

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 12 APRIL 2021



## WORLD | 6

Meghan Markle will not join Prince Harry at Prince Philip's funeral



## SPORT | 8

Nitish Rana of KKR scores brilliant 80 to help his team beat Sunrisers Hyderabad



## TABLOID | 16

Irrfan Khan's son Babil makes debut with Netflix film *Qala* that also stars Tripti Dimri

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**Jordan's King Abdullah II (right) and Prince Hamzah bin Al Hussein arrive to visit the tombs of former kings in Amman on Sunday. King Abdullah II and his half-brother Prince Hamzah made their first joint public appearance since a palace feud last week.**  
— AP

## Let India cherish 'positive trend' at LAC, says China

**Beijing:** With no forward movement at the latest round of Sino-Indian military talks on disengagement from the remaining areas in eastern Ladakh, the Chinese military has said that India should cherish the "current positive trend" of de-escalation and cooling down of tensions in the border area. The Chinese side came to the talks with a "premeditated mindset" and did not show any flexibility in moving forward on the disengagement process at the friction points in eastern Ladakh.  
■ **More on Page 4**

## Pawar in hospital, to have surgery today

**Mumbai:** The NCP president Sharad Pawar on Sunday has been admitted to Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai for a surgery of his gall bladder. He would be undergoing surgery on Monday morning for his gallbladder ailment.  
■ **More on Page 3**

## NIA arrests Kazi, a close aide of Waze

**Mumbai:** The National Investigation Agency on Sunday arrested Assistant Police Inspector Riyaz Kazi, a close aide of arrested API Sachin Waze, in connection with Mukesh Ambani bomb scare case and Mansukh Hiren murder case. The NIA has alleged that Kazi is a co-conspirator in the Ambani case.  
■ **More on Page 3**



**I like polls with more phases... we are earning more money attending more election rallies!**

WEATHER

Max: 38°C  
Min: 22°C  
RH: 14%  
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana  
Tithi: Phalguna Bahula  
Amavasya till 8.01 am  
Star: Revati till 11.30 am  
Varjyam: Nil  
Durmuhurtam: 12.42 pm to 1.31 pm; 3.10 pm to 4 pm  
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am

SUNSET TODAY 6.45 PM  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.57 AM  
MOONRISE TOMORROW 6.44 PM  
MOONSET TODAY 7.01 AM

■ Defies appeals for peace by Shah, gov ■ TMC demands EC action

## Bengal BJP chief warns of 'repeat' of election killings

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, APRIL 11

A day after four people were shot dead by the Central paramilitary forces during a violent mob attack on a polling booth at Shitalkuchi in Cooch Behar during the fourth phase of the Assembly election in West Bengal, state BJP chief Dilip Ghosh called them *dushtu chhele* (bad boys). Blatantly defying appeals by Union home minister Amit Shah and West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar to everyone to maintain peace in the remaining phases, the Midnapore BJP MP also threatened the public of a "repetition" of Shitalkuchi-style killings in the event of an "excess". On Sunday he told a party rally at Baranagar in north Kolkata: "Where did so many *dushtu chhele* come from? Those who were hit by the bullets at



Union home minister Amit Shah during a roadshow in support of BJP candidates at Santipur in Nadia district, West Bengal, on Sunday.

Shitalkuchi on Saturday were *dushtu chhele*. They will not exist in Bengal anymore. It has just begun. Those who think the Central forces carry guns only for show have felt the heat of the bullets." Mr Ghosh said: "This will be repeated across Bengal. If someone takes the law in their hands, he will get a befitting reply. On April 17, cast your votes standing in a queue early in the morning. The Central forces will be posted at the booths. No one will be able to show red eyes. Otherwise, we will be there. If anyone crosses the limit, you have seen what happened in

## Shah targets Didi, says: 'I will quit only if people ask'

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, APRIL 11

Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday squarely held West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's recent "provocative speech" responsible for the violent mob attack on the Central paramilitary forces which, in turn, shot dead four villagers at a polling booth in Shitalkuchi of Cooch Behar during the fourth phase of the election a day earlier.

Asking the Trinamul Congress supremo to apologise to the people for her instigation, he also questioned her silence on the killing of a first-time voter, Ananda Burman of the Rajbanshi community, after linking him to the saffron party.

Rejecting Ms Banerjee's demand for his resignation over the firing, Mr Shah said: "Didi has been constantly claiming: Amit Shah must resign. Didi, I will resign when the people ask me to. But you should get ready since you will have to resign on May 2."

Mr Shah said: "In the fourth phase of polls, a very sad incident took place. Some unidentified people attacked a polling booth and tried to snatch the weapons of the Central armed police



Mamata Banerjee

ban imposed by the EC on the visit of any political leader to the district. The Trinamul Congress chief also called the killings a "mass murder" in a virulent attack on the EC and the BJP after

speaking to the victims' relatives and standing by them during a phone conversation. She also assured them of government compensation for each family.

At Siliguri in North Bengal, the CM alleged Sunday morning: "We were supposed to visit Shitalkuchi. I wanted to stand by the victims' families. But you can see what is happening. They did not allow us anyway to meet the family members of those who were killed.

## Didi erupts as visit halted; mocks MCC as 'BJP code'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, APRIL 11

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday described the Election Commission's Model Code of Conduct (MCC) as the "BJP Code of Conduct ... or BCC" after she failed to visit the aggrieved family of the four villagers who were shot dead by the Central paramilitary forces at a polling booth at Shitalkuchi in Cooch Behar due to the 72-hour

## BPF flies candidates to Singapore

Cong-led alliance confident of Assam win, fears BJP is making poaching attempts

MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, APRIL 11

After the All-India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) shifted prospective winning candidates to Jaipur in Rajasthan, fearing poaching by the ruling BJP, the Bodoland People's Front (BPF), a constituent party of the Congress-led grand alliance, has also shifted 10 of its 11 candidates in the recently held Assembly polls in Assam to a foreign location. They are understood to be in Singapore.

It is significant that two days ago the 10-party Opposition grand alliance had flown out 20 candidates — 18 from the AIUDF and two from the

■ **IT IS SIGNIFICANT** that two days ago the 10-party Opposition grand alliance had flown out 20 candidates — 18 from the AIUDF and two from the Congress — to Rajasthan.

Congress — to Rajasthan. The only BPF candidate left in Assam is former minister Pramila Rani Brahma, who herself confirmed this development. "Yes, they have left on Saturday but I have no idea which country exactly they are visiting. I could not contact them," Ms Brahma told reporters.

Pointing out how one BPF candidate was lured to retire from the contest

a few days before polling, a BPF party source said that their party chief decided to send them to Singapore on a pleasure trip. Sources said 16 members of the Council Legislative Assembly (MCLA) of the Bodoland Territorial Council also accompanied them.

Ms Brahma, however, clarified that the MCLAs had plans to go on a foreign holiday after the month-long hectic election campaign. She also feared that the possibility of horse-trading could not be ruled out.

Asserting that the ruling BJP-led alliance was not going to get a majority in the Assembly polls, she said that given the past record of some BJP lead-

ers, the Opposition can't be complacent and be a silent spectator.

"We have to be cautious. We are trying to protect our candidates from the BJP's anti-democratic activities," Congress MLA and Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia told reporters.

If insiders are to be believed, the Congress-led grand alliance is hopeful of getting a simple majority in the Assembly polls, for which counting of vote will take place on May 2, but they are extremely worried about the possible poaching by the ruling party, which is alleged to have already started meeting prospective winning candidates informally.

## 2 encounters in Kashmir: 4 militants slain

**Srinagar, April 11:** Four militants from Lashkar-e-Taibiyeh (LeT) and al-Badr outfits, including those involved in the killing of an off-duty Territorial Army soldier in Anantnag on Friday, were gunned down on Sunday in two encounters with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir, police said.

With this, the death toll in the encounters that began on Saturday in Anantnag and Shopian districts has climbed to five as one militant was killed in the initial exchange of fire.  
— PTI

■ **More on Page 4**



A major fire erupted at Real Tech Park Tower near Vashi railway station at Navi Mumbai on Sunday.

## More states impose curbs ■ Maha undecided on lockdown 'Active cases' touch 11 lakhs; 1.52L more in 1 day; 839 die

SANJAY KAW  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

Hitting another record daily high of 1,52,879 new coronavirus infections, India's Covid-19 tally of cases on Sunday climbed to 1,33,58,805, while the active cases breached the 11-lakh mark for the first time since the pandemic broke out last year. The country has been clocking in over one lakh cases for five days. The death toll also rose to 1,69,275, with 839 new fatalities in the last 24 hours, the highest since October 18, 2020.

With 10,732 fresh infections, national capital Delhi also broke all records in the number of Covid-19 cases in a 24-hour span. Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal requested the Centre to remove all age restrictions on Covid-19 vaccinations, even as his government flagged the vaccine shortage and said that stocks for just seven to 10 days were left now.

Mr Kejriwal said the surge in Covid-19 cases this time was "worse"

than what Delhi saw during the third peak. This is the fourth wave in Delhi which is "much more dangerous", he added.

A day after announcing several new restrictions to check the spread of the deadly virus, the chief minister also said a full lockdown was not the solution to tackle the pandemic.

The Union government has, meanwhile, written to Maharashtra, Punjab and Chhattisgarh over reports by the Central health teams on Covid-19 testing and containment operations, hospital infrastructure and vaccinations to contain the virus' spread. Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan, in the letter, asked the states/UTs to take suitable corrective measures. The letter said: "The Union health ministry has been actively engaging with states in coordinating and collaborating on preparedness and the response to Covid-19."

Mr Bhushan said the

■ **Turn to Page 4**



Arvind Kejriwal

## Don't leave home unless vital: Kejri to Delhiites

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

The Covid-19 situation in Delhi is "very serious", with 10,732 cases in the last 24 hours, the highest since the pandemic began, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Sunday as he issued a stark warning: "Don't step out of your homes unless it is urgent".

"The fourth wave is more dangerous than the previous one," he said at a press conference.

In just a few weeks, Delhi has gone from less than 100 cases reported on a single day on February 16, to an exploding pandemic. The CM said his government doesn't want to impose lockdown in Delhi but that it might be forced to do so if the city falls short of hospital beds for serious patients. "We need your cooperation. If your cooperation is received and the situation at hospitals is under control, there will be no need for a lockdown in Delhi. But if beds in hospitals are unavailable, a lockdown may have to be imposed," he said.

■ **More on Page 2**

## All export of anti-viral drug Remdesivir banned by govt

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

India has banned all exports of the anti-viral drug Remdesivir amidst a surge in Covid-19 cases across the country. In an order, the government said it has banned the export of Remdesivir injection and Remdesivir active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) till the pandemic situation in the country stabilises.

Remdesivir is considered a key anti-viral drug in the fight against Covid-19, especially in adult patients with severe complications. Seven Indian companies are producing Injection

Remdesivir under voluntary licensing agreement with M/s Gilead Sciences, USA. They have an installed capacity of about 38.80 lakh units per month.

In a statement, the Centre said: "Export of injection Remdesivir and Remdesivir Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients prohibited till the Covid-19 situation in the country improves." To ensure more people can get Remdesivir, the government said that the manufacturers of Remdesivir have been asked to show on their websites the details of their stockists and distributors.

■ **More on Page 4**

## Shops, pubs, hairdressers set to open: UK lockdown eases today

ADITI KHANNA  
LONDON, APRIL 11

Non-essential retail shops, including shopping malls, pubs and restaurants and hairdressers are among the businesses gearing up to reopen their doors to customers from Monday, when England enters its next stage of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions being eased.

Indoor gyms, swimming pools, libraries, zoos and nail salons are also among the establishments now allowed to reopen, with pubs and restaurants required to strictly follow outdoor dining rules.

■ **INDOOR GYMS**, swimming pools, libraries, zoos and nail salons are also among the establishments now allowed to reopen, with pubs and restaurants required to strictly follow outdoor dining rules

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson had declared that he would be among the first people to order a pint of beer in a beer garden when the rules are relaxed, a plan now quietly postponed due to the week-long national mourning period following the death of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.

There is also unlikely to be an official statement from Downing Street to mark this next stage in the coronavirus lockdown roadmap. Meanwhile, retailers are hoping that customers will return to stores once again, having resorted to online shopping for months since the UK entered its second stay-at-home lockdown in January.

Many have spent money on measures such as safety glass, queuing systems, social distancing signage, better ventilation, and more frequent cleaning in an effort to keep people safe from the virus.  
— PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## Govt to organise conference on air pollution: Gopal Rai

**New Delhi:** Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Sunday announced the city government will hold a digital round-table conference on April 12-13 to address the issue of air pollution in the national capital. The minister said in a statement that theme of the conference will be "Measures to be taken to reduce air pollution in Delhi before winter 2021". "The work that our government has done in the last six years to fix the environment and improve the environmental condition has made a positive beginning in reducing Delhi's pollution, but it is not enough. Therefore, to fix the air quality of Delhi and to solve the crisis the government has set a target to significantly reduce the pollution level in the next five years," Rai said. He added that the Delhi government has set the target to reduce the city's pollution level by a third over the next five years. The conference will be attended by Dr Mukesh Sharma from IIT Kanpur; Dr Sagnik Dey of IIT Delhi; Sumit Sharma of TERI; Santosh Harish of Centre for Policy Research, Air Pollution Action Group; Karthik Ganesan of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water; representatives from CSE's Anumita Roy, professor Gufran Baig of Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, and Siddharth Virmani of the Energy Policy Institute of the University of Chicago. Along with this, social organisations and NGOs doing different work in the field of environment are also participating in it, Rai added. "On the basis of suggestions received from experts and organizations, the government will formulate a long-term action plan in order to tackle pollution in Delhi," he said.

— PTI

## Over 200 Delhi jail inmates vaccinated

**New Delhi:** Around 200 eligible inmates of the three jails in the national capital have been vaccinated against the novel coronavirus so far, and none of them has reported any adverse events, officials said on Sunday. A total of 326 inmates in the Delhi's prisons are above 60 years, and over 300 in the 45-59 age bracket with comorbidities. These two categories are eligible for vaccination in the ongoing nationwide drive. Earlier, the Delhi Prisons Department had set up a COVID-19 vaccination centre inside Tihar Jail to vaccinate the inmates. It was set up in the central jail hospital at jail number 3, they said. Director General (Prisons) Sandeep Goel said, "Around 160 inmates in Tihar jail and around 40 in Rohini and Mandoli jails have been vaccinated so far." The vaccination drive for prison inmates started on March 18. The officials said they are sending inmates of Rohini and Mandoli jails to the nearest government vaccination centre under police protection for taking jabs. According to a senior jail official, the family members of eligible inmates were asked to send the required documents through WhatsApp to jail officer's mobile number for the vaccination process. "We spoke to the families of the inmates asked them to send the documents required for the registration through WhatsApp and then vaccinated them," a senior jail official said. None of the inmates who has received the jab reported any complications, the official said. On March 1, the second phase of the COVID-19 vaccination drive began in the national capital. In the first phase, starting January 16, over 3.6 lakh beneficiaries comprising healthcare workers and frontline workers, were vaccinated in Delhi. — PTI



A sunbird sits on a Gulmohar flower in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

# 10,774 Covid-19 cases in city in 24 hours; 48 new fatalities push death toll to 11,283

## Delhi records highest single-day spike till date

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

Delhi recorded 10,774 fresh Covid-19 cases on Sunday, the highest single-day surge in the national capital till date, according to data shared by the health department.

According to a bulletin issued by the department on Sunday, 48 new fatalities were also recorded, pushing the death toll to 11,283.

The fresh cases came out of the record over 1.14 lakh tests conducted the previous day, the bulletin said, adding that the positivity rate stood at 9.43 per cent.

The previous highest single-day spike in Delhi was 8,593 cases, which was reported on November 11 last year while on November 19 the city recorded 131 Covid-19 deaths, the highest single-day fatality count till date. Delhi recorded 7,897 Covid-19 cases on Saturday while 39 more people died due to the coronavirus infection. The positivity rate had also mounted to 10.21 per cent, breaching the 10 per cent mark for the first time this year.

The positivity rate was above 15 per cent in mid-November last year.

On Friday, 8,521 Covid-19 cases and 39 deaths were recorded in the national capital. This was also the first time that more than 8,000 cases were recorded in a day this year amid a massive spike in the number of cases over the last few weeks.

On Thursday, the city recorded 7,437 cases. It was also the first time that over 7,000 cases were reported in a day this year.

A total of 1,14,288 tests, including 76,954 RT-PCR



Passengers get themselves registered for Covid-19 tests at a railway station in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

tests and 37,334 rapid antigen tests, were conducted on Saturday, according to the latest health bulletin.

The total number of cases stood at 7,25,197 on Sunday and over 6.79 lakh patients have recovered from the virus.

The number of active cases rose to 34,341 on Saturday from 28,773 a day before.

The number of people under home isolation increased to 17,093 from 15,266 on Saturday while the number of containment zones mounted to 5,705 from 5,236, the bulletin said.

Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain had warned, on Wednesday, that the new cases "could surpass" the previous single-day record registered in November given the pace of the infection spread.

On Sunday, he held a meeting on Covid-19 preparedness.

## Kejriwal asks Delhiites to take extreme precaution

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

The Covid-19 situation in Delhi is "very serious", chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Sunday as he issued a stark warning — do not step out of homes unless it is urgent.

"The fourth wave is more dangerous than the previous wave. The government is closely monitoring the situation," said Kejriwal at a press conference.

In just a few weeks, Delhi has gone from near normalcy — with less than 100 cases reported on a single day on February 16, to an exploding pandemic, a grim reminder that the virus is contributing to extract its toll.

He said the current

fourth wave of the pandemic in the city is "very dangerous" and is spreading at such a rapid rate that it has left many people baffled.

"Cases have escalated in a big way in the last 10-15 days. And, in the past 24 hours, the city has recorded 10,732 cases. The situation is very serious.

The chief minister said that his government does not want to impose lockdown in Delhi but such a situation may arise if there is a rush to the hospitals and beds are unavailable for serious patients.

"We need your cooperation. If your cooperation is received and the situation of hospitals is under control, there will be no need to impose lockdown in Delhi," he said.



Passengers aboard a DTC bus in New Delhi on Sunday. DTC buses operate at 50 per cent capacity in the wake of surge in coronavirus cases. — PTI

## Citizens' need of Covid vaccines must be given priority over export: Chadha

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

Terming vaccine universalisation and vaccine nationalism need of the hour, AAP leader Raghav Chadha wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying there must be a strict India-first rule as citizens' needs must be given priority over exports to other countries.

In a letter, the AAP MLA said the Centre has chosen to export over 64 million doses to 84 countries while Indian citizens are desperately looking for a vaccination centre that is still open.

"I wish to ask the government of India as to what its priority is — the people of Delhi or of Dominican Republic? The people of Maharashtra or of



Raghav Chadha

Mauritius? The people of Bengal or Bangladesh? Gujarat or Guj y a n a ? Odisha or Oman? Uttar Pradesh or the U n i t e d Kingdom? Kerala or Kenya," Mr Chadha asked.

He urged the government to prioritise vaccinating the entire 135 crore in India before "earning trivial international laurels."

"I urge the government of India to adopt 'vaccine nationalism' and prioritise vaccinating the entire 135 crore in India before earning trivial international laurels. Do not let vaccination centres shut while doses are being flown out of the country.

"It is further alarming to

read reports that the government of India will be exporting nearly 45 million doses to Pakistan in the coming days. On one hand, the government of India claims that Pakistan has only exported terrorism to India, on the other hand we are exporting life-saving vaccines to Pakistan," he said.

Mr Chadha said vaccine nationalism and vaccine universalisation are the need of the hour. "Vaccines should have a strict India-first rule with Indian citizens' needs being given priority over exports to other countries. The government of India should not be exporting doses while Indian citizens are dying by the thousand with a cure within grasp but out of reach," Mr Chadha said.

## 2 fire incidents in Delhi: 5 rescued, around 200 furniture shops gutted

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

Five people were rescued from a house fire in south Delhi's Greater Kailash locality early on Sunday, the Delhi Fire Services (DFS) said.

A DFS official said information regarding the blaze was received at 4.18 am and four fire tenders were rushed to the spot.

The fire originated on the first floor of the building in Greater Kailash and trapped those living above. The smoke engulfed the second floor of the building, the official said.

The fire was brought under control around 5 am, following which the



Debris of a shop after fire broke out in a furniture market at Shastri Park in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

rescue operation was started.

Five people were rescued safely from the second floor and they have been identified as Shivani (27), Bharat (35), Naveet (31), C

R Ram (60) and Romil (57), a senior fire official said.

Police said one Ram Kumar Singh informed them at 4.21 am regarding the fire. The cause of the fire was a short circuit in

the air conditioner's stabilizer. All five people were rescued on time.

In a separate incident, a major fire broke out at Shastri Park area of the national capital late on Saturday night, the official said.

The DFS received information about the blaze at a furniture market in Vijay Court near Shastri Park Metro Station at 12.45 am, they said.

A total of 27 fire tenders were rushed to the spot, the official said, adding that around 200 furniture shops were gutted in the incident. The fire was brought under control around 3 am and no injuries were reported in the incident, they added.

## 2 contract killers held for murder of transgender

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

Delhi Police has arrested a 33-year-old criminal and his associate for allegedly being involved in a murder case of a transgender at GTB Enclave area.

The accused have been identified as Gagan Bhardwaj alias Gagan Pandit, a resident of Paschim Puri, Paschim Vihar, and Varun (19), a resident of Lal Quan.

Police said that the accused were wanted in a shootout case of GTB Enclave area on September 5, 2020 in which one Ekta Joshi, a transgender, was killed. Pandit and one Aamir had fired at Ekta, police said.

Ekta, with her step mother Anita Joshi and step brother Ashish Joshi, had come to her residence from Laxmi Nagar. Around 8.30 pm, two persons came on a scooter and fired multiple shots in which she died, police said.

According to Pramod Singh Kushwah, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Special Cell, police received information regarding the accused and laid a trap near

Nirankari Samagam Grounds on Saturday.

"The accused were spotted in a car around 5 am coming from Majlis Park Metro Station side. They were signaled to stop, but the accused whipped out their pistols and fired at police. However, police nabbed the duo," said the DCP.

"Pandit disclosed that he is the mastermind of the execution of Ekta's murder. One Manzoor Elahi, a member of a group of transgenders, had approached him for killing Anita and Ekta, members of rival group of transgenders, the DCP said.

"Elahi agreed to pay ₹55 lakh to Pandit for the killing. Groups of transgenders headed by Sonam and Varsha of Faridabad and Kamal and Manjoor Elahi of GTB Enclave were the rivals of group of Ekta and her step mother Anita," said the DCP.

"The rivalry between both the groups of transgenders was on the issue of domination of the area in Trans-Yamuna for collecting money from the people on social occasions. Pandit was previously involved in 14 cases, said the DCP.

## 'Delhi fire dept received over 2,500 calls in March'

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

The fire department responded to 2,573 calls in Delhi in March as compared to over 1,600 in last year, officials said on Sunday.

According to the India Meteorological Department, Delhi recorded a mean maximum temperature of 33.1 degrees Celsius last month, making it the warmest March in the past 11 years.

According to a data shared by Delhi Fire Services (DFS), it received 1,851 calls in

January, 1,700 in February. As many as 2,573 call were received in March as against 1,638 received last year.

DFS director Atul Garg said the number of calls went up with an increase in temperature and the department was prepared to tackle any emergency.

"The calls have almost doubled since February. The number of calls have increased since first week of March," Garg said. "There has been an increase in the number of calls we receive now, especially since the last week of March."

▶ **ACCORDING TO** a data shared by Delhi Fire Services (DFS), it received 1,851 calls in January, 1,700 in February. As many as 2,573 call were received in March as against 1,638 received last year. DFS director Atul Garg said the number of calls went up with an increase in temperature and the department was prepared to tackle any emergency.

The DFS is restricting the leave for its staff, ensuring that maximum personnel are on standby,

overhauling all vehicles and equipment to making special arrangements to respond quickly to fires in agricultural fields, is it gearing up for a busy summer.

The department received more than 80 calls daily on an average in the last 10 days of March and it crossed the 100 mark since March 28, according to data.

It showed that the DFS received 136 calls, highest of that month on March 29, the day Delhi reeled under a 'severe' heat wave, as the maximum temperature shot up to 40.1 degrees Celsius, making it the hottest day in March in 76 years.

Among the several calls responded by the firefighters, one of those included the incident at Safdarjung Hospital on March 31 when a fire broke out in its ICU, following which 50 patients were evacuated and shifted to other wards safely by them with the help of the hospital staff.

In another incident, three members of a family trapped in a building fire in south Delhi's Greater Kailash were rescued by a team of firefighters along with Delhi Police personnel.

In another incident, three members of a family trapped in a building fire in south Delhi's Greater Kailash were rescued by a team of firefighters along with Delhi Police personnel.

## Civil defence volunteer killed in road mishap

**New Delhi, April 11:** A Delhi civil defence volunteer was killed on Sunday after being hit by a truck while he was on duty at Baba Haridas Nagar here, police said. The deceased has been identified as Punit Gupta, a resident of Pandav Nagar, they said. Accused Devinder Singh, a resident of Jharoda Road in Najafgarh, was caught and his truck was seized. Gupta's body was handed over to his family members after post-mortem at the RTRM Hospital. — PTI

## 2 confess to killing man after cops weave 'NASA satellite footage' story

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

After tricking with a NASA story, the Delhi Police arrested two men for allegedly killing a 35-year-old man who used to abuse the accused in northwest Delhi's Mangolpuri area.

The accused have been identified as Pradeep and Raju, both residents of Mangolpuri. Police said that body of one Chandarbhan, a resident of Mangolpuri, with injury marks was found

on Monday at 9.35 AM and he used to work as a cardboard box painter in Rampura Industrial area.

According to Parminder Singh, the deputy commissioner of police (DCP), Outer district, during investigation, it was revealed that the deceased was last seen with two men on a bike.

"Later, they were identified as Pradeep and Raju. Police did not have any evidence and released them. The inputs were

again cross checked and the duo were apprehended," said the DCP.

"To know about the truth, police told the accused that since the area was under surveillance through satellite cameras of NASA and in those footages, they were seen with the deceased. This led the accused confess to their crime," said the DCP.

The accused disclosed that they had attacked him on his face and throat with stones lying in the park, the DCP said.

The accused alleged that the deceased used to abuse them after drinking.

They had grudges against Chandarbhan and had planned to kill him. On April 4, they had drinks and brought the deceased to the isolated park in Mangolpuri Industrial area and killed him, said the DCP.

Pradeep is a sales agent working in a private company and Raju is a painter by profession. They have been arrested in the case, police said.



## SHORT TAKES

## BJP leaders call off stir over priest's death

**Jaipur:** BJP leaders here on Sunday called off their sir over the death of a temple priest after the Rajasthan government agreed to get the case investigated by a divisional commissioner. BJP Rajya Sabha MP Kirodi Meena along with other party leaders had been protesting near the Civil Lines railway crossing here for the past four days with the body of deaf and mute temple priest Shambhu, who had died amid a row over the registration of a piece of land. Shambhu, a resident of Dausa's Mahwa, had died last Friday, after which it was claimed that the priest had fallen sick as his land was fraudulently registered in the name of two people. Meena, who was leading the sit-in in Jaipur, had said Shambhu fell sick after his two-bigha plot was fraudulently registered. He had demanded action against the officials involved in the registration process. — PTI

## BJP nominee in TN polls +ve for Covid

**Chennai:** BJP nominee from Aravakkurichi constituency in the April 6 Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, K Annamalai, has tested positive for Covid. Annamalai tweeted saying he has tested positive for coronavirus and has been hospitalised. He requested those who came in contact with him recently "to watch out for any symptoms & get tested." A former Karnataka cadre IPS officer, Annamalai had taken voluntary retirement from service in 1996 and joined the BJP last year. He was fielded from Aravakkurichi Assembly constituency in the Assembly polls. Actor-politician Khushbu Sundar, also with the BJP, said her filmmaker husband Sundar C has tested positive for Covid. "He is doing well but admitted in hospital for precautionary measures...", she tweeted. — PTI

## Make 'Tika Utsav' successful: Nadda

**New Delhi:** BJP president J.P. Nadda asked party members on Sunday to work to make the 'Tika Utsav', which aims to inoculate maximum number of eligible people against coronavirus, successful and help keep the society healthy. He urged BJP members to follow PM Narendra Modi's suggestions fully to make the drive a success. Asserting that the vaccination drive between April 11 and 14 marks the beginning of the second big war on Covid, Modi on Sunday made several suggestions to people on tackling the virus and urged them to focus on personal and social hygiene. Elderly people or those who may not be much educated should be helped in getting the vaccine, he said, and also asked people to help those Covid patients in getting treatment who may lack resources or information. — PTI

## CONG CANDIDATE IN TN POLLS DIES OF CORONAVIRUS

**Chennai:** Congress party's Srivilliputhur constituency candidate in the April 6 Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, P S W Madhava Rao died on Sunday due to Covid complications, his family said. Rao was 63 years old and is survived by his only daughter. He died at a private hospital in Madurai this morning where he was admitted on March 20 for treatment, Rao's son-in-law, K. Rajiv told PTI. Congress party secretary and Tamil Nadu incharge Sanjay Dutt tweeted saying he was deeply pained to learn about the demise of Rao due to Covid complications. "Our heartfelt condolences to his family. We stand with them in this hour of grief & pray may his soul rest in peace," Dutt said. AIADMK top leader O. Panneerselvam and DMK president M.K. Stalin expressed shock and grief over Rao's death. Deputy chief minister Panneerselvam conveyed his condolences to the bereaved family and the Congress party. Mr Stalin said Rao's death was a huge loss for the people of Srivilliputhur and the Congress party. The DMK chief urged those in public life to act with precaution and get the vaccine administered. — PTI

## Cooch Behar killings 'turning point', says Gurung

Chief of one of two GJM factions claims that BJP is set to face wrath of voters in next 4 phases of polls

**Darjeeling, April 11:** Asserting that Saturday's firing by the CISF in Cooch Behar, which claimed four lives, will be a "turning point" in Bengal polls, Bimal Gurung, the chief of one of the two GJM factions, claimed that the BJP is set to face the wrath of voters in the next four phases of elections, especially in the northern part of the state.

Mr Gurung, in an interview with PTI, reaffirmed that "statehood is a dream nurtured by every Gorkha" living in the hills, while also noting that the TMC's pitch for a "permanent political solution" and the overall development of Darjeeling and its adjoining areas sounds "very encouraging".

Lashing out at the BJP for "deceiving the Gorkha jaati for 12 years with fake promises", Gurung, who deserted the NDA and joined hands with the TMC in October last year, said he will teach the saffron camp a "lesson for life", with Mamata Banerjee by his side.

The BJP had won the Darjeeling seat thrice since 2009 — with Jaswant Singh, SS Ahluwalia and incumbent Raju Bista representing the seat respectively over the past 12 years. Condemning the Cooch Behar incident, Gurung said, "Killing of innocent people — be it by the state police or the

**During the 2017 Gorkhaland agitation, many people were killed... The TMC subsequently faced the music election when it lost all 8 LS seats in north Bengal. This time, the BJP is set to meet the same fate**

— **Bimal Gurung,**  
GJM, Chief

central forces — is not acceptable. What happened on the polling day is nothing short of genocide; the BJP would feel the heat in North Bengal. The party would be wiped out from the region."

Four persons were killed and as many injured when the CISF opened fire in Sitalkuchi area of Cooch Behar, triggering a political storm, with the central forces claiming that shots were fired in self-defence. The TMC, however, termed it a "cold-blooded" murder to intimidate voters.

"During the 2017 Gorkhaland agitation, many people were killed... The TMC subsequently faced the music in the 2019 general election when it lost all eight Lok Sabha seats in north Bengal. This time, the BJP is set to meet the same fate," he asserted. — PTI



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign for state Assembly polls at Rajganj in Jalpaiguri district on Sunday. — PTI

## Cooch Behar killings: TMC holds statewide protests

**Kolkata, April 11:** The Trinamul Congress on Sunday said its workers staged thousands of demonstrations across West Bengal in protest against the killing of four people in firing by CISF personnel during polling in the fourth phase.

At least 11,700 demonstrations were held in south and north Bengal where TMC activists wore black badges and demanded the resignation of Home minister Shah, naming him as the con-

spirator of the incident, senior party leader Sukhendu Sekhar Roy said here.

Four persons died on Saturday in Sitalkuchi area of Cooch Behar when CISF personnel opened fire allegedly after coming under attack from locals, who "attempted to snatch their rifles", the police had said.

In Kolkata, TMC leader and minister Sashi Panja led protest rallies in Esplanade area, as participants lit candles and con-

verged in front of Mahatma Gandhi's statue. Similar demonstrations were also held in Taldangra in Bankura, Canning in South 24 Parganas and in Hooghly district, TMC sources said.

The deaths have set off a political firestorm in West Bengal, with the ruling TMC and challenger BJP blaming each other for the violence. CM Mamata Banerjee has said a CID probe will be instituted into the incident. — PTI

## Pre-poll violence in Pipili Assembly segment

3 workers of saffron party were injured in a clash allegedly with rival Biju Janata Dal

**Puri, April 11:** At least three BJP workers were injured in a clash allegedly with rival BJD activists at Delang in the by-poll bound Pipili assembly segment in Odisha's Puri district on Sunday, police said.

The incident took place during election campaigning at Brahmanabada village under Delanga police station. The injured three persons were initially admitted at the Delang community health centre. Two of them were later

shifted to AIIMS, Bhubaneswar, they said.

Alleging that the ruling party goons were being shielded by the police, hundreds of saffron workers sat on a dharna near Delang police station leading to tension in the area. They also blocked the road connecting Pattnayakia Chhak and Khura.

"The police are not taking action against the BJD goons who have set a reign of terror in Pipili-Delang area," BJP state vice-president Bhru

gung said.

Later a delegation of BJP MLAs comprising Mukesh Mahalinga, Nauri Nayak, Nityananda Gond, Kusum Tete met Chief Electoral Officer to complain about the alleged attack on BJP Mahila Morcha State Secretary Rashmi Rekha Das by some BJD supporters during campaigning in Pipili.

The BJP leaders also claimed that a group of BJP workers were also allegedly thrashed by rival BJD workers during

campaigning at Raigurpur village in Pipili. BJD spokesperson Lenin Mohanty rejected the BJP allegation and claimed that the saffron party workers are making false allegations against the ruling party.

He also said that the BJP has the habit of making such allegations and the saffron party workers are creating violence in Pipili area as they had done in Bijepur by-polls in Bargarh district.

The by-election to the Pipili seat was necessitat-

ed following the death of sitting BJD MLA Pradeep Maharathy.

The BJD has fielded Maharathy's son Rudrapratap in Pipili, the BJP nominee is Ashrit Pattanayk. The Congress has fielded Ajit Mangaraj as its candidate.

The polling in the Pipili segment is scheduled to take place on April 17 for which three companies of central armed police force will be deployed, said ADGP (Law and Order) Y. K. Jethwa. — PTI

## ED to initiate fresh rounds of proceedings against Prajapati

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI APRIL 11

More trouble seems to be in store for senior Samajwadi Party leader and former

mining minister of Uttar Pradesh, Gayatri Prajapati, as the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is contemplating initiating fresh rounds of proceedings to attach assets, worth several crores, belonging to him and his family members.

Sources said, "The agency sleuths are also collecting details about assets acquired by associates of the former minister and by those local leaders of Samajwadi Party, who were in constant touch with him. Besides, assets of certain former bureaucrats, who worked with Prajapati, are also under the scanner of the ED". Their fresh assets will be attached under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

"Investigation by the ED has already revealed that sons of the former minister, who is accused in a rape case, allegedly sold off some of his assets to garner funds for influencing key witnesses of the case apart from personal gains. More than 100 registries of different properties spread across Lucknow, Kanpur, Amethi, Sitapur and other areas had been recovered by the ED during searches", sources said. Besides, allotment letters of four villas in Mumbai, valued at ₹2.5 crore each, belonging to the family members of the former minister has also been seized, they added.



## NIA arrests Sachin Waze's associate API Riyaz Kazi

SHAHAB ANSARI  
MUMBAI, APRIL 11

The National Investigation Agency (NIA), on Sunday, arrested assistant police inspector Riyaz Kazi, a close aide of arrested API Sachin Waze, in connection with the Mukesh Ambani bomb scare case and the Mansukh Hiren murder case. The police has alleged that Kazi is a co-conspirator in the Ambani case. A holiday court remanded Kazi to NIA custody till April 16.

According to sources, the probe agency suspects that Kazi destroyed important evidence like fake number plates and digital video recorder (DVR) of the society where Sachin Waze resides. Kazi was seen in several garages where he got fake number plates made and later confiscated the DVRs from all the garages and destroyed them.

The NIA has already questioned Kazi in con-

## CBI questions Deshmukh's staff on corruption allegations

SHAHAN ANSARI  
MUMBAI, APRIL 11

The CBI on Sunday questioned two personal staffers of former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh in connection with the allegations of corruption levelled against him by former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh. Those questioned by the CBI are Mr Deshmukh's personal assistant Kundan Shinde

and personal secretary Sanjeev Palande.

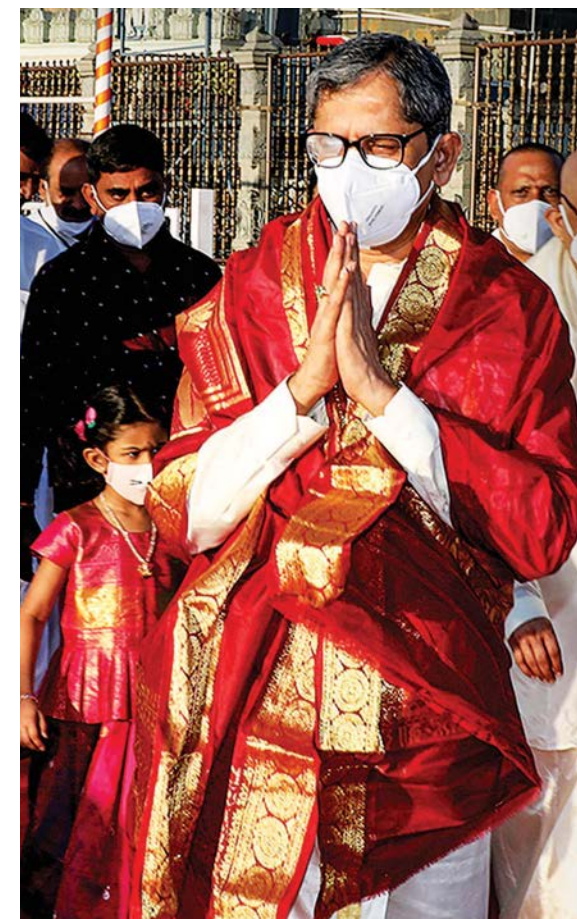
The agency started its preliminary enquiry into the allegations of bribery against Deshmukh on Tuesday. The Central probe agency had summoned them for questioning, as the Bombay High court has asked the CBI to conduct a preliminary enquiry into the allegations of corruption levelled against former Home Minister.

nection with his case in the past but now he has been arrested for custodial interrogation.

Earlier, on Friday, the NIA had recorded the statement of Mahesh Shetty, a bar owner who is close to Sachin Waze, in connection with the mur-

der case.

Waze was transferred to the Citizen Facilitation Centre (CFC) at the Mumbai police headquarters from the Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU) after his name cropped up in the Mansukh Hiren murder case.



CJI designate Justice N.V. Ramana after offering prayers at Lord Venkateswara Temple at Tirumala in Tirupati on Sunday. — PTI

## 'B'desh has become role model in fighting poverty'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

Bangladesh high commissioner Muhammad Imran has said that his country has become a role model in the world in fighting poverty. He was speaking at a cultural event recently organised in the national capital by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Bangladesh high commission to celebrate "Mujib Barsho" and 50 years of establishment of diplomatic relations between

India and Bangladesh.

The "Mujib Barsho" refers to the centenary birth anniversary celebrations of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman—popularly known as Bangabandhu—who successfully led the Bangladesh freedom struggle in 1971.

The Bangladesh high commissioner spoke about the close ties and connectivity projects between his country and India. He also spoke about the large number of tourists from his country visiting India every year

THE BANGLADESH high commissioner spoke about the close ties and connectivity projects between his country and India

as ties between the two neighbours gets even stronger in what is seen as a "Sonali Adhyay" (golden chapter) in bilateral ties. This comes even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh just last month.

The cultural event comprised a dance perform-

ance by the troupe from the renowned Srishti Cultural Centre in Bangladesh.

Last month, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar had said, "I would also like to express our admiration and pride, as your closest neighbour and friend, at Bangladesh's graduation from LDC (least developed country) status. It is truly a tribute to your miraculous socio-economic progress and a reflection of the statesmanship and leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina."

"We see Bangladesh as a key neighbour and a valued partner not only in South Asia but also in the broader Indo-Pacific region. It is no secret that we cite it to others as an example for emulation," he added.

It may be recalled that Bangladesh is celebrating 50 years of its existence this year. The Indian armed forces' victory over Pakistan in the war in December 1971 had led to the liberation of the erstwhile East Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh as an Independent nation.



## SHORT TAKES

**Militants gun down civilian in J&K dist**

**Srinagar:** Militants shot dead a civilian outside his house in the Budgam district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday while he was repairing power lines, the police said. The ultras fired on Nasir Khan in Buchipora in the Magam area of the central Kashmir district this afternoon, a police official said. He said Khan was rushed to a hospital, where he succumbed to the injuries. The area has been cordoned off and a manhunt launched to nab the attackers, the official said. A police spokesman said militants fired upon Khan outside his home while he was repairing electricity lines along with power development department officials. Preliminary investigations indicate that local militants Mohammad Yousuf Dar alias Kantur alias Tymoor and Abrar Nadeem Bhat with other associates of proscribed outfit Lashkar-e-Tayyaba were involved in the attack, the spokesman said. He said police have registered a case and the investigation is in progress. — PTI

**2 killed, 20 injured as tractor overturns**

**Berhampur:** At least two persons, including a woman, were killed and 20 others were injured when the tractor in which they were travelling overturned in Odisha's Ganjam district on Sunday, the police said. Around 25 people mostly women were returning from Tumba after collecting rice under the public distribution system to their native village Chhana Gao when the mishap occurred at Panchagaon, the police said. Two persons died on the spot, said inspector-in-charge of Jarada police station, Murtu-njay Swain. The deceased were identified as Mangala Pradhan and Sita Pradhan of Chhana Gaon. The injured persons were rushed to Jarada hospital and the critically injured ones were referred to MKCG Medical College and Hospital, the police said. — PTI

**19-yr-old rescued from kidnappers**

**Mathura:** A 19-year-old youth abducted for a ransom of ₹1 crore was rescued from three kidnappers after an exchange of fire, officials said on Sunday. Two of the kidnappers were arrested after the confrontation in the Tivaripuram area on Saturday night, SSP Gaurav Griver told reporters. Gantavya Agrawal, an undergraduate student and a resident of Mahavidya Colony in Govind Nagar, was kidnapped on April 9. The two arrested have been identified as Shiv Kumar and Shobhit Chauhan. Kumar has been admitted to a hospital after he received a bullet injury during the exchange of fire. The police has intensified the hunt for Nishant, the third kidnapper, the officials said. — PTI

# China on LAC row: India should cherish 'current positive trend'

*Both sides should adhere to consensus reached in previous talks: PLA spokesman*

**Beijing, April 11:** With no forward movement at the latest round of Sino-India military talks on disengagement from the remaining areas in eastern Ladakh, the Chinese military has said that India should cherish the "current positive trend" of de-escalation and cooling down of tensions in the border area.

A day after the 11th round of corps command-level talks that lasted for 13 hours, the Indian Army said in a statement on Saturday that both sides held a detailed deliberation on the disengagement of troops in the remaining friction points

of Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang in eastern Ladakh and agreed to jointly maintain stability on the ground, avoid any new incidents and resolve the outstanding issues in an "expeditious manner".

There was no visible forward movement at the latest round of military talks between the two countries as the Chinese delegation came to the talks with a "premeditated mindset" and did not show any flexibility in moving forward on the disengagement process at the remaining friction points in eastern Ladakh, people familiar with the negotiations said in New Delhi on Saturday.

**▶ THERE WAS** no visible forward movement at the latest round of military talks between the 2 countries as the Chinese delegation came to the talks with a 'premeditated mindset', people familiar with the negotiations said in New Delhi

In its press release on the latest round of talks between two militaries held on April 9, China's PLA said India should cherish the de-escalation and cooling in the border area, in an apparent reference to the disengagement of troops from the most

contentious area of the Pangong Lake in February.

Both sides should also adhere to the consensus reached in the previous talks, the state-run China Global Television Network on Sunday quoted the press release by a PLA spokesperson on the talks held at the Chushul border point on the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

The Indian Army statement said it was highlighted at the talks that completion of disengagement in other areas would pave the way for considering "de-escalation of forces".

— PTI



Devotees gather at Har Ki Pauri ghat to offer prayers during Kumbh Mela in Hardwar on Sunday amid spike in Covid-19 cases.

## 4 terrorists shot dead in 2 encounters in J&K

**Srinagar, April 11:** (PTI) Four militants from Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) and al-Badr outfits, including those involved in the killing of an off-duty Territorial Army soldier in Anantnag on Friday, were gunned down on Sunday in two encounters with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir, the police said.

With this, the death toll in the encounters that began on Saturday in Anantnag and Shopian has climbed to five as one militant was killed in the initial exchange of fire.

Towseef Ahmad Bhat and Aamir Hussain Ganie, both from Bijbehara and linked to the LeT, were killed at village Semthan in the Bijbehara area of south Kashmir's Anantnag district after they refused to surrender and fired indiscriminately on a search party, the police said.

Both of them were wanted in many terror crimes including the killing of an

**▶ THE MILITANTS** were also involved in threatening and intimidating the civilian population of the area and enticing young boys to join terror ranks

off-duty Territorial Army soldier Mohammad Saleem Akhoun near his home in Goriwan Bijbehara on Friday. They were also wanted in the case of an attack on a CRPF party in which a CRPF jawan was killed, an official said.

The security forces rescued all the civilians trapped in the area and halted the operation for the night, he added. In the wee hours, the operation was resumed and both the militants were eliminated, the official said.

The ultras were also involved in threatening and intimidating the civilian population of the area and enticing young boys to join terror ranks, he said.

According to police records, Bhat was active since 2017 and Ganie had joined the militant ranks in the year 2018.

Terrorists responsible for the killing of Army jawan have been neutralised within two days in Bijbehara encounter, IGP, Kashmir, Vijay Kumar said.

Arms and ammunition, including two AK series rifles, were recovered from the site.

The IGP said one of the slain militants in the Shopian encounter was newly recruited into the militant ranks and security forces made sincere efforts to persuade him to surrender, but the other militants did not allow him.

"Parents also made appeals, but other terrorists didn't let him surrender," Mr Kumar said.

He identified the slain militants as Aasif Ahmad Ganaai and Faisal Gulzar Ganaai — both residents of Chitragam Kalan. — PTI

■ Govt: Ban till Covid situation in country stabilises

## Remdesivir drug export banned as cases increase

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

India has banned export of the anti-viral drug Remdesivir amid a surge in Covid-19 cases in the country. In an order, the government said it has banned export of Remdesivir injection and Remdesivir active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) till the pandemic situation in the country stabilises.

Remdesivir is considered a key anti-viral drug in the fight against Covid-19, especially in adult patients with severe complications. Seven Indian companies are producing Injection Remdesivir under voluntary licensing agreement with M/s. Gilead Sciences, USA. They have an installed capacity of about 38.80 lakh units per month.

In a statement, the Centre said, "Export of injection Remdesivir and Remdesivir Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) prohibited till the Covid-19 situation in the country improves."

To ensure more people can get Remdesivir, the government said manufacturers of Remdesivir have been asked to show on their website the details of their stockists and distributors. Drugs inspectors and other officers have been asked to verify stocks, check any malpractice and stop hoarding and black marketing.

"The Department of Pharmaceuticals has been

## Maha CM still undecided on lockdown, decision April 14

SONU SHRIVASTAVA  
MUMBAI, APRIL 11

The MVA government is likely to impose a stricter lockdown from April 14 for two weeks as most of the members of the task force opined are in favour of it. However, Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray is yet to take a final call.

The CM held a meeting with the task force and senior bureaucrats of the state administration on Sunday to seek their views on form of lockdown and took stock of the present Covid situation in district-wise.

According to a senior official, the meeting lasted for about two hours. Most of the task force members have suggested imposing stricter lockdown for two weeks. The details of the lockdown are expected to be finalised within next 24 hours.

An official statement issued by the chief minister's office, the Maharashtra chief minister said that during the stricter curbs, they would establish an Oxygen generation plant, make arrangements of beds, other medical facilities and Remdesivir injection.

in contact with the domestic manufacturers to ramp up the production of Remdesivir," the government said. The National Clinical Management Protocol for Covid-19 lists Remdesivir as an investigational therapy, where informed and shared decision making is essential.

The states and UTs have been advised that these steps should again be communicated to all hospitals, both in public and private sector, and compliance monitored.

The decision comes days after several states reported shortage of the anti-viral drug or injection used to treat novel coron-

avirus cases. Several areas in a few states are witnessing people queuing up outside medical stores for the drug as the novel coronavirus cases in the country touch over daily highs for the past few days.

Maharashtra revenue minister Balasaheb Thorat had earlier said there is shortage of Remdesivir injections and the supply of vaccine doses was inadequate.

On Thursday, the state government capped the price of Remdesivir between ₹1,100 and ₹1,400 per vial and warned against its hoarding and black marketing.

## Will not let Khattar enter Badauli for April 14 event: Tikait

**New Delhi, April 11:** Farmer leader Rakesh Tikait on Sunday said that the Samyukta Kisan Morcha will not allow Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar to enter Badauli village for an event on April 14.

Speaking to the media at the Singhu border, Mr Tikait alleged that Mr Khattar is coming to "disrupt the amity" in the area in the garb of unveiling a statue of B.R. Ambedkar.

"We are not against Baba Saheb's statue, we are against Khattar. Samyukta Kisan Morcha has decided that as long as our protest is on we are against the CM and the deputy CM.

"He is not coming here to unveil the statue, but as per the BJP's plot he is coming here to disrupt the amity among people. And we, along with the Khap Panchayat, will not allow him to do that."



Mr Tikait said. Mr Khattar is scheduled to visit Badauli village in Panipat to unveil a statue of Ambedkar on the occasion of the Dalit icon's birth anniversary on April 14.

"We won't let him enter the village. If anyone else wants to unveil the statue, they can do it," Mr Tikait added.

Hundreds of farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at three border points of Delhi — Singhu, Tikri (along Haryana), and Ghazipur — demanding a repeal of three farm laws enacted by the Centre in September last year. — PTI

## Chandra set to take over as next CEC

**New Delhi, April 11:** Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra is set to become the next chief election commissioner, sources said on Sunday.

Going by the convention of appointing the senior-most election commissioner as the CEC, the government is learnt to have cleared his name for the top post at Nirvachan Sadan.

Mr Chandra will assume charge on April 13, a day after incumbent Sunil Arora demits office.

Mr Chandra was appointed as an election commissioner on February 14, 2019 ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

He would demit office on May 14, 2022.

Under him, the EC would hold assembly polls in Goa, Manipur, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. — PTI

## I will quit only if people ask, says Shah

■ **Continued from Page 1** forces (CAPF) personnel. When the CAPF jawans opened fire in self-defence and to protect their weapons, four people were killed. What is more sad is the way the entire incident is being politicised."

He was speaking to the media at Shantipur in Nadia district.

He added: "I saw Mamatadi's statement. A few days ago, at the same Shitalkuchi seat, Mamatadi gave a brazen speech asking the people to gherao and attack the

CAPF. I want to ask her: 'Isn't her speech responsible for the death of the four? Would the four have dared to attack the Central forces had she not made the speech?' Provoking them, you made a cause for firing."

Mr Shah later claimed at a BJP rally at Basirhat South in North 24 Parganas: "Didi, you, sitting in a wheelchair, left anyway but it was because of you that the four youths died." He said: "I feel Mamatadi still has time to offer her respect to the

fifth slain youth, talk about him and apologise to the people for her provocative speech."

Complaining about Ms Banerjee's sympathy only with the four victims, who were Muslims, the home minister said: "At the same booth, some goons of the Trinamul Congress killed our worker in the morning so that polling could not take place. Later, the attack on the CISF followed. But Mamatadi mourned the loss of four lives only. She is not bothered by the

death of Burman. This is a clear example to what level she brought down the politics of Bengal through her appeasement and vote bank politics even in death."

He added: "We are equally saddened by the death of the four like that of Burman."

"The death of whosoever should be above politics. But she did not mourn the death of Burman, or shed tears... This type of politics is neither the culture nor the tradition of Bengal."

## CM Mamata mocks MCC as 'BJP code'

■ **Continued from Page 1** Such a forcible decision is unprecedented. I respect the EC. But everything cannot be changed in the interest of a particular party. A system cannot be changed. It has to be maintained. The institution can continue forever. Yes, they can do anything. But there must be something which is essential for democracy and a free and fair election."

She claimed: "Since the ban is for 72 hours, I wait because of the MCC. I will visit the families on April 14, though I think the MCC has become the BJP

**▶ LATER SUNDAY,** the bodies of the four victims, after post-mortems, were brought to Jor Patki village in Shitalkuchi for the last rites, amid a pall of gloom

Code of Conduct now. It will do whatever they will ask it to do. Why will campaigns not be allowed for 24 hours? Just because the BJP's last date of campaign is April 13. I cannot be restricted in this way."

Wearing a black robe to protest against the

killings of the four at a rally in Jalpaiguri later, the TMC chief said: "On Saturday the BJP government, using its police, took the lives of four people by shooting them. All the bullets hit the upper parts of the victims. There has been no bigger mass murder and murder of democracy than this. I condemn this. I condemn Union home minister Amit Shah, the Government of India and those who carried it out."

Ms Banerjee said the state government's compensation for the victims' families will be

announced by chief secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay.

"Permission has been sought (from the EC). Now permission is required for everything, even helping the family of someone killed!" she quipped, adding that her party leaders and workers would also contribute to raise funds that would be donated to the families.

Later Sunday, the bodies of the four victims, after post-mortems, were brought to Jor Patki village in Shitalkuchi for the last rites, amid a pall of gloom.

## Bengal BJP chief warns of 'repeat' of election killings

■ **Continued from Page 1** Shitalkuchi. Shitalkuchi will be repeated in places. So be careful."

His warning came on the day Mr Shah said at Shantipur in Nadia: "I appeal to the people to maintain peace and cast their votes for their favourite candidates in the remaining phases of the polls. I also urge leaders of all political parties for a peaceful conduct of the polls according to the EC guidelines."

Mr Dhankhar tweeted: "All must unitedly condemn and abjure violence that has no place in democracy. Pained and anguished at violence in Cooch Behar leading to the loss of lives. People in authority must show statesmanship & ensure respect for constitutional institutions & CAPF engaged in public duty."

Lashing out at Mr Ghosh, Trinamul Congress spokesman Kunal Ghosh said: "The way he talks shows that he has no mental balance. According to him, he often talks to come in the headlines. But this time it amounts to playing with fire. The BJP, irrespective of its perception, creation or mind games, now feels that votes (were) cast against them in the later phases. Shitalkuchi is a dark chapter. When someone talks of a repetition of that, will the Election Commission turn a blind eye to it? Or is it only meant for acting against chief minister Mamata Banerjee and her party in the polls?"

## 'Active cases' touch 11 lakhs; 1.52L more in 1 day; 839 die

■ **Continued from Page 1** Centre has also taken note of issues related to the availability of vaccines and required action to augment supplies will be taken based on the available stock. He said a brief summary of the key performance indicators related to testing, hospital infrastructure and vaccination, as reported by the teams, was shared for suitable corrective actions by the state or district administrations. He said 30 Central teams have been deployed for the most-affected districts in Maharashtra.

While the cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has crossed 10 crores, things are getting bad from worse in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala, which cumulatively have 70.82 per cent of the total cases. Maharashtra alone has 48.57 per cent of the country's total active case-load.

Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases, at 55,411. It is followed by Chhattisgarh, with 14,098, while Uttar Pradesh has reported 12,748 new cases. Sixteen

states — Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab and Kerala — are displaying an upward trajectory in daily new cases.

The Maharashtra government is to decide soon on whether to go in for another lockdown in the state. The government is said to be considering an eight-day lockdown while experts want it for a period of two weeks.

In Himachal Pradesh, the government made it mandatory for all people coming from seven states that have seen a spike in coronavirus cases to show a Covid-19 negative test report on entering the state. Chief minister Jai Ram Thakur said people coming from Punjab, Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh need to carry a negative RT-PCR report not earlier than 72 hours while visiting Himachal Pradesh from April 16.

The Uttar Pradesh government has ordered the closure of all schools till April 30 and directed the imposition of a night cur-

few in all districts that report 100 new infections in a day or have 500 active cases. The state government also ordered that not more than 100 people be allowed to assemble at an open space for an event, while the number was put at 50 for closed spaces. The fresh government directives have come on a day the state reported its highest single-day spike of 15,353 cases since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Asserting that the "Tika Utsav", a four-day vaccination drive, marks the beginning of the second big war on Covid-19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday made several suggestions to people on tackling the virus and urged them to focus on personal and social hygiene. In a statement, he urged people to keep four things in mind, including "each one, vaccinate one", "each one, treat one" and "each one, save one".

Mr Modi said elderly people or those who may not be well educated must be helped to get the vaccine and asked people to help those patients to get treatment who may lack resources or information.



## THE ASIAN AGE

12 APRIL 2021

## Disquieting signals in forces firing on voters

The death of four persons in firing by the personnel of Central Industrial Security Force in a booth in Sitalkuchi Assembly constituency in West Bengal, and the death of a fifth person in violence in another booth in the same constituency, give out far too many disquieting signals. A clear picture of the two events is yet to emerge but a preliminary assessment leaves one in no doubt that the central armed police forces that were entrusted with the task of facilitating free and fair elections failed to meet the challenge.

The claim of the security forces that they fired at the people in self-defence prima facie defies logic. There have been no reports of widespread violence or of security personnel suffering injuries. It is natural that minor issues could crop up during elections but there will mechanisms to deal with them. It looks like there was no effort to take the local political leadership into confidence and calm the mob which the security forces allege gheraoed them. They forgot the fact that they were called in to help the polling process, and not to quell a local mutiny. It is deeply disturbing that the protectors, who have been trained to do a professional job, became responsible for the death of those they are to protect. A thorough investigation must be conducted to unearth the facts that led to the loss of so many lives in an otherwise eventless and protracted election process.

**The claim of the security forces that they fired at the people in self-defence prima facie defies logic. There have been no reports of widespread violence or of security personnel suffering injuries.**

Politicians joined issue no sooner had the news of the mishap reached them. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has been inimical to the central forces from the very beginning, and the latest incidents will fuel her charge against them. Her series of statements against the central forces would have made the local population suspicious of their intentions. It is an irony that Ms Banerjee had betted on the presence of the same central forces to ensure a fair election in the state 10 years ago. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was campaigning in West Bengal at the time when the unfortunate incidents happened, lost no time in blaming the chief minister for the violence. This is unfortunate. The Prime Minister should have counselled peace and calm instead of targeting his political opponent. The very fact that it was the forces under the Union government that shot the people down should have tempered the Prime Minister's response but it did not work that way.

The Election Commission has a lot to learn from the Cooch Behar incidents. It practically takes over local governance once the election process is set in motion. We do not know what instructions it had passed on to the security forces when it despatched them to the states; clearly they used the force not to the optimum but to the maximum. It is also evident that there is no local command and control system to address issues even though the West Bengal elections are conducted in eight phases with only two or three districts going to the polls at a time. The EC must ensure that it uses its powers to act in an efficient and non-partisan manner; grand statements alone are not enough.

## A modernising royalist

Considering the circumstances the world finds itself in now, only 30 members of the British royal family will attend the service for Prince Philip on Saturday. If not for Covid-protocol restrictions, half of Britain would have liked to turn up at the royal consort's funeral when he will be wheeled in a Land Rover hearse. So beloved a royal was he for his nation that an outpouring of grief over his passing, when just short of a century, is understandable. His ceremonial presence was a feature of over 22,000 public events besides any number of occasions on which he willingly walked two steps behind his wife, the long reigning monarch Queen Elizabeth II. He symbolised selfless public service while also making 5,496 speeches and undertaking 637 solo trips abroad.

To paraphrase his enormous contribution to a largely dysfunctional family that was beset with more than a fair share of scandals, induced mostly by extramarital love and marriage trouble, he modernised the British royal family while shepherding it into the modern age. And then, in the face of the latest public outrage over charges of racism made by one of their own — Prince Harry and his wife Meghan in an interview with Oprah Winfrey — the prince was busy trying to help keep together the anachronism that is royalty. A royal consort who knelt and swore to be his wife's "liege man of life and limb" at her coronation in 1952, was more than true to his word in holding steadfast to his own marriage for a good 73 years.

The time of his passing lends itself easily to hagiographical references. The unsentimental would, however, also see him as the gadfly that he was who often shocked the world as the prince of gaffes with his often slanderous, extempore remarks. To Indians he seemed racist for the extent to which he could be dismissive of them — "Some Indian must have put it there" was his snooty reference to a shoddily patched-up electrical connection. Just as Britain needed in war time a Winston Churchill, with all his faults, its royalty sorely needed Prince Philip to deal with peace time turbulence.

## THE ASIAN AGE

T. VENKATRAM REDDY  
Editor in Chief

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Subhani

POLL...



POLL VIOLENCE...



## Despite Modi's push, BJP yet to reach tipping point

Shikha Mukerjee

An eight-phase election, even for West Bengal where violence is intrinsic to the process and every government has been accused of rigging the outcome, seemed excessive when the Election Commission announced the dates. On second thoughts, it is just what the BJP needed to build up a wave in its favour, however hard that may be.

After four phases and 135 constituencies that have already made their choices, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, home minister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda are still hard at it, because another four phases and 159 constituencies have yet to decide. The BJP's top brass is doing some heavy lifting with Mr Modi in the lead to get that wave going. The process seems as fraught and dependent on a force of nature, meaning the wave, as were the tense days before the mega container ship blocking the Suez Canal, *Ever Given*, finally budged. The difference is the wave was not the only push that the container needed; there were dredgers and tugs pulling at the hulk to get it to move.

The staggered polling dates give the BJP the time it needs to campaign for its conquest of West Bengal. If it needs so much time to campaign when the elections are underway to build voter support, the question that must be asked is, what was the party doing between 2019 when it zoomed to winning 18 Lok Sabha seats and 40.64 per cent of the votes from a mere 10.16 per cent votes in 2016? One conclusion would be that as the West Bengal election grew closer, the BJP realised it needed time to deploy its mightiest weapon,

Mr Modi, in multiple locations to drum up the support and swing undecided voters to the safe side.

The need for a saturation campaign by Mr Modi is one way of acknowledging that Mamata Banerjee is a far stronger opponent than the BJP anticipated. It also means that the Trinamul Congress is not on its deathbed as a party and organisation, despite 30-odd recent defections, including the BJP's star acquisition Suwendu Adhikari, who seems to have dropped out of sight after the Nandigram voting.

A list of what makes the TMC and Ms Banerjee a far tougher challenge for the challenger, meaning BJP, is perhaps necessary to assess why the party is deploying Mr Modi in key constituencies to drum up the momentum it needs to get to the point where it can unseat the incumbent. In other words, the BJP has not as yet reached the tipping point.

Quite apart from usual comparisons, Ms Banerjee's popularity vis-a-vis Mr Modi's popularity, anti-incumbency at the state level, the attraction of the BJP as a new untested party in West Bengal, what will matter most is which party is best at holding the middle ground, meaning which party is most appealing to the median voter, the average woman/man in rural, urban and peri-urban West Bengal.

The BJP has shifted so far to the right, especially in terms of its Hindutva politics, and economic and divisive social engineering policies, that it is entirely dependent on the Hindu majority to give it the percentage of votes it needs to win an election,

especially in West Bengal. It boils down to being confident of getting at least 60 per cent of the total 70 per cent Hindu votes in the state, given that the overwhelming majority of 27 per cent Muslim voters are unlikely to choose the lotus symbol on EVM machines. Its leaders are quite candid that the party has no expectations of attracting Muslim votes; state party chief Dilip Ghosh as well as Amit Shah are on record about this.

Is it realistic that the BJP will get 60 per cent of the 70 per cent Hindu votes in West Bengal? It would appear, as yet, difficult. Bengalis are split between conservatives, who uphold religious and social orthodoxy, and Bengalis who reject it and embrace socially progressive values. Till this election is over,

there is no knowing how the Bengali voter will react to state-sponsored religious orthodoxy that is divisive in its intent and destabilising of the uneasy equilibrium between the Hindu and Muslim communities.

It is instructive to note that in 2019, the BJP's surge to 40.64 per cent of votes was a switch that hitherto Left voters made, sending its vote-share plummeting to 6.34 per cent in 2019 from 19.75 per cent in 2016. Congress votes declined by over 50 per cent in 2019 to 5.6 per cent; the Trinamul Congress suffered a marginal erosion of votes in 2019 compared to 2016, even though it lost in 12 seats

**The BJP's promise to deliver better development and integrate West Bengal with the mainstream, which it believes it controls, comes with a promise to polarise the state on communal lines. Will that appeal to the run-of-the-mill Bengali?**

to the BJP.

The Trinamul Congress, with over 43 per cent votes in 2019, obviously enjoys the support of a substantial section of Hindu voters. It is only if significant numbers of these voters shift away from Ms Banerjee that the BJP can muster the numbers it needs to oust India's only woman chief minister.

While the BJP campaign has focused almost exclusively on the evils of the Mamata Banerjee government, focusing on polarising the vote on religious identity lines by putting Muslim appeasement at the cost of the Hindu majority at the top of the list, it has ignored the quieter revival of the Left, led by the CPI(M), and the Samyukta Morcha as a new political combination that was created for this election. The Samyukta Morcha is contesting in all 294 seats; the Left is contesting in 177 seats, the Congress in 91 and the Indian Secular Front in 26 seats. The Left is fighting for its very survival, and in this election it is working to achieve a revival. Its pitch as the alternative is politically necessary but unrealistic. Any increase in the Left and Congress voteshare will take off votes that the BJP has been counting on to reach the tipping point. This can be offset if the Trinamul Congress loses its voters and loses the elections.

Which party makes it across the finishing line needs to occupy the middle ground in West Bengal in social and religious identity terms.

The BJP's promise to deliver better development and integrate West Bengal with the mainstream, which it believes it controls, comes with a promise to polarise the state on communal lines. Will that appeal to the run-of-the-mill Bengali, who as poet Shakti Chattopadhyay famously said, are into religion and into giraffes?

*Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata*

## LETTERS

## STOP THE VIRUS

The second wave of the coronavirus is wreaking havoc in India. Although state governments are not in favour of a complete lockdown, if the trends continue, it will become inevitable. That will spell a huge setback for the economy. Serve the governments right for not imposing a ban on Holi and allowing Kumbh to take place. People should observe distancing and follow Covid guidelines strictly. Testing and contact tracing should be stepped up alongside the vaccination programme.

**Yugal Kishore Sharma**  
Faridabad

## NOT IN SELF-DEFENCE

FOUR PERSONS were killed and as many injured at a polling booth in Cooch Behar's Sitalkuchi area when CISF personnel opened fire purportedly after coming under attack from locals who, they said, "attempted to snatch their rifles". However, booth officials say that those fired upon were citizens standing in queue to cast their votes. At first, a commotion was created by the personnel in the opposite direction. They began thrashing polling agents, falsely labelling them as ruffians, the official said. Then the firing took place. It was unprovoked. The first person to be shot was a young man recording the incident on his mobile. The Election Commission has taken a right decision imposing a bar on all political entries into Cooch Behar. But will that be enough?

**Sankar Paul**  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

## RUINOUS POLICY

DEMONETISATION was supposed to wipe out Naxalism and scrapping Article 370 terrorism from Jammu and Kashmir, but both are alive and kicking. Why could the government not wipe out terrorists from Kashmir even when thousands of security personnel are manning every nook and cranny? Similarly, demonetisation has only served to ruin the common man. The government thus hurts its own people in the name of nationalism. What will make it change its policy?

**Syed Abdul Monim**  
Navi Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Anthony Henriques (April 2). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

A.G. Noorani



## Vestige of colonial repression, J&amp;K surety bonds blow against democracy

Is there any country in the free world that compels its politicians in the Opposition to sign a bond for "good behaviour" before a magistrate with sureties and a named amount, and guarantees of good behaviour — threatening them with prison if they don't comply?

Developing countries have turned the imitation of repressive laws of their colonial masters into something of an art. Inevitably, on their independence, the old laws continued to be in force; subject to new fundamental rights. Our new rulers grabbed the old laws and began (mis)using them against their new "masters" — the people who voted them to power. The judiciary was not very assertive. Preventive detention laws are a good instance. But the last instance is the Criminal Procedure Code. Several codes were enacted. The Code of 1898 was in force till independence and beyond. India amended it in 1973 but ensured that the repressive elements endured — the sanction of the govern-

ment to prosecute its own minister or official in authority sitting as judge in its own case.

The code enables banning of books. There is Chapter VIII. It provides for "Security for Keeping the Peace and Good Behaviour". Even in olden times the language clearly pertained to persons of ill repute or "history sheeters" as they are called; in short, goondas. The chapter extends from Section 106 to Section 124.

Consider the scheme as a whole and you will find it has no application to political opponents. The British abused it for political ends sparingly. Restraint does not come easily to New Delhi.

The only change after Independence was the separation of the executive from the judiciary. The magistracy was divided into executive magistrates and judicial magistrates. Proper understanding is vital. To begin with, Section 106 provides for "security for keeping the peace" on conviction of an offence like criminal intimidation and

assault, in sum, plain goondagiri. Judicial magistrates make such an order. But Section 107 empowers executive magistrates to order execution of a bond if he "receives information that any person is likely to commit a breach of the peace or disturb the public tranquillity or do any wrongful act" that may be disruptive. The suspect is made to sign a bond for good behaviour. This, the courts have held, is a judicial proceeding. The section applies to persons distributing material which is likely to disturb the peace because it is seditious or communal. Section 109 applies to suspects who go into hiding. Section 110 applies to habitual offenders. The entire scheme of the chapter reveals that its object is not to control the politicians.

However, a complaint was filed in Pune against Bal Gangadhar Tilak under Section 108 of the Criminal Procedure Code for disseminating "seditious matter". Tilak was defended throughout from the magistrate's court in Poona (August 1916) to the

high court (November 1916), by Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. He won in the high court and did an unusual thing for him after judgment was pronounced. He turned around and shook hands with his close friend, Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The full text of his entire proceedings verbatim are reproduced in this writer's book, *Jinnah and Tilak*.

In 2019, the Government of India invoked these archaic, repressive provisions of a colonial law and put an entire people in bondage by forcing their leaders to sign bonds. Not content with the massive presence of its army and paramilitary in Kashmir since 1989, in 2019, New Delhi made a bonanza of bondage. It knew that the people would revolt if it scrapped Article 370 of the Constitution and what little was left of Kashmir's autonomy. Knowing full well that the people would protest, New Delhi got the leaders to sign bonds under Section 108 of the Criminal Procedure Code as if they were criminals. The leaders were

imprisoned. By Sept 19, 2019, 36 politicians were confined.

On November 5, 2020, the People's Democratic Party president, Mehbooba Mufti, said that 19 party leaders were asked to sign an affidavit after being detained and released later for taking out a protest rally. "India is the world's largest democracy only on paper now," she said.

A PDP spokesman said the affidavit was "unacceptable in a democracy". He said the 19 leaders "refused to sign surety bonds which asked them to refrain from taking part in unlawful, anti-national activities".

The surety bond stated: "That we are permanent residents of the J&K U.T. That a case under section 107/151 stands against us.... That we will not indulge... in any, unlawful, anti-national activities..."

There is no law in the statute books which defines what is "anti-national". This is sheer barbarism.

By arrangement with Dawn



## IN BRIEF

## Flood traps 21 Chinese miners

Beijing, April 11: Rescuers on Sunday were trying to reach 21 coal miners who were trapped by an underground flood in China's northwest, a state news agency reported.

The mine in Hutubi County in the Xinjiang region flooded at about 6:10 pm on Saturday, the *Xinhua News Agency* said. It said eight people were rescued. China's coal mines are among the world's deadliest, regularly suffering explosions and gas leaks despite repeated safety crackdowns.

## Nasa delays Mars copter flight

Washington, April 11: Nasa has delayed by at least several days the first flight of its mini-helicopter on Mars after a possible tech issue emerged while testing its rotors, the US space agency said Saturday.

Ingenuity's trip, which is to be the first-ever powered, controlled flight on another planet, was set for Sunday but is now on hold until at least April 14. A high-speed test of the four-pound (1.8 kilogram) helicopter's rotors on Friday ended earlier than expected due to an alert of a potential issue.

## No power, water in Saint Vincent

St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda, April 11: Massive power outages struck the Caribbean island of Saint Vincent before dawn on Sunday, as officials recorded more explosive activity at a long-dormant volcano that launched into a series of eruptions.

After remaining quiet for nearly 42 years, La Soufriere rumbled back into life Friday, blanketing the island in ash and permeating the air with the stench of sulphur.

The eruptions prompted thousands to flee for safety, with around 16,000 people living in areas under evacuation orders.

## Clark, Saddam lawyer, dies

Washington, April 11: Ramsey Clark, who promoted civil rights as America's top law enforcement official in the 1960s but later helped defend Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic in court, has died at 93. The often controversial liberal figure and former attorney general died April 9 at his home in New York City, a niece, Sharon Welch, told US media. No cause of death was given.

His political arc was extraordinary. While serving under president Lyndon Johnson, Clark's Justice Department prosecuted popular author and pediatrician Benjamin Spock for helping Vietnam War protesters evade the draft. But he also filed the first school desegregation and voting rights suits in the US North.

Within years of leaving government in 1969, he had become a stunningly direct critic of US foreign policy, which he called "genocidal," and of military spending, which he termed "certifiably insane."

## GERMAN POLL: 2 GOVS THROW HAT INTO RING

Berlin, April 11: Two German state governors on Sunday declared their willingness to become the centre-right candidate for the country's Sep 26 national election.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel isn't seeking a fifth term after 16 years in power. Her centre-right Union bloc has yet to choose its candidate between two state governors, Armin Laschet and Markus Soeder. "Markus Soeder and I had a long talk," Laschet told reporters after a meeting of the leaders of the parliamentary party factions of the Union bloc. "We both have declared our willingness to run for the candidacy for the chancellor."

Armin Laschet, who is the governor of Germany's most populous state North Rhine-Westphalia, won the leadership of Merkel's Christian Democratic Union, or CDU, in Jan. He hopes to succeed Merkel as chancellor as does Soeder, who is Bavaria's governor and the head of the CDU's Bavaria-only sister party CSU.

The centre-right Union bloc, which is made up by the two parties but dominated by the CDU, hasn't yet decided on its candidate for the parliamentary election. However, a decision is expected in the coming days. "There's a big expectation to come to a solution together, rather sooner than later, regarding the question of the candidacy for chancellor," Soeder said.

## Blackout hits Natanz atomic site, Iran calls it 'N-terrorism'

Raises regional tensions as world powers, Tehran negotiate tattered N-deal

Dubai, April 11: Iran on Sunday described a blackout at its underground Natanz atomic facility an act of "nuclear terrorism," raising regional tensions as world powers and Tehran continue to negotiate over its tattered nuclear deal. Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran, stopped short of directly blaming anyone for the incident. Details remained few about what happened early Sunday morning at the facility, which initially was described as a blackout caused by the electrical grid feeding the site.

Many Israeli media outlets offered the same assessment that a cyberattack darkened Natanz and damaged a facility that is home to sensitive centrifuges.

While the reports offered no sourcing for the evaluation, Israeli media maintains a close relationship with the country's military and intelligence agencies. If Israel caused the blackout, it further heightens tensions between the two nations, already engaged in a shadow conflict across the wider Middle East. "To thwart the goals



The Natanz atomic facility in Iran.

of this terrorist movement, the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to seriously improve nuclear technology on the one hand and to lift oppressive sanctions on the other hand," Salehi said, according to state TV.

He added: "While condemning this desperate move, the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasizes the need for a confrontation by the international bodies and the (International Atomic Energy Agency) against this nuclear terrorism." The IAEA, the United Nations' body that monitors Tehran's atomic

programme, earlier said it was aware of media reports about the incident at Natanz and had spoken with Iranian officials about it. The agency did not elaborate. Sunday's developments also complicated efforts by the US, Israel's main security partner, to re-enter the atomic accord aimed at limiting Tehran's programme so it can't pursue a nuclear weapon.

Power at Natanz was cut across the facility, which is comprised of above-ground workshops and underground enrichment halls.

— AP

## Israel: Will see Iran deal saves interests

Tel Aviv, April 11: Israel will work with Washington to ensure any "new agreement" on Iran's nuclear programme will safeguard regional security, Defence Minister Benny Gantz told his US counterpart Lloyd Austin on Sunday. The comments came as Austin made the first high-level US trip to Israel since talks resumed on reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear accord, which the Jewish state fiercely opposed.

Gantz said "we will work closely with our American allies to ensure that any new agreement with Iran will secure the vital interests of the world and the United States, prevent a dangerous arms race in our region and protect the State of Israel".

Austin, the highest-level envoy from President Joe Biden's administration yet to visit ally Israel, said Washington would work

with Israel "to advance shared security interest and priorities".

Stressing America's "iron-clad" bond with Israel, Austin said the US will "continue close consultations to ensure Israel's qualitative military edge and to strengthen Israel's security". Austin's visit came just days after the US said it had offered "very serious" ideas on reviving the hobbled nuclear agreement reached between Tehran and world powers, which was abandoned by former president Donald Trump in 2018. Israel under hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been a fierce critic of the Iran nuclear deal, dating back to when it was being negotiated during Barack Obama's administration. Netanyahu applauded when Trump withdrew from the deal and imposed sanctions on Tehran. — AFP

## Underground newsletters aid Myanmar youth

Yangon, April 11: Myanmar youth are fighting the junta's internet shutdown and information suppression with an explosive underground printed newsletter they are secretly distributing across communities.

For 56 days straight there have been internet outages in coup-hit Myanmar, according to monitoring group NetBlocks.

The country has been in turmoil since democratically-elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi was ousted in a February 1 coup, triggering a mass uprising that has resulted in a brutal security crackdown and more than 700 civilian deaths.

Thirty-year-old Lynn Thant, not his real name, started the underground newsletter and gave it the edgy name Molotov to appeal to young people.

"This is our response to those who slow down the flow of information — and that's a threat to us," he said.

Thousands of readers across the country are downloading the PDF version of the publication and printing out and distributing physical copies

across neighbourhoods in Yangon and Mandalay and other areas.

Lynn Thant is conscious of the risks involved.

Police and soldiers have arrested more than 3,000 people since the coup, according to local monitoring group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. Two hundred high profile celebrities, including actors, singers and social media influencers are on an arrest warrant list and could face three years' jail if convicted of spreading dissent against the military.

"If we write revolutionary literature and distribute it like this, we could end up in prison for many years," he said, his face concealed by one of the Guy Fawkes masks popularised by the dystopian movie "V for Vendetta".

"Even if one of us is arrested, there are young people who will carry on producing the Molotov newsletter. Even if one of us is killed, someone else will come up when someone falls. This Molotov newsletter will continue to exist until the revolution is successful."

— AFP

## CHINESE SHIPS IN SCS: U.S., PHILIPPINES SHOW CONCERN

Aboard a US Military Aircraft, April 11: Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin on Saturday discussed with his Philippine counterpart China's recent positioning of "militia vessels" near the Philippines in the South China Sea.

Austin spoke by phone with Philippine Secretary of National Defence Delfin Lorenzana while Austin was flying from Washington to Israel to begin an international trip. Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Austin and Lorenzana discussed the situation in the South China Sea and the recent massing of Chinese vessels at Whitsun Reef, which has drawn criticism from Manila. China has said its vessels are there for fishing. Austin proposed to Lorenzana measures to deepen defence cooperation, including by "enhancing situational awareness of threats in the South China Sea," Kirby said.

Kirby said earlier this week that the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and its strike group, as well as the amphibious ship USS Makin Island, are operating in the South China Sea. The US has no military forces based permanently in the Philippines but sometimes rotates forces to the country under the US-Philippines Visiting Forces Agreement. The recent gathering of Chinese vessels near the Philippines is among moves the US has criticised as efforts by Beijing to intimidate smaller nations. — AP

● **AUSTIN PROPOSED** to Lorenzana measures to deepen defence co-operation, including by "enhancing situational awareness of threats in the SCS," Kirby said.



Demonstrators take part in a march organised by the anti-restriction movement 'Men In Black' in Copenhagen on Saturday against mass testing and restrictive measures during the Covid-19 pandemic.

— AFP

## China vax found less effective

Beijing, April 11: In a rare admission of the weakness of Chinese Coronavirus vaccines, the country's top disease control official says their effectiveness is low and the government is considering mixing them to get a boost. Chinese vaccines "don't have very high protection rates," said the director of the China Centers for Disease Control, Gao Fu, at a conference Saturday in the southwestern city of Chengdu.

Beijing has distributed hundreds of millions of doses abroad while trying to promote doubt about the effectiveness of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine made using the previously experimental messenger RNA, or mRNA, process. "It's now under formal consideration whether we should use different vaccines from different technical lines for the immunisation process," Gao said.

Officials at a news conference Sunday didn't respond directly to questions

## Cops fine 100 at Paris restaurant

Paris, April 10: Paris police said Saturday they had fined over 100 diners at an underground restaurant flouting Coronavirus restrictions and arrested its organiser, after a week of allegations that ministers attended similar rule-breaking events.

Officers were "called out for an excessive noise complaint about a restaurant" late Friday and "put

an end to a gathering of over 110 people," the French capital's police posted on Twitter.

"Guests fined for failing to respect applicable health measures. Organiser and manager arrested," they added.

The prosecutor's office said the two were released Saturday as the investigation continues. — AFP

## UP TO 80% IN SICILY REFUSE AZ VACCINE

Rome, April 11: Up to 80 percent of people offered the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine in Sicily refuse it out of fears over its safety, according to the southern Italian region's president Nello Musumeci.

Public confidence in the Anglo-Swedish jab has been badly shaken by reports linking it to rare, but potentially fatal, blood clots, and by conflicting recommendations on its use. "In Sicily, there is an 80-percent refusal rate of the AstraZeneca vaccine. Every 100 people, 80 say no. It is natural" for people to be particularly concerned, "but we have a duty to believe scientists when they say it is more dangerous not to get vaccinated than to get vaccinated," he said. — AFP

## ROYAL | SNUB Prince Charles pays tribute to 'Papa', says family misses him

## No Meghan at funeral for Prince Philip

London, April 11: The funeral of Queen Elizabeth II's husband, Prince Philip, will take place next week, Buckingham Palace said on Saturday, announcing a stripped-back ceremony due to Coronavirus restrictions, and a return for exiled royal Prince Harry but not his wife, Meghan. The announcement came as the couple's eldest son, heir to the throne Prince Charles, 72, paid a heartfelt tribute to his "dear Papa", and said he and the royal family missed him "enormously".

"My dear Papa was a very special person who I think above all else would have been amazed by the reaction and the touching things that have been said about him, and from that point of view we are, my family, deeply grateful for all that," he added.

"It will sustain us in this particular loss and at this particularly sad time," The Duke of Edinburgh — the 94-year-old queen's husband of 73 years — died peacefully on Friday just two months short of his 100th birthday, triggering

eight days of national mourning. Royal officials said his funeral, which will be televised, will take place at 1400 GMT on Saturday, April 17 in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, west of London.

It will be preceded by a national minute's silence.

Government guidelines restrict mourners to just 30 people and close attention has been paid to the pared-down guest list for the funeral, particularly whether the duke's grandson Harry would attend. Palace officials confirm-

ed he would but his American wife, Meghan, who is pregnant with their second child, had been advised against travelling from the United States on medical grounds.

The couple, who quit frontline royal duties last year, have launched a series of broadsides against the royals, including accusing them of racism, and of failing to treat Meghan's mental health.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will also not be attending the funeral because of Covid restri-

ctions, Downing Street said. "The Prime Minister has throughout wanted to act in accordance with what is best for the Royal household, and so to allow for as many family members as possible will not be attending the funeral on Saturday," a spokesperson said. Gun salutes earlier echoed around the United Kingdom on Saturday as the armed forces paid solemn tribute to the duke.

The coordinated 41-round volleys to the former Royal Navy commander were fired. — AFP



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49591.32	-0.31
Nifty 50	14834.90	-0.26
S&P 500*	4,128.80	0.77
Dollar (₹)	74.75	0.27
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.40	0.11
Euro (₹)	88.89	-0.41
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,257▲97	0.20
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	63.18	-0.03
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.017	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.673	0.041

\* As of Friday/Saturday

## China approves third Sinopharm vaccine for trial

China has approved the third Covid-19 vaccine from Sinopharm Group Company to start clinical trials, the company said. The green light to begin testing comes after two inactivated vaccines from Sinopharm were approved and widely used both at home and in developing countries. The latest one is a recombinant vaccine that includes parts of the coronavirus's spike protein to stimulate immune response.

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## ■ Packaging units face input shortage Global producers ignore BIS mark

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 11

The government's insistence on BIS certification on certain imported tin and steel products has led to a shortage in metal packaging materials. The Steel and Steel Products Quality Control Order, issued on July 17, 2020 by the Ministry of Steel, has made BIS certification mandatory for imports of tinsplate and tin-free steel. Further, restrictions have been imposed on the import of various steel products like easy open ends and peel off ends used by the metal packaging industry, which has 10 per cent share of the \$50 billion packaging industry. The restrictions have affected a large number of micro, small and medium enterprises involved in making products using tinsplate steel-sheets of steel

**NOT BIG ENOUGH MARKET**

- ▶ Steel ministry has made BIS certification mandatory for imports of tinsplate and tin-free steel
- ▶ Restrictions have also been imposed on various steel products like easy open ends
- ▶ But foreign suppliers have stopped shipping tin plates to India, leading to shortage

coated with a thin layer of tin that have specialised use in consumer products like cans, hairclips, pens. "It is virtually impossible to force the international suppliers to go for BIS certifications as the procedure of BIS registration is highly cumbersome. Further, for the international suppliers of tin plates, India is a small market and hence they are not quite keen to get into lengthy bureaucratic and cost-intensive BIS certification procedures," says the Metal Container Manufacturers' Association (MCMA).

Since the order came into effect, foreign suppliers have stopped shipping tin plates to India and this has led to a shortage in the domestic market. "There is a huge demand-supply gap for tinsplate and tin-free steel in India to the extent of 2.5 lakh tonnes per annum which is met through imports. Moreover, tin-free steel is produced only by one mill, Tin Plate Company, and that too once a quarter," said Sanjay Bhatia, president, MCMA. The shortage has also led to rise in prices.

## Term life policies could become costlier

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, APRIL 11

Life insurers, including Life Insurance Corporation, could increase the premium on term life insurance policies by up to 10 per cent this fiscal. They are confident that a higher premium would not affect the demand for this product for various reasons.

"We expect up to 10 per cent hike in term life insurance in the near future. Even in the increased premium regime, women, who comprise half of the country's population, will continue to get it at cheaper rates, thanks to their better longevity rate than their male counterparts. Besides, the home loan borrowers, who often prefer the cost-effective term life in place of home insurance, will also continue to buy the product," said an official of a public sector insurer.

A significant rise in demand for term insurance has been observed of late, regardless of the cost.

"The increase in online term market is largely attributed to increasing awareness about insurance due to increased economic uncertainty during the coronavirus-led recession as well as mortality risk," said Gopal Kumar, an economist and actuary.

## IBC: Recovery rate plunges after settlement of big cases

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 11

Absence of high value companies led to a poor recovery rate for lenders from cases under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) during the December quarter of this fiscal. The recovery rate for Q3FY21 dipped to a low of 12.6 per cent, a steep fall from a high of 64.1 per cent reported in the March 2020 quarter.

In the past, the recovery rate in India used to be about 26 per cent. Post-IBC implementation, the overall recovery rate till date has improved to 39.8 per cent.

Of the total claims

which were settled via liquidation in Q3FY21, the realisable value was only Rs 20.3 crore, or around 21 per cent, of the total admitted claim amount of Rs 97.3 crore.

According to Sanjay Agarwal, senior director of Care Ratings, "The earlier quarters of the previous year saw resolution at a very high value for large steel accounts such as Essar Steel, Bhushan Steel, JP Infratech. Similarly, there was a high value cement account (Binani Cement) getting resolved last year. The recovery rate was high for these steel and cement companies. This year, some of the companies that have been admitted

are weaker of the cases with legacy bad debt and so the recovery rate for lenders have fallen steeply." Suspension of fresh bankruptcy proceedings due to the pandemic defaults also led to a slowdown in the number of cases getting admitted for Corporate Insolvency Resolution Processes (CIRPs). For instance, the number of cases admitted slowed down in nine-month FY21 (283 cases) compared with 1,517 cases admitted in 9MFY20. The December-end quarter witnessed a drop of around 83 per cent compared with the previous year.

## BUSINESS BRIEFS

### CAIRN TO FOREGO \$500 MN IF INDIA PAYS PRINCIPAL



New Delhi, April 11: UK's Cairn Energy Plc has offered to forego \$500 million and invest that amount in any energy project identified by the government if New Delhi agrees to honour an international arbitration award and returns the value of loss it incurred from being taxed retrospectively, sources said. The Scottish firm invested in the oil and gas sector in 1994 and made a huge oil discovery in Rajasthan. In 2006-07, it listed its Indian assets on the BSE. Five years later the government passed a retroactive tax law and billed Cairn Rs 10,247 crore plus interest and penalty for the reorganisation tied to the flotation. The state then expropriated and liquidated Cairn's remaining shares.

—PTI

### INFOSYS PLANS SHARE BUYBACK

New Delhi, April 11: Infosys said its board will consider a buyback proposal at its meeting on April 14. "The board of the company will consider a proposal for buyback of fully paid-up equity shares of the company at its meeting to be held on April 14, 2021." The company's board is slated to meet on April 13 and 14, to approve and take on record the audited consolidated financial results for the quarter and year ended March 31, 2021. In August 2019, Infosys had bought back 11.05 crore of its shares.

—PTI

### FRANKLIN 2ND TRANCHE SOON

New Delhi, April 11: SBI Funds Management (SBI MF) will distribute the next tranche of Rs 2,962 crore to unitholders of Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund's six shuttered schemes this week. SBI MF has already distributed Rs 9,122 crore to investors as directed by the Supreme Court earlier. "SBI MF would be distributing the next tranche of Rs 2,962 crore to unitholders," a Franklin Templeton spokesperson said.

—PTI

## GAMES

### SHORT TAKES

#### India pip Argentina in Pro League tie

Buenos Aires: The Indian men's hockey team snatched a dramatic penalty shoot-out win over Olympic champions Argentina after Harmanpreet Singh kept the side afloat in regulation time with his two goals in the action-packed first game of their FIH Pro League tie here.

The draw guaranteed a point for each team, but it was the tourists who walked away with the bonus point, thanks largely to some brilliant goalkeeping by P.R. Sreejesh. As per the event's rules, the team winning the shoot-out also walks away with the bonus point. — PTI

#### Wrestlers return empty-handed

Almaty, Kazakhstan: National champion Sandeep Singh Mann (74kg) failed to qualify for the Olympic Games at the Asian Qualifiers here on Sunday, keeping veteran Sushil Kumar's Tokyo hopes alive in the weight category. Also missing out on qualification was Satyawart Kadiyan (97kg) and Sumit Malik (125kg) in the three-day competition that concluded here on Sunday. All those who missed out have one last chance to make the cut for the Tokyo Games at the World Olympic Qualifiers, scheduled to be held in Sofia, Bulgaria from May 6-9. Sonam Malik and Anshu Malik were the only ones to qualify for the Games in Almaty. — PTI

#### Two Indian fencers test +ve in Cairo

New Delhi: Two Indian fencers participating in the World Junior and Cadet Championships in Cairo have tested positive for Covid-19, leading to them being quarantined there. Fencing Association of India (FAI) president Rajiv Mehta said that the infected fencers were doing fine and being looked after by the team doctor. "Yes, two fencers have tested positive and they are undergoing quarantine in Cairo," Mehta said. "Both the fencers are doing fine and they are being looked after by the doctor there," he added. India had fielded 24 fencers in all the three disciplines — sabre, foil and epee — in the tournament which ends on Sunday. — PTI

## Real edge past Barca in Clasico Benzema, Kroos score as Madrid go level on points with Atletico at top

Madrid, April 11: Real Madrid climbed to the top of La Liga on Saturday after Karim Benzema's flicked finish helped them claim a thrilling 2-1 victory over Barcelona in a wild *Clasico* at Valdebebas.

Benzema's superb piece of skill and a deflected Toni Kroos free-kick put Madrid in charge and while Oscar Mingueza pulled one back for Barca, they fell to defeat in what could be Lionel Messi's final appearance in this fixture. Victory means Real Madrid go level on points with Atletico, with the top three now separated by a single point.

Atletico, without the injured Luis Suarez, face Real Betis on Sunday. But Real Madrid now own the better head-to-head against both of their rivals while Barcelona and Atletico still have to play each other at Camp Nou in the run-in.

With Atletico stumbling and both Barca and Real Madrid hitting their stride, this game looked set to define, if not the title, then who would become favourites to be



Real Madrid's Toni Kroos (second from left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Barcelona during their *El Clasico* match at the Alfredo di Stefano Stadium in Valdebebas, near Madrid, on Saturday.

crowned champions in May. The result was a riveting contest at a rain-soaked Alfredo di Stefano stadium — certainly one of the most exciting *Clasicos* in years — that saw both teams squander numerous chances, several efforts come back off the woodwork and Casemiro sent off in extra time.

With the last play of the game, Barcelona substitute Ilaix Moriba rattled

Real Madrid's crossbar. "We're still in it," said Barca coach Ronald Koeman.

"We've lost a game against a team who is also fighting for the league but we have eight game left

## Havertz, Pulisic shine as Chelsea climb to 4th spot

London, April 11: Chelsea boosted their bid to finish in the Premier League's top four as Kai Havertz and Christian Pulisic starred in a 4-1 win at Crystal Palace on Saturday.

Thomas Tuchel's side blew Palace away with a swaggering first half display inspired by Germany forward Havertz.

Chelsea are up to fourth place and sit two points clear of fifth placed Liverpool.

West Ham, also two points behind the Blues, would reclaim fourth if they beat Leicester on Sunday.

Havertz has endured a difficult time since his close-season move from

● Thomas Tuchel's side blew Crystal Palace away with a swaggering first half display inspired by Germany forward Havertz.

Bayer Leverkusen, but he gave a rare glimpse of his quality with the opening goal in south London.

The 21-year-old turned provider to set up Pulisic for the second goal before Kurt Zouma put Chelsea three up after 30 minutes. Christian Benteke got one back for Palace in the second half, but Pulisic netted again as Chelsea cruised to their first win in three league games.

THE RESULTS	
Getafe	0
Cadiz	1
(Timor 64-og)	
Athletic Bilbao	0
Alaves	0
Elbar	0
Levante	1
(de Frutos 45+2)	
Real Madrid	2
(Benzema 13, Kroos 28)	
Barcelona	1
(Mingueza 60)	

and we will fight to the end."

Casemiro's red card had also given Messi a free-kick and the chance for a dramatic equaliser but instead the Argentinian made it seven games now without a goal against Real Madrid, with many wondering if his 45th *Clasico* will be his last.

Messi might yet turn the tide in the eight games still remaining but there is no doubt Madrid are in the groove after backing up beating Liverpool 3-1 on Tuesday with another crucial victory. — AFP

### AUGUSTA | MASTERS

## ‘Stunning’ Hideki takes 4-stroke lead

Augusta (United States), April 11: Hideki Matsuyama unleashed an incredible back-nine shot-making display to seize a four-stroke lead after Saturday's third round of the Masters, putting the Japanese star on the brink of a historic triumph at Augusta National.

Matsuyama, trying to become the first Japanese man to win a major title, fired a seven-under par 65, his career-low 18-hole Masters total and the first bogey-free round of the week, to stand on 11-under 205 after 54 holes.

"It will be a new experience for me being a leader going into the final round of a major," Matsuyama said. "I guess I'll relax as best I can and do my best tomorrow."

England's Justin Rose, Australian Marc Leishman and Americans Xander Schauffele and Will Zalatoris shared second on 209.

Rose, the 2013 US Open champion and a two-time Masters runner-up who led by one when the day began, needed a long par putt at 18 to salvage a second consecutive level par 72.

"I didn't play well enough today, simple as that," Rose said.



Hideki Matsuyama reacts during the third round of the Masters golf tournament on Saturday. — AP

"Of course I would have liked to have stayed with it a little better. To have a shot tomorrow, I'm delighted."

Matsuyama adapted as lightning-fast Augusta National was softened by rain, taking full advantage by going six-under in a seven-hole stretch of the back nine.

After a 78-minute storm delay, swirling winds vanished and the wet course was receptive. However, slowed greens became tricky to read — except by Matsuyama. — AFP

## KUDERMETOVA, KOVINIC REACH CHARLESTON FINAL

Miami, April 11: Veronika Kudermetova ended the fairytale run of Paula Badosa in Charleston on Saturday, booking a final showdown with Danka Kovinic in the WTA clay court tournament.

Kudermetova, the 15th seed from Russia, overcame her nerves to beat Badosa 6-3, 6-3 and reach her second final of the season.

She fell to Aryna Sabalenka in the title match at Abu Dhabi in January.

Montenegro's Kovinic defeated Tunisian Ons Jabeur 6-3, 6-2 to give herself a chance at a first WTA crown.

Spain's Badosa, ranked 71st in the world, had reached the semi-finals with a 6-4, 6-3 upset of world number one Ashleigh Barty of Australia.

It was just the second win of her career over a top-20 player, the first coming in the second round against 12th-ranked Swiss Belinda Bencic.

— AFP



