

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 25 APRIL 2021



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Rajasthan' Morris takes 4 wickets to help team beat Kolkata by 6 wickets in IPL

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Rhea Chakraborty has offered to help needy people in times of Covid crisis in the country



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French actor Gilles Marini and wife Carole Marini arrive at the Luxe Hotel to pick up his gift bag ahead of the Academy Awards 2021 in Brentwood, California, on Friday.

— AFP

Nagas help Army rescue 2 abducted ONGC employees

Guwahati: In a major breakthrough the Indian Army and Nagaland police with the support of some local Naga villagers on Friday night rescued two employees of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, who were kidnapped earlier this week from Sivasagar, in Mon district of Nagaland. The operations are still on to trace the third abductee Retul Saikia. The rescued employees were identified as Alakesh Saikia and Mohini Mohan Gogoi.

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C'garh: Maoists kill kidnapped jawan

Bhopal: A jawan who was abducted by Maoists three days ago in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Bijapur was brutally killed by the ultras, police said on Saturday. The slain jawan was abducted by Maoists on April 21.

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Israeli forces launch air attacks on Gaza

Gaza City: The Israeli military has carried out strikes targeting Hamas positions in the besieged Gaza Strip as evening clashes between Israeli police and Palestinians continued in Jerusalem. Palestinian news agency Maan said Israeli army tanks near the fortified fence separating the Gaza Strip from Israel launched attacks.

■ More on Page 6



Now, every day is my day!

WEATHER

Max: 38°C
Min: 21°C
RH: 17%
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Shuddha Trayodasi till 4.08 pm
Star: Hasta till 1.52 am (Monday)
Variyam: 11.53 am to 1.19 pm
Durmuhurtam: 4.50 pm to 5.41 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.52 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.44 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 6.06 PM
MOONSET TODAY 4.36 AM

20 more die gasping for oxygen in Delhi hospital, Kejri seeks help

HC says rising Covid-19 cases 'is not a wave, it's a tsunami', adds 'will hang anyone obstructing oxygen'

Centre, Delhi govt spar in court; S-G tells lawyer appearing for Delhi, 'Let's try and not be a cry baby'

AGE CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

A day after 25 patients died at the Ganga Ram Hospital, one of Delhi's biggest and most high-profile health facilities, 20 more people died gasping at Rohini's Jaipur Golden Hospital on Saturday as they waited for oxygen to be replenished.

On Saturday, day five of a continuing crisis stemming from acute shortage of oxygen that's suffocating critically-ill Covid patients to death, Delhi recorded the highest single-day rise of 357 Covid-19 deaths and over 24,000 fresh cases.

In the morning, as news came in of its 20 patients dying through the night due to lack of oxygen, Jaipur Golden's medical director D.K. Baluja said, "Oxygen pressure has dipped as we are running out of stock."

There is continued anxiety at the Jaipur Golden Hospital that the disaster could repeat itself if oxy-

gen is not supplied on time.

"Next impending oxygen crisis in Jaipur Golden Hospital. Over 200 lives at stake if liquid medical oxygen is not supplied by 9:00 PM tonight," the hospital tweeted at 7.15 pm Saturday.

Hospital officials added that over 80 per cent of the 200 patients in the hospital were on oxygen support and 35 were in the ICU.

Every few hours, as it has been for much of the week, hospitals across the city and its suburbs, including Ganga Ram, M a x Healthcare as well as other facilities, sounded the alarm about dwindling stocks on social media and other platforms.

Desperate for help, some hospitals, including Maharaja Agrasen, approached the Delhi high court, which said the mounting cases of Covid-19 cases "is not a wave, it's a tsunami".

Despite the mounting humanitarian crisis, the Centre and states governments and patients died due to lack of O2.

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Despite the mounting humanitarian crisis, the Centre and states governments and patients died due to lack of O2.

Many countries impose travel curbs on India Pakistan offers to help India with ventilators, PPEs, BiPap

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

Given the spike in cases, several states and UTs have announced temporary shutdowns. In Uttarakhand, where the Kumbh Mela has turned out to be a super spreader event, all government offices have been ordered to remain closed from April 23-28 as a measure to control spread of the virus in the offices.

The Tamil Nadu government has announced new lockdown guidelines under which from April 26 places of worship, beauty parlours, salons, spas, barber shops will remain closed and only parcel/takeaway will be allowed in hotels, restaurants, and tea shops.

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New Delhi, April 24: As several countries in Asia and Europe banned flights or travellers from India on Saturday in the wake of the massive surge in Covid-19 cases and fear of the new mutation, Pakistan expressed solidarity with the people of India and offered to provide relief support to India including ventilators, Bi PAP, digital X-ray machines, PPEs and related items.

The concerned authorities of Pakistan and India can work out modalities for quick delivery of the relief items. They can also explore possible ways of further cooperation to mitigate the challenges



Family members of Covid-19 patients wait to fill their empty cylinders with medical oxygen outside an oxygen filling centre in Kanpur on Saturday.

— PTI

India records 3,46,787 new cases of Covid-19 Govt waives import duty on Covid vaccine, oxygen

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

The harrowing nightmare for Covid-19 patients and their families continued on Saturday despite several high-level meetings called by the Centre for the last couple days as hospitals in Delhi, UP, Haryana, Punjab and Gujarat continued sending SOS messages for oxygen to the Centre and states governments and patients died due to lack of O2.

India on Saturday recorded 3,46,787 new cases of Covid-19 and 2,624 deaths. At the same time over 2.19 lakh recoveries have been registered in the last 24 hours and Case Fatality Rate has come down to 1.14 per cent. Eleven states/UTs did not report any Covid-19 deaths in the last 24 hours. Ten states — Maharashtra, UP, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, MP, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Rajasthan — reported 74.15 per cent of the new cases in

the country.

While Maharashtra reported the highest daily new cases at 63,818 and 676 deaths, there was some respite in Mumbai where a major decline in fresh cases was noticed. Mumbai reported 5,888 new cases and 71 deaths while 8,549 people got cured. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation released the third Sero survey data, in which 36.30% of Mumbai residents were

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CBI books Anil Deshmukh, NCP says 'witch-hunt'

Ex-minister charged for corruption

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, APRIL 24

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Saturday conducted searches at former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh's premises in Mumbai and his hometown Nagpur after registering a case against him in connection with allegations of corruption levelled against him by former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh. The NCP has termed the agency's action as a "political witch-hunt".

"The preliminary inquiry prima facie revealed that a cognisable case is made out in the matter wherein former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh and unknown others attempted to obtain undue advantage for improper and dishonest performance of his public duty," said the CBI FIR.

The CBI has charged Mr Deshmukh under Section 7 of the amended Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 2018, along with Section 120 B of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

After registering the case, the CBI conducted a search operation at a number of locations connected with Mr Deshmukh in Mumbai, Nagpur and other places.

A CBI team had arrived in Nagpur from Delhi on Friday night and carried out searches at Mr Deshmukh's house. In Mumbai, CBI teams con-

Will hold the post till Aug. 2022 Justice Ramana administered oath as 48th CJI

PARMOL KUMAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

Justice Nuthalapati Venkata Ramana was on Saturday sworn as the 48th Chief Justice of India. He was administered the oath of office by President Ram Nath Kovind. He will hold the post for about 16 months, until August 26, 2022.

The swearing-in ceremony of Justice Ramana was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, vice-president M. Venkaiah Naidu, law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and his predecessor CJI Sharad A. Bobde. Justice Ramana was elevated as a judge of the top court on February 17, 2014. Born in an agricultural family on August 27, 1957, in Ponnavaaram village, Krishna district, Justice Ramana did his BSc, BL and was enrolled as an advocate on February 10, 1983.

He began his career as a journalist of a leading Telugu newspaper for a short while before turning to legal practice in 1983. During his student days, he was known as an activist, involved in issues concerning farmers and industrial workers.

Appointed as a permanent judge of the Andhra Pradesh high court on June 27, 2000, Justice Ramana functioned as the acting Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh high court from March 10, 2013 to May 20, 2013.



Justice N.V. Ramana

■ He began his career as a journalist of a leading Telugu newspaper for a short while before turning to legal practice in 1983. During his student days, he was known as an activist, involved in issues concerning farmers and industrial workers

He was appointed Chief Justice of Delhi high court on September 2, 2013.

During his tenure in the Supreme Court, Justice Ramana has been a part of many significant rulings, including those on setting up of special courts for fast-tracking criminal cases against MPs and MLAs; bringing the CJI's office amenable to the Right to Information Act; and, lifting Internet restrictions in Jammu & Kashmir.

He has advocated the need to implement regional languages as the language of the court to increase participation of rural litigants in the trial process.

U'khand: 8 killed, 31 missing in avalanche

All dead are BRO workers, search on

Gopeshwar (U'khand), April 24: Eight Border Roads Organisation (BRO) workers were killed, seven injured and 31 went missing in an avalanche near the Indo-China border in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, officials said on Saturday.

A total of 430 BRO workers were at the road-construction site when the avalanche occurred on Friday, Uttarakhand Director General of Police (DGP) Ashok Kumar said.

Two bodies were recovered from the site in the Sumna area of Niti Valley on Friday night, while six more were recovered on Saturday, he added.

Of the 430 workers, 384 have returned to the ITBP and Army camps in the area so far, eight are dead, seven injured have been rescued while 31 are missing, the DGP said, adding that a joint search-and-rescue operation by Army, ITBP, SDRF and NDRF personnel continues in the affected area.

The injured were rescued in helicopters and flown to the Army hospital in Joshimath. The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Indian Army posts at Sumna are safe, the DGP said.

Sumna, where the avalanche occurred, is approximately 25 km from Malari village and located near the confluence of the Girthigad and the Kiogad.

—PTI

■ Turn to Page 4

Indonesia sub with 53 aboard sank: Navy

Banyuwangi, Indonesia, April 24: Indonesia's Navy on Saturday declared its missing submarine had sunk and cracked open after finding items from the vessel over the past two days, apparently ending hope of finding any of the 53 crew members alive.

Military chief Hadi Tjahjanto said the presence of an oil slick as well as debris near the site where the submarine last dove Wednesday off the island of Bali were clear proof the KRI Nanggala-402 had sunk. Indonesian officials earlier considered the vessel to be only missing, but said the submarine's oxygen supply would have run out early Saturday.

Navy Chief Yudo Margono told a press conference in Bali, "If it's an



File picture of KRI Nanggala-402

explosion, it will be in pieces. The cracks happened gradually in some parts when it went down from 300 meters to 400 meters to 500 meters. ... If there was an explosion, it would be heard by the sonar."

The navy previously said it believes the submarine sank to a depth of 600-700 meters (2,000-2,300 feet), much deeper than its collapse depth of 200 meters (655 feet), at which point water pressure would be greater than the hull could withstand.

"With the authentic evidence we found believed to be from the submarine, we have now moved from the 'sub miss' phase to 'sub sunk,'" Margono said at the press conference, in which the found items were displayed.

The cause of the disappearance was still uncertain. The navy had previously said an electrical failure could have left the submarine unable to execute emergency procedures to resurface.

Margono said that in the past two days, searchers found parts of a torpedo straightener, a grease bottle believed to be used to oil the periscope, debris from prayer rugs and a broken piece from a coolant pipe that was refitted on the submarine in South Korea in 2012.

—AP

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SHORT TAKES

JNU steps up efforts to curb Covid spread

New Delhi: The Jawaharlal Nehru University on Saturday said it has ramped up efforts to contain Covid-19 spread and help the students, staff, teachers and their families residing in the campus. According to a press note, the university administration said like every other institution in Delhi, JNU has been working hard to provide help, both medical and social, to all its residents, ever since Covid-19 struck the country. During the current wave of COVID-19 pandemic, the JNU administration has ramped up its efforts in containing the infection as well as providing emergency help to any member, students, staff, teachers and their families, residing in the campus, it said. To augment the Covid task force of JNU, which was set up in March 2020, the administration has recently formed another team, the Covid response team, which has been working 24x7 in managing and planning response to any Covid case in the varsity. The press note said this team is being supported by student volunteers of NSS and NCC, who, in addition, also conduct various activities to spread the awareness of Covid-19 appropriate behaviour among the students. The Covid response team also coordinates with the Delhi government officials to secure testing, vaccination and hospitalisation of those who need it. With the help of local Sub-Divisional Magistrate's Office, JNU has in the past few months organised several COVID testing camps in the campus, and organised a vaccination camp recently where for several days a significant number of JNU community members were vaccinated, it added. — PTI

Cops create green corridor for oxygen supply to GTB Hosp

New Delhi: The Delhi Police on Saturday created a green corridor and helped Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital in the eastern part of the national capital to get an oxygen tanker, officials said. According to police, a message and call was received from the government's appointed nodal officer for the hospital for police assistance of the transportation of oxygen tanker from Inox Plant, Modinagar in Ghaziabad. The details of the tanker and driver were shared. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Shahdara) immediately contacted DIG Police, Ghaziabad and SP Rural Ghaziabad and started the coordination for swift transportation with police escort, a senior police officer said. Later, a team was dispatched from GTB Enclave police station which met the UP Police team midway and took over the responsibility, they said. They escorted the tanker through the shortest possible route and finally reached the hospital within an hour around 11 am, the officer added. In the north district, police helped Sant Parmanand Hospital by providing 71 oxygen cylinders in quickest time. In southeast district, police helped a hospital in Lajpat Nagar to get oxygen cylinders where lives of 40 Covid patients were at stake.

AAP govt doing nothing to augment oxygen supply in Delhi, says Maken

New Delhi, April 24: The Congress, on Saturday, accused the Arvind Kejriwal government of spending crores on publicity but doing nothing in the past one year to augment the oxygen storage capacity or set up new plants in the national capital. Congress leader Ajay Maken said the Centre and the Delhi government can squabble later but they should at least work for public welfare and development during the Covid pandemic. Addressing a virtual press conference, he said the Centre has informed the high court that it has sanctioned eight pressure swing absorption (PSA) plants but only one has been set up. The Delhi government has not added even a single PSA plant in the past year and neither has it augmented the oxygen storage capacity in the national capital, he alleged.



Ajay Maken

"The Central and Delhi governments are fighting with each other. The Delhi government and the Centre can fight later over who will rule, but right now at least work for public welfare and development," he told reporters. "Why oxygen plants have not come up in Delhi whereas states like Rajasthan have set up 24 out of the 37 PSA units sanctioned in the past one year and seven big oxygen storage plants?" he asked. "Instead of doing their bit,

they are trying to put blame on each other to divert attention. What the Delhi government and the Central government have done is criminal. They have not spent a single penny on enhancing oxygen supply and adding storage capacity in Delhi in the past year," he said, urging them to provide at least oxygen to people struggling to get it. Mr Maken alleged that the Delhi government spent ₹355 crore on advertisement and publicity last year and another ₹467 crore has been earmarked as publicity budget for this year. "With a total of ₹822 crore being spent on advertisements and publicity in Delhi in the last two years, one can set up as many as 800 oxygen plants, adding 750 metric tonnes capacity of oxygen. But the government will not take such a step for public welfare," he alleged. — PTI

■ Severity of corona is such that all our available resources are proving inadequate: CM

Kejri sends SOS to all CMs, urges them to provide oxygen to Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday sent an SOS to his counterparts in other states seeking their help in boosting medical oxygen supply in the national capital on a day 20 Covid patients died at a private hospital as it was waiting for its oxygen to be replenished.

As the desperate hunt for the life-saving gas continued in the national capital amid rising coronavirus cases, the chief minister told the states that despite the central government's help, the severity of Covid-19 was such that all available resources were proving to be inadequate.

"I would be grateful if you could provide us with any oxygen, along with tankers, from your state or any organisation in your state. Kindly treat this as an SOS," Kejriwal wrote in his letter to the chief ministers.

Due to the unprecedented rise in Covid cases in the last few days, many Delhi hospitals have run out of oxygen, Kejriwal apprised the chief ministers. "I am writing to all CMs requesting them to provide oxygen to Delhi if they have spare. Though Central govt is also helping us, the severity of corona is such that all available resources are proving inadequate," the chief minister tweeted.

In the letter, Kejriwal wrote that Delhi does not produce any oxygen and its daily supplies were "woefully" short.

The Centre has increased Delhi's daily quota from 378 MT to 480 MT even as the ruling AAP dispensation has alleged interruptions in supplies from neighbouring states.

Several hospitals have also approached the High Court for ensuring oxygen supply amid a blame game



A man breaks down after the death of his relative at Jaipur Golden Hospital in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

HC asks Delhi govt to set up oxygen plant, directs Centre to ensure 480 MT per day

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

The Delhi High Court said on Saturday that if any official at the central, state or local administration was obstructing in the picking up or supply of oxygen, then it would "hang" that person. The observation by a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli came during the hearing of a plea by Maharaja Agrasen Hospital over shortage of oxygen for seriously-ill Covid patients.

The court told the Delhi government to give it one instance of who was obstructing the oxygen supply and said "we will hang that man". "We will not spare anyone," the bench added. The court told the Delhi government to inform the Centre also about such officials of the local administration so that it could take action against them. The high

court also asked the Centre when the 480 metric tonne (MT) of oxygen per day allocated for Delhi would see the light of the day.

"You (Centre) had assured us (on April 21) that 480 MT per day will reach Delhi. Tell us when will it come? The 480 MT per day is still to see the light of the day," the court said.

The Court directed the Centre and Delhi to coordinate between themselves for arranging the cryogenic tankers to ensure that hospitals in the national capital are given the complete allocated quantity of 480 MTs of oxygen.

The high court asked the Delhi government to set up its own oxygen plant and said that a smooth and fully allocated supply of oxygen to Delhi can resolve many problems. The court on Saturday also pulled up the Delhi government for not providing

proper suggestions to the Centre regarding supply of oxygen from nearby plants in place of its allocated oxygen supply from plants in West Bengal and Odisha. It also asked the Delhi government to make arrangements for tankers.

The bench also asked the Centre on Saturday about the arrangements being made to deal with the rise in Covid cases. "We are going to hit peak in mid-May. It's a tsunami actually. How are we going to build capacity? How are we preparing as on date about the situation of mid-May? What are the numbers we are looking at? Some people will eventually die. It's inevitable. Those who could be saved, we are losing those persons too. Those people who can fight it are saved, we need to look at that. Our mortality will otherwise go up. We should be able to reduce mortality," the court said.

Delhi hospitals forced to use back up stock amid severe oxygen crisis

New Delhi, April 24: Amid deepening crisis over the scarcity of oxygen, several hospitals in the national capital have been left with no option but to use their back up stock, with some like Saroj Super Speciality Hospital advising relatives to shift their patients to another facility.

While Fortis Hospital (Shalimar Bagh), presently running on its back up oxygen supply, urged the prime minister, Delhi chief minister and other ministers for "immediate assistance", Saroj Super Speciality, having not received oxygen refill for the past 44 hours, is now advising its patients to shift to other hospitals.

"We are running low on oxygen and using our back up now. We have alerted our patients about the situation, and are advising them to shift to

Only 45 minutes of oxygen left at SGRH, lives of over 100 at risk

New Delhi, April 24: Sending out yet another SOS, Delhi's Sir Ganga Ram Hospital (SGRH) said on Saturday night that the lives of more than 100 patients were at risk as it was left with just about 45 minutes of oxygen supply. The hospital said it had made at least four SOS calls in a span of 24 hours and it was in crisis mode with alarm bells ringing continuously.

The premier private hospital said the lives of more than 100 patients were at risk as it was left with just about 500 cubic metres of

oxygen that would last for just about 45-60 minutes. According to the hospital, it has a daily consumption of 10,000 cubic meters of liquid oxygen.

The hospital has resorted to manual ventilation and is in need of an urgent refill of liquid oxygen, officials said.

SGRH has been getting oxygen supply through tankers for the past few days while it has been making efforts to set up its own oxygen plants amid what it called below-contracted delivery from its suppliers. — PTI

another hospital. Things are really uncertain," P K Bhardwaj, medical director, Saroj Super Speciality

Hospital, told PTI. Bhardwaj said the hospital, which needs three metric tonnes of oxygen

■ **THE DATA** of the last 24 hours also revealed that the number of active coronavirus cases in the national capital is inching closer to the one-lakh mark. The tally of active cases has climbed to 93,080 in the city.

there might not be a need to extend it further.

Delhi recorded the highest single-day rise in its Covid-19 death toll with 357 more people succumbing to the viral disease and over 24,000 fresh cases, according to the latest bulletin issued by the city health department. The positivity rate stood at 32.27 per cent, the bulletin said.

The data of the last 24 hours also revealed that the number of active coronavirus cases in the national capital is inching closer to the one-lakh mark. The tally of active cases has climbed to 93,080 in the city.

A significant number of 22,695 patients have recovered from the infection, the bulletin said.

A total of 74,702 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours, while the Covid vaccine was administered to 35,455 people, it added. — PTI



People wait outside after they lost their relatives at Jaipur Golden hospital in New Delhi on Saturday. Atleast 20 critically COVID 19 patients died amid oxygen scarcity in this hospital.

— PTI

Covid positive dentist jumps to death from 14th-floor Noida flat

Noida, April 24: A 30-year-old dentist, who had tested positive for Covid-19 a few days ago, died after she jumped off her 14th-floor apartment in Noida, police said on Saturday.

She was rushed to a private hospital Friday night where she was declared dead.

The incident was reported in a residential society in Sector 137, under Surajpur police station limits, a senior official said.

The dentist was recently tested positive for coronavirus and had been staying in home isolation. Last night, she jumped off her apartment on the 14th floor of the building and died, additional deputy commissioner of police, Central Noida, Elamaram G said.

According to her husband, the woman was running fever and experiencing difficulty in

breathing since the past few days, police said. Further legal proceedings are being carried out by the police, the additional DCP said.

On Thursday night, a 51-year-old man undergoing treatment for Covid-19 had also ended his life by jumping from a hospital building in Noida. He was allegedly battling depression due to his health condition, according to the police. — PTI

70% traders want lockdown extension in Delhi, says CTI

New Delhi, April 24: Seventy per cent of the city traders are in favour of extending the lockdown beyond April 26 amid the worsening coronavirus crisis in the capital, said the Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI) on Saturday.

Out of the 700 traders organisations participating in a survey, almost 500 were in the favour of extending the lockdown, it added.

The survey included traders from Kashmiri Gate, Chandni Chowk, Chawri Bazar, Sadar Bazar, Khari Baoli, Karol Bagh, Kamla Nagar, Rajouri Garden, Nehru Place, South Extension and Shahdara.

"Most organisations were in favour of extending the lockdown for five to seven days in Delhi. The traders made it clear



A deserted look of Connaught Place during the lockdown in New Delhi on Saturday.

— G.N. Jha

that they would follow the decision of the Delhi government only about the lockdown and won't do any lockdown on their part," said Brijesh Goyal, chairman of the CTI.

Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on April 19 had announced a six-day lockdown from 10 pm on

Monday till 5 am on April 26 to deal with the rising number of Covid-19 cases as the national capital's health system was stretched to its limits.

The city has reported around 2,100 deaths due to the deadly virus in 11 days. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

34-hour curfew in J&K as Covid spikes

Srinagar: Entire Jammu and Kashmir was placed under a complete curfew for 34 hours from Saturday night in view of worsening Covid-19 situation. Lieutenant-governor Manoj Sinha, while taking to Twitter announced, "Complete Corona curfew to be observed in the Union Territory from 8PM, 24th April (Saturday) till 6 am, April 26. Essential and emergency services to be allowed. All market, commercial institutions will remain closed". J&K has witnessed an upward trajectory in Covid-19 cases over the past couple of weeks. The officials said that the UT on Saturday reported 2,030 fresh cases, taking the tally to 158, 374. Also, 15 more people died of the virus in the last 24 hours. With these, the total fatality count has went up to 2, 126. The government had earlier this week extended night curfew in all 20 districts of the UT.

Jagannath Temple bans people's entry

Bhubaneswar: As the cases of Covid-19 surged in Odisha, the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration in Puri on Saturday decided to stop entry of devotees into the Srimandir, the abode of Lord Jagannath, till May 15, 2021. However, the age-old traditions of Niti-Kanti (rituals) of Jagannatha will continue as usual. The decision to close the temple for devotees was taken at an urgent meeting convened by SJTA in view of the upsurge in Covid cases. As per official sources, all the challenges posed by Covid-19 were discussed in detail. On Saturday, the Covid-19 positive cases in Odisha crossed 4-lakh mark with 6,647 more persons testing positive for the virus and eight patients succumbing to the disease. The fresh cases pushed the state's coronavirus positive tally to 4,01,341 while the death toll surged to 1,981.

Maha: 6 dead after 'drinking' sanitiser

Mumbai: Six persons have died in Yavatmal district of eastern Maharashtra after apparently consuming hand sanitiser liquid as they could not get liquor. While in the case of three men doctors confirmed that consumption of sanitiser was the cause, the others who died in similar circumstances were cremated without informing the police. The police was alerted Friday about the deaths of three persons at the rural hospital in Vani following complaints of uneasiness and vomiting, he said. "Their family members said deaths were caused by the consumption of sanitiser as they could not get liquor due to Covid restrictions. Three other men were said to have died in a similar manner," the police said. — PTI

CONGRESS MLA DIES OF COVID IN INDORE

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, APRIL 24

Tribal Congress MLA from Alirajpur district in Madhya Pradesh Kalawati Bhuria died of Covid-19 in a private hospital in Indore early on Saturday morning, family sources said on Saturday. She is the first sitting MLA in MP who succumbed to the virus. She was admitted to the Shalby Hospital in Indore 14 days ago after she tested positive for coronavirus. Her condition deteriorated fast in the two days ago and the end came early on Saturday morning, her family sources said. "Her lungs were 70 percent infected. She was on ventilator", hospital's medical superintendent Vivek Joshi said. The 47-year-old leader who had shunned marriage to devote her time for social service was emerging as a key tribal leader of Congress in Madhya Pradesh, particularly among her tribe of Bhil in western belt of the state. The niece of former Union minister and Congress MLA Kantilal Bhuria, Kalawati was elected as Jhabua district zilla panchayat president four times before being elected as MLA from Jobat constituency in Alirajpur district in 2018 polls. "She was a very popular leader in the tribal region in the state. Her death is an irreparable loss to Congress," former minister and MP PCC vice-president Raja Pateria said.

Desperate times, desperate measures



Overcrowded Bandra Kurla Complex Covid-19 vaccination centre as people gather in large numbers to get themselves vaccinated on Saturday. — RAJESH JADHAV



Family members (above) of Covid-19 patients wait to fill their empty cylinders with medical oxygen in Kanpur. A patient (right) receives free oxygen, provided by a Sikh organisation at Indrapuram gurdwara, Ghaziabad. Smoke rises in the atmosphere due to cremation of COVID-19 victims at Swarn Rekha Ghat crematory in Ranchi on Saturday. — PTI



Defence PSUs, OFB medical facilities to treat civilians

New Delhi, April 24: All health facilities of defence public sector undertakings and the Ordnance Factory Board have been allowed to provide health services to civilian population requiring treatment for Covid-19, defence minister Rajnath Singh said on Saturday. Singh also said that the armed forces and the defence ministry will leave no stone unturned in providing all possible assistance to the civil administrations in dealing with the pandemic. The defence minister's comments came after he reviewed efforts by the three services and various other wings of his ministry in contributing to India's fight against a fast-spreading second wave of Covid-19. Officials said several Indian Navy ships were put on standby for any assistance in moving oxygen tankers in view of a shortage of medical oxygen for treatment of Covid-19 patients.

Singh carried out the review at a virtual meeting attended by Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat, Army Chief Gen. M.M. Naravane, Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh and DRDO chairman G. Satheesh Reddy, among others. "Reviewed the efforts of Ministry of Defence and the three Services to fight against the current wave of Covid pandemic through video conferencing facility. The Armed Forces and MoD will leave no stone unturned in providing all possible assistance to the civilian administration," he tweeted. — PTI

Serum Institute backs pricing of Covishield

'Initial rates based on advance funding'

New Delhi, April 24: Serum Institute of India (SII), which makes the most used Covid-19 vaccine in the country, on Saturday defended pricing of Covishield vaccine at 1.5 times the initial rate, saying the earlier price was based on advance funding and now it has to invest in scaling up and expanding capacity to produce more shots. The world's largest vaccine-maker, which manufactures AstraZeneca vaccine at Pune, earlier this week announced a price of ₹600 per dose for private hospitals and ₹400 per dose for state governments and for any new contract by the central government. It currently charges the central government ₹150 per dose for the existing supplies. The Opposition parties had criticised the differential pricing for Covid-19 vaccines, saying it was

discriminatory and will benefit only a "few big industrialists" while common people will suffer. SII in a statement clarified that there was an "inaccurate comparison" done between the global prices of the vaccine with India. "Covishield is the most affordable Covid-19 vaccine available in the market today," SII said. The initial prices were kept very low globally as they were based on advance funding given by those countries for at-risk vaccine manufacturing, it added. "The initial supply price of Covishield for all government immunisation programme, including India, has been the lowest", SII said. Government procurement for countrywide immunisation programmes in all countries, including India, has been at a far lower price as the volumes are very large, it added. — PTI

6 die in Amritsar due to 'O2 shortage'

Amritsar, April 24: Six patients died at a private hospital here on Saturday allegedly due to a shortage of oxygen, prompting the Punjab authorities to order a probe into the incident. Five of the six patients were infected with Covid-19, the hospital said. "Despite the district administration being repeatedly asked to extend help, no one turned up to do the needful," Sunil Devgan, chairman and managing director of Neelkant hospital where the deaths occurred, alleged. "Six patients, including two women, died due to

the shortage of oxygen," he claimed. However, medical education minister O.P. Soni refuted the charge and claimed that no proper information was given by the hospital about any shortage of oxygen. A mere simple message was dropped in a WhatsApp group to the administration, he said. Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh ordered the Amritsar deputy commissioner to initiate a thorough probe into the incident. Mr Singh also said the hospital prima facie seemed to have flouted orders given to all private

hospitals facing oxygen shortage to shift their patients to government medical colleges. The incident comes amid a deepening crisis over the scarcity of oxygen, vital to save critically ill Covid patients, with similar tragedies unfolding in hospitals in other parts of the country over the last few days. Mr Devgan claimed that after the death of patients, only five oxygen cylinders were supplied to the hospital. The hospital chairman claimed that three main oxygen suppliers have said that government hospitals are being pri-

oritised. "Heavy police force has been deployed outside the oxygen units to prevent oxygen supply to private hospitals," Mr Devgan alleged. Of the six patients who died at the hospital on Saturday, two were from Gurdaspur, one from Tarn Taran district and the remaining three were from Amritsar. The DC has set up a two-member committee, comprising a PCS officer, Dr Rajat Oberoi, who is also in-charge of the death analysis committee, and a civil surgeon from Amritsar, to probe the matter, an official spokesperson said. — PTI

Vaccinate 18-45 via online booking: Govt tells states to ramp up jab centres

Govt asks other social platforms to remove misleading Covid posts

New Delhi, April 24: Ahead of the roll-out of vaccination of people aged between 18 and 45 from May 1, the Centre on Saturday asked states to register additional private vaccination centres and ensure effective crowd management at sites and stressed on inoculation through "only online registration" for beneficiaries in the age bracket.

Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan and empowered group on technology and data management to combat Covid-19 chairman R.S. Sharma held a high-level meeting on Saturday to guide states and Union Territories on effective implementation of the new vaccination strategy (Phase-3) and to review their augmentation plans so as to strengthen the existing hospital and clinical treatment infrastructure for Covid-19 patients. With regards to the Phase-3 vaccination strategy from May 1, the states were advised to register additional private COVID-19 Vaccination Centres (CVCs) on mission mode by engaging with private hospitals, hospitals of industrial establishments, industry associations, etc., the health ministry

said in a statement. They have also been asked to monitor the number of hospitals that have procured vaccines and have declared stocks and prices on COWIN portal and schedule vaccination for eligible population for providing adequate visibility of vaccination slots on COWIN, the ministry said.

The states and UTs were asked to prioritise decision on direct procurement of vaccines by State/UT Government and publicising about facility of 'only online registration' for the 18-45 age group. They were also asked to train vaccination centre staff about vaccination, adverse event following immunisation reporting and management, use of COWIN and to coordinate with law-and-order authorities for effective crowd management at sites. — PTI

to incite public panic. The development comes at a time when India is registering a record number of coronavirus infections daily. When contacted, a Twitter spokesperson said when it receives a valid legal request, it reviews it under both Twitter Rules and local law. If the content violates Twitter's Rules, the content will be removed from the service. If it is determined to be illegal in a particular jurisdiction, but not in violation of the Twitter Rules, we may withhold access to the content in India only. — PTI

Zydus drug raises hope in curing moderately ill

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

As health experts continue to experiment with various drugs to find the most effective treatment for Covid-19 patients, Zydus Cadila's "Virafin" has raised some hope for curing moderately ill persons. Following the success of trial studies, the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) has given restricted emergency use approval to the 'Virafin' for treating the adult patients showing moderate Covid symptoms. Virafin is a pegylated interferon alpha-2b (PegIFN), which when subcutaneously injected to the patient in the early

stages of infection, resulted in their faster recovery. Studies have confirmed the safety, tolerability and efficacy of Virafin. The studies also reported that Virafin reduces viral load and aid in managing the disease in a better way, such as reduction in the need for supplemental Oxygen, thereby reducing the respiratory tension caused due to low oxygen levels. Phase 3 clinical trials reported that 91.15% of patients treated with "Virafin" had a RT-PCR negative by day seven and treatment significantly reduced the hours of supplemental oxygen in the patients apart from faster recovery as compared to other anti-viral agents.

Govt to get 24 oxygen containers from abroad

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

Home minister Amit Shah chaired a series of high-level meetings on Saturday with senior officials from multiple ministries to review the immediate supply of high-capacity oxygen tankers from abroad by IAF aircraft. Sources said at least 24 such "liquid O2 containers" are being sourced from Singapore, UAE and Germany to be rushed immediately to India by IAF.

Home ministry officials maintained that it was not a shortage of oxygen in the country but its transportation due to lack of proper tankers that was hampering the health system. Sources claimed the biggest problem was the liquid oxygen cannot be airlifted since its highly inflammable. As a result, it has been decided that Air Force will airlift empty oxygen tankers to the nearest plants so that at least one-way time can be cut down.

Mr Shah has constituted a core team of senior officials who have started a massive "global search" for oxygen tankers which can be rushed to India immediately. Along with this, the team is also looking at oxygen plants that can be assembled within a day or two at the hospital itself and start production of oxygen immediately.

Sources said the team has been able to trace some manufacturers in Germany and some other European countries who make these "mini oxygen plants" that can be started with 24 hours.

Maha to float global tender for Remdesivir, Covid jab

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, APRIL 24

To meet a growing demand for coronavirus vaccines and Remdesivir injections in the state, the Maharashtra government has decided to float a global tender for the procurement of these drugs used in the treatment of Covid-19. Maharashtra, which is the worst coronavirus-affected state in the country, is facing an acute shortage of vaccines and remdesivir drugs. Deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar announced that the state will purchase these drugs from foreign companies.

"We have decided to float a global tender for remdesivir. For this, a five-member committee will be appointed and it will be headed by state chief secretary Sitaram Kunte," he said in Pune. Chief minister Uddhav Thackeray has directed the chief secretary to issue a global tender. It will

HC DIRECTS MAHA GOVT TO START 24/7 HELPLINE FOR REMDESIVIR

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, APRIL 24

Taking note of shortage of Remdesivir injections in Maharashtra, the Bombay high court has directed the state government to provide the drug to patients at hospitals where he is being treated. The court also asked the government to set up a

24/7 help line so that patients and their relatives don't have to run from pillar to post. An interim order was passed by the bench comprising Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G.S. Kulkarni while hearing a public interest litigation. The matter was heard on April 22 and order was made available on April 23.

decide on which vaccines should be purchased, Mr Pawar added.

CM Thackeray has also discussed the details of the vaccine with CEO of Serum Institute of India (SII) Adar Poonawala. The SII has agreed to provide vaccines to the state as per its production capacity. But we have to keep other options open, he said. The deputy CM claimed that the Centre has halved

the supply of medical oxygen to the state. "We were getting 250 metric tonnes of oxygen, but it has been reduced to 125 MT," he added.

Maharashtra on Saturday recorded 67,160 new Covid cases taking its caseload to 42,28,836. The state also registered 676 deaths due to the infection, taking the toll to 63,928. The state now has 69,448 active Covid cases.

SEARCH FOR MISSING



General public is here by informed that this girl (depicted in the photo) namely: **Monika D/o Ajay Kumar R/o H. No. B-144/2, Gali No. 10, 1st Pusta, Shanti Mohalla, Delhi** has been missing/ kidnapped from her house since **20.03.2021**. In this regard a DD No. 08-A dated **21.03.2021** has been lodged in **P.S. New Usmanpur, Delhi**. Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the girl but no clue has come to light so far.

Her physical description is as under:-

Sex: Female, **Age:** 19 years, **Height:** 4'10" ft., **Complexion:** Fair, **Face:** Long, **Built:** Thin, **Wearing:** Light Green colour Suit-Salwar and Golden Chappal in Feet.

Any person is having information or clue about this missing girl may kindly inform to the following:-

Website: http://cbi.nic.in

E-mail: cbc@cbi.gov.in

Fax No.: 011-24368639

Tel. No.: 011-24368638/24368641

SHO

P.S. New Usmanpur, Delhi

Ph. No.: 011- 22172410

Mob. No.: 8750870722

DPI/702/NE/2021

SHORT TAKES

**Ambani bomb scare:
Sunil Mane suspended**

Mumbai: Mumbai police has suspended inspector Sunil Mane, a day after he was arrested by the NIA in connection with the recovery of an explosives-laden SUV near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence and the murder of businessman Mansukh Hiran. Mumbai Police spokesperson deputy commissioner of police S. Chaitanya on Saturday confirmed the development. Mr. Chaitanya said, "Mr. Mane's suspension was ordered on Friday." The Central agency had secured the custody of Mane till April 28 while suspended API Sachin Vaze and Riyaz Kazi were sent to judicial custody till May 5. According to the sources, Mr. Mane was questioned on Thursday night and he was also confronted with the confessions made by suspended Mumbai Police API Riyaz Kazi and Sachin Vaze in their statements to the NIA. — PTI

**Odia migrant dies on
board Puri-Okha Exp**

Bhubaneswar: An Odia migrant worker working in Surat city in Gujarat died on Saturday onboard Puri-Okha Express train while he was on his way to his native place in Odisha. The deceased, identified as Bhagairathi Gouda of Mirigilendi village in Ganjam district, had boarded the Puri-Okha Express on Thursday following Covid-19 restrictions in Gujarat. He was being accompanied in the train by his wife and son. Gouda reportedly died inside the moving train near Visakhapatnam following breathlessness. He had recently recovered from fever and cough after treatment in Surat, his son said. "My father had no other disease but was down with fever and cough related ailment some days ago. I had consulted the doctor and made various health check-ups and examinations as per doctor's advice. He had also recovered after treatment," son of the deceased said.

**Indian, French navies
to conduct wargame**

New Delhi: The Indian and French navies will hold a three-day mega wargame in the Arabian Sea beginning Sunday that will feature complex naval operations like advanced air defence and anti-submarine drills. The 19th edition of the Varuna exercise will showcase the increasing levels of synergy, coordination and interoperability between the two navies, officials said. The Indian Navy will deploy guided missile stealth destroyer Kolkata, guided missile frigates Tarkash and Talwar, fleet support ship Deepak, a Kalvari-class submarine and a sleet of P-8I long-range maritime patrol aircraft, they said. — PTI

**NATIONAL AWARDS
FOR 5 J&K GRAM
PANCHAYATS**

Jammu: Five gram panchayats in Jammu and Kashmir bagged the National Panchayat Awards-2021, an official spokesman said on Saturday. L-G Manoj Sinha extended his heartiest congratulations to the best performing panchayats for bringing laurels to the Union territory. Gram panchayat Kangroosa, block Kandi Rafiabadd, Baramulla, and Gram panchayat Hakermulla, block Soibugh, Budgam won the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar (DDUPSP), the spokesman said. He said gram panchayat Kootah, Hiranagar, Kathua was conferred with the Nanaji Deshmukh Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar (NDRGGSP), while gram panchayat Panzgam A, block Reddi Chowkibal, Kupwara won the Gram Panchayat Development Plan Award (GPDPA). Gram panchayat Achaballa A, block Nadihal, Baramulla bagged the Child Friendly Gram Panchayat Award (CFGPA), the spokesman said. The L-G applauded the sarpanches and other Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members for putting in outstanding efforts for effective and efficient delivery of public services for transformation of rural J&K. "These PRIs would be role models for other panchayats and these achievements shall motivate others to follow their path," Sinha said. — PTI

**UTTARAKHAND 430 BRO workers were at the site when the avalanche occurred
8 dead, 31 missing in glacier burst**

Gopeshwar (U'khand), April 24: Eight Border Roads Organisation (BRO) workers were killed, seven injured and 31 went missing in an avalanche near the Indo-China border in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, officials said on Saturday. A total of 430 BRO workers were at the road-construction site when the avalanche occurred on Friday. Uttarakhand Director General of Police (DGP) Ashok Kumar said. Two bodies were recovered from the site in the Sumna area of Niti Valley on Friday night, while six more were recovered on Saturday, he added. Of the 430 workers, 384 have returned to the ITBP and Army camps in the area so far, eight are dead,



Rescue and relief operation underway on Saturday after a glacier broke off in the Sumna area of Niti Valley near Uttarakhand's Chamoli district. — PTI

seven injured have been rescued while 31 are missing, the DGP said, adding that a joint search-and-rescue operation by Army, ITBP, SDRF and NDRF personnel continues in the affected area. The injured were res-

cued in helicopters and flown to the Army hospital in Joshimath. The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Indian Army posts at Sumna are safe, the DGP said. Sumna, where the avalanche occurred, is approximately 25 km from Malari village and located near the confluence of the Girthigad and the Kiogad, two streams that originate from the Dhauli Ganga river, which witnessed a calamitous avalanche in

February, killing 80 people and leaving 126 missing.

A part of the Nanda Devi glacier broke off in Chamoli on February 7, leading to massive floods, recalling a 2019 study that warned about the dangers of climate change and said Himalayan glaciers have been melting twice as fast since the start of this century. The glacier collapse at Joshimath led to a massive flood in the Alaknanda river system and caused large-scale devastation in the upper reaches of the ecologically fragile Himalayas.

In June 2019, a study spanning 40 years of satellite observations across India, China, Nepal and Bhutan, indicated that climate change is eating the Himalayas' glaciers. — PTI



ONGC officials Alakesh Saikia and Mohini Mohan Gogoi rescued by Indian Army along with Assam Rifles in an operation on Friday night. One AK 47 has also been recovered. — PTI

**Naga villagers help
Indian Army free 2
ONGC employees**

Efforts to trace third abductee

**MANOJ ANAND
with agency inputs
GUWAHATI, APRIL 24**

In a major breakthrough, the Indian Army and the Nagaland police, with the support of some local Naga villagers on Friday night, rescued two employees of the state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) who were kidnapped earlier this week from Sivasagar in Mon district of Nagaland. Operations are still on to trace the third abductee, Retul Saikia.

The rescued employees were identified as Alakesh Saikia and Mohini Mohan Gogoi. The police also recovered one AK-47 from the location.

The operations are still in progress to trace the third abductee.

Informing that security forces had launched joint coordinated operations since April 21, the day suspected ULFA-I rebels had kidnapped the three employees of ONGC from a rig site at Lakwa oil field in Assam's Sivasagar district, sources said that security forces have also sealed the international border with Myanmar.

A news agency reported that three men were whisked away in an ambulance. And there is specific information that the kidnapping was carried out by ULFA(I) under

▶ **A TOTAL** of 14 linkmen, who aided the United Liberation Front of Assam-Independent (ULFA-I) in kidnapping the three ONGC employees, were apprehended by the Assam police.

▶ **THE RESCUED** employees were identified as Alakesh Saikia and Mohini Mohan Gogoi. The police also recovered one AK-47 from the location.

the command of its self-styled major Ganesh Lahon @ Purna Lahon and his accomplices Aidyanam Asom @ Moniram Borgohain and Pradip Gogoi @ Akon, an Assam police release said. "Use of ambulance by ULFA for kidnapping the ONGC employees - especially during the pandemic, is reprehensible", Assam special director general of police G.P. Singh tweeted.

Meanwhile, a total of 14 linkmen, who aided the United Liberation Front of Assam-Independent (ULFA-I) in kidnapping the three ONGC employees, were apprehended by the Assam police.

The Assam police also said it has received specific information that the banned ULFA (Independent) was involved in the kidnapping of the three ONGC employees from Sivasagar.

**C'garh Maoists kill
abducted police SI**

**RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
Bhopal, April 24**

A jawan, who was abducted by Maoists three days ago in Chhattisgarh's South Bastar district of Bijapur, was brutally killed by the Ultras, the police said on Saturday. The body of Murali Tati, who was a sub-inspector in the district reserve group (DRG), an exclusive tribal counter-insurgency wing of the Chhattisgarh police, was found on the outskirts of the village of Peddepara under Gangalur police limits in Bijapur district early on Saturday morning, the Bastar police said.

The slain jawan was abducted by Maoists near Palsumpura under the Gangalur police station on April 21. Maoists' West Bastar division owned responsibility for his killing.

The jawan's widow had earlier appealed to the Maoists to release him,

saying that he was not mentally stable.

Murali, a father of three children, was posted at a police station in Jagdalpur, the headquarters of Bastar. He was on sick leave for one-and-half months.

A delegation of Gondwana Samaj, a local tribal society, had earlier appealed to the rebels to free the jawan and was planning to meet the Naxals to negotiate his release from their custody.

The incident comes barely a fortnight after CRPF jawan Rakeshwar Singh, who was held hostage by Maoists during the April 3 encounter with security forces at Jonaguda in Bijapur district leading to the killing of 23 jawans, walked free from Naxal custody.

A week ago, three women health workers were abducted by Maoists in Bijapur district. They were, however, freed a couple of days later.

**TMC workers detained on
order of EC observers: Didi**

Bolpur (WB), April 24: chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday alleged that the three special observers of the Election Commission were ordering police officers to detain TMC workers during the polling hours, asserting that she would move the Supreme Court against such a "conspiracy" after the elections.

Addressing party members at the Gitanjali auditorium in Bolpur in Birbhum district, Ms Banerjee said that she can't be silenced even if she is show-caused.

"Enough is enough. I don't have any issue if they (EC observers) are working for free and fair elections but they have been working only to help the BJP. They want to finish off Trinamul," the chief minister alleged.

"These officials are giving orders to detain our men on the night before the polls and keep them in custody till 4 pm. This



Mamata Banerjee

WhatsApp conversation has been given to me by people in BJP," she said, showing the transcript of a purported chat between the special observers with DMs and SPs.

Ms Banerjee said that her party, TMC, will not take this lying down and move the Supreme Court against such a "conspiracy and partisan approach" after the elections.

"However, these three retired people won't be able to influence the elections. Their partisan conduct will help BJP win

▶ **ADDRESSING PARTY** members, Ms Banerjee said that she can't be silenced even if she is show-caused

▶ **ADDRESSING PARTY** Ms Banerjee said that her party, TMC, will not take this lying down and move the Supreme Court against such a 'conspiracy and partisan approach' after the elections.

only seven-eight seats. I personally don't believe BJP will cross the 70-mark," she claimed.

Ms Banerjee also hit out at the EC over the spike in Covid cases in the state, maintaining that the movement of lakhs of people from one district to another for poll-related works was the reason behind it. The Central forces personnel and the people who came from other states for campaigning were also not made to undergo RT-PCR tests, she claimed. — PTI

**■ Bharat Biotech prices its vaccine at ₹600 for states
Covaxin to cost ₹1,200 for pvt hospitals**

New Delhi, April 24: Bharat Biotech has fixed the price of its Covid vaccine, Covaxin, at ₹600 per dose for state governments and at ₹1,200 per dose for private hospitals, the vaccine maker announced on Saturday. In a statement, Bharat Biotech chairman and managing director Krishna M. Ella said the company is supplying the vaccine to the Central government at ₹150 per dosage.

"We would like to state that more than 50 per cent of our capacities have been reserved for Central government supplies," Ella said. Recovering cost is essential in the journey of innovation towards other

▶ **IN A** statement, Bharat Biotech chairman and managing director Krishna M. Ella said the company is supplying the vaccine to the Central government at ₹150 per dosage.

vaccines such as intranasal Covid-19, Chikungunya, Zika, Cholera and others, he added. The company has tagged the vaccine between \$15-20 for export markets.

Earlier this week, Serum Institute of India (SII) had announced a price of ₹400 per dose for "Covishield" for state governments and ₹600 per dose for private hospitals.

The company also said for the next two months, it will address the issue of limited capacity by scaling up vaccine production.

"Going ahead, 50 per cent of our capacities will be served to the government of India's vaccination programme, and the remaining 50 per cent of the capacity will be for the state governments and private hospitals," Serum Institute of India had said in a statement.

American vaccines in the private market cost more than ₹1,500 per dose, while Russian and Chinese vaccines cost greater than ₹750 per dose, it had noted.

Covishield comprises over 90 per cent of the 12.76

crore Covid vaccines administered across the country so far, according to government data on Wednesday.

Of the 127,605,870 Covid vaccination jabs administered till now, 11,60,65,107 are of Covishield, while 1,15,40,763 are Covaxin, according to the government's CO-WIN portal.

Earlier in the day, the government waived customs duty on the import of Covid vaccines as well as medical grade oxygen and related equipment as the nation battled its worst health crisis with a 'tsunami' of infections setting a new world record for cases for the third consecutive day. — PTI

**Nobody above law: NCP,
Sena on Deshmukh case**

Mumbai, April 24: With the CBI conducting searches at the premises of former Maharashtra minister Anil Deshmukh, the NCP on Saturday said nobody was above the law, but added that the truth behind the "political conspiracy" against him and the state government would come out through the high court-ordered probe. Talking to reporters, NCP spokesperson and Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik said, "Nobody is above the law. Anil Deshmukh is cooperating with the agencies."

He said he was not aware if any FIR has been regis-

tered against Deshmukh.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) is yet to reveal for whom suspended police officer Sachin Waze was working when he planted explosives outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence, Malik said.

"What was the role of former Mumbai police commissioner (Param Bir Singh) in the case. All these actions are taking place based on the ex-commissioner's letter," he alleged.

"This is nothing but misuse of power to malign the state government and Anil Deshmukh. We have full

faith in the judiciary and know that the truth behind the political conspiracy will be exposed through the probe," he said.

The CBI on Saturday conducted searches at Deshmukh's premises in Mumbai and his hometown Nagpur after registering a case against him in connection with allegations of corruption levelled against him by Param Bir Singh.

Deshmukh, an NCP leader, had resigned as a minister earlier this month after the high court asked the CBI to probe the allegations against him. — PTI

**Govt waives import duty
on Covid vaccine, oxygen**

▶ **DURING THE** meeting, PM emphasised the immediate need to augment the supply of medical grade oxygen as well as equipment required for patient care both at home and in hospitals.

PM directed the revenue department to ensure seamless and quick custom clearance of such equipment. But on the ground there was little relief. Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal wrote to all states requesting them to divert their spare oxygen reserves to Delhi, and Punjab CM Capt Amarinder Singh ordered shutdown of operations of some of the state's industries to divert oxygen for medical use as five patients died at a hospital in Amritsar due to its shortage. Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan said Delhi has been allotted more oxygen than what they had asked for and UT government has to now rationalise the quota. But hospitals and people continued to plead for oxygen, oxygen beds.

Senior officials in the Centre said the government is taking a lot of measures to improve supply of oxygen and medical supplies. IAF planes are bringing in cryogenic oxygen tanks from Singapore and transporting oxygen tanks in the country to reduce travel time. Railways' Oxygen Express has delivered nearly 150 tonnes of oxygen in the last 24 hours in Maharashtra and UP and more trains are on way, officials added.

However, given the magnitude of the problem, it is evident there was not much contingency planning in advance taking into account this kind of grave situation. If there had been, many lives could possibly have been saved. The usually easily available oxygen concentrator that sold till early this year between ₹35,000-45,000 is currently not available in the market but can be bought for ₹1.50 lakh in the black market. Adding to the chaos is shortage of RT-PCR testing material and testing reagents now in many places.

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20 more die gasping for O2 in Delhi hospital

■ **Continued from Page 1** BJP-led government at the Centre and the AAP government in Delhi seem to be locked in an endless battle, with one pleading for oxygen, and the other saying enough has been and is being delivered.

The two had a terse exchange in court on Saturday over supply of medical oxygen to hospitals in Delhi.

The Delhi high court, which was hearing the Arvind Kejriwal government's SOS for more and uninterrupted oxygen supply to hospitals, was told by the Delhi government's lawyer, "If we don't get 480 tonnes (of oxygen), the system will collapse. We have seen in the last 24 hours. Something disastrous will happen." The city got only 297 tonnes of med-

▶ **THE TWO** judge bench of Justice Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli, told the Delhi government to give it one instance of who was obstructing oxygen supply and said, "We will hang that man... We will not spare anyone."

ical gas on Friday, he said.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing on behalf of the Centre, brushed aside the Delhi government alluding to inaction, and said, "I know my responsibility. I know many things but not saying anything. Let's try and not be a cry baby." The court, while listening to Maharaja Agrasen's plea for more oxygen and the claim that the oxygen supply is being obstructed, the Delhi high court report-

edly said that if anyone obstructs oxygen supply, "we will hang that man".

The two judge bench of Justice Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli, told the Delhi government to give it one instance of who was obstructing oxygen supply and said, "We will hang that man... We will not spare anyone."

The court then asked the Delhi government to set up its own oxygen plant and said that a smooth and fully allocated supply of oxygen to Delhi can resolve many problems.

But that will take time and with Delhi's situation getting increasingly more desperate, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday wrote to his counterparts in other states, requesting for oxygen and saying the Centre was helping but the crisis

is so severe that all available resources are proving to be inadequate.

CM Kejriwal tweeted, "I am writing to all CMs requesting them to provide oxygen to Delhi if they have spare. Though Central govt. is also helping us, the severity of corona is such that all available resources are proving inadequate."

In the letter, he wrote, "Delhi does not produce any oxygen. Due to the severe rise in corona cases in the last few days, many Delhi hospitals have run out of oxygen. Daily supplies of oxygen to Delhi are woefully short of our requirements." He requested them for oxygen, along with tankers, from their state or any organisation in their state. He asked for this request to be treated as an SOS.

CBI books Anil Deshmukh, NCP says 'witch-hunt'

■ **Continued from Page 1** inspector Sachin Waze to collect Rs 100 crore every month from 1,750 bars and restaurants in Mumbai. Mr Waze is being inves-

tigated by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for his alleged role in the industrialist Mukesh Ambani house bomb scare and the death of businessman Mansukh Hiran.

The NCP said nobody was above the law, but termed the action against Mr Deshmukh "a political witch-hunt". Maharashtra NCP chief

Jayant Patil said, "The CBI is using the high court's permission to hold an inquiry to settle a political score. The raids are being used to malign a political leader."

THE ASIAN AGE

25 APRIL 2021



Sucheta Dasgupta
Off the beaten track

Hope and sorrow in the time of C-virus

A ghost lives in my body and watches over the state of my heart. It does not take up space. It refuses food and drink, and speaks only when spoken to. I consult it when I need to identify my feelings. For my benefit, it keeps a record of them. For some reason, strange or otherwise, I alone was never an adept at that.

The only time the ghost speaks to me of its own accord is when I am tired. Whenever I expend myself beyond my lung capacity, it tells me: This is how it felt for him, too, when, for instance, he resumed breathing for your sake, twice coming out from under ventilation. And the cold finger of guilt grips my heart.

The first time I heard the ghost speak was when I was perspiring over the griddle a full year after Baba died.

Baba went under ventilation three Marches ago, in the late spring of 2018. The lone tree tucked away at the back of the interstate bus terminus was full of stars.

Baba did not die of the coronavirus. Following cardiac and kidney failure, he died of septic shock. Between the two illnesses, the pneumonia was the common factor.

Baba, a doctor, has missed out on the whole pandemic plus the vaccine conversations.

I have given up exercising for fitness. There is no one to perform for, vie against, show off. It puts me on a better footing than the children in my neighbourhood, fretting because they want to but cannot play. Less than a month ago, I saw a desi mother supervising their games in the park as I silently applauded her. To me, she was the pith of society, salt of the earth. That was then, though. This is now. In-between, the coronavirus has exploded and is now spreading furious and fast.

Despite its no-pussyfooting bravado and stupendous majority, the government did not declare a lockdown on Holi. The Kumbh continued uninterrupted. The virus, meanwhile, reached the interiors and the second wave has since surpassed the first one. The daily case count is over three lakhs. Experts say the peak is many weeks away. India is notorious for its non-existent chains of primary and secondary medical infrastructure. My husband held that these omissions on the part of the government — failing to declare a curfew, call off the Kumbh and so on — fell on its policy blindspot.

Well, one didn't. The decision to hold an eight-phase legislative assembly election, ongoing in the present, was deliberate. My home state, West Bengal, was chosen for this singular punishment.

Our leaders thus dropped the ball when our severely constrained health workers had almost won the match. The latter slogged away alone. Many did not return home in days. The hospitals were full of despair.

A young man asked a photographer to click the smoke coming out of his mother's pyre. She was there.

The high courts stepped in. They bore upon the Centre to direct uninterrupted transport of oxygen across state borders. India is the world's largest producer of industrial grade oxygen. But earlier, state governments had refused to come on the same page on this simplest of measures.

Even though I am his eldest, I am not going to my hometown to perform Baba's annual rite. My younger sister will fill in for me. The coronavirus is a factor. But what made the decision for me is my awareness from the start that I have not been a good child. While he never needed me to, I did not help Baba take care of the family. No one took care of him, on the other hand. I spurned his wish for me to become a doctor. For the sake of my journalistic quest, I abandoned him.

My rishirin to Baba will be paid when I complete my memoir of our differences. Baba was a flawed man. But no one, including a never-genuinely exceptional me, had a mind like Baba's.

Periodically, the seed of my guilt bursts on my skin in angry hives. When I work very hard and accomplish a minuscule amount of good it goes away. I risk losing a bit of my memory of Baba whenever that occurs.

The young child I know in our condominium has started school. But school is online and she does not speak a word, and I worry that the lack of physical contact with classmates and peers will further rob her of that incentive. Whenever we meet, I am infected by her boundless energy. But she is more poised than I ever will be and never exposes her weak spots. Like her inability to articulate. Her absence of vocabulary.

I, too, had once chosen certainty over sharing, but I had been pushed to do that.

I dream of her growing up. To being from nothingness, darkness to light. Like Vak, daughter of Ambhrin, she will give a name to all existence, one by one, that will, in turn, give rise to noun, thought, knowledge and identity. That day, should I be around, she will probably look into my eyes with those great big ones of hers and there will be a reckoning. Or there will be not.

Subhani



An AWOL government



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

It is like a nightmarish déjà-vu moment for me. Opening the debate on the demands for grants for the ministry of health and family welfare in the Lok Sabha on March 17, 2021, I, at the outset, stated: "Mr Speaker Sir, this discussion is taking place at a point in time when the world is being engulfed, if not overwhelmed, by the second wave of coronavirus infections." These words have unfortunately proven to be prophetic in the case of our nation.

The last two weeks have been a nightmare for India as the second wave of Covid-19 hit the nation in all its fury. Overflowing hospitals, oxygen scarcity, hoarded life-saving drugs being sold on the black market, diagnostic centres stretched to a breaking point and hospitals approaching the courts to maintain oxygen supplies. The worst is even cremation and burial grounds not being able to cope with inflow of dead bodies and death numbers literally being fudged. People are being cremated on make-shift platforms set up on public pavements — denied dignity even in death.

The imagery of the past fortnight could not have been more bizarre. On one hand, the Prime Minister and home minister were addressing frenzied supporters in West Bengal and, on the other hand, sick and even dying people were being turned back from hospitals for lack of space.

The government is AWOL— absent without leave.

What is, however, even far more felonious if it turns out to be true is that the Indian-origin double mutant strain, B.1.1.67, that is responsible for the current

rampage, was first detected as way back on the 5th of October 2020. Since both earlier mutations, E84Q and L425R, were discovered in the virus' crucial spike protein, its devastation potential should have been sequenced on a war footing. Instead, it was consigned to the back burner and never taken seriously because Covid infection numbers had started declining.

How could we have missed the second wave of Covid-19 with all the empirical evidence of hundred years of history staring us straight in the face? Downright negligence, coupled with hubris, made the governments, both at the Centre and some in the states, let their guard down.

Surprisingly, when the Prime Minister addressed the nation on Tuesday night, he said lockdown should we used as a measure of the last resort. On March 23, 2020, when India was at 341 cases and only seven dead, he was the most enthusiastic champion of a national lockdown. All through the whole of last year, ministers and spokespersons of the NDA/BJP alliance kept touting it as the magic bullet that had saved millions of lives. *Jan Hai To Jahan Hai* (If there is life there would be paradise) — they sang in chorus. One year later, the Prime Minister and his band of not-so-merry men are singing an entirely different tune.

With a 32 lakh crore hole in the Union budget spread over two fiscals, 2020-21 and 2021-22, and no cushion to fall back upon, for the economy has been grossly mismanaged going back to the illogical demonetisation in November 2016, livelihoods are

With a 32 lakh crore hole in the Union budget spread over two fiscals, 2020-21 and 2021-22, and no cushion to fall back upon, for the economy has been grossly mismanaged, livelihoods are now being prioritised over lives

now being prioritised over lives. If the wheels of the economy do not keep ticking, the Union government stares at the spectre of bankruptcy.

It is, therefore, not true that even in times of a raging pandemic, the allocations in the Union budget for health in the current fiscal are at best tardy. I had pointed this out during the Parliament debate. In 2020-21, the ministry received an allocation of ₹67,112 crores. This is an increase of a measly 3.9 per cent over the revised estimates of 2019-20 ₹64,609 crores. In 2019-20, the cumulative public health expenditure of all the states put together was a meagre ₹1,96,659 crores. The Union government's performance was even worse at ₹36,339 crores.

We all know India's health system is in shambles. Last year in these columns, I had argued that what we need is a new health deal for India. I had calculated that India requires an infrastructure investment of ₹6 lakh crores to rebuild its public health system bottom upwards. The human resource cost to staff it is separate.

Given this state of play, a second wave meant that it would be each to their own. One would be primarily responsible for saving one's own life and those of one's loved ones.

Had we not experienced the same a year back? The disadvantaged sections of our society — the millions of internal migrants who keep the wheels of our economy turning — were compelled to walk home as they were doused with

with chlorine water, cane-charged and made to suffer a million other ignominies by a callous state to prevent them from reaching their home and hearth. Once again as states announce lockdowns and curfews, you see the same stampede at bus stands and railway stations as people make a beeline back to their villages. The clock has turned a full cycle.

It, therefore, begs a question: Should people themselves not have come together to enforce Covid-appropriate behaviour during the lull when cases had come down? But given our intrinsic sense of fatalism — it is all in God's hands — we threw all caution to the winds. This, even when it is known that there is never a government when it is required the most.

Maybe, given the hand-to-mouth existence of the bulk of our people who need to migrate to urban agglomerations to keep their body and soul together, it is not even humanly possible to think beyond the next meal. They are thus destined to play the Russian roulette, for the choice is a really a binary between death by hunger or death by virus.

Will this situation ever change? Can we build a state-of-the-art education and healthcare system for our people? The answer is yes. However, it would first and foremost require population control. With 135 crore people and growing by the minute, it is just not possible for any system to provide even the basic level of amenities required for a decent living. A broad national consensus regarding the need to contain population needs to be created at the earliest. How many more tragedies would it take to understand this?

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

LETTERS

BIG NO FROM USA

Does it matter if the regime changes in America? Trump's USA put more faith in business than science, to then book Covid vaccines twice its need. As a result while it suffered heavy casualties earlier, but gained an enviable pace of vaccination and firewalled itself against the endless quirks of the virus. And now the Biden Administration has again denied India the supplies that it requires to produce vaccines on the scale required by its population. It has made it clear that its priority lies in saving American lives. We must now pay the price for our misplaced faith and poor investment in health infrastructure.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

OXYGEN POLITICS

WEST BENGAL chief minister Mamata Banerjee has accused the Centre of diverting tonnes of oxygen, which was being supplied by HAL, from her state to others ruled by the BJP, such as Uttar Pradesh. It is difficult to understand how the Centre and the ruling BJP could have been benefited by diverting the oxygen from a state which is poll-bound to states which were not facing polls. On the other hand, the people of West Bengal have always been treated badly by the Centre because they rarely know to exercise their democratic rights. However, the matter needs to be investigated and the decision rolled back if the allegation is true.

M.C. Joshi
Lucknow

DOOR TO DOOR

IT IS COMMENDABLE that citizens have been asked to register online for receiving the Covid-19 vaccine. However, there are hundreds of thousands of destitute underprivileged. There are many elderly, too, who are living alone and do not know how to use cyber devices. The Centre and state governments as well as the local administrations will have to look into their problems and urgently do the needful. It is best if the vaccination becomes a door-to-door programme, or else India will not be Covid-free.

M. Pradyu
Kannur, Kerala

WELCOME, RAMANA

JUSTICE N.V. RAMANA, who took over as the 48th Chief Justice of India on Saturday, faces several challenges, including filling up 411 vacancies of judges in the high courts and six in the Supreme Court. It is imperative that the judiciary is strengthened both quantitatively and qualitatively by the new incumbent to ensure that the workload at all levels of the judiciary remains under control. He must also do his best to rid the highest seat of justice in the country of its lately tarnished image.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

Pradeep S. Mehta
and Prashant Tak

Haryana law a bad example: Populism won't create new jobs

Haryana is the latest addition to the growing phenomenon where Indian states are formulating laws and policies to reserve jobs for locals in the private sector. Other states that have undertaken such measures, though with negligible implementation, include Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Is it a race to the top or the bottom? It is certainly petty, immoral and may not achieve its objectives.

The Haryana government recently enacted the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act 2020, which requires private establishments that employ 10 or more workers to reserve 75 per cent of new jobs with a monthly salary of less than ₹50,000 for domiciles of Haryana.

It has resulted in a rift between the state government and the private sector, as evident from the backlash it has received from private entrepreneurs and industry bodies. Many private sector firms have threatened to move out.

This practice of regional protectionism has a ripple effect, that is likely to push other states to follow suit due to populist considerations, or a race to the bottom. It will end up restricting the freedom of workers to migrate and access better employment opportuni-

ties. It may also push employers to leave places where such laws are applicable. Most critically, it will lead to the erosion of national unity.

The perceived economic rationale of such laws — to generate jobs for locals and boost local industrial ecosystems — seems to get defeated.

To govern a commercial ecosystem, the state government is entitled and mandated to enact laws concerning land, labour, capital and energy.

These laws are meant to ensure smooth commercial activity. Each or both of the objectives forms the economic rationale towards formulation of a law. Additionally, under the new paradigm of stakeholder capitalism, the government, private sector, labour and civil society need to work in a compact over each other's actions for inclusive and mutually beneficial governance.

While enacting this law, the Haryana government failed to do adequate pre-legislative exercises to test its economic rationale. It also undermined its compact of cooperation with the private sector. The law restricts the opportunities of migrant workers and disrupts the industrial ecosystem of Haryana. It seems like an expression of the state government's insecurity towards unemployment and a classic example of ad hocism in law-

making, driven by populism.

There already exists a trust deficit between the government and private sector, as each has avoided accountability towards the other on various occasions. The private sector knowingly failed to adequately distribute its acquired wealth and institutionalise precarious jobs. The government has overregulated the private sector, leading to a high compliance burden. The world is debating stakeholder capitalism vs shareholder capitalism: to ensure that every enterprise works for society, not just its owners.

In both instances of state supervision of business, however, labour has borne the brunt of the adverse consequences. What is unfortunate is that self-interest, rather than mutual interest, drives the solution of modern economic problems.

There is nonalignment between the problem statement specified in the statement of objects and reasons of the Haryana law and its objectives.

The statement specifies the influx of migrants competing for low-paid jobs as the prime reason for the adverse impact on local infrastructure and housing, and proliferation of slums. It further attributes these factors to the rise of environmental and health issues, thus affecting the quality of life and livelihood.

It's true there is migrant influx for low-paid jobs in Haryana or the entire National Capital Region as it is in Mumbai or Kolkata. There can be two possible reasons. First, availability of abundant work opportunities under different industry segments; and second, lack of work in the states where the workers migrate from.

However, the primary reason for the burden on local infrastructure, housing and proliferation of slums is not the presence of migrants. It can be attributed to factors like lack of state capacity in undertaking welfare measures, non-availability of decent jobs in the private sector. Further, the quality of life and livelihood is affected for the same reasons.

Therefore, the solution to address this doesn't lie in reserving jobs for locals but in enhancing the investment on local infrastructure, welfare measures and strengthening skill development initiatives. The solution also demands ensuring decent work for low-paid workers in particular. Decent work implies that the primary needs of workers, including health, food, shelter and clothing, are fulfilled. It also places a worker in a position where monetary savings are ensured and there is an opportunity for skill enhancement.

Ensuring decent work is a goal in

itself and has an economic rationale of increased productivity and development of human beings. Working towards it requires the efficient performance of the compact between the government, labour and the private sector.

The state governments also need to realise such quota enabling measures are accompanied by newer compliances for enterprises. The proliferation of compliance responsibilities dilute the state's agenda of facilitating the "ease of doing business" and also reduces the governance deficit.

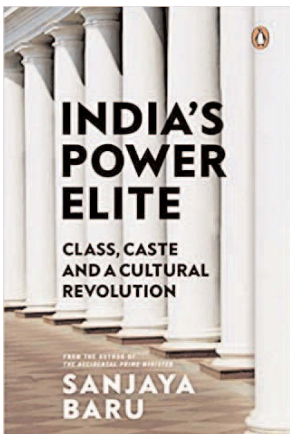
The policies enabling employment quotas for locals is driven by populism. It has far-reaching consequences which goes beyond the direct impact on labour, the government and the private sector. It adversely affects the investment prospects for a commercial ecosystem, urban mobility of workers and has an immense opportunity cost. Therefore, any state action towards enhancing employment must be anchored through an economic rationale. This will be clear when the compact between the government, labour and the private sector is evidently functional.

The writers work for CUTS International, a global public policy research and advocacy group

INDIAN TOP 10
BESTSELLERS

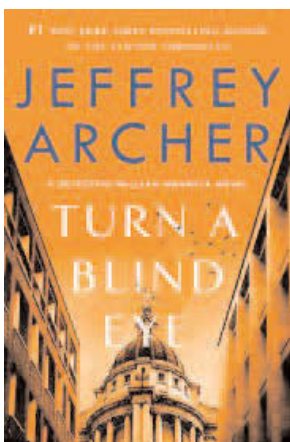
NON-FICTION

- INDIA'S POWER ELITE**
Sanjaya Baru
Penguin, ₹699
- BORN A MUSLIM: SOME TRUTHS ABOUT ISLAM IN INDIA**
Ghazala Wahab
Aleph, ₹999
- GHALIB: A WILDERNESS AT MY DOORSTEP: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY**
Mehr Afshan Farooqi
Allen Lane, ₹799
- REPUBLIC OF HINDUTVA**
Badri Narayan
Penguin Viking, ₹499
- ALL ROADS LEAD NORTH — NEPAL'S TURN TO CHINA**
Amish Raj Mulmi
Context Westland, ₹799
- REMNANTS OF A SEPARATION**
Aanchal Malhotra
HarperCollins, ₹599
- THE MYSTERY OF THE PARSEE LAWYER**
Shrabani Basu
Bloomsbury, ₹699
- THE CODE BREAKER**
Walter Isaacson
Simon & Schuster, ₹899
- INDUS BASIN UNINTERRUPTED**
Uttam Kumar Sinha
Penguin Vintage, ₹799
- THE FRONTIER GANDHI**
Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Imtiaz Ahmad Sahibzada (Translator)
Roli Books, ₹695



FICTION

- TURN A BLIND EYE**
Jeffrey Archer
Pan Macmillan, ₹450
- THE LAST QUEEN**
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni
HarperCollins, ₹599
- SHUGGIE BAIN**
Douglas Stuart
Picador, ₹499
- TAKEDOWN**
Brad Thor
Emily Bestler Books—Atria, ₹599
- THE BEGUM AND THE DASTAN**
Tarana Husain Khan
Tranquebar, ₹499
- KLARA AND THE SUN**
Kazuo Ishiguro
Faber & Faber, ₹699
- JUNGLENAMA: A STORY OF THE SUNDARBAN**
Amitav Ghosh
HarperCollins, ₹699
- MURDER AT THE MUSHAIRA**
Raza Mir
Aleph, ₹799
- CLUB YOU TO DEATH**
Anuja Chauhan
Picador, ₹499
- A TIME FOR MERCY**
John Grisham
Hodder & Stoughton, ₹699



Bahrison, New Delhi

B'bye chick flicks, welcome cross-cultural crime fiction



Devapriya Roy

review

In *Club You to Death*, her sixth novel (and first cosy crime), bestselling author Anuja Chauhan chooses to set the action in the posh Delhi Turf Club, located in the salubrious environs of Lutyens Delhi. Modelled mostly on the Delhi Gymkhana — though in the Acknowledgements Chauhan credits, in addition, several other clubs from across the country — “The Army Club in Dinjan”, “the DSOI at Dhaula Kuan”, “the Press Club of India at Raisina Road”, “the sunny sky-blue Bangalore Club, the multi-balconied Catholic club, all clubs, basically!” — DTC, that bastion of “old, established Dilliwallas”, automatically brings her fans right back to the territory where her most memorable book *Those Pricey Thakur Girls* was situated.

Of course, *TPTG* was about the genteel, sometimes even shabby, lives of the propertied elite in an India that was still socialist, while, in stark contrast, *CYTD* is about the capital's super-rich, whose portfolios have multiplied several

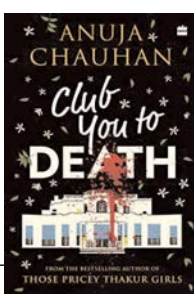
hundred times since liberalisation, and their kin, the not-particularly-wealthy-but-still-super-privileged upper-classes — retired home secretaries and generals — whom we get to see up close and personal, warts and all, through Chauhan's wacky (and prismatic) lens.

There are three qualities that Chauhan novels are famous for: a toe-curling romance, mostly between polar opposites; a larger story where said polar-opposites are required to rise up to a challenge, whether war, investigative journalism, politics or cricket, that brings about a kind of coming-of-age — this is what gives Chauhan's popular fiction its signature heft; and most importantly, the way she uses a polyglossic register to bring alive a specific world, in English. And it is safe to say that in *CYTD* she doesn't disappoint on any of these counts.

The story begins with Akash ‘Kashi’ Dogra, an idealistic lawyer who tries to live down all his elite connections — schooling in “TVVS” and Doon for instance, and the DTC mem-

bership his father has bestowed upon him much like a family inheritance — by living in a barsaati in Nizamuddin, representing slums in the Supreme Court (and winning them large compensations from the government), and being continual-ly inspired by his fiery girlfriend Kuhu Banerjee (“JNU ki Bangalan” to his mother Mala) who is busy building a school in Kalahandi.

Much against his will, Kashi finds himself at DTC on “Tambola Sunday”, and realises that he hadn't abandoned “the sprawling, sunlit, dahlia-edged lawns” awash with “the well-remembered Sunday morning bouquet of candyfloss, tandoor smoke and strong beer” because of his principles but chiefly because



CLUB YOU TO DEATH

By ANUJA CHAUHAN
HarperCollins India, ₹399

DTC is second home to his ex-Bambi Todi, pint-sized heiress to the vast Todi fortune, who had dumped him unceremoniously three years ago, when her parents had fixed her match with tycoon Anshul Poddar, who also happened to be one of the most eligible bachelors in the national Marwari community. (However, Anshul had died tragically after the engagement.)

Fate conspires to throw Bambi and Kashi together again — rekindling old sparks — when, the day after Tambola Sunday, the club's handsome Zumba instructor Leo Matthews is found dead in the gym at DTC, and investigations reveal he had been poisoned. ACP Bhavani Singh, the true breakout character of this book, “cute as a cheeku and keen as a cheel”, is deputised to solve this case. Married to an English teacher and father to two grown-up daughters, Singh is mellow, decent, fit — single-handedly redeeming the image of the Delhi Police — and invariably uses the charming “hum” that is common in eastern UP and Bihar versus the “main” of I-obessed Delhi, that Chauhan has translated cleverly into “we”. (That Singh uses the royal “we” is definitely one of the linguistic masterstrokes of this book.) Aided by his deputy, the irascible Padam Kumar, Bhavani Singh realizes quickly that he needs an “insid-

er” or two to navigate the murky corridors of DTC, and drafts in Kashi and Bambi to help. And soon secrets begin to tumble out by the dozens, leading, 350-odd pages later, to a proper Agatha Christie-like finale, where “Cheeku-cheel Bhavani” performs like Poirot in front of a gathering of all the players.

Having dominated the rom com segment for a decade now, it is understandable that Chauhan would want to venture into new territory — the cosy mystery — and, with *Baaz*, she had in fact experimented with the element of suspense in her tale. But it is also arguable that thanks to the OTTs, which seem to have rejected the Indian rom com firmly in favour of crime and drama as genres, its corresponding ripple effect in popular culture, seems to be translating into the popular fiction market as well. Is the age of rom com or chick lit — that term despised by Chauhan herself — over? At least for a phase? That is a question one cannot help but ask. (Meenakshi Madhavan Reddy's new novel, still in manuscript form, is a murder mystery too.)

I must confess, my next question is somewhat shameful. Can Pankaj Tripathi please play Bhavani Singh on screen?

Devapriya Roy is the author of five books, most recently Friends from College

WE RECOMMEND

BUNCH OF CAUTIONARY TALES ON SEXIST ABUSE

AGE CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi: *#MeToo* by Karan Puri (Invincible Publishers, ₹299) is a collection of six imaginary accounts of sexual abuse, its aftermath and denouement, mostly from the victim's perspective. Most are concise but lack in analysis. The language is simple and the reader gets to meet a variety of characters, including the male victim. The key to resolving the crisis is shown to be lying with the victims, themselves. The diversity of circumstance is possibly intended as a means to show how pervasive the problem of gendered as well as sexual harassment is, as present in Indian society today. Among the six cautionary tales, the story that leaves a lasting impression, however, is not directly to do with sexual harassment. It is about a feisty small town girl who is framed by her overcompetitive colleagues as an unscrupulous femme fatale and accused of playing the victim if only because she is too robust and fearless to shy away from pushing boundaries. Titled somewhat indifferently as “Corporate Me Too”, its message is subtle and realistic, and it describes all-too familiar truths about group dynamics and people's motivations. The author is at his best when he writes about worlds with which he is most familiar. We wish him good luck on his writing journey!



FAST FACT: Thirty-four-year-old Danish poet **Olga Ravn's** novel, *The Employees*, has been shortlisted for this year's International Booker Prize. It is all about the human and humanoid crew of Six-Thousand Ship forming attachments to objects picked up from planet, New Discovery. Structured as a series of witness statements compiled by a workplace commission, the crackling prose is as chilling as it is moving.



Those doughty homeboys with the wooden rackets



R. Mohan

review

This is the breeziest history of any sport ever written. Avoiding the clutter of chronography and detailed accounts of the operations and decisions of the administration, the story of Indian tennis is told in engaging fashion with anecdote after anecdote bringing out the thrills and excitement of the sport while giving us more than a glimpse into the careers and achievements of old gladiators who have long departed. They had only a wooden racket and strength in their legs to play this fascinating game that is so well captured by the television cameras as the tennis court is just the right size to bring out the totality of the visual spectacle that the game is.

The descriptions of a budding generation of champions,

many of whom were Englishmen, should be an eye-opener for young people who may only have heard of the names but only a smattering of description of the skills that made them legends. The stirring deeds of Dr Hassan Ali Fyzee and his brother Dr Akhtar Ali were early signs of how well Indians took to tennis. And then up pops the name of Cota Ramaswami, a batsman who averaged 56.66 in Tests but was never picked again. He had the distinction of winning both the doubles ties that he played in for India in the Davis Cup. And there was the first tennis superstar of India in Mohammed Sleem while Ghaus Mohammed became the first ethnic Indian to get as far as the quarter-finals at Wimbledon.

A fascinating story is the one about how T.K. Ramanathan

took his promising young son Krishnan to play in Wimbledon (juniors). While watching the final between Jaroslav Drobny and Frank Sedgman, Krishnan was fascinated by the players and simply kept looking at their faces as they exchanged strokes. “I didn't take my eyes off their faces during the match until Father tapped me out of my reverie and said, ‘Look at Sedgman's feet, not his face.’ As I watched Sedgman's dancing feet and remained in awe of his speed about court, it turned out to be a big tennis lesson for me — It is the feet that play tennis.” What a moment and how beautifully the technicality behind the game is captured.

As we read through a roll call of tennis greats, from two generations of the Krishnans, the Amritraj brothers and down to Leander Paes, a thought that springs to the mind is why did no Indian have the temperament and the wherewithal to win a Grand Slam though it is readily conceded that many of them had the talent. Two of them were particularly world class — Ramanathan Krishnan and Vijay Amritraj, and they came

the closest with the former entering the semi-final in Wimbledon twice and Vijay figuring in quarter-finals twice, in the year of the boycott in 1973 and then in 1981. In many such moments when within touching distance of greatest glory, they went down to those who were world-beaters. How come Krishnan could not beat Hoad or Rosewall when it mattered most, or Vijay beat Borg or Connors?

As we moved on from the era of great Indian players, came a

time when the exploits of collective Indians in the Davis Cup began to capture national attention. An India that was still far from emerging as a world power in terms of its economy, the national team did well enough to climb the heights to get to the challenge round of the Davis Cup — the first time in 1966 when they lost to Australia and in 1974 when, unfortunately, India did not even get a tilt at the title as the government would not allow the team to play South Africa, which still had Apartheid on its statute. That was a grave early disappointment for a bunch of eager over-achievers who were spurred on by national pride.

The era of triumph for Indian tennis players in doubles came much later but when it did it took the nation once again by storm. While flag waving Indian spectators began to resemble Brazilians at soccer games, India became a force to be reckoned with in team events. But it was the Grand Slam titles won in doubles by the likes of Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi, known as the “Indian Express” (they won three titles together and 27 titles in all with differ-

ent partners) and then by the glamorous star Sania Mirza who took the women's game to its greatest heights in a transformational role as the Princess of Indian tennis that tennis picked up a huge following in India.

Leander Paes proved to be the most durable of India's doubles experts, winning 18 Grand Slams (and an Olympic medal) while partnering a variety of international stars like the Martinis — Navratilova and Hingis. The author is at his best in answering a question that would have puzzled many an Indian sports aficionado. This is to do with whether all this hyper nationalism was truly worth it when the country could not so much as win an individual Grand Slam or a Davis Cup or its true equivalent in the women's game. “What is it about Indians and doubles?” he was asked at a corporate event and he answers it very well in his description of Indians being subtle and clever.

Ramanathan Krishnan responded best to the query on doubles, saying — “Subtle movements, good reactions and supple wrists. Add to that quick thinking on the court.

And there you have your answer.” The same attributes could be those that our cricketers have parlayed into success as world beaters. The precision needed in doubles play also enables singles players with versatility, including maybe even John McEnroe of whom it was said — The best doubles team in the world is John McEnroe and anyone.” Indians as a group and playing with anyone may come a close second. This should open our eyes into appreciating more of our sportsmen's deeds on the wide doubles courts of the tennis world.

Sania Mirza's career, her exploits on the court, her brush with religious bigots and her fortitude in going on to be a path breaker for NextGen in women's tennis have been splendidly recounted. It may be new to many that Rita Davar, an early woman tennis player, had three match points against her Dutch opponent in the junior girl's final in Wimbledon in 1952, which she lost 7-5, 1-6, 5-7. However, on the distaff side in the Open era, quite none has matched Sania's trail blazing ways. The book is a must read for all tennis lovers..

Worst version of China to world



Anil Bhat

review

The simple two-worded title of this book—Xi's China — is hugely suggestive of the fact that it is the worst version of China for the world so far. Even the experimentation of biological weapons, which has been continuing under the policy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for decades, has resulted in a contamination of “more than the world”. Even if this happened accidentally, it is bad enough. But the strong suspicion that what emanated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology under the name of Covid-19 was indeed a bioweapon exists because there was hardly any of the deadly global effects felt of Covid-19 in Beijing and Shanghai. And the term “more than the world” is because the world comprises 193 countries. Beyond 193 are territories. This virus contaminated 214 countries and territories.

Covid-19, known to be isolated from bats, could not have originated from Wuhan's seafood market, because bats are not sold there. The contamination's domino effect has meant an economic breakdown with millions losing their livelihoods.

Quite obviously planned much before the pandemic, as it set in, Mr Xi substantially stepped up

China's aggressive military consolidation of its planned “global domination”. Beginning with India, the PLA made the greatest and most grotesque of attempts at grabbing more Indian territory than already grabbed since Aksai Chin. It used medieval weapons to attack Indian troops. China's PLA Navy became a nuisance to many nations in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

With an insightful foreword by Ram Madhav Varanasi, member, governing body, India Foundation, and former general secretary, BJP, the book's 10 chapters under three parts are: An Endangered Utopia, From Paper Money to Liquor Money, Social Credit, Schooling System Economics, An Exam to Rule Them All, Filial Piety, Empty China, ID, Chinese Keyboard and Communism as an Accident.

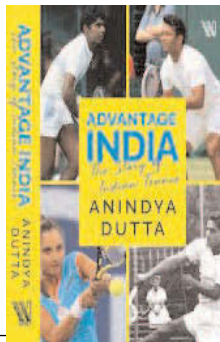
The author, who lived in China from 2010 to 2020, has made some profound observations. Secondat has very well encapsulated a wide array of subjects, revealing much which is impactful for the Chinese public and the world, into a very reader friendly paperback.

Secondat also brings out the transformation that has come with Internet, digitisation and great infrastructure development. And while he sees a great potential of progress for the people in the post-pandemic future, whenever that may be, but which will be denied to them, as he expects the CCP to maintain its tight leash.

What has been completely suppressed in China is how callously the CCP treats China's ordinary citizens, how it runs concentration camps of Tibetans and Uighurs, how cruelly it has repressed and silenced millions suffering from Covid-19 and what its actual death count is.

One of Secondat's disconcerting observations in the chapter “Empty China” is about the quarantine not changing the Chinese way of life. He states that despite the size of its population, “China remains most of the time an empty country. An enormous amount of infrastructure has been built during these last years but it looks desperately empty. This is the consequence of a deadly cultural policy, which consists in building wonderful cultural infrastructure while impeding cultural activity for political reasons. Hence buildings remain widely under used.”

Anil Bhat, a retired Army officer, is a defence and security analyst based in New Delhi



ADVANTAGE INDIA

By ANINDYA DUTTA
Westland, ₹599

IN BRIEF

Stop killings, Myanmar told

Jakarta, April 24: Indonesian President Joko Widodo has said that Southeast Asian leaders have demanded an immediate end to killings and the release of political detainees in Myanmar, in an emergency summit with its top general and coup leader in the Indonesian capital.

The leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations also told Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing in the talks Saturday in Jakarta that a dialogue between contending parties in Myanmar should immediately start, Widodo said, adding that the situation in the troubled Southeast Asian nation is unacceptable.

Zarif to visit Iraq, Qatar today

Tehran, April 24: Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is to visit Iraq and Qatar on Sunday, his ministry announced, following reported talks brokered by Baghdad between Tehran and regional rival Riyadh.

The talks in the Iraqi capital earlier this month, which have not been confirmed by either capital, were held at the level of officials not ministers and aimed at restoring relations severed five years ago, an Iraqi official and a Western diplomat said in Baghdad. Tehran has neither confirmed nor denied the reports saying only that it has “always welcomed” dialogue with Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has flatly denied them.

PoC shot: 7 deputies on leave

Elizabeth City, US: Seven North Carolina deputies have been placed on leave in the aftermath of a PoC man being shot and killed by members of their department serving drug-related search and arrest warrants. The disclosure comes as calls increase for the release of deputy body camera footage amid signs, including emergency scanner traffic, that Andrew Brown Jr. killed as he was trying to drive away.

Clot: US lifts J&J vax pause

New, more potent virus strain in Lanka

Washington, April 24: US health officials lifted an 11-day pause on Covid-19 vaccinations using Johnson & Johnson's single-dose shot, after scientific advisers decided its benefits outweigh a rare risk of blood clot.

The government uncovered 15 vaccine recipients who developed a highly unusual kind of blood clot, out of nearly 8 million people given the J&J shot. All were women, most under age 50. Three died, and seven remain hospitalized.

But ultimately Friday, the Food and Drug Administration and Centres for Disease Control and Prevention decided that J&J's one-and-done vaccine is critical to fight the pandemic and that the small clot risk could be handled with warnings to help younger women decide if they should use that shot or an alternative.

Above all else, health and safety are at the forefront of our decisions, CDC director D. Rochelle Walensky said. Our vaccine safety systems are working. We identified exceptionally rare events out of millions of doses” of the J&J shot and will continue to monitor them.

The US decision similar to how European regulators are rolling out J&J's shot comes after CDC advisers Friday voted 10-4 to resume vaccinations but panelists made clear that they must come with warnings about the risk. The group debated but ultimately steered clear of outright age restrictions. This is an age group that is most at risk (of clotting) that is getting vaccine predominantly to save other people's lives and morbidity, not their own. And I think we have a responsibility to be certain that they know this,” said Dr Sarah Long of Drexel University College of Medicine, who voted against the proposal because she felt it did not go far enough in warning women. — AP

Colombo, April 24: A new Coronavirus strain that is airborne and more potent than all those found previously in Sri Lanka has been discovered in the island nation.

The variant, which is highly transmissible, can remain airborne for nearly an hour and is spreading fast, Neelika Malavige, the head of the Department of Immunology and Molecular Sciences of the

Sri Jayawardenapura University said.

This variant of Coronavirus is more highly transmissible than all found so far in the island. The droplets can remain airborne for nearly an hour, Malavige said. Health authorities feared that the new variant is spreading rapidly after last week's New Year celebrations with more younger people getting infected. — PTI

NZ PAUSES TRAVEL BUBBLE WITH W. AUSTRALIA AFTER VIRUS CASE

Wellington, April 24: New Zealand on Friday paused arrivals from Western Australia, temporarily excluding the state's travellers from a quarantine-free bubble between the countries due to a Covid-19 outbreak.

“As set out in our Trans-Tasman bubble protocols, travel between New Zealand and Western Australia

has been paused, pending further advice from the state government,” a statement on the New Zealand government website said.

Earlier on Friday the Perth and Peel regions were sent into a three-day lockdown after Western Australia recorded its first community transmission of the virus in 12 months. — AFP

GERMANY

BERLIN RESTRICTS TRAVEL FROM ‘HIGH-RISK’ INDIA

Berlin, April 24: Germany will shut out all travellers arriving from India apart from its own citizens, Health Minister Jens Spahn said Saturday, as a new variant has made the South Asian country the latest Coronavirus hotspot. “We're very worried about the new mutation of the virus discovered in India. So as not to endanger our vaccination programme, India travel has to be significantly limited,” Spahn told the Funke newspaper group. — AFP

KUWAIT

ALL COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS FROM INDIA SUSPENDED

Dubai, April 24: Kuwait suspended all direct commercial flights from India due to worsening Covid-19 situation in the country.

The move came after instructions from health authorities. Kuwait's directorate general of civil aviation said that it had suspended all direct commercial flights from India, effective April 24. Passengers arriving from India or via another country will be banned from entering unless they have spent 14 days out of India. — PTI

PAKISTAN

IMRAN EXPRESSES SOLIDARITY WITH INDIA OVER CRISIS

Islamabad, April 24: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Saturday expressed solidarity with the people of India battling the deadly wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, saying we must fight this global challenge confronting humanity together.

In a tweet, Khan said: Our prayers for a speedy recovery go to all those suffering from the pandemic in our neighbourhood and the world. His tweet came after Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi expressed support to the people of India.

IRAN

TEHRAN BANS FLIGHTS FROM INDIA, PAKISTAN

Tehran, April 24: Iran's state-run IRNA news agency is reporting the country's civil aviation agency has banned all flights to and from India and Pakistan because of the dramatic surge in Coronavirus cases in the two nations.

IRNA says the decision was made by Iran's Health Ministry and it takes effect Saturday at midnight.

Mohammad Hassan Zibaksh, spokesman for Iran's Civil Aviation Organisation noted there are no routine flights between Iran and India and flights are operated occasionally.

He said flights to and from 41 countries were prohibited in Iran, while those who want to fly to other countries listed as high risk are required to have a test in Iran. — AP

Lost submarine sank: Indonesia

Says vessel went down, cracked open April 21

Banyuwangi (Indonesia), April 24: Indonesia's navy on Saturday said items were found from a missing submarine, indicating the vessel with 53 crew members had sunk and cracked open, and that there was no hope of finding survivors.

Military chief Hadi Tjahjanto said the presence of an oil slick as well as the discovery of debris near the location of KRI Nanggala 402's last dive on Wednesday off the island of Bali were clear proof of the vessel had sunk.

Indonesia earlier considered the vessel to be only missing. Navy Chief Yudo Margono told a press conference in Bali, “If it's an explosion, it will be in pieces. The cracks happened gradually in some parts when it went down from 300 metres to 400 metres to 500 metres...If there was an explosion, it would be heard by the sonar.” The navy previously said it believes the submarine

● **THE NAVY** previously said it believes the submarine sank to a depth of 600-700 metres (2,000-2,300 feet), much deeper than its collapse depth of 200 metres (655 feet), at which point water pressure would be greater than the hull could withstand.

sank to a depth of 600-700 metres (2,000-2,300 feet), much deeper than its collapse depth of 200 metres (655 feet), at which point water pressure would be greater than the hull could withstand. The cause of the disappearance was still uncertain.

The navy had previously said an electrical failure could have left the submarine unable to execute emergency procedures to resurface. Margono said in the past two days, searchers found parts of a torpedo straightener, a grease bottle believed to be used to oil the periscope, debris

from prayer rugs and a broken piece from a coolant pipe that was refitted on the submarine in South Korea in 2012. “With the authentic evidence we found believed to be from the submarine, we have now moved from the sub miss' phase to sub sunk,” Margono said at the press conference, in which the items were displayed.

Margono said rescue teams from Indonesia and other countries will evaluate the findings. He said no bodies have been found so far. Officials previously said the submarine's oxygen supply would have run out early Saturday. An American reconnaissance plane, a P-8 Poseidon, landed Saturday and was set to join the search, along with 20 Indonesian ships, a sonar-equipped Australian warship and four Indonesian aircraft. Singaporean rescue ships were expected Saturday, while Malaysian rescue vessels were due Sunday. — AP

Biden: Atrocities against Armenians were genocide

Washington, April 24 : President Joe Biden has formally recognised that the systematic killings and deportations of hundreds of thousands of Armenians by Ottoman Empire forces in the early 20th century were “genocide” — using a term for the atrocities that his White House predecessors have avoided for decades over concerns of alienating Turkey.

With the acknowledgement, Biden followed through on a campaign promise he made a year ago Saturday — to recognise that the events of 1915 to 1923 were a deliberate effort to wipe out Armenians.

● **WITH THE** acknowledgement, Biden followed through on a campaign promise he made a year ago Saturday — the annual commemoration of Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day — to recognise that the events of 1915 to 1923 were a deliberate effort to wipe out Armenians.

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the events of 1915 to 1923 were a deliberate effort to wipe out Armenians.

Biden used a presidential proclamation to make the pronouncement. While previous presidents have offered somber reflections of the dark moment in history via remembrance day proclamations, they have studiously avoided using the term genocide out of concern that it would complicate relations with Turkey — a Nato ally and important power in the Middle East. — AP

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Nadal surges into Barcelona semis

Barcelona: Rafael Nadal stepped up his bid for a 12th Barcelona Open title with a 6-1, 6-4 victory over Cameron Norrie in the quarterfinals on Friday, while Stefanos Tsitsipas will play Jannik Sinner in the last four. Nadal, who captured his first Barcelona title as an 18-year-old at the 2005 tournament, will face Diego Schwartzman or Pablo Carreno Busta in Saturday's semifinals. Tsitsipas swept aside Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-3, 6-3, the Canadian who recently teamed up with Toni Nadal, the uncle and former coach of the 20-time Grand Slam winner. Tsitsipas extended his winning run to eight matches. — AFP

Barty battles past Pliskova in QFs

Stuttgart, Germany: World number one Ashleigh Barty fought back to reach the semifinals of the WTA Stuttgart clay-court tournament with a 2-6, 6-1, 7-5 win over Karolina Pliskova on Friday. Barty faces fourth seed Elina Svitolina in Saturday's semifinal after the Ukrainian staged a remarkable comeback in her 6-7 (4/7), 7-5, 6-2 win over Petra Kvitova. Second seed Simona Halep is yet to drop a set in Stuttgart as she reached the semifinals with a 6-1, 6-4 win over Ekaterina Alexandrova. In her semifinal, Halep will face either fifth seed Aryna Sabalenka or Anett Kontaveit. — AFP

Persepolis hammer FC Goa in return leg

Margao: Starting with as many as eight fresh faces, FC Goa were thrashed 4-0 by Iranian champions Persepolis FC in their return-leg AFC Champions League Group E match here on Friday. Shahriar Moghanlou (24th minute), Mehdi Torabi (43rd), Issa Alkassar (47th) and Kamal Kamyabinia (58th) scored for the winners in a completely one-sided match. The result saw Persepolis, with 12 points from four games, extending their 100 per cent win record while FC Goa suffered their second consecutive defeat after the 1-2 loss to Yahya Golmohammadi's side on Tuesday. — PTI

Toffees add to Gunners misery

Own goal from Arsenal goalkeeper gifts Everton first win in seven games

London, April 24: An own-goal from Arsenal goalkeeper Bernd Leno handed Everton a 1-0 Premier League win on Friday as around 2,000 fans protested against Gunners owner Stan Kroenke outside the Emirates Stadium.

With both sides chasing places in Europe next season, it was Carlo Ancelotti's side who came out on top with a first win in seven games.

German keeper Leno turned a Richarlison cross into his own goal in the 76th minute to give the Toffees victory.

Arsenal supporters had gathered outside the ground demanding Kroenke stand down after the club's attempt to join the doomed Super League project.

The result left Everton in eighth place, three points off the Champions League places after their first league win at Arsenal since 1996.

Arsenal are ninth, nine points off the top four.

“It was really important to stay attached to the top of the table,” Ancelotti told the BBC.

“The performance was



Everton's Richarlison (left) vies for the ball with Granit Xhaka of Arsenal in an EPL match in London on Friday. — AFP

good. It's all good news tonight and this gives us confidence for the next games. Finally I can say we are back.”

The game produced few

chances.

Everton's Gyfi Sigurdsson saw a 30-yard free-kick come back off the crossbar.

Arsenal were furious

when a second-half penalty, awarded for a foul by Richarlison on Dani Ceballos, was overturned by VAR for an offside in the build-up.

PAYET PROPELS MARSEILLE TO WIN AT REIMS

Paris, April 24: Dimitri Payet scored two goals and set up Arkadiusz Milik for another as Marseille came from behind to defeat Reims 3-1 away in Ligue 1 on Friday.

Reims took the lead when Nathanael Mbuku powered a header in at a corner, but Marseille levelled almost immediately as Payet swept in a pass from Pol Lirola.

Payet then delivered a fantastic low cross for Milik to tap in from close range in first-half stoppage time.

Marseille goalkeeper Steve Mandanda turned an effort from Senegal striker Boulaye Dia onto the post in the second half, while Reims were reduced to 10 men. Payet was denied a hat-trick by an excellent stop from Predrag Rajkovic, with Milik ruled offside as he poked in the rebound. — AFP

LEAGUE CUP | FINAL

Man City look to end title drought

London, April 24: Treble-chasing Manchester City face a Tottenham side desperate to end their trophy drought in the League Cup final as two members of the failed European Super League clash at Wembley on Sunday.

Just seven days after the bombshell revelation that City and Tottenham were among 12 clubs plotting the breakaway Super League, they will contest the first major silverware of the English season.

Alarmed by the furious public backlash against the Super League, City's owners were the first to lose their nerve when they

pulled out on Tuesday. City's exit sparked a chain reaction that saw Spurs withdraw along with fellow Premier League teams Liverpool, Chelsea, Manchester United and Arsenal. But amid grovelling apologies from owners, supporters remain furious at the cynical betrayal and there have been calls for sanctions against the six Premier League teams.

Against that explosive backdrop, it is ironic the League Cup will be the focus of attention for two of the Super League founders this weekend. — AFP

Super League fiasco gives clubs open goal to reset with UEFA

Geneva, April 24: Purged of most of its leaders in the Super League fiasco this week, the group representing European soccer clubs was given a chance to reinvent itself.

Now the European Club Association is free to push for reversing Champions League changes that favour the wealthiest and more powerful who threatened to tear apart soccer's traditional fabric.

The decisions UEFA made on Monday for a Champions League revamp in 2024 — of 36 teams each playing 10 games in a single standings — clearly favour the rebels.

Two wild cards for storied clubs is one gift that

● **The decisions** UEFA made on Monday for a Champions League revamp in 2024 — of 36 teams each playing 10 games in a single standings — clearly favour the rebels.

can be taken back now they no longer dominate a key UEFA committee.

Hours earlier around midnight on Sunday, the 246-member ECA lost 12 of the most influential — and most demanding — when they left to announce their own Super League. The project quickly col-

lapsed amid a ferocious backlash from fans and domestic leagues, governments and Champions League organizer UEFA, handing the ECA a chance to restore trust.

“Over the past week, we have seen the worst but also the best of football,” ECA chief executive Charlie Marshall said in a statement Friday.

“Ultimately, the best has triumphed.”

The “worst” was done by clubs and people that were Marshall's bosses until the early hours of Monday. They led ECA through talks with UEFA to shape the Champions League's future while plotting a rival to usurp it. — AP

ZIMBABWE POST MAIDEN WIN AGAINST PAK IN T20

Harare, April 24: Zimbabwe beat Pakistan for the first time in a Twenty20 international Friday, with four-wicket Luke Jongwe the star of a shock 19-run triumph at Harare Sports Club.

A maiden victory in 16 attempts seemed unlikely when the tourists restricted the hosts to a meagre 118-9 with Tinashe Kamunhukamwe (34) the only batsman to impress.

But right-arm medium pacer Jongwe (4-18) wreaked havoc and Zimbabwe bowled out Pakistan for 99 in 19.5 overs.

It was the lowest total defended in a T20 international in Harare and victory for Zimbabwe levelled the three-match series at 1-1 ahead of the decider at the same venue Sunday.

Pakistan arrived in Zimbabwe brimming with confidence after completing a double in South Africa, winning a one-day international series 2-1 and a T20 series 3-1. — AFP

Brief scores: Zimbabwe 118/9 in 20 overs (Kamunhukamwe 34, Hasnain 2/19) beat **Pakistan 99** in 19.5 overs (Babar 41, Jongwe 4-18, Burl 2-21).

