

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | TUESDAY 27 | APRIL 2021

WEATHER



Max: 36°C
Min: 23°C
Rainfall: 3%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Chithirai 14
Tithi: Pournami
Star: Swathi
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
Yamagandam: 9 am to 10.30 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.39 am
Luhar: 12.13 pm
Asar: 3.13 pm
Maghrib: 6.23 pm
Isha: 7.36 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.34 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.05 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 6.57 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 7.55 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+3,13,774)	(+2,638)
1,76,20,194	1,97,756

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+15,684)
TN: 10,97,672 13,651

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

14,82,83,452

DEATHS

31,28,904

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

Govt appoints EA Secretary on RBI board

Mumbai: The Reserve Bank on Monday said the government has appointed Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth on the central bank's board. Seth replaces Tarun Bajaj, who was appointed as Revenue Secretary earlier this month. A 1987-batch Karnataka cadre IAS officer, Seth assumed charge of the Department of Economic Affairs last week. "The Central Government has nominated Ajay Seth, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India as a Director on the Central Board of Reserve Bank of India vice Tarun Bajaj," the RBI said in a statement. The nomination of Seth is effective from April 24, 2021, and until further orders, it said.



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

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Fish, chicken and all meat sales banned on Saturdays



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Bank chief's tenure capped at 15 years

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Delhi Capitals to meet RCB today



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COVID CARE

Sterlite can open to make O2: TN

G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 26

The State government decided to allow Sterlite Industries to produce Oxygen at its Copper Smelter plant in Thoothukudi on Monday even as Advocate General Vijay Narayan told the Madras High Court that most of the oxygen manufactured there was of industrial quality and not fit for medical use but steps would be taken to convert all the 1,050 MTs of oxygen to be fit for medical use.

Though the nod to open the oxygen manufacturing plant alone was given for four months, on a temporary basis, at an all-party meeting, attended by representatives of 'recognized political parties,' leaders of a few other political parties came down heavily to the decision.

The meeting took note of the prevailing conditions, wherein there was a shortage of oxygen in hospitals to treat people affected by Coronavirus, which in its second wave was sweeping through the State with more virulence than earlier, and favoured the opening of the oxygen plant alone.

Among the conditions laid out for Sterlite were that none of the other units in the Thoothukudi plant can be opened or operated and the that the oxygen produced in the next four months, which may be extended in view of the continuing pandemic, should be primarily supplied to hospitals in Tamil Nadu.

'Under no circum-



● **Among the parties that attended the meeting were DMK, Congress, BJP, CPM, CPI and PMK.**

All set for O2 production, say Sterlite officials

ARULOLI M | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, APRIL 26

The Sterlite administration here on Monday said that the unit was ready for the production of medical grade oxygen in its two units.

Issuing a statement on its preparedness following the decision taken at the Chief Minister convened all party meeting on Monday, Sterlite administration said, "We are committed to making the entire production capacity of 1,000 tonnes available for the purpose of medical grade oxygen."

stances will the company be allowed to produce copper or electricity or any other produce inside the plant,' said one of the resolutions at the meeting, which made it clear that the oxygen manufacturing would be monitored by a committee, led by the Thoothukudi District Collector. ■ **P2**

Madras HC slams ECI for allowing poll rallies and spreading Covid

■ Court wants safety measures for vote counting day (May 2)

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 26

The Madras high court on Monday came down heavily on the Election Commission of India for not ensuring that political parties adhered to the Covid protocol at the time of election campaigns and rallies.

A bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy, hearing a petition on whether there were adequate Covid-19 safety procedures in place during vote counting at the Karur constituency, went so far as to say, "Election Commission officers should be booked on murder charges probably."

"Were you on another planet when political rallies were being held?" the chief justice asked EC's standing counsel when he told the court that measures had been put in place to ensure Covid-19 protocol during vote counting. The first bench made the observations while passing interim orders on a petition pertaining to counting of votes at assembly constituency No.135 in Karur District.

The petitioner apprehended that at assembly constituency No.135 in Karur, special measures have to be taken at the time of counting to maintain Covid protocol since 77 candidates were in the fray and even though an additional hall has been arranged by the Election Commission for the purpose of counting, that may not be suffice to accommodate the counting personnel and the agents of 77 candidates.

The bench said in the suo

US oxy concentrators arrive



Recalling that India had "sent assistance to the United States as our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic" during the first global wave last year, US President Joe Biden on Monday assured that his country was "determined to help India in its time of need", even as 318 Philips Oxygen Concentrators were transported from New York to New Delhi on Monday in an Air India flight.

Karnataka locks down

Karnataka announced a two-week lockdown with only essential movement allowed

motu proceedings pertaining to the Covid situation initiated by this court on April 22, 2021, among the directions issued to the state, some were for appropriate measures to be put in place in consultation with the Election Commission for counting on May 2, 2021. Even though the polling was by and large peaceful in this state on April 6, 2021 it must be observed that the Election Commission could not ensure that political parties adhered to the Covid protocol at the time of election campaigns and rallies. "Despite repeated orders of this court, going on like a broken record at the foot of almost every order on an election petition, that Covid protocol ought to be maintained during the campaign time, the significance of adhering to such protocol may have been lost on the Election Commission."

IT Czars reach out

Google CEO Sundar Pichai and his Microsoft counterpart Satya Nadella have assured help to India as the country grapples with a ravaging coronavirus crisis.



PM SPEAKS TO US PREZ, JAPAN PM ON COVID

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

US President Joe Biden late on Monday evening spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and assured him of America's "shoulder-to-shoulder steadfast support and solidarity" with India in the battle against Covid "by quickly deploying resources" such as oxygen-related supplies, therapeutics, ventilators and "identifying sources of raw materials to be made available for the manufacture of Covishield vaccines", even as PM Modi thanked him and "underscored the importance of smooth and efficient supply chains of vaccine raw materials and medicines". PM Modi also conveyed to the US President India's "commitment to contain the COVID-19 pandemic globally through Vaccine 'Maitri' (India's vaccine exports), and its participation in COVAX and the Quad Vaccine Initiatives".

New Delhi had last month appealed to the US to ensure smooth supply of vaccine raw materials even as India is currently being battered by a second ferocious wave of Covid. The US President had recalled earlier in the day that India had "sent assistance to the United States as our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic" during the first global wave last year.

Reduce prices, vax makers told

VINEETA PANDEY
with agencies input
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

Reacting to criticism from several states and political parties over profiteering during a major health crisis, and many asking that there be uniform pricing of vaccines for the Central and state governments, the BJP-led government on Monday asked Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech to the lower prices of their Covid-19 vaccines – Covishield and Covaxin, respectively.

It is learnt that the issue of vaccine pricing was

STRAY VIOLENCE IN SIXTH PHASE BENGAL POLLS

RAJIB CHOWDHURI & PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI | DC
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE, APRIL 26:

The seventh phase of the Assembly Election in 34 seats spread over five districts in West Bengal recorded 75.06% polling peacefully by and large except some stray incidents of violence in Murshidabad on Monday.

While nine seats in Murshidabad saw a voters' turnout of 80.30%, six constituencies in South Dinaipur of North Bengal saw 80.21% polling with 78.76% and 70.34% voting in six seats of Malda and nine in Burdwan West respectively from 7 am to 5 pm.

TN CM calls for fair vax pricing

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APR 26

Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami took objection to the differential prices fixed for Covid-19 vaccines by the manufacturers who would be charging the States more than what they would charge the Centre. He urged the Centre to do the procurement for the States.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, he said "the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India has announced a new policy to be adopted in the phase 3 of the COVID-19 vaccination throughout the country. As per this policy,

States have been given the responsibility to procure and administer vaccine to the people in the age group of 18 to 45."

The vaccine would be procured by States at a price be distinctly different from the price that the Centre would be paying since manufacturers had already announced an increased rate for States, he said. Terming the differential price mechanism as 'inherently unfair' since it places a higher financial burden on States and also 'iniquitous' since the States had considerably less fiscal resources than the Centre, Palaniswami urged the Centre to supply the vaccine for phase 3. ■ **P2**

TO PM FUND

Cummins gives \$50k

Australian pacer Pat Cummins who plays for Kolkata Knight Riders donated \$50,000 towards the PM CARES Fund for oxygen supplies in India. He also urged other players to contribute to the fight against the deadly virus. "As players, we are privileged to have a platform that allows us to reach millions of people that we can use for good. I am advised that the Indian government is of the view that playing the IPL while the population is in lockdown provides few hours of joy and respite each day at an otherwise difficult time for the country," Cummins said in his statement.

Ashwin, 2 Aussies pull out of IPL for personal reasons

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 26

Pressure is mounting on the organisers of the Indian Premier League to scrap the ongoing edition as more players pull out of the cash-rich league in the wake of a Covid-19 surge in the country. However, the BCCI has insisted that the tournament will go on. After the opening leg in Chennai and Mumbai, the IPL juggernaut has moved to Ahmedabad and Delhi with players being confined to bio bubbles.

Off-spinner R. Ashwin announced in the small hours of Monday that he would be taking a break



from the IPL as his family in Chennai is "putting up a fight against COVID-19". "I want to support them during these tough times. I expect to return to play if things go in the right direction," said Ashwin who represents Delhi Capitals. Ashwin's par-

ents are hospitalised after testing positive.

While Ashwin is the first Indian player to announce his pull out, two more Australian cricketers joined the growing list of foreign withdrawals on Monday. "Adam Zampa and Kane Richardson have decided to leave India citing personal reasons," said Royal Challengers Bangalore.

Former Aussie skipper Ricky Ponting, currently the coach of Delhi Capitals, said the situation is "quite grim". "Yes, it's hard for the players to be away from their families and I can't even imagine putting myself in that situation," said Ponting.

Knights gallop to five-wicket win



Kolkata Knight Riders pacer Pat Cummins (centre) celebrates a Punjab Kings wicket during an IPL game in Ahmedabad on Monday. Cummins took two wickets as KKR returned to winning ways by beating Punjab by five wickets. — **IPL**

China censors history-making Oscar winner

Beijing, April 26: Beijing-born Chloe Zhao was scrubbed from Chinese social media on Monday as a nationalist backlash airbrushed out her remarkable achievement of becoming the first woman of colour to win the best director Oscar. Zhao on Sunday night became the second woman ever to win the coveted award at the Oscars, as her film Nomadland — about marginalised Americans roaming the west — bagged best picture and its lead, Frances McDormand, won best actress.

But all recent posts containing her name and Nomadland were mysteriously wiped from the Twitter-like site Weibo by Monday noon Beijing time. Her win was also met with silence by Chinese media.



Producers Frances McDormand and Chloe Zhao, hold the Oscar for Best Picture for "Nomadland" as they pose in the press room at the Oscars on Monday at Union Station in Los Angeles. — **AFP**

Initially hailed by state media for her film's success at the Golden Globes in March, Zhao became the

target of a nationalist backlash after social media users dug up years-old interviews in which she

appeared to criticise her country of birth.

Chinese cinemas abruptly pulled the film's scheduled release. This year's Oscars were also not aired on Chinese television or streaming channels. Zhao appeared to allude to these difficulties in her Oscars acceptance speech, saying, "I've been thinking a lot lately of how I keep going when things get hard."

She also quoted a line from a Classical Chinese poem that translates to "people are fundamentally good at birth" — a move praised by many Chinese social media users, before the posts were deleted.

Weibo was initially flooded with posts praising Zhao on Monday morning, while others decried censorship. "Chloe Zhao becomes the

first Asian/Chinese female filmmaker to win the best director Oscar in history," wrote an entertainment blogger with more than 8.9 million followers, in a post that gained thousands of likes before it was deleted.

"China's public opinion control is outrageous. After Chloe Zhao's startling Oscars win, there is not even a fart on Weibo," wrote an outraged user. Despite the censors' efforts, on the streets of Beijing, pride in an Asian director reaching the apogee of US cinema was easy to find.

"She's the pride of Chinese people... it's very rare for a Chinese to get an Oscar award," Yan Ying, a female engineer, told AFP on Monday morning.

— **AFP**

OTHER STORIES

After husband's death, woman tries to kill two children in suicide pact

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 26

In what appears to be a suicide pact, a 34-year-old woman killed herself by consuming soft drink laced with poison, and also attempted to kill her two children in Tambaram on Sunday, the police said.

According to police, the deceased has been identified as, Neeta (34), a resident of Ambedkar Nagar in Selayiur near Tambaram. Her children, 10-year-old son and a 6-year-old daughter, who were also fed with poison are undergoing treatment at Egmore Children's hospital.

Police sources said though the reason for the extreme step taken by Neeta is not certain, it is assumed that the family was grieving the loss of Neeta's husband and father of the two children Manoj Kumar (39).

Manoj, who worked in a private company in the city, was fatally knocked down by a car on March 15 on Maduravoyal-Tambaram Bypass road.

Police said the incident happened in the early hours of Sunday, when Neeta had allegedly mixed poison in juice and gave it to the children. While the children were sipping the drink, Neeta reportedly drank it and within a few minutes, she screamed in pain.

Manoj's mother who lives on the ground floor of the house rushed to the house after hearing the cries of the two children. The trio was rushed to a private hospital nearby, where Neeta passed away. The two children are currently under treatment, the police said. Selayiur police have registered a case and begun an investigation into the matter.

CM requests Centre to procure and supply entire quantity of vaccine

From P1

He said it was a legitimate expectation as a budgetary provision of ₹ 35,000 crore had been made in the Budget Estimates for 2021-22 for the COVID-19 Vaccination programme.

He requested the Centre to procure and supply the entire required quantity of vaccine for administering all groups including those in the age group of 18-45 to the States.

'Further, the Government of India could also explore alternative sources of supply of vaccine including possible imports to ensure that the vaccine roll out takes place across the country smoothly and expeditiously in the coming weeks,' the Chief Minister said.

Fish, chicken and all meat sales banned on Saturdays

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 26

The state government banned sale of fish, chicken and meat on Saturdays to combat the spread of Covid-19 even as a new set of restrictions came into force on Monday, including closure of all places of worship, creating resentment among devotees.

A government order said that fish markets, fish stalls, chicken stalls and all other meat stalls should be closed on Saturdays and Sundays for effective containment of coronavirus.

Warning violators of strict action under the provisions of the Disaster Management Act and various

sections of IPC, the government said that the huge crowds witnessed at fish markets and meat stalls with people not following social distancing norms prompted the government to bring in the new restriction.

Last Saturday's rush at fish markets and meat shops was triggered by the fear of the Sunday lockdown that came into force for the first time. So to stock up on food items for Sunday, the crowds had thronged the fish and meat vends at various places.

In fact, heavy crowds were seen in almost all shops on Saturday including vegetable shops, groceries and other stores.

However, the vignettes of the mad scramble at places like Kasimedu and other fish markets where buyers get just a few hours to grab at the fresh catches were frightening with most people seen without facemasks.

On Monday, barber shops, spas, beauty parlours, cinemas, malls, bars, places of worship and big format shops all remained closed, causing resentment among the people and also those who lost business.

Hotels and restaurants were allowed to provide only take away facility and not serve food on their premises. Since that rule was applicable to even tea stalls, people who just sip

a cuppa at the roadside shops found it difficult to take it away somewhere and drink.

Also the new regime of obtaining e-pass to enter the State from other States other than Puducherry also came into force, keeping the police and authorities on their toes particularly in the border districts.

Already parks and tourist spots had been closed down and the closing down of places of worship caused consternation in devotees, who wanted to know how places of worship could turn out to be spreaders of the virus if a limited number of people were allowed to enter.

However, people tried to

adjust to the new restrictions and work their way out of the inconveniences caused by them.

While many private companies expanded work from home facilities or reduced the number of staff attending offices, government offices and public sector companies insisted on 100 per cent attendance, adding to the strain on public transport, considered to be a major source of viral infection.

Even those employed in the non-essential services in the government and public sector offices had to attend office regularly without fail, despite some of the premises turning out to be Covid-19 clusters.

State adds 15,000 more Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 26

The state added over 15,000 new Covid-19 cases and 95 deaths on Monday.

According to the data provided by the health department, the state recorded a total of 15,684 new cases that is a slight rise from 15,659 on Sunday.

With this, the total Covid-19 tally in the state has touched 10,97,672 while death toll reached 13,651 including 4,602 in Chennai.

Chennai registered 4,250 new cases and 35 deaths jumping from 4,206 new cases and 30 deaths on Sunday. Now, total cases in the district touched 3,14,074.

New cases in Chengalpattu district on Monday touched 1,142 cases while the count on Sunday was 1,242. Four people also succumbed to Covid in the district. Total cases in the district now stand at 75,032.

Number of daily cases in Coimbatore has gone up to 1,056 from 1,038 on Sunday with two deaths. Chennai, Coimbatore, and Chengalpattu districts, which reported over 1,000 cases each, together added a total of 6,448 while it contributed 6,486 cases on Sunday.

While Erode, Madurai, and Thiruvallur recorded over 500 cases districts like Kancheepuram, Krishnagiri, Selam, Thanjavur, Thiruvannamalai,

Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli, Tirupur and Trichy added 300 plus cases. Apart from this, 7 districts crossed 200mark and 11 districts reported over 100 cases.

The contribution of Chennai and surrounding districts including Thiruvallur and Chengalpattu on Monday is 6,230 while the tally on Sunday was 6,333.

Monday also added over one lakh active cases with 1,07,145 that is a rise from 1,05,180 on Sunday. The total active cases in the Chennai district now stand at 31,142 that is a dip from 31,535 on Sunday.

Death cases touched 9 Kancheepuram while Salem recorded 5 deaths. Thiruvallur, Thanjavur and Madurai reported 4 cases each in addition to Chengalpattu.

Three death cases reported in Vellore and Trichy and Dindigul, Kanyakumari, Tenkasi, Thiruvannamalai, Thiruvallur and Thoothukudi recorded two cases each.

Apart from this, Cuddalore, Dharmapuri, Kalakurichi, Karur, Nagapattinam, Perumbalur, Thirupattur, Tirunelveli and Villupuram districts registered death cases. A total of 1,15,642 persons were subjected to RT-PCR tests through 264 labs while total individual tests were 1,22,610 on Sunday. At least 2,17,63,365 individuals tested so far in the state.

Negative Covid report mandatory for air passengers travelling from TN to six cities

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 26

Air passengers travelling from Chennai to six cities in the country will now be required to produce a negative RT-PCR report taken at most 72 hours before travelling.

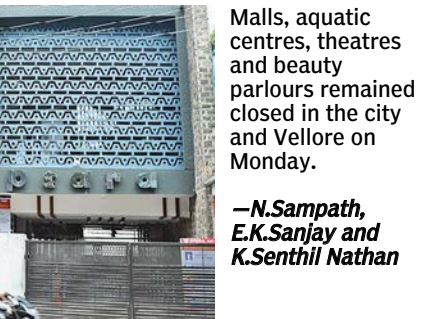
According to the sources, these six cities, Bhuvaneshwar (Odisha), Jaipur (Rajasthan), Imphal (Manipur), Rajkot (Gujarat), Bagdogra (West Bengal) and Union Territory Andaman has asked the Chennai airport authorities to check the medical report of the passengers, as Chennai is one of the sensitive spots in the country with surging Covid-19 cases.

According to the sources at the Chennai airport, a new SOP has been put in place for travel to these six places to contain the spread of coronavirus. All the passengers shall provide a Negative covid-19 report and then allowed to board the flights. Social distancing should be ensured during boarding / deboarding and travel, sources at the airport said. If passengers travelling to these cities fail to produce the report, they will not be allowed to travel.

The city presently has over 31,500 active cases and is testing around 20,000 people a day. With the city registering 4206 cases on Sunday, the number of cases is expected to further rise by mid-May.



With all the religious places closed owing to lockdown, devotees offer their prayers in front of a closed temple on Chitra Pournami.



Malls, aquatic centres, theatres and beauty parlours remained closed in the city and Vellore on Monday.

—N.Sampath, E.K.Sanjay and K.Senthil Nathan

Prepaid taxis at airport boon to passengers

P.A. JEBARAJ | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 26

Despite a total lockdown in the city due to the spiking Covid-19 cases, the air passengers arriving at the Chennai airport could be able to book existing prepaid cab services without any hassle.

While the total lockdown

brought life to a standstill in the city, the operation of trains and flights remain unaffected despite the total lockdown in the city on Sunday.

On Sunday, there were complaints of commuters facing severe hardship in getting cabs and autorickshaws to reach their destination. Some of the com-

muters took social media to lash out on the issue, even though the railway authorities denied such allegations.

Similarly, the airport authorities on Monday said that air passengers too had a hassle-free journey from the airport to their destinations in the city. The Airports Authority of India

has granted approval to offer pre-paid taxi services from the airport.

An officer said, "There is a counter inside the airport where passengers can book taxis 24/7 despite total lockdown. The Chennai airport has two taxi services functioning from its premises - Chennai Airport prepaid taxi Owners-drivers associ-

ation and Aviation express." The rates of both taxi services are also approved by the AAI, according to the officer.

>>>> Passengers arriving at the Chennai airport are able to book prepaid cab services without any hassle.

—DC



Collector orders closure of liquor shops

DC CORRESPONDENT
NAGAPATTINAM, APRIL 26

The district administration here has ordered closure of all TASMAC retail outlets and its bars across the district from Tuesday until further orders. In a press release here on Monday, Collector Praveen P. Nair said the decision was taken to prevent the

spread of Covid-19. He warned that violations would be punished severely. Similar orders have been passed by S. Divyadarshini, V. Shantha, T. Rathna, P. Srivenkata Priya, B. Uma Maheswari and Prashant M. Wadnere, collectors of Tiruchy, Tiruvallur, Ariyalur, Perambalur, Pudukkottai, and Karur districts respectively.

MACT awards ₹31.70 lakh as damages to woman researcher

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 26

The Motor Accidents Claims Tribunal (MACT) has directed a private insurance company to pay a compensation of ₹31.70 lakh to a woman research officer who sustained grievous injuries in an accident four years ago. In the petition, V. Poornima of Medavakkam said she was working as a scientist fellow in Central Leather Research Institute, Chennai and earning ₹40,000 per month as stipend.

On March 29, 2017 at about 7.15 am, when she was riding a motorcycle on Velachery main road, opposite to Indian Bank, Medavakkam branch, a man driving his JCB in a rash and negligent manner hit her motorcycle. She sustained grievous injuries and was rushed to a hospital where she was treated for 43 days and underwent surgeries. She sustained 95 percent locomotors disability. The movement of her right hand was affected and she

faced difficulties in breathing, lifting heavy objects, bending right hand and hip. She was not able to ride two-wheelers. Due to the injuries, she could not continue her PhD research and was unable to continue the job for a year.

She said V. Palanivel, Tambaram, owner of the vehicle, was responsible for the accident. Hence, Palanivel and Reliance General Insurance Co. Ltd., Nungambakkam, insurer of the vehicle, are statutorily and vicariously liable to pay her compensation with interest and cost.

Special sub judge, small causes court-I, RRevathy said this tribunal comes to the conclusion that the accident occurred due to the rash and negligent driving of the JCB driver. The petitioner had sustained injuries and took treatment as an inpatient in three spells for 43 days and underwent surgeries. Hence, the petitioner is entitled for a compensation of ₹31.70 lakh.

Off-centre

The art of show-off

Tamil Nadu politicians do not loathe show-off, whether it's about their academic qualification, party designation or admiration for their masters. It'll be displayed big on their luxurious car with the 'banned' sun film on the window shields. This correspondent on Sunday came across such a Toyota Fortuner, owned by Dr P Sashi Kumar, a DMK politician. His designation as Tiruvallur district president of the 'International Human Rights Council' was flaunted on the car's number plate. At least 10 per cent of the front glass reminds people, with a banner headline, that he is 'Dr Sashi'. It does not end there. A good portion of the rear end glass has his name in Tamil too.

— T.Sudheesh



Kudos to kindness

After NGOs and government agencies, now members of the transgender community have also come out to help the needy during Sunday curfew in Chennai. A few transgenders in Chennai have started a kitchen called 'Oru Pidi Anbu' as restaurants are closed on Sundays. The group has been feeding the needy, homeless, elders, migrant workers, sanitation workers and those stranded on the roads.

— Sindhiya Samuel

Tunes to beat blues

It was a bizarre event in Coonoor town in the Nilgiris last Thursday, when band masters, folk music artists and musicians attached to the local orchestra troupes, staged a different sort of performance, both to create awareness on Covid-19 and also to express their plight on how their livelihood has been affected by the Covid-19 crisis.

These musicians performed sorrowful tunes in an expression as to how sorrowful their lives were without a regular earning. One of the participant, Thamarai Selvan, said that due to stringent norms in hosting functions, marriages, festival

celebrations in temples and other related things, music artists, especially wedding bands, orchestra troupes and other folk musicians who play ritual music in temples and other related functions, are totally deprived of their livelihood.

"We are the one sector which are totally neglected. We wish the government consider giving us some sops to tide over the revenue crisis. Those sorrowful tunes we played were to attract the attention of the government and also create awareness on Covid-19 spread," he added.

— B. Ravichandran

Stuck in homes again with fear

With people expecting total lockdown in the state next week, gated communities and multi-storied apartments in the city have begun implementing strict safety measures on their premises.

All public areas including play zones and club house have been banned for residents from this week in several apartments due to surge in

Covid-19 cases. With online classes also over for the academic year, parents are finding it difficult to keep their children confined to homes. Residents have begun activating their online groups, quiet for the last few months, where they used to chat every week last year during the peak Covid days. An air of trepidation is palpable.

— B. Vijayalakshmi

SHORT TAKES

HOSPITAL FIRE:
CUSTODY OF DOCS
EXTENDEDSHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, APRIL 26

A local court on Monday extended police custody of the two doctors of the Vijay Vallabh Hospital in Virar in suburban Mumbai, where 15 Covid patients lost their lives in a fire three days ago, till Wednesday.

Chief executive officer (CEO) Dr Dilip Shah (56) and the chief administrative officer Dr Shailesh Pathak (47) were arrested on Sunday and remanded to police custody till Monday by a holiday court.

The crime branch unit 3 of the Mira Bhayander Vasai Virar commissionerate told the court that the custody of the doctors was required as various documents pertaining to the fire safety of the hospital was to be received from them. The hospital has been accused of not carrying out the mandatory fire audits.

A police official said that the nurses, ward boys and doctor on night duty when the incident took place are being questioned. They too are named in the FIR, as the police have come to know that before informing the fire brigade, the hospital staff tried to control fire for 10-15 minutes on their own.

A nurse has told the police that Dr Shah and Dr Pathak were immediately informed after sparks from the AC unit of the ICU were noticed. It was Dr Shah and Dr Pathak who then called the fire brigade.

The police have booked Dr Shah and Dr Pathak for culpable homicide not amounting to murder and other relevant sections of IPC.

A huge fire erupted on Friday in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) located on the second floor of the four-storey hospital.

At the time of the incident, there were 83 patients in the hospital and 17 of them in the ICU. The ICU of the 90-bed hospital was gutted and 15 Covid patients were charred to death on April 23.

CONG. MIFFED
WITH NCP ON
VACCINES' ISSUEBHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, APRIL 26

Differences within the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) Government in Maharashtra over the free vaccination drive came to the fore as the Congress has expressed displeasure over the NCP announcing the decision unilaterally. The decision should be announced by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, said Maharashtra Congress chief Balasaheb Thorat.

"The decision to provide vaccine against Covid-19 for free to people of the state should have been announced by the chief minister. An attempt by others to take credit for it was not good," said Mr Thorat on Monday.

His comments came a day after Maharashtra Minority Affairs Minister and NCP leader Nawab Malik said the State Government will float global tenders for providing Covid-19 vaccines for free to people above 18 years of age in the state.

EMINENT WRITER
MANZOOR
PASSES AWAYRABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPLA, APRIL 26

Manzoor Ahtesham, whose works depicting the lives of Indian Muslims in independent India have received wide acclaim, died of Covid-19 early on Monday morning.

He was 73 and is survived by his two daughters.

The title of the writer's maiden work *Ramazan Mein Ek Maut*, a short story anthology published in 1973, has proved apocalyptic as he passed away in the holy month of Ramadan.

Born on April 3, 1948 in Bhopal, Ahtesham was a product of Aligarh Muslim University. His family wanted him to be an engineer. But, he chose to be a writer.

He has written many short stories, novels and dramas enriching Hindi and Urdu literature. His short story compilations titled *Tashbih*, and *Tamasha Tatha Anya Kahaniyan*, have been widely acclaimed in the Hindi literature world. His novels, *Dastan Ek Laapata*, *Kuch Din Aur*, *Sukha Bargad*, *Basharat Manzil* and *Pahar Dhalite* have earned him a glorious place in the Hindi literature world.

Vaccination drive



People gather in large numbers to receive Corona vaccination outside a government hospital in Nadia, West Bengal on Monday. Total vaccination across the country has crossed over 14.5 crore with more than 31 lakh doses of vaccine administered till 8 pm on Monday. — PTI

7th phase by and large
peaceful, over 75% vote

Raninagar BJP candidate Mashwara Khatun's car attacked

FROM PGI

However four hot seats - Bhowanipore, Rasbehari, Ballygunge and Kolkata Port - in South Kolkata clocked only 59.91 per cent polling during which chief minister Mamata Banerjee and her MP nephew cast their votes. A revised figure of polling is expected from the Election Commission on Tuesday.

Unlike other districts, Murshidabad remained tense since morning. At Senapara, Raninagar BJP candidate Mashwara Khatun's car was attacked and her polling agent was beaten up by armed Trinamul Congress workers. The police had to rescue her.

Allegations again surfaced against the Central paramilitary forces of ransacking Raninagar

block TMC president Mizanur Rahman's residence and destroying food. When district TMC president and MP Abu Taher Khan went there, angry workers of his party shouted "Go Back" slogans at him. He was soon seen leaving in his car in face of the protest. At Gurapasa High School in Nabagram, the Central forces allegedly beat an elderly TMC worker so much that he had to be admitted at Nabagram Hospital.

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

at the Farakka Hospital.

Murshidabad Congress candidate Niyazuddin Sheikh was caught by the TMC workers distributing money hidden in masks at a booth in Gudhia High School. But Mr Ahmed claimed that he distributed only masks to the voters for their protection from Covid-19. The Election Commission has sought a report of the incident.

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

Meanwhile, the Election Commission transferred a few police officers as West Bengal voted in the seventh phase of assembly polls on Monday, officials

said.

Shantanu Sinha Biswas, an inspector at the Directorate of Economic Offences, was transferred to the office of the DIG Jalpaiguri Range as a crime inspector, they said.

Sinha was accused by the BJP of manipulating postal ballots. Srimanta Kumar Bandopadhyay, the Assistant Commissioner of Asansol-Durgapur Police, was named the new Sub-divisional Police Officer of Bolpur, as per an order issued on Sunday night. Shubhendra Kumar, the present SDPO of Bolpur, was diagnosed with Covid-19.

Nihar Ranjan Roy, the circle inspector of Krishnaganj was made the new inspector in charge of the Murshidabad police station, replacing Atish Das, the order said.

Assam rules out
full lockdown Mask up even
indoors: CentreMANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, APRIL 26

Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma here on Monday said that there will be no shortage of oxygen, ICU and isolation beds in the state for next 10 days and in between state has started augmenting its resources to build up its capacity to face any eventuality due to pandemic.

Pointing out that the state government has made arrangements to import oxygen from neighbouring Bhutan, Sarma told reporters that the oxygen production capacity of

the state has reached to 61 MT per day while storage capacity has already been expanded to 468 MT.

Informing that they are going to operationalise three more oxygen plants soon, he said that there will be no shortage of Remdesivir too as he requested drug manufacturer Sun Pharma to expedite the production at its Palasbari plant to 80,000 vials per week. Sarma said that he visited Sun Pharma's Palasbari plant near Guwahati on Sunday and requested them to scale up production to ensure that there is no shortage in the state.

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

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

"Rather, I'll say that the time has come that we start wearing masks even

otherwise inside our homes. We used to talk about wearing it outside homes, but the way the infection has spread, it will be better if we wear mask inside our homes if we are sitting with someone," he said.

"But, definitely, if there is a Covid-19 positive person, that person must wear the mask and others inside the house also must wear a mask and the positive person should be kept in a different room," Paul underlined. Paul added that people should also avoid stepping out of their houses unnecessarily and not invite guests at home.

ASSAM
CONSTABLE
HELD IN ONGC
ABDUCTION CASEMANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, APRIL 26

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

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

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

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

Asserting that security forces are leaving no stone unturned to rescue the third ONGC employee Ritul Saikia also, security sources said that security forces have got some inputs about the Ulfa-I rebels involved in the incident and operations have been launched to bust all the link points.

On Friday, in a joint operation army and Nagaland police had rescued two ONGC captives.

Mamata aide
Mondal gets
CBI summonsDC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, APRIL 26

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has summoned a key Trinamul Congress leader and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's blue-eyed boy Anubrata Mondal for questioning over his suspected role in the high-profile cattle smuggling case. At around 12.30 pm on Sunday he was served the summons by the CBI directing him to appear at its anti corruption branch office at Nizam Palace in South Kolkata at 11 am on Tuesday.

Known to be a strongman of Birbhum which is going to the polls in the eighth phase on April 29, Mr Mondal is the TMC president of the district. He is also the third TMC functionary to come under the central agencies' radar in the case.

The CBI summons to Mr Mondal came close on the heels of a notice served by the Income Tax department to know the source of his income and assets following allegations of his disproportionate assets by Bolpur BJP candidate Anirban Ganguly.

Furious over the summons to Mr Mondal, the TMC chief stood by him and accused the BJP of harassing him through the central agencies like previous occasions ahead of the polls. "Do you

● **FURIOUS OVER** the summons to Mr Mondal, the TMC chief stood by him and accused the BJP of harassing him through the central agencies like previous occasions ahead of the polls.

know they are very scared? On Sunday two CBI personnel visited the residence of Kesto (nickname of Mr Mondal) and asked him to visit their office on April 27. He is kept under watch in every election so that he can not step out of home. Why will he go to the CBI office?" she wondered at her last poll campaign rally in North Kolkata.

Ms Banerjee alleged, "Though a democratic process like election has been underway, agencies are used intentionally. Won't Kesto work during the polls? After all he is the president of a party in a district. People are entering homes with Covid. They should be tested to know their health condition before their entry. I clearly told Kesto not to appear at the CBI office and instead inform them that he would be available after the election. The district head of a political party should not be obstructed from doing his work."

Didi wants EC
to withdraw
central forcesDC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, APRIL 26

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

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

She said, "This Election Commission can do anything and everything. We have to fight against it for our place. We are not getting the benefits of Raj Dharma of the EC. We welcome the ruling of the Madras HC. Let each and every court scrutinize the EC role. We also urge the Supreme Court to look into how it helped in the growth of Covid-19 cases by scheduling the polls in eight phases, ignoring a

scope of clubbing them."

The CM, who is also the state health minister, added, "Moreover, around three lakh central forces personnel have been deployed here for the last couple of months. Occupying important places they are only spreading the infection which has not been giving us a window to create space at safe homes and increase the bed capacity in the hospitals. It is a crime. I ask the EC to withdraw the central forces. I think those whose poll-duty is over should be withdrawn now."

The state reported 15,992 fresh Covid-19 cases with 68 more deaths in the last 24 hours.

Ms Banerjee lambasted the EC for pulling her up for her provocative remarks instead of show-causing either Prime Minister Narendra Modi or union home minister Amit Shah despite their controversial comments in their rallies.

She once again made it clear that she would take legal steps against the central poll panel, underterred by its rebuttal of her claims of vindictive stance.

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

COVID | BLUES

Govt expects cases to decline soon; Plus-II students demand cancellation of annual exams

For Covid, Odisha passing through 'plateau' stage

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 26

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

"Since the daily cases in Odisha are found to be stable at a particular level - above 6,000 and below 6,500 - for a few days now, it could be interpreted as a plateau phase. The num-

ber or such period is expected to decline in the upcoming days," he said. However, the top health official said that nothing can be assumed specifically now.

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

Dismissing the report of shortage of beds in intensive care units (ICUs), the DMET said that there were many ICU beds in designated Covid hospitals.

"If the number of Covid patients rises further, the more number of ventilators will be set up accordingly," he assured.

The statement of the DMET has come as a great piece of consolation to people in panic due to the steep rise in Covid-19 cases since the beginning of the current month.

According to Dr Mohanty, usually there is an upsurge trend and subsequently plateau and then declining stage which is a natural course during any epidemic or pandemic situation. The DMET admitted that local contact

cases were certainly a worry sign.

"However, we are appealing everybody to follow Covid-19 appropriate behaviour. Everybody needs to follow all the Covid-19 norms so that they do not spread the virus to others," he added.

State health director Dr Niranjan Mishra said that 70 per cent of beds are currently available in different hospitals for Covid patients. "We have constituted a cluster comprising 2/3 districts. The patients are shifted to other districts after beds are filled at hospitals in a particular

district," Dr Mishra said.

Talking about the stock of oxygen, he said that Odisha is an 'oxygen surplus' state. "To avoid shortage of oxygen, directions have been issued to keep the oxygen stock by filling the cylinders. We have enough beds, oxygen and medicines to tackle the Covid situation," he said. "The micro management plan has been made to administer the Covid vaccines to the beneficiaries in the state," he added.

Meanwhile, a group of Plus-II students on Monday staged a demonstration at Lower PMG

square in Bhubaneswar demanding cancellation of annual examinations conducted by the Council of Higher Secondary Education, Odisha.

It was for the second time that the students raised the demand for cancellation of Plus II exam in the state.

The students alleged that the state government was yet to make any announcement regarding the dates for the conduct of the exam due to which there is confusion and at the same time it will create problems in pursuing higher education. The students

threatened to intensify their agitation if no step was taken to cancel the Plus II exam. The Naba Nirman Yuva Chatra Sangathan has also extended support to the demands of the students.

The group threatened to gherao Naveen Niwas, the official residence of Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, if no decision is taken within 10 days. Following the demonstration, police held a discussion with the agitating students. However, as they were reluctant, police took immediate steps to disperse them.

IN BRIEF

Russia expels Italian diplomat

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

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

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

Romania to expel Russian diplomat

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

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

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

Jihadists kill 31 Nigerian soldiers

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

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

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

'14 protests: 108 on trial in Turkey

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

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

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

AFGHANISTAN ATTACKS KILL 12 POLICEMEN

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

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

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

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

Police from Logar province confirmed the attack.

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

EU mounts legal action on AstraZeneca for vax delay

Charges vaccine maker for failing to respect terms of contract

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

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

— AP



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

— AFP

Burj Khalifa lit up with Tricolour

Dubai, April 26: Prominent iconic buildings, including the Burj Khalifa, in the UAE were lit up with the Tricolour to show solidarity with India as it grapples with a growing Covid-19 crisis.

The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) headquarters and the world’s tallest building, Burj Khalifa, in Dubai were lit up with the colours of the Indian flag in solidarity with India as it responds to a

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

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

— PTI

Google, MS Indo-American CEOs pledge aid to India

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

Nadella said that his

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

devices,” he said.

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

— PTI

Boris in soup for ‘dying’ talk

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

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

But he is now locked in a

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

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said the *Daily Mail* report, based on unnamed sources, was “not true” and had been “categorically denied by practically everyone.”

“None of this is serious. The prime minister has been utterly focused on delivering, alongside Cabinet colleagues, the response to Covid,” he told *Sky News*.

— AFP

UK VAX FOR ALL AGED 44, ABOVE

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

— PTI

World military spending grows

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

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

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

think military spending would decrease,” he said.

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

— AFP

MISINFORMATION OF VIRUS: FB BLOCKS OZ MP

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

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

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

— AFP

CHINA

CARGO FLIGHTS TO INDIA SUSPENDED

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

— PTI

Zarif’s leaked recording offers blunt comments

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

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

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

n’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

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

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

— AP

Germany flays Navalny curbs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moscow denies the allegation.

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

— AFP

Suu Kyi court date postponed

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

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

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

Twelve weeks since Suu Kyi was detained, Min Min Soe said they still have not received permis-

sion to meet their client face-to-face — one of many hurdles the team has faced.

“When the judge asked (police) which stage they have reached, they replied they couldn’t tell specifically,” she said, adding that Suu Kyi was frustrated by the slow pace.

“I think she is not getting access to watch news and TV. I do not think she knows the current situation happening in the country,” she said.

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

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

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

— AFP

NUCLEAR | DISASTER

Dozens gather in ghost town of Pripyat, hold candle vigil

Ukraine marks 35 years since Chernobyl

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated

from the area around the disaster site, and the exclusion zone has now become a ghostly uninhabited region. About 600,000 emergency workers and state employees who became known as “liquidators” were dispatched with little or no protective gear to help clean up the aftermath of the disaster.

A 2005 United Nations report estimated that up to 4,000 people could eventu-

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

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

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

— AFP

22 given death in Libya ‘sham’ trials

Tripoli, April 26: Eastern Libyan military courts have sentenced at least 22 people to death and jailed hundreds more since 2018 in “sham, torture-tainted” trials to exert control, Amnesty International said Monday.

“Military courts have convicted hundreds of civilians in eastern Libya in secret and grossly unfair military trials,” the London-based rights

group said.

The trials were “aimed at punishing real or perceived opponents and critics” of the forces loyal to eastern military strongman Khalifa Haftar, it added.

Oil-rich Libya has been torn by conflict since the toppling and killing of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in a Nato-backed uprising a decade ago.

— AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

27 APRIL 2021

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oscars in pandemic times

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

"It has been quite a year, and we are still smack dab in the middle of it," Regina King said in reference to the pandemic as well as the verdict on the George Floyd killing. "Our love of movies helped to get us through," she added. That is significant because in many people's reckoning some parts of life must go on despite the pandemic. And what can be better than entertainment brought to people's homes on a screen? We would do well to remember that 97 per cent of people have proved immune to the infernal pathogen. Perhaps much the same argument drives the IPL, which is India's biggest entertainment extravaganza.

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

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Aakar Patel

India's health calamity has exposed flaws in Guj Model

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist



Subhani

Covid mess to cost govt dear at home & abroad



K.C. Singh

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

NEED CLEAR INFO

It is extremely sad to know that four police personnel in Chennai had reportedly died due to Covid-19 since April 19. We salute their great bravery shown as duty-bound, committed frontline warriors in the huge battle presently being fought by the nation against the deadly pandemic. However, we also understand those frontline warriors were the first in the population to be vaccinated throughout the country. We are informed by medical experts through the media that persons getting fully vaccinated would be protected against being hospitalised and the risk of their death would be considerably reduced, even though they could still get potentially infected by the virus. In the light of this, citizens getting vaccinated would certainly be keen to have some official data as to whether, till date, those like frontline workers, despite already having both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine administered, had to be hospitalised due to the virus or very, unfortunately, if some even lost their lives. If so, we need clear information from the government.

A. Mohan,
Chennai

WITHDRAW AGITATION

It is very sickening to note that the striking farmers have decided to prolong their strike further despite the spread of the pandemic with greater virulence. The pandemic is a common enemy that should be fought by all persons with common sense. The farmers should withdraw protests against farm laws. The disease will not distinguish between persons on the basis of their profession and social status. The time has come for the SC to declare the agitation as illegal and unlawful. Just because of their numerical strength, one group cannot be allowed to be the source of danger to others due to their obstinacy. SC should on its own do this in the interest of all others who are anyway connected with the agitation that had lost its sheen and support.

Kongunaattan,
Coimbatore

quick BITES

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Mankind Pharma to give ₹100 cr to families of dead

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



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

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 26

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

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

The RBI also said the chairman of the board



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

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

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

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

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

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

AUTO INDUSTRY VETERAN JAGDISH KHATTAR PASSES AWAY

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

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



Jagdish Khattar

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

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

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

MPHASIS OWNERSHIP CHANGE TO SET OFF OPEN OFFER

New Delhi, April 26: Shares of Mphasis Ltd closed with a gain of over 1.6 per cent on Monday after Blackstone said funds managed it will acquire a majority stake in the mid-sized IT firm.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Price gap of ready and under construction houses narrows

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 26

Sluggish demand has narrowed down the price difference between ready-to-move-in and under-construction residential units to as low as 3 per cent.

The price gap between ready and or under-construction housing, which has been narrowing since 2017, has come down to 3 to 5 per cent, indicating the sluggishness in demand in the market, finds Anarock Property Consultants.

In 2017, the price gap stood at 9 to 12 per cent and it had narrowed to 5-8 per cent in 2018.

In Mumbai, the price difference shrunk from 12



per cent in 2017 to 3 per cent in Q1 2021. In the case of Bengaluru, it was 12 per cent and 4 per cent and Pune, the gap narrowed from 12 per cent to 5 per cent.

According to Anarock, average prices of ready-to-occupy homes in Delhi NCR were Rs 4,650 per sq.

ft. and for under-construction ones Rs 4,500 per sq. ft. In Mumbai it stood at Rs 10,700 per sq ft and Rs 10,350 per sq ft respectively.

Apart from sluggish demand, unsold stock too held back the price rise of ready-to-occupy homes in these years. Construction delays and stalled projects also made customers averse to investing in under-construction units. Further, ready-to-occupy homes do not attract GST and this has been an added attraction.

"The shrunk price gap works well for end-users as well as investors," said Anuj Puri, chairman, Anarock Property Consultants.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

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

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

TATA MOTORS TO CUT PRODUCTION

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

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

POWERGRID INVIT'S IPO THIS WK



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

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Hockey captain Rani, 6 others +ve

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

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

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

Nadal bags 12th Barcelona crown

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

Cirstea wins WTA title after 13 years

Istanbul: Romania's Sorana Cirstea said she "didn't expect" to win the Istanbul claycourt tournament on Sunday, her second career title coming 13 years after her first. The 31-year-old Romanian defeated top-seeded Elise Mertens of Belgium 6-1, 7-6 (7/3) in the final having not dropped a set all week.

Cirstea, ranked at 67 in the world, captured her maiden title at Tashkent in 2008. Sunday was her fifth final, having made her maiden championship match as a 17-year-old qualifier at Budapest 2007. "I'm very, very happy for this trophy," Cirstea said at the winner's ceremony. —AFP

FOUR IN A ROW FOR CITY

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

London, April 26: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said winning felt much better with fans in attendance after beating Tottenham 1-0 at Wembley to lift the League Cup for the fourth consecutive year in front of 8,000 supporters on Sunday.

Aymeric Laporte's header eight minutes from time finally rewarded a dominant performance from City as they extended Spurs' 13-year wait to win a trophy.

For the first time in 13 months, a football match in England had designated fans from both teams inside the stadium in one of a series of test events at the 90,000 capacity Wembley as coronavirus restrictions are eased.

"It's not full, but it is much better," said Guardiola. "To celebrate with them is much better. 'We played really well. We are incredibly happy to win the first title, four in a row in this competition, but especially because in the last 33 games, we won 30.'"

Defeat by Chelsea in the FA Cup semi-finals last weekend means City cannot claim an unprecedented



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

ed quadruple of trophies this season.

However, they remain on course for a treble with the first leg of their Champions League semi-final against Paris Saint-Germain to come on Wednesday before possibly after another Atletico slip. Sevilla have largely been overlooked as possible champions in Spain but they are right in the mix as well now after a 2-1 win over Granada puts them just three points off the top and one behind Real Madrid.

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

Real Madrid host Sevilla a day later. —AFP

sealing the Premier League title next weekend.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—AFP

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

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

ing on Monday.

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

But Juventus and AC Milan were less clear,

acknowledging the failure of the plans without specifying whether or not they were leaving the project.

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

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

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

Deepika, Atanu trap triple gold

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

Jayanta Talukdar triumphed in Croatia way back in 2009.

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

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

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

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

TOKYO TO DECIDE ON FAN LIMIT BY END OF MONTH

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

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

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

