THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 18 APRIL 2021

MOVIES 7

Popular Tamil actor and social activist Vivekh dies, fans, fraternity in grief



SPORT 8

Chahar of Mumbai grabs 3 wickets to help team win by 13 runs against Hyderabad

TABLOID 10

Actor Sonu Sood, who is known for his Covid relief



Vol. 28 No. 61 | 16 pages | ₹5.00

www.asianage.com

RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17



French actress Isabelle Huppert poses during the photocall of the film La Daronne (Mama Weed) in the BCN Film Festival on in Barcelona on

LAC: Army puts off commanders' meet with China

New Delhi: Indian Army has postponed its crucial **Commanders Conference** and cancelled retiring officers conference in April due to rising Covid-19 cases. Indian Army's bi-annual Commanders Conference, which is attended by it top commanders from all over the country, was scheduled to be held from April 26 has been postponed. It would have discussed emerging situation at the line of actual control with China in Ladakh.

More on Page 4

EU panel flags poor human rights in India

New Delhi: In a shocker for India just days after a bilateral human rights dialogue with the European Union (EU), the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament by an overwhelming majority vote of 61 out of 71, "expressed concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in India" More on Page 3

WH: Biden will lift

refugee cap in May

Washington: Facing swift blowback from allies and aid groups, the White House said President Joe Biden plans to lift his predecessor's historically low cap on refugees by next month, after initially moving only to expand the eligibility criteria for resettlements.



Let us loot vaccines and oxygen from the hospital!



Max: 36°C Min: 22°C **RH:** 24% **Rain: 0%**

Forecast: Sunny

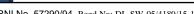
ASTROGUIDE

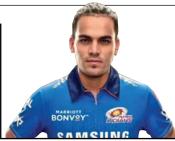
Plava: Uttarayana Tithi: Chaitra Sjuddha Shashti till 10.31 pm Star: Arudra till 5 am (Monday)

Varjyam: 11.48 am to 1.33 **Durmuhurtam:** 4.49 pm to

Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm **SUNSET TODAY 6.48 PM SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.51 AM MOONRISE TOMORROW 12.24 PM**

MOONSET TODAY 9.55 AM





work, tests +ve for virus

States complain of oxygen, medicine & beds shortage

RECORD STATS India sees highest 1-day MODI APPEAL PM urges to keep Kumbh

deaths at 1,341 and 2,34,692 fresh cases participation symbolic amid Covid crisis

New Delhi, April 17: With hospitals bursting at the seams, oxygen supplies dwindling and ICU beds in short supply, the Centre on Saturday assured adequate availability of everything to states. The assurance came on a day when India recorded the highest single-day deaths at 1,341 and 2,34,692 fresh cases, pushing its Covid-19 tally to 1,45,26,609 and the death toll due to the viral disease to 1,75,649.

Registering a steady increase for the 38th day in a row, the tally of active Covid-19 cases has climbed to 16,79,740 in the country, accounting for 11.56 per cent of its total caseload, while the national Covid-19 recovery rate has dropped to 87.23 per cent.

The mounting crisis is being made worse by shortage of oxygen cylinders, ventilators, Remdesivir and vaccines in hospitals, 11 states and Union Territories said at a meeting convened by the Centre on Saturday amid the worrying spurt in

coronavirus cases.

The high-level meeting was chaired by Union

new Covid cases.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who also

SUNIL THAPLIYAL and BHASKAR HARI SHARMA

Roads, markets, buses and

Metro trains remained

largely empty on Saturday

as the national capital,

grappling with soaring Covid-19 cases, observed

weekend curfew, with

chief minister Arvind

Kejriwal sending both an

The Covid-19 situation in

Delhi has become "very

SOS and a warning.

NEW DELHI, APRIL 17



Connaught Place wears a deserted look during weekend lockdown in New Delhi on Saturday.

and hospital beds, oxygen, Delhi has reached 24 per remdesivir and tocilizum- cent -- one in four of all

health minister Harsh Vardhan with the health ministers of 11 states and UTs to review measures taken by them for prevention, containment and management of the recent surge in Covid-19 cases.

The states, including Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, West Bengal, Delhi, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, unprecedented surge in

Delhi under lockdown, still

registers record 24K cases

ab for patients are in short

supply, Mr Kejriwal said

The number of Covid-19

cases are rising rapidly

with 24,000 fresh cases

reported in the last 24

The chief minister said he

spoke with Union health

minister Harsh Vardhan

and requested him for oxy-

Ramdesivir and

hours.

tocilizumab.

held a high-level review on the emerging Covid-19 situation in the country, which is blowing over with every passing day, said on Saturday the ongo-ing Kumbh in Haridwar should now have symbolic participation due to the Covid-19 crisis. He, however, did not order that it be called off.

Mr Modi tweeted that he spoke to Swami Avdheshanand Giri of Juna Akhara over telephone and enquired about the health of saints, many of whom have contracted

cent -- one in four of all

people being tested are

serious and worrisome," Mr Kejriwal said. "Cases

have gone up really fast.

That is why we are facing shortages even though

everything seemed under

control until a few days

ago. But the speed at

which this corona is grow-

ing, no one knows where

its peak will be," he added.

More on Page 2

"The situation is very

positive, he said.

Uddhav calls PM over oxygen, told Modi on W. Bengal tour

BHAGWAN PARAB

health Union minister Harsh Vardhan has assured Maharashtra of an adequate and uninterrupted Thackeray supply of medical oxygen and other resources during the coronavirus pandemic. The assurance came after Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray's claim that he had contacted the Prime Minister's Office to inform about the acute shortage of medical oxygen and Ramdesivir, but was told that the PM is in Bengal for the election campaign. Meanwhile, Union minister Piyush Goyal asked Mr Thackeray "stop his daily dose of

shameless politics."

More on Page 4

5 dead in Covid hospital fire in **Chhhattisgarh**

AGE CORRESPONDENT RAIPUR, APRIL 17

A major fire broke out in a private Covid hospital here, killing five patients. While one Covid-19 patient succumbed to burn injuries, four others died due to disruption of oxygen supply caused due to the mishap, officials

The fire broke out due to a short circuit, preliminary police investigation suggested.

Prince Philip laid to rest in Royal Vault

■ More on Page 4

Modi, Mamata battle over audio, Didi orders probe

Mamata Banerjee playing politics on dead bodies: Modi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday accused West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee of trying to reap "siyasi faida" (political dividends) from people's deaths, a day after the release of a fresh audio clip of the Trinamul Congress supremo's instructions in a phone call to her party candidate, Partha Pratim Roy, to keep the bodies of the four victims of Shitalkuchi firing in Coochbehar, ready for a rally.

Responding to Mr Modi immediately, Ms Banerjee accused him of tapping her phone and sought his apology and resignation as the PM. She also ordered a CID probe and vowed not to

Didi, to what extent will you go to for votebank? Fact is that she thought to get siyasi faida out of the deaths (of people in Cooch Behar). Playing politics over dead bodies is an old habit of Didi. Narendra

Modi.

to talk about, forget development. It is now tapping the conversation I am having with someone. That means all of your phones are also tapped. - Mamata Banerjee,

Bengal

BJP has no issue

she described as "a great

The PM alleged at a BJP rally in Asansol of Burdwan West, "You must have heard Friday's audio tape about what happened in Coochbehar. What kind of politics Didi is playing

over the five (Ms Banerjee allegedly mentions four in the clip) painful deaths, has come to light and is now clear to all. In the audio, a TMC leader in Coochbehar is asked to take out a rally with the

Turn to Page 4

5th phase: 78.36% turnout amid rising Covid-19 cases

SANJAY BASAK NEW DELHI, APRIL 17

Even as West Bengal recorded the highest sin-gle-day spike of nearly 7,000 Covid cases on the eve of polling day, one witnessed complete disregard of Covid protocol as people queued up to vote on Saturday. While the majority of voters in polling booths could be seen wearing masks, there were plenty without them. Not only were social distancing norms completely ignored, there seemed to be no provision for sanitisers and other such facilities in polling booths.

At least 78.36 per cent voter turnout was regis-tered till 5 pm on Saturday across 45 assembly constituencies of West Bengal where voting was held for the fifth phase, Chief Electoral Officer Aariz Aftab said.

Jalpaiguri witnessed the highest polling percentage



casting their vote in Nadia district on Saturday.

(81.73), followed by Purba Covid protocols continues Bardhaman (81.72), Nadia (81.57), North 24 Parganas (74.83), Darjeeling (74.31) and Kalimpong (69.56), he said. "By and large polling has been peaceful in Bengal today apart from a few incidents of violence,"

Mr Aftab said. The gross violation of

even as a report published in the journal The Lancet 'dismissed the predominant scientific view that SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes Covid-19, is not an airborne pathogen." The authors of the report have listed 10 ■ Turn to Page 4

MP bypoll: 62% voting

Nath prestige

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY

held

ers.
The polling was held with strict enforcement of guidelines set by the Election Commission under which a voter was required to wear a hand glove and mask while pressing a button in the electronic

"The polling in the by-election passed off peace-

ed 62 percent polling. But, the polling percentage may rise further since

More on Page 3

in fight for

BHOPAL, APRIL 17

by-elections to Damoh Assembly con-Saturday, witnessed turnout of 62 percent vot-

machine to cast his vote.

fully", the chief electoral officer's office here said. "The by-election record-

people were still standing in line in a few booths to cast their votes", the office said.

BJP's Rahul Singh Lodhi, who had switched over to the saffron party from Congress around six months ago leading to the by-elections in the seat, is locked in a keen contest with Congress' Ajey Tondon in the constituency.

The bypoll hold significance for former chief minister Kamal Nath.

serious and worrisome", The positivity rate in Lalu gets bail in graft case, may walk free Mon.

RJD supremo will be released after 39 months and 25 days of incarceration

NAYYAR AZAD PATNA, APRIL 17

Jharkhand high court on Saturday granted bail to RJD president Lalu Prasad in the Dumka treasury case of the multi-crore rupees fodder scam on completion of half the sentence period, paving way for his release from jail. The case was registered in 1990 when Mr Yadav was the chief minister of the state.

According to reports, Mr Yadav is likely to be freed from incarceration on Monday. Reports how-ever suggested that Mr Yadav may not return to Patna and would follow the advice of his doctors who have been treating him at AIIMS in New

The 73-year-old RJD supremo was airlifted to AIIMS New Delhi on January 24 last in view of

his bad health. He was granted bail by the single bench of Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh on grounds that he has served more than half of his jail term in the Dumka case. He was awarded the five-year jail



term in the case. According to his lawyers, he has been instructed to furnish a bail bond of Rs. 1 Lakh and a fine of Rs. 10 Lakh. He has also been asked not to leave the country without the permission of the court.

The court granted him bail on grounds that he has served over half of his jail term in the Dumka treasury case," Lalu Yadav's lawyer Prabhat Kumar said. He was earlier granted

bail in Chaibasa and Deoghar treasury cases on similar grounds. He has been languishing in jail since December 4 Sikhs among eight killed in mass shooting at FedEx facility in US

Sikhs, including three women, were among eight people who were killed in a mass shooting at a FedEx facility in the US state of Indiana staffed by a large number of Indiannumber of employees, American shocking the community leaders who appealed to President Joe Biden to tackle the growing hate crimes and gun violence in the country.

The gunman, identified as 19-year-old Brandon

employee. He allegedly died by suicide after the bers of the community shooting on late Thursday night at the FedEx facility in Indianapolis. He was last employed by FedEx in

Queen Elizabeth watches as pallbearers carry the coffin of the Duke of Edinburgh

Saturday. Prince Philip died on April 9 at the age of 99 after 73 years of marriage to

during his funeral at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle, Windsor, England, on

Hole was interviewed by FBI agents last year, after his mother called police to say that her son might commit suicide by cop",

the bureau said on Friday. This is the worst Sikh massacre in the US after the Oak Creek Gurdwara

munity leader Gurinder Singh Khalsa said. — PTI

mass shooting in Wisconsin on August 5, 2012. where seven mem-

were killed. About 90 per cent of the workers at the FedEx delivery service facility are said to be Indian-Americans, mostly from the Sikh community.

"This is very heart-breaking. The Sikh community is devastated by this tragic incident," com-

Assam Cong rules out split, horse-trading in Opp. alliance

MANOJ ANAND **GUWAHATI, APRIL 17**

Assam Congress on Saturday ruled out the possibility of any split or horse-trading in the grand alliance of Opposition which is confident to form the next government in Assam. Clarifying that agenda of a meeting of

Congress candidates here on Saturday was

to prepare them for

counting of votes, former leader of opposition in Assam assembly Debabrata Saikia told this newspaper that it was ruling BJP which is spreading news in the media about possible hoarsetrading in Congress led grand alliance. "We had a meeting of all the party candidates with AICC in-charge Jitendra Singh. The meeting reviewed its action plan for counting of votes. The candidates were told to select agents for the counting station and train them about the

counting procedure." Admitting that ruling BJP which is not going to get requisite seats to form the government may resort to horse-

trading or any other **Turn to Page 4**

SHORT TAKES

Jamia defers PhD entrance exams for rise in Covid cases

New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) on Saturday announced it would postpone the PhD entrance tests in view of an unprecedented surge in coronavirus cases in the national capital. On Friday, Delhi recorded its highest-ever single-day Covid-19 figures as 19,486 cases and 141 deaths were reported, prompting chief minister Arvind Kejriwal to order setting up more coronavirus facilities and increase the strength of oxygen beds. On Thursday and Friday, the city had recorded 16,699 and 17,282 cases, respectively. According to a notice from JMI, the tests that were scheduled to be held on April 20, 22, 24, and April 26 will be held at a later date. "The Competent Authority, keeping in view of Covid-19 surge in Delhi and weekend Curfew imposed by Government of NCT of Delhi, has postponed the Ph.D. **Entrance Tests which were** earlier announced to be held on 20, 22, 24 and 26 of April 2021 till further orders," it said. On Wednesday, the university had announced it will postpone the exams for Classes 10 and 12 exams at JMI schools scheduled to be held from April 15 following the Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) decision on Wednesday to cancel Class 10 exams and postpone Class 12 exams. — PTI

164 arrested for violations of **curfew in Delhi**

New Delhi: More than 360 cases have been registered and 164 people arrested for violations of the ongoing weekend curfew imposed by the Delhi government amid a surge in coronavirus cases, police said on Saturday. "On Saturday from 8 am to 8 pm. a total of 363 FIRs have been registered and 164 people were arrested," Delhi Police PRO Chinmoy Biswal said. Police said that 2,432 challans were issued to people for violations of the curfew. Over 1,900 people were booked for allegedly violating the night curfew. According to data shared by the police, 72 cases were registered from 10 pm on Friday to 5 am on Saturday. The police issued 283 challans to people for violating Covid-19 norms and 20 cases were registered under Epidemic Act or other laws. The order for night cur few will be in force till April 30. People engaged in certain professions have been exempted from the curfew.

Keiriwal govt's plasma bank has failed: Congress

New Delhi: Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) president Anil Chaudhary on Saturday alleged that the plasma bank started by the Delhi government has "completely failed" in times of need. According to a statement released by the DPCC. Chaudhary said Delhi and central governments are proving to be "completely unsuccessful" in controlling the coronavirus, "Covid patients are not getting any help in this disaster, Today, when patients in Delhi are in need of plasma, they have to run from pillar to post," Chaudhary was quoted as saying. — PTI

Mercury dips after rain, maximum temperature 35°C

New Delhi: Delhi registered a significant drop in minimum and maximum temperatures on Saturday, a day after it received light rainfall. according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The maximum temperature dropped to 35 degrees Celsius from 40 degrees Celsius a day ago. It was two notches below the normal. The minimum temperature settled at 18.2 degrees Celsius, four degrees Celsius below the normal. The IMD said Delhi recorded 2.4 mm rainfall between 8:30 am on Friday and 8:30 am on Saturday. A strong dust storm had hit the national capital on Friday, affecting visibility and air quality. The

■ Around 24,000 cases reported in Delhi ■ Situation 'very serious', shortage of oxygen, remdesivir: Kejriwal Weekend curfew: Roads empty, markets shut

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, APRIL 17

Roads, markets, buses and Metro trains remained largely empty on Saturday as the national capital, grappling with soaring Covid-19 cases, observed weekend curfew, with chief minister Arvind Kejriwal sending both an SOS and a warning.

The Covid-19 situation in Delhi has become "very serious and worrisome", and hospital beds, oxygen, remdesivir and tocilizumab for patients are in short supply, Mr Kejriwal said

on Saturday.
The number of Covid-19 cases are rising rapidly with 24,000 fresh cases reported in the last 24

The chief minister said he spoke with Union health minister Harsh Vardhan and requested him for oxygen, remdesivir and tocilizumab.

The positivity rate in Delhi has reached 24 per cent — one in four of all people being tested are positive, he said.

"The situation is very serious and worrisome," Mr Kejriwal said. "Cases have gone up really fast. That is why we are facing shortages even though everything seemed under control until a few days ago. But the speed at which this corona is growing, no one knows where its peak will be," he added.

"Any health infrastructure has limitations. The government is trying its best to increase the number of beds. I hope that we will be able to add 6,000 more beds in the next two

to four days," he said.

Delhi led major cities across India into a weekend lockdown Saturday as the country confronts a fierce new coronavirus wave, with more than 2.3 lakh fresh daily cases that has left many states strug-gling for drugs and hospital beds.

The country another record 2.34 lakh cases on Saturday to pass 1.45 crore overall and 1,341

MAJOR MARKETS, including Sadar Bazar, Chandni Chowk, Connaught Place, Khari Baoli. and Karol Bagh and industrial areas like Bawana, Narela, and Okhla, wore a deserted look during the day. However, there was exception near facilities like the LNJP Hospital, GTB Hospital, AIIMS, and ISBTs - Kashmere Gate, Anand Vihar, and Sarai Kale Khan — where people were seen taking the public transport.

Earlier Delhi Govt had announced to tie up of hospitals with hotels, so more beds become avail-

Meanwhile the national capital came to a halt as the city grappling with soaring Covid-19 cases observed weekend curfew to break the chain of spiralling coronavirus infections. It clamped at 10 pm on Friday and will continue till 5 am on Monday. Roads, markets and buses across Delhi were largely empty from Saturday morning. Apart from essential service providers working in pharmacies, grocery shops, hospitals, some restaurants, police stations, and banks, majority of Delhi's residents appeared to have stayed at

Commissioner said, police are strictly enforcing weekend curfew. People who are out of their house unnecessarily are being prosecuted & cases being registered against them. "I appeal to people to respect weekend curfew and stay at home and not face any trouble," he said.

Major markets, including Sadar Bazar, Chandni Chowk, Connaught Place, Khari Baoli and Karol Bagh, and industrial areas like Bawana, Narela, Okhla, wore a deserted look during the day.

However, there exception near facilities like the LNJP Hospital, 1.45 crore overall and 1,341 GTB Hospital, AIIMS and deaths took its pandemic total to 175,649 deaths. Anand Vihar and Sarai



Connaught Place wears a deserted look during weekend curfew in New Delhi on

Govt deputes babus in pvt Covid hospitals for better management

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 17

Seeking better Covid-19 management, the Delhi government has deputed bureaucrats in private hospitals too in view of the raging pandemic in the city, officials said on Saturday. A total of 10 IAS officers have already been appointed nodal officers at various Covid hospitals of the Delhi govern-

"About 15 DANICS offi-cers have been posted in private hospitals across Delhi to handhold the management and oversee

Kale Khan, where people were seen taking the public transport.

Those going to inter-sate bus terminals, airports and railway stations, have been exempted from the weekend curfew if they show valid tickets.

On Saturday, shops providing essential services, including pharmacies, grocery stores, food outlets and banks, remained adherence of all Covid measures," the health department said in a state-

Also, 24 DANICS (Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu Civil Service) probationers have been deployed in state government hospitals to assist the nodal IAS officers in overall general superintendence, it said.

The national capital has left financial capital Mumbai far behind in the daily tally of Covid-19 cases, with an exponential rise in numbers.

Food delivery service agents were also seen on the roads as the Delhi Management Authority has given permission to restaurants for home delivery services. Chinmoy Biswal, Delhi Police PRO, said all the district deputy commissioners of police were on the ground to ensure the implementation of week-

"To ensure better patient management and quick decision making, 10 IAS officers have been appointed as nodal officers for Delhi govt Covid Delhi govt Covid Hospitals. Each officer shall be stationed at their respective hospital and ensure robust and effective public grievances sys-tem also," deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia tweeted on Friday.

The government hospials include, LNJP tals include, LNJP Hospital, GTB Hospital, DDH Hospital, BSA Hospital, and SGM Hospital, according to the

tial goods and services is being facilitated. We have placed banners on pickets and outside the gates of the colonies to tell people about the curfew and asked them not to come outside their houses

unnecessarily. "We are also monitoring the Covid helpline and assisting people who are facing difficulty in getting movement pass," Biswal

India's largest Covid facility

New Delhi, April 17: The country's largest Covid-19 facility at Radha Soami Satsang Beas in South Delhi, which was closed down in February, is being revived considering the unprecedented surge in coronavirus cases, officials said on Saturday.

The management at the spiritual organisation's centre in Chattarpur confirmed that the facility will be restarted soon. "The government is planning to restart the facility soon.

duct a survey and finalise the modalities," Sethi, the secretary of the Radha Soami Satsang Beas centre, told PTI. Asked if the Sardar Patel Covid Care Centre is being revived, South Delhi District Magistrate Ankita Chakravorti replied in the affirmative. The 10,200-bed facility was inaugurated on July 5 last year and was Tibetan Border Police.

JNU issues strict guidelines amid rising Covid-19 cases

University on Saturday ordered a slew of restrictions amid rising cases of the novel coronavirus infection in the national

In a circular, the varsity said, the sports stadium has been closed with immediate effect and yoga activities in the offline mode have also been suspended. It, however, said such activities can be run in online mode.

Dining facility at canteens and eateries in the campus will also be closed with immediate effect, it

"Dining Aravali guest house canteen as well as other canteens/eateries will be closed and only home delivery and takeaway would be allowed," it said. The operation of can-

teens and 'dhabas; of the schools, special centre and residential areas shall be only in takeaway and home delivery mode, it

"The hostel residents are strongly discouraged from visiting other hostels and going out of the campus or to schools/centres, unless it is absolutely essential," the circular stated.

Covid-19: 363 inmates of 3 **Delhi jails vaccinated so far**

New Delhi, April 17: Around 50 eligible inmates were vaccinated at a Covid vaccination centre established at Rohini jail by the Delhi Prisons department on Saturday, officials said. A total of 363 inmates have been vaccinated so far in three jails under the Delhi Prisons department

— Tihar, Mandoli and Rohini, they said. A total of

50 eligible inmates of

on Saturday. Earlier the eligible and willing inmates of Rohini Jail were being taken outside to the nearest Covid vaccination centre for inoculation under police guard. On March 23, a Covid vaccination centre was started at Tihar Jail. Of the 363 inmates, 262 have been vaccinated at the Tihar jail complex, followed by 68 at Rohini jail and 33 at Mandoli jail, they

Red Fort case: After his bail, **Deep Sidhu** arrested again

New Delhi, April 17: The Delhi Police's Crime Branch arrested actor-activist Deep Sidhu on

Saturday in connection with an FIR lodged by Archaeological Survey of India for

Deep

allegedly damaging public property during the farmers' tractor parade violence on Republic Day at Red Fort, officials The arrest came after a Delhi court granted bail

to the actor-activist. arrested on February 9 in connection with the Special Judge Neelofer Abida Perveen granted relief to the accused on Friday on a personal bond of ₹30,000 and two sureties of amount

The court noted that the accused was in custody since February 9, 2021, with 14 days of remand in police custody. It said that a police plea for further incarceration for the sole purpose of voice sampling was not justifiable.

Weekend curfew looms over Delhi restaurateurs

New Delhi, April 17: Some decided to shut down, others downsized their staff and almost all registered a dip in the number of home deliveries as the weekend curfew in Delhi brought with it a sense of deja vu for restaurant owners.

It is business "far from usual" for them, counting on their losses even on weekend, the days that have traditionally raked in the moolah for food and

beverage industry. Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal had announced a curfew this weekend and the closure of malls, dinein services at restaurants till April 30 as part of sweeping restrictions to contain the spiralling coronavirus infections.

The decision on weekend curfew comes days after the AAP government had imposed night curfew from 10 pm to 5 am till April 30.

Our sales in comparison to regular weekends have gone down by 90 per cent," said Mohit Ahuja, owner of Shakespeare Cafe, Punjabi Bagh.

'We've asked only the kitchen staff to come since we are only delivering this weekend. The situation is really bad and our sales, our suffering irreparable, Ahuja said.

Prashant Karan, director Junkyard Cafe, Saket, that the announcement of weekend restrictions slashed the sales "drastically"

Though getting orders from regular customers, Aakriti Sawhney, owner MeMy Caf, Chhatarpur, said delivery orders on partner food apps saw a "considerable downward

Sawhney added that almost 30 per cent of her staff was left with no work as dine-in facility had been

ordered to shut. For Reve, a French bistro in Aerocity, said there was no option but to shut down the place completely as

PUSHED TO the wall, the restaurants, trying to make the best of the home-delivery option available at the moment. are requesting customers to order directly from them and not from food aggregator apps

overhead charges would have cost them more than what they call the "minimal" sales out of homedelivery orders.

'Staff has been asked to stay home safe until further orders. Also, since our restaurant location is not in a residential area so we expect very few or nominal orders," Yadav said.

The restaurants, according to industry experts, had just begun to see 35-40 per cent of occupancy after a long lull following the coronavirus lockdown

"Things were finally looking up and the hospitality industry had only just started to recover when the night curfew and weekend lockdown got imposed again," said Riyaaz Amlani, MD and imposed CEO. Impresario Handmade Restaurants (SOCIAL, Smoke House

Deli and Boss Burger). "This will probably be the final nail in the coffin for the F&B industry. A major chunk of our business happens during the weekends," Amlani said. "Delivery and cloud kitchens will in no way, shape or form help restaurants survive another

lockdown.

Pushed to the wall, the restaurants, trying to make the best of the home-delivery option available at the moment, are requesting customers to order directly from them and not from food aggregator apps so they can save on commissions and somehow through these difficult

Vaccines don't stop infection, but help in reducing severity: Health economist New Delhi, April 17: Covid-19 vaccines do not stop one sor at the University of sor at the Univ

from getting infected but instead help in curing the disease faster and reducing its severity, said health and development economist Professor Anup Malani. He also said that reinfection can be one of the reasons behind the recent surge in cases in the country.

Malani, a professor at the University of Chicago Law School and the university's School Medicine, has been leading a series of Covid-19 serosurveys in cities and states across India with economic development-focused think-tank IDFC. In an interview with PTI,

think-tank IDFC Malani said: "I fear this is the biggest misunderstanding around India and even in other countries today. Previous infection and vaccines do not stop you from being infected. That was

sor at the University of

Chicago Law School and

the university's Pritzker

School of Medicine, has

been leading a series of Covid-19 serosurveys in cities and states across India with economic development-focused

how immunity worked. Instead, natural vaccine-acquired

the infection faster once you are infected." This has two benefits it helps you avoid death or other serious health harm from the infection, and it helps reduce the probability you will infect someone else. So it is possible to be reinfected. but the harms of the infection will be lower he The level of reinfection in

the population depends on the prevalence of the infection and the prevalence of immunity, natural or vaccine acquired, Malani said. "The level of reinfection is driven up by more activity (like large gatherings), and

recently increased at a faster rate than immunity. This is the most optimistic interpretation of the surge, he said. Council Indian Medical Research (ICMR) director general Balram Bhargava earlier this

India is that activity

month had said that reinfection of cases are around one per cent. Malani said there can be

two possibilities behind the recent surge in cases. one is people are not wearing masks and gathering, and the other is emergence

water currently.

DJB vice chairman

Raghav Chadha had on

Wednesday written to the

Haryana chief minister

Water supply to be affected for a week: DJB

New Delhi, April 17: The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) on Saturday said water supply in parts of the capital is likely to remain affected for a week due to "reduced availability" of raw water from the Upper Ganga Canal.

The water utility said the "production" capacity Sonia Vihar and Bhagirathi water treatment plants was reduced by 25 per cent to 30 per

"Water supply in areas of

East Delhi, Northeast Delhi, South Delhi and NDMC will remain affected in the evening... The situation may remain so for a week until the situation

improves," it said. Delhi gets 250 million gallons of raw water a day through the Upper Ganga adding around 200 million gallons a day (MGD) is being received at present. On Wednesday, high ammonia concentration

in the Yamuna and less

water in the river had affected the "production" capacity at Chandrawal Wazirabad water treatment plants — which supply around 228 MGD drinking water to people in Delhi. At present, ammonia

concentration at the Wazirabad barrage is 3 parts per million (PPM), a DJB official said. Wazirabad and

The Chandrawal water treatment plants are supplying

requesting him to address the issue of "short supply of raw water" and discharge of pollutants in the river from Harvana. charged into the drains in

Haryana Wazirabad barrage and pollutes the Yamuna downstream, he had said

60 years of Russian space exploration celebrated

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI **NEW DELHI, APRIL 17**

An event that took place 60 years ago still fires the imagination of the world as a milestone for humanity and is much celebrated globally by Russia at home and in foreign capitals, including New Delhi.

In April 1961, the erstwhile Soviet Union sent the first man into space in the first manned flight. astronaut, Gagarin, became a global household name for posterity. The event had also already-close ties between the Soviet Union and India, with Gagarin making a famous trip to India in November that year, meeting India's then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru at a civic reception hosted in his honour at the Red Fort.

Even though the Soviet Union collapsed three decades ago, its successor state Russia continues to celebrate the momentous achievement. In India, a function was hosted earli er this week at the Russian Centre of Science and

then highlighted the Culture (RCSC) in New Delhi by RCSC director Fyodor A. Rozovskiy to mark the milestone.

On April 12, Gagarin spent about 89 minutes in the five-ton satellite about 188 miles from earth. It also marked a triumph for the Soviet Union over its Cold War rival, the United States. Ironically, even six decades later and much after the end of the Cold War, ties between the US and Russia still remain sour.

The Russian embassy's deputy chief of mission (DCM) in New Delhi,

Roman Babushkin, said that Gagarin's flight in 1961 was also the starting point of the Russian-Indian cooperation in a sphere of space exploration, which includes joint flights and joint work on navigation systems.

"Russia and India are closely cooperating in multilateral formats, primarily in the framework of the UN Committee on Outer Space, where we promote responsible behaviour to prevent arms race in outer space. This is also part of our agenda in BRICS, where we also work on the

initiative of remote satellite constellation," Russian DCM added.

The Indian government had informed Parliament earlier this year that as per India's Gaganyaan space project, the first unmanned mission is planned in December 2021 while the second unmanned flight is planned in 2022-23 followed by a human spaceflight demonstration.

The government said the chosen crew members are currently generic space flight training in Russia.



mercury is predicted to

remain below 40 degrees

Celsius in the next five to six





SHORT TAKES

C'garh: Naxals kill

panchayat secretary

Raipur: Suspected Maoists on Saturday brutally killed a local panchayat secretary in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Narayanpur, police said. The body of Harak Choudhury, secretary of Pochwada gram panchayat under Orchha block in Narayanpur district was spotted near the culvert in the village of Rohtad by the local villagers.A Maoist pamphlet in which Naxals owned the responsibility of killing the panchayat secretary was found stuck in the body, police said. According to the police, the slain tribal had gone to Rohtad village under the gram panchayat in connection with some official works and was attacked by a group of Naxals armed with sharp weapons and sticks while he was returning to Pochwada in the morning.Maoists later threw the body near the culvert in the village of Rohtad.

Won't end protest

against farm laws'

Ghaziabad: Farmers can sacrifice their lives but will not end the protest against the farm laws, said BKU national president Naresh Tikait while accusing the Centre of extending a stepmotherly treatment to them. Addressing a monthly mahapanchayat at the Delhi's Ghazipur border here, the BKU leader alleged that even after five months of protest by them, the government is not paying any heed to their demands. The government has thrown the matter in abeyance after saying that it is a phone call away, said the leader. The BJP-led Centre is working for capitalists, that is why it is extending a stepmotherly treatment to the protesting farmers, he said, adding that the government should fulfil their demand of scraping the three laws and give

Dog tied to scooter, dragged in Kerala

a written assurance on the MSP for crops. — PTI

Malappuram: In yet another act of cruelty against canines in Kerala, a pet dog was tied to a two-wheeler and dragged along a road at Edakkara in Malappuram district on Saturday. Police have registered a case. A video of the incident has gone viral. The animal's agony came to an end after some people forcibly stopped the scooter in which two people were riding. The dog had some injuries on its legs, police said. The incident comes four months aftera pet dog was tied to a car and dragged along the road in Kochi in December last year. The video of the incident, taken by an eyewitness, had gone viral following which police had arrested a man, who had driven the vehicle. — PTI

CBI TO APPROACH INTERPOL FOR RCN **AGAINST MISHRA**

New Delhi: The CBI is all set to approach the Interpol to get a 'Red Corner Notice' (RCN) issued against Bijay Mishra, brother of TMC leader Binay Mishra who is a close confidant of party MP Abhishek Banerjee, in a cattle smuggling case. Sources said, "The agency is expected to approach Interpol in this regard on Tuesday. The issue was recently discussed by the senior officials of the CBI at the agency headquarters here." A lookout notice has already been issued against absconding Mishra by the CBI. The agency has already questioned several senior officers of the Bengal police. "If required, the agency may question two more senior officials of state police. Besides,

the role of three more statelevel politicians is also under the scanner of the agency' sources said. The CBI named Binay Mishra as a co-accused in its supplementary chargesheet filed in the cattle-smuggling case in the month of February. Binay

Mishra is believed to be very close to Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee's nephew, Abhishek Banerjee. In its chargesheet filed before a special CBI court in Bengal's Asansol, the agency had shown Binay Mishra as absconding. On February 18, the CBI filed a chargesheet in the case against Border Security Force (BSF) Commandant Satish Kumar and six others for their alleged involvement in a cattle-smuggling racket operating at the India-Bangladesh ■ Sporadic incidents of clashes between TMC and BJP supporters were reported from some parts of state

Bengal polls: Over 78% voter turnout in 5th phase

RAJIB CHOWDHURI

The fifth phase of the Assembly Election covering 45 seats in six districts of West Bengal recorded 78.36% voters turnout on Saturday amid sporadic incidents of violence during which a Trinamul Congress worker was shot at in an attack allegedly by the BJP activists in

Nadia.
Till the reports last came till 5 pm, while Jalpaiguri, Kalimpong and of North Darjeeling Bengal reported 81.73%, 69.56% and 74.31% polling respectively, Nadia, North 24 Parganas and Burdwan East in South Bengal clocked 81.57%, 74.83% and 81.72% polling serially. A revised figure is expected from the Election Commission on Sunday.

In North 24 Parganas, 16 seats that went to the polls included Dum Dum, Bidhannagar (Salt Lake), Kamarhati and Rajarhat New Town. Though the EC described the fifth phase as "peaceful," incidents of attacks and counter-attacks between the ruling TMC and BJP workers took place at various places in the three South Bengal districts.

At Santipur in Nadia, a TMC worker, Santu Baul, was shot at when he was returning home after casting his vote. He suffered bullet injuries on his left hand. The ruling party

BJP and the Trinamul

Congress on Saturday approached the West Bengal CEO with their

demands on the purported

audio link in which chief

minister Mamata Banerjee

is heard suggesting a rally with bodies of those killed in CISF firing during

While the saffron party

urged chief electoral offi-

cer (CEO) Aariz Aftab to

take note of the purported

audiotape claiming it could lead to untoward sit-

polling on April 10.

▶ TILL THE reports last came till 5 pm, while Jalpaiguri, Kalimpong and Darjeeling of North Bengal reported 81.73%. 69.56% and 74.31% polling respectively, Nadia, North 24 Parganas and Burdwan East in South Bengal clocked 81.57%, 74.83% and 81.72% polling serially

MEANWHILE, THE EC adjourned the polling at two Murshidabad seats: Shamshergunj and Jangipur after the deaths of two candidates: Rejaul Haque Biswas of the **Congress and Pradip** Nandi, a Sanjukta Morcha candidate from the RSP of the Left Front due to

blamed the BJP for the shooting. Its workers however clashed with the BJP at Gayeshpur, workers hurled bombs attacked their homes. Chaitanya Acharya, a BJP worker, was injured. At Kamarhati where for-

mer TMC minister Madan Mitra contested, his rival candidate Raju Banerjee of the BJP claimed that his car was attacked by workers Belghoria. Mr Mitra however fell ill after supervis-ing the polls amid heat in the constituency through-out the day. In the morning allegations surfaced against the central paramilitary forces of opening

BJP and TMC move poll

against those who released

it "violating rules". Aftab said that the audio clip was sent to the EC which is

A controversy erupted on

Friday after the BJP

released the purported

audio clip in which Banerjee is heard telling

Sitalkuchi to hold a rally

with the bodies of the four

persons killed in CISF fir-

ing during the fourth phase of polling.

uations in the next phases of the Assembly elections, alleged that her phone is take action against those who are behind it. -PTI

Ms Banerjee at an elec-

TMC nominee of

looking into the matter.

body in audio clip issue

Kolkata, April 17: Both the the TMC demanded action

Kurulgachha in Deganga of North 24 Parganas. The villagers blamed the Central Reserve Police Force jawans posted at booth no 215 for the firing in the air. The EC sought a report immediately from the district administration. The Barasat district police in its inquiry report to special police observer Vivek Dube stated however that no proof of firing was found after looking into the matter

with the CRPF officials.

Meanwhile, the EC
adjourned the polling at two Murshidabad seats: Shamshergunj and Jangipur after the deaths of two candidates: Rejaul Haque Biswas of the Congress and Pradip Nandi, a Sanjukta Morcha candidate from the RSP of the Left Front due to Covid-19. While Biswas was a candidate at Shamshergunj, Nandi was

fielded at Jangipur. At many places, voters were seen without masks amid the resurgent coronavirus, raising concerns. The security forces ensured social distancing at the booths, while elec-tion officials provided masks, hand sanitiser and polythene glove to the vot-West Bengal on Saturday registered its highest single- day spike of 7,713 Covid cases, taking the tally to 6,51,508, bulletin released by the state health department

will order a CID probe into

it. The purported audio-

tape was released on the eve of the fifth phase of

polling to influence voters

and the BJP's Information

Technology cell was behind it, former Union

minister Yashwant Sinha, who led a TMC delegation,

told reporters after meet-

Mr Sinha said that it was

against the election model code of conduct and the

party urged the CEO to

take it up with the EC and

ing the CEO.



Women shows their Voter ID card as they stand in a queue to cast their vote at a polling station during 5th phase of state Assembly election at Salt Lake in Kolkata on

Didi blames EC of scuttling her Assembly poll campaign

AGE CORRESPONDENT

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, on Saturday, blamed the Commission scuttling her Assembly poll campaign, at the behest of the BJP, by curtailing the daily campaign time from 7.00 pm to 10.00 am and extending the silence period from 48 hours to 72 hours for the remaining three phases in the wake of a massive spike in Covid-19 cases in its fresh wave in the state.

The TMC supremo told the EC at a party rally in Galsi of Burdwan East, You are working according to the wishes of the BJP. If anything big happens, you will be responsi ble. Already two candidates have died at two seats in Murshidabad where we won earlier. Though they belonged to two different parties, I feel sad for them because I do not want any death."

You deliberately curtailed the campaign period, at a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign rally at Galsi in Purba Bardhaman district on

Tearing into the Central poll panel, she also claimed, "As the remain-ing phases include urban areas like Kolkata, we will not be able to campaign because the door-to-door campaign is held in the day time while rallies are held in the evening there."

Ms Banerjee alleged, "We wanted the remain-

and Union home minister ing poll phases to be Amit Shah did not have clubbed so that people do not get infected. But it was not done. Instead, the time for campaign has been curtailed. Why? When the areas under the control of BJP—though they will not win there this time-went to polls, eight-to-ten days were given to them. But now the silence period has also been increased in all the remaining phases. We lost

Only BJP can end infiltration woes: Shah

Chapra (Nadia), April 17: Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday gave assurances that the BJP, if voted to power in Bengal, will put an end to the problem of infiltration, stressing that "not just humans, birds, too, won't be able to enter the country from across the (India-Bangladesh) border".

Addressing a rally here in Nadia district, which shares boundary with Bangladesh, Mr Shah claimed that Mamata Banerjee does not want refugees living in India to get citizenship, and was therefore opposed to the implementation of a new law. Mr Shah also caid that the TMC supremo practises "fake secularism" with an eye on her vote bank.

"Infiltration is a big problem in this area. Fake currency notes are found in many places... Only the BJP will be able to stop infiltration," he added. — PTI

Bengal sees 7,713 new **Covid cases**

Kolkata, April 17: West Bengal, which is witnessing Assembly election, on Saturday registered its highest singleday spike of 7,713 coronavirus cases, taking the tally to 6,51,508, bulletin released by the state health department said.

The death toll rose to 10,540 after 34 Covid fatalities were regis-tered in the state, it added. The city on Saturday

also accounted for its highest one-day spike of 1.998 new cases along with 10 more casualties. Neighbouring North 24 Parganas registered Parganeeight
Murshidabad (5),
Birbhum (3) and two
seeh in South 24

Purulia, the bulletin

J&K: Police justifies arrest, dismissal of woman officer

AGE CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, APRIL 17

As the dismissal and subsequent arrest of a woman special police officer (SPO), on charges of "glorifying militants" and disrupt-ing security forces' operation against them in a village of southern Kulgam district earlier this week, has evoked severe criticism from opposition parties and also on social media, the Jammu and Kashmir police on Saturday sought to justify its action on the merits. It urged people not to pay any heed to those "who are trying to paint the incident in any hue other than a criminal act."

In a statement issued here, the police said, "It has been found that on various media platforms, a number of vested interests with malafide intentions have put in a lot of efforts into making the incident appear like an 'over-reach' and an 'excessively strict

action'. It claimed that 31-year-old SPO, Saima Akhtar, "uttered anti-India and pro-freedom slogans off-camera thus inviting penal action Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act,1967". No such charge against her was mentioned in the police's April 16 statement, which had said that during the search operation launched by the security forces in Karewa Mohalla of Frisal village of Kulgam the search party was "obstructed"

EU pulls up India on rights abuses Bypolls held for

'CAA is discriminatory in nature against Muslims & dangerously divisive'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, APRIL 17

In a shocker for India just days after a bilateral human rights dialogue with the European Union (EU), the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, by an overwhelming majority vote of 61 out of 71, expressed concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in India" including reports that "human rights defenders and journalists in the country lack a safe working environment" and "concerns about the difficult situation faced by Indian women and minority groups and caste-based The committee's recom-

▶ THE COMMITTEE'S recommendations also mentioned reports that 'voice alarm regarding India's

mendations also mentioned reports that "voice alarm regarding India's CAA, which according to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is fundamentally discriminatory in nature against Muslims and dangerously divisive.

It further noted that the "EU is closely following the situation in Kashmir and reiterates its support for stability and de-escalation between ... India Pakistan.'

"highlighted mmittee India's rising regional and

geopolitical influence, as the country has strengthened its position as an economic and military power and rapidly grown as an important trading partner for the EU." It called for "improving and deepening the EU's relationship with India as a strategic part-ner." It "also expressed con-cern at the deteriorating relationship between India and China, and the role of China's expansive policy and substantial military

build-up in the area.' These were part of a "set of recommendations for the European Union on improving its bilateral partnership with India in view of the upcoming EU-India Leaders' meeting" in Portugal on May 8, which is expected to be attended by the PM Modi.

by 61 votes in favour, 6 votes against, with 4 abstentions," a statement put up on the EU website said. The "report will now be submitted to a vote in pean Parliament as a

whole in plenary."
This comes after India and the EU held their ninth bilateral human rights dialogue earlier this week on April 12 in the national capital during which both sides had "exchanged views on strengthening human rights, including in social, economic, and cultural spheres" and "dis-cussed civil and political rights, freedom of religion or belief, women empowerment, children's rights, rights of minorities and vulnerable groups.'

35-year-old man held for passing

New Delhi, April 17: The ed a 35-year-old man for allegedly passing sensi-tive information about Army deployment to a foreign intelligence agency, officials said on Saturday. The accused has been identified as

2 Lok Sabha, 12 **Assembly seats** New Delhi, April 17: Bypolls were held for two for two parliamentary

parliamentary con-stituencies in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and 12 Assembly seats spread across 10 states on

The by-election in Pipili Assembly seat in Odisha was adjourned following the death of Congress candidate Ajit Mangaraj due to Covid on Wednesday. In Nagaland, only one candidate H. Chuba Chang of the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) had filed nomination for the bypoll to the Noksen assembly constituency and was elected unop-posed, the Election Commission said.

In Andhra Pradesh, about 60-64 per cent turnout was recorded in the bypoll to the Tirupati(SC) Lok Sabha constituency. Opposition Telugu Desam, BJP and Congress demanded that the bypoll be cancelled forthwith, alleging that the ruling YSR Congress instigated bogus voting on a large scale, particularly in the temple town Tirupati.

Taking serious note of it, the EC directed the collectors of Chittoor and SPS Nellore districts to crack down on the bogus voters and ensure fair poll. State director general of police D.G. Sawang, however, claimed in a statement that the polling process was continuing in a "peaceful atmosphere" and everybody was exer-cising their franchise "fearlessly".

Tirupati went to the bypoll due to the death of SPM and sitting YSRC MLA Balli are in fray.

BYPOLLS WERE held constituencies in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and 12 Assembly seats spread across 10 states on Saturday

Durga Prasad Rao last September.

In Karnataka, polling was held in Belgaum Lok Sabha seat and Basavakalyan and Maski assembly segments. Bypoll to Belgaum seat was necessitated following the death of Union minister Suresh Angadi. A tentative 60 per cent

voting was recorded in the by-election to Damoh assembly seat in Madhya Pradesh till 6 pm where the ruling BJP and the opposition Congress are locked in a straight con-Damoh district returning officer Tarun Rathi said the polling percentage might go up to 70 or 75 per cent after factoring in the figures of the final polling, which ended at 7 pm. In Uttarakhand, a turnout of over 43 per cent was recorded in the bypoll to the Salt assembly seat in Almora. Except for a minor incident in which one person complained of another person disturbing the election process in the Majhor sector, polling went off peacefully, SSP Pankaj Bhatt said.

Nearly 70 per cent voters exercised their franchise in Mizoram for byelection to the Serchhip Assembly seat, where six candidates, including those of the ruling Mizo National Front (MNF), ZPM and the Congress

Agency cautions users against certain WhatsApp weaknesses

New Delhi, April 17: Country's cyber security agency CERT-In has cautioned WhatsApp users about certain vulnerabilities detected in the popular instant messaging app that could lead to breach

of sensitive information. A "high" severity rating advisory issued by the CERT-In, or the Indian Computer Emergency Computer Emergency Response Team, said the vulnerability has been detected in software that has "WhatsApp and WhatsApp Business for Android prior to v2.21.4.18 and WhatsApp and WhatsApp Business for iOS prior to v2.21.32."

v2.21.4.18 and v2.21.32 denotes the versions of the WhatsApp messenger that are downloaded by users for using

A 'HIGH' severity rating advisory issued by the CERT-In, or the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, said the vulnerability has been detected in software that has "WhatsApp and WhatsApp Business for Android prior to v2.21.4.18 and WhatsApp and WhatsApp Business for iOS prior to v2.21.32

the platform on their mobile or computer devices. The CERT-In is the national technology arm to combat cyber attacks and guarding the

Indian cyber space.
"Multiple vulnerabilities have been reported in WhatsApp applications which could allow a remote attacker to execute

arbitrary code or access sensitive information on a targeted system," the advisory issued on Saturday said. Describing the risk in

detail, it said that these vulnerabilities "exist in WhatsApp applications due to a cache configuration issue and missing bounds about within the bounds check within the audio decoding pipeline." "Successful exploitation

of these vulnerabilities could allow the attacker to execute arbitrary code or access sensitive information on a targeted system," it said. The advisory added that users of the app (application) should update the latest version of WhatsApp from Google Play store or iOS App Store to counter the vulnerability threat. -PTI

sensitive info

Harpal Singh, a resident of Tarn Taran in Punjab, they said.

"A highly motivated and radicalised man was arrested for passing sensitive information to foreign intelli-gence agency. He conveyed details related to Indian Army personnel, Army movements, location of Army and BSF posts and bunkers on the outposts of India at India-Pakistan border,' a senior police officer SHORT TAKES

ASSAM DIST WITH 100 CASES CAN SHUT SCHOOLS

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, APRIL 17

Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said that they have authorised the district administration to suspend the elementary class education in the schools in respective districts where more than 100 Covid positive cases are reported. Informing that district administration would be taking the decision independently, Mr Sarma also appealed to all eligible people to get themselves vaccinated as the state has a vaccine stock of over five lakh doses and another one lakh is expected to arrive soon. Pointing out that the state health department had to rationalize the vaccination programme after stocks started dwindling in the absence of arrival of more vaccine doses, the minister said that they have also decided to go for vaccination in all the schools so that teachers and employees eligible for vaccine could be vaccinated. Assam has vaccinated 15,55,461 people so far out of which 2.77.594 have had their second dose while 12,77,867 have been given

Assam Cong rules out split

■ Continued from Page 1 tactics to muster majority

after the counting of votes, Mr Saikia said, "Assam Congress does not have any "horse" now which could be traded. All the tradeable "hoarse" sold them-selves out to BJP long back."

Mr Saikia, who is the son of former Assam chief minister Hiteshwar Saikia and also instrumental in the signing of the Assam Accord, said that his party would do well as in the first phase of polling which was crucial, the BJP's communal agenda did not work. "The BJP's divide and rule policy did not work. The last time we had performed very badly in Upper Assam because of the BJP's divisive agenda. But it has failed this Assam want to live in harmony. The trick of polarising the voters on communal lines did not work so we are confident to march ahead to form the next government," said Mr Saikia who is also one of the frontrunners for the top post of chief minister in case the Congress comes to power.

Outright rejecting chances of any split in the Congress-led grand alliance in post-counting scenario, Mr Saikia said that the grand alliance came into existence to become the voice of anti-BJP sentiments. "The leaders of all the constituents of the grand alliance have read the mood of the voters at the grassroots. In case of any elected leader going against the people's sentiment would cost them dearly," said Mr Saikia, who also clarified that he was not aware of his party booking rooms in star hotels or resort at Tezpur to keep the candidates of northern Assam in confinement beside defending them from any possible horse-trading.

Maha, Centre trade barbs over oxygen, Remdesivir

Uddhav needs to stop his daily dose of shameless politics: Goyal

BHAGWAN PARAB

Union health minister Harsh Vardhan has assured Maharashtra of an adequate and uninterrupted supply of medical oxygen and other resources during the pandemic. The assurance came after Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray's claim that he had contacted the Prime Minister's Office to inform about the acute shortage of oxygen and Remdesivir, but was told that the PM is in Bengal for the election campaign. Union minister Piyush Goyal hit out against the Maharashtra CM and said he should "stop his daily dose of shameless politics and take responsibility".

"Spoke to #Maharashtra CM Sh Uddhav Thackeray Ji. Reassured

SONU SHRIVATAVA

Amid the shortage of

Remdesivir injections in

Maharashtra, the NCP leader and Maharashtra

minister Nawab Malik on

Saturday alleged that

Prime Minister Narendra

Modi-led Central govern-

ment has asked companies

that supply Remdesivir

not to supply it to Maharashtra. Mr Malik said when Maharashtra

asked the 16 export compa-

nies for Remedisivir, it

was told that the Centre

has asked them not to sup-

Maharashtra. These com-

panies were warned that,

if they did, their licences will be cancelled, he

Terming Mr Malik's

claim a lie, the Union min-

isters challenged him to

disclose names of 16 com-

claimed.

the medicine to

MUMBAI, APRIL 17



BKC Covid-19 vaccination centre was closed due shortage of vaccine in Mumbai on Saturday.

@OfficeofUT of adequate he held discussions with & uninterrupted supply of medical oxygen & all possible support w.r.t health-care infra, medicines & therapeutics. Additional 1,121 ventilators are also being rushed to them given the surge in cases," the health minister said. Dr Vardhan added that

Minister: Centre blocking

Remdesivir supply to Maha

minister Malik's claim a

lie, the Union ministers

challenged him to dis-

close names of 16 compa-

Mr Malik said that while

the country reported

more than two lakh posi-

tive coronavirus cases,

reported 60-62,000 cases

"After Maharashtra gov-

ernment's demand, the

Government of India has

imposed a ban on the export of the Remdesivir

injection. The export-ori-

ented 16 units are unable

to export it. They were

seeking permission from

the Government of India

to sell the injections with-

in the country. The Centre

asked them to provide the

injections to seven compa-

alone

Maharashtra

every day.

nies and stock available

Mr Thackeray's office to discuss stringent action to be taken for containment. surveillance and treatment of Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra has been

the worst coronavirus-affected state in the coun-

leader added. 16 export-oriented units in India

have 20 lakh vials of

Mr Malicious further

said that when the

Maharashtra government got to know about it, it

directly wanted to pur-

chase the injections from

them. Subsequently, the

companies have informed

the centre the same. "The

central government asked

the companies if they sup-

ply the medicine directly

to the Maharashtra gov

ernment, action would be

taken against them (companies)," Mr Malik

MoS for chemicals and

objected to Mr Malik's allegations and said that

the Centre has been in

active contact with offi

cers of the state govern-

ment and is assisting with the supply of Remdesivir

Mansukh

alleged.

fertilisers

Mandaviya

Remdesivir, he said.

ing 67,123 cases and 419 The state has recorded 37.70 lakh coronavirus cases and 59,970 deaths so

Earlier, state's minority affairs minister Nawab Malik had accused PM Modi of being busy in elections while "people are dying." He claimed that Mr Thackeray tried the PM over the shortage of oxygen and Remdesivir, a drug for Covid-19 treat-ment, but was told he was on a visit to West Bengal. However, Mr Goyal refut-

ed the allegations saying Maharashtra has received the highest quantity of oxygen in the country. Saddened @OfficeOfUT's gimmicks on oxygen. GoI, with all stakeholders, is ensuring maximum oxygen production in India..." Mr Goyal

Remdesivir stolen from MP hospital

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, APRIL 17

the cry for Remdesivir getting louder in Madhya Pradesh, unidentified miscreants on Saturday broke into the storeroom of a government hospital here and decamped with boxes containing the life saving drug, leaving the administration as well as police shell-shocked.

The incident came to light when the medical officers found the iron gate of the storeroom of the government-run Hamidia hospital here cut open and some boxes containing vials of Remdesivir missing in the morning. "The mat-ter was immediately reported to the police", hospital superintendent I.D. Chourasia said.

Incidentally, this was the first incident of theft of life saving drugs.

fury, caught off guard again The Congress Working Committee (CWC) lashed out at the Central govern-

Sonia: Covid-19 has hit with

online meeting on Saturday, the apex body accused the Centre of "colosed" mismanage-Sonia Gandhi ment" in the war against the Covid pandemic and gen. "It is deeply concerncautioned of an "unpreceing to read news reports of catastrophe" acute shortages of medical unless urgent corrective equipment and hospital beds. Reports from across the country speakof the scarcity of Covid-19 vacpresident Sonia Gandhi said India has "regrettably been cine as also of life-saving caught off guard again including

drugs, inclu Remdesivir," she said. Lashing out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi she added, "I have written to the Prime Minister after meeting with Congress CMs. Our CMs have spoken to the him and written to the concerned minister from time to time pleading for relief. Some of them were left with only a few days of

on the part of the govern-ment. On the contrary, some other states have received preferential received prefer treatment or relief." Attacking the vaccine Maitri programme she said that considering the highest infection rate in country export should have been held back for our citizens. She added that the government instead of listening to constructive sugges-

tions by the Opposition is

ridiculing them. This was

in reference to opening up

the permissions for for-

tilators. But there has

been thundering silence

eign vaccines. Mrs Gandhi said that the Congress has extended hands of cooperation since February-March last year. "We cannot, however, lose sight of the fact that the second wave of the pandemic has hit the country with fury. Despite a year to prepare, we have, regrettably, been caught off guard again," she said.

5 dead as fire breaks out in Covid hospital

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, APRIL 17

AGE CORRESPONDENT

ment over the handling of

the Covid-19 fallout. In an

measures are taken.

despite a year to prepare". She accused the Modi gov-

ernment of "gross unpre-paredness" and "adho-cism" in managing the cri-

sis and suggested reducing

the immunisation age to 25 years and providing

income support to people.

She targeted the govern-

ment over the shortage of

vaccines, medicines, hos-

pital beds and medical oxy-

NEW DELHI, APRIL 17

"colossal

dented

Congress

Fire broke out in an intensive care unit of a private Covid hospital killing patients. While one Covid patient suc-cumbed to burn injuries, the other three died when the mishap rendered the oxygen supply system dysfunctional.

The fire was caused by a short-circuit, preliminary probe suggested. Relatives of patients were breaking the glass windows to enter the wards Many patients were

brought outside the hospital and administered oxygen. Later, they were shifted to different hospitals in the city. Chhattisgarh_

minister Bhupesh Baghel expressed shock and grief over the tragic incident and announced financial assistance of ₹4 lakh each to the next kin of the deceased. Around 30 Covid-19

patients were undergoing treatment in the hostook place, police said.

terror attacks on the US in

The US has lost more

than 2,000 personnel since

2001 in the war that was

triggered by the terror

attacks carried out by al-

Qaeda. There have been

renewed global efforts to

bring lasting peace to

Afghanistan.

peace process.

Withdraw ads inviting people to Kumbh: PIL

PARMOD KUMAR NEW DELHI, APRIL 17

The Supreme Court has been moved seeking direction to the Centre and the Uttrakhand government to withdraw advertisements inviting people to Hardwar for Kumbh as a large gathering in the wake of the surge in Covid cases is inconsistent with the Covid guidelines and

regulations.
A PIL by advocate
Sanjai Kumar Pathak has
also sought direction to the Election Commission Covid guidelines against the candidates, campaigners and public in West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry, and Assam currently in the midst of assembly elections. It has sought action against the

violators of guidelines. The PIL has sought direction to the Centre and the Uttarakhand government to immediately withdraw all the advertisements inviting people to Haridwar for Kumbh and to clear the existing mass gathering from Haridwar city as

soon as possible
It has also sought to put in place safety protocol for the people returning to their homes from Kumbh. It has sought direction to the EC to identify the violators of Covid 19 guidelines during the electioneering

panies and stock available with them. nies which are not ready to purchase it," the NCP **Married woman raped inside** truck for 21 days in Odisha

A married woman was allegedly raped for 21 days inside a truck in Nayagarh district after being abducted from the district's Balasore Jaleswar area. She was rescued in critical condition, Nayagarh police inspector Girija Nandan Pattanaik informed this newspaper on Saturday.

According Mr Pattanaik, the victim, who is pursuing her graduation in economics (honours) lives with her family, that includes her husband, five-yearold daughter and sister. at a rented house at

On March 24, while the

nearby job-work centre to make photocopies of some documents, a car stopped on her way and one person inside the vehicle asked her for the directions. Seeing her busy at talk with the first person, another person inside the vehicle suddenly opened the door that hit on her head following which she lost

When she regained her consciousness and cried for help, two youth in the age group of 25 and 30 threatened to kill her if she shouted for help. Panicked, the woman remained Subsequently, the duo allegedly raped her inside the truck for more than 21 days.

consciousness.

■ US decision to withdraw troops a 'big step': Jaishankar India will stand with Afghan: MEA

New Delhi, April 17: External affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Saturday conveved to his Afghan counterpart Mohammad Hanif Atmar that India will always stand with the people of Afghanistan.

Mr Jaishankar said the role of neighbours in the Afghan peace process figured in his conversation with Mr Atmar.

In the telephonic talk, the two foreign ministers discussed the evolving situation in Afghanistan following the announcement by the US to withdraw its forces from the conflictridden country September 11.

tweet, Jaishankar described his conversation with Atmar



INDIA HAS been a major stakeholder in the peace and stability in Afghanistan. It has already invested \$2bn in aru arro reconstruction activities

THE US has lost more than 2.000 personnel since 2001 in the war that was triggered by the terror attacks Jaishankar carried out by al-Qaeda

"Good conversation with FM @MHaneefAtmar of Afghanistan on recent developments. Discussed the role of neighbours in the Afghan peace process. As always, India will stand with the people of Afghanistan," he said.

In an address at the Dialogue Raisina Friday, Mr Jaishankar described the US decision as a "big step" and said it going to

Afghanistan in a certain direction and that it would be important for the stakeholders to work together to ensure that the direc-

announcement, US President Joe Biden on will troops Afghanistan

tion is the right one. significant

Wednesday said American leave September 11 that would coincide with the 20th

anniversary of the 9/11

Russia recently organised a conference in Moscow where all major stakeholders were invited to brainstorm over ways to move forward in the

> stakeholder in the peace stability Afghanistan. already invested \$2 billion in aid and reconstruction activities in the country.
>
> — PTI

India has been a major

and to take action against them.

■ Continued from Page 1

the infection, and also conveyed his appreciation for their cooperation with the local administration. "I prayed that two 'shahi snan' have taken place and Kumbh (participation) should now be kept symbolic. This will boost the fight against this crisis," the Prime Minister tweeted in Hindi.

States complain

Responding to Mr Modi's call. Avdheshanand urged people to not come to the Kumbh mela for bathing in large numbers due to the Covid-19 situation and to follow the rules. The ongoing Kumbh, which

has seen people from different parts of the country attending in large numbers, has drawn flak from various quarters as the number of Covid-19 cases have zoomed at a rapid pace in the past few weeks. The event has also reported the coronavirus cases in large numbers.

On Saturday evening, Mr Modi reviewed the availability and supply of ventilators, oxygen and medicines to fight the pandemic and called for utilising the entire national capacity across private and public sectors to produce vaccines, amid concerns in various states

about lack of these essentials. At the meeting to review the status of preparedness to handle the Covid-19 situation, Mr Modi said local administrations needed to be proactive and sen-

THE ONGOING Kumbh has drawn flak from various quarters as the number of Covid-19 cases have zoomed at a rapid pace in the past few weeks. It also reported coronavirus cases in large numbers.

sitive to people's concerns. These remarks assume significance in the backdrop of reports of Covid-19 patients and their families accusing the authorities in several states of apathy in providing treatment. Mr Modi said there is no sub-

stitute for "testing, tracking and treatment" to reducing mortality Directing officials to ensure close coordination with states, he said all necessary measures must be taken to ramp up the

availability of hospital beds for Covid-19 patients and that additional supply of beds through temporary hospitals and isolation centres should be ensured. He also spoke about a need to utilise the full potential of India's pharmaceutical industry to meet the rising demand of

Remdesivir and other medicines. On the issue of vaccination. the Prime Minister directed all officials to make efforts to utilize the entire national capacity, in the public as well as the private sector, to ramp up vaccine production. -PTI

various medicines and reviewed

Modi, Mamata battle...

■ Continued from Page 1

victims' bodies. Didi, to what extent will you go to for votebank? Fact is that she thought to get 'siyasi faida' out of the deaths. Playing politics over dead bodies is an old habit of Didi."

His attack on the CM came after a BJP delegation lodged a complaint with West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer, Ariz Aftab, against the TMC chief on the audio tape on

Saturday morning. Slamming Mr Modi, Ms Banerjee told him from her rally at Katwa in Burdwan East, "When the PM says people have understood everything after hearing the audio tape on Friday, it means he is giving encouragement. He mentioned that. Then it means you, as the PM, intercepted my phone. Don't you feel ashamed of intercepting a CM's phone? You resign as the PM before showing your face to the people again.

She also alleged, "If you have not done it, how could you give it a clean chit? Privacy cannot be invaded, according to a Supreme Court verdict. I have already entrusted the CID to probe who did it. I had said nothing wrong. So many youths were killed. How visit an area on the day of its polling? I would have been an outsider who is not allowed since I am not a voter of Coochbehar though I can visit elsewhere. So I asked for the bodies to be kept.

Ms Banerjee claimed, "Later I

planned to visit Shitalkuchi. All arrangements were done. But the Election Commission imposed a 72hour ban on visit there. Isn't it true? want to know from you. If you have any shame, you will apologise after replying. You will also not be spared from facing the probe. You have to explain. Don't forget that. We honour the PM chair irrespective of our dislike about you. You are insulting the chair."

Earlier the TMC chief told anoth-

er rally in Galsi of the same dis-"BJP has no issue to talk about, forget development. It is now tapping the conversation I am having with someone. That means all of your phones are also tapped. Do you understand it? The central government is even tapping your phones to know what you are cook-

ing at home. It is a great scam."

She added, "I feel that truth should be out after the CID inquiry. want to know who tapped my phone. I will not spare anyone. Many FIRs have been lodged. The BJP publicised it unitedly which means a guilty mind is always suspicious. BJP has done it with the help of the central paramilitary forces and your brokers. I will certainly find it out. I have already come to know who all are involved in this game. Do you think I will

The PM and the CM also traded charges about the prosecution in cases of violence against women and attacks on SC/ST in the state among other issues.

78.36% turnout amid rising cases ■ Continued from Page 1

reasons for their claim that

'SARS-CoV-2 is transmitted primarily by the airborne route." However, this particular claim by researchers is yet to be endorsed by the World Health

Organisation(WHO). Experts maintained that the impact of this gross violation and disre gard of Covid protocol would be felt across the state after the election results on May 2.

Doctors' appeal to put "people before power" seems to have fallen on deaf ears as the big guns of the BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home minister Amit Shah, continue holding public rallies.

On Saturday, Mr Modi urged people to turn up in large numbers, especially first-time voters, to exercise their franchise for the fifth phase of Bengal polls. "Urging all those voting in today's fifth phase of the West Bengal election to vote in large numbers. First-time voters, in particular, should exercise their franchise," Mr Modi tweeted.

It may be recalled that the Election Commission has refused to club the remaining phases of Bengal elections and hold polling for them all

Reports from the state indicate that Congress candidate from Samserganj, Murshidabad, Rezaul Haque, died after he tested Covid positive and RSP candidate from Jangipur, Pradip Nandi, TMC candidate from Galpokhar, Golam Rabbani have tested

positive.

Regardless of the deaths and spikes, there's complete apathy among leaders cutting across party lines. Be it Sanyukta Morcha, TMC or BJP, politics over dead bodies is reigning supreme.

An on the spot review of rallies carried out by an English daily in Bengal showed that people attending rallies were not wearing masks. Even leaders on the stage could be seen without masks and there was no social distancing either on the stage or on the ground.

Political leaders, be Mamata Banerjee, Gandhi, BJP heavyweights -none have even bothered to make any arrangements to ensure Covid protocols are followed at the rallies.

On Tuesday at Jamui in East Burdwan, BJP supporters were quoted as saying, "The coronavirus has gone. There has not been a single case in these areas since last

Speaking to a TV channel, a leader, Chatterjee, when asked about clubbing remaining election phases, said, "Threat of violence in Bengal is as great as Covid cases.

Leaders keep hemming and hawing when asked about rallies, road-shows amidst rag ing Covid cases.

BJP's Chandra Kumar Bose said, "It is difficult to conduct rallies where you can follow social distancing." He then assures, "But most of us wear masks."

Ananya Chakraborty of TMC avoids the question and attacks the Prime Minister instead. "Before the elections, the chief minister (Mamata Banerjee) asked for an adequate number of vaccines, so that all those above 18 years of age could get vaccinated. The Centre paid no heed to our request.

Ms Banerjee on the other hand linked the spike of the covid cases to "BJP people coming to Bengal from worst-hit states like Gujarat." In fact, she's trying to make Covid surge as her election plan. "Do not spread coronavirus in Bengal Narendra Modiji... Your party is bringing in people from Gujarat and Rajasthan for erecting stages and doing other works for BJP rallies. These outsiders are spreading Covid in Bengal," she said at a public rally on Thursday.



THE ASIAN AGE

18 APRIL 2021



Ranjona Banerji

Off the beaten track

Being a sport! The story of my fitness journey

fter you reach a certain age and size, in my case at least, your thoughts turn to another age and size, largely imaginary. For instance, when I was little, I was very thin. This is true. I have photographic evidence. I also had no actual talent as an athlete, but I was athletic enough to be made to run various races, jump over sandpits and poles and once, with luckily no major casualties, chuck a javelin. The third leg of the "house" team, if you will, and this carried on over three "houses" in three schools and two cities.

Once I was pushed into a race outside my training or comfort zone — 400 m, because there was no one else to make up the numbers. My preferred race was the 100 m sprint. The school's sports consultant, of whom we were in awe because he had been to the 1976 Montreal Olympics and wanted Nadia Comaneci in person, said that my hamstring muscles were not long enough for my legs, so I had a funny stride. Not good for longer runs. Anyway, desperation made the house hamstrung. And in I went. After 300 metres, my heart burst out of my 13-year-old chest and I am not ashamed to say that a friend's sister (in a similar situation for another house) and I, walked the last 100 m together, chatting. Since we finished the race, we were not disqualified. Heads, um, held high!

The one thing I could not do was swim except for an ungainly life-saving dog paddle. Luckily then no one ever threw me into a swimming pool for some greater sporting glory. The swimming coach, whom we called Bumblebee because he had a large yellow and black motorbike and kept bellowing at us in the CCI swimming

pool in Bombay (1970s, that was its name then) managed to hammer a mediocre breaststroke into me before we buzzed off to a new school in Calcutta.

Calcutta.

School finished and thus finished organised exercise. You may not believe it now but in the 1980s, hardly no one dedicated their lives to treadmills, yoga mats and smoothies. Plus, we were undefeatable. We worked hard and played harder. There was no time for dumbbells.

As it turned out, the dumbbells were us. All that confidence was highly misplaced. And by the time you realized that time and hormones were against you, the tyres on the cars on the roads had nothing on you and your stomach, arms, thighs, hips et cetera. That's when you wake up at the crack of dawn and walked all over Aarey Milk Colony where the best exercise was running away from laughter clubs. I tried a few gyms. A

friend found an excellent place in Ahmedabad where all you had to do was lie on a series of moving tables which exercised different parts of your body. Don't laugh. It was brilliant and actually worked.

You may not believe it

now but in the 1980s,

yoga mats and smoothies. Plus, we

hardly no one dedicated

their lives to treadmills,

were undefeatable. We

harder. There was no

time for dumbbells.

worked hard and played

A couple of close friends and I, in our mid to late 40s, signed up for an exercise regime. This was zeal plus hubris. Also, when your vision goes a bit, you can't really focus on the mirror any more and you miss all those wrinkles. So having scoffed at middle-aged ladies in salwar kameezes and sneakers huffing and puffing in suburban Mumbai's parks, we joined a gym. Not the treadmill sort. But the calisthenics and exercise sort. Why humans put themselves through this is one of life's mysteries. Anyway, we mountain-walked and pulled long rubber bands and cross-trained and then hobbled out after an hour with not one part

of our bodies working.

The zeal was such that we were horrified when we attended an afternoon "old ladies" class — all the old ladies were at least five years younger than us — and saw that they spent all their time lying on their mats flirting with the young male instructors. We shuddered in self-righteous wrath as we finished all our exercises, and never went to an afternoon class again. Instead, we sacrificed lunch and went straight from yoga to the gym. Plus, we walked all over suburban Mumbai scorning every hopeful passing auto.

At the end of the year, all we had to show for it were collapsed muscles,

At the end of the year, all we had to show for it were collapsed muscles, dodgy knees, sprained ankles and broken toes. The only worthwhile part of this exercise was the yoga.

In between I did walk up and down some hills around my parents' home, full of self-righteousness.

Now when 60 stares at you in the face and the tyres cannot be dislodged and who the hell wants to carry those dumbbells, and the hills are so pretty to look at, technology comes to the rescue! You install some free fitness app on your phone. You carry your phone everywhere. It counts every useless step you take. From refrigerator to chocolate cake to sofa to put the plate in the sink and at the end of the day, you have walked 5 km, used up 2,500 calories and done 9,622 steps. Or some such nonsense. You are happy. You smile beatifically at the phone. The phone is thrilled at the attention and you reset for the next day. I did away with the "heart points" or whatever because I never collected any.

When my sister and I were younger, teenagers, we used to watch Jane

Fonda exercise videos and eat chips.

I am not so callous nor so arrogant now. I don't eat while I watch those exercise ads on Instagram. I just switch to the food pictures after 10 minutes of fit young people contorting into some rebel poses.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on media affairs, politics and social trends. She tweets at @ranjona.



Second wave gives the lie to Modi's 'decisive' image



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

he time has come to call a spade a spade. And, this spade is about the government's spectacular unpreparedness in anticipating the second wave of the pandemic, and the woeful absence of strategy and planning to cope with it. It is not as if the unexpected happened. Global experience shows that a second wave

shows that a second wave — more vicious and infectious than the first — was to be expected. A responsible government, not lulled into complacency by its own propaganda of how well it had handled the pandemic, would have — beyond dramatic gestures — diligently prepared for it. The truth is that the government did not.

A key difference between the first and second waves is that now we have vaccines as a signifant weapon to fight the onslaught of the virus. The government itself made much of the fact that India is the vaccine capital of the world. What then led to the deplorable condition that when we needed the vaccines the most, they were - and are — in short supply? The government squandered away the natural advantage Índia had by exporting or gifting millions of vaccines. It did not give the required monetary support in time to indigenous pro-ducers like the Serum Institute of India so that they could ramp up vaccine production, even when it had an earmarked budgetary allocation of Rs 30,000 crores to handle the pandemic. And, it unforgivably delayed the introduction of new vaccines like Sputnik and Johnson &

Johnson, by not speeding or abridging trials and approvals. Where imports were planned there are reports of major mess-ups leading to cancellations of major contracts. What we are now seeing is incoherent and improvised action when the crisis is upon us, rather than a planned anticipation that was the need of the hour.

Contrast this with what

other governments like the UK and the USA have done. In America the government not only gave credit liberally to vac-cine producers, but guaranteed them an assured buy-back at remunerative prices so that they could pay back the loans extended to them. The result is there to see. One-third of Americans are vaccinated, and the entire country will be vaccinated by the middle of the year. The UK, too, imported vaccines from every source that it could. We, on our part, gave away what we had, and did precious little to boost production at home for which we had the capacity.

There is a shortage, too, of oxygen, ventilators, testing kits and hospital beds. While it is true that the demand has gone up exponentially, a wise

It begs all rational thinking why the EC is not agreeing to club the balance three phases of the Bengal Assembly elections and hold them on one day. Mamata Banerjee endorses this proposal. Why doesn't the PM do so, too?

Shri Krishna in the Bhagwad Gita tells Arjuna to do his duty irrespective of consequences. Our theory of dharma also includes a particular category — aapad dharma — which kicks in times of crisis or

emergency...

government would have prepared for the demand in anticipation of the inevitable by increasing production and capacity *prior* to the second wave hitting us. There is little accountability in this bureaucratic muddling, and total opacity in how the money has been spent thus far in the PM Cares Fund.

The administrative list

The administrative list-lessness of the govern-ment can be seen in its inability to take stern measures even in the face of the second wave. Why else would have permission have been given to the Kumbh Mela celebrations at Haridwar, where some 40 lakh sadhus and devotees took the plunge in the long-suffering Ganga? All norms of social distancing or masks were thrown to the wind, even as our netas smiled at the devotion of what they assume is their "vote-bank". Hinduism certainly does not sanction this abdication from duty. Shri Krishna in the Bhagwad Gita tells Arjuna to do his duty irrespective of the consequences. Our theory of dharma also includes a particular category — aapad dharma — which kicks in times of crisis or emergency and allows individuals and leaders to take hard decisions for survival. The Modi government likes the label of a "decisive" government, but its actions are quite

to the contrary.

The same lackadaisical approach holds true for the government's defence of political rallies in the

ongoing state assembly elections. Both leaders and the crowds they want so desperately to get seem to believe that Covid does not exist. The Prime Minister lectures to the nation about "do gaz ki doori" and "mask hai zaroori", but when it comes to electioneering all such advice is thrown out of the window. There is no point in saying that other political parties do the same. If you are in the hot seat you have to set the benchmark for Covid-appropriate behaviour and uphold it through your actions. It through your actions. It also begs all rational thinking why the Election Commission is not agreeing to club the balance three phases of the Bengal Assembly elections and hold them on one day. Mamata Banerjee endorses this proposal. Why doesn't the PM do so, too? If he does, I am convinced — for obvious reasons

for obvious reasons that the EC will agree. The second Covid wave has vividly shown the glaring gulf between image and delivery of the Modi Sarkar. This is not politicking over a crisis. This column is written in anguish at a crises that ed by better preparation and handling, and anger at the long list of omissions and commissions that account for TV screens exploding with visuals of grieving citizens whose loved ones have died for lack of oxygen or a hospital bed, or who have returned empty handed from vaccination centres. Our health workers deserve our enduring gratitude, but what can we make of a health minister who expostulates that states are indulging in cheap politics when they ask for vaccines which are verifiably in short supply? Beyond a point, bluster does not work. It is time to call a spade a spade.

> The writer, an author and a former diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

MEA MUST STEP IN

It is reported that 57 per cent of India is under curbs due to the second wave of Covid-19 with the number of deaths soaring by the day. The government plans to step up vaccine output to 10 times by September but by then it may be too late. The Serum Institute of India CEO, Adar Poonawalla has urged **US President Joe Biden** to lift the embargo on export of raw materials needed to ramp up production of the Covid-19 vaccines Covishield and **Bharat Biotech's** Covaxin. The ministry of external affairs must step in and make a fresh diplomatic effort to obtain a positive response to his request.

M.C. Joshi

GLASS HOUSES

WHEN THE HOME MINISTER observes that the poor people of Bangladesh come to India as they don't have enough to eat in their own country, then it must be equally credible that India has neither good institutions for higher studies nor research, with Indians in their thousands flocking the United States. Or that while we create babus and not administrators here, Indians occupy top posts in the Joe Biden administration. At the lower end, our economy creates no jobs even when millions of our skilled artisans are welcomed abroad. That said, introspection and a measured tongue is alien to our politicians.

R. Narayanan

TIME ON NIRAV SIDE

THOUGH THE extradition of Nirav Modi has been sanctioned by the UK government, it does not mean that the fugitive diamantaire will be brought to India soon. As a last ditch effort to delay the inevitable, he may appeal to the Lord Chancellor, or, petition the Crown itself for mercy, or for grant of political asylum in Britain; citing maltreatment of economic offenders in India and so-called sub-human conditions in Indian jails. Even if he is brought to India to stand trial in a fast track court, the entire process is bound to start from the square one. Hearings are going to consume many years and by the time time the final verdict is delivered, he will have enjoyed a long respite.

Arun Malankar Mumbai

RIP, VIVEKH

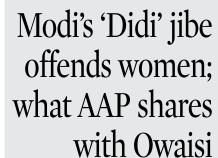
THE PASSING AWAY of Tamil actor annd comedian, Padma Shri awardee, Vivekh (59) today (April 17) at a private hospital in Chennai due to massive cardiac arrest is shocking. After taking the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine the previous day, he met the media and urged everyone eligible to get vaccinated soon. He was an admirer of Swami Vivekananda and APJ Abdul Kalam. Based on Kalam's advice, Vivekh had planted 30 lakh trees so far in Tamil Nadu. He is best remembered for his role in Balachander's *Pudhu Pudhu Arthangal* (1989), wherein he played the hero's manager, Kadhal Mannan (1998) and Anniyan (2005). He was 59. RIP.

Sankar Paul Chakdaha, West Bengal

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

Anita Katyal
Political
Gup-Shup

Let my fingers do the walking?



rime Minister Narendra Modi's war cry "Didiii O Didiii, Arrey Didiii" (referring to Mamata Banerjee) at all public rallies in poll-bound West Bengal has pre-dictably angered the Trinamul Congress, more so as it has become a source of inspiration for eve-teasers. Roadside Romeos have apparently been mimicking the Prime Minister, using the same catcall, when they see women on the streets of Kolkata. Many of them have even been arrested by the police on charges of harassment. Five women have filed an FIR at the Amherst Street police station while the Bengal Citizens Forum has lodged a strong protest, saying the catcalls were a penal offence. The Forum also took out a protest march and submitted a complaint to the Election Commission, which is still pending. Women leaders belonging to the TMC have also slammed the Prime Minister, saying this was not just an insult to an elected chief minister but to all women.

adhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was personally reluctant to impose a lockdown but he was liter-

ally pushed into doing so by his bureaucrats who did some plain speaking to him about the need for drastic measures given the alarming spike in Covid-19 cases in the state. Though Mr Chouhan did go by the advice of his officers, informal instructions were conveyed to the lower rung bureaucracy that the lockdown need not be implemented strictly and that people moving out should not be penalised. And the Damoh constituency where a bypoll was held last week, was deliberately exempted from adhering to the lockdown to allow political parties to organise their election rallies. They were helped in this effort by the local election commission officials who went to town with the slogan, "Corona se nahi darenge, matdan hum zaroor karenge", urging voters to come out in large numbers on polling day. Incidentally, while Mr Chouhan was battling the alarming rise in infections, his health minister Narottam Mishra was busy overseeing the Assembly poll in West Bengal. Mr Mishra reached his home state a few days before the byeelection in Damoh which happens to be his stronghold.

elhi chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal has a lot in common with AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi. Either it is deliberate or inadvertent, but the leaders end up helping the Bharatiya Janata Party by entering an electoral fray resulting in the weakening of the Congress. Mr Owaisi did so in Bihar and Mr Kejriwal in the Gujarat local elections. In fact, there is talk that the two parties even receive covert funding from the BJP. Currently, AAP is focusing on expanding its footprint in Uttarakhand. To that extent, it has initiated a vigorous recruitment drive and is positioning itself as a credible alternative in the hill state. Interestingly, Mr Kejriwal is concentrating on the Kumaon region, which is where the Congress has strong roots, and not on Garhwal which is known to be the BJP's fiefdom. Given the antiincumbency against the BJP in Uttarakhand, the Congress has a chance of coming back to power

here. But Mr Kejriwal could well

end up playing spoils port, much to the $\ensuremath{\mathrm{BJP}}$'s delight.

here appears to be no end to the raging battle in the upper echelons of the prestigious India International Centre even four years after eminent jurist Soli Sorabjee was forced to step down as the Centre's president though he retains his position as life trustee on the IIC board. Mr Sorabjee's tenure was cut short in 2017 following a spate of allegations of financial impropriety and bungling in the admission of members. A fresh attempt was made recently at the IIC annual general meeting to debar Mr Sorabjee and Justice Srikrishna from holding any office. It is not clear why this matter was raised after four years. The resolution was, however, not approved as several members pointed out that such a drastic action could not be taken in the absence of the two trustees and without giving them an opportunity to have their say. It must be mentioned that an enquiry committee was set up to probe the charges against Mr Sorabjee but little is

known about its report.

he surprise victory notched up by the Tripura scion Pradyot Kishore Deb Barman's fledgling party in the recent election to Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, proved to be a major embarrassment for the Congress. Not only did the party finish fourth but Mr Barman who had been the Tripura Congress president left following differences with the party's Northeast in-charge Luizinho Faleiro. Apparently, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had got in touch with Mr Barman last year when he was in the US and asked him to rejoin the Congress Mr Barman was willing to do so but was unable to get in touch with Rahul Gandhi as he had changed his phone number on his return from America and his staff was not very helpful in organising a meeting with the Nehru-Gandhi scion. Mr Barman then decided to float his

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

EDITOR IN CHIEF: T. VENKATRAM REDDY, PRINTER & PUBLISHER: K. SUDHAKAR; THE ASIAN AGE office is located at: New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124; Published and Printed on behalf of and for; Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301; London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ; RNI Registration number: 57290/94

OUR CRITIC'S RATING Outstanding ★★★★★ Great ★★★★ Good ★★★ Okay ★★ Poor ★ Truly Terrible TT

Watch it for Ghaywan and Konkona

Aieeb Daastaans

OR: Shashank Khaitan, Raj Mehta, naywan, Kayoze Irani Releases on Netflix

SUPARNA SHARMA

jeeb Daastaans, from Karan Johar's little OTT production Dharmatic Entertainment, tells four stories of people impaled in a life they don't want but can't get out of because of their caste, class, family compulsions or lack of choices. They are all similarly unhappy, seething and searching for something better.

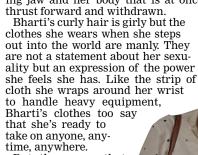
As is the track-record of all Bollywood anthologies, *Ajeeb Daastaans* diligently follows the template. It has four twisted stories of which two are middling, one is good and one truly fabulous.

All the four films by four different directors are bristling with atmosphere and are marked by powerful performances by actors who are cast in compelling roles and placed in a dramatic situation that draws us in immediately. But three of the four are filmy, drawing a lot from their Bollywood predecessors, and only one seems to be informed by life. They are nice, but feel like stories we have seen or heard before. All except Geeli Pucchi.

Directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, Geeli Pucchi, that Ghaywan has written with Sumit Saxena, strips down the capricious innocence of caste privilege to its hard-wired mendacity. It also has a powerful and unsettling performance by Konkona Sen Sharma. If it weren't for this film, Ajeeb Daastaans would have been interesting but

eeli Pucchi, the title itself dripping with some afternoon obscenity, levitates *Ajeeb Daastaans* to a higher

It tells the story of Bharti (Konkana Sen Sharma), a factory worker, who wants a desk job and has all the qualifications for it. But she is a dalit and carries her anger and hunger for more in her slightly protruding jaw and her body that is at once



But the power that Bharti thinks she has drains out of her body when she sees pretty Priya Sharma (Aditi Rao Hydari), so fragile and dove-eyed, take up the job she so wants. Bharti is at once repulsed by and drawn to the power that comes in a petite size of feminine

fragility.

"Ajeeb-ajeeb log hote hain aur badboo bhi aati hai," Priya says in a friendly banter to







Bharti, inviting her to share her tiffin at her desk and not on the factory floor, thinking Bharti is one of her. Bharti's reaction to Priya's casually racist remarks, prejudices is not visible on her face, but her body registers it as

a hole in her armour.

And then one day, when
Bharti suddenly senses that she has some power, she doesn't flinch using it as a gentle but sharp whip that's gripped tightly by her rage.
The film's last shot

is so fabulous that i want to watch it again and again on a loop.

ieeb Daastaans. which explores women's desire through all its stories and lets them come up for air for a bit b e f o r e

pulling them down again, begins with Majnu, a about a husband wife

trapped in a loveless marriage.

Directed by Shashank Khaitan, it's set in a large mansion in a Hindi-speaking, gun-wielding world where Babloo Bhaiyya (Jaideep Ahlawat) rules. He is married off to Lepakshi (Fatima Sana Shaikh) for financial and political reasons but on the wedding night itself he tells her that he won't be able to love her but expects her to keep khandaan ki izzat.

Lepakshi's frustration coils around her everyday and she grabs every opportunity to humiliate Babloo and get some jollies for

The threat of violence looms when Babloo Bhaiyya is around, even when Raj (Armaan Rainan), the dasning, educated son of the driver, arrives to fan all sorts of desires.

Despite a pair of fried testicles, a cutesy twist that revisits masculinity, and the film's predictable end, *Majnu* is blessed by excellent acting by all, including Raj's angry mother. It also has a lovely song — Bagiya mein bhanwara...

hilauna, directed by Raj Mehta, is a complex story about grey characters that is revealed through a police investigation. But what they are investigating is shared with us later, in a dark, gory, stunning moment.

Meenal (Nushrratt Bharuccha) is a young, sexy maid who dotes on her little sister

Binny (Inayat Verma). Sushil (Abhishek Banerjee) the istri-walla loves Meenal and Binni but has no power and bristles everytime injustice accosts him.

Meenal has a clear worldview - she knows what her place is in this world organised by caste and class. She knows she has no power except guile and the fact that she is very attractive. She uses both to curry small favours.

Smiling and winking at little Binni as she plays on the emotions of women she works for, bitching out one, pandering to the new officer in town, her circumstances and routine exploitation have brought a hard coldness to her heart that she unknowingly passes on to Binni. And when Binni acts on her own desires and feelings of jealousy, it leaves even Meenal stunned

The film, also written by Sumit Saxena, is carried by Nushrratt Bharuccha's charming but inevitable duplicity.

nkahi, directed by Kayoze Irani, is the last film in the anthology and tells the story of Natasha (Shefali Shah), a mother who can't cope with husband's disinterest in their daughter who is losing her hearing. And then, a man walks into her life, all sparkles, warmth and sunshine. Though *Ankahi* is lit by lovely performances by Shefali Shah and Manav Kaul, it felt dull and cliched.



Vivekh cremated with police honors

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

he untimely death of popular actor and social activist Vivekh at the age of 59 on Saturday after he suffered a massive heart attack left the Tamil film fraternity and fans in deep grief. Vivekh breathed his last at 4.35 am. He was cremated with police honours at the electric crematorium in Mettukuppam this

The actor, a Padma Shri recipient and who has acted in over 200 films with top Tamil heroes, is known for his work on social issues and the environmental protection front. He actively campaigned and involved himself in planting saplings and afforestation. He also collaborated with the government in disseminating significant social awareness messages to the public on TV including the latest on preventing coronavirus spread. It was heart-wrenching to coronavirus spread. It was near t-wrenching to note that his tweets, which he had posted to condole Abdul Kalam's death, going viral. The post of Vivekh, which is in Tamil, roughly translates as, "A simple, selfless and clean life too will end someday. However, many die away! But only few will live on even after death". An admirer of late president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, he was actively engaged in planting one crore tree saplings through his Green Kalam initiative. Prime Minister Modi, chief minister K. Palaniswami, DMK president M.K. Stalin, actor Rajinikanth, Makkal Needhi Maiam leader Kamal Haasan were among those who expressed shock and grief over his death and conveyed their condolences to the bereaved.

On Friday morning, an unconscious Vivekh was brought to the SIMS hospital in Chennai. He reportedly suffered a cardiac arrest due to a 100 per cent blockage in the heart vessel. The hospital said in a statement that the actor was revived and underwent an emergency coronary angiogram followed by angioplasty. He was then put on Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO) support at the intensive care unit. Dr Raju Sivasamy, vice president of SIMS hospital, said Vivekh's condition was not related to the vaccine he took on Thursday. "He suffered an acute coronary syndrome with cardiogenic shock. This is a separate cardiac event. It may not be due to Covid vaccination." He also confirmed that he was not infected with the deadly virus. Vivekh is survived by his wife Arulselvi and two daughters Amrithanandini and Tejaswini.

In a special league of dreary, bad films

The Big Bull

Streaming on Disney + Hotstar

SUPARNA SHARMA

ollywood is a star-driven film industry. What that means and often results in are films like *The Big* Bull where just the fact that a big star has been engaged is enough, all else be damned. "All else" includes writing — story, screenplay and dialogue, direction, production design, background score.

Star-driven enterprises serve a very significant purpose. Inept writers, directors, production houses remain gainfully engaged by riding on the power of a star.

Abhishek Bachchan is a star who can act. He has just been beset by too many bad choices after a few good ones initially. This time round, however, he signed up with a director and writer who are in a special league of their own when it comes to being bad.

Bollywood has a large, prospering league of bad which ranges from films that are bad in unique, new ways — where it's obvious that some thought, effort went into making it — to woeful, listless

films which are bad in ways that many other previous films have been The first kind of films can be fun-

bad, while the other is dreary.
To illustrate, Ram Gopal Varma's Daud would fall in the fun-bad category, and *Department* in mournfully bad. Director Vijay Krishna Acharya's Tashan is in the first category, but his

rather-die-than-watch-this category. The Big Bull is a pool of mournful stupidity. A life-sucking bad film. The sort that leaves you in need of a cold shower and cold beer to wash it all

Thugs of Hindostan is in the I'd-

Leading this turgid enterprise is Kookie Gulati the director. He was set off on this listless path by a story and screenplay that he co-wrote with Ariun Dhawan.

Mr Kookie had earlier directed an atrocity called Prince (2010) that still feels like a fresh scar on my brain. Now I have two scars courtesy Mr

Based loosely and irresponsibly on the life and crimes of Harshad Mehra, *The Big Bull* opens with reporter Meera Rao (played by Ileana D'Cruz and based on Sucheta Dalal) talking about Hemant Shah (Abhishek Bachchan) to a hall full of millennial MBA students.

Cut to flashback in a chawl where Hemant, in full-sleeve printed shirts, used to live with his brother Viren (Sohum Shah), mother (Supriya Pathak) and angst about not being rich. That feeling was made worse by the father of the girl next door he liked, Priya (Nikita Dutta). Her daddy



wanted a well-settled son-in-law.

We are told two things about Hemant. Three, actually.

1. That Hemant had "the world's best bhai aur dost". We meet the bhai, but see the *dost* fleetingly.

2. Hemant keeps saying, "Mujhe dheere chalna aata hain hai" – and yet the film he is in is an excruciatingly slow crawl.

3. Hemant doesn't drink, but only till he can afford the best daru. Later in

With these character traits, Mr Kookie & Co. try to stitch together a chronology of the rise and fall of the stock broker, but they remain vague on details and are often incoherent, as if a terrible arts student was suddenly asked to sit for an economics exam.

The film, neither clear nor really interested in what actually happened, tells us Harshad Mehta's story in the sort of sketchy way that the arts student would try to fill up the answersheet — with gibberish, throwing in some "economics sounding" words at

Hemant wants to become a stock broker and for this he gets a bank receipt in an underhand manner and starts playing the stock market. The amount of the bank receipts increases, and so does Hemant's game.

He then manipulates the price of a company's share price and uses union leader Rana Sawant (Mahesha Manjrekar) to tip him off about which auto plant will be shut so that he can

make more money in shares This is insider trading and Mannu Malpani (Saurabh Shukla), chairman of SEBI, doesn't like it. But he can't do

The film conveys all this through dull generalities. To show that Hemant was a master manipulator and the king of the share market, it makes him stand, arms akimbo, staring and smiling at the trading floor often. To show that he is always planning his next move, Hemant has to

keep tapping his fingers. In between there is romance with Priya, which means that several songs arrive at frustratingly predictable

moments. Soon Hemant gets very rich, pays Rs 26 cr income tax and the CBI and I-T guys get after him.

Hemant suspects that it is one of his employees and so he invites them all to his house and then asks them to take off their clothes and jump into his pool.

Half-naked office employees covering their man-boobs as Hemant stares down at them with a sulky pout is, perhaps, when the film hits the high note of absurdity.

ookie & Co seem incapable of taking facts and then turning them into a screenplay. If they were capable of doing that they would have just binge-watched Hansal Mehta's Scam 1992. They probably did watch it and decided it was all too much and that they'd rather go with a bullshit story and hero's pointless bluster.

Abhishek Bachchan's twitter handle is @juniorbachchan and so there is no getting away from the comparison. But, he has a personality that is

Chota Bachchan is all goodness, warmth and decency. So much so that when he tries to be evil or creepy, he has to ham it.

The film gives Abhishek a shitty start — a pouty, pretentious pose in a nightgown — that seals his character's fate and tells us that we should not expect acting, just posturing.
The film is also confused between its

love for Abhishek and the story it wants to tell. While The Big Bull wants to show Abhishek as a good guy, a "dreamer" who helped many people make money, the story of Hemant—a manipulator of people and money who had little regard for rules keeps peeing on its party.

So the film can only muster the courage to make its star sit with a manspread and thrust his stomach out to convey indecency and greed. Sometimes it also makes him laugh out loud, without any reason or expla-

'sually, even in bad films, there are actors who can act. No such luck here.

Sohum Shah is a decent actor but he has been given nothing here except to be the voice of nagging worry.

Supriya Pathak has spent so much time in the world of Tarak Mehta Ka Ulta Chashma and Khichdi that she now seems incapable of doing anything else.
Ileana D'Cruz has mastered the art

of speaking without letting her lips move. Despite that she is not bad. It says a lot about a film and its actors if Ms D'Cruz is the one redeeming thing that comes to mind.

Natanz attack suspect named

Tehran, April 17: (AP) Iran state television has named a suspect in the attack that damaged centrifuges at its Natanz nuclear site and says he fled the country. The report Saturday named the suspect as Reza Karimi. It showed a passport-style photograph of a man it identified as Karimi. The report also aired what appeared to be an Interpol "red notice" seeking his arrest. The arrest notice was not immediately accessible Interpol's public-facing database. Interpol, based in Lyon, France, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The attack Sunday, suspected to have been carried out by Israel, has inflamed a shadow war between the two

Raul Castro steps down

Havana, April 17: Raul Castro said he is stepping down as Cuban Communist Party leader, leaving without a Castro guiding affairs for the first time in more than six decades and handing control to a younger generation. The 89-year-old Castro made the announcement in a speech Friday at the opening of the eighth congress of the ruling party, the only one allowed on the island. The reins will now pass to 60-yearold Miguel Diaz-Canel, who has already served as Cuba's president since 2018.

Russia detains

Ukrainian consul

Moscow, April 17: Russia detained a Ukrainian diplomat for allegedly receiving classified information from a data-base of the country's main

security agency. The Federal Security Service, or FSB, said Saturday that Alexander Sosonyuk, Ukraine's consul in St Petersburg, was taken into custody on Friday during a meeting with a Russian in which he received "information of a classified nature contained in the databases of law enforcement agencies and the FSB".

Worldwide Covid death toll tops a staggering 3 million

True number is higher because of possible government concealment

The global death toll from coronavirus topped a staggering 3 million people Saturday amid repeated setbacks in the vaccination campaign and a deepening crisis in places such as Brazil, India and France.

The number of lives lost, as compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is about equal to the population of Kyiv, Ukraine; Caracas, Venezuela; or metropolitan Lisbon, Portugal. It is bigger than Chicago (2.7 million) and equivalent to Philadelphia and Dallas combined. And the true number is believed to be significantly higher because of possible government concealment or the many cases overlooked in the early stages of the outbreak that began 16 mon-ths ago in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019.

Around the world, the trajectory of the virus and the race to bring it under control vary widely from country to country.

Even as the US and Brit-

ain see their vaccination drives hit their stride and they begin to contemplate life after the pandemic, other places both rich and poor — France and India among them — are lagging behind in putting shots in arms and have imposed

new lockdowns. Worldwide, deaths are running at over 12,000 per day on average and new cases at more than 700,000 a day. The US toll alone is over 560,000, accounting for more than 1 in 6 of the world's Covid-19 deaths. The US is followed by Brazil, Mexico, India and Britain. This month, the US recommended a pause in the use of Johnson & Johnson's vaccine while authorities investigate



People take part in a protest in the central Puerta del Sol to protect the national health service during and after the pandemic, in Madrid, on Saturday.

USTR discusses TRIPS waiver proposal

Washington, April 17: US Trade Representative Katherine Tai, in a virtual meeting with GAVI's CEO Dr. Seth Berkley, discussed, among other things, the proposed waiver of certain provisions of the WTO's agreement on intellectual property rules for the manufacture of coronavirus vaccines.

In the virtual meeting with Berkley on Friday, Tai discussed increasing vaccine production, global health issues and the proposed waiver of certain provisions of the World Trade Organisation Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) for Covid-19 pandemic, the USTR said in a statement.

The TRIPS Agreement is a minimum standards agreement, which allows members to provide more extensive protection of intellectual property if they so wish.

Tai expressed her appreciation for the important role GAVI has played in securing and distributing vaccines for developing countries through COVAX and other initiatives, it

Tai highlighted her commitment to using trade policy to save lives in the pandemic and ensure that the United States, and the world, are better prepared in the future.

She also welcomed Berkley's views on how to accelerate the rollout and distribution of vaccines to developing countries, the USTR said.

The virtual meeting comes ahead of a May 5 meeting of the World Organisation's (WTO) General Council which is likely to discuss a proposal on the matter by

A day earlier, 10 Democratic senators sent a letter to President Joe Biden urging him to publicly support a temporary patent waiver for Covid-19 vaccines that would allow countries to manufacture treatments locally, expe-

diting the global vaccina-

tion effort, saving count-

less lives and crushing the

pandemic. The proposal to temporarily waive the WTO's intellectual property rules was put forward by India and South Africa in

Afghanistan: US may up troops before recall

se its troop presence in Afghanistan temporarily over the coming weeks and months in order to fulfill President Joe Biden's order to safely withdraw all forces from the country by Sep. 11, the Pentagon said Friday.

Pentagon chief spokes-man John Kirby declined to provide specifics and said details are still being worked out.

But he said it's logical to assume that you may need some logistics help, maybe some engineering help, you may have to add force protection capabilities again temporarily just to make sure that the drawdown goes in a safe, orderly and effective way. Biden announced Wednesday that the US will pull all of its more than 2,500 troops out of Afghanistan by Sep. 11.

NATO announced it would follow the same timetable for withdrawing

Washington, April 17: more than 7,000 allied forces. The president's decision defies a May 1 withdrawal deadline that was agreed to by the Trump administration as part of a peace agreement with the Taliban. Instead, Biden said that the US withdrawal would begin on May 1. Speaking at a Pentagon

press conference on Friday, Kirby had few details on the pace and timing of the drawdown. He said it was not clear how many troops would be out of the country by May 1 as a signal to the Taliban that the US was abiding by its new plan to begin leaving.

The Taliban has warned that it will retaliate if the US does not abide by the Trump administration's

And those threats are a key concern for the Pentagon as it tries to safely move troops and likely millions of dollars in equipment out of the

\$1.7B US network to track virus variants

Washington, April 17: The US is setting up a \$1.7 billion national network to identify and track worrisome Coronavirus mutations whose spread could trigger another pandemic wave, the Biden administration announced Friday.

White House officials unveiled a strategy that features three components: A major funding boost for the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and state health departments to ramp up coronavirus gene-mapping; the cre-

ation of six centres of excellence partnerships with universities to conduct research and develop technologies for gene-based surveillance of pathogens, and building a data system to better share and analyse information on emerging disease threats, so knowledge can be turned into action. Even as we accelerate our efforts to get shots into arms, more dangerous variants are growing, causing increases in cases in people without immunity, White House coronavirus adviser Andy Slavitt said.

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Sports Minister

Riiiiu is Covid +ve

New Delhi: Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Saturday said that he has tested positive for Covid-19 but is feeling "fit and fine". The 49-year-old posted the development on his Twitter page. "After getting repeated test for Covid-19, today my report has come out positive,' Rijiju wrote in his Twitter handle. "I'm taking the advice of the Doctors. I request all those who have come in my contact recently to be observant, exercise selfquarantine and get themselves tested. I'm physically fit and fine," he added. Rijiju was in Uttarakhand on Friday to inaugurate a Water Sports and Adventure Institute

Ravi retains title: silver for Bajrang

Almaty, Kazakhstan: Indian wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya retained his Asian Championship title with a solid performance but Bairang Punia settled for a

silver medal after withdrawing from the much-awaited final against Takuto Otoguro due to an elbow injury, here on Saturday. Ravi Dahiya, though, gave India

the first freestyle gold medal of this edition with a commanding show. Bajrang said that he did not want to aggravate the condition of his right elbow. He said he started feeling the pain during the quarterfinal against Korean Yongseok Jeong. - PTI

Tsitsipas makes

Monaco: Stefanos Tsitsipas

Monte Carlo final

defeated Dan Evans 6-2, 6-1 in the semifinals of the Monte Carlo Masters on Saturday and will face Andrey Rublev or Casper Ruud for the title Fourth seed Tsitsipas needed just over an hour to dispatch Britain's Evans. Tsitsipas has yet to drop a set in Monte Carlo this week and is through to his third Masters 1000 final. He finished runner-up in Canada in 2018 and Madrid the following year. Rublev and Ruud meet in the

second semifinal later on Saturday. Rublev ended Rafael Nadal's bid for a 12th Monte Carlo title in

the quarterfinals. — AFP

NEWCASTLE HAMMER WEST BCCI hopeful of

Diop, Joelinton and Willock heroics pip West Ham; Spurs held by Everton despite Kane's double

(United April 17: Newcastle moved closer to Premier League survival after Joe Willock's late goal capped a thrilling 3-2 win against 10-man West Ham that dented the visitors' bid for a top four finish in the Premier League. Steve Bruce's side had squandered a two-goal lead in the closing stages at St James' Park, but Willock came off the bench to snatch a priceless winner. Newcastle are nine points clear of the relegation zone with just six games remaining in a turbulent season on Tyneside.

The Magpies had taken control in the first half thanks to Issa Diop's own goal and a blunder from West Ham keeper Lukasz Fabianski for Joelinton's

West Ham defender Craig Dawson was sent off for two bookings in between those goals.

But the Hammers set up

a tense finale when Diop got one back before Jesse Lingard equalised with a penalty 10 minutes from

On-loan Arsenal mid-fielder Willock settled a pulsating encounter with his thunderous header, putting Newcastle in position to avoid relegation.



Tottenham Hotspur's Harry Kane (left) scores his team's second goal against Everton during their English Premier League match at Goodison Park in Liverpool on Friday.

impressive achievement for Bruce, who has battled with dressing room rifts and distracting takeover

The defeat was a big blow for West Ham as they chase an unexpected place season's Champions League.

remain fourth, but Chelsea

Staying up would be an are just one point behind with a game in hand, while fifth-placed Liverpool would go above Hammers if they beat Leeds on Monday.

another match, England forward Harry Kane suffered a worrying ankle injury ahead of next week's League Cup final after scoring twice in Tottenham Hotspur's 2-2 draw away to Everton in the Premier League on Friday.

Gylfi Sigurdsson also grabbed two goals for Everton in a result that did little for either side's

European hopes. Kane, expected to lead England's attack in this year's coronavirus delayed European Championships, went off in stoppage time

Hamilton revs up to 99th

career pole in Emilia GP

towards the end of the match after rolling his ankle when challenged in the box at an Everton cor-

Kane's 20th league goal of the season put Spurs ahead in the 27th minute at Goodison Park only for Sigurdsson to equalise soon afterwards from the

domestic season

New Delhi, April 17: The T20 World Cup in October BCCI plans to kick-start its 2021-22 domestic season in September this year with the Syed Mushtag Ali 1°20 tournament and has also allocated a threemonth window to the Trophy December after the marquee event had to be cancelled last season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, the Duleep Trophy, Deodhar Trophy and Irani Cup are not a part of the tentative calendar prepared by the cricket operations team. Apart from this, five women's competitions have also been dropped from the ros-

The 2020-21 season was a severely truncated one with only the National T20 (Mushtaq Ali) and ODI (Vijay Hazare Trophy) championships being held in the wake of pandemic. For women, only the National One-Day meet was organised.

Amid a second wave of Covid-19 cases across India, the BCCI is still hopeful of conducting the domestic season across age-groups in men and women's categories after a curtailed last season. With India playing the and the mega IPL auctions in the offing next year, it is understood that all stakeholders want to start off with two white ball tour naments — Mushtaq Ali between September to October" followed by the Vijay Hazare Trophy in November. Ranji Trophy, India's pre-

mier tournament which was cancelled for the first time in 87 years in 2020, has been planned between December and March in the upcoming season.

The BCCI has also slotted the U-23 tournaments for men and women along with the U-19 events which weren't held during the last season.

The performances in the U-19 One Day Challenger tournament along with Cooch Behar Trophy (days format) and Mankad trophy (one day) will help in selection of India colts team for ICC U-

19 World Cup next year. Women's T20 as well as ODI Challenger Trophy will not be played along with these events' under-23 versions.

The under-19 women's T20 Challenger Trophy will also not be played.

COMPOUND ARCHERS LEFT STRANDED DUE TO COVID

Kolkata, April 17: India's compound archery team members were "left stranded" on Karnal Bypass till late at night on Friday while travelling to Delhi airport but the national federation said it might have happened in its bid to separate them from the recurve group after a coach tested positive for Covid-19.

The Sonepat-based compound archers were to join the Olympic-bound recurve team at Delhi airport to catch a 2.50am flight to Amsterdam en route Guatemala City for the April 19-25 World Cup Stage I. But after hearing that compound team coach Gaurav Sharma had tested positive for Covid-19 at SAI, Sonepat on Thursday, the Archery Association of India decided not to allow them join the recurve team. The compound archers have now been withdrawn from the tournament, the much-anticipated first event after the pandemic halted all events in

"We cannot compromise on the safety of our recurve archers as they are slated to play in the Olympics in less than 100 days. As per the SOP, we had to isolate them (compound archers) who were in direct contact with the coach," AAI secretary general Pramod Chandurkar said.

LIFTER MIRABAI SCRIPTS WORLD RECORD, BOOKS OLYMPIC SPOT

Former world champion Mirabai Chanu made a splendid return to the weightlifting arena, setting a new world record in clean and jerk while also bettering her own national record en route winning a bronze medal at the Asian Championship here

on Saturday.
Chanu also confirmed her Tokyo Olympic spot as she has now competed in the six mandatory qualifying events.

The 26-year-old Indian lifted 86kg in snatch and a world record of 119kg in clean and jerk for a total of

While the earlier clean

and jerk world record was 118kg, Chanu's personal best total in 49kg was 203kg (88kg+115kg) at the National Championship in February last year.

The gold medal went to Hou Zhihui of China who created a new world record in snatch and total weight with an effort of 213kg (96g+117kg) while her compatriot Jiang Huihua clinched the sillifting (89kg+118kg) in the gold

level Olympic qualifier. Chanu was off to a shaky start as she failed to lift 85kg in her first two snatch attempts. She then lifted 86kg in her final

Imola (Italy), April 17: World champion Lewis Hamilton edged out the Red Bull duo to claim pole position for the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix on

It was Hamilton's 99th career pole and although there is a Red Bull directly behind the Mercedes driver, it will be Sergio Perez rather than Verstappen.

Hamilton edged Perez by 0.039 seconds and was faster Verstappen, who is expect ed to be his main challenger this season.

"I didn't expect to be ahead of two Red Bulls, they've been so quick this weekend." Hamilton said. Hamilton's teammate Valtteri Bottas had a scrappy final lap and will start from eighth on the grid after finishing 0.487

slower. Lando Norris will start just ahead of Bottas. The McLaren driver was heading for the front row after a superb final lap but had

his time deleted because of exceeding track limits. Charles Leclerc qualified in an encouraging fourth for Ferrari but his team-

of qualifying, known as Q3, and will start 11th on the grid. Pierre Gasly and Daniel

Ricciardo will start fifth and sixth, respectively, while Esteban Ocon and Lance Stroll round out the top 10. Earlier in the day,

mate Carlos Sainz failed to

make it into the final part

Verstappen posted the fastest time in the final practice as the Red Bull driver was nearly half a second faster than the rest of the pack. He was 0.456 ahead of Norris and 0.557 clear of Hamilton.

 CHENNAI SUPER KINGS
 DELHI CAPITALS
 KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS
 MUMBAI INDIANS
 PUNJAB KINGS • RAJASTHAN ROYALS • ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE • SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

THE ASIAN AGE, NEW DELHI, SUNDAY, 18 APRIL 2021

ORANGE Nitish Rana, KKR Sanju Samson, RR Bairstow, SRH **PURPLE** Harshal

Patel, RCB Rahul Chahar, MI

Trent Boult, MI

Off the field



Ben Stokes bids adieu to his Rajasthan Royals teammates as he returns to the UK for a surgery.

Sams in RCB bubble after negative test

Australian all-rounder Daniel Sams on Saturday joined the Royal Challengers Bangalore's bio-bubble after returning with two negative RT-PCR results more than a week after testing positive for COVID-19. The 28-year-old had arrived in India on April 3 with a negative COVID-19 report but tested positive dur-ing the second test on April 7 and was in quarantine since then. "We are pleased to that Challengers Bangalore, all-rounder Daniel Sams, has joined the RCB bio-bubble on 17th April 2021 with negative reports for COVID-19," RCB said in a statement.

"RCB medical team was in constant touch with Sams to ensure his safety and declared him fit after all the required examinations as part of the BCCI protocols.

Chahar earns rich praise from Shastri

Deepak Chahar's best IPL performance 4-1-13-4 on Friday earned rich praise from national head coach Ravi Shastri. "Proven fact. Genuine swing both ways with control can undo the best. Super variations. Brilliant," Shastri tweeted.

Chahar recalled how a random fan's social media comment hurt him. "Expectations are high here and you have to perform in every game, so this is for that man, who made the comment, if I would not have played, this performance might have not come," Chahar said.

Padikkal is great talent, says Lara

Devdutt Padikkal needs to "iron out" a few technical things but the legendary Brian Lara is confident that the Royal Challengers Bangalore left-hander would better his performance during this IPL with a few Man of the Match awards. The 20year-old Padikkal was one of the finds of the last IPL, scoring 474 runs with five halfcenturies and contributing handsomely to RCB's cam-

"A few little things to iron out. I hope he did that in the break and comes back really storming hard for this IPL," Lara said.

Published by K. Sudhakar for and on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002. and Printed by him at BFL Infotech Limited, C-9,

Sector - III, Noida - 201301. Editor - T. Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 57290/94, Price in Nepal - Nep.Rs. 20.00

per copy.



FIELD DAY FOR MI

Hardik hits bull's eye twice as Mumbai run Sunrisers out

AGE CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 17

Hardik Pandya showcased his top-class fielding skills as Mumbai Indians beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by 16 runs here at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium

on Saturday.
Chasing 150, Sunrisers
were bowled out for 137.
Rahul Chahar and Trent Boult took three wickets each, but it was Hardik's two crucial run-outs that changed the complexion of the match Sunrisers'

inexperienced middle-order failed to raise to the occasion once again as they slumped to their third consecutive defeat.

Powerplay Sunrisers 57 runs with opener Jonny Bairstow dictating the terms.

Bairstow (43 off 22 balls) who was striking the ball like a dream plotted his

downfall. Englishman was out hitwicket while trying to paddle sweep left-arm spinner Kunal Pandya.

The required run-rate shot up as Mumbai conceded just seven runs between overs seven and At the half-way mark, Sunrisers needed 77 off 60 The biggest turning

point was David Warner's dismissal. Hardik unleashed a stunning throw from point to catch Warner short of the crease. As an upset Warner (37 off 34 balls) walked back to the dresssituation. The onus was once again on their muddling middle-order.

After a solid start, Mumbai made 53 in powerplay. Warner but once a solid start, Mumbai made 53 in powerplay. ing room, Sunrisers found

Vijay Shankar raised some hopes by clubbing Krunal for back-to-back sixes as the 16th over earned Sunrisers 16 runs. looking in fine touch.

The equation became 31 off 24.

Then, Hardik hit the bull's eye yet again to run out Abdul Samad. With the pressure mounting, Vijay perished soon with Sunrisers still requiring 17 runs off seven balls.

Earlier, Kieron Pollard's brilliant cameo powered Mumbai to a competitive total of 150 for five. Pollard who was dropped on 18 by Vijay went on to frustrate Sunrisers by making 35 off 22 balls. He finished the innings with a flourish by hitting backto-back sixes Bhuvneshwar Kumar in the final over.

and his change of pace worked wonders. Vijay dismissed Rohit Sharma (32 off 25 balls) who was

SCORECARD

Mumbai Indians: Quinton de Kock c sub (J Suchith) b Mujeeb Ur Rahman 40, Rohit Sharma c Virat Singh b Shankar 32, Suryakumar Yadav c & b Shankar 10, Ishan Kishan c Bairstow b Mujeeb Ur Rahman 12, Kieron Pollard (not out) 35, Hardik Pandya c Virat Singh b Ahmed 7, Krunal Pandya (not out) 3. Extras (lb 6, nb 1, w 4) 11. Total (for five wickets in 20 overs) 150.

FoW: 1-55, 2-71, 3-98, 4-114, 5-131. Bowling: Bhuvneshwar 4-0-45-0, Khaleel Ahmed 4-0-24-1, Mujeeb Ur Rahman 4-0-29-2, Abhishek Sharma 1-0-5-0, Vijay Shankar 3-0-19-2, Rashid Khan 4-0-22-0.

Sunrisers Hyderabad: David Warner run out (HH Pandya) 36, Jonny Bairstow hit wicket b KH Pandya 43, Manish Pandey c Pollard b Chahar 2, Virat Singh c Yadav b Chahar 11, Vijay Shankar c Yadav b Bumrah 28, Abhishek Sharma c Milne b Chahar 2, Abdul Samad run out (HH Pandya) 7, Rashid Khan Ibw b Boult O, Bhuvneshwar Kumar b Boult 1, Mujeeb Ur Rahman (not out) 1, Khaleel Ahmed b Boult 1. Extras (lb 3, w 2) 5. Total (in 19.4 overs) 137.

134, 9-135. **Bowling:** Trent Boult 3.4-0-28-3, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-14-1, Adam Milne 3-0-33-0, Krunal Pandya 3-0-30-1, Rahul Chahar 4-0-19-3, Kieron Pollard 2-0-10-0.

POINTS TABLE **Points** +0.367 0 +0.1752 +0.616 2 0 2 0 2 +0.000 0 2 - 0.909

Bangalore look to continue fine run

AGE CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 17

Challengers Bangalore are riding on a crest of a wave after winning two out of their first two games this season. They would be keen on posting a hat-trick of wins when they lock horns with Kolkata Knight Riders here at the M.A. Chidambaram stadium on

Sunday afternoon.
With RCB finding an unlikely bowling hero in left-arm spinner Shahbaz Ahmed and 'million-dollar' Glenn Maxwell ending his five-year drought for an IPL half-century, Virat Kohli's team appear to have the right combination

in their playing XI.

Maxwell's dramatic change in IPL fortunes has been credited to Kohli's admirable leadership. Kiwi Kyle Jamieson, who has added teeth to RCB's pace bowling unit, too praised Kohli for helping him adapt to Indian conditions.

"He (Kohli) is such an experienced leader. He is a skilful leader and the way that he approaches the games certainly complements the way I like to go about things. He is competitive, he is aggressive and likes to take the game on, which is something I like to adopt as well," Jamieson

afternoon game (3:30pm start) is expected to change the dynamics at Chepauk which proved to be a nightmare for chasing teams in the previous games. However, spin will remain the most-potent weapon on a slow surface.

Kolkata are coming off a disappointing result after

Live on TV Kolkata Knight Riders vs Royal Challengers Bangalore from 3.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD1

HEAD to HEAD

Matches

KKR 14 RCB **FOR THE RECORD**

 Eoin Morgan who has scored 6,921 runs at an average of in 297 innings needs 79 more to become the fourth Englishman and 22nd batsman over all to score 7,000 runs in T20 match

Virat Kohli who has scored 5,944 runs at an average of 38.10 in 186 innings needs 56 more to become the first batsman to complete 6,000

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

 RCB beat Knight Riders by 82 runs at Shariah.

RCB beat Knight Riders by 8 wickets at Abu Dhabi.

STATS: S. PERVEZ QAISER

dominating the game for a major part of it. KKR would be eager to see skip-per Eoin Morgan hitting the top form. He hasn't touch the double-digit this season. West Indian allrounder Andre Russell who was brilliant with the ball hasn't performed well with the bat for KKR either.

Having scored back-toback half-centuries, lefthanded opener Nitish Rana is KKR's biggest con-tributor.

Kolkata's spin trio of Harbhajan Singh, Varun Chakravarthy and Shakib Al Hasan managed to keep the opponent batsmen at bay in powerplays.



CSK skipper M.S. Dhoni talks to Punjab Kings youngster

Dhoni the heartbeat of CSK, says Stephen

Mumbai, April 17: Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming has called skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni the team's heartbeat and said the desire to do well even after playing 200 matches is a testament to his attitude towards the game and the franchise. Dhoni has been leading the side since the inaugural edition of the league in 2008.

"His longevity has to be mentioned and appreciated... to play 200 games and still have a desire to do well is a testament to his attitude towards the game and franchise," Fleming said after CSK beat Punjab Kings by six wickets win in the ongoing IPL here on

Friday.
"I think the franchise has grown and MS has grown with it, so it is a great relationship and great fun," the former New Zealand skipper added.

Terming Dhoni the heartbeat of CSK, Fleming said, 'He is the heartbeat of CSK, there's no doubt about it. Whether it's perHis longevity has to be mentioned and appreciated... to play 200 games and still have a desire to do well is a testament to his attitude towards the game and franchise — STEPHEN

FLEMING CSK coach

formance, guidance or leadership, you run out of things to say about him."
He said the manner in which the team bounced back after the first game impressive and praised Man of the Match

efforts (4/13). "Really impressed with the way he bounced back

after the first game. Without doubt, Deepak gets a little bit of swing and a little bit of movement, he is one of the finest around. His ability to swing the ball is one. But his control and skill set is also very high.

Deepak Chahar for his

DC hold edge over Punjab

Mumbai, April 17: Delhi Capitals skipper Rishabh Pant will aim to display better tactical acumen in situations against a 'blow-hot-blowcold' Punjab Kings in what promises to be a bat-tle of brittle middle-orders in an IPL match here on Sunday.

Both teams are coming into the 'Norther Derby' of IPL after enduring defeats in their previous games but Delhi Capitals are definitely a better side on paper. Pant, relatively inexperi-

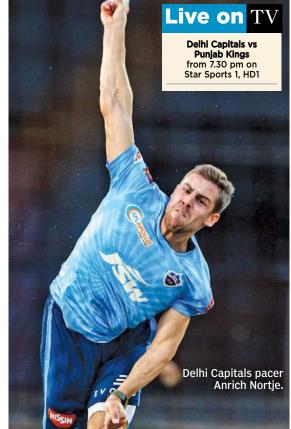
enced in terms of IPL cap-taincy, lost the plot in the last game where he didn't finish his best bowler Ravichandran Ashwin's quota and instead used Tom Curran's friendly medium pacers.

As coach Ricky Ponting pointed out, he would expect a better "on his feet" thinking from the young captain.

The likely addition of Anrich Nortje in the play-ing XI will only bolster Pant's bowling attack which lost its bearings during the last match with Curran's lack of pace on a slow track being cannon fodder for Chris Morris and David Miller.

Punjab Kings, on the other hand, suffered an inexplicable batting col-lapse against Chennai Super Kings with Deepak Chahar's extra bounce and slight seam movement causing the damage. This was after a healthy 200 plus total in the open-

ing game. The nature of the Wankhede track is posing a few questions under



lights for top-order batsmen as the last two games have shown with underlying moisture aiding quali-

ty fast bowling. So KL Rahul versus Kagiso Rabada and Chris Woakes bowling to Chris Gayle could be as enticing as Prithvi Shaw encountering the guile of Mohammed Shami and Shikhar Dhawan trying to unsettle a disciplined Arshdeep Singh.

Jaydev Unadkat and

Rajasthan Royals have shown that despite massive improvements, there are still some chinks in Shaw's armoury and Arshdeep could be used to expose that.

Both teams are top heavy in batting with DC dependant on Shaw, Dhawan and Pant for doing the bulk of scoring while the same job profile is held by KL Rahul, Chris Gayle and Deepak Hooda in the Punjab line-up.

HEAD to HEAD

Matches

26

PBKS 15 DC FOR THE RECORD

 KL Rahul who has scored 4,938 runs in 141 innings needs 62 runs to become the 11th Indian and 70th batsman overall to score 5,000 runs in T20s.

• R. Ashwin who has taken 249 wickets in 246 innings needs just one wicket to become the third Indian and 23rd bowler overall to take 250 wickets in T20s. LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

 Delhi beat Punjab in Super over after the match ended in a tie at

Punjab beat Delhi by 5 wickets at **STATS:** S. PERVEZ QAISER

Even the weaknesses of both the teams are pretty If Ajinkya Rahane's lack

of power-hitting and Marcus Stoinis' indifferent show is affecting the DC middle-order, Mayank Agarwal's prolonged badpatch coupled with Nicholas Pooran's susceptibility to short balls over his shoulder are not great news for Punjab either. middle-orders'

struggles in both the dugouts will make it an engrossing contest with DC bowlers expected to hold sway in Nortje's pres-In case of Punjab Kings,

save Mohammed Shami, the two high-priced pacers

— Jhye Richardson and Riley Meredith — haven't exactly set the stage on

SHAHRUKH SAYS HE HAS SKILLS TO BAIL OUT TEAMS

Mumbai, finishing off matches, Punjab Kings batsman M Shahrukh Khan says he has the ability to adapt and skills to bat anywhere.Khan made 47 off 36 balls and helped Punjab cross 100 in their IPL match against Chennai Super Kings here on Friday.

"My role is playing down the order as a finisher but you don't expect to go out and blast in every game because there will be situations where the team bundles out and you need to take responsibility and see the team through," he said.

"I'm branded as a complete finisher. I am a good batsman, I was batting up the order for Tamil Nadu for a couple of years. So, I've been batting at the top order. I've the skill in me to bat and see the team through in tough situa-"I think I've really devel-

er in the last couple of years but still, my core game is still with me-See the ball and play normal cricketing shots," added. The 25-year-old righthander said it was a good learning curve to play in

oped my game as a finish-

the presence of top players. "The way they are having conversations with people around the team... Pooran, Gayle, Malan and obviously Rahul. It's really going to improve your batting and obviously new to IPL."