



JAISHANKAR FOR  
AFGHAN-LED PEACE  
PROCESS



'GALWAN DESTROYED  
INDIA-CHINA TRUST'

P4

P7



HK PRO-DEMOCRACY  
ADVOCATES  
GIVEN JAIL TERMS

P11



GIVE ASHWIN THE  
BALL AND BOB'S  
YOUR UNCLE

P12

WEATHER

Partly cloudy sky with possibility of very light rain / drizzle. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 36 and 19 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil	RELATIVE HUMIDITY
Max: 69%	Min: 23%
TEMPERATURE	
Max: 40.0°C (+3)	Min: 20.2°C (-2)
SUN RISES 05:53 hrs MOON RISES 09: 56 hrs	SUN SETS 18:48 hrs MOON SETS 23:32 hrs

THUMBNAILS



During the ongoing holy month of 'Ramadan', at Jama Masjid in New Delhi on Friday. AGENCIES

Former CBI director Ranjit Singh passes away: A former CBI director Ranjit Singh passed away in New Delhi on Friday morning in what is believed to be a Covid-19 related death, senior officials said. He was 68. He was confirmed positive for coronavirus on Thursday night and breathed his last at 4.30 am on Friday. He had taken over as the CBI chief in 2012.

P4

FIR against ED quashed in gold smuggling case: In a setback to the LDF government, the Kerala High Court on Friday quashed two FIRs registered by the crime branch of the state police against unnamed ED officials for allegedly coercing Swapna Suresh and Sandeep Nair, the accused in gold smuggling case, to give statement implicating chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan in the case.

P4

Russia to expel US diplomats: Russia on Friday responded in kind to new US sanctions, saying it would expel 10 US diplomats and take other retaliatory moves in a tense showdown with Washington. Moscow said it will add eight US officials to its sanctions list and move to stop US NGOs from interfering in Russia's politics.

AP

# Heavyweights in Ph 5 fight

5th phase to witness battles between veterans and turncoats amidst Covid spurt in Bengal



Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee during a poll campaign at Paita, North 24 parganas; (right) Home Minister Amit Shah campaigns at Krishnanagar on Friday.



## EC curtails campaigning for remaining poll phases

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, 16 APRIL

### PROTOCOLS

- Campaigning curtailed 72 hours before polling
- Rallies, meetings and roadshows prohibited from 7 p.m. to 10 a.m. beginning Friday in view of spurt in Covid numbers

od will now apply for the remaining phases.

Earlier, during the all party meeting convened by the state chief election officer today to exchange views with political parties regarding the spurt in Covid-19 cases, while the Trinamul Congress demanded clubbing of the last two phases, the BJP and the Sanjukta Morcha rejected the idea.

The move came on the heels of an all party meeting convened by the Election Commission to exchange views with representatives of 10 recognised political parties in view of the Covid surge and Calcutta High Court's recent observation.

The EC had previously ordered a 72-hour 'silence period', instead of the normal 48 hours, before the fifth phase of polling tomorrow scheduled tomorrow in the wake of the deadly violence in Cooch Behar during the fourth phase.

A similar silence per-

iod Khokon Das for the TMC. In an almost unprecedented move, minister Siddiquilla Chowdhury has shifted his base from Mangalkot to Monteswar alleging interference by the party's strongman Anubraja Mondol.

Debaprasad Bag is contesting as a Trinamul candidate at Kalna, after Biswajeet Kundu, sitting Trinamul MLA defected to BJP.

Elections have been held in 135 constituencies so far, and the remaining 159 seats are set to go to polls between 17 & 29 April.

## Britain home secy approves Nirav's extradition to India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LONDON, 16 APRIL

### IN SOUP



Nirav Modi, 50, who remains behind bars at Wandsworth Prison in south-west London, has 14 days to apply for permission to appeal against the Home Secretary's order in the High Court in London

UK Home Secretary Priti Patel has signed off on the order to extradite Nirav, wanted in India over \$2 billion PNB bank fraud

A prima facie case to have been established on all counts of charges brought by the Central Bureau of Investigation and Enforcement Directorate money laundering, intimidation of witnesses and disappearance of evidence, he had said.

Under the UK Extradition Act 2003, the judge sent his findings to the Secretary of State for Home Affairs. It is the UK Cabinet minister who is authorised to order an extradition under the India-UK Extradition Treaty and has two months within which to make that decision.

The CBI had registered the case on 31 January, 2018 against Modi, Choksi and others including then officials of PNB on a complaint from the Bank on the allegations that the accused had hatched a criminal conspiracy amongst themselves to defraud the public sector Bank by fraudulently issuing Letters of Undertaking.

"I am satisfied that there is evidence upon which NDM [Nirav Deepak Modi] could be convicted in relation [to] the conspiracy to defraud the PNB. A prima facie case is established," the judge noted.

## Top court issues norms for speedy disposal of cheque bounce cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

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

### SC asked the Centre to amend laws to ensure clubbing of trials in cases which are lodged within one year against a person relating to the same transaction

dence in cheque dishonour cases can now be tendered by filing affidavits and there would be no need to examine witnesses physically.

The bench, also comprising Justices LNageswar Rao, BRGavai, ASBopanna and SRavindra Bhat, asked the Centre to make "suitable

amendments" in the Negotiable Instruments Act to ensure that trials in cheque bounce cases lodged in 12 months against a person can be clubbed together into one consolidated case.

It reiterated the earlier decision and held that trial courts have no "inherent power" to reconsider their decisions to summon persons to face trials in the cheque bounce cases.

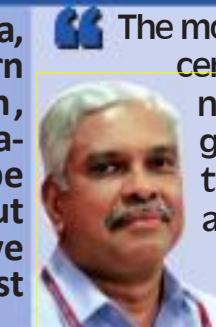
The apex court said the issues which have not been dealt by it would be considered by a committee headed by Justice RC Chavan, former judge of the Bombay High Court.

## IMD predicts normal monsoon this year

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

### RAIN ALERT

► Rainfall in Odisha, Jharkhand, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya is likely to be below normal, but normal or above normal in the rest of the country



The monsoon will be 98 per cent of the LPA, which is normal rainfall. It is a really good news for the country and will help India have a good agriculture output

M RAJEEVAN,  
SECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY  
OF EARTH SCIENCES

Range Forecast for the four-month rainfall period from June to September.

The monsoon will be 98 per cent of the LPA, which is normal rainfall. It is a really good news for the country and will help India have a good agriculture output," Rajeevan said at a virtual press conference.

The LPA, the average

of the season's rainfall across the country from 1961-2010, is 88 cm. The news augurs well for economy, battered due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Southwest monsoon is one of the primary drivers of the country's economy, which is largely based on agriculture and its allied activities. Large parts of the coun-

try rely on the four-month rainfall season for agriculture and also for filling reservoirs.

This is the first time the IMD has made a specific forecast on spatial distribution. Rajeevan said the IMD will also issue month-wise forecasts during the next four months and also for the homogenous regions of the country-IMD's four divisions - the Northwest India, East and Northeast India, Central India and South Peninsula.

The country has recorded above normal rainfall for the last two rainfall seasons.

The La Niña and El Niño factors major influences on the Indian monsoon. "There are less chances of formation of an El Niño," Rajeevan said.

## 8 dead in shooting at FedEx facility in Indianapolis

INDIANAPOLIS, 16 APRIL

Eight people were shot and killed in a late-night shooting at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis, and the shooter has killed himself, police said.

Multiple others were injured Thursday night when gunfire erupted at the facility near the Indianapolis International Airport, police spokesperson said. Four were hospitalized, including one with critical injuries.

The shooter has not been identified. Police were called to reports of gunfire just after 11 p.m. and officers observed an active shooting scene. The gunman later killed himself.

AP

DETAILS ON P10

## PM reviews medical oxygen stocks; India adds 2.1L cases

SNS & PTI  
NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Amidst a steep rise in coronavirus cases, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday undertook a comprehensive review to ensure adequate medical grade oxygen supply in the country and called for ramping up its production.

With cases hitting a new peak in several parts of the country, health infrastructure has come under increasing strain, while the demand for medical oxygen has increased.

India on Friday added 2,17,353 new coronavirus infections, the second consecutive day the country reported over 2 lakh new cases, along with 1,185 new fatalities.

The PM undertook a comprehensive review to ensure adequate medical grade oxygen supply in the country, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in

► Medical oxygen is an essential public health commodity and any impediment in the supplies of medical oxygen in the country may critically impact the management of patients suffering from Covid-19 disease in other parts of the country.

AJAY KUMAR BHALLA - HOME SECRETARY

on 20 April, 25 April and 30 April respectively. The Prime Minister was briefed about production capacity in the country to meet the rising demand, it said.

He suggested increasing oxygen production according to the capacity of each plant. Officials also briefed the PM about the efforts being made to import medical grade oxygen.

The PMO said that an overview of district-level situation in these states was presented to the prime minister. It said 4,880 MT, 5,619 MT and 6,593 MT have been allocated to these 12 states for meeting their projected demand of medical oxygen as



## Second Covid wave grips India

CICSE defers class 10, 12 exams:

The CICSE on Friday deferred the board exams of classes 10 and 12 in view of a rise in Covid-19 cases across the country.

In light of the nationwide surge in coronavirus cases, the class 10 and 12 exams which were to be held from 4 May have been deferred, the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations' chief executive and secretary Gerry Arathoon said.

► Lockdown in all UP districts tomorrow: Amidst a surge in Covid-19 cases, the Uttar Pradesh government has announced a lockdown across the state on Sunday. To enforce wearing of masks, the state government has doubled the fine to Rs 1,000 for those caught without masks.



Passengers arrive to board train to their native places, outside Anand Vihar Railway Station on Friday.

### Weekend lockdown in Chandigarh:

The Chandigarh administration announced a weekend lockdown in the union territory from 10 pm on Friday to 5 am on Monday.

► K'taka CM tests Covid positive: Karnataka chief minister BS Yeddyurappa tested Covid positive on Friday. He was admitted first to Ramaiah Hospital before the doctors shifted him to Manipal Hospital for treatment.

Javadekar tests Covid positive: Union minister Prakash Javadekar said he has tested positive for coronavirus and urged those who came in contact with him in the last few days to get themselves tested.

Digvijaya Singh tests positive: The former MP CM had given his sample for Covid test to the staff of Delhi-based Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital on Thursday after developing symptoms.





MAMATA BANERJEE  
WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER

# Pb safest place for business; no lockouts, strikes in 30 yrs: Capt

CM makes a strong pitch to Japanese investors for doing business in Punjab in multiple sectors

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, 16 APRIL

**A**sserting firm commitment of the Punjab government in facilitating investments from Japan through "Invest Punjab", Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Friday highlighted his vision of having a "Little Japan" in Punjab that builds upon the current thriving presence of more than 100 Japanese business establishments in the state.

In his virtual address to the 'Indo-Japan Investment Symposium: Investment Opportunities in the State of Punjab' organised by the Japan Desk at Invest Punjab in coordination with Embassy of India, Tokyo, the CM said Punjab is the



"safest place" to do business having witnessed no lockouts and strikes in last 30 years. "Invest Punjab has been

rated as the 'top performing' state and a dedicated Japan Desk has been formed at Invest

Punjab for facilitating Japanese investors willing to invest in the state and would be the 'match making' platform

for Japanese and Punjab based companies", said Capt Amarinder.

Inviting the Japanese enterprises to Punjab, the CM highlighted the opportunities for investment or collaboration with Punjab-based companies in multiple sectors such as agri and food processing, technical textiles, engineering, pharma and medical devices, and skill development.

He also iterated the availability of 1000 acres of land near Rajpura for the development of a dedicated "Japanese Industrial Township" in Punjab.

In his opening remarks, the Indian Ambassador to Japan, Sanjay Verma, welcomed Japanese companies to explore complementarities in India and especially

in Punjab, introducing Punjab as one of the most prosperous states in India that is also a preferred investment destination for international companies.

Highlighting the "pro-industry atmosphere" in Punjab, state chief secretary Vini Mahajan said that Punjab was well on its way to becoming a "lighthouse state in ease of doing business".

The investor-friendly ecosystem has allowed the Punjab government to receive Rs 80,000 crore of investments that are under various stages of implementation. The state government has aggregated land over 1000 acres at three locations that can be explored by Japanese industries, the chief secretary added.

## Haryana schools to remain closed till 30 April

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
CHANDIGARH, 16 APRIL

In view of the rapidly growing cases of Covid-19, the Haryana government on Friday decided that schools will remain closed for students of Class I to Class XII till 30 April.

As per the directions issued by the school education department in this regard, this decision will be applicable to government schools as well as private schools.

As per directions issued by the Haryana directorate of school education, all the teachers will continue to come to the schools as before so that the exam results can be prepared and released on April

## Delhi's wanted miscreant, aides held in Nuh after encounter: Haryana Police

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
CHANDIGARH, 16 APRIL

Haryana Police on Friday claimed to have arrested a criminal, who was on the wanted list of Delhi Police, following a brief exchange of fire in Nuh district.

Police have also nabbed three of his aides. One country-made pistol, a desi katta and cartridge were also recovered from them, a Haryana Police spokesperson said.

He said the arrested criminal was identified as Javed alias Jabid, a resident of Khorai in Nuh. Delhi Police had announced a reward of Rs 50,000 on his arrest. His associates are Gajender alias Gajju

of district Alwar (Rajasthan), Mohan of village Khorai (Nuh) and Ashok, a resident of village Damdama (Nuh).

A police team had received secret input that a criminal with Rs 50,000 bounty along with his three associates was present in a deserted room near a farm on main road Taoru.

Acting swiftly, a police party immediately raided the location. Seeing themselves surrounded by police, Javed and fellow miscreants started firing on the police team. In retaliation, police opened aerial fire and managed to nab them. Javed, who hurt while running away by jumping into a deep ditch, was admitted

in hospital for treatment.

Police are investigating the criminal background of miscreants. More incidents are likely to be disclosed during investigation, the spokesperson said.

In another case, Haryana Police has arrested another criminal Musahid alias Musa, carrying a reward of Rs 5,000 from Nuh district. He was involved in about half a dozen cases of plotting to commit loot and dacoity in Nuh and Gurugram. He was absconding for a long time.

He was nabbed from village Bawla after getting a secret input, the spokesperson said.

Meanwhile, Haryana

Police has arrested three persons for making bets on a match of the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL).

A Haryana Police spokesperson informed that acting on secret input, a team of Crime Investigation Agency conducted a raid at a house in DC colony where the accused were found making bets on the IPL match between Rajasthan Royals (RR) and Delhi Capital (DC).

Police have arrested three accused from the spot while one of the accused managed to escape.

As many as 24 mobile phones, one laptop, one LED, Rs 5000 cash and other goods were recovered during the operation.

Cong will form govt in HP in 2022 polls: Shukla



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
SHIMLA, 16 APRIL

**The huge support of people for the party in MCs elections will result in Congress returning to power in state in the 2022 assembly elections, says Rajeev Shukla**

The Congress will now definitely issue which are connected with ground realities and welfare of the common man, with the party leaders giving befitting reply to the misleading agenda of the ruling party," he said.

He further stated that today, all sections of the society be it youth, women, farmers or common man, were fed up with autocratic policies, false promises and slogans of double engine of the ruling BJP.

"Congress party leaders will work unitedly and on ground for bye-elections to Fatehpur assembly seat and Mandi parliamentary constituency and the party is hopeful of getting people's mandate in these elections," he added.

Shukla urged the party to gear up for bypolls in Himachal and said they should disseminate knowledge on the party's principles among masses.

Congress was the oldest political party in the country which had always worked for the welfare of all sections of the society and will continue to do so in the future too, he added.



# Wear mask Stay Safe!

dip/shabdgarhi/dj0002/21-22

Once again, Corona figures in Delhi are increasing at a fast pace. So, do not forget to wear a mask before stepping out of your home. Come, let's defeat this pandemic together.



Please get vaccinated to protect yourself from Corona

For more information related to Corona log on to [delhifightscorona.in](http://delhifightscorona.in)

DIRECTORATE OF HEALTH SERVICES, GOVERNMENT OF NCT OF DELHI



Wash Your Hands Frequently with Soap and Water



Follow Social Distancing



Former CBI chief Sinha passes away

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Former CBI director Ranjit Sinha died here Friday morning at the age of 68 what is believed to be a Covid related death, senior officials said. He was confirmed positive for coronavirus on Thursday night and breathed his last at 4.30 am, the officials said.

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

The scathing remarks by Justice RM Lodha were a result of Sinha's nine-page affidavit to the Supreme Court giving details of his meetings with the then Law Minister Ashwani Kumar and other senior officers during which changes were made in the coal scam probe report submitted to the apex court. "Whatever the Supreme Court says is correct," was his response to the reporters after the controversy.

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

"Our heartfelt condolences go to the bereaved family in this hour of intense grief. May his soul rest in peace," Director-in-charge Praveen Sinha said in a statement.

A tough task master, Sinha was known for his grip on terrorism and insurgency related issues.



Covid-related restrictions will continue and the govt will decide on the future course of action aimed at controlling its spread on 20 April

KARNATAKA CHIEF MINISTER B S YEDIYURAPPA

DURING AN EMERGENCY MEET

India

# 'Peace process must be led, owned & ruled by Afghans'

Jaishankar says in a discussion on Afghanistan at the 'Raisina Dialogue'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

**O**bserving that the future of Afghanistan should not be a return to its past, external affairs minister S Jaishankar today called for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace process in the battle-scarred country.

The outcome of the (peace) process should be in the collective interests of the Afghan people," he said participating in a discussion on Afghanistan at the "Raisina Dialogue", being hosted here by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and Afghanistan National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib. Referring to the proposed withdrawal by US troops from the war-ravaged nation by 11 September, Jaishankar cautioned the international community to take care not to "throw the baby out with the bathwater."

Afghanistan, he said, needed a "double peace". "It

India concerned over violence & targeted killings in Afghanistan

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Reacting to the announcement by the US to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan before 11 September, India today expressed deep concern over the increase in violence and targeted killings in the troubled nations and called for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire there.

"We have noted the decision of the US to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan and to end its military operations there. We are closely following the ongoing intra-Afghan peace process. Afghan people have seen more than four decades of war and unrest and deserve long-lasting peace and development," Ministry of External

affairs (MEA) spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said in a statement. He said India was of the view that an Afghan peace process should be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled. Any political settlement must be inclusive and should preserve the socio-economic and political gains of the past 19 years. The spokesperson said India supported a united, democratic and sovereign Afghanistan and remained engaged with the Afghan stakeholders and also its regional and international partners regarding next steps in the war-ravaged nation. He pointed out that India has participated in the Doha conference and recently, the Heart of Asia conference in Dushanbe on Afghanistan.

needs peace within and it

added. The neighbours of Afghanistan must contribute towards this endeavour, he added without naming any country. Talking about India's massive developmental assistance to Afghanistan, Jaishankar said, "In the last 20 years, we have demonstrated through our actions and projects on the ground what our real feelings are for Afghanistan."

The Afghan NSA indirectly referred to Pakistan's continued support to the Taliban. "Any further push means direct involvement by a neighbour in Afghanistan...if limits are crossed, there will be huge problems for this neighbour," he said. In his remarks, the Iranian minister sought to dispel Pakistan's misgivings about the Chabahar Port, which is being used by India as a transport link to Afghanistan. "Chabahar is not against China or the Gwadar Port. Chabahar is a place where we can all come together in order to help Afghanistan...India is playing an active role in Chabahar," he said.

needs peace around," he

## Kerala gold smuggling row: HC quashes FIRs against ED officials

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOCHI, 16 APRIL

In a jolt to the CPI(M)-led LDF government, the Kerala High Court on Friday quashed the two FIRs registered by the state police against Enforcement Directorate officials for allegedly forcing key accused in the gold smuggling case to give statements against chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

Quashing the FIRs, the

court held that police should have approached the Special PMLA Court, which is considering the cases related to the money trail in the gold smuggling, seeking remedy to their grievances that the ED officials were fabricating evidences. The court also directed the investigating officer to submit all information gathered in the matter to the PMLA court in sealed cover. Justice V G Arun pro-

nounced judgment in two pleas filed by Deputy Director of ED Kochi Zone, P Radhakrishnan. The court also said that since there are non-cognisable offences alleged, the Crime Branch of the Kerala Police could not have taken up the matter in derogation of Sec 155 (1), CrPC. The court, however, said that the Special Court hearing the gold smuggling case may examine the available

material to discern whether an enquiry is required in this matter. The investigating officers shall forthwith submit all the records pertaining to the crimes before the Special court in a sealed cover. Solicitor General of India Tushar Mehta, Additional Solicitor Generals S V Raju and KM Nataraj had appeared for the ED. Senior Advocate Harin P Raval appeared for the state government.

## Maha to face shortage of Remdesivir for next 2 to 3 days: Minister

MUMBAI, 16 APRIL

Maharashtra will face a shortage of 12,000 to 15,000 Remdesivir injections, used to treat Covid patients, for the next two to three days, state Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Minister Rajendra Shingane said on Friday.

He said pharmaceutical companies manufacturing Remdesivir have stepped up production but it will take time for the new stock to reach the market. He said, Companies that produce Remdesivir injection have increased their production but it will take some time for the vials to hit the market. If we consider a 10-12 per cent shortage, Maharashtra will continue to face a shortage of 12,000 to 15,000 Remdesivir vials for the next two to three days.

Referring to her injury, the chief minister said the BJP wanted to stop her from canvassing by "targeting her leg", but she has managed to come out triumphant.

They had targeted my leg,

## Mamata blames BJP for Covid surge in Bengal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NABADWIP, 16 APRIL

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee said on Friday she will call upon the Election Commission to stop the BJP from bringing "outsiders" during campaigning, squarely blaming the saffron party for exacerbating the Covid-19 situation.

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

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

The Trinamul Congress boss said local labourers and decorators can be engaged for the purpose after necessary Covid-19 tests.

Blaming companies for delay in supply of the much sought-after Covid drug, the FDA minister said, The heads of Remdesivir-making companies had 15 days back assured me to supply around 55,000 vials of the injection. However, till April 15 these companies could provide only 37,000 to 39,000 vials to the state.

I held a video conference meeting with the CEOs and MDs of some of the companies that produce Remdesivir today again. These companies have now assured me that supply will be streamlined April 19 onwards, he said.

He lauded the Centre's move to ban the export of Remdesivir. "Ready stocks of Remdesivir (which were bound for shipments abroad) are available even in Maharashtra. Some of the company representatives met me with a proposal of allowing these stocks to be sold in Maharashtra, Shingane said.

"Maharashtra CM has also issued orders allowing export-bound stocks to be sold in the state (following the ban). I do not know how much such vials are available (with companies)," he said.

Banerjee, who suffered injuries on her leg during campaigning in Nandigram on 10 March, has since been seen seated on a wheelchair in rallies and roadshows.

She said the Covid-19 surge in West Bengal could have been under check had Modi ensured vaccination for every citizen of the state.

"The virus had become weak in the last five-six months. But, the PM did not take steps to vaccinate every citizen. He did not even respond to my suggestion for free vaccination for people of the state for political reasons.

"On our part, we have already started free inoculation at some camps in Kolkata and other areas," Banerjee said.

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

Urging all eligible voters to exercise their franchise on Saturday, the fifth phase of Assembly elections, she alleged, "If you don't, citing some excuses, the BJP will try to delete your name from the voter list."

The TMC chief also slammed the BJP-led government at the Centre for the hike in LPG cylinder prices.

"If they have their way, BJP will take it to Rs 5,000 per cylinder... Tell them we don't want cash for votes, we want cooking gas for free," she said, accusing the saffron party of distributing money among people for votes.

## 'Ran out of vaccines', Andhra CM writes to Modi, seeks 60 L doses

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

HYDERABAD, 16 APRIL

TN reports 8,449 new cases:

Tamil Nadu reported 8,449

New Covid infections and

related 33 deaths on Fri-

day, pushing the caseload to

9,71,384 and 13,032 respec-

tively, said the Health Depart-

ment. Chennai continued to

constitute the major chunk of

the new cases, account-

ing for 2,636 new infections

aggregating to 2,77,300. The

districts of Cuddalore and

Coimbatore today witnessed

102 and 583 new cases,

respectively. Thirty three

patients died today, taking

the total number of fatalities

in the state to 13,032. SNS

Tirupati Lok Sabha seat will be held tomorrow.

TDP MP Kesineni Nani and Telugu actor and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan too have tested positive.

The chief minister also held a video conference with district collectors and Superintendents of Police and ruled out lockdown as it would lead to financial ruin.

Instead, he emphasised on focussed testing which includes testing of primary contacts and vaccination to tackle the surge in cases. Hesad mortality rate in rural areas were more since patients were reaching hospitals late.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Foundation (HRF), a civil society group urged the state government to prohibit and put an effective stop to huge religious congregations, big assemblies and gatherings and election rallies while ensuring that migrant labourers are not harassed and provided with all basic amenities.

## TENDER

### NORTHERN RAILWAY

#### E-TENDER NOTICE

Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction Distribution, DRMs Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi for & on behalf of President of India invites open e-tender under single packet system for the under noted work-

1 Name of Work with its location	Design, supply, erection, testing & commissioning of 25 KV OHE for Electrification of inspection pits in connection with creation of maintenance and testing facilities for homing of Electric Locomotive at Diesel Shed, Tughlaqabad.
2 Approx. Cost of work	Rs. 96,65,210.48
3 Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 0/-
4 E-Tender Bid Online Submission Period	29.04.2021 (00.00 Hrs.) to 13.05.2021 (15.00 Hrs.)
5 E-Tender Bid Submission End Date & E-Tender Open Date & Time	13.05.2021 (15.00 hrs.)
6 Fund Allocation	20427503
7 Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	<a href="http://www.irrepd.gov.in">www.irrepd.gov.in</a>

No.: 04-TRD-NDLS-2021-22 Date: 16.04.2021 870/2021

Serving Customers with a Smile

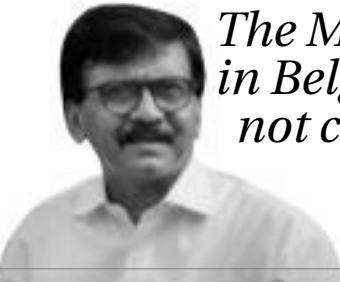
### PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LIMITED

Regd. Office: PSPCL Head Office, The Mall, Patiala (Corporate Identity Number: U40109PB2010SGC033813) Website: [www.pspcl.in](http://www.pspcl.in) Contact No.: 0164-2756446

Superintendent Engineer / C&I Circle, O&M, GHTP, Lehra Mohabbat invites E-Tender for the work of:

1 Tender Enquiry No. 279/GHPT/SE/C&I/FSSS/AMC/12 Dated: 16-04-2021 Routine, Breakdown, Periodical / Preventive Maintenance and shutdown overhauling of C & I Equipments / Instruments installed in FSSS, ASLD, Local PLC systems, Local Gauges, H2 Plant, Ash Water Recovery System etc, at Stage-1 (2 x 210 MW) & Stage-2 (2 x 250 MW) Guru Hargobind Thermal Plant Lehra Mohabbat, Distt: Bathinda (Punjab), as per details given in the tender specifications for a period of one year.
2 Tender Enquiry No. 280/GHPT/C&I/M&IM-104/Vol-I Dated: 16-04-2021 Routine / Preventive Breakdown & Shutdown Maintenance of C&I Equipments / Instruments / Measurement & Interlocks System, Annunciation System, Flue Gas Analyzers, Steam & Water Analysis System, etc., installed at 2 x 210 MW Stage-I & 2 x 250 MW Stage-II, Guru Hargobind Thermal Plant (GHTP), Lehra Mohabbat, Distt: Bathinda, Punjab as per details given in the tender specifications for a period of one year.

For detailed NIT & tender specifications, please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 17-04-2021 from 1



*The MES has symbolised the struggle of the Marathi-speaking people in Belgaum. At least Marathi politicians from Maharashtra should not campaign against a Marathi candidate in Belgaum*

SLAMMING DEVENDRA FADNAVIS FOR CAMPAIGNING AGAINST MARATHI CANDIDATE IN KARNATAKA'S BELGAUM

SHIV SENA LEADER SANJAY RAUT

The Statesman

05

NEW DELHI, SATURDAY 17 APRIL 2021

THUMBNAILS



Smoke billows from a forest fire at Ketli area in Shimla on Friday.

IANS

**Woman SPO held in J&K:** A woman special police officer in Kashmir's Kulgam district has been terminated from service and arrested for "glorifying terrorism". A police spokesman said that the SPO Salma Akhtar has been booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and an FIR has also been registered against her.

SNS

**Two held for growing cannabis:** The Narcotics Control Bureau raided a flat in Dombivali in neighbouring Thane district and seized cannabis being cultivated in a flat using a method in which plants are grown without using soil, also called hydroponic farming, an official said on Friday.

PTI

**Pandharpur bypoll:** The bypoll to Pandharpur-Man-gavdevha Assembly constituency in Maharashtra's Solapur district will be held on Saturday. The NCP and the Opposition BJP are in a direct fight in this by-election, which was necessitated due to the death NCP legislator Bharat Bhalke owing to post-COVID complications in November last year.

PTI

**HC asks Guj to start portal for real time Covid info**

AHMEDABAD, 16 APRIL Taking serious cognizance of complaints about the Gujarat Government's callous handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, the High Court has asked it to take some measures to make the scenario patient-friendly.

The High Court directive comes at a time Gujarat's daily Covid cases are approaching the 9,000-mark and the flow of dead bodies at crematoria are still rising.

Among the many measures the High Court bench headed by Chief Justice Vikram Nath suggested is starting an online portal to show real time availability of Covid beds in various hospitals.

The display of real-time availability of beds in the state's hospitals would save the patients and their relatives from the hardships of shuttling between different health care facilities, said the High Court while hearing the Suo Motu PIL it took up on Sunday. Regarding the controversy about shortage of medical grade oxygen, the High Court asked the Government to keep it informed about the availability of oxygen for Covid patients.

The High Court also asked the Gujarat Government to regularly publish correct data about Covid-19 patients, number of deaths due to the virus and the number deaths due to comorbidities so that people's belief that official figures are untrue is removed.

The High Court would resume its further hearing on the matter on Tuesday next. Meanwhile, after a petition was filed in the HC urging action against state BJP president C.R. Paatil for illegally procuring and distributing the crucial Remdesivir injection, Chief Minister Vijay Rupani has defended the party chief saying that the party chief has done all these as part of his 'public service'. He was non-committal on questions like whether C.R. Paatil had any pharmacist's license to procure such drugs without proper prescriptions.

SNS

# 'No state has asked to stop train services yet'

Rly Board CEO says if demand increases railways will operate more trains

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

No state has asked the railways to stop any train service yet, Railway Board Chairman Suneet Sharma said on Friday, adding that wherever the states have raised concerns about containment zones, passengers have undergone random tests and checks at the destinations.

Addressing a press conference, Sharma said the railways has highlighted that all protocols are being followed by the states on the IRCTC's e-ticketing website, advising passengers if they need to undergo an RT-PCR test or carry COVID-negative certificates while travelling to certain areas.

"As of now, no state government has asked us to stop trains. However, whenever there are concerns, the state governments have discussed the issues with us and where there are containment zones, they are doing random tests and checks. The railways has all these details on the e-ticketing website and passengers



Passengers stand in a queue at a ticket counter to board buses for their native places, at Sindhi Camp bus stand in Jaipur on Friday.

IANS

Passengers are provided information on whether they have to undergo tests or carry a COVID-negative certificate on arrival," he said.

Sharma also said the railways is doing a thermal screening of the passengers and has also notified the fine amounts for not following COVID protocols. He ruled out running Shramik Special trains and said trains will be run wherever there is demand and requirement.

Sharma also said the price of platform tickets has been increased at several stations to discourage crowding.

"We have 4,000 isolation coaches for Covid at different

locations across the country. We have received a demand from Nandurbar in Maharashtra for over 100 coaches and 20 isolation coaches have been provided," he said when asked about the converted coaches that can act as COVID care centres.

Sharma said the railways is keeping a close watch on all stations in Mumbai, Gujarat, Karnataka and wherever the demand is high, the zonal general managers have been authorised to operate more trains.

"I assure you that there is no dearth of services, the situation is quite normal, par-

ticularly in Mumbai, Surat and Bengaluru," he said.

The Indian Railways is currently running 1,490 mail and express trains and 5,397 suburban train services on an average per day. "We are also running 28 clone trains of highly-patronised trains and 947 passenger trains," Sharma said, adding that 70 percent of the train services have been restored. "To clear the extra rush across the country, the railways is operating 140 additional trains," he said.

Sharma said the 140 special trains will make 483 trips in April and May.

Citing the figures of the additional trains operating in several states, he said the Central Railway is operating 85 such services which will complete 284 trips, the Western Railway is operating 28 trains for 152 trips, the Northern Railway is operating 15 special trains for 19 trips, the East Central Railway is operating two special trains for four trips, the North Eastern Railway is operating nine trains for 14 trips and the North Central Railway is operating one train for 10 trips.

## SEEKING PEACE



Devotees come out after offering prayers on the First Friday of the Holy month of Ramadan, at historic Makkah Masjid, in Hyderabad on Friday.

IANS

## Eyeing China, Aus PM calls India 'a natural partner'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL



In an apparent reference to China's increasing aggressive behaviour, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has expressed concern over tensions due to territorial claims in the Indo-Pacific and called India a "natural partner" of his country in shaping the future of the region.

The Indo-Pacific is the epicenter of strategic competition.

Tensions over territorial

claims are growing. Mil-

itary modernisation is hap-

pening at an unprecedented

rate. Democratic sovereign

nations are being threatened

and coerced by foreign inter-

ference. Cyber-attacks are

becoming more sophistica-

ted, including from state spon-

sored actors, and frequent

shuttle flights between differ-

ent countries are becoming

more common. The Indo-Paci-

fic and called India a "natu-

ral partner" of his country in

shaping the future of the re-

gion.

The Indo-Pacific, he said,

confronted some formidable

challenges, and the pan-

demic has sparked a renewed

appreciation amongst like-

minded nations for each

other and what they could

together do for the region.

"Together, we carry the aspi-

rations for the future. A re-

gion stable, a region prosper-

ous with healthy people and

a clean environment. We will

continue to work together to

achieve those goals," he ad-

## Pollution causing Covid surge in Bihar: BSPCB

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
PATNA, 16 APRIL

Is air pollution also contributing to the surging Covid-19 cases? The Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) has asked the state government to take immediate steps to keep the air pollution under control amid reports that poor air quality could be one of the reasons behind the Covid spread.

According to a recent study published in the European Respiratory Review, air pollution could be a contributing factor to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. "Air pollution may be linked to an increase in COVID-19 severity and lethality through its impact on chronic disease such as cardiopulmonary diseases and diabetes. Experimental studies have shown that exposure to air pollution leads to a decreased immune response, thus facilitating viral penetration and replication," said the study.

Apparently alarmed at the deteriorating air quality in the state, the pollution watchdog has shot off letters to various departments such as road construction, building construction and urban development, asking them to launch strict measures to check contamination of air.

According to the pollution board, various factors have been polluting the air. They include neighbourhood/outside factors which share is huge (29 percent), domestic (24 percent), transport (13 percent), waste burning (9 percent), industries (6 percent), brick kilns (5 percent) and others (14 percent).

The pollution board has

now planned to install air

quality monitoring stations in

24 out of the state's total 38

districts to know the source of pollution and initiate corrective measures. Authorities said the air quality in the state had improved considerably during the last year's lockdown but post lockdown, the situation is back to square one.

The authorities are alarmed at the way the Covid cases have been surging alarmingly with each passing day, breaking the previous records. The seriousness of the situation can be underlined from the fact that the active cases have registered more than 15-fold increase in the past one fortnight. On 1 April, the state registered a total of 1,907 cases which jumped to 29,079 on 15 April.

The Covid cases set a new record yesterday when they crossed 6,000 for the first time in Bihar since the pandemic hit the state last year. Even at the peak of the wave last year, a maximum of little over 4,100 cases had been reported last year but this time, the coronavirus is breaking all records with each passing day.

What is further alarming is the lack of adequate beds in the hospitals treating Covid patients even as the acute

scarcity of oxygen cylinders has further become a matter of serious concern, prompting many private hospitals to deny admission of patients. As a temporary solution to this problem, the state authorities have directed the oxygen manufacturing units to divert oxygen cylinders for industrial use to hospitals till the situation gets normal.

Politics takes back seat, Cong, BJP too shut offices: The BJP and the Congress in Bihar have also shut their party offices after the JD(U) and the RJD in view of the resurgence in coronavirus cases in the state and other parts of the country.

With large number of infections surfacing every passing day, political parties in Bihar have also decided to halt their activities for the time being.

The parties will attend a virtual meeting called by Governor Phagu Chauhan on the Covid situation on April 17, Raj Bhavan sources said on Friday. "The BJP office has been closed because of the COVID situation. If needed, we will hold online meetings of the office bearers," state party general secretary Devesh Kumar said.

The window for this activity will be open from 19/04/2021 to 28/04/2021 on all working days. Concerned workers or any stakeholder may submit information/documents via post/email; or record their statement to Sh. Roshan Lal, APFC, EPFO Delhi West, EPFO Complex, Sector-23, Dwarka, New Delhi-110077.

Contact: 011-20892251  
Email: [epfodelhiwest.c1@epfindia.gov.in](mailto:epfodelhiwest.c1@epfindia.gov.in)

davp 23182/11/0001/2122

## Seers seek apology from Niranjan Akhada for Kumbh wrap up

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
DEHRADUN, 16 APRIL

Niranjan Akhada Secretary Puri had said that seers of their akhada will wind up their camps and leave the Kumbh Kshetra on April 17.

their camps and leave the Kumbh Kshetra on April 17. Those interested in taking part in the April 27 Shahi Snan may come for it separ-

rately, he had said.

Many seers have tested positive after the commencement of Kumbh, including Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad president Mahant Narendra Giri, who is admitted at the AIIMS, Rishikesh. Mahamandaleshwar of Maha Nirwani Akhada from Madhya Pradesh Swami Kapil Dev, who had tested positive for COVID-19, died at a private hospital here on April 13.

their camps and leave the Kumbh Kshetra on April 17.

Seers of other akhadas in Haridwar on Friday demanded an apology from Niranjan Akhada for announcing the "conclusion" of the Kumbh Mela in view of a surge in cases, saying it did not have the right to do so.

Niranjan Akhada, one of the 13 akhadas of seers participating in the Kumbh, had announced in Haridwar on Thursday that the Kumbh Mela was over for them.

"The main Shahi Snan

(held on the occasion of Mesh Sankranti on April 14) is over.

Many in our akhada are showing symptoms. So, for us the Kumbh Mela is over," Niranjan Akhada Secretary Ravindra Puri had said.

Niranjan Akhada pres-

ident Mahant Dharmadas said that only the mela officer or the chief minister has the right to announce the "end of the Kumbh Mela".

"By announcing the con-

clusion of the Kumbh Mela without the agreement of other akhadas, Niranjan Akhada has committed an unpardonable crime of creating chaos and confusion among the seers. Niranjan Akhada must apologise to the Akhada Parishad for what it has done or else it is difficult to keep up ties with them," he said.

Terming Niranjan Akhada's decision as "incorrect", he said any decision vis-a-vis Kumbh is taken collectively by the akhadas. Bada Udaseen Akhada also made it clear that it was not in favour of early conclusion of the Kumbh Mela. No decision regarding Kumbh can be taken without a meeting of Akhada Parishad. Bada Udaseen Akhada president Mahant Maheshwar Das said. The Kumbh Mela is organised collectively by akhadas through consultation with each other but Niranjan Akhada did not talk to the akhadas before taking the decision, he said.

"Kumbh begins and ends

on its 'Muhurat'.

It will end as per the schedule

## Small is beautiful

It is time, perhaps, to hold those vocal about the proposition that a crisis is an opportunity to their word. The crisis which is the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the massive hole in India's public health infrastructure and central to it is the lack of coordination between various agencies at the central, state and local levels. An absence of accountability has been a direct consequence of this state of affairs. It is the ordinary citizen who suffers, as usual. That a structural shift is required in the Indian governance and delivery model has been brought out in sharp relief by the pandemic. But reform of the state apparatus must not be limited to ad-hoc measures restricted to dealing with Covid-19. It is, therefore, pointless to go on ad nauseum about the tweaks in public healthcare which may or may not prove efficacious but to turn the ruling dispensation's attention to one of its longest standing promises which it only partially fulfilled during the 1999-2004 AB Vajpayee administration ~ breaking India up, as it were, into smaller states. Smaller administrative units, there is enough empirical evidence in the public domain to establish, make for enhanced governance, greater cohesion, and superior delivery of goods and services to citizens. It also provides a fillip to genuine federalism as greater accountability comes into play, unlike in the current administrative structure of the country which is essentially that introduced under the Mughals on to which the British colonial state grafted its own variations and which, post-Independence, saw the reorganisation of states on a linguistic basis. All this has done is create regional satraps who have treated large tracts of India as their personal fiefdoms with little or no institutional checks on their power unlike those which, at least on paper, exist for the Centre. The relatively smooth birthing of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttarakhand a little over two decades ago, and the botched-up creation of Telangana in 2014, are the only substantive attempts the political establishment has made to address an issue which has been hanging fire for long. The current public health crisis provides an opportunity for the government to act. The BJP, after all, has from its very inception, been a proponent of smaller administrative units. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who showed great courage in expending his political capital ~ and was richly rewarded for it by the electorate ~ on the abrogation of Article 370, smoothing the path for the construction of the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya, and working on a Uniform Civil Code including the banning of triple talaq, has been surprisingly coy in fast-tracking the creation of smaller states. One explanation could be political. Given that many of the larger states which have been identified by experts as being ripe for downsizing including Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Maharashtra are also the ones from where the BJP has had a large number of MPs elected in the 2014 and 2019 General Elections, there could be an element of hesitation in upsetting the applecart. Mr Modi ought to be sanguine for this is a highly exaggerated concern. If the past two national polls have taught political analysts anything, it is that the Indian voter is ready to support decisions taken in the national interest.

## Telangana turmoil

Telangana is in turmoil as K Chandrasekhar Rao, Chief Minister and founder-leader of the Telangana Rashtra Samiti, tries to establish an opposition-less State with his immediate family firmly in control. The Telugu Desam Party which dominated the political scene in composite Andhra Pradesh of which Telangana was a part, virtually gave up in Telangana when it was separated in 2014. The last of the two TDP MLAs in the Telangana Assembly, Mecha Nageshwar Rao and Sandra Venkata Veeriah joined the TRS a few days back, taking the party's strength to 101 in the 119-member House. At the time of the 2018 Assembly election, the TRS had won 88 seats. Later, 12 of the 18 Congress MLAs joined the TRS, taking its strength to 100. Its Nagarjuna Sagar MLA Nomula Narasimhaiah passed away in December last. The Congress, ruling party of Andhra Pradesh at the time of bifurcation, had a strong base in the State and had the support of the people of Telangana for having conceded their long-standing demand for separation. It not only failed to cash in on the goodwill and support of the people, but also was unable to hold its own flock together. The bye-election to the Nagarjuna Sagar Assembly seat is yet another opportunity for Chandrasekhar Rao to achieve his goal of ensuring an opposition-mukht Telangana. The only fly in the ointment is the growing strength of the BJP in the State. Its impressive performance in the recent Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation election is a wake-up call for the Chief Minister. He has rolled out the red carpet for disgruntled elements in the BJP like Anjaiah Yadav and Ravi Kumar Naik to join the TRS. Notwithstanding the TRS occupying the political space vacated by the Congress and the TDP in Telangana, the BJP has been making steady, albeit slow, progress in the State. Its winning four Lok Sabha seats in the 2019 election came as a surprise to Chandrasekhar Rao. What shocked him was the defeat of his daughter Kavitha in Nizamabad at the hands of the BJP. The BJP has already started preparing the ground to do a West Bengal in Telangana when the State goes to the polls in 2023. In the political realignment that is taking place ahead of the Assembly election, Telugu Desam leaders are joining the BJP, taking with them their swathe of the OBC social base. The Congress has missed the boat and is unlikely to stage a comeback. The history of Telangana is marked by the armed struggle of 1946 led by the undivided Communist Party while the struggle for separation of Telangana from AP was led by secular democratic forces. Shortly before the Hyderabad municipal election, Chandrasekhar Rao issued a veiled threat to the BJP that he would organise an anti-BJP front at the national level.

# Covid-19 and Europe

Contrasting with those opposed to Covid-19 restrictions, there is the destabilizing and frustrating new reality many now encounter, a situation few predicted and which caught most governments unprepared and all of them under-prepared. There is small wonder in those circumstances that those feeling the pinch of coronavirus restrictions became readily susceptible to theories of scapegoats, conspiracies and reductive narratives



**S**ince the arrival of Covid-19 in Europe early last year, the numbers of confirmed cases and deaths have remained at critical levels across the continent. At the time of writing, infections exceed 42 million and coronavirus-related fatalities have passed the one million mark. The gravity of the situation became apparent as early as Spring last year, when European governments, with rare exceptions like Sweden, did away with hubristic dismissal of the pandemic to decree restrictions in the form of remote schooling, non-essential business closures, mandatory mask-wearing and expanded executive powers. One of the most impactful measures at that time was a limit on cross-regional travel and the creation of social bubbles, limiting how many people were allowed to meet in person.

At the same time as the coronavirus spread, so have populist right-wing ideologies across Europe, giving rise to coinage of a new term, 'pandemic populism'. The latest manifestations of this ideological hybrid are large-scale protests seen in the Netherlands, Germany and Finland. A sweeping criticism of scientific orthodoxy has been aligned with populist slogans against globalization, immigration and multi-culturalism, along with the propagation of rights of marginal groups.

It is impossible to deconstruct these coterminous movements to identify the various factors that meld into these protests, but the presumption is that this is a coalition of diverse interest groups. One protestor at the Helsinki anti-COVID-restrictions rally this month carried a sign reading 'White Lives Matter', an obvious riposte to the global Black Lives Matter protest movement that resulted in summer 2020 following the totally unnecessary death of George Floyd in Minnesota at the hands of the police.

With the European continent now in a third wave of the debilitating coronavirus pandemic, those vocally opposing government-imposed restrictions for public health reasons and those who promote right-wing ideology are proceeding hand-in-hand towards a political reckoning. The emergence of, and increasing support gained by, various populist movements in Europe long predates the pandemic. As with Donald Trump's unlikely US presiden-

tial campaign and victory in 2016, Europe also saw leaders with autocratic inclinations use the democratic process to implement populist agendas in Europe. President Victor Orban set about reshaping Hungary's democratic apparatus and Poland voted into power a right-wing leader, Andrzej Duda, who is so divisive that his policies have sparked demonstrations in Warsaw, the scale of which has been unseen since Soviet times. And in Britain, the public, animated by fears of unrestrained immigra-

tion and domination from the EU capital in Brussels, voted narrowly to remove itself from the European Union.

In attempting to establish a connection between the anti-lockdown protests and the discrete European-flavoured populism, an appreciation of the nature of populism may be attempted.

There are two key ideas housed in the rhetoric; firstly, that 'the people' face a conflict against 'the others'. Essential here is the de-legitimization of large segments of the populace, be they immigrants, those of different religions, or simply fellow citizens who disagree politically. Secondly, that strong centralized leadership is called for in order to advance the agenda of real patriots.

Contrasting with those opposed to Covid-19 restrictions, there is the destabilizing and frustrating new reality many now encounter, a situation few predicted and which caught most governments unprepared and all of them under-prepared. There is small wonder in those circumstances that those feeling the

pinch of coronavirus restrictions became readily susceptible to theories of scapegoats, conspiracies and reductive narratives. The tactics for mobilizing opposition in Europe to government-prescribed Covid-19 restrictions appear to have been imported wholesale to Europe from the United States, drawing from the extreme propaganda of the anti-liberal section of the far-right of the Republican Party. Social media platforms contribute ideological echo chambers where the most controversial voices are algorithmically aided to reach the widest audience in order to optimize engagement with as many people as possible. Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, with Instagram & WhatsApp, are listed companies beholden to shareholders, not the good of humanity.

For a platform whose mission is to connect its users, Facebook does not give much consideration to who those people are, and whether they should remain connected, while a report published this month by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism revealed that accounts on Instagram promoting health misinformation on Covid-19 grew in the first quarter of the year by more than one million viewers. Right-wing groups take refuge in poorly moderated digital platforms where conspiracy theories provide a fruitful outlet in the search for a beleaguered public's attention.

Yet the merging of Europe's far-right groups and anti-lockdown movements online does not necessarily take any uniform shape, nor always create the same impact on mainstream political engagement. Reports in Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Foundation for Social Democracy from eight European countries suggest that in some cases the crisis brought an opportunity for greater coordination between alt-right disparate ends of the political spectrum.

It is impossible to assess the potential outcomes of the ongoing situation. Even with the administration of vaccines, Covid-19 seems good to remain for the foreseeable future. The eagerness of populist activists to harness the present existential despair will not be fully understood for many years, but it is sure to impress itself strongly on future European politics.

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

editor@thestatesman.com

## Irritating and provocative

**SIR,** The article, "Spotlight Bengal" by Prafull Goradia published today is irritating, as also provocative. Some pertinent points must be added.

Hindutwa is not an original "ism" born in the soil of India, but is the Indian version of Nazism or Fascism, borrowed from Europe.

In fact Golwalkar, one of the founders of RSS, stressed the need for a 'Holocaust' in India, to cleanse our holy fatherland (Pitrubhumi) of the evil elements living here down the ages.

Rajnaryan Bose never coined the term 'Hindutwa'; in fact, he was a Brahmo, a modern sect of educated Hindus who renounced traditional Hinduism, and embraced their version of "Nirakar Adwaita" as true Hinduism, as propounded by Ram Mohan Roy.

Bose wrote a book extolling

the greatness of Hinduism, and gave a call to Hindus to unite on one platform.

After his demise, his followers united in one body named "Hindu Mahasabha", which was not a political organisation, until Syama-prasad Mukherjee made it such. The term "Hindutwa" was first propagated by Savarkar in 1925.

Both the "Anushilan samity" and "Jugantar Gosthi" were armed revolutionary organisations, that had nothing to do with any religion. They worshipped "Bharatmata", the image of which was first drawn by Abanindranath Tagore in the style of Devi Durga".

To Sri Aurobindo, the soil of Bharat was Holy Mother, so he fought for the liberation of that Mata from the clutches of foreign rulers. That is all.

In his Yogi years in Pondicher-

ry, he and his Yogic companion, the Holy Mother, delivered sermons before the map of undivided India, the "Bharat Mata", still on display in the playground. Gurudev Rabindranath associated himself with "Anushilan Samity" for a brief period, but got disillusioned with its theory and practice of violence and quit it soon.

During the anti-Bengal Partition agitation in 1905, Rabindranath strived to unite both the communities by "Raksha Bandhan", tying of knot by all to all and made it a mass festival, with songs like, "Banglar Mati Banglar Jal" and "Bidhir Badhan Kathe tum". Thus, a North Indian festival was adopted in Bengal to celebrate communal harmony.

He himself took out a rally to Nakhoda Mosque and tied a knot on the wrist of the Imam there. So,

the contention of Mr Goradia, to show Sri Aurobindo or Rabindranath in the light of Hindutwa, is fraught with malafide intention.

"Vande Mataram" by Bankim Chandra was and is an adoration of the mother image of our land, in which the Hindu and the Muslim have equal share, unlike the Savarkarite doctrine of exclusion.

Yes, the Jana Sangh was born in Calcutta in 1951, at the behest of Syamaprasad. After partition, the flood of refugees in Calcutta and Bengal, earned huge discredit to Syamaprasad and his communal politics that demanded partition at any cost.

He thus felt that contesting election in the name of Hindu Mahasabha would be disastrous and so launched a new party and called it the Jana Sangh.

But in the 1952 election, this Jana Sangh was swept away from the soil of Bengal.

Yours, etc., Asis Sengupta, Kolkata, 15 April.

## RIGHT DECISION

**SIR,** The Central government has taken the right decision by can-

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**  
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

**ASIAN VOICES**

## The vain dream of eternal power

**A**nyone who has seized political power wants to remain in power for good. Some have illusions that they can wield power forever, and others do whatever it takes not to lose power. Eventually, however, that dream of eternal power will be shattered and rulers will realize that power is evanescent in essence, after all. Indeed, no power on earth lasts forever.

Not realizing this basic fact, our arrogant political leaders frequently harangue that they could and would remain in power for at least two decades or even a century. However, this is nothing more than an illusion, a delusion of grandeur. Yet it is revealing. Indeed, no one who truly believes in democracy would utter such undemocratic remarks. When the people turn their backs on those politicians, they will learn the hard way that their daydream of eternal power will inevitably be debunked. Political power is always ephemeral. Intoxicated with fantasy, however, our politicians do not seem to realize it.

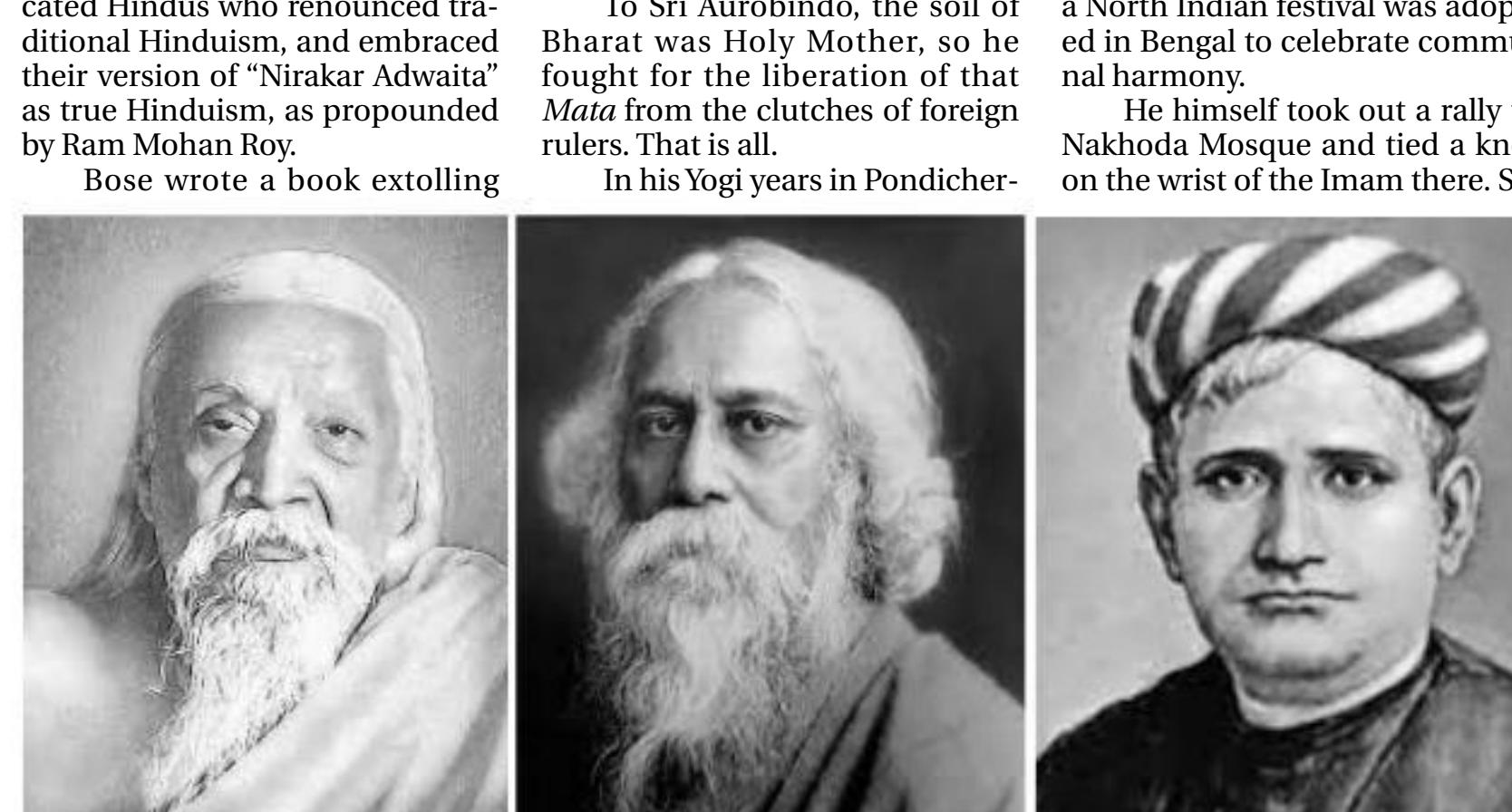
Recently on Netflix, I came across a 2020 Chinese fantasy movie, "The Yin-Yang Master: Dream of Eternity." Set centuries ago, it tells the story of a fateful fight between a malevolent serpent demon trapped in the palace and the four yin-yang masters who try to stop the demon from rising again. Whenever the serpent demon is reborn, the yin-yang masters must kill it or trap the monster again within the Imperial City. In the story, the serpent demon threatens to rise again. Qing

Ming, a young yin-yang master, travels to the Imperial City to stop the demon from reappearing.

In the palace, he meets the three other yin-yang masters. Together, they awaken the four stone guardians that protect the Imperial City. Qing Ming learns that the malicious dragon is sealed within the body of the empress, who has not appeared in public for a long time. He also learns that Princess Zhang Ping has not aged for the past 60 years, which is only possible for someone who is the vessel of the serpent demon. Thus, he suspects that the princess is in fact the empress. His suspicion turns out to be true.

In the Imperial City, Qing Ming notices the striking resemblance between the palace priest, He Shouyue, and his late master, Zhongxing. He Shouyue turns out to be the spirit guardian of Zhongxing, who fell in love with the princess but later parted with her nonetheless. When he left the princess, Zhongxing left his spirit guardian instead to console and protect her. Both He Shouyue and Princess Zhang Ping conspire to live and remain in power forever, using the serpent demon.

One intriguing thing in this fantasy movie is that the good princess and the evil serpent demon are, in fact, one. She has the serpent demon in her body, as she is its vessel. Like yin and yang, the princess and the serpent demon coexist, complementing and resisting each other.



## RECKLESS

**SIR,** Your editorial "Kumbh and Covid" (14 April) is spot-on. You have rightly blamed the public mentality for the abnormal surge of Covid case. Governments ~ both at the Centre and in states ~ are trying their best to enhance public awareness, the lack of which is defeating efforts to lessen the spread of Covid. By this time it has been already established that vaccines are not the ultimate solution. Combining vaccines with prevention guidelines is the only way. Who will save us if we ourselves invite the catastrophe?

Yours, etc., Aranya Sanyal, Siliguri, 15 April.

the contention of Mr Goradia, to show Sri Aurobindo or Rabindranath in the light of Hindutwa, is fraught with malafide intention.

"Vande Mataram" by Bankim Chandra was and is an adoration of the mother image of our land, in which the Hindu and the Muslim have equal share, unlike the Savarkarite doctrine of exclusion.

Although it may affect the academic results of many bright and meritorious students, in the end it is not a bad move for them as well since the most precious thing for anybody is to look after one's life.

Parents and teachers should counsel dispirited students. Due to the negligence of our brothers and sisters and casualness of our Government in following Covid-19 protocols, cases are spreading rapidly.

Most surprisingly, the Central Government has still not rung the alarm bell and instead it has allowed conduct of Assembly Elections in several states. This is concerning. Our state government should take strong decisions immediately regarding the conduct of Board examinations and HS Exams.

Yours, etc., Iftekhar Ahmed, Kolkata, 15 April.

## RIGHT DECISION

**SIR,** The Central government has taken the right decision by can-

## 'Galwan destroyed India-China trust'

gest that the disengagement process will mostly likely be slow.

**Q. The last round of senior commanders' talks apparently did not yield a positive outcome. Don't you agree with suggestions that the stand-off can't be resolved unless there is intervention at the highest political level on the two sides?**

A. The 11th round of corps commanders meeting did not result in a joint statement indicating that there were mutual differences in implementing the disengagement process. The meeting comes after a series of online interactions and physical meetings between the two ministries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Ladakh to meet the troops. He also gave a "free hand" to the Indian military to address the issue on the borders. China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Tibet although it is not clear if he had meetings with the military. President Xi Jinping made statements to his troops for "battle ready" preparations. External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar and Defence Minister Mr Rajnath Singh met their Chinese counterparts in Moscow. The National Security Advisor had telephonic interactions with his Chinese counterpart, the Special Representative on the border issue. All these suggest that the leaders are aware of the situation on the borders. As the militaries of both countries are under civilian control, it is certain that the border incidents since March 2020 have been cleared by the civilian leaderships. In this backdrop of continuous civilian leadership association with the situation on the borders, it is doubtful if their "intervention" again would result in disengagement. It is possible that the issue could be resolved if the costs for one or both parties are high. China relented in February this year because after their occupation of Pangong Tso Finger 8 to 4 areas, the Indian military occupied the Kailash ranges which proved costly to China.

**Q. Do you see the possibility of the current Sino-Indian military stand-off at Eastern Ladakh coming to an end any time soon?**

A. On 10 February 2021 after the Chinese side indicated disengagement from the Pangong Tso theatre, the Indian side responded positively and both began the disengagement and de-escalation process. Both sides exchanged a detailed written agreement for "phased, coordinated and verifiable" disengagement and "synchronised de-escalation" of troops at the western sector of the border with China, although implementation of this is a complex and complicated process given the violence that erupted on 15 June last year at Galwan that left 20 Indian soldiers dead (and four Chinese, according to Beijing). If China and India have to focus on their respective nation-building processes, they have to come to terms on the border sooner than later. It is not clear if the current disengagement process is coming to an end soon. Following the 1988 agreement between India and China during PM Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing, it was decided that pending territorial dispute resolution, peace and tranquility should prevail in the border areas in order to focus on other aspects of bilateral relations like trade, economy, tourism etc. Now that we have uncertainty on the borders, caused mainly by China disregarding the five agreements on confidence building measures, India has stated that peace on the borders is essential to re-starting bilateral relations. On the other hand, China is arguing that bilateral relations should be improved forthwith regardless of the situation on the borders. Moreover, China stated that India "should meet half-way" on the borders which was rejected by India stating that first China should go back to March 2020 positions on the border. These sug-

**Q. Even if the current situation in Ladakh is resolved, do you think India-China relations can ever become normal again?**

A. Eventually, the situation in Ladakh will be resolved although the time frame is uncertain. India's basic position is that peace and tranquillity should prevail on the borders before bilateral relations could become normal. Secondly, if China had reneged on the five CBMs agreements signed in 1993, 1996, 2005, 2012 and 2013 and deployed troops in March 2020 in the areas close to the Line of Actual Control, then there is no guarantee that China will not disturb peace on the bor-



der again in the future. Mutual trust that has been built since the 1976 diplomatic normalisation has been destroyed by China in the last one year's military misadventures in the western sector. China has to first show its sincerity in resolving the issue for normalising relations.

**Q. Can India trust China after the Ladakh stand-off?**

A. The June 15 incident last year has destroyed trust between India and China. The incident led to the deterioration in bilateral relations. In order to rebuild trust again, it may take ages. The current Chinese Cold War statements reflected in their extreme nationalist tabloids or official statements on "what is right and wrong" does not help resolve the trust levels between the two countries. India had initiated the two "informal summit meetings" at Wuhan and Chennai in hopes of improving and stabilising relations with China in the context of the current global disruptions. Yet India has been left high and dry with the situation in the western sector of the border. The twin tragedies of Galwan and Covid-19 pandemic that spread from Wuhan (when three students from Kerala returned) have led to public anger in India.

**Q. China wants decoupling of trade ties from the border issue between the two countries. Do you think India can afford to do that, given the public sentiments against China after the Galwan Valley clash?**

A. China's position is that regardless of the situation on the borders, India should open its market to Chinese products. This has also been the theme during the RCEP negotiations. While China has not yet addressed the huge trade deficits (of over \$900 billion in favour of China in the last decade), it still wants to explore the Indian market. Even though it has become a member of the World Trade Organisation and recently championed globalisation, it is still restrictive in its trade practices with

non-tariff barriers and others to the detriment of Indian products. On the other hand, India had stated since 1988 that peace on the borders is a sine qua non of the bilateral relations. These two positions have to be reconciled before normalising relations.

**Q. Why has China become so aggressive against all its neighbours over the last few years, especially after the outbreak of Coronavirus?**

A. The 19th Communist Party Congress in 2017 (which is under implementation till 2022) stated that China should "occupy the centre-stage" in regional and global orders. In addition, China's leader stated that its "core interests will not be sacrificed for developmental interests" suggesting that Beijing will be assertive on its perceived interests on Tibet, Xinjiang, South China Sea, Taiwan, Senkaku Islands, borders with India and others. China's emergence since 2010 as the second largest economy in the world following its favourable engagement policies with the United States which diverted global investments, markets, technologies and others to China helped the latter to flex its muscles. China has become the largest trading partner with over 128 countries in the world and frequently exercises political pressures on them. While China stated that it tackled Covid 19 pandemic in an "open, transparent and responsible" manner after the 23 January 2020 lockdown of Wuhan, over 5 million people from Wuhan travelled to different destinations in the world (including three to Kerala), thus spreading the pandemic. As every country today is busy addressing Covid-19 infections, China thought this is an opportunity for further assertiveness. This is clearly visible in the Taiwan Straits, South China Sea, India-China border areas or coercive diplomatic postures on Australia or other countries.

**Q. Why is the 'Quad' grouping an anathema to China?**

A. Much of the China rise is in the high seas — investment flows, imports and exports (nearly \$4 trillion), ship building and others. Much of China's encroachments are also in the maritime domain — South China Sea, Senkaku Islands, the "two ocean strategy" since 2009 (on Indian and Pacific Oceans) and others. The "Quad" and the Indo-Pacific focus is on maritime areas as well — Pacific and Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal and South China Sea. The Quad and the Indo-Pacific signatories are advocating free and open region, rule of law, freedom of navigation, maritime security, infrastructure, counter-terrorism, North Korean WMD proliferation and others. On all these issues, China has to answer a number of questions. It walked away from the UNCLOS dispute resolution in South China Sea and eventually The Hague tribunal quashed in July 2016 any "historical claims" in the region. China's "territorial sea" concept is exclusive and has no scope for high seas free transport. China's proposed Code of Conduct intends to be an exclusive club. Also, the proposed Quad+ could include Vietnam, South Korea, Indonesia or other countries, in addition to UK, France and Germany which have shown interest. This is problematic to China as it is a beneficiary of the Asia-Pacific construct since the 1980s and the ground seems to be slipping away for new actors like Japan, Australia, India and others.

**Q. Do you see the possibility of China joining hands with Russia and Pakistan to counter the 'Quad'?**

A. China has criticised the Quad for being a Cold War relic, with ideological (democracy) leanings and exclusive regional grouping. Russian foreign minister Lavrov criticised the Indo-Pacific in December 2020 and recently visited Gujrat in China and New Delhi and Islamabad. It appears, although Russia is not a major maritime country, at China's best and for realpolitik considerations, it has been siding with China. Western sanctions on Moscow for its role in Crimea are also a major driver in Russian calculations. It is not clear what would be Pakistan's role as it is still a major non-NATO ally of the US, although there were tensions with the US on counter-terrorism compliance issues.

**Q. Do you foresee any possibility of India and China joining hands to meet the challenge posed by Covid-19?**

A. After Covid-19 began spreading, India and China cooperated in organising health officials' online coordination with SAARC countries and Eurasian countries. Both are also cooperating at the UN-led Covax initiative on vaccines.

## Between a rock and a hard place

AMISH RAJ MULMI

**W**hile our nation is facing vaccine starvation, more than 6 crore doses of vaccines have been exported,' opposition leader Rahul Gandhi wrote to Indian prime minister Narendra Modi last week. 'Was the export of vaccines also an 'oversight', like many other decisions of this government, or an effort to garner publicity at the cost of our citizens?' Other parties like the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) too chimed in. Its national spokesperson Raghav Chadha wrote, 'I wish to ask the Government of India as to what its priority is—the people of Delhi or of Dominican Republic? The people of Maharashtra or of Mauritius... [humanitarian aid] cannot be at the cost of Indian citizens.'

On the other hand, Modi defended India's decision to export the Covishield vaccine by saying, 'We understand fully, that mankind will not defeat the pandemic unless all of us, everywhere, regardless of the colour of our passports, come out of it. That is why, this year, despite many constraints, we have supplied vaccines to over 80 countries.' Indian external affairs minister S Jaishankar

outlined India's position by emphasising on equitable access to vaccines, 'because we all know that no one will be safe till everyone is safe.' Further, he argued, 'India must rise as an enlightened power. [It will] not close the door on others.'

India has been struggling to contain the current wave of Covid-19, with worst-hit states like Maharashtra issuing stringent orders to contain the spread, despite not declaring a lockdown. Several states have reported a shortage of vaccines, despite 108 million doses already being administered domestically, hence the opposition's remarks. Massive gatherings at events such as the Kumbh Mela and state election campaigns have not helped the country either. Its temporary moratorium on the export of Covid-19 vaccines has affected countries like Nepal that are dependent on the multilateral COVAX facility and purchases from the Serum Institute of India. There are now reports that India may resume vaccine exports only by June.

The Serum Institute of India's (SII) vaccine production has faced several setbacks, notably a fire in January; its chief has said the US has restricted exports on key materials needed to produce the vaccines, and that the company requires at

least ?30 billion to bump up production. The WHO-backed COVAX programme should have received 100 million doses by May; it has received only 28 million. And AstraZeneca, the pharma company that developed the Covishield vaccine, has sent a legal notice to SII over the delays. Several media outlets have highlighted the government's tardy efforts to scale up vaccine production, with Business Standard writing, 'The vaccine rollout has been hampered by the Indian state's customary arrogance and its disdain for the private sector.'

Despite these domestic challenges, the Indian government's commitment to deliver vaccines to Nepal during the telephonic conversation between the two foreign ministers is reassuring. But with increasing opposition at home on the export of vaccines, combined with India's own challenges in containing the current wave, means Delhi's vaccine diplomacy is coming into conflict with its domestic situation.

In an unprecedented scenario such as the times we are currently living in, scaling up vaccine production and exports while supplying to the domestic population would always have been a challenge. Had the current wave not

occurred, India may even have succeeded in matching exports with domestic demands. Delhi now may give emergency approvals to foreign vaccines that have been approved by the US, UK and Japan, and those approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO), besides approving the Russian-made Sputnik-V, which a pharma company will produce locally. But the key, as reports suggest, will be a commitment from the Indian government to buy a certain quantity of doses.

On the other hand, it is most noticeable that the US, which has played a key role in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, a multilateral programme initiated in 1988, and has provided nearly \$2 billion out of the \$11 billion spent so far on the eradication programme, has focused solely on vaccinating its population in the current pandemic. While its investments in vaccine development and procurement have so far been highly successful—36 per cent of the population have received one dose and 22 per cent have received both doses—its non-internationalist approach to the pandemic raises difficult questions about the existing world order that the US leads, at least from the perspective of developing countries.

Two countries have taken the lead in supplying the world with vaccines—

India and China. The latter had exported nearly 115 million doses by the end of March, while it has given vaccines to nearly 80 countries and three international organisations. In Nepal, too, although the grant of 800,000 vaccines was stuck in Beijing due to logistical issues, the Sinopharm Verocell vaccine has allowed its vaccination programme to be resumed, albeit for a short period.

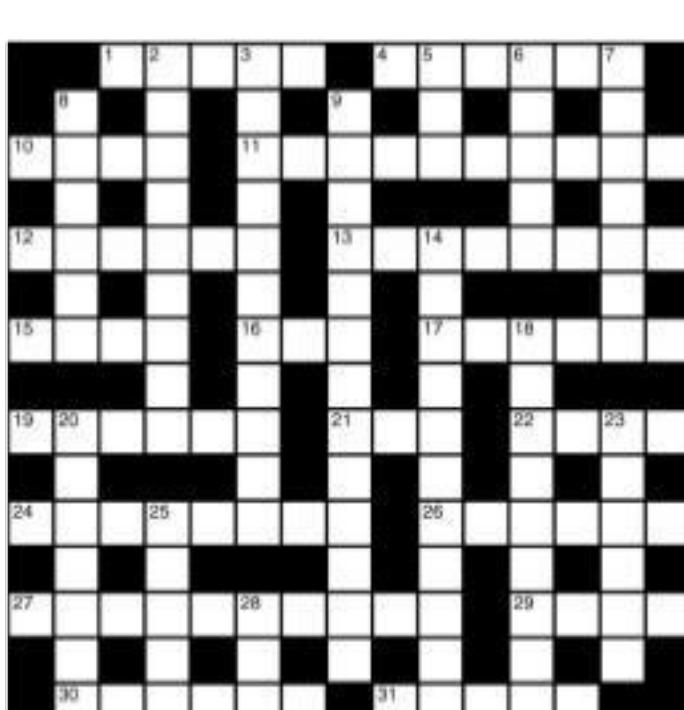
While the churn in the global order is exemplified by these instances, in many ways they also point to the limits of what multilateral organisations like the WHO can do in the current era. The strain foreign policy puts on domestic politics, especially in a democracy, is now stark in the case of India. From the other side of the mirror, if India ramps up its production capacities to supply to its domestic population at the cost of vaccine exports, that will raise similar questions about its diplomacy too.

Finally, the pandemic—and the response to it—has also sharpened the cries of nationalism, as seen in the pointed critiques by Indian opposition leaders (although the BJP itself rose to power by emphasising ethnonationalism). Who matters more, as the AAP leader asked—your voters, or people from other countries?

The Kathmandu Post/ANN

NO 2886

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

SOLUTION FOR 10 APRIL



### ACROSS

- 1/4 Cause of 3,18, it's been claimed – crass! Please go for treatment (5,6)
- 10 Rector charged hundred for rent (4)
- 11 City junior left out what crook might be doing with money (10)
- 12 Has to move a long way back for descendants of Muhammad (6)
- 13 Cry of anguish during row – becoming more sensitive (8)
- 15 Carlyle maybe covering original matter (4)
- 16 See 28 Down
- 17 Potter's wife and daughter in valley (6)
- 19 Tree burning – 27 content partially? (6)
- 21 Was due to read out lines (3)
- 22 Force to stop

### (5)

- 7 Swimmer in northern city upset about article (4,3)
- 8 Little bit extra? Son's grabbed 50! (6)
- 9 Bit loopy, endlessly untrue rambling – best say no more! (6,4,3)
- 14 Crazy dame found defending subject never previously considered (9-2)
- 18 Dead tree involved in trickery with others ultimately – ecological disaster (9)
- 20 Kind of rock music essentially gone weird (7)
- 23 Female Republican in Georgia's unconventional (6)
- 25 Scorer Henry cuts a tragic figure (5)
- 28/5/16 Share a new doctor – French one didn't hang around (3,3,3)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

100 YEARS AGO

### OCCASIONAL NOTE

Britain's educational system is now one of the most liberal in the world, so Mr. Fisher declared in introducing his yearly education estimates in the House of Commons. As these estimates amount to fifty-one millions, the taxpayers are entitled to expect a good return for their money. The whole system which is now a matter for pride as second to none in the world has been built up by laborious effort within the last century - most of it since the Elementary Education Act of 1870, or during the last half-century. A hundred years ago, as it has been truly said, systematised elementary education was practically non-existent. The year 1833 witnessed the first serious effort by Government to deal with the question, by the appointment of a special committee to "consider the best means of providing useful education" for the children of the poorer classes in England and Wales. If the question be asked what are the fruits which the nation has to show, there is an answer ready to hand. The experience of the great war proved that modern education has strengthened, or, at least, certainly has not impaired, the old virility of the national character. The experience of the Labour troubles of today has tended to show that the predominant influence, after all, is the intelligence and steadiness of the bulk of the population for which, undoubtedly, the national system of education is entitled to a large share of credit.

### NEWS ITEMS

## STRIKE OF INDIANS IN FIJI

The Government of India have received intimation from the Governor of Fiji that the strike of Indian labourers in the main island still continues. The behaviour of the strikers is reported to be unexceptionable, and most of the police reinforcements have now been withdrawn. Information was received by the Government of India that it had been decided to deport Sadhu Bashishtha Mani to India. A telegram was sent to the Governor of Fiji asking why this measure had been thought necessary, and the following reply has been received:- Mani deported under the Immigration Ordinance as an undesirable immigrant causing unrest in the colony. When arrested he was on his way from the strike area to other districts with the object of calling out labour on preposterous demands.

## PUNJAB COUNCIL PROROGUED

The last meeting of this session of the Punjab Legislative Council was held today at the Council chamber, the Hon. Mr. Butler presiding. There was a large attendance of Members, and among the distinguished visitors present were Sir William Vincent, the Hon. Mian Muhammad Shafi and Sir Shadi Lal, Chief Justice. On the agenda paper there was a large number of amendments to the Gurdwara Bill, but the Council first proceeded with Sardar Mehta Singh's motion that consideration of the Bill be postponed till the next session of the Council. The motion was debated at length, every member supporting it, and was carried unanimously. The President read a message from H.E. the Governor proroguing the Council till May 9.

## DESTRUCTIVE FIRE AT AMRITSAR

Last night about 11 o'clock a fire broke out in a godown in Chauk Karmon Deori which enveloped five shops, several offices, godowns and a stable. The local fire brigade, the Seva Samiti and various officials got to work promptly and the Lahore Fire Brigade was also called and arrived at 3 A.M. The godowns were full of highly combustible articles, but by 5 A.M. the fire was practically extinguished. Several houses collapsed and others which were in a dangerous condition will have to be pulled down. The damage is estimated at about a lakh of rupees. The cause of the fire is unknown.

## FUTURE OF INDIAN WOMEN

Sir Harry L. Stephen, formerly judge of the High Court, Calcutta, in a lecture on the legal position of Hindu women before the Victoria League, said the three reforms he would advocate in regard to Indian women related to caste, the purdah and infant marriage. He did not propose that these reforms should be brought about by law but by a change of popular opinion. Sir Edward Deschamps Chamier, late Chief Justice of the High Court of Bihar and Orissa, said that twelve years ago he was a party to a refusal to permit women to practice in the courts. A lot of water had run under the bridges since then and we were faced today with new conditions.

*This will not only worsen the human tragedy of the pandemic, but also the economic suffering of the most vulnerable.*

SANJIV MEHTA

HINDUSTAN UNILEVER CHAIRMAN &amp; MANAGING DIRECTOR

## THUMBNAILS

**Makesense Tech to amalgamate:** Info Edge on Friday said its subsidiary Makesense Technologies Ltd will amalgamate with PB Fintech that operates PolicyBazaar. "Makesense Technologies Ltd and PB Fintech Pvt Ltd, at their respective board meetings, held on April 15, 2021, have approved the proposed scheme of amalgamation between Makesense Technologies Ltd and PB Fintech Pvt Ltd and their respective shareholders," Info Edge said in a regulatory filing on Friday. PTI

**Ques Corp acquires resi-**duat: Bengaluru-headquartered business services provider Ques Corp announced on Friday the acquisition of 30 per cent stake in Conneqt Business Solutions Ltd for Rs 208 crore, pursuant to the Put Option notice by Tata Sons Pvt. Ltd. With this transaction, Conneqt will become a wholly owned subsidiary of Ques. Conneqt is a leading CLM and BPM services provider in India and operates 21-plus delivery centres with more than 29,000 employees, a Ques statement said. PTI

**Vedanta contribution:** Diversified natural resources firm Vedanta Resources has said it contributed \$4.66 billion (Rs 34,018 crore) to the public exchequer in India during the 2019-20 fiscal. Its overall contributions to public exchequers of various countries stood at USD 4.7 billion (Rs 34,310 crore) during the fiscal year, Vedanta Resources said in its latest report. "Consistent with our commitment to building on transparency, we present our fifth tax transparency report." PTI

**Tata Pune plant in compli-**ance with Covid norms: Tata Motors on Friday said it is operating its Pune-based manufacturing facility with a limited number of employees as per the guidelines issued by the Maharashtra government amid surge in COVID-19 cases in the state. Tata Motors rolls out models like Nexon, Harrier, Altroz and Safari from the Pune plant. PTI

**CMR launches 'AeroCity':** Infra major, CMR Group on Friday announced the launch of CMR AeroCity Hyderabad Rajiv Gandhi International Airport here as part of its vision to provide world-class infrastructure in India. Spanning around 1 million sq ft of leasable area, spread over four towers, CMR AeroCity Hyderabad has been seamlessly designed for the future business corridor. PTI

**New Economic Affairs Sec-**retary: Ajay Seth, a 1987 batch IAS officer of Karnataka cadre, on Friday assumed charge as Secretary Economic Affairs at a time when the economy which was showing signs of recovery is being threatened by the second wave of Covid-19. PTI

# Vaccine wait tempers Wall Street optimism

Global markets cautious amidst coronavirus outbreaks in Asia, USA

ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOKYO, 16 APRIL

**G**lobal shares advanced Friday after China reported its economy expanded at an 18 per cent annual pace in the first quarter of the year.

France's CAC 40 added 0.2 per cent in early trading to 6,247.86 while Germany's DAX gained 0.6 per cent to 15,352.50. Britain's FTSE 100 rose 0.4 per cent to 7,013.48. US shares were set for a slow start, with Dow futures inching up less than 0.1 per cent at 33,925.0. S&P 500 futures fell 0.1 per cent to 4,159.90.

Jubilance over positive Chinese and US economic data and another record high on Wall Street was tempered by caution over coronavirus outbreaks in the region, where rollouts of the vaccine have lagged.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 gained 0.1 per cent to finish at 29,683.37. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 recouped earlier losses, rising 0.1 per cent to 7,063.50.



South Korea's Kospi added 0.1 per cent to 3,198.62.

The contrast between the speed of vaccine rollouts in the US and Asia has been striking. Nearly half of American adults have gotten at least one dose of the vaccine, and about 30 percent of adults in the US have been fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Japan, where inoculations for the public have barely started, has seen a resurgence of infections in recent weeks.

The country's western metropolis of Osaka reported more than 1,200 new infections Thursday, its highest since the pandemic began. A top ruler

party official suggested the possibility of cancelling the Tokyo Olympics, set to start in July, if infections continue to surge.

Japan decided on measures to stem the rise of infections for several additional areas, Kanagawa, Chiba and Saitama prefectures, near Tokyo, as well as Aichi in central Japan. Six areas, including major cities of Tokyo and Osaka, were already under such measures, which has restaurants closing at 8 pm. The government is also asking people to social distance and avoid gathering in crowds.

Prakash Sakpal and Nicholas Mappa, senior econ-

omists for ING, said the markets are awaiting the outcome of a meeting between Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and President Joe Biden, set for the weekend.

But its rebound in factory and consumer activity following the coronavirus pandemic is leveling off, according to data released Friday. The figures were magnified by comparison with early 2020, when China suffered its deepest contraction in decades.

Investors are welcoming a raft of encouraging economic reports showing how hungry Americans are spending again, how fewer workers are losing their jobs and how much fatter corporate profits are getting.

Expectations are very high on Wall Street that the economy and thus corporate profits are rebounding thanks to Covid-19 vaccinations and massive support from the US government and Federal Reserve.

New data on retail sales and jobless claims Thursday reinforced the view that the recovery is accelerating.

The seven-component



## Second wave of Covid-19 poses risk to economic recovery: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI, 16 APRIL

The spike in coronavirus cases poses a risk to economic recovery, and the GDP is unlikely to achieve the earlier projected 3 per cent growth for March quarter 2020-21, Wall Street brokerage Bank of America (BofA) Securities said on Friday.

Noting that a month-long nationwide lockdown can shave off 100-200 basis points off the GDP, the brokerage said growth is still weak, amplified by the steep fall in key economic activity indicators and the anaemic loan growth, and the surging pandemic cases is only increasing the worries on the growth front.

However, the report by BofA Securities did not offer a likely GDP number for the March quarter 2020-21. The latest official number puts the daily infections at 2.17 lakh in the past 24 hours and 1,185 deaths-- both are the

highest in the world and more than the combined numbers of the second and the third most affected countries-- Brazil and the US.

The report said it remains to be seen if the second wave subsides without national lockdown and noted that Maharashtra, which contributes over 16 per cent of national GDP is already under lockdown till the end of the month as the state has more than half of the new cases.

A bit of good news is that real lending rates are falling thanks to the steady RBI easing and normalization of core WPI and these factors should push 2021-22 loan growth to 12 per cent from 5.6 per cent in the last fiscal year. Real interest rates are a proxy for pricing power.

Falling real lending rates will push up loan growth. Despite some spike in inflation, the nominal marginal cost of funds based lending rate (MCLR) is now down to 145 basis points since March 2019 and the real MCLR is lower by 506 basis points since then. And so are the nominal and real weighted average lending rates. In sum, "an anemic loan growth only buttresses our view of a weak recovery," the report concluded.

## Economy in better shape compared to previous Covid-19 wave: CEA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL



The Indian economy is in a better shape as compared to the previous Covid-19 wave witnessed last year because of vaccines, Chief Economic Adviser K V Subramanian said on Friday.

Speaking at an event organised by e-commerce major Amazon, he said uncertainty is much lower this time but people should be cautious.

"There is a second wave therefore people should be careful about it and follow all regulations. But overall compared to previous episode, we are in a better shape because vaccine is out and vaccination drive is proceeding. So uncertainty is much lower," he said.

Following the outbreak of

COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, India went in for one of the strictest lockdowns in the world, leading to a massive contraction of about 24 per cent in GDP.

Beginning March this year, the second wave started rearing its head with a sudden jump in cases, forcing many states to go for localised restrictions to break the COVID-19 chain.

India added a record

2,17,353 new coronavirus infections in a day, taking the total to 1,42,91,917, while active cases surpassed the 15-lakh mark, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Friday. This is the second consecutive day that the country has reported over two lakh cases.

Subramanian further said "one key thing that stood out during this pandemic is the rollout of e-commerce and digitisation, something that India has embraced."

As many as 800 million people were provided essential supplies through the public distribution system and cash transfer through the Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile (JAM) in a seamless manner with a click of button, while most advanced countries like the US provided financial support to its citizens by issue of cheques implemented over 2 months, he added.

"I think Indian economy is really equipped very well to usher in the significant growth that is happening in e-commerce," he said.

He also suggested that MSMEs should embrace technology and invest in innovation for growth of their businesses.

## Jet fuel price cut by one per cent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Jet fuel price on Friday was cut by 1 per cent, the second reduction in rates this month following softening international crude oil prices.

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was reduced by Rs 568.88 per kilolitre, or 0.9 per cent, to Rs 57,805.28 per kl in the national capital, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

This is the second reduction in rates this month. Earlier, prices were cut by 3 per cent on 1 April. These price cuts were the first in six months. Meanwhile, petrol and diesel prices remained unchanged after the fourth reduction in three weeks on Thursday. Petrol price on Thursday was cut by 16 paise per litre and diesel by 14 paise.

## NIXI Academy launched by National Internet Exchange

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

to adopt IPv6.

"This panel will guide all such Indian entities and help in increasing IPv6 adoption. It's a joint effort of the Department of Telecom, IT Ministry, and community to promote IPv6. The expert panel group comprised of members from government and private organisations," the statement said. NIXI Academy has been created to educate technical and non-technical people in India about technologies like IPv6, which, in turn, is expected to lead to better management of internet resources in the country.

"The easy-to-use platform helps network operators and educators understand networking best practices, principles and techniques; manage Internet resources better; and use appropriate Internet technologies more effectively," it explained.

## WIMWIsure conducts two lakh passenger & commercial vehicles inspection remotely in FY21

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL



WIMWIsure, AI-enabled insurance service platform for on-demand inspection of insurable assets, on Friday said the company conducted over 2 lakh virtual inspections of passenger and commercial vehicles in the financial year ended March 2021 and also turned profitable during the year.

The Indian motor insurance marketplace has noted a clear shift towards remote 'Do-It-Yourself' checks and inspection-as-a-service because of Covid-19 which has necessitated moving away from physical vehicle inspections, WIMWIsure said in a release.

"During the lockdown, Insurtech WIMWIsure has conducted more than 2 lakh virtual inspections for pas-

senger and commercial vehicles through its on-demand artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled video inspection platform in the financial year 2020-21," it said.

The nearly four-year-old company said it saw the bulk of its over 3.5 lakh inspections till date during the lockdown, witnessing strong demand from tier-II and III cities for mid-range SUVs, sedans and hatchbacks.

The luxury car segment,

which is typically chauffeur-driven, also witnessed a surging demand for the self-service technology, indicating remote video inspections becoming popular across all categories of vehicle owners.

It added that the pandemic has accelerated the shift from everything manual, laborious, time consuming to real-time, DIY and quick methods, especially in the insurance industry which is otherwise a process and paper-intensive sector.

## India remains badly placed to tackle Covid spread: Fitch Solutions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Despite several healthcare reforms, India remains badly placed to tackle the third wave of Covid-19 infections sweeping the nation, Fitch Solutions on Friday said, adding the unprecedented crisis has highlighted the need to increase investment in the healthcare sector.

After some success in curbing the virus considerably, India's economy had returned to functioning normally by the second half of 2020.

"However, over recent weeks, the virus has started spreading rapidly, partly due to complacency on the social distancing measures and mask-wearing policies," Fitch Solutions said in a note.



With daily Covid-19 cases crossing the grim milestone of 2 lakh, several hospitals across the country are stretched beyond their capacities in handling the rising burden of the highly infectious disease. States such as Maharashtra, Delhi, Chennai, Punjab and Karnataka bearing the maximum load of the pandemic are already falling short of health infrastructure and equipment, ranging from oxygen to ventilators, it said.

"Despite several health-care reforms, India remains badly placed to tackle the rapid spread of the coronavirus," it said, adding the epidemic could be worse in India if it is not adequately contained.

With 8.5 hospital beds per 10,000 population and 8.0

physicians per 10,000, the country's healthcare sector is not equipped for such a crisis.

Besides, more than 80 per cent of the population still does not have any significant health insurance coverage and approximately 68 per cent of the Indian population has limited or no access to essential medicines. Fitch Solutions said India's vaccine rollout has been slow.

The country of 135 crore people has administered 8.09 crore vaccine doses until April 2021, the most after the US and China, but it lags far behind in immunisations per capita.

India, the world's biggest

factor accounting for the poor quality, limited reach and insufficient public provisioning of healthcare.

"Dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic has brought out the critical importance of the public sector in health provisioning," the agency said.

The unprecedented cri-

sis, it said, has highlighted the need to increase investment in the healthcare sector.

Fitch Solutions said India's vaccine rollout has been slow.

The country of 135 crore people has administered 8.09 crore vaccine doses until April 2021, the most after the US and China, but it lags far behind in immunisations per capita.

India, the world's biggest

country in the COVAX plan."

Among the Indian cities, Mumbai remains one of the worst Covid-19 hit.

Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation decided to discharge asymptomatic patients at the earliest to vacate beds for the patients with more serious symptoms.

## Ashok Leyland delivers first lot of light bullet proof vehicles

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

and shallow water. It can accommodate a crew of 6 with ample cargo space to carry substantial mission equipment.

The vehicle also offers superior protection and combat capability and the crew is well protected from both ballistic and blast threats, it added. "Supplying to the Armed Forces is a matter of pride for us. We are delighted to have the opportunity to be able to use our expertise in mobility in the service of our nation. "This LBPV is another example of our team's capability combined with a strong sense of understanding of what is required in arduous conditions," Ashok Leyland Managing Director and CEO Vipin Sondhi said.

These modern vehicles were delivered on April 13. The light bulletproof vehicle is an adapted version of Lockheed Martin's CVNG, the company said in a regulatory filing. It has been developed under the transfer of technology from Lockheed Martin to Ashok Leyland. It is completely indigenised and developed in India, Ashok Leyland added.

LBPV has high off-road mobility in mud, sand, rocks,

# Daily COVID count breaches 3000 mark in Odisha

Khordha, Sundargarh emerge as COVID hotspots

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, 16 APRIL

**O**disha registered 3108 new COVID 19 cases on Saturday, the biggest single day spike since 8 October. Three deaths were reported taking the death toll to 1938.

All the thirty districts on Friday reported infections with Khordha (534) and Sundargarh (523) accounting for the maximum of positive cases in the past 24 hours. Both the districts which recorded 34 per cent of overall infections of the day have emerged as the COVID hotspots of the

state.

What apparently raises alarm is the rapid growth in the daily positivity rate in the district. The positivity rate, which implies the percentage of COVID positive cases out of the samples tested in 24 hours, hovered one per cent or less than one per cent earlier last month has jumped almost to 10 per cent today.

The daily COVID diagnostic test in the current month remained low at a range of 25,000 to 34,000.

"The often repeated catchphrase of 'aggressive contract tracing and health sur-

veillance; carries little meaning unless testing is aggressively carried out", public health experts opined.

There was a 4.40 per cent of growth in infection to the overall caseload in the past eight days.

The active cases have jumped to 16,889 with today's steep rise in positive cases. The positivity rate of 31,891 samples tested in 24 hours stood at 9.74 per cent.

The case fatality rate (CFR) currently stands at 0.53% in Odisha. The State's recovery rate currently stands at 94.77%.

Shortage of vaccines continue to hamper the inocu-

## Three women buried alive

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KORAPUT, 16 APRIL

Three women were buried alive when a mound of limestone caved in while they were digging near it at Podugada under Potangi block today. Another sustained serious injuries and was hospitalized.

The women were collecting limestone for their household purpose when the mishap took place.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik expressed grief over the death and announced ex-gratia of Rs 5 lakh each to next of kin of the deceased.

## Hyder case: Focus now on those who had helped him escape

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, 16 APRIL

A day after arresting the fugitive gangster and murder case convict Seikh Hyder from Telangana, Odisha police has stepped up its ambit of investigation to prosecute those who either overtly and covertly helped the gangster escape from SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack.

The dreaded gangster and life convict had exploited the lax or the non-existent security system and had escaped from the hospital on 10 April with consummate ease causing a huge embarrassment to the state police.

Hyder who was in Samalpur jail was brought to the Cuttack hospital for some medical treatment on March 23 and he escaped on April 10. Six police constables have been suspended following the incident. However the top cops are yet to be held accountable for the convict's

escape.

"We will take him on remand for questioning to ascertain the modus operandi of the daring escape", Police Commissioner Saumendra Priyadarshi said while briefing reporters today.

"The conspiracy angle of the daring escape and suspected involvement of jail, police staff besides the personnel of VIMSAR Burla and SCB medical college hospital lies top of the investigation's agenda", he said.

Hyder escaped from the surgery ward at 4.40 pm on 10 April while police were informed of the escape only at 7.30 pm. The crucial three hours were lost in the process and he could flee the state's border.

After interrogation of Yakub Khan, an aide of the fugitive gangster we could know that Hyder has slipped out of the state to neighbouring Telangana. The gangster's luck ran out and he was nabbed in a

coordinated drive with the neighbouring state's police, he said.

Priyadarshi said eight suspects including three women have so far been detained for allegedly abetting the gangster's escape.

The crime record of Hyder dates back to the nineties. Many in Kendrapara town had seen him pulling a rickshaw before he graduated to the world of crimes to pull triggers.

Initially, he played second fiddle to another gangster Tito before breaking away to form his own group. There had been incidents of gang rivalry between Tito and Hyder groups in the past that had claimed 18 lives. Tito's rival gangster Suleiman was also among those who were gunned down in the clashes.

The dreaded gangster scripted history of crimes right from murder, extortion to fixing of government tenders.

## Puri Jagannath temple to remain shut on weekends

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, 16 APRIL

With the alarming resurgence of Covid-19, the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) on Friday issued a revised standard operating procedure (SOP) for the 12th century shrine and declared the weekend shutdown of the temple from 24 April.

Currently, the devotees are barred entry into the temple on Sunday. As the COVID outbreak cases go unchecked, the temple administration was forced to stop darshan on Saturday also from 24 April, said SJTA officials.

## FICCI asks Odisha CM to desist from lockdown

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, 16 APRIL

FICCI president Uday Shankar has requested Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik to avoid resorting to another lockdown or even a partial lockdown in Odisha as it will push the economy into a downward spiral.

In a letter to the CM, the FICCI chief acknowledged the resurgence of COVID 19, but hoped that the state avoids a lockdown. Steps like ramping up testing, awareness

and enforcement of COVID appropriate behavior will help avert lockdowns, he noted.

FICCI has requested the central government to open up the vaccination for all the people above 18 years of age to give a massive push to the vaccination drive, he stated. Vaccination camps in the colonies and societies

with the help of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), involvement of the private sector will also help push the vaccination drive, noted Uday Shankar.

## Odisha seeks cancellation of trains from Chhattisgarh

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, 16 APRIL

With districts bordering neighbouring Chhattisgarh registering a spike in COVID cases, the Odisha government has suspended inter-state bus services and is learnt to have even requested the centre to suspend train services for at least 15 days.

In another development the officials have appealed to citizens not to resort to panic buying

## Minor impregnated by relative

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BALASORE, 16 APRIL

In a shocking incident a 17-year-old differently-abled minor girl has been allegedly impregnated by her relative.

The Khaira police identified the accused as Pradip Sethi and said he has absconded.

The brother of the victim said she was in a physical relationship as the accused had promised to marry her. When she informed Sethi he allegedly asked her to abort the child and refused to marry her.

ing in view of the night curfew. The government has issued notifications asking concerned officers to clamp down on pharma outlets which are allegedly storing medicines related to COVID 19 treatment.

Meanwhile the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) assured people that there will be no shortage of essential items like milk, edibles, medicines in the city.

The state capital reported

## Interstate Ferro-Chrome theft racket busted

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, 16 APRIL

The Special Task Force (STF) of Odisha police, on Friday unearthed an inter-state racket thriving on theft of ferro-chrome in Manguli-Tang junction area on the outskirts of Cuttack city.

Six persons have been taken into custody and Ferro-chrome weighing around 214 tons was seized in separate raids. The market value of the seized Ferro-chrome is estimated around Rs 2 crore.

"During raids, an inter-state gang operating in multiple states like Odisha, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Jhark-

hand etc., was busted and a huge quantity of stolen cargo of Ferro-chrome (weighing around 214 tons) was seized," the STF stated in a release.

"It is learnt that the gang members would either remove or steal the cargo from the trucks while it is being transported to consignee at various ports. Generally, Ferro-chrome is exported from India through various ports to different countries like Japan, South Korea.

Further investigation is on," the STF said, adding that three trucks, a generator set and an electric sewing machine were seized by the STF squad.

## Cannabis worth Rs 1 crore seized in Malkangiri

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, 16 APRIL

Police on Friday busted an interstate ganja smuggling racket in Odisha's Malkangiri district by making a seizure of 113 quintals of the banned drug substances worth more than Rs one crore.

The seizure was made at Kaprakruti ghat road in Chitrakonda police limits of the district. Acting on a tip-off, police intercepted a tractor and seized the hemp packed gunny bags, locally called ganja. A suspected drug peddler has been arrested and is being interrogated, said Inspector Chi-

trakonda police station, Surya Prakash Nayak.

It was an interstate racket as the seized ganja was being smuggled to neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. Search is on to arrest other members of the organized racket.

## NALCO gets Utkal-E coal block

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, 16 APRIL

NALCO, the Navratna CPSE, has been granted the mining lease of Utkal-E coal block.

The lease has been granted over an area of 523.73 Ha in villages Nandichod, Gopinathpur Jungle, Kundajhari Jungle, Kosala & Koruda under Chendipada Tahasil of Angul District.

The initial capacity of Utkal-E coal block is 2 million tonnes per year with a total mineable reserve of approx. 70 million tones, said a release of the company today.

Nalco has already executed the mining lease for the Utkal

hand etc., was busted and a huge quantity of stolen cargo of Ferro-chrome (weighing around 214 tons) was seized," the STF stated in a release.

"It is learnt that the gang members would either remove or steal the cargo from the trucks while it is being transported to consignee at various ports. Generally, Ferro-chrome is exported from India through various ports to different countries like Japan, South Korea.

Further investigation is on," the STF said, adding that three trucks, a generator set and an electric sewing machine were seized by the STF squad.

## Odisha registers 20 per cent growth in revenue collection

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, 16 APRIL:

Revenue generation of Odisha has grown by more than 20 per cent in FY 2021-22 over the last fiscal. The total revenue generated in 2020-21 has crossed Rs 56,363 crore, claimed official sources.

The figures were revealed at a meeting conducted by chief secretary Suresh Mahapatra where in principal secretary finance Ashok Meena pre-

sented the financial status.

Encouraged by the growth, Mahapatra enhanced the target of revenue collection for FY 2021-22. The target of Rs 40,000 crore was set for own tax revenue, a 15 per cent hike over the previous year and for non-tax sources it was fixed at Rs 21,500 crore.

It may be noted here the budget estimate from non-tax and own-tax sources was fixed at Rs 20,000 cr and Rs 37,500 cr respectively for the current FY.

Mr Meena informed that 95 per cent of the state's revenue collection has been brought into the electronic fold.

The chief secretary directed the departments to focus on collection of arrear revenue from different sources. The departments were asked to explore all possibilities of the mutual and out of court settlement methods for collection of arrear industrial water rate and electricity dues.

## LEISURE

### 10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



#### ACROSS

- 1 Analyse (a sentence) (5)
- 4 Uncertainty (5)
- 7 Old shabby clothing (4)
- 8 Ceaseless (8)
- 9 Type of bed (4-6)
- 12 Horse's headgear (6)
- 13 Marked as correct (6)
- 15 Natural disaster (10)
- 18 Italian noblewoman (8)
- 20 Fly upwards (4)
- 21 Venture (5)
- 22 Result (5)

#### DOWN

- 1 Railway station area (8)
- 2 Reverberate (7)
- 3 Gear (9)
- 4 Female rabbit (3)
- 5 Excessive (5)
- 6 Prong (4)
- 10 Technical drawing aid (3,6)
- 11 Drink (8)
- 14 Car's frame (7)
- 15 In the manner of (5)
- 17 Ungulate's foot (4)
- 19 Pig pen (3)

#### SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD

- ACROSS
- 1 Neck and seek, 17 Roads, 19 Corps, 20 Taint, 21 Extreme, 22 Squid, 23 Tot.
- DOWN
- 7 Hide-and-seek, 1 Knitted, 14 Current, 15 Grats, 16 Aspect, 18 Adieu, 19 Cite.

By arrangement with The Independent. Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

### BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



### RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



### DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



### NEED TO KNOW

#### HOSPITALS

- AIRLINES 26588500, 26588900
- Moolchand Medcity (formerly Hospital) 42000000 & 24-hour Chemist Shop 42000447
- Vidysagar Institute for Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences 26924300, 26924304
- Batra Hospital & Medical Research Centre 29051280, 29958747
- Deen Dayal Upadhyay 25496320, 25494403
- Guru Tegh Bahadur 23717473, 23325320

#### RAILWAY INQUIRY



Coronavirus cases are continuing to rise globally at worrying rates

WHO DIRECTOR-GENERAL TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS

OBSERVING THAT THE NUMBER OF NEW CASES CONFIRMED PER WEEK HAS ALMOST DOUBLED

## THUMBNAILS



A woman in a wedding gown outside the Forbidden City in Beijing on Friday.

**UK Covid-19:** UK health authorities have identified 77 cases of the highly infectious B.1.617 variant of coronavirus which causes Covid-19, first found in India, and has designated it a Variant Under Investigation (VUI). The B.1.617 strain's mutations are feared to make the variant spread faster and partially evade immunity.

**Google misled Android users:** Google broke Australian law by misleading users about personal location data collected through Android mobile devices, a judge found on Friday. Justice Thomas Thawley said that Google misled Android mobile device users about personal location data collected between January 2017 and December 2018.

**Shortage of drugs:** Brazilian health workers are forced to intubate patients without the aid of sedatives, after weeks of warnings that hospitals and state governments risked running out of critical medicines.

**Floyd death trial:** Derek Chauvin's trial in George Floyd's death will be in a jury's hands by early next week, after his defense wrapped up with Chauvin passing on a chance to take the stand and tell the public what he was thinking when he pressed his knee against Floyd's neck. Chauvin on Friday informed the judge he would invoke his Fifth Amendment right not to testify.

## White House: Intel on Russian 'bounties' on US troops shaky

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON, 16 APRIL

The White House on Thursday said that the intelligence community does not have conclusive evidence that Russian intelligence operatives encouraged the Taliban to attack American troops in Afghanistan.

The assessment, revealed Thursday as the US announced a host of new sanctions on the Russian government, undermines one of the sharpest attacks Joe Biden and other Democrats leveled against former President Donald Trump during the 2020 White House race.

Biden repeatedly attacked Trump on the campaign trail for not standing up to Russian President Vladimir Putin despite his administration being aware of intelligence suggesting Russian agents were offering bounties to the Taliban.

## Eight dead in shooting at FedEx facility in Indianapolis

Police say the gunman shot himself dead and his identity could not be ascertained yet

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
INDIANAPOLIS, 16 APRIL

A gunman killed eight people and wounded several others before killing himself in a late-night shooting at a FedEx facility near the Indianapolis airport, police said, in the latest in a spate of mass shootings after a relative lull during the pandemic.

Five people were hospitalized after the Thursday night shooting, according to police. One of them had critical injuries, police spokesperson Genae Cook said. Another two people were treated and released at the scene. FedEx said people who worked for the company were among the dead.

A witness said that he was working inside the building when he heard several gunshots in rapid succession.

"I see a man come out with a rifle in his hand and he starts firing and he starts yelling stuff that I could not understand", Levi Miller told WTHR-TV. What I ended up



Family members await information about their loved ones who work at the FedEx facility in Indianapolis on Friday.

doing was ducking down to make sure he did not see me because I thought he would see me and he would shoot me.

Police have not identified the shooter or said whether he was an employee at the facility. "We're still trying to ascertain the exact reason and cause for this incident", Cook said.

Craig McCarron, of the Indianapolis police, told NBC

today that officers still knew very little. It was the latest in a recent string of mass shootings across the US. Last month, eight people were fatally shot at massage businesses across the Atlanta area, and 10 died in gunfire at a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado.

It was at least the third mass shooting this year in Indianapolis alone. Five people, including a pregnant woman, were shot and killed in Janu-

ary, and a man was accused of killing three adults and a child before abducting his daughter during an argument at a home in March.

Family members gathered at a nearby hotel to await word on loved ones and some employees were bused there for tearful reunions. But other relatives said they still had no information about their loved ones hours later. Most employees aren't allowed to carry cellphones inside the FedEx building, making contact with them difficult.

When you see notifications on your phone, but you're not getting a text back from your kid and you're not getting information and you still don't know where they are what are you supposed to do? said Mindy Carson, holding back tears. Her daughter, Jessica, works in the facility and she had not heard from her.

Police were called to reports of gunfire Thursday just after 11 p.m., and officers came in contact with (an) active shooter incident, Cook said. The gunman later killed himself.

The officers responded, they came in and did their job. A lot of them are trying to face this, because this is a sight that no one should have to see, Cook said.

Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett lamented that the city was confronted with the horrific news of yet another mass shooting, an act of violence that senselessly claimed the lives of eight of our neighbors. FedEx released a statement saying it is cooperating with authorities.

We are deeply shocked and saddened by the loss of our team members following the tragic shooting at our FedEx Ground facility in Indianapolis, " the statement said. "Our most heartfelt sympathies are with all those affected by this senseless act of violence. Aman told WTVT that his niece was sitting in the driver's seat of her car when the gunfire erupted, and she was wounded. She got shot on her left arm, said Parminder Singh. She's fine, she's in the hospital now. He said his niece did not know the shooter.

## Biden to meet Japan PM to boost China-facing alliances

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON, 16 APRIL

President Joe Biden is welcoming Japan's prime minister to the White House on Friday in his first face-to-face meeting with a foreign leader, a choice that reflects Biden's emphasis on strengthening alliances to deal with a more assertive China and other global challenges.

Biden and PM Yoshihide Suga also look to counter messaging from Chinese President Xi Jinping that America and democracies in general are on the decline, after the political turmoil and international withdrawal that marked Donald Trump's presidency.

The Biden administration calls managing US policies toward the Indo-Pacific, where China under Xi is flexing growing economic and military power, the primary challenge for the United States.

That helped guide Biden's decision, announced this week, to pull US troops out of Afghanistan and free the administration to focus more on East Asia.

For Biden and Suga, "our approach to China and our shared coordination and cooperation on that front will be part of the discussion."



Press secretary Jen Psaki said on Thursday.

The two will discuss other regional security issues, including North Korea's nuclear program.

Suga, a farmer's son who rose to Japan's highest political office after an early stint as a worker in a cardboard factory, succeeded boss Shinzo Abe last September, after long serving as his chief cabinet secretary.

The months-old Biden administration, for its part, looks to Suga to keep going on alliance-strengthening moves by both countries.

The two governments have been working to strengthen technology supply chains independent of China during a shortage of semiconductors that's worrying businesses around the world. Japan is expected to announce an investment in 5G cellular networks, boosting alternatives to China's network, as part of that supply chain cooperation.

## US too negative towards China, says Beijing

BEIJING, 16 APRIL

A top Chinese diplomat said Friday that US policy toward China is too negative and that cooperation could be critically important as the Biden administration focuses on combatting Covid-19 and promoting economic recovery.

The US appears to be highlighting confrontation and playing down cooperation, Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng said in an interview. Such an approach, I must say, is too negative, he said, adding that it lacks a forward-looking spirit.

Le also signaled that China is unlikely to make any new pledges at a climate change meeting called by President Joe Biden for next week.

Hespoke as Biden's climate envoy, John Kerry, was discussing the issue on the second day of closed-door meetings with Chinese counterparts in Shanghai.

Chinese President Xi Jinping announced last year that China would be carbon-neutral by 2060 and aim to reach a peak in its emissions by 2030. For a big country with 1.4 billion people, these goals are not easily delivered, Le said. Some countries are asking China to do more on climate change. I am afraid this is not very realistic.

Biden has invited 40 world leaders, including Xi, to an 22-23 April virtual climate summit. The US and other countries are expected to announce more ambitious national targets for cutting carbon emissions.

The US and China have become increasingly at odds over a range of issues, including accusations of human rights abuses in Tibet and the Xinjiang region, a crackdown on protest and political freedom in Hong Kong, China's assertion of its territorial claims toward Taiwan and in the South China Sea and accusations Beijing was slow to inform the world about the Covid-19 outbreak.

## NEED OF THE HOUR



Military police officer Everaldo Pinto, dressed as superhero Captain America, sprays alcohol on children's hands amidst the pandemic in Petropolis, at Brazil's Rio de Janeiro state.

## Senators to Biden: Waive vaccine intellectual property rules

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON, 16 APRIL

Ten liberal senators are urging President Joe Biden to back India and South Africa's appeal to the World Trade Organization to temporarily relax intellectual property rules so coronavirus vaccines can be manufactured by nations that are struggling to inoculate their populations.

The lawmakers, in a letter delivered to the White House on Thursday evening, wrote that Biden should prioritize people over pharmaceutical company profits and support the temporary waiver of the rules. A waiver could pave the way for generic or other manufacturers to make more vaccines.

Simply put, we must make vaccines, testing, and treatments accessible everywhere if we are going to crush the virus anywhere, the law-



makers say in the letter, which was obtained by The Associated Press.

More than 100 nations support a temporary waiver, which could help vaccine manufacturing ramp up in poorer countries that are struggling to acquire vaccine supplies. The Biden administration has said it is studying the issue.

Opponents, including pharmaceutical companies,

worry that it would set dangerous precedent in allowing scientists around the globe to copy American and European companies' research some of which was funded by the US government long before patents expire. The Trump administration had opposed calls for the waiver.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment on the lawmakers' letter. The lawmakers' appeal to Biden came after a group of 170 former world leaders and Nobel laureates earlier this week sent a similar letter to Biden urging him to support a temporary waiver of the WTO's intellectual property rules.

The coronavirus pandemic has killed nearly 3 million people worldwide, including more than 170,000 in India and more than 50,000 in South Africa, according to figures compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

## William, Harry's cousin to walk in between at Prince Philip funeral

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LONDON, 16 APRIL

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

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

There have been widespread reports of an estrangement between 38-year-old William, the second in line to

the British throne, and his younger brother Harry, 36, ever since he stepped back from frontline royal duties and relocated to the US.

Details of the ceremonial funeral released by Buckingham Palace on Thursday confirmed the others in the procession to St George's Chapel as all four children of the late royal: Prince Charles the Prince of Wales, Princess Anne the Princess Royal, Prince Andrew the Duke of York, and Prince Edward the Earl of Wessex and Forfar.

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

the lockdown restrictions.

During the Service, a small choir of four will sing pieces of music chosen by the Duke of Edinburgh.

The choir will be located in the Nave, away from the seated congregation, and in line with public health guidelines there will be no congregational singing.

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

The Queen will travel in the State Bentley in the procession, behind the family members on foot, before entering by a side door to the chapel. Inside, she will be seated by herself under the social distancing guidelines.

The ceremony, which was

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

From the Duke's German heritage, the guests include Bernhard, the Hereditary Prince of Baden; Donatus, Prince and Landgrave of Hesse; and Prince Philipp of Hohenlohe-Langenburg. Vice Admiral Sir Tim Laurence, the husband of Princess Anne, and the Earl of Snowdon, the son of the Queen's sister Princess Margaret.

The Duke's German heritage, the guests include Bernhard, the Hereditary Prince of Baden; Donatus, Prince and Landgrave of Hesse; and Prince Philipp of Hohenlohe-Langenburg. Vice Admiral Sir Tim Laurence, the husband of Princess Anne, and the Earl of Snowdon, the son of the Queen's sister Princess Margaret.

Prince Philip, who died aged 99 on 9 April, is said to have planned his funeral with military precision and Buckingham Palace said the arrangements are in keeping with his wishes.

The funeral will be broadcast live on TV and radio to allow people around the world to take part in mourning the Duke, the palace said.

On Saturday, at 2.40 p.m. local time the coffin will emerge from the State Entrance of Windsor Castle into the Quadrangle and placed onto the bespoke Land Rover Defender TD5 130 designed by the Duke as part of a project spanning 16 years.

At the conclusion of the Service, the Duke of Edinburgh's Coffin will be lowered into the Royal Vault.

## Biden proposes strategic stability dialogue with Russia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
WASHINGTON, 16 APRIL

Hours after expelling 10 Russian diplomats in connection with interference in last year's US Presidential elections, President Joe Biden has proposed a strategic stability dialogue with Moscow, as officials of the two countries discussed the possibility of a summit meeting in Europe this summer.

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

Hours after signing the executive order imposing sanctions on its erstwhile cold war rival, Biden told reporters at the White House that during a telephonic conversation with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, he had proposed that they meet in person this summer in Europe for a summit to address issues facing both the countries.

"Our teams are discussing that possibility right now. And if that summit were to occur, and I believe it will, the United States and Russia could launch a strategic stability dialogue to pursue coop-

eration in arms control and security, Biden said.

We can address critical global challenges that require Russia and the US to work together, including reining in nuclear threats from Iran and North Korea, ending this pandemic globally, and meeting the existential crisis of climate change, he said.

During the phone call, Biden said he expressed concern on Russia's military build up on the Ukraine border and in Crimea. "I reaffirmed US support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. And I strongly urged him (Putin) to refrain from any military action, he said.



*Today, with the vaccines we have procured, which aren't a lot, we have inoculated 500,000 to 600,000 people so far.*

SPOKESMAN OF THAILAND'S CENTER FOR COVID-19 SITUATION ADMINISTRATION TAWEESEN VISANUYOTHIN

REFERRING TO THE COUNTRY'S BATTLE AGAINST THE THIRD WAVE OF COVID-19

## China's economy grows 18.3 pc in Q1

The GDP of the world's second-largest economy grew by 2.3 per cent, expanding to \$15.42 trillion in dollar terms in 2020

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BEIJING, 16 APRIL

China's economy grew a record 18.3 per cent in the first quarter of 2021, riding on strong domestic and foreign demand and aided by recovery from a low base in early 2020 when Covid-19 stalled the world's second-largest economy, according to statistics released on Friday.

The gross domestic product (GDP) reached 24.93 trillion yuan (about \$3.82 trillion) in Q1, data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said.

This is the highest quarterly growth rate since China first began publishing GDP data in 1993.

The double-digit growth puts the average Q1 growth of 2020 and 2021 at 5 per cent from the 2019 level, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

In the first three months, China saw a steady industrial production rebound, improvement in market sales, recovery in fixed-asset investment, and noticeable momentum in foreign trade of goods, it said.

China's economy, which was the first to be hit by the coronavirus pandemic when it broke out in central China's Wuhan city in late 2019, and



Residents wearing masks to protect from the coronavirus pass by the shutdown Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan in central China.

early to recover from its impact, grew 2.3 per cent in 2020, registering the lowest annual growth rate in 45 years.

The GDP of the world's second-largest economy grew by 2.3 per cent expanding to \$15.42 trillion in 2020, according to the data released by the NBS said.

In the local currency, the GDP exceeded the 100 trillion yuan (\$15.42 trillion) threshold to 101.5986 trillion yuan.

Early this month, the IMF increased China's GDP projection to 8.4 per cent for this year, a 10-year high but cautioned that the growth is unbalanced and private consumption has not recovered

as fast.

The IMF projection is higher than the over six per cent target fixed by the Chinese government for this year.

In its World Economic Outlook, the IMF also cautioned Beijing to address its high corporate debt levels resulting from the easy monetary policy put in place during the coronavirus pandemic.

It's still very heavily reliant on public investment.

And private consumption has not recovered as fast as we would have hoped, Gita Gopinath, the IMF's chief economist and director of research, said while releasing the report.

China-US tensions that remain elevated on multiple fronts, ranging from international trade to intellectual property and cybersecurity, also got a mention in the report.

"Domestic economic disparities arising from the pandemic downturn may also prompt new trade barriers. Amid already high levels of trade restrictions, such actions would add to inefficiencies and weigh on the recovery."

Furthermore, risks of protectionist tendencies surrounding technology are emerging," the IMF report said.

The IMF has also advised

China to further address its high corporate debt levels that have resulted from the easy monetary policy put in place during the coronavirus pandemic.

Releasing the Q1 data on Friday, NBS spokeswoman Liu Aihua said the economic recovery in the first quarter of this year continued, and positive factors are accumulating.

"At the same time, we must also see that the Covid-19 epidemic is still spreading globally; the international landscape is complicated and severe, the foundation for domestic economic recovery is not yet solid, and some service industries and small and micro enterprises are still facing more difficulties in their production and operation," Liu said.

Tian Yun, vice director of the Beijing Economic Operation Association, told the Global Times tabloid that the role of a sharp increase in overseas orders in shoring up China's industrial production acceleration in the first three months.

"The global economy seems to be walking out of the pandemic-induced recession, which will boost foreign demands for Chinese merchandise till at least June. This stays in contrast to last year when the recovery of the supply side outpaced that of the

demand side," he said.

According to the Q1 data, China's value-added industrial output, an important economic indicator, went up 24.5 per cent year on year in the first quarter this year as factory activities continued to pick up.

Output by major industrial firms increased by 14 per cent compared with the first quarter in 2019, resulting in an average year-on-year Q1 growth of 6.8 per cent over the past two years, the Xinhua report said.

It also said China's surveyed urban unemployment rate stood at 5.3 per cent in March, 0.6 percentage points lower than the same period last year.

A total of 2.97 million new urban jobs were created in the first quarter, the NBS said.

China's fixed-asset investment (FAI) went up 25.6 per cent year on year in the first quarter of 2021, the NBS said.

The FAI amounted to 9.6 trillion yuan (about 1.47 trillion US dollars) in the first three months, according to the NBS.

The double-digit growth was driven by a low base of comparison early last year when Covid-19 paralysed economic activities in China.

Compared with the 2019 level, FAI growth came in at 6 per cent.

sent government.

Shaukat Tareen is replacing Hammad Azhar, who was appointed towards the end of the last month after Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh was removed for failure to control raging inflation in the country.

Azhar, who was also serving as minister of industries and production, was appointed Minister for Energy after the reshuffle, while Khursro Bakhtiar was given the charge of ministry of industries and production.

Minister for Science Fawad Chaudhry was appointed information minister while his predecessor Shibli Faraz was appointed as minister for science. It will be Chaudhry's second stint as information minister as he was given the charge in 2018 but later shifted to ministry of science.

Former energy minister Umar Ayub Khan was shifted to head the ministry of economic affairs. Khan has shuffled his cabinet several times since coming to power in August 2018.

Shaukat Tareen appointed as Pak's new finance minister



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ISLAMABAD, 16 APRIL

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has appointed Shaukat Tareen as the new finance minister of the country, the fourth to don the mantle, in another cabinet reshuffle, it was announced by his office on Friday.

A banker by profession, Tareen, 68, served in the same capacity in the government of Pakistan Peoples Party (2009-10) for a short period before he decided to step down to raise capital for his Silk Bank.

Tareen was facing corruption charges and had initially refused to accept the post until his name was cleared.

It was not known if the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) dropped charges against him or not. He is a cousin of Jehangir Tareen, dubbed as sugar baron due to several sugar mills, who is an influential politician but is facing probe in the sugar scandal of the pre-

Israel to lift outdoor mask mandate

TEL AVIV, 16 APRIL

The rules to enforce wearing of masks outdoors in Israel will be lifted starting Sunday, Health Minister Yuli Edelstein said.

Edelstein said in a statement on Thursday that he had instructed the Ministry's Director-General, Hezi Levi, to sign an order to cancel the restriction, reports Xinhua news agency.

The decision was made on the recommendation by the professionals in the ministry, who said that, due to the low Covid-19 morbidity, there is no longer a need for wearing face masks outdoors in Israel. In closed places, however, the mask-wearing rules will still apply, the statement noted. The fine for not wearing a face mask was first set at 200 new shekels (\$61). IANS

## Hong Kong pro-democracy advocates given jail terms

ASSOCIATED PRESS

HONG KONG, 16 APRIL

A Hong Kong court on Friday sent five leading pro-democracy advocates, including media tycoon Jimmy Lai, to up to 18 months in prison for organising a march during the 2019 anti-government protests that triggered an overwhelming crackdown from Beijing.

A total of nine advocates were given jail terms, but four of them, including 82-year-old lawyer and former lawmaker Martin Lee, had their sentences suspended after their age and accomplishments were taken into consideration.

They were found guilty earlier this month of organizing and participating in a massive protest in August 2019, where an estimated 1.7 million people



marched in opposition to a bill that would have allowed suspects to be extradited to mainland China. The march was not authorized by the police.

Their convictions and sentencing are another blow to the city's flagging democracy movement, which is facing an unprecedented crackdown by Beijing and Hong Kong authorities.

The court suspended the 11-month prison sentence

of Lee, an 82-year-old lawyer and former lawmaker known for his advocacy for human rights and democracy, for two years because of his age.

Lai, the founder of Hong Kong's Apple Daily tabloid, was sentenced to 12 months in prison. He was already held on other charges, including collusion with foreign forces to intervene in the city's affairs in a new crime under a sweeping national security law that Beijing imposed on the city in 2020.

Lee Cheuk-yan, a pro-democracy activist and former lawmaker who helped organize annual candlelight vigils in Hong Kong on the anniversary of the bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989, was sentenced to 12 months in prison.

The move is likely to raise tensions even as Iran negotiates

## Iran starts enriching uranium to 60 pc, its highest level ever

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DUBAI, 16 APRIL

Iran began enriching uranium on Friday to its highest level ever, edging closer to weapons-grade levels to pressure talks in Vienna aimed at restoring its nuclear deal with world powers after an attack on its main atomic site.

A top official said only a few grams an hour of uranium gas would be enriched up to 60 per cent purity triple the level it once did but at a rate far slower than what Tehran could produce.

International inspectors already said Iran planned to do so above-ground at its Natanz nuclear site, not deep within its underground halls hardened to withstand airstrikes.

The move is likely to raise

tensions in Vienna over a way to allow the US back into the agreement and lift the crushing economic sanctions it faces. However, its scope also provides Iran with a way to quickly de-escalate if it chose.

The announcement also marks a significant escalation after the attack that damaged centrifuges at Natanz, an attack this past weekend suspected of having been carried out by Israel. While Israel has yet to claim it, it comes amid a long-running shadow war

between the two Mideast rivals.

Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, Iran's parliament speaker, announced the move in a Twitter post later acknowledged by Iranian state television.

The young and God-believing Iranian scientists managed to achieve a 60 per cent enriched uranium product,

Qalibaf said. "I congratulate the brave nation of Islamic Iran on this success. The Iranian nation's willpower is miracu-

lous and can defuse any conspiracy. The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, the country's civilian nuclear arm, later acknowledged the move to 60 per cent, according to state TV. Ali Akbar Salehi said the centrifuges now produce 9 grams an hour, but that would drop to 5 grams an hour in the coming days.

Now, any enrichment (level) is possible if we decide it, Salehi said. State TV later referred to the decision as a "show of power against terrorist racism."

It wasn't clear why the first announcement came from Qalibaf, a hard-line former leader in the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard already named as a potential presidential candidate in Iran's upcoming June election.

## Cabinet reshuffle: S Korean President picks new PM

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

SEOUL, 16 APRIL

South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Friday nominated former Interior Minister Kim Boo-kyum as the new Prime Minister during a cabinet reshuffle, the presidential Blue House said.

Kim will become the third Prime Minister of the Moon government, which was inaugurated in May 2017, if the nomination is approved in the parliamentary confirmation hearings.

The President also replaced five other Ministers.

Lim Hye-sook was named as the Minister of Science and ICT, and Moon Sung-

wook was picked as the Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy.

An Kyung-duk was nominated as the Minister of Employment and Labour, while Noh Hyoeng-ouk was selected as the Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport. Park Jun-young was named as the Minister of Oceans and Fisheries.

Moon also named new senior secretaries, including Lee Cheol-hee as senior presidential secretary for political affairs and Lee Tae-han as senior presidential secretary for social affairs.

Park Kyung-mee was named as the new Blue House spokesperson.

President's decision, adding that the Kabul government will ensure a smooth transition.

The President said that the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) were capable enough to defend their country and ensure security.

The top US diplomats said, "The withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan will not mean the weakening of strategic relations between the two countries. The US will honor its commitments to the government and people of Afghanistan."

Blinken said his visit to Afghanistan was important because he wanted to convey in person America's commitment to an enduring partnership with the country and

its people.

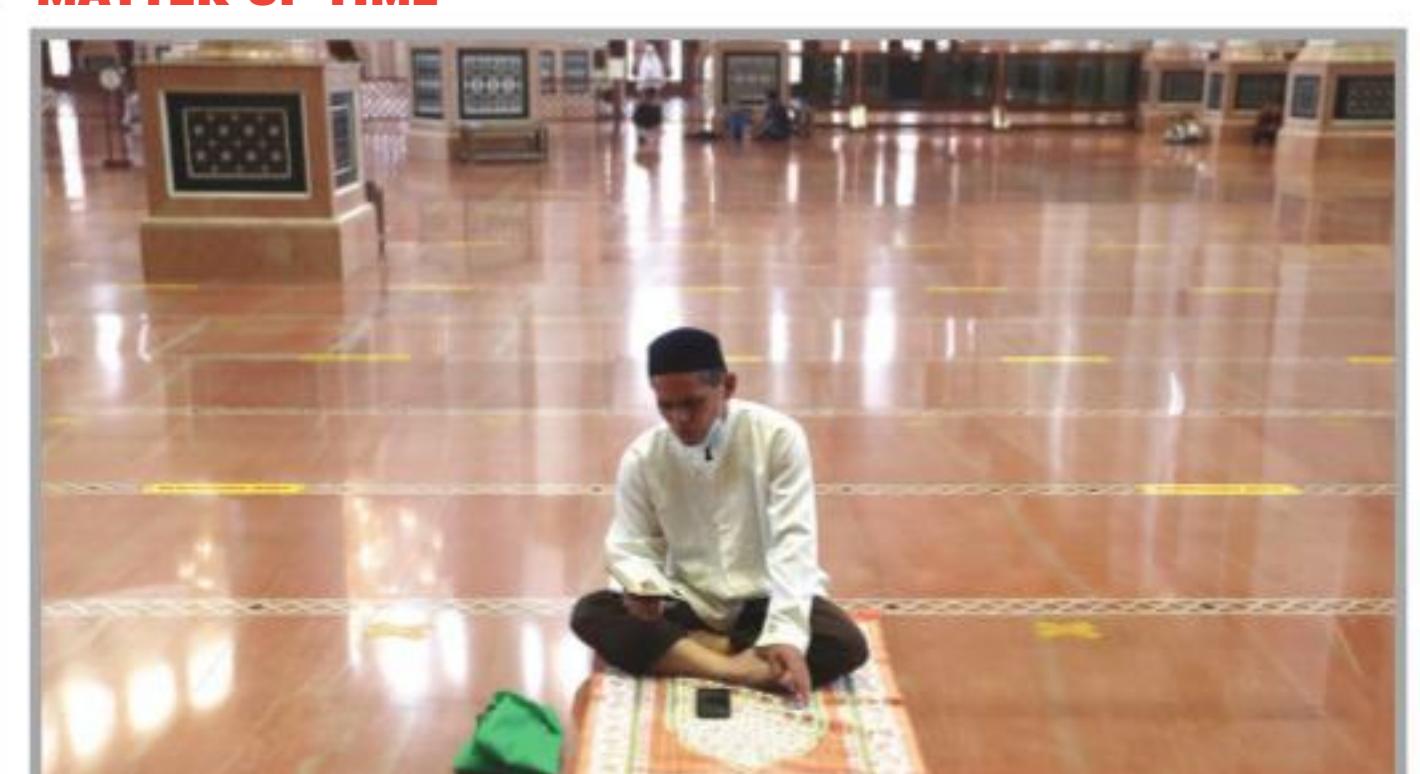
"We never intended to have a permanent military presence here."

"Threat from Al Qaeda in Afghanistan is significantly degraded."

"By our enduring to support to Afghanistan economically, diplomatically, politically, I want to say that as we proceed, we will remember the extraordinary courage, strength and sacrifices our troops who served in Afghanistan in the past two decades," he said.

The Secretary of State also warned the Taliban against attacking the US forces as they are withdrawing from Afghanistan, saying any attack by the Taliban will be met with forceful response.

## MATTER OF TIME



A man reads the Muslim holy book, the Quran, while waiting for the time to break his fast at the Kubah Mas mosque in Depok, Indonesia, on Friday.

## Myanmar coup foes tout minority-backed shadow government

AGENCIES

YANGON, 16 APRIL

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

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

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

The Committee Repre-



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

Helming the so-called "National Unity Government" is Suu Kyi, in her position as State Counsellor, and President Win Myint, who is also under house arrest and facing a barrage of charges from the junta.

They are flanked by a vice president who is ethnic Kachin and a prime minister who is ethnic Karen, said Min Ko Naing,



## AIMING HIGH

Having hit the top of the men's One-Day Internationals batting rankings, Babar Azam (photo, left) targets doing the same in Test cricket. He dethroned Virat Kohli as the world's top batsman in one-day cricket, leading Pakistan to a nine-wicket win in the third Twenty20 International against South Africa.

For more updates

www.thestatesman.com

## THUMBNAILS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
CHENNAI, 16 APRIL

**G**etting the combination right will top SunRisers Hyderabad's agenda when they take on a qualitatively superior Mumbai Indians in an Indian Premier League encounter here tomorrow, trying to arrest an early slide after back-to-back defeats.

To make matters worse, the nature of the Chennai track is not great news for the David Warner-led Orange Army that failed to chase down a sub-150 total. Chasing has been the Sunrisers' minus-point in the first two matches, highlighting a certain lack of depth in their playing XI and their below-par Indian bench strength.

In these circumstances, facing a formidable team like Mumbai Indians, fresh from their back-from-the-brink victory against Kolkata Knight Riders, could be a difficult proposition.

For skipper Warner, there are some serious questions faced into his choice of the playing XI, which many believe have not been well-thought-out. The results back that assessment too.

Using two wicketkeepers -



- Jonny Bairstow and Wriddhiman Saha -- in the same XI hasn't served any tangible purpose with the veteran Indian looking all at sea as an opener.

Saha has been playing in the IPL since its first edition (2008)

and a close look at his record indicates he has not been consistently successful in terms of scoring runs.

With a seasoned man like Kedar Jadhav in the dug-out, along with two talented youngsters, Priyam Garg and Abhishek Sharma, Saha is on borrowed time as far as his place in the

side is concerned. Jadhav and Sharma also provide the option of slow bowling -- off-breaks from the veteran and slow-left-arm orthodox from the younger.

With only Warner and Rashid Khan being the certainties among the overseas players, a

left Warner far from amused. And Krunal Pandya, who bowls a much flatter trajectory and also a little quicker than Ahmed, can make matters even worse for the Pandseys and Samads if they do not come up with a better gameplan.

For Pandey, being dropped

from India's central contracts has been a blow but his inability to finish games regularly is one of the reasons he might not wear the India shirt anytime soon.

However, this tournament gives him a platform for course correction.

He is one of the five with the slowest strike rates to reach 3000 IPL runs. On a track like Chepauk's, at times it becomes essential to play as late as possible and to use the depth of the crease, which Williamson is adept at.

The other worry has been the team's bowling with T Natarajan not in the kind of form he showed last season and Bhuvneshwar Kumar proving expensive.

Sandeep Sharma and Siddarth Kaul do not inspire too much confidence when one looks at Mumbai Indians' top-order, comprising Rohit Sharma, Quinton de Kock, Suryakumar Yadav and Ishan Kishan. It is unlikely that MI will tinker with their playing XI, especially after winning the thriller against KKR.

However, they would like to give a better account of their batting as theirs is a line-up that can just throw the pitch factor out of the equation.

## Ponting says Pant made a major mistake

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI, 16 APRIL

"The length wasn't quite where it needed to be. If you look at the replay of the game, if you bowled a reasonable yorker, he didn't score off them. If it was back of a length, sort of, above the stumps, he didn't get hold of them either, especially with pace on the ball. We talked about how to bowl to him, but the execution probably wasn't there."

Ponting said dew had been a factor in the second innings as bowlers found it difficult to grip the ball. "The other thing you have got to factor in is just how wet and how dewy the ball was in the second innings of the game," Ponting said.

"It wasn't easy for the bowlers to grip. You could see it at the end there. There were a few full-tosses that fast bowlers bowled with the ball slipping out of their hand a little bit."

"That's part and parcel of Indian Premier League cricket. We knew coming here that there would be a little bit of dew in the second half of the game. And we didn't adapt, and we didn't execute as well as we could have tonight."

bowled beautifully. Three overs, none for 14. Hadn't even conceded a boundary,"

Ponting said in the subsequent virtual Press conference.

"He had a disappointing game in game one, but he has worked really hard in the past few days to make sure he adjusted and got things right in this game. I thought he bowled beautifully tonight. Probably a mistake on our behalf, and something we will be talking about later on."

The Royals needed 58 from the last five overs. Morris smashed four sixes in the last two overs during his quickfire 18-ball 36 to take the team home with two balls to spare.

"We probably gave him (Morris) a few too many easy balls, a few too many slot balls if you like," Ponting said.

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"That's part and parcel of Indian Premier League cricket. We knew coming here that there would be a little bit of dew in the second half of the game. And we didn't adapt, and we didn't execute as well as we could have tonight."

## Chahar stars with ball as Chennai restrict Punjab Kings to 106/8

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI, 1 APRIL

Deepak Chahar's superb opening spell stood out as Chennai Super Kings restricted Punjab Kings to a below-par 106 for eight in an Indian Premier League match here on Friday.

Tamil Nadu's power-hitter M Shahrkhan Khan was the only Punjab batsman to make an impression, with a 36-ball 47 (4X4s, 2X6s) before falling to Sam Curran in the final over as CSK was all out.

Sam Curran (1/12), Moeen Ali (1/17), Dwayne Bravo (1/10) were the other wicket-takers for CSK.

Aiming to bounce back after being outclassed by Delhi Capitals in their opening match, CSK bowlers justified skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni's decision to bowl first by reducing Punjab to 26 for four in the powerplay (first six overs).

Chahar engineered the Punjab slide in the very first over by sending back Mayank Agarwal (0) with a beauty which nipped away from middle stump to hit the off stump.

Chahar kept up the pressure and increased CSK's woes with his

consistency and conceded only two fours in his four-overs spell.

In-form Punjab skipper KL Rahul (5) was run-out by a brilliant direct throw from Ravinder Jadeja fielding at short-cover as the batsman tried to scramble for a single.

Jadeja was in the act in the fifth over again, grabbing a superb catch diving full-length to dismiss Chris Gayle for 10 to give Chahar his second wicket. Nicholas Pooran bagged his second straight duck, pulling a short delivery straight into the hands of Shardul Thakur at long-leg.

Deepak Hooda (10), who played a blinder in Punjab's first match against Rajasthan Royals, could not repeat his hero-

ics, lobbing a simple catch to Faf du Plessis as the team slipped to 26 for five in the seventh over.

Shahrkhan Khan and Jhye Richardson (15, 22 balls, 2x4s) added 31 runs for the sixth wicket in what was the best partnership of the innings.

Murugan Ashwin (6) then added 30 runs with his Tamil Nadu teammate Khan to help Punjab's cause in an otherwise nightmare night for them.

Mahendran Singh Dhoni, playing his 200th game for CSK, won the toss and chose to bowl.

## Brief Scores:

Punjab Kings: 106 for eight in 20 overs (Shahrkhan Khan 47; Deepak Chahar 4/13).

## Snakes and ladders

## NEW DELHI, 16 APRIL

Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal suffered demotions when the Board of Control for Cricket in India announced its central contracts yesterday.

Both found themselves in grade C, Yadav slipping from grade A and Chahal, from grade B.

According to a website, a spate of injuries has resulted in Bhuvneshwar Kumar being shifted from grade A to grade B. Hardik Pandya (B to A) and Shardul Thakur (C to B) were rewarded with promotions.

Shubman Gill, Axar Patel and Mohammed Siraj, who made impressive Test debuts during the 2020-21 season when India overcame an injury crisis to beat Australia 2-1 away and England 3-1 at home, entered the contracts list as Grade C players.

Patel returns to the list for the first time since 2017-8, when he was a Grade C player. Gill and Siraj were contracted for the first time.

AGENCIES

## Now, Emery waits for Gunners to roll up

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
LONDON, 16 APRIL

With their season on the line, Arsenal's players produced a devastating first-half performance last night to beat Slavia Prague and reach the Europa League semi-finals.

They'll meet a familiar face there. Arsenal's 4-0 win in the Czech capital -- secured courtesy of a three-goal burst in six minutes from the 18th -- clinched a 5-1 aggregate victory and set up a last-four match against Villarreal, who are managed by Unai Emery.

The Spanish coach spent an overwhelming 18 months at Arsenal as Arsene Wenger's replacement in 2018-9 and was rebuilding his managerial acumen at Villarreal, who beat Dinamo Zagreb 2-1 and advanced 3-1 on aggregate. Manchester United and Roma complete the semi-final line-up.

United are back in the last four for a second straight season after beating Spanish team Granada 2-0 for a 4-0 aggregate win. Roma drew 1-1 with Ajax to squeeze through 3-2 on aggregate.

Arsenal and Roma were under pressure to advance because the Europa League represented their only chance of winning a trophy this season and their only realistic route into next season's Champions League, owing to their lowly cur-

rent placing in their domestic leagues.

Arsenal are ninth in the Premier League and Roma seventh in Serie A.

The winners of the Europa League earn an automatic spot in the far more lucrative Champions League.

## A message

Arsenal sent a message before and during the win over Slavia. The hosts learned the day before the game that their defender, Ondrej Kudela, had been banned for 10 games for racially abusing Rangers' Glen Kamara during a round-of-16 game last month.

Before kick-off, as Slavia's players stood in a line at the center circle, Arsenal's players took a knee in a symbolic ges-

ture in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, with Alexandre Lacazette doing so right in front of the Slavia team and star-striking the players.

Arsenal responded by having an early goal by Emile Smith Rowe ruled out for off-side by VAR by scoring three times in quick succession, first through Nicolas Pepe in the 18th and then Lacazette -- from the penalty spot -- and Bukayo Saka.

That meant Slavia, the runaway leaders of the Czech league who had not lost at home in nearly 18 months, needed to score four goals to qualify. By half-time, the hosts had essentially given up as they removed some of their key players to preserve their condition for the league.

Lacazette, continuing as

striker, added a fourth in the 77th minute.

The boys were really at it from the start, Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said. "It is a really important win in a crucial moment. We won in a convincing way." Arsenal lost to Chelsea in the Europa League final in 2019.

Villarreal's goals were scored by Paco Alcacer and Gerard Moreno at the end of the first half, with Zagreb -- the last-16 conquerors of Tottenham -- grabbing a consolation through Mislav Orsic. Villarreal are in the semi-finals of the Europa League for the first time since 2016.

## Cavani milestone

Edinson Cavani scored his 50th goal in European competition to lead United to victory over Granada at Old Trafford. The 34-year-old Uruguayan striker met a flicked header back into the middle of the area by Paul Pogba with a left-foot volley into the bottom corner in the sixth minute.

A 90th-minute own-goal by Jesus Vallejo completed a second straight 2-0 win over Granada.

United lost in the semi-finals to Sevilla last season and were defeated at that stage three other times -- twice in the English League Cup and again in the FA Cup -- under Ole Gunnar Solskjær.

Lacazette, continuing as

## Asian Wrestling C'ship: Maiden gold medals for seasoned Vinesh and teen sensation Anshu

AGENCIES  
ALMATY, 16 APRIL

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

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

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

Also standing on top of the podium was Divya Kakran (72kg) while Sakshi Malik (65kg) settled for a silver medal, a performance which should boost her confidence after enduring a long-wretched run in the sixth minute.

India has a rich haul of seven medals from the women's event as the country won four gold, a silver and two bronze medals in this edition.

Sarita Mor (59kg) had won gold while Seema Bisla (50kg) and Pooja (76kg) settled for bronze medals on Thursday.

Young Sonam Malick (62kg) unfortunately could not compete due to an injury. She also bagged Olympic quota along with Anshu recently.

The 19-year-old Anshu was yet again impressive as she underlined her progress in the senior circuit with yet another confident performance in 57kg.

She won her final 3-0 and was never really troubled by Mongolia's Battsetseg Altantseg, except for a double-leg attack initially in the bout.

The Mongolian was most busy defending and Anshu kept her lead intact for gold.

Earlier in the day, Vinesh won by technical superiority against Mongolia's Otgonjargal Ganbaatar and Taipei's Meng Hsuan Hsieh while an injured Hyunyoung Oh from Korea did not turn up for the semifinal.

Anshu won her first two bouts by technical superiority against Uzbekistan's Sevara Eshmuratova and Kyrgyzstan's Nazira Marsbek Kyzy to reach the semifinal.

Her quick moves and tremendous energy had her rivals gasping for breath.

Up against Altantseg, she was leading 9-1 when the referee awarded a 'victory by caution' to the Indian. The Mongolian was cautioned thrice.

Competing much better than she was in the recent trials and competitions, the Rio Games bronze medallist Sakshi won her first two bouts by technical superiority and was leading 3-0 against Hanbit Lee when the Korean suffered a knee injury and opted out of the contest.

She began aggressively in the final against Mongolia's Bolorulgaa Zorigt but was pinned on a counter move.

Also doing well was Divya, who competed in the 72kg category. She stunned reigning Asian Champion Zamila Bakbergenova from Kazakhstan 8-5 en route the final.

She won the final by pinning Korea's Sujin Park to be only the second Indian after Sarita Mor to win two gold medals at this meet. She had won gold in 68kg in the 2020 edition.