observed until Friday, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was one of many people who sent best wishes to the monarch.

"I have always had the highest admiration for Her Majesty and her service to this country and the Commonwealth," Johnson said.

Erdogan fires trade minister

Ankara, April 21: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan fired the country's trade minister Wednesday following allegations that her husband's company received a tender to sell disinfectants to the ministry.

In a mini Cabinet reshuffle, Erdogan also split the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services into two and appointed new ministers to lead them, according to a decree published in the Official Gazette. The president named Mehmet Mus, a prominent ruling party lawmaker, as trade minister to replace Ruhsar Pekcan, according to the decree.

Indonesian sub with 53 missing

Jakarta, April 21: Indonesia's navy is searching for a submarine that went missing north of the resort island of Bali with 53 people on board, the military said Wednesday.

Military chief Hadi Tjahjanto said the KRI Nanggala 402 was participating in a training exercise when it missed a scheduled reporting call. The submarine is believed to have disappeared in waters about 60 miles (95 kilometres) north of Bali, he said.

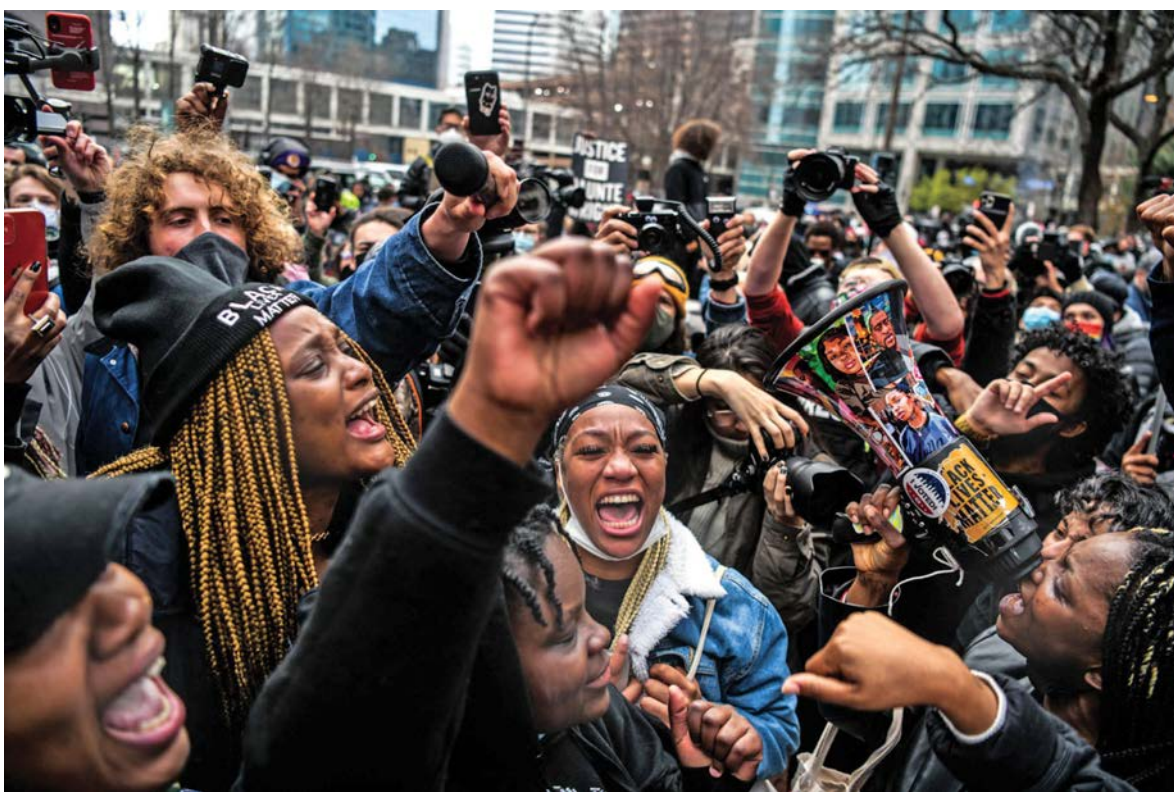
Tjahjanto said the navy has deployed scores of ships to search the area, including a hydrographic survey ship, and has asked for help from Singapore and Australia, which have submarine rescue vessels. Local media reports said the navy believes the submarine sank into a trough at a depth of 700 metres.

LANKA OBSERVES 2ND ANNIV OF EASTER ATTACKS

Colombo, April 21: Sri Lanka on Wednesday commemorated the second anniversary of the Easter Sunday terror attacks by observing a two-minute silence to remember the victims of the coordinated suicide blasts in 2019 — one of the deadliest attacks in the country's history.

Nine suicide bombers belonging to local Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jamaat (NTJ) linked to ISIS carried out a series of devastating blasts that tore through three churches and as many luxury hotels on April 21, 2019, killing 258 people, including 11 Indians. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa observed the two minutes silence at his official residence in Colombo in honour of the victims of the blasts. "Held two minutes of silence in remembrance of all those who were victims of the #EasterSundayAttack two years ago," Prime Minister Rajapaksa tweeted.

Sri Lankan lawmakers who were all dressed in black also observed silence in the parliament complex. Addressing the main memorial service held at the St Anthony's Church, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, the Archbishop of Colombo, said that the authorities had failed so far to identify the real perpetrators of the crime.



People celebrate as the verdict is announced in the trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin outside the Hennepin County Government Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota on Tuesday.

— AFP

US cop Chauvin guilty of killing George Floyd

Jury: Former Minneapolis officer guilty of all 3 charges

Washington, April 21: A federal grand jury has found Derek Chauvin, a former Minneapolis police officer, guilty on all three counts of murder of African American George Floyd last year. Floyd (46), was killed in a brutal abuse of police force on May 25 last year during an arrest after a store clerk alleged, he had passed a counterfeit \$20 bill in Minneapolis. Chauvin (45), pinned down Floyd with his knee on the pavement of a south Minneapolis intersection for more than nine minutes.

"I can't breathe. I can't breathe," were his last words. The horrific death of Floyd resulted in a nationwide violent protest. A 12-member federal jury in Minneapolis on Tuesday found Chauvin guilty on all three counts: second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. President

Police shoot, kill teen girl in Columbus

Columbus (Ohio), April 21: Police shot and killed a teenage girl Tuesday afternoon in Columbus just as the verdict was being announced in the trial for the killing of George Floyd.

The Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation was at the scene Tuesday night on the city's southeast side, *The Columbus*

Dispatch reported. Officers had responded to an attempted stabbing call when police shot the girl at about 4:45 p.m., the newspaper reported. The 911 caller reported a female was trying to stab them before hanging up, according to the *Dispatch*. The girl was taken to a hospital, where she was pronounced dead. — AP

Joe Biden said it was a murder in the full light of day and it ripped the blinders off for the whole world to see the systemic racism in the country.

"The systemic racism is a stain on our nation's soul. The knee on the neck of justice for PoC Americans. Profound fear and

trauma. The pain, the exhaustion that PoC Americans experience every single day," Biden said.

The verdict giving justice, he said is not enough. "We can't stop here. In order to deliver real change and reform, we can and we must do more to reduce the likelihood

that a tragedy like this will ever happen to occur again, to ensure the black and brown people or anyone so they don't fear the interactions with law enforcement, that they don't have to wake up knowing that they can lose their very life in the course of just living their life," he said.

In an address to the nation soon after the verdict, Vice President Kamala Harris said PoC Americans and PoC men in particular have been treated throughout the course of history as less than human.

"Today we feel a sigh of relief. Still, it cannot take away the pain. A measure of justice isn't the same as equal justice. This verdict brings us a step closer and the fact is we still have work to do," she said. Observing that America has a long history of systemic racism, Harris said: — PTI

250,000 PEOPLE DISPLACED IN MYANMAR: UN

Yangon, April 21: The Myanmar military's crackdown on anti-coup protesters has displaced close to a quarter of a million people, a United Nations rights envoy said Wednesday.

The junta has stepped up its use of lethal force to quash mass demonstrations against a Feb. 1 coup which ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. At least 738 people have been killed and 3,300 are languishing in jails as political prisoners, according to a local monitoring group.

"Horried to learn that... the junta's attacks have already left nearly a quarter (of a) million Myanmar people displaced," UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews tweeted on Wednesday.

"The world must act immediately to address this humanitarian catastrophe." More than 2,000 Karen people have crossed Myanmar's border. — AP

US-backed Afghan peace meet postponed

Sponsors cite lack of prospects for progress

Kabul, April 21: An upcoming international peace conference that was meant to move Afghanistan's warring sides to a power-sharing deal and ensure an orderly US exit from the country has been postponed, its sponsors announced Wednesday.

They cited a lack of prospects for meaningful progress. As peace efforts stalled, Germany's Defence Ministry suggested Nato military planners were contemplating a possible withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan as early as July 4. That's more than two months ahead of the planned Sep. 11 pullout date. "The Resolute Support headquarters in Kabul are currently considering whether to shorten the withdrawal period," said German Defence Ministry spokesman David Helmbold. "The 4th of July is now being considered as a pullout date. The ministry informed the (German parliament's) defence co-

mmitee about this today."

Still, the latest delay in getting Afghanistan's warring sides to hammer out a peace deal underscored the difficulties the Biden administration and Nato are facing in orchestrating an orderly exit from conflict-scarred Afghanistan. Both have said they would begin withdrawing their remaining troops — a total of close to 13,000 — from the country on May 1 and complete the pullout by Sep. 11, no matter what.

The decision to delay the conference came several days after Taliban insurgents, who are key to peace efforts, dismissed the US-promoted conference in Istanbul as a political spectacle serving American interests.

No new date was given for the conference, which was to have started Saturday under the sponsorship of the United Nations, Turkey and Qatar. Turkey's foreign minister said the conference was delayed until after the Mu-

slim fasting month of Ramadan, which ends in mid-May. Just hours before the announcement of the postponement, a suicide bomber attacked a convoy of Afghan security personnel, wounding seven people in the capital Kabul. The Interior Ministry said civilians and security personnel were among the wounded. The attack was the first in weeks in the capital, even as targeted killings have escalated and Afghanistan's security personnel have come under relentless attacks by Taliban insurgents.

Recent months have also seen an increase in government bombing raids on suspected Taliban positions and increased raids by Afghan special forces. Residents fear the attack could be a harbinger of what's to come as foreign troops prepare to begin their final withdrawal from Afghanistan. No one took immediate responsibility for the attack. — AP

200 million citizens have been vaccinated: China

Beijing, April 21: Around 200 million Chinese, or 14.29 per cent of the population, have been vaccinated for Covid-19 so far, with an emphasis on front-line workers, university students and people living in border areas, a health official said Wednesday.

China is ramping up vaccination efforts after a slow start, prompted in part by the virtual elimination of domestic transmission. Just two local cases were reported on Wednesday, both in the city of Ruili, which borders on Myanmar.

Center of Disease Control official Cui Gang told a news conference that key areas and members of the population were being prioritized for vaccines. China has approved five domestically produced vaccines and exported millions of doses, although some scientists believe they provide less protection than those by Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca. The Chinese vaccines have an efficacy range of 50.7 per cent to 79.3 per cent, based on company data, lower than their foreign peers but still effective. China is now giving millions of shots a day and a top government doctor, Zhong Nanshan, has announced a goal of vaccinating 560 million of the country's 1.4 billion people by mid-June.

China locked down the city of Wuhan for more than two months starting in Jan. 2020 after the Coronavirus was first detected in late 2019. Wuhan became known as the epicentre of the pandemic, although Beijing has suggested the virus might have been circulating earlier and possibly brought to China from abroad. Since then, China has controlled the virus through stringent border controls. — AP

FRANCE TO PUT ENTRY CURBS ON INDIANS

Paris, April 21: France will impose new entry restrictions on travellers from India to fight a contagious Coronavirus variant spreading in that country, an official said on Wednesday.

The restrictions come in addition to those previously announced regarding four other countries: Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Brazil that will be implemented starting from Saturday.

Government spokesman Gabriel Attal also confirmed that France will lift its ban on domestic travel as planned on May 3, but will maintain its nighttime curfew, now in place from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. — AP

Radioactive stuff: Lanka asks Chinese ship to leave

Oz scrapping BRI deal: China hits out

Colombo, April 21: Sri Lanka has asked a Chinese ship to leave the southern port of Hambantota after it was found to be carrying radioactive material, officials said on Wednesday.

Anil Ranjith, the top official of the Sri Lanka Atomic Energy Authority (SLAEA), said that the ship was on its way to China from the port of Rotterdam when it developed technical difficulties and entered the Hambantota Port. The SLAEA said the vessel had failed to disclose its radioactive cargo when it docked in at the port.

The ship was managed by the China Merchants Port Holding Company. The main Opposition leader Sajith Premadasa said in parliament that the Sri Lanka Navy, who is in

charge of the Hambantota port security, was not allowed to carry out inspections on the vessel. "The local agent of the vessel had not informed the presence of dangerous cargo

between China and the Victoria state is conducive to deepening economic and trade relations between the two sides," a statement by the Chinese Embassy in Australia said. "This is another unreasonable and provocative move taken by the Australian side against China." — AFP

on board cargo when they sought permission from the Harbour Master to enter the port." Ranjith said it was a commercial vessel, which carried radioactive material. — PTI

IMPORTANT | SPEECH

Former Prez Donald Trump withdrew US from the Paris Climate deal

Xi to attend Biden virtual climate summit today

Beijing, April 21: Chinese President Xi Jinping will take part in US President Joe Biden's climate summit being organised virtually on Thursday and Friday in which several world leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will participate.

At the invitation of Biden, President Xi will attend and deliver an "important speech" at the Leaders' Summit on Climate on Thursday by video link from Beijing, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced on Wednesday. Biden has invited 40 world lead-

ers, including Modi, to the two-day conference beginning April 22, which according to a White House statement will underscore the urgency and the economic benefits of stronger climate action.

It will be a key milestone on the road to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) this Nov. in Glasgow, the statement said. Chinese experts consider invitation to Xi for the summit as a positive signal for the China-US relationship, facing growing tensions on a number of issues like Xinjiang, Hong

EU reaches climate deal

Brussels, April 21: The European Union reached a tentative climate deal that should make the 27-nation bloc climate-neutral by 2050, with member states and parliament agreeing on the targets on the eve of a virtual summit that US President Biden will host.

Kong and Taiwan.

The Chinese top leader's attendance was confirmed just a day before the summit, and a day after Rus-

sian President Vladimir Putin confirmed he will be speaking at the summit, showing that the two countries are willing to take

part in global efforts to address the climate issue despite tensions with the US, state-run *Global Times* daily reported. The US and China are the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gases. Former US President Donald Trump withdrew America from the Paris Climate deal but Biden announced the return of the US to the Paris climate accord after he took over the presidency. Climate change has been a major area of focus for Biden.

Ahead of the US-led climate summit, Xi held a video summit exchanging

in-depth views and reaching a consensus for cooperation on climate change with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. China's attendance signals that cooperation between China and the US is still the mainstream tone, Li Haidong, a professor at the Institute of International Relations of the China Foreign Affairs University, told the daily. "The attendance of our leader can also reassure other countries, as the world anxiously needs a strong voice on this issue," Li said. — PTI

CARGO VESSEL'S 4 FOUND DEAD IN PHILIPPINES

Manila, April 21: Rescuers in the southern Philippines found the bodies of four crew members Wednesday and rescued seven others who jumped off a cargo vessel, which took in water and listed after its anchor broke in rough seas, officials said.

Nine other crew members of the LCT Cebu Great Ocean remain missing. The coast guard and maritime police were continuing a search off Surigao del Norte province. — AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	47,705.80	-0.51
Nifty 50	14,296.40	-0.44
S&P 500*	4,158.17	0.56
Dollar (₹)	74.89	-0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.71	-0.60
Euro (₹)	90.31	-0.18
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,756*305	0.65
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.35	-1.04
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.074	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.585	-0.014

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Instagram curbs on unsolicited messages

Facebook Inc is beefing up tools on its photo sharing app Instagram to combat harassment and hate speech in private messaging and comments. Instagram announced it will let users hide direct message requests that contain offensive words, phrases or emojis. All direct message requests from a predefined list will be filtered into a separate hidden requests folder. People will also be given the option to preemptively block new a/c's.

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Motor insurance business dips in FY21 Health, property drive non-life biz

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 21

Strong uptick in demand for new Covid-related policies (Corona Kavach and Rakshak), penetration among mass segments through the newly launched Arogya Sanjeevani plan and high property insurance rates helped the non-life insurance industry clock a modest 5.20 per cent growth in 2020-21 even as the country largely remained under lockdown during the fiscal first half. Other segments such as motor, travel, crop and marine insurance reported a decline in business. By the data released by the insurance regulator on Wednesday, the gross premium underwritten by the non-life insurance industry up to March 31, 2021 grew by 5.20 per cent to Rs 1.98 lakh crore. Health insurance during the year



grew by 13.37 per cent to Rs 58,584 crore while the property insurance segment posted 28 per cent growth with a gross premium underwritten of Rs 20,139 crore. On the other hand, with new car sales taking a hit and the insurance regulator maintaining a status quo on motor third party premium rates, the motor insurance business declined by 2 per cent to Rs 67,790 crore. Similarly, crop insurance declined by 3.37 per cent to Rs 31,183 crore.

Sanjay Datta, head-underwriting and claims at ICICI Lombard General Insurance, said, "New car sales were down during the first six months...Crop insurance business fell as several states discontinued the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. Similarly, travel insurance business was also impacted due to lockdowns. So was marine insurance." "It's very difficult to predict the outlook for FY 22. We will have to wait and see how Covid plays out. Claims have started rising since the last week of March," added Datta. In July, the regulator had mandated insurers to provide Corona Kavach and Corona Rakshak health insurance policies. These two plans cover hospitalisation expenses, domiciliary treatment and the cost of consumables like PPE kits, masks and gloves, etc.

RAIL ROUTE PAYS OFF FOR MARUTI SUZUKI

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, APRIL 21

Maruti Suzuki's increasing use of the rail network to transport its vehicles to far flung cities and towns is paying off. India's biggest carmaker despatched more than 1,80,000 vehicles in FY2021, its highest shipments through the Indian Railways in a fiscal year. This amounts to nearly 13 per cent of total sales. Over the last five years, Maruti Suzuki transported

over 7.2 lakh vehicles via the rails. The focus on using railways has helped the company offset over 3,200 tonne of CO2 emissions, cumulatively. "The transportation of finished vehicles via railways has many tangible benefits. It is a clean, environment-friendly mode of transportation. It reduces congestion on highways and there is more space available to other vehicles," Kenichi Ayukawa, MD & CEO, said.

AIR POLLUTION COSTS INDIA INC ₹7 L CR

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 21

Air pollution costs Indian businesses about Rs 7 lakh crore every fiscal in lost revenue and productivity, according to a study. The cost of air pollution for Indian businesses is about \$95 billion, Rs 7 lakh crore, or around 3 per cent of India's total GDP, says the study by Dalberg Advisors, Clean

COVAXIN PREVENTS HOSPITALISATION 100%: BHARAT BIO

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, APRIL 21

Bharat Biotech said on Wednesday the phase-3 analysis of Covaxin has demonstrated 100 per cent efficacy against the cases of severe Covid-19 infections. "The efficacy against severe Covid-19 disease was 100 per cent with an impact on reduction in hospitalisations. The efficacy against asymptomatic Covid-19 infection was 70 per cent, suggesting decreased transmission in Covaxin recipients," the company said. It said the phase-3 study enrolled 25,800 persons in the 18-98 age group, with analysis conducted 14 days after the second dose. Prof. Balram Bhargava, secretary, department of health research and DG-ICMR said, "The vaccine has shown the efficacy of 78 per cent in the second interim analysis."

Tata Steel receives UAE payment via blockchain

New Delhi, April 21: Tata Steel on Wednesday said it has received a "blockchain-enabled transaction", a global first for the steel industry, from a UAE-based firm for a steel export order.



The steel maker did not disclose the size of the transaction. "Tata Steel and HSBC successfully executed a blockchain enabled transaction, a global first for the steel industry. This transaction was executed on Contour's blockchain platform," a company statement said. The live trade finance

transaction involved the export of steel by Tata Steel to Universal Tube & Plastic Industries, UAE, the statement added. "This unique initiative, executed in collaboration with HSBC, demonstrates our continued efforts to lead technology-led disruptions by challenging

the status quo and reimagining the global trade set-up," said Peeyush Gupta, vice president (steel marketing & sales), Tata Steel. Explaining the concept of a blockchain transaction, Tata Steel said this technology in trade finance enables comprehensive visibility for all involved parties and enhances security in payment. It helps reduce the document negotiation and banking transaction cycle from week(s) to a few days. It also shortens the transaction time of letter of credit. — PTI

Nomura upbeat on financial stocks

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 21

The recent corrections have made fundamentally strong banks and NBFCs good investment candidates, as financial stocks had delivered strong returns from last year lows, says Japanese investment bank Nomura. Similar trajectory is expected as the second Covid-19 wave pans out and impacts the same set of economic agencies and sectors. Top financial stocks have corrected sharply by 8 to 33 per cent from recent historical peaks as the second wave has soured sentiments. Lockdowns are likely to be localised and relatively less stringent this time, which augurs well for financial stocks, it said. Banks' loan growth has been tepid during the pandemic so far and the out-

FPI HOLDINGS UP BY \$105 BN IN H2

Mumbai, April 21: The value of the FPI holdings in the domestic equities reached a record \$555 billion in 2020-21, a steep \$105 billion growth between September 2020 and March 2021, according to a report. In comparison, the holdings of the domestic institutional investors, at \$203 billion, were not even half of their foreign counterparts, the report by Bank of America (BoFA) Securities said. In 2020-21, foreign portfolio investors have pumped in a record \$37

billion, or Rs 2.75 lakh crore, into Indian equities, the highest in two decades, according to data from the National Securities Depository. In FY10, FY11 and FY13, FPI inflows had crossed \$20 billion. The domestic institutional investor inflows remained at a negative Rs 1.38 lakh crore in 2020-21, taking the total value of their holdings to \$203 billion, spread across ETFs (\$38 bn), large-cap fund (\$24 bn), flexi cap funds (\$22 bn) and mid-cap fund (\$16 bn). — PTI

look is also not encouraging for the near future. It said retail loan growth has hovered in 8-10 per cent range between April 2020 and April 2021. Loan growth is likely to remain tepid until the impact of Covid-19 is fully minimised, it said.

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

UAE cricketer is banned for fixing

Dubai: The ICC on Wednesday banned United Arab Emirates (UAE) player Gadeer Ahmed Khan for five years from all cricket after he admitted breaching the anti-corruption code and also charged Mehardeep Chhayakar on six counts for corruption. Khan was charged in October 2019. The ICC said that Khan admitted to six breaches that relates to failing to disclose approaches or invitations received in relation to the Zimbabwe v UAE series in April 2019. Khan disclosed inside information in August 2019. He failed to disclose to the ACU full details of any approaches or invitations received. — PTI

Goa lose game in Asian League

Margao: FC Goa put up a spirited fight before going down 1-2 to Group 'E' leaders Persepolis FC, bringing to an end the Indian club's unbeaten run in the AFC Champions League here on Tuesday. Quite remarkably, FC Goa grabbed the lead when Edu Bedia headed in to the bottom right corner from the centre of the box in the 14th minute. Bedia was assisted by Brandon Fernandes following a set piece situation. But the Indian club's joy was short-lived as Persepolis FC fought back strongly to not just equalise but also go ahead in the high-octane contest. — PTI

India-Britain hockey put off

Lausanne, Switzerland: The FIH Hockey Pro League matches between India and Great Britain, scheduled for May 8-9 in London, were on Wednesday postponed following the UK government's decision to add India to the travel 'red list'. "FIH, Hockey India and Great Britain Hockey are monitoring the evolution of the situation in the hope of rearranging these matches at a later date," a FIH release said. India will still travel to Europe to play the matches against Spain (May 15-16) and Germany (May 22-23) while Britain will host Germany (May 12-13), USA (Women, May 22-23) and Spain (Men, May 22-23).

Super flop! Elite league in red European Super League dead as top teams withdraw following furious fan response

London, April 21: The two Milan giants and Atletico Madrid followed all six English Premier League clubs in pulling out of the European Super League on Wednesday, dealing a fatal blow to the project. The withdrawals by Manchester City, Manchester United, Liverpool, Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham came just 48 hours after the league's unveiling late on Sunday following a furious response from fans and officials. The three Italian clubs involved — Juventus, AC Milan and Inter Milan — admitted defeat and La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid also pulled out. Real Madrid and Barcelona — the last of the

initial group of 12 clubs to sign up — have yet to make any comment but the project in its current form is dead in the water. AC Milan were one the main drivers behind the plans, having missed out on the Champions League for the past seven seasons. The seven-time European champions said change was necessary due to the changing football landscape but admitted they "must be sensitive to the voice of those who love this wonderful sport". Italian champions Juventus said they remained "convinced of the soundness of the project's sport, commercial and legal premises" but accepted it could not go ahead in its original form.

● The withdrawals by Manchester City, Manchester United, Liverpool, Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham were followed by Juventus, AC Milan and Inter Milan and Spanish leaders Atletico Madrid.

The Super League promised guaranteed entry for its founding clubs and billions of dollars in payments. Most of the clubs have huge debts and wage bills, and suffered a sharp drop in revenues during the coronavirus pandemic. But the project was vehemently opposed across the

football spectrum, from fans to players, coaches, politicians and UEFA and FIFA, the European and world football bodies. The clubs were threatened with a ban from domestic and European football, while their players could even have been barred from representing their countries. UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin struck a conciliatory tone on Wednesday, saying he wanted to "rebuild the unity" of European football, and described the English clubs as "back in the fold". "I said yesterday that it is admirable to admit a mistake and these clubs made a big mistake," Ceferin said in a statement.

"But they are back in the fold now and I know they have a lot to offer not just to our competitions but to the whole of the European game. The important thing now is that we move on, rebuild the unity that the game enjoyed before this and move forward together," Ceferin added. Shares in Juventus plunged by more than 13 per cent on Wednesday following a slump in the value of Manchester United stocks. In response to the English pull-outs, the Super League had said it was looking for ways to "reshape", insisting the "status quo of European football needs to change". — AFP



Bayern Munich's Cameroon forward Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting (left) scores the opening goal during their Bundesliga match against Bayer Leverkusen in Munich on Tuesday. — AFP

Bayern set for ninth German title

Berlin, April 21: Bayern Munich can be crowned Bundesliga champions this weekend after taking a 10 point lead at the top of the table with a 2-0 win at home to Bayer Leverkusen on Tuesday. Bayern seized control at the Allianz Arena with early goals by Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting and Joshua Kimmich after second-placed RB Leipzig had

earlier suffered a shock defeat at relegation-threatened Cologne. With just four games to go, club world champions Bayern will be guaranteed a ninth German league title in a row with a win at Mainz on Saturday. It was business as usual as Bayern quickly dominated Leverkusen and scored from their first attack.

When Thomas Mueller's shot was saved, Choupo-Moting was on hand to tap home the rebound on seven minutes. Kimmich added Bayern's second goal on 14 minutes when David Alaba's cross only went as far as the Germany midfielder who fired home from the edge of the area. Leverkusen raised their game after the break with

Leon Bailey firing past Manuel Neuer, but his goal was ruled offside. Choupo-Moting had the ball in the Leverkusen net for the second time with 25 minutes left but his effort was ruled offside. Bailey's cross across the six-yard box was then fired off the crossbar by Karim Bellarabi on 69 minutes. — AFP

YOUTH WORLD | CHAMPIONSHIP

8 Indians punch into title rounds

New Delhi, April 21: Eight Indian boxers, including seven women, stormed into the finals of the youth world championships in Kielce, Poland, an unprecedented achievement for the country in the marquee age group event. Apart from the eight finalists, three others settled for bronze medals at the tournament, a performance which betters the 10 medals that India won in its best ever show not too long back in the 2018 edition in Hungary. The ones who made the finals, to be held on Thursday after a rest day on Wednesday, were Gitika (48kg), Babyrojisana Chanu (51kg), Vinka (60kg), Arundhati Choudhary (69kg), Poonam (57kg), Thokchom Sanamachu Chanu (75kg) and Aliya Pathan (+81kg) among women.

Vinka will next take on Kazakhstan's Zhuldyz Shayakhmetova. Arundhati had little trouble getting past Uzbekistan's Khadi-chabonu Abdullaeva in a unanimous 5-0 verdict and she will be up against Poland's Barbara Marcinkowska in her summit showdown. Babyrojisana also notched up a similar result against Italy's Elen Ayari. She has Russia's Valeriia Linkova to contend with in the finals. Manipur's Babyrojisana is the reigning Asian youth champion.

Poonam sailed past Uzbekistan's Sitora Turdibekova 5-0, and France's Sthelyne Grosy awaits her in the gold medal bout. Sanamacha clinched a 4-1 triumph over Poland's Daria Parada. She will square off against Kazakhstan's Dana Diday in her last bout of the event. Aliya had a tough one against Poland's Oliwia Toborek but the Indian did enough to prevail 3-2. Moldova's Daria Kozorez will be her final challenge. In the evening session, Sachin was the lone Indian to triumph. — PTI

WOMEN RECURVE ARCHERS TOP QUALIFICATION AT WC

Guatemala City, April 21: Indian recurve archers had a blazing start on their return to the World Cup after nearly two years as the women's team topped the qualifications with Ankita Bhakat and Deepika Kumari's super show in the opening stage here. Atanu Das grabbed the second spot behind world number one Brady Ellison to propel the men's team to a third place finish, as India have qualified straight to quarterfinals in the men's and women's team event besides mixed section where Das and Deepika will be in action together for the first time after their marriage last year. "Mixed team, you know, I like very much. If I get to play with Deepika then it's awesome. We're a couple you know and then we'd be the first couple to play in the Olympics. So it's fun," Das, who last won a mixed pair bronze with Deepika at the Asian Championships, said. — PTI

— *PTM*