

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI TUESDAY 27 APRIL 2021



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Pat Cummins donates \$50,000 to India's fight against Covid pandemic

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Kher's tweet 'aayega toh Modi h' amid Covid-19 crisis infuriates twitterati



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Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson passes a rugby ball during his visit to Net World Sports in Wrexham, north Wales, on Monday. — AFP

2 Army jawans killed in avalanche in Siachen sector

New Delhi: Two Indian Army jawans died on Sunday due to an avalanche in Sub Sector Haneef, Siachen Sector. "Two Army soldiers sustained fatal casualties due to an avalanche in Sub Sector Haneef, Siachen Sector. The avalanche occurred at 1300 hours on 25 April 2021," said a senior official. He said that two soldiers could only be rescued by evening (1930 hours) and both these soldiers succumbed to injuries. "Rest all soldiers and porters are stable and out of danger," he added.

Noted Hindi author Manzoor dies at 73

Bhopal: Noted Hindi litterateur and Padma Shri awardee Manzoor Ahtesham has died of Covid-19 in Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, family sources said on Monday. He was 73. He died in the intervening night of Sunday and Monday at a private hospital after being admitted a week back. **Full report on Page 3**

Rains in many parts from April 26-30

New Delhi: The IMD on Monday predicted a wet spell over several parts of the country from April 26 to 30. Thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds are very likely at isolated places over Telangana, Kerala and Mahe from April 26. — PTI



Shh! Don't say no oxygen. You might be booked under the Gangster Act!

WEATHER

Max: 42°C
Min: 24°C
RH: 14%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Shuddha Pournami till 9 am
Star: Swati till 8.07 pm
Varjyam: 1.03 am to 2.27 am
Durmuhurtam: 8.27 am to 9.17 am; 11.05 pm to 11.50 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.53 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.44 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 7.16 PM
MOONSET TODAY 5.52 AM

■ **Judges warn: We'll stop counting on May 2 if norms are ignored**

EC 'should be charged with murder' for allowing poll rallies: Madras HC

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs CHENNAI, APRIL 26

The Madras high court on Monday severely reprimanded the Election Commission for the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country, holding it "singularly" responsible for the spread, called it the "the most irresponsible institution" and said its officials should be booked under charges of murder.

The EC's move to allow political parties to hold rallies and meetings had led to the spread of the pandemic, the court said. "Were you (living) on another planet when political rallies were being held," a bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthil Kumar Ramamoorthy asked EC officials.

The bench, hearing a petition on whether there were adequate Covid-19 safety procedures during vote counting in Karur constituency, declared: "Election Commission officers should probably be booked on murder charges."

"Despite repeated orders of this court going on like

Despite repeated orders of this court going on like a broken record at the foot of at least every poll petition entertained that Covid protocol ought to be maintained, the significance of adhering to such protocols may have been lost on the EC...

— Madras high court

It is only when the citizen survives that he enjoys the other rights that this democratic republic guarantees unto him. The situation is now one of survival and protection and everything else comes second to it.

— Madras high court

a broken record at the foot of at least every election petition entertained that Covid protocol ought to be maintained in the campaign, the significance of adhering to such protocols may have been lost on the Election Commission going by the puerile silence on the part of the commission as the campaigns and rallies were conducted without distancing norms being maintained and in wanton disregard of the other items of the protocol," the bench said.

The high court has sought a suitable blue-

print from the EC on how the Covid-19 safety norms will be followed on counting day, and it warned orally that it could even stop the counting of votes on May 2 if these protocols were not adhered to.

"At no cost can the counting result in a catalyst for a further surge... politics or no politics, and whether the counting takes place in a staggered manner or is deferred. Public health is of paramount importance and it is distressing that the constitutional authorities have to be reminded (of this). It is only when the

No victory celebrations on Kerala counting day

Thiruvananthapuram: The political parties in Kerala have decided not to organise victory celebrations on May 2 when the counting of votes takes place for the recently concluded Assembly elections. The decision was taken at the all party meeting presided over by chief minister Mr Pinarayi Vijayan here on Monday. **PAGE 4**

citizen survives that he enjoys the other rights that this democratic republic guarantees unto him. The situation is now one of survival and protection and everything else comes second to it."

The measures must not be limited to Karur alone, the court insisted, and added: "Similar appropriate measures must be adopted at every counting centre... regular sanitisation, proper hygienic conditions, the mandatory wearing of masks and adherence to social

■ Turn to Page 4

TN lets Sterlite reopen Tuticorin plant for 4 mths to produce 02

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR and D. SEKAR CHENNAI, APRIL 26

The Tamil Nadu government on Monday decided to allow Sterlite Industries to produce oxygen at its copper smelter plant at Thoothukudi even as advocate-general Vijay Narayan told the Madras high court that most of the oxygen manufactured there was of industrial quality and not fit for medical use. He added that steps would be taken soon to convert all the 1,050 MTs of oxygen to be fit for medical use.

An all-party meeting approved the move to open the oxygen plant alone for four months and said none of the other units can be operated. The oxygen produced in the next four months, which period may be extended in view of the continuing pandemic, should be mainly given to hospitals in Tamil Nadu. **■ More on Page 3**



The Indian tricolour is lit up on landmarks across Dubai in solidarity with India as it responds to a second Covid-19 wave. — PTI

■ **Modi thanks Japan PM for help in 'summit phone talk'**

PM calls up Biden, US promises supplies to help India beat Covid

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to the United States and Japan on Monday, with US President Joe Biden assuring him of America's "shoulder-to-shoulder steadfast support and solidarity" by deploying resources such as oxygen-related supplies, therapeutics, venti-

lators. In a phone conversation late Monday evening, Mr Modi highlighted the importance of smooth and efficient supply chains of vaccine raw materials and medicines and Mr Biden assured him that the US would identify sources of raw materials to be made available for the manufacture of Covishield vaccines. PM Modi also conveyed to the US President India's commitment to

contain the Covid-19 pandemic globally through vaccine "Maitri" (India's vaccine exports), and its participation in COVAX and the Quad Vaccine Initiatives.

Also, in a "summit telephone talk" with Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga on Monday that lasted 25 minutes, PM Modi thanked Japan "for providing assistance to India for combating the pandemic". **■ Turn to Page 4**

'NCP trying to take all credit for free vaccines'

Cong miffed; rift within MVA out in open

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, APRIL 26

Differences within the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra over free vaccination came to the fore with the Congress expressing displeasure over the decision unilaterally. The decision should be announced by chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, said Maharashtra Congress chief Balasaheb Thorat.

"The decision to provide vaccine against Covid-19 for free to people of the state should have been announced by the chief minister. An

attempt by others to take credit for it was not good," said Mr Thorat on Monday.

His comments came a day after Maharashtra minority affairs minister and NCP leader Nawab Malik said the state government will float global tenders for providing Covid-19 vaccines for free to people above 18 years of age in the state.

Without naming the NCP, Mr Thorat said, "A discussion on providing a free vaccine was underway and it was not correct to make an announcement right away to get credit for it. This is absolutely not

■ Turn to Page 4



Mass cremation of Covid-19 victims and others takes place at the Gazipur crematorium in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

able to the Central government at a rate of ₹150 per dose. Several states including Delhi and Rajasthan have announced that the will administer these vaccines free of cost to their 18-plus population from May 1.

A huge rush for vaccines is expected as India continues to report a very high number of daily Covid-19 cases. On Monday, the country registered nearly 3.53 lakh fresh cases and 2,812 deaths, putting a huge load on an already fragile healthcare system.

As per the Union health

ministry, India's total active caseload has reached 28,13,658. It now comprises 16.25 per cent of the country's total positive cases and a net incline of 1,30,907 cases was recorded from the total active caseload in the last 24 hours. The eight states of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Kerala cumulatively account for 69.67 per cent of India's total active cases.

With over 2,800 deaths in a day, the waiting time **■ Turn to Page 4**

Mask up even inside homes: Govt to citizens

New Delhi, April 26: As a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic rips through the country, the government on Monday said it is time people start wearing masks inside their homes as well, and refrain from inviting guests. Addressing a press conference here, Niti Aayog member (health) V.K. Paul said if there is a Covid-positive person inside the house, he or she must wear the mask so as to prevent other family members from getting infected.

"Rather, I'll say that the time has come that we start wearing masks even otherwise inside our homes. We used to talk about wearing it outside homes, but the way the infection has spread, it will be better if we wear mask inside our homes if we are sitting with someone," he said. **■ More on Page 3**

'Close down' for 14 days in K'taka

Bengaluru: The Karnataka government on Monday announced more restrictions in what it termed as a "close down" across the state for 14 days from Tuesday night in a bid to control the huge spike in Covid-19 cases in the state.

The state Cabinet led by chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa also decided to provide Covid-19 vaccinations free of cost at government hospitals for those between 18-44 years of age. — PTI

648 cops test +ve for Covid in U'khand

Dehradun: As many as 684 Uttarakhand police personnel have tested positive for coronavirus in recent days, an official said on Monday.

Director general of police Ashok Kumar said of them, only one policewoman is in critical condition. The policewoman could not be given coronavirus vaccine as she is pregnant, Mr Kumar said. — PTI **■ More on Page 3**

SHORT TAKES

55-year-old man killed, 2 injured as bus hits scooter

New Delhi: A 55-year-old man was killed while two others were injured after a speeding cluster bus rammed into a scooter and two e-rickshaws in west Delhi's Subhash Nagar on Monday morning. The deceased was identified as Mandeep Singh (55), a resident of Pratap Nagar while the injured have been identified as Rajan (32) and Hansa (40). According to a senior police official, after receiving information about the accident around 8 am, an Emergency Response Vehicle (ERV) reached Subhash Nagar and found three men lying on the road. "One of the three men was dead and two others — Rajan and Hansa — were rushed to a nearby hospital. The bus driver identified as Azad was also arrested," said the senior police official. "A case under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 279 (rash driving or riding on a public way), 304A (causing death by negligence) and 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others) was registered," police said.

Take up measures to irrigate parks expeditiously: HC

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Monday asked the AAP government's Jal Board to decide as expeditiously as possible a representation by a resident of the national capital to the local authorities to ensure immediate watering of all the over 6,800 parks in the city to maintain the greenery. A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh directed the Delhi Jal Board to decide the representation in accordance with the law, rules, regulations and government policy applicable to the facts of the case. The court said a decision be taken "as expeditiously as possible and practicable" and with the observation disposed of the plea by Delhi resident Vivek Garg who had sought immediate supply of treated water to all the parks. — PTI

Himachal to supply oxygen to Delhi amid Covid crisis

New Delhi: The Himachal Pradesh government will arrange oxygen supply to Delhi, which is facing acute shortage of the life-saving gas for Covid-19 patients, an official spokesperson said in Shimla on Monday. Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur, on the request of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, has agreed to arrange emergency supply of oxygen to Delhi amid the Covid-19 crisis, he added. In a letter written to his Delhi counterpart, Thakur said that the Himachal Pradesh government was "highly concerned" about the situation emerging in the national capital and would be more than happy to extend all possible help to the Delhi government. Thakur said that officers of the Delhi government may contact additional director of industries for arranging the supply of oxygen from the state. Kejriwal, in a tweet, also thanked the chief minister for his help. — PTI

SC suspends judicial work to pay homage to Justice Shantanagoudar

PARMOD KUMAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

The Supreme Court on Monday suspended its day's judicial work after paying homage to Justice Mohan M Shantanagouda who passed away on Saturday night in a private hospital in Gurugram after a brief illness.

On his first working day as the Chief Justice of India Justice N.V. Ramana had listed no case before his Bench. He led a condolence meeting at the court premises, joined by seven other judges, who were to hold court on Monday. He said all judges are deeply pained and saddened by Justice Shantanagoudar's sudden death.

Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman, Justice Uday Umesh Lalit, Justice AM Khanwilkar, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, Justice L. Nageswara Rao, Justice S. Ravindra Bhat and Justice Hrishkesh Roy joined



Mohan M Shantanagoudar

the condolence.

Attorney General K. K. Venugopal, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Vikas Singh and Advocates on Record Association chief advocate Shivaji Jadhav attended the meeting virtually through video conferencing.

At the end of the condolence meeting, the Chief Justice announced that there would be no judicial business for the day and the matters listed on Monday would be taken up on Tuesday.

Justice Lalit-led 3-judge Bench was just to start hearing a criminal appeal of Sanjay Choudante vs Maharashtra government when the three judges left for the condolence meeting called by the Chief Justice Ramana.

The top court has suspended regular work in view of the Covid-19 spread and is hearing only urgent matters.

Elevated to the Supreme Court in February 2017, Justice Shantanagoudar would have remained in office till May 5, 2023.

Hailing from Karnataka, as a lawyer he practised mainly in civil, criminal and constitutional matters. He became an additional judge of the Karnataka High Court on May 12, 2003 and its permanent judge on September 24, 2004. He was an acting Chief Justice of Kerala High Court from August 1, 2016 and became its Chief Justice on September 22, 2016.

■ Purchase of 1.34 crore doses approved, will speed up purchases further: CM

Kejri announces free Covid vaccine to all above 18 yrs

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

Free Covid-19 vaccine will be provided to all above 18 years of age in the national capital, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Monday, saying his government has already approved the purchase of 1.34 crore doses.

He said the Delhi government will make efforts to speed up the purchases further and administer jabs to people as soon as possible after the inoculation drive opens up on Saturday for everybody above 18.

Covid-19 has begun to affect in a big way those below 18 years of age too, he said, adding if the available vaccines are effective for this age group as well, or if any special vaccines can be manufactured for children, the Centre should allow inoculating this population also. Delhi has been witnessing surging Covid-19 cases and deaths, as well as an acute oxygen crisis as several hospitals have been sending SOS messages every day due to shortage of life-saving gas.

"The Delhi government has decided to provide free Covid-19 vaccines to all those above 18 years of age. We are working on a plan to start large-scale vaccination as soon as possible," Kejriwal told an online briefing.

Even as officials later said free vaccine may be made available through Delhi government-run centres, they added that exact modalities are being worked out. Kejriwal also appealed to vaccine manufacturers to bring down the price to ₹150 a dose, saying that they have an entire lifetime to earn

Record 380 deaths, 20,201 cases in Delhi, positivity rate over 35%

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

Delhi recorded the highest single-day rise in its Covid-19 death toll with 380 people succumbing to the infection on Monday, while the positivity rate stood at over 35 per cent, according to the latest bulletin issued by the city Health Department.

The capital recorded over 20,201 fresh cases. With these cases, the national capital's cumulative Covid-19 tally has climbed to over 10.47 lakh and the toll stands at 14,628, the bulletin said.

The positivity rate stood at 35.02 per cent, it added.

profits but this is a time to show humanity. He said the Central government should cap the price of vaccines, if needed.

Last week, the Serum Institute of India (SII) had announced that it would price its Covishield vaccine at ₹600 per dose for private hospitals and ₹400 per dose for state governments. Another vaccine manufacturer, Bharat Biotech, had also announced that its Covaxin would be available to state governments at ₹600 a dose and private hospitals at ₹1,200 a dose.

"At a time when Central and state governments are capping the rate at which medicines and other facilities should be made available to people, vaccines should also be moderately priced," the chief minister said, adding that Covid-19 vaccines should have one price across the nation.

The tally of active cases in the city is at 92,358. A significant number of patients, 22,055, recovered from the infection in the last 24 hours, the bulletin said. A total of 57,690 tests, including over 18,000 rapid-antigen tests, were conducted in the said period, it added. A total of 43,637 vaccine doses were administered to people in the said period and the beneficiaries included 31,888 people who took the first dose and 11,749 people who received the second dose, the bulletin said. The number of containment zones in the city has jumped to 29,104. The Delhi High Court on

Monday directed hospitals in the national capital to "scrupulously follow" the AAP government's circular on not to insist on Covid positive test reports before admitting patients showing symptoms of coronavirus.

A bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh also directed the Delhi government to "widely publicise" its April 23 circular on the matter. The order came while disposing of a PIL seeking directions to the Delhi government to order hospitals not to insist on Covid positive reports to hospitalise patients who show symptoms of coronavirus.



At a time when Central and state governments are capping the rate at which medicines and other facilities should be made available to people, vaccines should also be moderately priced.

— Arvind
Kejriwal
Delhi CM

ITBP Covid centre with 500 oxygen-beds starts in Delhi

New Delhi, April 26: A Covid care centre with 500 oxygen-supported beds run by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) began functioning in Delhi from Monday with the admission of at least 110 patients, officials said. The facility named Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel Covid Care Centre (SPCCC) has been opened in view of Delhi registering a sharp rise in coronavirus cases, shortage of oxygen beds and its healthcare system creaking under the pressure. The facility is located at the Radha Soami Beas campus in Chhattarpur area of south Delhi.

The border guarding force has been designated by the Union home ministry as the nodal agency to run it. "The SPCCC has started functioning. About 110 patients have been admitted till now," ITBP spokesperson Vivek Kumar Pandey said.

According to the laid out procedure, there will be



Patients get free oxygen, provided by a Sikh organisation, at Indrapuram Gurdwara in Ghaziabad on Monday.

— PTI

no walk-in admissions to the centre. Admission at this centre will be made after approval by district surveillance officers in Delhi. The ITBP has said that treatment at this centre will be free of cost.

Officials and eyewitnesses said a number of patients whose oxygen levels were fluctuating had voluntarily queued up outside the facility in

hope of getting admission.

"The standard operating procedure says only DSOs can approve the admissions at this centre. This is a cumbersome step for a patient who is gasping for breath. The admissions should be done like in normal hospitals after ascertaining the patient's condition," a volunteer coordinating admission for

ITBP deputy inspector general (DIG) D.K. Goyal told reporters at the facility that the SOPs state that patients whose oxygen saturation level is 85 or above will be admitted to the facility as it a Covid care centre and not a hospital.

Another official manning the SPCCC said admitted patients who require intensive or better medical care will be referred to the GTB and Safdarjung hospitals from here.

Officials said the SPCCC at present only had oxygen beds and no ICU and ventilator facilities. Videos and photos provided by the force showed ambulances bringing in patients who were admitted after preliminary checkup conducted by ITBP doctors and paramedical staff under a tented canopy in the porch.

Covid patients in Delhi, including at this centre, said.

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— PTI

HC: Take steps to curb oxygen cylinders' black-marketing

New Delhi, April 26: The Delhi high court on Monday took strong note of black-marketing of oxygen cylinders, reportedly being sold at ₹1 lakh per unit in the national capital for treating seriously ill Covid-19 patients, and asked the AAP government to take action against those indulging in it, saying distribution of gas cylinders is "your baby."

With regard to distribution of oxygen cylinders, there is a major issue in Delhi, the high court said while sharing the incident of a senior advocate who had personally informed the judge that people were demanding ₹1 lakh per oxygen cylinder.

"Oxygen cylinder distribution is your (Delhi government) baby. You have powers, exercise them. If someone is engaging in black-marketing, take action. They need to be taken to task. Bring them before us and we will take action," a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said during a three-and-a-half-hour long hearing on escalating oxygen crisis in various hospitals in Delhi.

The court was informed by the Delhi government counsel that refillers of oxygen cylinders were not providing details of supplies and refills.

The court also directed that refillers have to comply with its earlier order to provide details of the deliveries made by them to hospitals and others, failing which it shall be compelled to take strict action against them.

It also asked the Delhi Chief Secretary, who was present at the hearing, to hold a meeting with oxygen suppliers, refillers and hospitals during the day to work out a distribution plan.

The court was hearing various petitions by Maharaja Agrasen Hospital, Jaipur Golden Hospital, Batra Hospital, Shanti Mukund Hospital and Saroj Super Speciality Hospital here among others over shortage of oxygen for treating seriously ill Covid patients.

It was also hearing a petition of advocate Rakesh Malhotra related to COVID-19 testings and infrastructure, which was revived by the high court itself on April 19, in view



Relatives of Covid-19 patients wait to refill cylinders with medical oxygen at Naraina in New Delhi on Monday.

— PTI

Delhi hospitals' struggle for oxygen continues

New Delhi, April 26: Hospitals in the national capital continued to grapple with a shortage of oxygen, saying they are still operating on the "beg and borrow" mode, while three of them also raised the issue before the Delhi High Court on Monday, stating they were not receiving enough supplies.

Sources at the elite Sir Ganga Ram Hospital said in the morning they had been waiting for three days to refill their oxygen cylinders, used for transporting critically ill Covid patients. The hospital received 64 refilled cylinders around 4.20 pm.

The Jaipur Golden Hospital in Rohini took to social media, posting at 12 noon that they were still awaiting their supplies. Bansal Hospital, where 40 Covid-19 patients are admitted, received the sup-

ply in the nick of time, said Delhi Police officials who arranged the cylinders. SOS calls were also raised by Tuli Multispeciality Hospital in Shahdra and Irene Hospital in Kalkaji.

"The hospital has 104 oxygen cylinders which are used while moving extremely sick Covid patients in case of emergency which is happening quite frequently now. All the cylinders were sent three days ago to different locations for emergency refill. For the last three days, our staff is camping there but to no avail," said an official at Ganga Ram Hospital. The official added the elite hospital is on "beg and borrow" mode. The hospital later confirmed they received 64 refilled cylinders and also 10 tonnes of liquid oxygen during the day. — PTI

of surge in cases.

During the hearing, the court was informed by INOX, major supplier of oxygen to Delhi, that some of its tankers on their way to the national capital have been stopped by the Rajasthan government and were yet to be released.

Obstructing cryogenic tankers carrying medical oxygen for Covid-19 patients will tantamount to endangering human lives, the bench said, pointing out that the Rajasthan government must honour the orders not to cause any hindrance in transportation of the gas to other states.

We hope and expect the

State of Rajasthan to honour the orders passed by the court and the Central government. An obstruction in the matter of liquid oxygen at this stage will tantamount to endangering hundreds of human lives. It will serve no purpose to anyone to obstruct, the bench said, adding that the stoppage of tankers will have a snowballing effect.

The two judges, who have been conducting marathon proceedings on the oxygen crisis almost on a daily basis since April 19, including on holidays, said they wish they could save each and every life being lost due to coronavirus. — PTI



Meals being prepared at Bangla Sahib Gurudwara in New Delhi on Monday for Covid-19 patients quarantined at home.

— PTI

Delhi govt to DMs: Form STF to stop black-marketing of life-saving drugs

New Delhi, April 26: The Delhi government has directed all district magistrates to constitute a 'Special Task Force' to take strict action against those involved in hoarding and black-marketing of life-saving drugs which are used for treating coronavirus patients. Chief Secretary Vijay Dev, in an order, said drugs controllers will also constitute sufficient number of teams on urgent basis for inspecting, checking, raiding and stopping the manufacturing and supply of spurious drugs. Dev, who is also the chairman of DDMA's state executive committee, directed officers concerned to submit a daily action-taken report.

Dev, who is also the chairman of DDMA's state executive committee, directed officers concerned to submit a daily action-taken report.

On Sunday, Delhi recorded 350 Covid-19 deaths and 22,933 cases with a

348 on Friday and 306 on Thursday, according to government data.

"All district magistrates shall also constitute a Special Task Force with the help and assistance of their counterpart district DCPs, the chief secretary said in the order issued on Sunday.

"This Special Task Force shall be primarily responsible for inspecting, checking, raiding and stopping the manufacturing and supply of spurious life-saving drugs and also to prevent the black marketing and hoarding of all life-saving drugs which are used for treating COVID-19 patients," he added.

All district magistrates and DCPs will issue necessary directives to all field functionaries and 'Special Task Force' for taking

positivity rate of 30.21 per cent. This was the fourth day on the trot that the city had recorded over 300 fatalities due to coronavirus.

It had reported 357 fatalities, the highest so far since the pandemic began a year ago, on Saturday,

strictest action against the blackmarketeers, hoarders and manufacturers and suppliers of spurious drugs, Dev said.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced that the Delhi government will provide free COVID-19 vaccines to all those above 18 years of age in the national capital for which purchase of 1.34 crore doses has been approved.

Vaccinations will be open for all adults from Saturday.

The government will make efforts to speed up vaccine purchase and administer it to the people, Kejriwal said in an online briefing.

Free vaccines will be provided at the Delhi government-run centres in the national capital.

— PTI

Black-marketing of Remdesivir: 5 held in Delhi

New Delhi, April 26: Five people have been arrested from different parts of Delhi for their alleged involvement in black-marketing of Remdesivir injection amid its heightened demand due to surging coronavirus cases, police said. The first set of arrests was made in south Delhi, where three people were nabbed, while two more were taken into custody in west Delhi, they said.

The three arrested in south Delhi have been identified as Likhit Gupta (30), a resident of Patparganj, Akash Verma (23), who lives in Daryaganj, and Anuj Jain (40), a resident of Geeta Colony, they said.

On Sunday, police nabbed Gurpreet Singh (29), a resident of Tilak Nagar, and Anuj Jaiswal (30), a resident of Geeta Colony. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Covid-19: Thailand restricts India travel

New Delhi: Thailand has decided to restrict entry of travellers from India in view of the coronavirus crisis. India on Monday reported 3,52,991 new infections, the fifth straight day to record three lakh-plus cases. The embassy of Thailand in Delhi said in a statement that certificates of entry (COEs) issued to non-Thai nationals to enter the country from India with the arrival date from May 1 will be cancelled. "The issuance of COEs for non-Thai nationals who will be arriving in Thailand from India from May 1 onwards will be suspended until further notice," it said. Earlier, the embassy announced that it would arranged flights from New Delhi to Bangkok on May 1, May 15 and May 22. The Embassy in its latest statement said it will not accommodate non-Thai nationals on the flights to Bangkok on May 1, May 15 and May 22. — PTI

Assam rules out imposing lockdown

Guwahati: Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma here on Monday said that there will be no shortage of oxygen, ICU and isolation beds in the state for next 10 days and in between state has started augmenting its resources to face any eventuality due to pandemic. Pointing out that the state government has made arrangements to import oxygen from neighbouring Bhutan also, Mr Sarma told reporters that the oxygen production capacity of the state has reached to 61 MT per day while storage capacity has already been expanded to 468 MT. Informing that they are going to operationalise three more oxygen plants soon he said that there will be no shortage of Remdesivir too as he requested drug manufacturer Sun Pharma to expedite the production at its Palasbari plant to 80,000 vials per week.

648 cops test +ve for Covid in U'khand

Dehradun: As many as 684 Uttarakhand Police personnel have tested positive for coronavirus in recent days, an official said on Monday. Director general of Police Ashok Kumar said of them, only one policewoman is in critical condition. The policewoman could not be given coronavirus vaccine as she is pregnant, Mr Kumar said. The DGP claimed that the police force is largely safe amid the second wave of this pandemic. "Ninety per cent of our police personnel have received both doses of coronavirus vaccine," he said. The DGP said 1,981 police personnel had contracted the infection before the vaccination programme was launched. Of them, 100 were admitted to hospitals and seven had died, the DGP said. — PTI

Japan alarmed over China sea moves

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

In a "summit telephone talk" with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday that lasted 25 minutes, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga "expressed serious concerns about China's continued and strengthened unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East and South China Seas, including the Coast Guard Law". The reference to China was made in a statement on the telephone

talk released by Japan but there was no reference to it in a separate statement on the conversation that was released by New Delhi. The Japanese statement reflects increasing alarm in Japan over Chinese strategic intent, with a reiteration of the concerns first raised by PM Suga when he earlier spoke to PM Modi last month. "The two leaders confirmed the importance of Japan-India bilateral cooperation and multilateral cooperation, including Japan-Australia-India-U.S. quadrilateral cooperation, towards real-

izing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. They also shared the view to continue their effort on building a rules-based free and open international order," Japan said.

The Japanese foreign ministry further said, "Prime Minister Suga stated that he hopes to further develop cooperation in areas such as cyber, digital, decarbonization, health care and connectivity, and also mentioned possible collaboration in such fields as 5G, submarine cables, strengthening of industrial

competitiveness, diversification of supply chain, development of India's North Eastern Region and the Specified Skilled Worker system." Japan added, "The two leaders welcomed the steady progress on the high-speed rail project including the 12th Joint Committee Meeting on the Project for the Construction of Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail, and affirmed their intention to keep advancing Japan-India cooperation in various fields."

Noted Hindi litterateur Ahtesham dies of Covid

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, APRIL 26

Manzoor Ahtesham, whose works depicting the lives of Indian Muslims in independent India have received wide acclaim, died of Covid-19 early on Monday morning. He was 73 and is survived by his two daughters. Ironically, the title of the writer's maiden work *Ramazan Mein Ek Maut*, a short story anthology published in 1973, has proved apocalyptic as he passed away in the holy month of Ramzan. Born on April 3, 1948 in Bhopal, late Ahtesham was a product of Aligarh Muslim University.



Manzoor Ahtesham

His family wanted him to be an engineer. But, he had defied his family's wishes by choosing to be a writer. He has written many short stories, novels and dramas enriching Hindi and Urdu literature. His short story compilations titled *Tashbih*, and *Tamasha Tatha Anya Kahaniyan*, have been widely acclaimed in the Hindi literature world. His novels, *Dastan E Laapata*, *Kuch Din Aur*, *Sukha Bargad Basharat Manzil* and *Pahar Dhalte* have earned him a glorious place in the Hindi literature world.

'Time to start wearing masks inside homes'

It will prevent Covid spread in the family: Niti Aayog

New Delhi, April 26: As a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic rips through the country, the government on Monday said it is time people start wearing masks inside their homes as well, and refrain from inviting guests.

Addressing a press conference here, Niti Aayog member (Health) Dr V.K. Paul said if there is a Covid-positive person inside the house, he or she must wear the mask so as to prevent other family members from getting infected.

"Rather, I'll say that the time has come that we start wearing masks even otherwise inside our homes. We used to talk about wearing it outside homes, but the way the infection has spread, it will be better if we wear mask inside our homes if we are sitting with someone," he said.

"But, definitely, if there is a Covid-19 positive person, that person must wear the mask and others inside the house also must wear a mask and the positive person should be kept in a different room," Paul underlined.

He added that people should also avoid stepping out of their home unnecessarily and not invite guests at home. He also suggested if the house lacks such facilities for isolation, then people may go to isolation centres, known as corona care centres.

Getting admitted to a hospital is not the only option, Paul said. "Hospital beds are used for the needy people."

Highlighting the importance of vaccination, Paul said, "We cannot let the pace of Covid-19 vaccination decline or slacken in the face of the emerging situation. In fact, it should be escalated and with that intent the government of India brought a revised (vaccination) policy. We believe and are confident that will bring in more acceleration," he said. AIIMS director Dr Randeep Guleria, who also addressed the press conference, sought greater community participation to ensure optimal utilisation of hospital facilities. "We see now there is unnecessary panic among people which is causing more harm than good. Those who test positive even if their oxygen saturation levels are normal and have mild symptoms, they also want to get admitted. "It is causing a lot of rush outside hospitals and suffering to genuine patients as they do not get proper treatment. Also, hoarding of drugs at homes is causing unnecessary shortage of essential drugs in markets and also leads to misuse of drugs," he said. Underlining the importance of oxygen in the treatment strategy for Covid-19 patients, Dr Guleria said its misuse must be avoided. — PTI

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HC: Everyone must carry Aadhaar, mask

SHAHAB ANSARI
MUMBAI, APRIL 26

Aurangabad bench of the Bombay high court on Monday said that citizens should practice restraint and discipline during this Covid pandemic before blaming the government. The court reminded citizens of their responsibilities like not venturing out without any valid reason and wearing masks while stepping out of their homes. A division bench of Justice Ravindra Ghuge and Justice B.U. Debadwar said this while hearing a suo moto (on its own) public interest litigation on the issues like lack of oxygen, Remdesivir injections and people not following lockdown restrictions etc. The court had taken cognisance of such issues last week.

Online registration must to enter HP

Shimla: Online registration has been made mandatory from Tuesday midnight for people wanting to enter Himachal Pradesh, a state government notification said. The order was issued on Sunday by the state health secretary under the HP Epidemic Disease (Covid-19) Regulations, 2020.

All people desirous of entering the state shall register themselves online and details of their arrival will be shared with all concerned for the purpose of quarantine requirement and contact tracing, the order said. — PTI



A boy dives the water to beat the afternoon heat at Cuff Parade in Mumbai on Monday.

— PTI

Retired medical personnel recalled to fight crisis: CDS

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

Prime minister Narendra Modi on Monday reviewed with Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat the preparations and operations undertaken by the Armed forces to assist in Covid-19 situation in the country.

CDS briefed the PM that all medical personnel from armed forces who have retired or taken pre-mature retirement in the last 2 years are being recalled to work in Covid facilities within proximity of their present place of residence. Other medical officers who retired earlier have also been requested to make their services available for consultation through medical emergency help lines.

Prime Minister was also informed that all medical officers on staff appointments at Command

▶ **THE CDS** informed the PM that nursing personnel are being employed in large numbers to complement the doctors at the hospitals. He also said that oxygen cylinders available with armed forces in various establishments will be released for hospitals.

Headquarters (HQ), Corps HQ, Division HQ and similar HQ of Navy and Air Force will be employed at hospitals.

The CDS informed the PM that nursing personnel are being employed in large numbers to complement the doctors at the hospitals. CDS said that oxygen cylinders available with armed forces in various establishments will be released for hospitals.

The CDS also said that they are creating medical facilities in large numbers and where possible mili-

tary medical infrastructure will be made available to civilians. PM also reviewed the operations being undertaken by IAF to transport oxygen and other essentials in India and abroad.

Indian Air Force's C17 transport aircraft on Monday airlifted 6 empty cryogenic oxygen containers from Dubai. It will lift another 6 containers from Dubai on Tuesday.

On Saturday, IAF had airlifted 4 containers of cryogenic oxygen tanks from Changi International Airport, Singapore.

Prime Minister also discussed with the CDS that Kendriya and Rajya Sainik Welfare Boards and Officers posted in various headquarters in veterans cells may be instructed to coordinate the services of veterans to extend the reach to maximum extent possible including in remote areas.

New 524 deaths push overall casualty toll to 65,284 Covid cases drop to 48,700 in Maha

Mumbai, April 26: The daily number of Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra dropped to 48,700 on Monday, taking the count of infections to 43,43,727 while 524 deaths pushed the toll to 65,284, the state health department said. Maharashtra had reported the lowest number of infections in this month so

far on April 1 (43,183 cases). On April 2, the state had added 47,827 infections.

With 2,22,475 new tests on Monday, the number of samples tested so far in Maharashtra rose to 2,59,72,018, the department said. "Maharashtra has been seeing the daily spike of

around 60,000 cases in the last two months. The state had reported the highest number of 68,631 cases in a day on April 18. In the last one week, there has been no significant rise in the number of daily cases. In the last six days, 4,42,466 patients have recovered and discharged," state health

minister Rajesh Tope said. On Monday, 71,736 patients recovered from Covid-19, including 13,674 recoveries from Pune, which is the highest such number in the state, he added. The health department said 36,01,796 people have recovered so far in Maharashtra. — PTI

SUMMER SPECIAL TRAINS

For the convenience of passengers, Railways have decided to run following Summer Special fully reserved Trains (Single Side Trips) as per schedule given below :-

04474 Delhi Jn. - Muzaffarpur Jn. Summer Special Express		1 Trip
STATIONS		Train No. 04474
		Arrival Departure
Delhi Jn.	↓	-- 23:00
Muzaffarpur Jn.		21:00 --

Day of run : 04474 Ex. Delhi Jn. on 27.04.2021 (Tuesday)
Stoppages : Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Lucknow NR, Barabanki Jn., Gonda Jn., Mankapur Jn., Babhan, Basti, Khalilabad, Gorakhpur Jn., Deoria Sadar, Bhatni Jn., Bhatpar Rani, Mairwa, Siwan Jn., Chhapra & Hajipur Jn. Stations.
Accommodation : AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

04476 New Delhi - Bhagalpur Jn. Summer Special Express		1 Trip
STATIONS		Train No. 04476
		Arrival Departure
New Delhi	↓	-- 23:55
Bhagalpur Jn.		21:30 --

Day of run : 04476 Ex. New Delhi on 27.04.2021 (Tuesday)
Stoppages : Kanpur Central, Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Patna Jn., Patna Sahab, Fatuha, Bakhtiyarpur Jn., Barh, Mokama Jn., Hathidah Jn., Luckeesarai Jn., Kiul, Kajra, Abhaipur, Dharhara, Jamalpur Jn., Bariaipur & Sultanganj Stations.
Accommodation : AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

04478 Delhi Jn. - Saharsa Jn. Summer Special Express		1 Trip
STATIONS		Train No. 04478
		Arrival Departure
Delhi Jn.	↓	-- 23:00
Saharsa Jn.		01:00 --

Day of run : 04478 Ex. Delhi Jn. on 28.04.2021 (Wednesday)
Stoppages : Hapur, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Lucknow NR, Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Deoria Sadar, Bhatni Jn., Siwan Jn., Chhapra, Sonpur Jn., Hajipur Jn., Shahpur Patori, Barauni Jn., Begusarai, Khagaria Jn., Mansi Jn. & Simri Bakhtiyarpur Stations.
Accommodation : AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

04480 New Delhi - Jaynagar Summer Special Express		1 Trip
STATIONS		Train No. 04480
		Arrival Departure
New Delhi	↓	-- 23:55
Jaynagar		05:15 --

Day of run : 04480 Ex. New Delhi on 29.04.2021 (Thursday)
Stoppages : Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Hapur, Alamnagar, Lucknow NR, Barabanki Jn., Rudauli, Faizabad Jn., Ayodhya, Goshinganj, Akbarpur, Shahganj Jn., Jaunpur Jn., Varanasi Jn., Varanasi City, Aunrihar Jn., Ghazipur City, Yusufpur, Ballia, Suraimanpur, Chhapra, Dighwara, Hajipur Jn., Muzaffarpur Jn., Samastipur Jn., Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn. & Madhubani Stations.
Accommodation : AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

04482 Delhi Jn. - Sitamarhi Summer Special Express		1 Trip
STATIONS		Train No. 04482
		Arrival Departure
Delhi Jn.	↓	-- 23:00
Sitamarhi		02:10 --

Day of run : 04482 Ex. Delhi Jn. on 29.04.2021 (Thursday)
Stoppages : Pilkhuwa, Hapur, Amroha, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Hardoi, Alamnagar, Lucknow NR, Barabanki Jn., Rudauli, Faizabad Jn., Ayodhya, Goshinganj, Akbarpur, Shahganj Jn., Jaunpur Jn., Varanasi Jn., Varanasi City, Aunrihar Jn., Ghazipur City, Yusufpur, Ballia, Suraimanpur, Chhapra, Dighwara, Hajipur Jn. & Muzaffarpur Jn. Stations.
Accommodation : AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

04484 New Delhi - Darbhanga Jn. Summer Special Express		1 Trip
STATIONS		Train No. 04484
		Arrival Departure
New Delhi	↓	-- 23:55
Darbhanga Jn.		23:00 --

Day of run : 04484 Ex. New Delhi on 30.04.2021 (Friday)
Stoppages : Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Lucknow NR, Barabanki Jn., Gonda Jn., Mankapur Jn., Babhan, Basti, Khalilabad, Gorakhpur Jn., Deoria Sadar, Bhatni Jn., Bhatpar Rani, Mairwa, Siwan Jn., Chhapra, Hajipur Jn., Muzaffarpur Jn., Dholi, Samastipur, Hayaghat & Laheria Sarai Stations.
Accommodation : AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

04486 Delhi Jn. - Katihar Jn. Summer Special Express		1 Trip
STATIONS		Train No. 04486
		Arrival Departure
Delhi Jn.	↓	-- 23:00
Katihar Jn.		04:00 --

Day of run : 04486 Ex. Delhi Jn. on 30.04.2021 (Friday)
Stoppages : Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Lucknow NR, Barabanki Jn., Gonda Jn., Mankapur Jn., Babhan, Basti, Khalilabad, Gorakhpur Jn., Deoria Sadar, Bhatni Jn., Bhatpar Rani, Mairwa, Siwan Jn., Chhapra, Hajipur Jn., Muzaffarpur Jn., Samastipur, Dalsingh Sarai, Barauni Jn., Begusarai, Khagaria Jn., Mansi Jn., Thana Bihpur Jn. & Naugachia Stations.
Accommodation : AC 3 Tier, Sleeper & Reserved Second Seating.

For any kind of information such as arrival/departure timings and stoppages enroute, the passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

Note: All norms of the State and Central Government regarding COVID-19 including Social distancing, sanitization etc., may be followed in the trains and at the Railway stations. All other precautions associated with COVID-19 should also be ensured.

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SHORT TAKES

Rahul demands free Covid vaccine for all

New Delhi: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday said all citizens should get Covid vaccines for free and the country should not be made a "victim of the BJP's system". India's vaccination campaign is all set to get a major boost from May 1 when everyone above the age of 18 will be eligible for vaccine. "Enough of discussion. All citizens of the country should get vaccine for free. Don't make India a victim of the BJP's system," he said in a tweet in Hindi. Mr Gandhi and the Congress have been asking for free vaccination of all. The party has also criticised the government's vaccination policy and the handling of the Covid situation in the country. Maharashtra, which is leading in the number of cases and deaths in the country, Gujarat, Odisha and Rajasthan has said they will provide free vaccination to all, joining several other states. — PTI

MP farmer donates ₹2L to buy oxygen

Neemuch: Moved by the plight of Covid patients and the growing scramble for medical oxygen, a farmer from Neemuch district in Madhya Pradesh has donated ₹2 lakh he had set aside for his daughter's lavish marriage to the local administration for buying the life-saving gas. Champalal Gurjar, who hails from Gwal Deviyar village, has handed over a cheque of ₹2 lakh to district collector Mayank Agrawal for buying two cylinders of medical oxygen one for the district hospital and another for Jeeran Tehsil where he lives. Gurjar, who survives on farming, said he raised his daughter Anita with great care and wished that her marriage, which took place on Sunday, was a grand ceremony. However, the pandemic situation made Gurjar change his mind at the last moment. — PTI

Former BJD MP dies of Covid-19

Bhubaneswar: Former Lok Sabha member from Phulbani, Sugrib Singh, died of Covid-19 infection on Monday, his relatives informed on Monday. He was 57. Singh was admitted to a private hospital in Bhubaneswar on Saturday and succumbed to the virus on Monday morning while undergoing treatment, said his brother-in-law Philiman Nayak. "We are heartbroken by his sudden and untimely demise. He was elected from Phulbani parliamentary constituency in 2004 and worked for the betterment of the society," Nayak added. The former parliamentarian started his career as a journalist and then stepped into politics. He became the chairman of Phulbani Notified Area Council (NAC) and then elected as a Lok Sabha member in 2004 on a BJD ticket.

Centre asks Bharat Biotech and Serum India to lower prices

■ **Continued from Page 1** to cremate the Covid-19 patients too is getting as harrowing and long as it is to get those alive but gasping for oxygen admitted to hospitals. Crematoriums in Delhi and many other states are functioning beyond their capacity, non-stop and makeshift arrangements have been made in several crematoriums for the last rites of the dead.

As surge continues to swallow people, several patients are now driving out of Delhi to get patients admitted in any hospital that has oxygen. From Delhi, people are driving as far as Chandigarh and as close as Meerut in search of ICU and oxygen beds as Delhi hospitals are packed to the brim and many are facing acute shortage of medical oxygen.

Officials of the Union health ministry, however, says there is "unnecessary panic".

"We see now there is unnecessary panic among people which is causing more harm than good. Those who test positive even if their oxygen saturation levels are normal and have mild symptoms, they also want to get admitted. It is causing a lot of rush outside hospitals and suffering to genuine patients as they do not get proper treatment. Also, hoarding of drugs at homes is causing unnecessary shortage of essential drugs in markets and also leads to misuse of drugs," said Dr Randeep Guleria, director AIIMS-Delhi.

Mamata welcomes Madras HC order

Demands withdrawal of Central forces from Bengal

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, APRIL 26

Welcoming the Madras high court's severe reprimand to the EC for the spike in Covid-19 cases during the Assembly election, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, on Monday, appealed to the country's judiciary to put its lens on the EC and demanded the withdrawal of the Central paramilitary forces in the last phase of the polls to curb the spread of the infection in the state.

Emboldened by the Madras HC's stinging remarks on the Central poll panel, the Trinamul Congress supremo also squarely held the EC and the Central forces responsible for the explosion in Covid cases in her last poll campaign rally in North Kolkata since it was also the last day of campaign for the eighth and last phase of the polls.

She said, "This EC can do anything and everything. We have to fight against it for our place. We are not getting the benefits of Raj Dharm of the EC. We welcome the ruling of the Madras HC. Let each and every court scrutinise the EC's role. We also urge the



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee flashes victory sign after casting her vote at a polling booth during the 7th phase of West Bengal state Assembly polls at a polling station in Kolkata on Monday.

— PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Supreme Court to look into how it helped in the growth of Covid-19 cases by scheduling the polls in eight phases, ignoring a scope of clubbing them." The state reported 15,992 fresh Covid-19 cases with 68 more deaths in the last 24 hours.

Ms Banerjee further lambasted the EC for pulling her up for her provocative remarks instead of show-causing either Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Union home minister Amit Shah despite their controversial comments in their rallies. She once again made it clear that

she would take legal steps against the Central poll panel, undeterred by its rebuttal of her claims of vindictive stance.

She also reiterated that her party would be back in power for the third consecutive term in the state with a "comfortable majority."

She observed, "BJP will suffer a crushing defeat. The EC will put some seats in the pockets of BJP. We know of these. This will help the BJP to cross 70 seats in its tally. But it will not get more than 75-80 seats. We will get a comfortable majority by crossing the target of 200 seats."

Health expert says Covid in 'plateau' stage in Odisha

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 26

As Odisha consistently logs over 6,000 cases daily, the case graph seems to have hit a plateau in the last few days. This is what the state director of medical education and training (DMET) Dr CBK Mohanty told reporters on Monday.

"Since the daily cases in Odisha are found stable at a particular level – above 6,000 and below 6,500 – for a few days now, it could be interpreted as a plateau phase. The number of such periods is expected to decline in the upcoming days," Dr CBK Mohanty said.

However, the top health official said that nothing can be assumed specifically now.

On April 22, the state recorded 6,164 cases while 6,215 persons were found infected with coronavirus the next day. On April 24, 25 and 26, the state recorded 6,647, 6,116 and 6,599 new cases, respectively.

HC: Citizens should show discipline amid Covid surge before blaming 'Adhere to norms, then blame govt'

Mumbai, April 26: Citizens should practice restraint and discipline amid the surge in Covid cases before blaming the government, the Auranga bad bench of Bombay high court said on Monday while passing several directions on the pandemic. A division bench of Justices Ravindra Ghuge and B.U. Debadwar directed that all persons, including public servants not on duty and doctors and paramedical staff, carry their Aadhaar cards while stepping out of their homes and also wear masks.

"We as citizens should show some loyalty to our place and sensibility before blaming the government. Residents need to practice restraint and discipline," Justice Ghuge said.

The court noted that schemes and systems are good but it is humans who destroy them and make

K'taka announces 'close down' across the state for 14 days

Bengaluru, April 26: The Karnataka government on Monday announced what it termed as a 'close down' across the state for 14 days from Tuesday night in a bid to control the huge spike in Covid cases in the state. The state cabinet led by chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa also decided to provide Covid vaccinations free of cost at government hospitals for those between 18-44 years of age.

them rotten. "We see youngsters, girls and boys, loitering outside without any purpose. People are travelling on bikes on triples and sometimes even four persons without helmets and masks," the court said.

The court said any per-

"Strict measures to control Covid will be taken. From tomorrow night till the next 14 days, there will be a close down for the whole state," Mr Yediyurappa said.

Speaking to reporters after a three hour long cabinet meeting here, he said shops selling essential commodities will be allowed to remain open only from 6 am to 10 am.

— PTI

son stepping outside shall have to wear a mask covering their nose and mouth.

"Wearing a mask below the chin or exposing their mouth or chin shall also be booked as such people often turn out to be super-spreaders of coronavirus,"

Assam: Constable held in ONGC abduction case

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, APRIL 26

In a significant development in three ONGC employee abduction case, Assam police on Monday arrested a police constable who is alleged to have helped the outlawed Ulfa-I rebels in the kidnapping of three ONGC employees on April 21 from Upper Assam's Sibsagar district.

Constable Basanta Boragohain, of 25 Assam Police Battalion was arrested from Sadiya on Monday. He was in charge of the security of the ONGC rig site at Lakwa field in Sivasagar on the day of the abduction.

Indicating that the police constable was in touch with Ulfa-I rebels and helped them in abducting the ONGC employees, police said that they have already apprehended three persons who were directly involved in the incident

the link points.

On Friday, in a joint operation, the Army and Nagaland police with the help of local Naga villagers had rescued two ONGC captives – Mohini Mohan Gogoi and Alakesh Saikia from Mon district in Nagaland.

The third employee, Ritul Saikia, however, could not be rescued.

Meanwhile, security sources feared that one of three abducted ONGC employees who is yet to be rescued was in the custody of another group of Ulfa-I rebels who might have succeeded in crossing over to Myanmar.

Asserting that security forces are leaving no stone

turned to rescue the third ONGC employee Ritul Saikia also, security sources said that security forces have got some inputs about the Ulfa-I rebels involved in the incident and operations have been launched to bust all

No celebrations in Kerala on counting day

GILVESTER ASSARY
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 26

The political parties in Kerala have decided not to organise victory celebrations on May 2 when the counting of votes takes place for the recently concluded assembly elections.

The decision was taken at the all-party meeting presided over by chief minister Mr Pinarayi Vijayan here on Monday.

The representatives of political parties unanimously decided to direct their workers and supporters to stay away from counting centres on the

counting day. No victory processions, car and bike rallies would be taken out on May 2. There will be no public reception for victorious candidates. Counting centres would be out of bounds for the public.

Only poll officials, representatives of political parties (limited number) and media persons would be allowed at the counting centres. Those entering counting centres will have to carry negative reports of RTPCR tests taken 72 hours before the counting.

The all-party meeting endorsed the Government's view that the current situation does

not call for a total lockdown. The representatives of the political parties felt that a total shutdown would adversely affect the people. Instead, the government would go for a strict form of restrictions in areas where the infection rate is high.

The other decisions taken at the all-party meeting; a maximum of 50 persons to be allowed at the wedding ceremony, 20 persons at funerals, maximum of 50 persons in mosques for prayers during Ramadan,

people going to offer prayers should carry their own mats, use water only from pipes and avoid the

usual serving of food and refreshments after prayers.

In government offices, only 50 per cent of staff would be allowed on the basis of the rotation system to be finalised by the departments concerned.

The meeting decided to continue with the weekend lockdown. The leader of the opposition cautioned about a possible shortage of blood in blood banks, as people are reluctant to donate in view of the pandemic.

The chief minister has appealed to those between the ages of 18 and 45 to donate blood as part of a special drive.

Modi calls up Biden, US promises supplies to help India beat Covid

■ **Continued from Page 1**

India had last month appealed to the US to ensure smooth supply of vaccine raw materials as it struggles with a second ferocious wave of Covid. Earlier in the day, President Biden had tweeted, "Just as India sent assistance to the United States as our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic, we are determined to help India in its time of need." On Monday, 318 Philips Oxygen Concentrators were transported from New York to New Delhi on an Air India flight.

About his conversation

with President Biden, PM Modi tweeted, "Had a fruitful conversation with @POTUS @JoeBiden today. We discussed the evolving Covid situation in both countries in detail. I thanked President Biden for the support being provided by the United States to India. My discussion with @POTUS @JoeBiden also underscored the importance of smooth and efficient supply chains of vaccine raw materials and medicines. India-US healthcare partnership can address the global challenge of coronavirus pandemic."

In a statement, the White House said, "President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., pledged America's steadfast support for the people of India who have been impacted by the recent surge in Covid-19 cases. In response, the US is providing a range of emergency assistance, including oxygen-related supplies, vaccine materials, and therapeutics... The two leaders resolved that the United States and India will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder in the effort to protect our citizens and the health of our communities."

Nomadland makes Oscar history

■ **Continued from Page 1** The Father. The actor stars opposite Olivia Colman in the movie.

It was a surprise win for the actor as many expected the trophy to go to Chadwick Boseman for his turn in May Rainey's Black Bottom.

The India connection came through with the Academy honouring actor Irrfan Khan and costume designer Bhanu Athaiya in its "In Memoriam" segment.

The night clearly belonged to Zhao and Nomadland, a front-runner for the awards

from the beginning. Zhao, who moved to the US from China as a teenager, is the first woman of colour and the only second woman after Kathryn Bigelow's 2010 win for The Hurt Locker to win the best director trophy.

"This is for anyone who has the faith and the courage to hold on to the goodness in themselves and to hold on to the goodness in other no matter how difficult it is to do that, the 39-year-old director said in her acceptance speech. "I have always found goodness in the people I've

met everywhere I went in the world," she added.

The film's star and producer McDormand struck a chord with her speech in a year that has seen theatres remain shut as people across the globe struggled with the coronavirus pandemic.

"One day very, very soon, take everyone you know into a theatre, shoulder to shoulder, in that dark space, and watch every film that's represented here tonight," McDormand said in her speech. — PTI

Madras HC: EC 'should be charged with murder'

■ **Continued from Page 1**

distancing norms before any counting begins or continued. The state health secretary and director of public health should be consulted by the EC and the officer responsible in the state to put appropriate measures in place immediately." The court listed the case for the next hearing on April 30, and the EC's blueprint must be placed on record before that, it ordered.

Earlier, the Calcutta high court had expressed dissatisfaction with the EC over the enforcement of Covid-19 health safety norms in the ongoing West Bengal Assembly election process, including campaigning. On April 22, hearing three PILs seeking enforcement of Covid protocols in the polls, a division bench headed by Chief Justice T.B.N. Radhakrishnan had said issuance of circulars and holding meetings on Covid safety were not enough.

It later directed the authorities to make the people of Bengal abide by the restrictions imposed by the EC on public behaviour regarding the protective protocol.

'NCP trying to take all credit for free vaccines'

■ **Continued from Page 1** right. We had discussions with CM. The CM should declare about free vaccines. Some people are trying to take personal and political credit."

State environment minister and Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray too made an announcement on Twitter but deleted the tweet later, leading to further confusion.

"The Govt of Maharashtra has decided to vaccinate its citizens free of cost. This is not something that we think of as a choice, but as a duty that we consider of

■ **STATE ENVIRONMENT** minister and Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray too made an announcement on Twitter but deleted the tweet later, leading to further confusion.

utmost importance: protecting the citizens from covid," Mr Thackeray tweeted.

However, he later deleted the tweet saying he did so "to not cause confusion regarding the official vaccination policy of Maharashtra."

"The official policy of vaccination will be

declared by the empowered committee and we must await its recommendation for a fair policy for all sections of society," said Mr Thackeray.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut said the state government will take a decision on providing free vaccines to citizens. "The Maha Vikas Aghadi government is taking all steps to save each life. Chief minister Uddhav Thackeray and the state's entire Cabinet are working hard to fight the pandemic. They are fighting for oxygen, ventilators and beds," he said.

Bengal records 75% voting

■ **Continued from Page 1** worker so much that he had to be admitted at Nabagram Hospital.

Later the CM, while lashing out at the Central forces over its excessive use of force, said, "We will lodge an FIR against the CRPF in these incidents." In Farakka, an aged TMC worker, Janmejy Mondal, was injured in an attack by

the BJP workers armed with sharp-cutting weapons. He was admitted at the Farakka Hospital.

Murshidabad Congress candidate Niyazuddin Sheikh was caught by the TMC workers distributing money hidden in masks at a booth in Gudhia High School. But Mr Ahmed claimed that he distributed only

masks to the voters for their protection from Covid-19. The Election Commission has sought a report of the incident.

Meanwhile, Jalangi Sanjukta Morcha candidate Saiful Islam Mollah from the CPI(M) and his three associates were attacked by the TMC workers with bamboo poles and sticks at Chohanpara.

THE ASIAN AGE

27 APRIL 2021

Govt must wake up to reality, do a course correction swiftly

The world is waking up to the tragedy that India has found itself in, with scores of people dying for want of oxygen and critical drug shortages in several parts of the country. The United States, which had only last week insisted that its job was to vaccinate Americans first and held back critical raw materials for vaccine production in India, has now promised to speed up the delivery of such goods; and it is now “pursuing options to generate oxygen on an urgent basis” in India. Going by reports, these will include oxygen aggregators and concentrators. The European Union, France, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have also started sending vital medical supplies. Even Pakistan has offered to send help to India.

The world media is awash with the details on how the NDA government’s lackadaisical approach during the interregnum between the first and second waves of the pandemic have landed India in the mess. And they cannot be faulted. Reports of the parliamentary committee on health in February warning about “an unprecedented increase in the demand for non-invasive oxygen cylinders and instances of lack of oxygen cylinders” have already appeared. It had also recommended that the government “encourage adequate production

Reports of the parliamentary committee on health in February warning about “an unprecedented increase in the demand for non-invasive oxygen cylinders and instances of lack of oxygen cylinders” have already appeared.

of oxygen for ensuring its supply as per demand in the hospitals”. It’s not that the government had done nothing; it had initiated steps but not with the urgency with which a nation prepares for a second wave which experts had warned was coming. The Prime Minister’s Office had on January 5 announced the PM-Cares Fund had allocated ₹201.58 crore for installing 162 dedicated pressure swing adsorption (PSA) oxygen generation plants in public health facilities. However, only 33 had been built by April 18. The procurement of the plant was to be done by the Central Medical Supply Store, an autonomous body under the Union health ministry. It may be hoped that the 551 new PSAs the PM Cares Fund has newly sanctioned will not meet with a similar fate. From the responses, one cannot be faulted if one thought that the Government of India was the last to get a grip of the crisis.

Augmenting healthcare infrastructure is a long-term programme even in the face of a pandemic. The immediate, effective and assured tool to fight it is universal vaccinations, but the government has been displaying a lack of urgency about that too. The mandarins deciding vaccine policy are yet to wake up from their slumber and see the unfolding events. Parliament has passed a budget with a sum that will be sufficient to inoculate every eligible Indian free of cost if it bought the doses at the price the manufacturers decided in the first phase. The government has several legal and administrative options, including the compulsory licensing route, to enhance production. However, it seems to be in no hurry and, worse, it has passed the responsibility for inoculation first to the state governments and then to citizens. The government may, at least now, make a course correction in order to obviate a similar global initiative to vaccinate Indians.

Oscars in pandemic times

A sanitised Oscars ceremony was befitting in the dark times the world is going through. Even then, it didn’t have to end the way it did with the oldest actor to win the coveted prize, Anthony Hopkins, not tuning in even by video from his home in Wales. Hollywood, well-known for its love of a cinematic climax to all stories big and small, also didn’t quite time it right. An empty stage with a golden Oscar statuette and then just the titles was a strange but, perhaps, symbolic climax to a ceremony which, clubbed with a narcissistic red carpet and extravagant parties, used to represent the glitz and glamour of the movies.

“It has been quite a year, and we are still smack dab in the middle of it,” Regina King said in reference to the pandemic as well as the verdict on the

George Floyd killing. “Our love of movies helped to get us through,” she added. That is significant because in many people’s reckoning some parts of life must go on despite the pandemic. And what can be better than entertainment brought to people’s homes on a screen? We would do well to remember that 97 per cent of people have proved immune to the infernal pathogen. Perhaps much the same argument drives the IPL, which is India’s biggest entertainment extravaganza.

This year’s awards were a “woke” Hollywood’s ode to diversity, with Chloe Zhao, of Chinese origin, becoming the first woman of colour to win the best director statuette. colour to win the best director statuette. Predictably too, China rubbed her out because she is not in sync with its nationalistic ideals. Empathy was at the very heart of the prize that went to Frances McDormand who starred in *Nomadland*, with real-life actor-nomads from marginalised, itinerant communities in a post-recession United States reflecting an American dream gone awry. The greatest disappointment may have been in black actor Chadwick Boseman not winning best actor posthumously while Hopkins won it for portraying an older man with dementia in *The Father*. It was, however, a historic day for women and people of colour, and no one can complain about that.

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Subhani



Covid mess to cost govt dear at home & abroad



K.C. Singh

On March 12, US President Joe Biden conveyed the inaugural summit of the “Quad” countries, comprising Australia, India, Japan and the United States, held in a virtual format. Their joint statement headlined “The Spirit of the Quad” emphasised the combating of Covid-19. In the last paragraph, they committed to combining medical, financing, manufacturing and delivery as well as development capabilities to address the “historic crisis”. India was seen as the hub of vaccine manufacture and the vanguard in this battle.

Covid-19’s second wave hit India soon afterwards, with India’s leadership preoccupied with crucial state elections, the Kumbh Mela and cricket. The mutant virus had begun wreaking havoc in Britain. Unmindful of this, India was exporting AstraZeneca (Covishield) vaccines to friendly developing countries and fulfilling its Covax commitments. The cases began spiking, first in Maharashtra and Punjab, and finally in the nation’s capital, Delhi. Two virus variants, the British B.1.1.7 and a local double mutant B.1.617, may have accelerated the spread. The Quad spirit of cooperation ran into vaccine nationalism when India’s pleas to the US for assistance were rudely rejected. The public discourse started getting toxic, especially in the social media, with escalating criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his deputy, home minister Amit Shah, for campaigning without masks and amidst mammoth crowds. The Election Commission too irresponsibly conceded the BJP’s desire for the eight-phase, month-long polls in West Bengal.

Alongside, the lackadaisical vaccination programme started, with frontline workers and

then the older, more vulnerable population. But as the vaccination was stepped up, the demand began outpacing the supply. Instead of being the “Vishwa Guru” and global factory for vaccines, India now blocked exports. The Serum Institute of India, producing the AstraZeneca vaccine Covishield, and Bharat Biotech, producing Covaxin, fell behind their production targets. The European Union sued SII for breach of commitments. In turn, it complained its production was being hampered by US restrictions on raw material exports.

India-US relations came under strain as public opinion in India soured. Both sides failed to communicate their respective concerns properly. In America, newly elected President Joe Biden assumed office, promising to undo the harm done by the unscientific and populist approach of his predecessor Donald Trump. He invoked the old Defence Production Act (DPA), within two weeks of assuming office, to marshal all resources. His target of 200 million shots in the first 100 days was achieved before time. The US also started building up a strategic reserve of vaccines, now amounting to over 300 million surplus shots. But the DPA constrains the export of vaccines. Consequently, the four million doses given to Mexico and Canada were called a loan.

The US had other considerations for not sharing its vaccines. Both Pfizer and Moderna have obtained liability protection from the US government for civil or criminal liability for any untoward health episode post-vaccination. If exported, they would seek similar protection from the importing nations. Only about one-third of the US population has been fully vaccinated so far and thus a fresh surge of cases was troubling. The new spike is driven by mutated ver-

sions, the efficacy of vaccines against which is still unclear. The British mutant B.1.1.7 is believed to be 60 per cent more contagious and 67 per cent deadlier. As per the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) data, adults in their 20s to 50s are getting hospitalised in the Midwest, South and Northwest. *The New York Times* said: “From Minnesota to New Jersey to North Carolina, younger people are making up a growing share of hospitalisations”. Currently, 45,000 persons are hospitalised in the US.

Thus, an India unprepared for the second surge ignored US concerns when publicly seeking relaxations of DPA restrictions on the export of vaccine production raw material and a possible loan of unused AstraZeneca vaccines, so far unapproved for emergency use. The initial rejection was taken as a snub and allowed to play in public. China’s glee was palpable as its English mouthpiece *Global Times* chided India for depending on the US and not seeking Beijing’s help. Russia also rushed to supply oxygen, etc.

When India’s mishandling and the fresh surge became lead news in the US media, and after mass cremation pictures appeared on the front pages of its major newspapers, the Democrats and the Biden administration finally woke up. The liberal wing of the Democratic Party, which the Indian government and especially external affairs minister S. Jaishankar chided over their criticism of India’s Kashmir policy, now came to India’s rescue. US national security adviser Jake Sullivan tweeted on April 25 that after he talked to India’s NSA Ajit Doval the US agreed to “deploying more supplies and resources” to aid India as both nations had the greatest number of cases globally. Among this

When India’s mishandling and the fresh surge became lead news in the US, the Democrats and the US administration finally woke up.

would be raw materials, protection kits, therapeutics, rapid diagnostic kits, ventilators, etc.

The US Development Finance Corporation will aid the expansion of vaccine manufacture by Hyderabad-based Biological E Ltd, which has finished its Phases 1 and 2 trials. Baylor Medical College has provided the proven and simpler yeast-based expression technology. The company is to produce one billion doses by the end of 2022 at an affordable price. This is the magic bullet for the developing and underdeveloped world, now without access to a vaccine. Africa doesn’t have even a vaccine producer now. Globally, the developed nations, with 16 per cent of the world population, have cornered 52 per cent of vaccines. But the US has still not cleared the export of unused AstraZeneca vaccines. President Joe Biden said the US was helping India in its hour of need as India it them in the past, but the focus is on capacity building.

How does India return to being seen as the world’s vaccine hub rather than a troubled victim? Political mismanagement, electoral partisanship, religious pandering and the lack of foresight have damaged India’s image. It has left China smirking, though on the positive side Pakistan’s political comments and public opinion have been empathetic. The current electoral cycle ends on April 29 in West Bengal, but immediately another begins as the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election is due in February 2022. Has the government learnt the lesson that public health and safety must remain above politics? Also, US help will come laced with unsaid conditions. For one, majoritarianism and the democracy deficit may invite more forceful US intervention. India’s Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan policies will also see closer US monitoring. The mismanaged pandemic at home will diminish the government’s political space both at home and abroad.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh

LETTERS

PRICE AMBIGUITY

Every adult citizen of India will be eligible for vaccination from May 1 onwards. This is the fourth phase of vaccination, even as only 37 per cent of health workers in the first phase have been fully vaccinated. Already, many are unable to take their second doses as the vaccine stocks have been depleted. And importantly, there is a huge price difference for this vital product, which is sure to give rise to hoarding and blackmarketing. Who will help us when that occurs?

Vijay Singh Adhikari
Nainital, Uttarakhand

OUTRAGEOUS YOGI

IT IS shameful to see how hospitals in the nation’s capital and neighbouring areas like Gurgaon and Noida have to knock at the doors of the judiciary for oxygen. The Centre and state governments have already thrown in the towel and are indulging in mudslinging matches. In this context, the audacious claim by UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath that there is no dearth of oxygen and hospital beds in the state is outrageous. Seeing the current state of affairs is dampening the fighting spirit needed by every citizen to tide over this unprecedented crisis. Political leaders need to shun politics and all pretence and do everything in their power to contain the virus. The pandemic is not sparing the VIPs either.

Deepak Singhal
Noida

CLIMATE PLAN A DUD

THIS REFERS to the editorial, “Resetting the green agenda” (April 24). Already 110 countries have pledged carbon neutrality by 2050, including the European Union, the United States, Japan and Brazil. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres specifically requested India to get off coal. But the National “Action Plan on Climate Change” has little such bold action as the retrofitting of cities, transportation and industries. India’s focus must be to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in earnest, quickly.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

Aakar Patel



India’s health calamity has exposed flaws in Guj Model

Just before the 2014 election, two of India’s most famous economists had a public quarrel. Because they were academics the language was mostly polite, but the disagreement was not minor. It was about the so-called “Gujarat Model”. Jagdish Bhagwati took the side of Narendra Modi, and Amartya Sen took the opposite side. In brief, the Bhagwati-Modi view was to prioritise economic growth over social spending. Sen’s view was that economic growth was not possible without social spending.

Sen did not oppose a liberalised business environment: his concern was primarily what the government did. Bhagwati did not oppose social spending: his concern was what the government should not do.

Both sides had rational arguments, but Sen had one unanswerable question. Could anyone name a nation that had become developed without a healthy and well-educated population? The answer to that was no. There is no nation on the world that has ignored investing in the health and education of its population and become developed. It is social spend-

ing that leads to growth and not the other way around. You cannot have a population that is not very literate and not very healthy and expect that industrialists will do all the work necessary to make a nation developed. The state and the government have the primary responsibility and function in this area.

The “Gujarat Model” believes that if the government supports industrialists by offering them subsidies, ease of doing business, freedom from workers’ unions and holding vibrant Gujarat melas — if it does this for a sufficiently long period, then the benefits will accrue to the general population because it is business that makes the economy strong.

The Sen model believes that a healthy and educated population is both an end in itself and a means to achieving economic prosperity. It was in fact possible for the government to create a healthy and educated population even when it had no real economic strength, and Cuba is an example of this. There is no example of a developed nation that had a Third World education and healthcare system. For this reason, the

State must focus on building a strong education system and a strong healthcare system and prioritise its spending in these areas. Sen supports schemes like MNREGA and the right to food, Narendra Modi opposed MNREGA and called it a monument to failure. The Congress Party said this week that in 25 years under the BJP, including 12 years under Mr Modi, Gujarat did not build a single new government hospital. The BJP has not denied the claim, meaning that it is correct. Of course, many Vibrant Gujarat summits were held. What did they produce ultimately? The answer is not development, whatever definition we can use for it. Yes, it is true that some Gujaratis have become very wealthy, a few even managing to triple their wealth in 2020 a year, when many of us lost work. But for the majority there was no benefit. The large industries that came up in Gujarat did not employ a lot of people. This is why the most dominant political community of the state, the Patidars, took to the streets demanding reservations in jobs.

The sacrifice that was made by the population for the Gujarat Model was

very great. Gujarat was low on the Human Development Index and in 2012 Mr Modi told the *Wall Street Journal* that malnutrition in his state was high because its girls were “fashion conscious” and didn’t want to drink milk.

This sort of contempt and ignorance of fundamental issues has come at a cost to India. The Sen model is not only about expenditure, it is also about the focus of the State. A government which believes that it is the well-being of its citizenry as measured through their health and education will be geared and organised in a particular way. It will not be caught scrambling one year after a global pandemic because it does not have enough oxygen or medicines or beds. The Gujarat Model expected that the private sector would take care of health because it was a business and there would be consumers. That is not how the rest of the world has achieved it.

It is not necessary to say today that Bhagwati was totally wrong because he was, and we can see that all around us. As India suffers and the ruling party is on the defensive, the

truth is that the only way that this wave will pass is if exponential growth of the virus stops on its own. The intervention of the government is so poor and so weak that it cannot by itself do anything significant to save us. In the short term we have to suffer the consequences and there is no option.

This is the reason why Prime Minister Modi has been missing from the public eye after stopping his rallies in West Bengal abruptly. The reason why Mr Modi was furious that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal showed their interaction to the rest of us was not because it was a breach of protocol but because the truth was exposed and it was embarrassing. At a moment of crisis, we are choosing to run away from the fact that core beliefs about what the government should do have been proven wrong. We should have an honest discussion once again about the Bhagwati and Sen debate and what we should do in the medium and long term.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

IN BRIEF

Russia expels Italian diplomat

Moscow, April 26: Moscow said Monday it was expelling an Italian diplomat in response to the “unfriendly” removal of two Russian officials from Rome in March over an espionage scandal.

The foreign ministry said it had summoned Italy’s ambassador and informed him that Russia was declaring “persona non grata” Rome’s naval attaché in Moscow, who would have 24 hours to leave the country.

Rome announced late last month it was expelling the two Russian officials after an Italian navy captain was caught by police selling confidential military documents to a Russian embassy official.

Romania to expel Russian diplomat

Bucharest, April 26: Romania said Monday it will expel a Russian diplomat, the latest European country to do so in solidarity with the Czech Republic, which is involved in a spat with Moscow.

The deputy military attaché at the Russian embassy in Bucharest, Alexei Grichayev, would be declared “persona non grata... in view of his activities and actions contrary to the Convention of Vienna on diplomatic relations,” the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Romania’s foreign minister Bogdan Aurescu summoned Russian ambassador Valery Kuzmin to his offices on Monday, according to the statement.

Jihadists kill 31 Nigerian soldiers

Kano, Nigeria, April 26: At least 31 Nigerian soldiers were killed when IS-aligned jihadists ambushed a military convoy escorting weapons and overran a base in northeast Nigeria’s Borno state, military sources said on Monday.

Fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) attacked the convoy with rocket-propelled grenades on Sunday in the town of Mainok outside the regional capital Maiduguri before storming the nearby base.

The attack was the deadliest this year against Nigeria’s army which has been battling a decade-long jihadist insurgency in the region that has killed 36,000 people.

'14 protests: 108 on trial in Turkey

Ankara, April 26: Turkey on Monday put 108 Kurdish politicians on trial for their alleged roles in deadly 2014 protests that erupted as jihadists from the Islamic State group overran the Syrian town of Kobane.

The case against current and former members of the pro-Kurdish HDP party — including its two former co-leaders — stems from one of the darker episodes of the decade-long Syria war. Thirty-seven people died in violent demonstrations against the Turkish army’s inaction in the face of an IS offensive against the largely Kurdish northern Syrian town.

The jihadists were driven out of Kobane in January 2015 by US-backed Syrian Kurdish fighters that Turkey officially views as terrorists.

AFGHANISTAN ATTACKS KILL 12 POLICEMEN

Kabul, April 26: At least 12 Afghan policemen were killed on Sunday, including seven who were ambushed by the Taliban south of the capital, officials said, as fighting continued in the violence-wracked country.

The two separate attacks in the provinces of Logar and Kandahar came as the top US military commander in Afghanistan, General Scott Miller, said work had begun to withdraw the remaining American forces as ordered by President Joe Biden this month.

“Seven policemen were killed and three wounded when the Taliban ambushed their vehicles in Mohammad Agha district of Logar province,” Dedar Lawang, spokesman for the provincial governor, said.

The policemen were part of a security force guarding copper mines in Logar, south of the capital Kabul.

Police from Logar province confirmed the attack.

Afghanistan, whose economy has been severely impacted by decades of conflict and endemic corruption, has reserves of copper, iron, cobalt and lithium. In a separate attack on Sunday, a suicide bomber ran an explosives-laden car into a police vehicle in the southern Taliban bastion of Kandahar, killing five policemen.

EU mounts legal action on AstraZeneca for vax delay

Charges vaccine maker for failing to respect terms of contract

Brussels, April 26: The European Commission on Monday said it has launched a legal action against vaccine maker AstraZeneca for failing to respect the terms of its contract with the EU.

Spokesman Stefan De Keersmaecker said, “The Commission has started last Friday legal action against the company AstraZeneca on the basis of breaches of the advance purchase agreement.” He said that the reason for the legal action was that “some terms of the contract have not been respected” and that “the company has not been in a position to come up with a reliable strategy to ensure a timely delivery of doses”. Contract with EU foresaw an initial 300 million doses for distribution among the 27 countries, with option for a further 100 million. But only 30 million doses were delivered. — AP



A lone woman walks past stalls in an almost-empty shopping alley in Bangkok on Monday, amid an expansion of lockdown restrictions to halt a surge in Covid-19 cases. — AFP

Burj Khalifa lit up with Tricolour

Dubai, April 26: Prominent iconic buildings, including the Burj Khalifa, in the UAE were lit up with the Tricolour to show solidarity with India as it battles the second Covid-19 wave, the official WAM news agency reported.

“As #India battles the gruesome war against #COVID19, its friend #UAE sends its best wishes. Glowing star @BurjKhalifa in #Dubai lits up in Flag of India to showcase its support,” Indian Embassy in the UAE tweeted on Sunday. The embassy also tweeted a video of the Burj Khalifa displaying the Indian flag in solidarity with India as it responds to a

second Covid-19 wave, the official WAM news agency reported.

“As #India battles the gruesome war against #COVID19, its friend #UAE sends its best wishes. Glowing star @BurjKhalifa in #Dubai lits up in Flag of India to showcase its support,” Indian Embassy in the UAE tweeted on Sunday. The embassy also tweeted a video of the Burj Khalifa displaying the Indian flag in solidarity with India as it responds to a

Google, MS Indo-American CEOs pledge aid to India

Houston/Washington, April 26: Google CEO Sundar Pichai and his Microsoft counterpart Satya Nadella have assured help to India. “Devastated by the worsening Covid crisis in India. Google & Googlers are providing ₹135 crore in funding to @GiveIndia, @UNICEF for medical supplies, orgs supporting high-risk communities, and grants to help spread critical information,” Google CEO Pichai said in a tweet.

Nadella said that his

company will continue to use its resources and technology for relief efforts and support for buying oxygen devices. Nadella said he was “heartbroken” by the current Coronavirus situation in India. “I am heartbroken by the current situation in India. I’m grateful the US government is mobilising to help. Microsoft will continue to use its voice, resources, and technology to aid relief efforts, and support the purchase of critical oxygen concentration

devices,” he said.

US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have assured India and its people of providing all assistance, including urgently sending necessary medical life-saving supplies and equipment, to help the country combat the deadly crisis. “Just as India sent assistance to the United States as our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic, we are determined to help India in its time of need,” Biden said. — PTI

Boris in soup for ‘dying’ talk

London, April 26: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced a call to resign on Monday after claims he dismissed the prospect of thousands dying from Covid-19, as a row over government “sleaze” escalated.

In a front-page headline, the *Daily Mail* newspaper reported Johnson had said he would rather see “bodies pile high in their thousands” than impose a third Coronavirus lockdown. Ultimately, Johnson did order a new round of restrictions in January. But he is now locked in a

damaging war of words with his former top aide Dominic Cummings over his Coronavirus policies last year and financial dealings.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said the *Daily Mail* report, based on unnamed sources, was “not true” and had been “categorically denied by practically everyone.” “None of this is serious. The prime minister has been utterly focused on delivering, alongside Cabinet colleagues, the response to Covid,” he told *Sky News*. — AFP

UK VAX FOR ALL AGED 44, ABOVE

London, April 26: Everyone aged 44 and above in Britain will now be able to book their Covid-19 jab starting on Monday as the UK’s National Health Service (NHS) vaccine programme expands further to more younger age groups. Around half a million 44-year-olds will receive a text message inviting them to get their jab. — PTI

Oz ventilators, PPE, oxygen for India

Melbourne, April 26: Australia will send oxygen, ventilators and personal protective equipment to India as part of an immediate support package to the country which is battling with the latest surge of the Covid-19 cases, Health Minister Greg Hunt said on Monday.

The federal government was in the process of considering what it could send to help, the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* news channel quoted Hunt as saying.

“India is literally gasping for oxygen,” the federal health minister said.

And while we can assist with the national medical stockpile, their particular request is for assistance

with regards to the physical supply of oxygen. That will be one of the things we are looking at, in particular with the states, the minister said.

The federal government also confirmed to send oxygen, ventilators and personal protective equipment to India as part of an immediate support package to be announced on Tuesday, according to the report.

However, Australia would not send vaccines.

Hunt further said: “We are in a strong position on that front because we don’t need them at this point in time. We will still keep a reserve, but if they can be of assistance (they will be donated).” — PTI

World military spending grows

Stockholm, April 26: Military expenditure worldwide rose to nearly \$2 trillion in 2020, defying the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, researchers said Monday.

Global military spending increased by 2.6 percent to \$1,981 billion in 2020, when global GDP shrank 4.4 percent, according to a report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Diego Lopes da Silva, one of report’s authors, said the development was unexpected. “Because of the pandemic, one would

think military spending would decrease,” he said.

“But it’s possible to conclude with some certainty that Covid-19 did not have a significant impact on global military spending, in 2020 at least,” Lopes da Silva said. He cautioned however that due to the nature of military spending, it could take time for countries “to adapt to the shock”. The fact that military spending continued to increase in a year with an economic downturn meant the share of military spending out of total GDP had risen. — AFP

MISINFORMATION OF VIRUS: FB BLOCKS OZ MP

Sydney, April 26: Facebook removed Australian member of parliament Craig Kelly’s page for repeatedly peddling pandemic misinformation, the social media giant said Monday.

Kelly previously had posts blocked on the platform and was forced to quit the governing Liberal Party, amid controversial statements on vaccine safety, lockdowns and unproven Covid treatments.

Facebook said it removed his popular page permanently after “repeated violations” of its policies. — AFP

CHINA CARGO FLIGHTS TO INDIA SUSPENDED

Beijing, April 26: China’s state-run Sichuan Airlines has suspended all its cargo flights to India for 15 days, causing major disruption to private traders’ efforts to procure the much-needed oxygen concentrators and other medical supplies from the country despite Beijing reiterating its readiness to help India. “China has been following the situation in India and expressed readiness to help curb the latest surge,” FM spokesman Wang Wenbin said. — PTI

NUCLEAR | DISASTER

Dozens gather in ghost town of Pripyat, hold candle vigil

Ukraine marks 35 years since Chernobyl

Kiev, April 26: President Volodymyr Zelensky was due Monday to visit the Chernobyl exclusion zone and address Ukrainians to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the world’s worst nuclear disaster.

The exclusion zone is a 30-kilometre (20-mile) radius around the nuclear power plant that was evacuated in the aftermath of an explosion and was deemed unsafe for humans to

live for thousands of years. Ahead of his arrival, dozens of people gathered in the nearby ghost town of Pripyat and held an overnight vigil with candles in memory of the those who lost their lives in the accident.

The deaths of some 30 people were directly linked to the explosion in the fourth reactor at Chernobyl during a safety test on April 26, 1986.

But thousands more are feared to have died in the years that followed from radiation poisoning across Ukraine as well as its northern neighbour Belarus and Russia to the east.

The exact number of victims remains a subject of intense debate because the Soviet authorities kept most of the information about the disaster hidden.

Hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated

Zarif’s leaked recording offers blunt comments

Dubai, April 26: A recording of Iran’s foreign minister offering a blunt appraisal of diplomacy and the limits of power within the Islamic Republic has leaked out publicly, providing a rare look inside the country’s theocracy.

The release of the comments by Mohammad Javad Zarif set off a firestorm within Iran, where officials carefully mind their words amid a cut-throat political environment that includes the powerful paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, ultimately overseen by the country’s supreme leader. Zarif has been suggested as a possible candidate for Iran’s June 18 presidential election as well.

Outside of Iran, Zarif’s comments could also affect talks in Vienna aimed at finding a way for Tehran and the US to both come into compliance with Ira-

n’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Already, sabotage targeted Iran’s nuclear facility at Natanz during the talks as Tehran has begun enriching a small amount of uranium up to 60% purity, which edges the country closer to weapons-grade levels. After the leak became public, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh did not dispute the tape’s authenticity. He told journalists on Monday that the recording represented just a portion of a seven-hour interview Zarif gave to a well-known economist that was to be held for posterity by a think tank associated with the Iranian presidency.

Khatibzadeh called the release of the recording “illegal” and described it as “selectively” edited. — AP

Germany flays Navalny curbs

Berlin, April 26: Germany condemned an order by Russian prosecutors Monday to suspend all activities by jailed opposition figure Alexei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) and its regional network.

Chancellor Angela Merkel’s spokesman Steffen Seibert said “using the instruments of fighting terror against politically undesirable opinions is in no way compatible with the principles of the rule of law”.

A Moscow court had begun a preliminary hearing into designating FBK and its regional offices as “extremist” after prosecutors requested they be added to a list of “terrorist and extremist” organisations run by Russia’s Anti-Terrorism Committee.

The Moscow City Court confirmed that the activities of the group’s regional network were suspended, but clarified that prosecutors had the power to make the decision and

said a final court ruling on designating the group as extremist was still due.

Russia’s list of extremist organisations currently consists of 33 including the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda and the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The groups are banned from operating in Russia and participating in their activities can result in lengthy prison terms.

Navalny, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s most prominent opponent, was arrested in January on returning to Russia from Berlin after recovering from a near-fatal poisoning attack he says was orchestrated by the Kremlin.

Moscow denies the allegation.

He is serving two-and-a-half years on old fraud charges — which he says are politically motivated — in a penal colony in the town of Pokrov east of Moscow. — AFP

Suu Kyi court date postponed

Yangon, April 26: Myanmar’s junta again postponed court proceedings against deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Monday her lawyers said, as they fight for permission to visit her 12 weeks after she was detained.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military ousted the Nobel laureate in a February 1 coup, shutting the country back into junta rule after a brief experiment with democracy. Large swathes of the population have taken to the streets in protest, with security forces unleashing a brutal campaign to quell the massive uprising.

Meanwhile Suu Kyi has been under house arrest, with the junta charging her under six cases — including for sedition and having unlicensed walkie-talkies. But movement on her case was once again delayed until May 10, her lawyer Min Min Soe said Monday after a hearing.

Twelve weeks since Suu Kyi was detained, Min Min Soe said they still have not received permission to meet their client face-to-face — one of many hurdles the team has faced. “When the judge asked (police) which stage they have reached, they replied they couldn’t tell specifically,” she said, adding that Suu Kyi was frustrated by the slow pace. “I think she is not getting access to watch news and TV. I do not think she knows the current situation happening in the country,” she said.

Besides not being able to meet with Suu Kyi, junta-imposed mobile data shutdowns have also prevented video-conferencing in previous hearings.

The most serious charge Suu Kyi faces falls under Myanmar’s official secrets law, with a hearing due in Yangon on May 6.

Nationwide protests continued Monday, with demonstrators holding signs that said “Free our leaders” and waving red flags emblazoned with a golden peacock — the symbol of Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy Party. — AFP

ally perish from the invisible poison in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus.

The Greenpeace environmental group issued its own study the following year estimating that 100,000 people had already lost their lives as a result of the accident.

In November 2016, a massive metal dome was erected over the remains of the reactor. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	48386.51 1.06
Nifty 50	14485.00 1.00
S&P 500*	4,189.51 0.22
Dollar (₹)	74.73 0.39
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.99 0.11
Euro (₹)	90.41 0.04
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,976▼81 0.17
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.57 -0.82
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.038 0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.568 0.001

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Mankind Pharma to give ₹100 cr to families of dead

Mankind Pharma will donate Rs 100 crore to the families of deceased doctors, police officers, pharmacists, and other healthcare workers who have lost their lives fighting the pandemic. The firm plans to start releasing the money with immediate effect and hopes to complete it within three months, Mankind said in a statement. The firm said it is standing alongside the families of the heroes who lost their lives.

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Age ceiling for top tier set at 70 years Bank chief's tenure capped at 15 years

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 26

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday fixed the tenure of managing directors and chief executive officers (MD & CEO) and whole-time directors (WTD) in private sector banks at 15 years and prescribed the maximum age of 70 years for such functionaries.

The central bank also said a CEO, MD or WTD, who is a promoter or major shareholder of a bank as well, will not be eligible to hold these posts for more than 12 years, with an extension of up to 15 years permitted at its sole discretion. Bank chiefs and WTDs who are not promoters will be eligible for a second-term even after the 15-year period after a three-year break. During this three-year gap, the individual shall not be associated with the bank or its group entities in any capacity.

The RBI also said the chairman of the board



must be an independent director. It also listed other guidelines on the pay of non-executive directors, age limits and setting up of audits, remuneration and risk-management committees.

The RBI has given banks until October 1 to comply with the rules. Analysts pointed that promoter Uday Kotak, who has been at the helm of Kotak Mahindra Bank for over 12 years, had been re-appointed for a term of three years starting January 2021, may not be immediately impacted.

Similarly, the RBI approved the reappointment of N. Kamakodi, MD & CEO of City Union Bank,

for three years effective May 1, 2020 will continue. Kamakodi has been heading the bank since 2011.

"However, one will have to wait and see as to what view the RBI takes on Bandhan Bank. Does the limit include the MD and CEO's tenure when he was heading Bandhan as an NBFC? Similarly, the MDs of Federal Bank, DCB Bank and RBL Bank have been there for long but the upper limit of 15 years may not have an immediate impact on these banks," said an analyst.

J.N. Gupta, former executive director of Sebi, said, "I am unable to understand as to why the RBI feels that independent directors and non-executive directors should be paid a fixed sum which is in total contradiction with the provisions of the Companies Act. Secondly, how can a promoter who owns substantial equity in the bank be asked to sit on the fence and watch non-interested parties manage the bank."

AUTO INDUSTRY VETERAN JAGDISH KHATTAR PASSES AWAY

New Delhi, April 26: Former managing director of Maruti Suzuki India, Jagdish Khattar, passed away Monday morning following a cardiac arrest, according to people close to him.

Khattar (79), a former bureaucrat, was considered as one of the most high profile leaders of the Indian automotive indus-



Jagdish Khattar

try, laying the foundation for Maruti's future growth after the government began its disinvestment in 2002 and gradually exited from its joint venture with Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC).

He had joined the then Maruti Udyog Ltd in July 1993 as director (marketing).

Maruti Suzuki chairman R. C. Bhargava, who persuaded Khattar to leave IAS and join Maruti, termed him as a "first class person" and his demise as a "big loss" both personally as well as for the automotive industry. —PTI

MPHASIS OWNERSHIP CHANGE TO SET OFF OPEN OFFER

New Delhi, April 26:

Shares of Mphasis Ltd closed with a gain of over 1.6 per cent on Monday after Blackstone said funds managed it will acquire a majority stake in the mid-sized IT firm.

This, the private equity firm said, will trigger an open offer for acquisition of up to 26 per cent stake for about Rs 8,262 crore.

A wholly owned subsidiary of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, UC Investments (Office of the Chief Investment Officer of The Regents, University of California) and others will co-invest with Blackstone PE fund in the company, a statement said.

A different fund managed by Blackstone had acquired a controlling stake in Mphasis from Hewlett Packard Enterprise in September 2016.

Based on the open offer subscription, the blended purchase price will vary between Rs 1,452 and Rs 1,497 per share and the purchase consideration will vary between Rs 15,200 crore and Rs 21,000 crore (about \$2 bn-2.8 bn), the statement said.

At the end of March 2021 quarter, Marble II Pte Ltd, a fund managed by Blackstone, held 56.03 per cent stake in Mphasis.

Mphasis in a regulatory filing said Marble II will sell up to 55.31 per cent stake as part of a share purchase pact signed on Monday.—PTI

TN allows Sterlite to open copper plant to produce O2

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 26

The Tamil Nadu government has allowed Sterlite Industries to open the shuttered copper plant in Tuticorin to produce oxygen. The decision was taken amidst a surge in Covid-19 cases and the shortage of medical oxygen across the country.

The all-party meeting convened by Tamil Nadu chief minister K. Palaniswami on Monday allowed the plant to produce oxygen for four months. However, Vedanta cannot produce copper in the plant or use it for any other activity.

On Friday, the Supreme



Court had asked why Vedanta couldn't operate the plant given the "emergency-like" situation in the country. The court was hearing a plea by Vedanta, seeking opening of the unit on the ground that it would produce 1,050 tonnes of oxygen and give

it free of cost to treat Covid-19 patients.

While the Centre had supported the plea, the Tamil Nadu government has opposed it apprehending that reopening the plant could pose law and order problems since the public was opposed to its opening. In May 2018, 13 people who were protesting the expansion of the copper plant were killed in police firing.

The plant was then shut following an order by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and the state government over violation of environmental norms. The case is still pending in the Supreme Court.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

TECH MAHINDRA Q4 NET UP 34.6% TO ₹1,080 CR

Mumbai, April 26: Tech Mahindra reported a 34.6 per cent jump in net profit to Rs 1,081 crore for the March 2020 quarter and guided towards targeting for a double-digit revenue growth in FY22. Its post-tax net profit grew 9.8 per cent to Rs 4,428 crore in 2020-21, on the back of a 2.7 per cent growth in overall revenues to Rs 37,855 crore. CEO and MD C. P. Gurnani said 2020-21 was the "repair" year when the company faced the pandemic impact, and promised 2021-22 to be a "growth year". —PTI

TATA MOTORS TO CUT PRODUCTION

Pune, April 26: Tata Motors said it has decided to "calibrate" production of its vehicles with actual demand to prevent oversupply and a pile up of inventory at the company and dealers. It did not give any details about the likely quantum of

reduction in production. "The lockdown enforced in various parts of the country is expected to impact vehicle demand temporarily," the auto major said, adding, Hence, the firm has set in motion a comprehensive 'Business Agility Plan' to protect and serve the interests of its customers, dealers and suppliers. —Michael Gonsalves

POWERGRID INVIT'S IPO THIS WK



Mumbai, April 26: Powergrid INVIT will come out with India's first PSU infrastructure investment trust IPO on Thursday, April 29. The IPO seeks to raise Rs 7,734.92 crore from units sold at a price band of Rs 99 to Rs 100 apiece. IRB INVIT and Indi Grid INVIT are already listed on the stock exchanges. An INVIT is a collective investment scheme similar to a mutual fund that invests in infrastructure projects. The Powergrid INVIT IPO comprises fresh issue of units for up to Rs 4,993.48 crore and the selling unitholder is offering units aggregating up to Rs 2,741.50 crore. —Ravi Ranjan Prasad

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Hockey captain Rani, 6 others +ve

New Delhi: Seven members of the Indian women's hockey team, including captain Rani Rampal, and two support staff members on Monday tested positive for Covid-19 ahead of a training camp at the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) Centre in Bengaluru.

All the players and support staff are asymptomatic and have been placed under observation at the SAI centre.

"They were tested on April 24, post quarantine after their return from their respective home towns to their training base at SAI Bengaluru, as per the laid down protocol," the SAI said in a statement. —PTI

Nadal bags 12th Barcelona crown

Barcelona: Rafael Nadal saved a championship point to beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-4, 6-7 (6/8), 7-5 on Sunday and claim a 12th Barcelona Open title in the ATP's longest match of 2021. He secured his first title of the year and 87th of his career, denying Tsitsipas back-to-back triumphs following his maiden Masters 1000 title at Monte Carlo last week. Nadal avenged his Australian Open quarter-final loss to Tsitsipas and will return to second in the ATP rankings on Monday by climbing back above Daniil Medvedev after his marathon 3-hour 38-minute win. —AFP

Cirstea wins WTA title after 13 years

Istanbul: Romania's Sorana Cirstea said she "didn't expect" to win the Istanbul claycourt tournament on Sunday, her second career title coming 13 years after her first. The 31-year-old Romanian defeated top-seeded Elise Mertens of Belgium 6-1, 7-6 (7/3) in the final having not dropped a set all week. Cirstea, ranked at 67 in the world, captured her maiden title at Tashkent in 2008. Sunday was her fifth final, having made her maiden championship match as a 17-year-old qualifier at Budapest 2007. "I'm very, very happy for this trophy," Cirstea said at the winner's ceremony. —AFP

FOUR IN A ROW FOR CITY

Guardiola's men outclass Tottenham to retain League Cup in front of fans



Manchester City players celebrate with the trophy after winning the League Cup final against Tottenham Hotspur 1-0 at the Wembley Stadium in London on Sunday. —AP

ed quadruple of trophies this season.

However, they remain on course for a treble with the first leg of their Champions League semi-final against Paris Saint-Germain to come on Wednesday before possibly

sealing the Premier League title next weekend.

Victory takes Guardiola's personal tally of major trophies to 25 across his spells in charge of Barcelona, Bayern Munich and City, seven of which have come in England.

"I was in big clubs: Barcelona, Bayern Munich and here, that's why it is easier to do it," added the Catalan modestly.

By contrast, Tottenham's long wait for just one goes on. Spurs could have no complaints, though, at the

end of a chaotic week that saw them sack Jose Mourinho on Monday and, along with City and four other English clubs, pull out of a proposed European Super League amid fan fury.

Son Heung-min was reduced to tears after full-time, but in caretaker boss Ryan Mason's second game in charge, Spurs were completely outclassed by a far superior side.

"It's difficult to take for everyone associated with the football club," said former Tottenham midfielder Mason.

"It hurts. I know that feeling and it is normal that they are hurting. This group of players care deeply about this football club. We tried, it wasn't enough today and it's tough to take."

After a slight dip in form in recent weeks, City were back to their best as they pinned Tottenham back from the first whistle and should have won by a far more comfortable scoreline.

Hugo Lloris's goal lived a charmed life, particularly during the first half.

—AFP

ATLETICO DEFEAT BY BILBAO HANDS INITIATIVE TO BARCA

Madrid, April 26: Atletico Madrid's title hopes suffered a setback on Sunday as a shock 2-1 defeat at Athletic Bilbao handed Barcelona the upper hand in a thrilling race at the top of La Liga.

Real Madrid's draw with Real Betis on Saturday gave Atletico the chance to pull further clear but instead they ended the weekend with their lead reduced, a loss at San Mames the latest twist in Europe's most unpredictable domestic chase.

Barcelona had earlier beaten Villarreal by the same scoreline, with Antoine Griezmann's quick-fire double becoming all the more valuable

after another Atletico slip. Sevilla have largely been overlooked as possible champions in Spain but they are right in the mix as well now after a 2-1 win over Granada puts them just three points off the top and one behind Real Madrid.

Yet Barcelona were the biggest winners, with Ronald Koeman's team able to go top of the table if they win their game in hand at home to Granada on Thursday, even if Atletico might have a way back given they are still to play at Camp Nou on May 8.

Real Madrid host Sevilla a day later. —AFP

Italian clubs in rebel league to be banned from Serie 'A'

Rome, April 26: The Italian football federation (FIGC) said on Monday that clubs who join a breakaway league would be banned from all domestic competitions including Serie 'A'.

Three Serie 'A' clubs — Juventus, Inter Milan and AC Milan — were among 12 major European sides who were involved in the plans to launch a European Super League last week.

"(Clubs) who plan to play in competitions outside of FIFA or UEFA will lose their affiliation to our championship," FIGC president Gabriele Gravina said after a meet-

ing on Monday. Inter Milan announced their withdrawal from the proposed Super League last Wednesday after the departure of the 'big six' English clubs.

But Juventus and AC Milan were less clear, acknowledging the failure of the plans without specifying whether or not they were leaving the project.

"It is obvious that if, on June 21, the closing date for applications for registration, some wanted to participate in competitions of a private nature, they would not take part in our championship," said Gravina in a statement.

"At the moment, we have no information on who stayed and who left the Super League."

The new rule will be added to the licenses of the clubs and into the regulatory texts of the FIGC.

—AFP

Deepika, Atanu trap triple gold

Guatemala City, April 26: Indian archery's star couple Deepika Kumari and Atanu Das led the show with two individual gold medals as the country capped its best ever performance in a World Cup, claiming three golds and a bronze in the tournament's first stage here.

Former world number one Deepika claimed her career's third individual World Cup gold to add to the team's triumph, while her husband Das grabbed his first ever World Cup individual medal in style winning the men's recurve individual final.

The two are now automatically qualified for this season's most-coveted Archery World Cup Final.

"We travel together, train together, compete together and win together," Das, who got married to Deepika in June last year after a two-year courtship, said after claiming the gold medal on Sunday.

"She knows what I like, and I know what she likes."

This was the best ever World Cup finish by India's recurve archers with two individual and one team gold medals in their return to the top International calendar year event after almost two years.

Also, this was India's best ever individual recurve men's result since

● This was the best ever World Cup finish by India's recurve archers with two individual and one team gold medals in their return to the top International calendar year event after almost two years.

Jayanta Talukdar triumphed in Croatia way back in 2009.

India started with the women's trio of Deepika, Ankita Bhakat and Komalika Bari winning the first team gold after seven years. They scripted a stunning turnaround to down fancied Mexico 5-4 (27-26) in an intriguing shoot-off.

The performance rubbed off on the mixed pair of Das and Bhakat as they bagged a bronze, upsetting top seeds USA 6-2 with yet another fightback at the Sports Complex Los Arcos here.

But the icing on the cake came in the individual events later in the day when Deepika and Das bagged two individual golds in their respective events.

This was Deepika's third career stage win and first since Salt Lake City 2018. —PTI

TOKYO TO DECIDE ON FAN LIMIT BY END OF MONTH

Tokyo, April 26: Tokyo 2020 President Seiko Hashimoto said on Monday that she will decide the upper limit of spectators for the Olympics and Paralympics by the end of April.

"As for the upper limit of spectators, we will make a decision on that regard by the end of April. In order to flexibly address the virus situation including the state of emergency, we will work closely with the IOC, IPC, the central government and the Tokyo metropolitan government in order to gain consensus," said Hashimoto during Tokyo 2020 executive board meeting held in the capital.

Hashimoto noted that she was highly aware of concern about the virus resurgence as the state of emergency has been issued in Tokyo and three other prefectures but will have anti-virus measures that address all the possible issues that may be caused by holding the games amid the pandemic. —AP

