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OTHER STORIES

STRICT LOCKDOWN IN ARMY QUARTERS

Naveen Kumar | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 18

The Army establishment in the twin cities has introduced a curfew system inside the canteen store facilities to prevent the possible spread of Covid-19 virus. It has introduced a token system wherein customers are let in alphabetically with a head-count of five persons per store. Cantonments in the city have been following government guidelines and have temporarily issued guidelines for the Canteen Store Department (CSD) facilities in the fight against the second wave of Covid. Sources revealed that jawans are sending trucks to the residential quarters for the families to buy vegetables and other essentials. The Army had issued directions earlier this week to reduce physical attendance in its offices by 50 per cent. Those attending offices have been told to have staggered timings, ensure all Covid-19 protocols and avoid crowding. The directions stipulated that meetings or conferences should be done virtually as much as possible. Strict rules are imposed for quarantine facilities for anyone who has been travelling and RT-PCR test is made compulsory, said an official, requesting anonymity. "In several parts of the country, we have to undergo a strict 14-day quarantine after a travel and must show a negative report in the RT-PCR test to join the force. All facilities have been provided inside the hospitals and protocols are maintained to control the spread," he said. Speaking about the controlled lockdown in the Army areas, a resident said that every entrance and exit of the colonies is shut down by guards manning them. "Curfew is being maintained wherein details and purpose of visit are asked for during the day, with the gates being shut after evening. The situation inside the Army base is better than he civil areas as we re under constant watch and families have to strictly follow lockdown norms," said an individual. Meanwhile, the former Army chief Gen. Ved Prakash Malik has raised concern over the frightening rise in the daily Covid-19 cases in India while slamming the ongoing election rallies, farmers' agitation and other events.

SECOND WAVE HITS ZOO HARD, VISITORS REDUCE DRASTICALLY

T.S.S.SIDDHARTH | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 18

The second wave of Covid-19 has severely hit revenues of Nehru Zoological Park with the daily number of visitors falling drastically. Earlier, the zoo would attract 10,000 visitors on a regular and around 15,000 on weekends. On extended weekends or festival holidays, the numbers used to go well past 20,000 a day. Now it has come down to 1,000 and 1,500 visitors a day. With around 20 of the zoo staff falling victim to Covid-19 and currently under quarantine, zoo officials also stepped up sanitation to keep the animals safe. "There is a vaccination drive within the zoo for the staffers. Till now, the UPHC Chandulal Baradarj has vaccinated 300 staffers," said a source from the park. Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, curator of Nehru Zoological Park, VVL Subhadra Devi, said: "The inflow of visitors has come down drastically, which means the funds we acquired through the sale of entry tickets have come down." The authorities are digging into funds acquired through animal adoption programmes and left-over reserves to make ends meet. "We are getting a few donations, apart from that we are using the funds used for adoptions, spending last year's unused funds and in some cases asking the state government to chip in, as it did last year. As of now, we have been able to manage but if the situation persists, we will have a dire situation on hand," she added. Last year, the state government provided around Rs eight crore towards feed costs and maintenance. The officials spent around Rs 18 crore last year on animal food costs and scoverheads.

TS reports 5,093 cases in 24 hrs

Hyderabad, GHMC area reports 598 cases, highest in state, 12 die while being treated for Covid

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 18

More and more Covid-19 cases are being reported in Telangana, as predicted by the state health department, even as the number of people that the disease has claimed is increasing with each passing day. According to the figures released by the health department for Saturday, Telangana had 5,093 new cases, yet another daily high since the arrival of the Coronavirus was first discovered in the state on March 2 last year. Also on Saturday, 15 people died while receiving treatment for Covid-19, marking the second straight day of more than ten people dying from the disease in a single day in the state. On Friday, the state reported the deaths of 12 Covid-19 patients. The steep rise in Covid-19 cases that was previously restricted to Hyderabad and the surrounding districts of Medchal-Malkajgiri, Ranga Reddy and

CASES RISE IN STATE OVER A WEEK			
Date	Daily	Active	Deaths
April 11	2,251	21,864	6
April 12	3,052	24,131	7
April 13	2,157	25,459	8
April 14	3,307	27,861	8
April 15	3,840	30,494	9
April 16	4,446	33,514	12
April 17	5,093	37,037	15

Sangareddy, has now become the norm in more than half of Telangana's 33 districts. As many as 15 districts reported cases in their hundreds on Saturday with Hyderabad and the rest of the GHMC area reporting the most, 598 cases. There were 435 cases in Medchal-Malkajgiri, 326 in Ranga Reddy, 314 in Nizamabad, 235 in Sangareddy, 184 in Kamareddy, 180 in Jagtial, 168 in Nalgonda, 160 in Nirmal, 149 in Karimnagar, 148 in Khammam, 139 in Mahbubnagar,

136 in Warangal Urban, 121 in Mancherial, and 111 in Siddipet districts, according to the health department. The department said 37,037 persons were classified as Covid-19 patients, with 12,861 of them admitted to hospitals for treatment. The total Covid-19 cases as on Saturday stood at 3,51,424 and the toll at 1,824, according to the health department. On Saturday, the department said 1,555 people were declared as recovered from the disease in the state taking the total recovered cases to 3,51,424.

Remdesivir injections now available for purchase: Etala

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

Remdesivir injections, in great demand following the surge in Covid-19 cases requiring hospitalisation, will be available for purchase by individuals at a counter at the Drug Contoller's office in the city, health minister Etala Rajendar said on Sunday. Any request for purchase must be accompanied by a prescription from the doctor treating a patient in a hospital. Addressing a press conference at the makeshift State Secretariat at BRKR Bhavan here, Rajendar cautioned that remdesivir must be used sparingly and with caution only in cases where it is absolutely required. He said that to remove bottlenecks, Telangana

had requested the Centre to reduce the mandatory 15-day holding period of remdesivir doses by the manufacturers to one week, which will make availability of supplies easier. Rajendar said the situation regarding availability of the injections, along with oxygen and other medical supplies was being constantly monitored by Chief Minister K. Chandrababbarao. Under the Chief Minister's guidance, the state administration was ensuring availability of everything needed, from PPE kits, medicines, kits for asymptomatic patients and those advised isolation at home, beds in hospitals, and availability of adequate doctors and hospital staff. Over the past couple of days, Rajendar

said, he, along with minister K.T. Rama Rao had been speaking with drug manufacturers and oxygen generators to ensure adequate supplies are available. Dismissing fears over the rising Covid-19 cases, Rajendar said the state administration was geared up to take care of every single patient needing any attention and care. He said while reports of non-availability of beds in a few private hospitals were true, not everyone who tested positive requires hospitalisation or ventilator support. He said there were a total of 60,000 beds available in the state, including those at medical colleges and permission have been given to private hospitals with more than 20 beds to treat Covid-19 patients.

TS RECEIVES 2.7 L ADDITIONAL DOSES OF VACCINATION

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

On a day state-run hospitals suspended their Covid-19 vaccination drive, Telangana on Sunday received 2.7 lakh additional doses. This will enable it to resume the vaccination drive on Monday. It may be recalled that the vaccination drive was suspended for a day with all government vaccination centres closed as the state ran out of vaccine supplies. Telangana has been administering anywhere between 1 lakh and 1.5 lakh doses of vaccine daily over the past few days. Officials hope that more supplies will arrive before they run out of the latest stock that arrived on Sunday. On Saturday, the state administered 1,50,464 vaccine doses including 1,39,994 first doses and the rest to others who completed their vaccination shots by receiving the second dose.

Be transparent on Covid orders, says former PM

FROM PAGE 1

Singh said the Centre should publicise vaccine dose orders placed and accepted for delivery over the next six months. He said the government should indicate how vaccine supplies are to be distributed to states. "If we want to vaccinate a target number in this period, we should place enough orders in advance so that producers can adhere to an agreed schedule of supply," he noted. The former PM said the government should indicate how this expected vaccine supply will be distributed across states based on a transparent formula. He suggested that the central government could retain 10 per cent for distribution based on emergency needs, and states should have a clear signal of likely availability so

that they can plan their rollout. Noting that India has emerged as the largest vaccine producer in the world, he said at this time of a public health emergency, the government must proactively support vaccine producers to expand their manufacturing facilities quickly by providing funds and other concessions. With domestic supplies being limited, Singh said any vaccine that has been cleared for use by credible authorities such as the European Medical Agency or the USFDA, should be allowed to be imported without insisting on domestic bridging trials. "We are facing an unprecedented emergency and, I understand, experts are of the view that this relaxation is justified in an emergency. The relaxation could be

for a limited period during which the bridging trials could be completed in India," he said. A warning to all consumers of such vaccines be given that these vaccines are being allowed for use based on the approval granted by the relevant authority abroad, he said. Singh said he is forwarding his suggestions for consideration in a spirit of constructive cooperation in which he has always believed and acted upon. "I hope the government will accept these suggestions immediately and act on them promptly," he said. Singh recalled how over the year, the world and India have been grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic with many parents not seeing their children in over a year and many people lost their livelihood. —PTI

OVER 80 COVID CARE COACHES READY FOR USE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 18

The South Central Railway has about 80 Covid care coaches ready to be used by the state government to house patients, sources said. According to the Union health ministry guidelines, these converted coaches can be used by the state government when they exhaust their own medical facilities. The process of conversion of railway coaches entails removal of the middle berth, conversion of toilets into shower rooms and others. A railway official said it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's idea to convert the coaches for Covid care. The railways executed it on mission mode, the official said.

Sampath donates plasma 22 times

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 18

Moved by the news of a person who died over 21 years ago after not receiving blood while undergoing some treatment at the Gandhi Hospital, Sampath Kumar started donating blood. He is the highest donor of plasma since the outbreak of Covid-19. He donated plasma 22 times. The 42-year old Kota Shesa Sampath Kumar runs a beauty parlour and is a social worker. Till date, he has donated blood 84 times and platelets 133 times and plasma 22 times, which is the highest in the state. He has received numerous awards for his service. He donated blood for the first time in life in 2000. Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, Kumar said, "Donating blood used to be a taboo till 2000. After an increase in viral fevers, demand for blood and platelets increased; as did taboos surrounding it. I wanted to fight these taboos and set an example by donating and

encouraging others to do the same." Sharing his inspiration of how he started blood donation, he said, "I read a news article regarding a person's death due to unavailability of blood. The news moved me, so I decided to donate blood since then to whoever needed it." During the lockdown last year, Kumar facilitated blood to thalassaemia patients. He contracted Covid-19, after recovering from which, he began giving plasma. His wife Jayashree is a software engineer and daughter is studying MBBS, both of whom encouraged him to donate plasma.

CYDERABAD POLICE FLOODED WITH PLEAS FOR PLASMA DONATION

DURGA PRASAD SUNKU | DC
HYDERABAD APRIL 18

With a surge in Covid-19 cases, the Cyberabad police is being flooded with requests for plasma

donation. Around 600 police personnel from Cyberabad commissionerate donated plasma during the first wave. However, as many of them are vaccinated, they have to wait for 28 days to donate plas-

ma. During the first wave of Covid-19 last year, Cyberabad Covid control room facilitated several plasma donations and benefiting many patients. Now, in the second wave,

the police is off to facilitating plasma donations again. Assistant commissioner of police Hanumanth Rao said, "There is a massive surge in requests from public in last few days.

TIRUPATI BYPOLL EVMS PUT IN STRONGROOMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 18

The Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) and other units pertaining to Saturday's Tirupati Lok Sabha by-elections received from Chittoor district polling stations were kept in the strongrooms at S.V. Arts College here on Sunday. Although polling ended by 7 pm on Saturday, it was only by Sunday morning that some of EVMS and VVPATs reached Tirupati. The machines were kept in strong rooms in the presence of candidates and representatives of various political parties. They were sealed in the presence of election observer Dinesh Kumar Giridhar Lal, district election officer and collector M. Harinarayan and AROs. Giridhar Lal also reviewed the scrutiny of the polling process with the DEO, municipal commissioner P.S. Girisha, SPs S. Senthil Kumar and Ch. Venkata Appala Naidu and joint collector Veerabrahmam, polling officials and representatives of contestants. Addressing officials, Giridhar Lal said that the central armed police forces would safeguard the strong rooms.

Education minister hails NEP at LPU

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 18

Education minister Dr Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' told an international conference that the New Education Policy (NEP) had been drafted in consultation with all the stakeholders ranging from students, teachers and scientists to NGOs. He was virtually addressing a conference comprising top global universities, that was organised by Lovely Professional University (LPU), on Sunday. Twelve senior academicians from universities in

the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and Cyprus took part in the day-long 'Conference on International Higher Education Opportunities in the Post-Covid World.' About the NEP, Dr Pokhriyal said the aspirations of 33 crore Indian students studying in 1,000 universities and 45,000 degree colleges were reflected in the new policy. "It is the biggest innovation, where participation is from everyone. It is the policy of the country for the country, by the country and of the country," the minister said.

Covid in the air triggers panic

FROM PAGE 1

Some families have lost more than one member to the disease. Over the past few days, Director of Health Services Dr G. Srinivasa Rao, who has been leading the fight on the ground against Covid-19, has spoken plainly and made it clear that the days ahead would be dark and dangerous, and unless everyone steps up to do their bit things may get out of hand.

He had also been vocal about how the disease is spreading through air more freely now than what was believed in the past and has made no bones about how the Covid-19 situation in the state is dire, and likely to get only worse over the next six to eight weeks. In some ways, there appears to be some stark contrasts in the ways the government, and the health officials, have been speaking about Covid-19 of late.

Maharashtra BJP leaders criticise police action

FROM PAGE 1

"There is a shortage of this medicine and its export has been stopped by the government. Hence, we acted swiftly and called the owner of the pharma company just to question him about where the medicine has been stored in the city. We acted in good faith for the larger interest of the public," the DCP said. DCP Shinge also said the supplier was called for an inquiry, that it wasn't an arrest and he was allowed to go after questioning. However, the incident turned out to be a high-voltage drama due to the intervention of BJP lead-

ers Devendra Fadnavis, former chief minister, and Pravin Darekar, who rushed to the Vile Parle police station late Saturday night and objected to the police action. Fadnavis said: "We have been trying to get ramdesivir for Maharashtra by reaching out to pharma companies. Four days ago we requested Bruck Pharma to supply us ramdesivir but they couldn't until permission was given. I spoke to Union minister Mansukh Mandaviya and also got the FDA's permission." However, the police claimed the communication from the FDA to the pharma company was not shared with the

police station. Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole demanded action against Fadnavis for intervening in the police action against the hoarders of Ramsedivir. "How did Fadnavis as an individual get permission for the storage of the drug? Has the Centre allowed him and the BJP to do the blackmarketing of ramdesivir?" he asked. Bruck Pharma is one of 16 manufacturers of ramdesivir in India that has permission to export, but it does not have a marketing licence. In order to sell ramdesivir, it has to approach one of seven pharma companies that have a marketing licence for ramdesivir in India.

₹1 LAKH FOR COVID CARE TO STATE STAFF

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 18

The Telangana state government on Sunday announced that all its employees, former employees, and members of their families who are eligible for medical reimbursement claims, can seek up to ₹1 lakh for Covid-19 treatment if they are admitted to a hospital under emergency conditions. In its circular, the health, medical and family welfare department said government employees in service and pensioners and their dependents and all eligible categories are allowed to secure treatment under emergency conditions and this provision will be applicable for Covid-19 treatment too, subject to a ceiling of ₹1 lakh.

OTHER STORIES

BJP LEADERS
ARRESTED FOR
ATTACKING COPS

DC CORRESPONDENT

KOMARAM BHEEM ASIFABAD,
APRIL 18

Police arrested BJP leader Palvai Harish Babu and his follower Gollapalli Veerabhadrachary and twenty villagers of Kondapalli in Penchikalpet mandal and eight villagers of Rebbena and produced them before the Magistrate of Sirpur (T) on Sunday. Palvai Harish Babu was remanded till April 30 and shifted to jail.

A few days ago, Palvai Harish Babu extended support to the podu land cultivators and organised a hunger strike demanding the state government to issue pattas to the podu lands.

Police arrested the BJP leaders on the charges of provoking the villagers against the police and to encroach the forest lands being cultivated illegally by the villagers.

Police put charges that three women constables suffered injuries in the attack on the police by the villagers in the night on April 8.

REVANTH REDDY
LIKELY TO VISIT
INDRAVELLI

DC CORRESPONDENT

ADILABAD, APRIL 18

News is making rounds in the political circles that TPCC working president, member of Parliament Revanth Reddy and Mulugu MLA Seetakka are likely to visit Indravelli to pay homage to Indravelli martyrs at the memorial on April 20.

However, it is said that their visit to Indravelli is not a party program. It is said after paying tributes to the Indravelli martyrs, the two Congress leaders will visit Keslapur where they will offer puja to the serpentine God Nagoba diety.

It is said that the leaders will visit an Adivasi gudam in the same locality to interact with the Adivasis and will have community lunch and leave to Hyderabad.

RAMA NAVAMI
FETE TO BE A
LOW-KEY AFFAIR

DC CORRESPONDENT

BHADRACHALAM, APRIL 18

The celestial wedding of Goddess Sita and Lord Sitaramachandra Swamy in Bhadrachalam will be held without the usual crowds and pomp on April 21 in view of the Covid-19 situation.

As part of it, all rituals and sevas being held in the Antharalayam will be cancelled from Monday to April 30. Only Seeghradarsham will be allowed in the temple and distribution of prasadam and theertham has been cancelled.

The same system will be followed in the Rama temple of Parnasala. Food distribution in Nityannadana Satram in Bhadrachalam will be done through packets. VIPs including ministers A. Indrakaran Reddy, P. Ajay Kumar and officials apart from the priests, temple personnel and security will be allowed in the temple during the Kayanam, which will be held in the temple premises.

Bhadradri additional collector Venkateswara Rao said that those not wearing masks will not be allowed and sanitisers will be placed everywhere in the temple premises for use.

The Sri Krishna Chaitanya Sangham, Korukonda, in East Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh brought 250 kg thalabralu that were made by devotees by following sacred rituals. The devotees handed over it to the temple officials.

Bhadradri Pranthan Parirakshana Samithi chairman B. Sankar Reddy requested the temple authorities to conduct the Kalyanam by referring to the real gotranama of Lord Sriramachandra.

He said that the temple authorities should take all measures not to violate the traditions and customs of the temple.

● **VIPS INCLUDING** ministers A. Indrakaran Reddy, P. Ajay Kumar and officials apart from the priests, temple personnel and security will be allowed in the temple during the Kayanam, which will be held in the temple premises.

Row over polluted water
for drinking, irrigation

Decomposed waste found polluting Mid Manair Dam reservoir

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 18

Officials are finding it difficult to supply water for drinking and irrigation needs with the decrease in water level.

The water in Mid Manair Dam (MMD) reservoir is also becoming increasingly polluted due to decomposition of organic and inorganic remains of plants and animals.

It may be noted here that the MMD is one of the most important reservoirs in the prestigious project of Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS) for supplying water to the people for both irrigation and drinking needs.

It is the main source for supplying drinking water to Siricilla, Vemulawada, Choppadandi constituencies and for Karimnagar Municipal Corporations (KMC) limits through Lower Manair Dam (LMD) under Mission Bhagiratha project.

Last year, the water storage level in MMD was about 25 tmc ft but in the last month, the water level was decreased to 15 tmc ft as there is no water supply from KLIS project.

With the supply of 11 tmc ft of water for irrigation needs to Warangal, Medak and Nalgonda districts, the water level in MMD has fallen to rock



Municipal commissioner V. Kranthi inspects the water supply through municipal taps at Mukarampura colony in Karimnagar. —BY ARRANGEMENT

bottom level. Moreover, the drainage water from Siricilla and Vemulawada municipalities is flown into the MMD making it unfit for supply.

The Superintending Engineer of pollution department, Krishna Rao, said that at the time of MMD project construction, some of the villages were submerged under the project and the remains of plants, dust and wastes materials along with damaged houses of such villages were mixed up in water and were decomposed.

Due to the chemicals released from the decomposed waste, the colour of the water has changed to light green and it is emitting foul smell.

Steps are taken to remove the silt present in all the canals, tanks and

reservoirs and to filter the water before supplying it for drinking purposes, he assured.

The state leader of BJP SC Morcha, Durgam Maruthi, alleged that for the past two weeks onwards, the drinking water supplied by the KMC through taps under Mission Bhagiratha is emitting foul smell and is with a lot of dust and pollutants. People panicked on drinking the water.

They complained that they are suffering from throat infection even after boiling and filtering the water. The water is not useful either for drinking or for irrigation needs. Not only the health of the people but also crops are being affected.

The KMC is supplying drinking water through LMD without taking any

measures of filtering water and playing with the lives of people. The government must take immediate steps for installation of water filter machinery using advanced technology and must use the water after testing it, he demanded.

The officials of KMC are not showing any interest for filtration of such polluted water which is supplied to LMD. Under the reign of the TRS government in the Karimnagar smart city, people are supplied with the polluted water to drink. Is this the development, the TRS is boasting of, he questioned.

Meanwhile, the Municipal commissioner Valluri Kranthi inspected the water supply in Mukarampura and Godamgadda areas few days back said that compared to last week the quality of water was increased to 90 percent pure and further steps will be taken for supplying 100 percent safe drinking water to the people under KMC limits.

She ordered the officials concerned to test the quality of water daily before supplying it to the households along with fixing the perfect time for supply of water and urged the people to boil and filter the water before they drink it for a few days.

CONG WILL WIN
MAJORITY SEAT
IN KMC: BHATTIDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, APRIL 18

Congress Legislature Party leader Bhatti Vikramarka asserted that Congress will win majority of divisions in the Khammam Municipal Corporation elections.

In support of his contention, he said many leaders from TRS, who are vexed with corrupt deeds of transport minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar, have joined Congress. Incidentally, K. Sarita, TRS corporator, joined Congress in the presence of Bhatti.

The Congress leader said corruption is rampant in state with Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao and his son and minister K. T. Rama Rao busy accumulating wealth through corruption means, particularly by way of kickbacks in Kaleswaram Project and Mission Bhagiratha.

TRS leaders are busy exploiting natural resources of the state for their own benefit, instead of serving the people, he said. He maintained that people of Telangana are keen on teaching TRS leaders, including minister Ajay Kumar, a lesson for their corrupt deeds. He charged that no contract works in Khammam and Bhadradi districts could be sanctioned without the consent of Puvvada.

Bhatti said Congress will expose all the misdeeds of TRS government in Khammam elections.

Villagers in Adilabad forced
to drink water from rivuletsPILLALAMARI
SRINIVAS I DC
ADILABAD, APRIL 18

Despite rising instances of Covid positive cases, officials have failed to ensure supply of drinking water to villages that are facing acute water problems in old Adilabad district.

Many water bodies have dried up due to high temperatures and quite early this summer.

To make it worse, gram panchayat and rural water supply departments neglected drinking water supply to the villages. The officials are still engrossed in repairing Mission Bhagiratha pipes and connecting them to villages while the locals remain dependent on far-

● **THE OFFICIALS** are still engrossed in repairing Mission Bhagiratha pipes and connecting them to villages while the locals remain dependent on far-off streams and rivulets for their drinking water needs.

off streams and rivulets for their drinking water needs.

The problem is high in Narnoor, Gadeguda, Sirikonda, Indravelli, Uttoor and Jainoor, Kerameri, Tiryan, Sirpur (U), Lingapur, Ichoda, Boath, and Bharajarhathnour mandals.

Meanwhile, revenue and health officials are

engaged in measures to control the spread of coronavirus.

The state government has not released any special funds to mitigate the drinking water problem during this summer and zilla parishads are not making arrangements to bring relief to the villagers.

Given the grim Covid situation, villagers are not allowing anyone from other villages to take water from their agriculture wells.

In some villages, people are buying purified drinking water cans from water plants in towns with some bringing them on their bikes or autos spending up to ₹20 on each can of purified drinking water.

TRS picks Sudharani to
be Warangal's MayorANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC
WARANGAL, APRIL 18

The nomination papers for the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation elections are still underway but the TRS seems to have ended the race for the Mayor's seat.

Without leaving anything to suspense, the party leadership is said to have sent signals to its leaders that Gundu Sudharani, former Rajya Sabha MP and TRS women's wing state president, would be the party's nominee. As expected, she filed her papers on Sunday.

The caste equation came into play for Sudharani to be just one step away from becoming Warangal Mayor. Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao who evidently wanted to address the criticism of not giving much prominence to the Padmashali community, chose Sudharani who has so far maintained a clean image. She joined the TRS from the Telugu Desam in November 2015 when she was a member of the Rajya Sabha. She held the position of chairperson of the Women's Cooperative Finance Corporation until recently. The TRS leadership took the key decision despite pressure from the other top leaders especially those hailing from the Munnuru Kapu community.

With both the TRS MLAs from Warangal Urban district belonging to the Munnuru Kapu community, the party leadership seems to have decided that handing over another big post to the same community does not augur well with the masses.

Leaders close to TRS working president and minister K.T. Rama Rao have been lobbying hard for the mayoral seat for some time now. In particular, Nagula Venkateswarlu, chairman of the State Debt Relief Commission, has worked hard for the mayoral seat. While he initially got positive signs, he reportedly was shut out in the last minute.

Dasyam Vijay Bhaskar, the brother of Warangal West MLA Vinay Bhaskar, Vaddiraju Ravi Chandra, a businessman, and Gundeti Narendar, TRS



Gundu Sudharani with Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao.

Many bizmen in
KMC electoral frayRAVINDRA SESHU | DC
KHAMMAM, APRIL 18

Nearly 35 businessmen and real estate players have filed their nominations for the ensuing elections to Khammam Municipal Corporation (KMC). About 281 nominations have been filed in 60 divisions by candidates from TRS, Congress, BJP, CPI, CPI-M and Jana Sena apart from independents by Sunday, the last day for filing nominations.

Interestingly, ticket aspirants of different political parties were told by their respective in-charge leaders to contest only if they could spend ₹50 lakh.

Interestingly, ticket aspirants of different political parties were told by their respective in-charge leaders to contest only if they could spend ₹50 lakh. The message on election expenditure is clear and loud. With this, many businessmen and those from real estate evinced interest in contesting as TRS nominees, followed by Congress and BJP.

Vaddeboina Narasimha Rao, who was elected as councillor and later corporator for the last five times from Congress in Khammam, has decided not to contest, this time around. D Poornachander, a Congress loyalist was given a party ticket from his division.

Vaddeboina said, "Congress fielded Poornachander to disprove the

belief that cash-flow is a key point to win. We as Congress workers take it seriously and will strive for his win".

BJP and Jana Sena are having an alliance in KMC. The latter is contesting from 12 divisions as part of the understanding. Congress and CPI-M have an alliance in Khammam and their leaders are working out seat sharing in the corporation.

TD district president Kurapati Venkateswarlu said that the party decided not to have alliance with any party and is contesting from 12 divisions.

Surprisingly, ten persons from TRS, with business interests, filed their nominations on Sunday after taking out a massive rally. Koinni Venkanna filed his nomination for 50th division and Jana Vgnana Vedika Telangana JAC and Lambadi Hakkula Porata Samiti are extending support to him.

senior leader from the Padmashali community, are said to be top runners. The aspirants have

reportedly not given up hope and are trying their level best to try their luck till the last minute.

IYSO sets up mask wall in
Karimnagar bus stationDC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 18

Members of Indian Youth Secured Organisation (IYSO) Team India have established a Mask Wall at RTC Bus Stand in Karimnagar and are distributing masks for free to prevent Coronavirus from spreading in the district.

Police commissioner V. B. Kamalasan Reddy inaugurated the Mask Wall. Appreciating IYSO, he also took part in free distribution of masks among people.

Incidentally, police are collecting a fine of Rs. 1,000 from people who are found on roads without wearing a mask. "It is the minimum responsibility of people to follow orders issued by the state government on wearing masks compulsorily," the commissioner pointed out.

IYSO founder president Ghansham Ojha called on people to understand the grave situation the country is going through following the rapid spread of Coronavirus in its second wave. People of

Karimnagar district must take all safety precautions to save themselves from Coronavirus, including by wearing masks, Ojha underlined.

Additional DCP S. Srinivas, ACP Ashok Kumar, SHO Ch. Vijay Kumar and Tirumal, SI Srinivas, apart from IYSO members Vishwanath Balram, Md. Fayaz, Rakshanda Ojha, Anmol Ojha and Pavan Kumar were among those who were present on the occasion along with officials of Traffic police department.

SHARMILA ENDS HER THREE-DAY HUNGER STRIKE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 18

Y.S. Sharmila on Sunday ended her three-day hunger strike demanding that the state government issue notifications for providing jobs to unemployed youth in Telangana.

Family members of Murali Yadav and Koppu Raju, who had committed suicide seeking issue of these notifications, offered her lemon water for ending her 'nirudhyoga deeskha'. Addressing a gathering on the occasion, Sharmila accused Chief

Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao of taking the lives of unemployed people by not providing them jobs, even though there are 1.9 lakh vacancies in all government departments. But the TRS government has not bothered to issue any job notifications.

CORONA | CRISIS

Seethakka warns that Covid second stage is deadly, dangerous

MLA urges NGOs to help needy

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 18

Mulugu MLA Danasari Anasuya alias Seethakka has urged the social service organisations to come forward to help the needy to get through the coronavirus pandemic, who reside in interior forest areas.

She distributed essentials to 47 families in Saralamma Adivasi Gothi Koya Gudem in Bayakkapeta village and Gothi Koya Gudam next to Elubaka along with representatives of the Blue foundation Kranti, Kiran, Kishore, Madhu and Ashok.

They also distributed rice, pulses, oil, wheat

flour, face masks, other essentials and toys to children at Thakkallapalli Adivasi Gothikoyagudem in Bayakkapeta village.

Speaking on this occasion, Seethakka said that such acts help the poor to get through these hard times.

She warned that the second stage of the corona is exacerbated and called on the people to take physical precautions to repel the Coronavirus epidemic by not leaving their homes unless there is dire requirement.

She thanked the representatives of the Blue Foundation for their support.

Youth Congress district

● **SEETHAKKA CALLED** on people to take physical precautions to repel the Coronavirus epidemic by not leaving their homes unless there is dire requirement. She thanked the representatives of the Blue Foundation for their support.

president Banoth Ravi Chander, former MP Enaganti Ramaiah, Kisan cell constituency president Sanjeeva Reddy, Kisan cell district secretary Chakrapu Raju, Youth Congress constituency spokesperson Vamsi Krishna were present among others.



Mulugu MLA Seethakka and Blue foundation members distribute essentials need to tribals, in Bayakkapeta village, on Sunday. —BY ARRANGEMENT

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SHORT TAKES

RAIPUR HOSPITAL
FIRE: PROBE
ORDERED

Raipur, April 18: Authorities have ordered an investigation after five Coronavirus patients died in a fire at the Covid-19 ward of a private hospital in Chhattisgarh's capital city Raipur, police said on Sunday.

Raipur collector Dr S. Bharathi Dasan has ordered an investigation into the incident. Officials have been directed to conduct safety check at Coronavirus hospitals in the city.

The fire broke out at Raipur's Rajdhani hospital on Saturday, police said. "Five Coronavirus patients died in the incident. One was charred to death and the others died due to suffocation," a police official said, adding a case of negligence will be registered against the owners of the hospital.

A supervisor saw smoke coming out of the ward and informed the hospital authorities, who alerted the police. The fire brigade and hospital staff rescued the other patients. "The fire broke out in the Covid-19 ward of Rajdhani Super Speciality Hospital located at Pachpedi Naka under Tikrapara police station at 4.30 pm and was brought under control by the firefighters in 20 minutes," tikrapara station house officer Sanjeev Mishra said.

When the fire broke out, there were around 30 patients in the ward, Mishra said. Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel expressed grief over the incident and announced a compensation of ₹4 lakh each to the families of the deceased.

CENTRE NOD TO
BOOST MEDICAL
OXYGEN SUPPLY

New Delhi, April 18: The Centre has sanctioned installation of 162 pressure swing adsorption (PSA) plants in public health facilities in all states, the health ministry said on Sunday, as demand of medical oxygen goes through the roof amid spiralling Coronavirus cases in the country.

The PSA plants manufacture oxygen and help hospitals become self-sufficient in their requirement for medical oxygen, while also reducing the burden on the national grid for its supply of medical oxygen.

A total of 162 PSA oxygen plants have been sanctioned by the government for installation in public health facilities in all states, the ministry tweeted. "These will augment medical oxygen capacity by 154.19 MT."

Thirty-three of the 162 PSA plants have been installed — five in Madhya Pradesh, four in Himachal Pradesh, three each in Chandigarh, Gujarat and Uttarakhand; two each in Bihar, Karnataka and Telangana; and one each in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Puducherry, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, it said.

Fifty-nine more PSA plants will be installed by April-end, while 80 more will be installed by May-end.

BSY IN HOSP FOR
COVID, STABLE
AND RECOVERING

Bengaluru, April 18: Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa who is undergoing treatment for Coronavirus at a private hospital is now stable and recovering, his office said on Sunday.

"The Chief Minister who was admitted in a hospital on Friday for Covid treatment is being monitored by a team of expert doctors. The health of the Chief Minister is stable and he is recovering," the office of the Chief Minister tweeted on Sunday.

Yediyurappa is spending his time in the hospital reading his favourite books and is in touch with officials to give them necessary directions, the tweet further said.

The Chief Minister had fever on Friday and when he got himself tested, the report came positive for Coronavirus. Accordingly, he got admitted to the hospital.

This is the second time Yediyurappa contracted Coronavirus.

This was despite the fact that the Chief Minister took the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine.

He was supposed to chair an all-party meeting on Sunday to take a stringent measure in view of rising Coronavirus cases in Bengaluru.

However, the meeting has been postponed to Monday and revenue minister R. Ashoka will now preside over the meeting.



City streets wear a deserted look during weekend lockdown to curb Covid-19 cases in Agra on Sunday.

— PTI

With 2.71 lakh new cases,
India sees highest ever rise

States running out of beds, oxygen, drugs; govts scrambling to save lives

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

With 2,71,204 new cases, India saw the highest ever daily spike of Covid-19 on Sunday. The daily positivity rate in the last 12 days has doubled from 8 per cent to 16.69 per cent and the death in the last 24 hours due to the virus was 1,570. As states are running out of hospital beds, medical oxygen, and several life saving drugs, the union and state governments are scrambling to save lives.

Railways is gearing up to transport Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) and Oxygen Cylinders through "Oxygen Express" via green corridors to ensure fast movement of these trains. This came after Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra state governments approached the Ministry of Railways to explore whether Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) tankers could be moved through it.

In Delhi, the weekend curfew ends on Monday but traders in Chandni Chowk have decided to pull the shutters down till Sunday. Delhi government has filed FIR against four airlines under DDMA Act

Delhi oxygen quota given
to other states: Kejriwal

New Delhi, April 18: Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said Delhi is facing an "acute shortage" of oxygen for Covid-19 patients and alleged that the quota of the city has been diverted to other states.

The Chief Minister's remarks came hours after he wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his help in enhancing the number of hospital beds and immediate oxygen supply for patients in Delhi.

A central government

official has rejected Kejriwal's claims as "blatant lies" and said there was no panic situation in industries minister Piyush Goyal urging him to ensure "uninterrupted" supply of 700MT of oxygen on daily basis and restore supply of 140MT of oxygen by a supplier INOX.

The output of INOX, one of the major suppliers to Delhi hospitals, has been "diverted" to other states which has already started causing "critical shortages", he charged in the letter.

A senior official in the Commerce Ministry said that the allegations made by the Delhi CM are "blatant lies".

According to official figures, Delhi hospitals received 254 MT of medical oxygen on April 16 and 612 MT on April 17. As of April 17, the daily demand of oxygen from Delhi was 197 MT. The total stock at INOX and Goyal Gas, Linde, Air Liquide for Delhi is 311 MT and the total stock position of oxygen in the capital is 700 MT. — PTI

on Saturday halted its inoculation drive in over 1,000 session sites including in the hotspot Nuapada district, a senior health department official said. The states vaccine stocks will be exhausted in two days, family welfare director Bijay Panigrahi said.

Only 56,472 people were given jabs at 465 session sites on Saturday against 91,195 who had been vaccinated in 781 centres on Friday, he said. The state has so far vaccinated 49,58,447 people, the health department official said.

Panigrahi said that the vaccination drive could not be taken up in rural Odisha due to the scarcity of Covishield vaccines. Covaxin is being administered in Bhubaneswar, while it is Covishield in the rest of the state.

More than 6,000 people have been vaccinated against Covid-19 at 'mandis' in Punjab during the ongoing procurement of crops, according to an official statement on Sunday.

In addition to putting in place adequate protocols at the 154 mandis (wholesale markets), the state government has started special camps to inoculate all stakeholders and has so far vaccinated more than 6,000 eligible persons.

TN imposes night curfew from
April 20, full lockdown Sundays

R. MOHAN &
D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 18

It's back to basics again in the fight against Covid-19 in Tamil Nadu. Curfew at night (10 pm to 4 am) and a total Sunday lockdown have been ordered to kick in from Tuesday, April 20. The decision to try and clamp down was taken after a lengthy meeting at the Chief Minister's residence on Sunday.

In a statement released late evening, the government spelt out the measures it will be putting in place to try and stem the tide of the Coronavirus that has been infecting close to 8,000 people a day in its second wave before exploding past the 10,000-mark

STALIN URGES MODI TO SUPPLY 20L
DOSES OF VACCINE FOR TAMIL NADU

Chennai, April 18: DMK president M.K. Stalin on Sunday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to direct officials to send 20 lakh Covid-19 vaccine doses "requisitioned" by the Tamil Nadu government immediately and ensure supplies commensurate with the state's population.

In view of rapid increase in the number of people getting infected by

Covid-19, 'universal vaccination' is the need of the hour to protect lives, the DMK chief said in a letter to the Prime Minister and appealed to him to "take a policy decision swiftly" over it.

Tamil Nadu would need more vaccine doses than allotted now to accomplish effective vaccinations, break the cycle of infection and flatten the curve, he said. — PTI

on Sunday when 10,723 new cases pushed the caseload to 9.91 lakh and total fatalities to 13,113.

The night curfew will be total with autos and taxis also banned. In normal times, autos and taxis are

expected to ply only for medical emergencies and to serve train and air travel passengers. There will be strict SOPs on public transport on working days. State Board exams for Class 12 have also been postponed and classes can be held only online and summer camps are banned.

Inter-district and inter-state transport will not be allowed either and only persons driving in an emergency will be allowed on the road. Of course, essential services like the carrying of milk and making newspaper deliveries and hospital emergency service vehicles will be allowed to ply. Transportation of petrol, diesel and LPG will also be exempted.

SEVERE | SHORTAGE

Gujarat reported 10,340 new Covid-19 cases and 110 deaths on Sunday

Guj Dy CM admits shortage of beds, health infra

Ahmedabad, April 18: Gujarat deputy chief minister Nitin Patel on Sunday admitted that the present requirement of beds and other healthcare facilities in the wake of the spike in Coronavirus cases is more than the state administrations' capacity.

Patel, who handles health portfolio, said though the state government is adding more facilities and beds at regular intervals to accommodate

more patients, it fell short of demand.

"Over 9,000 new Coronavirus cases are emerging in Gujarat everyday. Though we are adding new facilities and beds at regular intervals, it falls short against the demand as the inflow of Coronavirus patients is much higher," Patel told reporters at civil hospital campus here.

"Requirement for beds and other healthcare facilities in the present situation is higher than the

health department and administration's capacity. In view of the spike in cases, we are adding more beds to accommodate the patients," he said.

Commenting on the long queue of ambulances carrying Coronavirus patients outside the civil hospital, Patel said it is the government's obligation to save each and every patient turned away by other hospitals.

"Long queues happen because other hospitals

refuse to admit patients. Such patients then come to us for treatment. Such queues are not a pleasant sight, but it is our obligation to save each and every patient. Till they are admitted in the hospital, till they are in ambulance, we try to keep them alive by giving oxygen," he added.

Gujarat reported 10,340 cases and 110 deaths on Sunday, the highest one-day case count and death toll for the state since the pandemic began. — PTI

MP: Row over
death of 10 in
govt hospital

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, APRIL 18

Ten Covid-19 patients died reportedly due to lack of oxygen in a government hospital in Madhya Pradesh, triggering an outcry.

The incident took place in the medical college hospital in Shahdol late on Saturday night.

While six patients died around midnight on Saturday, four others passed away in the early morning.

"Six people admitted in the ICU died last night. The deaths were not due to lack of oxygen. There were 62 patients in the ICU. Overall, there were 255 Covid-19 patients in the Covid hospital last night. Out of them, 155 were on oxygen", Milind Shiralkar, dean of the medical college hospital said on Sunday.

The hospital has its own oxygen plant.

He, however, said the oxygen pressure was going down in the system since Saturday evening. He has reported the matter to the local administration and sought liquid oxygen pillars to resume

● KIN OF the deceased, however, claimed some patients in the ICU were seen gasping for oxygen when the pressure in the oxygen supply system had gone down.

oxygen supply to the system.

However, no provision of liquid oxygen pillars was made till two in the morning.

Oxygen was supplied to the patients through oxygen cylinders, he added.

The dean said a probe was ordered into the incident.

Kin of the deceased, however, claimed some patients in the ICU were seen gasping for oxygen when the pressure in the oxygen supply system had gone down. "I watched my brother dying due to lack of oxygen in the ICU", Ravi Kumar Jaiswal whose brother was admitted in the ICU told visiting reporters.

State medical education minister Vishwas Sarang denied that lack of oxygen had caused the death of ten Covid-19 patients in Shahdol medical college hospital.

14-day quarantine
must for Kumbh
mela returnees

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
with agency inputs
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 18

Apparently worried over the sudden surge in Covid-19 cases across Odisha and Delhi, the state governments on Sunday made 14-day quarantine mandatory for Kumbh Mela returnees.

Several thousands of people, most of them from western Odisha, had visited Kumbh mela at Haridwar in Uttarakhand.

"The whole country is witnessing a surge in the number of Covid-19 cases. Spurt in the number of cases in the neighbouring states specially Chhattisgarh is affecting the border districts of Odisha," said director of public health Niranjan Mishra.

"As Kumbh mela has ended, it is expected that many participants will return to the state and it may worsen the situation. A list of the returnees has been prepared and it has been sent to all the district administrations. All the returnees have to stay in compulsory quarantine for 14 days. Even the quarantine period is mandatory for the returnees with Covid-19 negative certificates," said Mishra.

"If situation gets out of control in these states, the migratory Odias working there will be forced to return to the state. Odisha government is preparing a master plan to deal with any kind of eventualities," added Mishra.

Meanwhile, Delhi residents who have visited the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar or are planning to do so will have to undergo compulsory 14-day home quarantine on their return and upload their details on an official

website, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority said in an order.

The order issued on Saturday said those who visited Kumbh from 4 April onwards or those who plan to do so till end of the religious congregation at Haridwar on April 30 will have to upload their personal details, ID proof and dates of departure and arrival back to Delhi at the website www.delhi.gov.in.

"All residents of Delhi who have visited or are going to visit Kumbh 2021 at Haridwar, shall be required to compulsory home quarantine themselves for 14 days on arrival to Delhi," said the order issued by Vijay Dev, chief secretary and chairperson on executive committee of DDMA.

If a person returning from Haridwar Kumbh fails to upload his particulars on the Delhi government portal, he will be sent to institutional quarantine centre for 14 days by district magistrates concerned, the order said.

Violators of the DDMA order will be liable to be proceeded against under the Disaster Management Act 2005 and other legal provisions, it added.

A total of 1,701 people had tested positive for Covid-19 in the Haridwar Kumbh Mela area from April 10 to 14 confirming fears that one of the world's largest religious gatherings may contribute further to the rapid rise in Coronavirus cases.

A majority of the 48.51 lakh people who took part in the last two royal baths (shahi snan) held on the occasion of Somwati Amavasya on April 12 and Mesh Sankranti on April 14 were seen openly violating norms like wearing of face masks and social distancing.



A Covid patient receives primary treatment outside Kanpur LLR Hospital in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday. — PTI

IN BRIEF

Afghan mosque hit kills eight

Jalalabad, Afghanistan, April 18: Eight members of the same family were gunned down in an attack on a mosque in eastern Afghanistan, officials said Sunday. The shooting happened on Saturday night in the city of Jalalabad in Nangarhar province, and was believed to be over a land dispute, the province's governor Zaiulhaq Amarkhil said.

Five brothers and three of their male cousins were killed. "The incident is under investigation but initial information shows a land dispute has caused the incident," Amarkhil said. Fareed Khan, a spokesman for Nangarhar police, confirmed the attack.

4 cops sprayed, hospitalised

Sacramento (US), April 18: Four Sacramento police officers were hospitalised with injuries after they were sprayed with a liquid irritant during protests Saturday night, police told *KCRA TV*.

The demonstrators had gathered at the state Capitol downtown to protest the police shooting deaths of Daunte Wright in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, and Adam Toledo in Chicago. Protesters met at the Capitol Rose Garden after 8 p.m. and began marching around the downtown area later in the night, *KCRA* reported.

Demonstrators briefly sat in the streets in the Lavender Heights area before marching back toward the Capitol. The protest ended about 11 p.m.

Syria prez poll on May 26

Damascus, April 18: (AP) Syria's parliament speaker announced Sunday that presidential elections in the war-ravaged country will be held on May 26.

Speaker Hammoud Sabbagh said the window for nominations will be open for 10 days starting Monday. Syrians abroad will vote May 20, he said. The election is widely expected to give President Bashar Assad a fourth seven-year term.

It is unclear whether any candidates will run against him but any such runs would be symbolic.

The United States last month warned Assad that the Biden administration will not recognise the result of its presidential election unless the voting is free, fair, supervised by the United Nations and represents all of Syrian society.

Syria has been in the throes of civil war since 2011.

JIHADISTS KILL FIVE NIGERIAN SOLDIERS

Kano, Nigeria, April 18: Five Nigerian soldiers were killed, four injured and dozens missing when IS-aligned jihadists attacked a military base in northeast Nigeria's Borno state, two military officers told AFP Saturday.

Fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) on Friday dislodged troops from a base in Kamuya village, 35 kilometres (22 miles) from regional district Biu after a gunfight.

"The terrorists killed five soldiers and injured four others in the attack on the Kamuya base," a military officer told AFP. The insurgents sacked the base, forcing troops to withdraw in disarray, said a second military officer, who gave the same toll.

"So far 41 troops have returned while 58 are still missing and are presumed to have escaped the attack," said the second military officer.

Search and rescue operation was ongoing to "locate the missing soldiers", the officer added. Kamuya is the home village of Nigeria's former army chief Lieutenant-General Tukur Buratai which has been repeatedly targeted by jihadists, prompting the setting up of a base to end the attacks. ISWAP has focused on targeting military installations and troops since it split from mainstream Boko Haram in 2016 and rose to become a dominant group.

More than 20 people were killed following days of attacks on the town of Damasak this week where the militants burnt offices of international aid agencies and several homes. The attacks have forced 65,000 residents to flee into neighbouring Niger, according to the UN.

The 12-year jihadist conflict has killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million from their homes in Nigeria's northeast. The violence has spread to neighbouring Niger, Chad and Cameroon.

Masks off as Israel vaunts virus win

Marks key milestone as the country vaccinates its way out of a Coronavirus nightmare



A woman walks along a closed vaccination centre in the city of Nice, France, on Sunday, amid the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The centre closed due to a lack of candidates for the proposed vaccination.

— AFP

sophisticated medical data systems.

Since Dec., some 53 percent of Israel's 9.3 million people have received both doses of the jab, including around four-fifths of the population aged over 20.

As recently as Jan. it was registering 10,000 cases per day. But as the effects of mass vaccination kicked in, by March it was able to implement a gradual reopening.

"There's no better advertisement for Pfizer," said Shalom Yatzkan, a computer programmer who had been in quarantine after catching the virus.

"I was sick for three days, I had neck pains and felt weak," he said as he walked through central Jerusalem. "I just hope the new variants don't catch up with us."

Another Sunday landmark in Israel's exit from Coronavirus restrictions was the full resumption of the country's educational system, without restrictions on the numbers of pupils in classrooms.

Speaking at a Jerusalem high school, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailed the "festivity" of the day for the schools, while warning of complacency. "We're not done with the Coronavirus yet, since it can return," he said, stressing the need to obtain "millions more vaccinations".

"Sooner or later, we'll need another vaccination (dose)," he said. The situation in Israel is in stark contrast to the occupied West Bank. — AFP

Canada records second case of rare blood clot

Toronto, April 18: Canadian health authorities said Saturday the country has recorded a second case of rare but serious blood clotting linked to AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine, but still recommend the shot for use.

The patient, who lives in the western province of Alberta and received a version of the AstraZeneca vaccine supplied by the Serum Institute of India, "has received treatment and is recovering," Canadian health authorities wrote on Twitter.

Canada reported its first case of blood clotting associated with low platelets on Tuesday in a Quebec

● **BLOOD CLOT** formations linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine "remain very rare" and Canada still believes that the vaccine's benefits "outweigh the potential risks".

woman who received the same shot.

Blood clot formations linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine "remain very rare" and Canada still believes that the vaccine's benefits "outweigh the potential risks," Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada said. Canada's health authorities added that they

would "continue to monitor the use of all #COVID19 vaccines closely and examine and assess any new safety concerns."

At the end of March Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunisation (NACI) recommended suspending the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine in people under the age of 55 while it evaluated the risks. Health Canada said that limiting the use of the vaccine to certain populations was not necessary for the moment.

After a slow start, Canada's vaccine campaign is gaining momentum.

— AFP

80K Germans remembered

Berlin, April 18: Germany is paying tribute on Sunday to the nearly 80,000 people it has lost to the Coronavirus, even as the country struggles to get a grip on another rise in infections.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will lead a memorial event with other top officials at Berlin's Konzerthaus concert hall. His office says it is also dedicated to the

bereaved who could not accompany their relatives when they died and for whom important and comforting rituals of mourning were not possible.

Germany's confirmed death toll from Covid-19 stood at 79,914 on Sunday, an increase of 67 over the previous day. That is the fifth-highest total in Europe, after the UK, Italy, Russia and France.

Germany had a compar-

atively small number of deaths in the pandemic's first phase, but saw much higher infection levels in the fall and winter. In Jan., more than 1,000 deaths per day were reported at times in the country of 83 million people.

Infections have increased again over the past two months as a more contagious Coronavirus variant first detected in Britain took hold. Germany has

reported 3.14 million cases since the pandemic began.

Chancellor Angela Merkel is trying to get a bill through parliament that would mandate an emergency brake in areas where there are more than 100 weekly new cases per 100,000 inhabitants. The nationwide rate stood at 162 on Sunday. It would require the closure of stores, cultural and sports facilities. — AP



Alexei Navalny

'CONSEQUENCES' IF NAVALNY DIES, WARNS U.S.

Washington, April 18: US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan warned Sunday that Russia will face "consequences" if hunger-striking Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny dies.

Jailed opposition leader Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent opponent, was arrested in Jan. upon returning to Russia after recovering from a near-fatal poisoning attack he says was orchestrated by Moscow.

"In terms of the specific measures we would undertake, we are looking at a variety of different costs that we would impose, and I'm not going to telegraph that publicly at this point," Sullivan told CNN.

"But we have communicated that there will be consequences if Mr. Navalny dies." The 44-year-old Russian began a hunger strike on March 31 to demand proper medical treatment for back pain and numbness in his legs and hands.

On Saturday, Navalny's doctors said his health had rapidly deteriorated and demanded prison officials grant them immediate access.

"Our patient can die any minute," cardiologist Yaroslav Ashikhmin said, pointing to Navalny's high potassium levels and saying he should be moved to intensive care. Both France and Germany on Sunday joined a growing international chorus of protest at Navalny's treatment.

Sullivan said the White House had told the Kremlin that Moscow would be "held accountable by the international community" for what happens to Navalny while in Russian custody. US President Joe Biden said that Navalny's situation was "totally unfair," but he is facing criticism for not bringing up the dissident's treatment in a phone call to Putin last week or being more forthright in his public comments. — AFP

B'desh arrests hardline leader of Islamist group

Dhaka, April 18: An influential hardline cleric of an Islamist group was on Sunday arrested in Bangladesh on charges of instigating deadly violence in the Muslim-majority country. A joint team of police and detectives raided an Islamic seminary in Mohammadpur area of the capital Dhaka on Sunday and arrested Hefazat-e-Islam Joint Secretary General Mamunul Haque, who has been in the limelight due to some recent controversies, officials said.

● **TEACHERS AND** students of the seminary initially staged protest and tried to obstruct the raid. Haque was detained from a room on the first floor of the building, officials said.

● **HAQUE AND** other Hefazat leaders had been accused in several cases, including attacks on law enforcers and police stations and vandalism.

rt. DB officials said Haque is also an accused in a number of cases.

Earlier, the Hefazat leader made the headlines by his controversial remarks regarding sculptures. He is also accused of threatening the government in the past. In Nov. last year, he demanded an immediate halt to the installation of a sculpture of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the capital's Dholaipar. The Islamist group is yet to issue any statement over Haque's arrest but one of

its leaders preferring anonymity said the group planned to face the cases constituting a strong lawyers' panel.

Dozens of Hefazat leaders and activists have been arrested in recent weeks after the hardline Islamist group waged anti-government protests. Officials said Haque and fellow Hefazat leaders were likely to be charged for instigating violence during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bangladesh tour last month and ruthless demonstrations in 2013 when several other people were killed as the group was demanding a blasphemy law. Seventeen people were killed and scores injured in violence in different parts of Bangladesh during the protests in late March.

Meanwhile, a local court in Dhaka on Sunday placed Hefazat-e-Islam Dhaka city President Junayed Al Habib and its Assistant Secretary General Jalal Uddin on seven-day remand each in a case lodged over the group's 2013 violence in the capital. Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Shahinur Rahman passed the order as police produced them before the court and pleaded to place them on 10-day remand in the case lodged with the capital's Paltan police station. Separate units of police arrested Junayed from the capital's Baridhara area and Jalal from the Mohammadpur area on Saturday. — PTI

Sikhs seek probe into shooting

Washington, April 18: Influential American lawmakers and Sikh community leaders have sought a thorough investigation into the mass shooting at a FedEx facility in the US state of Indiana as a potential hate crime that killed eight people, including four Sikhs.

Indian-American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi on Saturday called for investigation of potential anti-Sikh motivations in the incident that took place late Thursday night.

While the Indianapolis and Sikh communities continue to mourn, and as the rest of our country mourns with them, investigators must also determine if this mass shooting was a hate-motivated attack.

— PTI

Wisconsin shooting claims three lives

Kenosha, April 18: A shooting at a tavern in Wisconsin killed three people and seriously injured two others early Sunday, a sheriff's department official said.

The shooting happened at Somers House Tavern in the Village of Somers, Kenosha County Sgt. David Wright said. The suspected shooter was not immediately captured. Wright said the shooting appeared to be a "targeted and isolated incident," and authorities didn't believe the general public was in danger.

Officials were still working to determine the identities of the people who died. The two people who were wounded were taken to area hospitals, Wright said. The road leading up to the tavern remained closed early Sunday as officials investigated the latest in a string of recent shootings. Last month, four people were killed at an office shooting in California, eight people were fatally shot at massage businesses in the Atlanta area, and 10 died in gunfire at a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado. — AP

ONE KILLED IN OMAHA MALL SHOOTING

Omaha (US), April 18: A shooting at a Nebraska mall left one person dead and another wounded as terrified shoppers ran for cover. Authorities believe the shooting at Westroads Mall in Omaha was an isolated incident, and not a random attack. Police determined the suspects had fled the scene after searching the mall, according to Omaha police Lt. Neal Bonacci. Officers first gave the "all clear" around 1 p.m. — about an hour after multiple shots were fired.

— AP

WEEK'S | DELAY

Mission equal to Wright Brothers' 1903 flight

Nasa Mars copter flight 'today'

Washington, April 18: Nasa's Ingenuity Mars Helicopter could make its first flight over the Red Planet as soon as Monday, the US space agency reported, following a delay of more than a week due to a possible technical issue.

The mini-helicopter's trip will mark the first-ever powered, controlled flight on another planet, and will help Nasa reap invaluable data about the conditions on Mars.

"Nasa is targeting no earlier than Monday, April

● **A PIECE** of fabric from that plane has been tucked inside Ingenuity in honour of that feat.

19, for the first flight of its Ingenuity Mars Helicopter," the space agency reported Saturday.

Data will return to Earth "a few hours following the autonomous flight," which would take off at approximately 3:30 am (0730 GMT), Nasa said. Ingenuity's first trip was

initially set for last Sunday, but was delayed after a potential issue emerged during a high-speed test of the four-pound (1.8 kilogram) helicopter's rotors.

Nasa calls the unprecedented helicopter operation highly risky: The flight is a challenge because the air on Mars is so thin — less than one percent of the pressure of Earth's atmosphere.

The helicopter arrived on Mars attached to the underside of the Perseverance rover, which

touched down on February 18. After the helicopter's flight, Ingenuity will send Perseverance technical data on what it has done, and that information will be transmitted back to Earth.

The helicopter mission is be the equivalent on Mars of the first powered flight on Earth — by the Wright brothers in 1903 in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. A piece of fabric from that plane has been tucked inside Ingenuity in honour of that feat. — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

19 APRIL 2021

Vital shortages hit India amid Covid's 2nd wave

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to the people concerned to use the entire national capacity in the production of vaccines against Covid-19 comes at a time when poor anticipation and planning coupled with a lackadaisical approach of the government he heads have started having a telling impact on the pandemic situation in the country. For more than a year, the world has been under the grip of the fear the micro-organism has unleashed, but the nation which the government and the Prime Minister have been tom-tomming as the pharmaceutical hub of the world is now facing a shortage of everything that the healthcare workers need to fight the virus and save lives — hospital beds, antiviral life-saving drugs, vaccine, oxygen, intensive care units and ventilators. This, despite the fact that the government has set up a dedicated fund — PM-Cares — to promote initiatives to fight the virus.

The nation has no idea whether the government was, like most people in India, thinking if the pandemic had vanished, given the very little effort it was seen to be taking to face an exigency like the one we are facing now. There was little or no extra investment made to augment healthcare infrastructure in the country in the

The government must invest in health infrastructure, ban gatherings and work with every institution, state or otherwise, to enforce Covid-appropriate behaviour

interregnum or to step up production capacities of the same materials, which we now face a shortage of. That the government has learnt little from the past is reflected from the fact that even the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, the national trade union belonging to the Sangh Parivar to which Mr Modi's BJP belongs, has cautioned about the reverse migration of guest workers from the towns and cities to the villages, in anticipation of another nationwide lockdown. It is stating the obvious that the government did not show as much alacrity as the guest workers did about

planning for the future in the face of a pandemic attack.

It must not also go unsaid that the government had been busy plucking the low hanging fruits from the beginning of the corona fight. It started with the premature show of gratitude to the healthcare fraternity even before they started the real fight. Even the Indian Air force was dragged into the farce of showering flower petals on them from the skies when, on earth, they were fighting the virus with their back to the wall, with little availability of infrastructure and consumables. The government missed no chance to advertise the world's largest vaccination programme with little idea about the number of people it will have to vaccinate or the quantity of vaccine it would require or how to produce and distribute the same. Today, the vaccine manufacturers are running pillar to post seeking financial help to augment production capacity but the government does not seem to understand it at all; we heard no firm and immediate commitment from the government till now.

But it's not all lost as yet — the government must launch massive investment programmes in healthcare infrastructure, put its foot down firmly and ban all social, religious and political gatherings that can turn superspreaders, and work with every institution, state or otherwise, to enforce Covid-appropriate behaviour. Every rupee, every action and every moment count now.

Don't recoil from scrutiny

The Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, in a majority vote, has expressed concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in India. It has pointed out that "human rights defenders and journalists in the country lack a safe working environment" and commented on "concerns about the difficult situation faced by Indian women and minority groups, caste-based discrimination". This could not have come as sweet music to the ears of the rulers who seem convinced that vaccine diplomacy and a presence in Quad as a counterbalance to China in the difficult time of the pandemic proves that India enjoys a pride of place in the international community.

The EU stance on India's recent human rights record only adds to concerns already expressed by US freedom watchdogs and the UN. While an ostrich-like posture is easy enough to adapt on foreign perceptions of what ails Indian democracy now, a moment's reflection might show what the reality is. Dispassionate observers have signalled that India has been guilty of demonising its minorities, subverting institutions, intimidating journalists and social media executives, criminalising dissent and whimsically controlling the Internet. The incarceration of so many who opposed the CAA and the harsh treatment meted out to those supporting the months-long farmers' protest by lending their voices to global social media criticism are symptomatic of contempt for a dissenting opinion, be it from celebrities, academics and media-persons.

It is paradoxical that while we seem to crave international attention and pat ourselves on the back when we come in for praise, we recoil from any kind of scrutiny. Beyond reflection, there is a need to accept criticism, understand the reasons why and act on it to move away from an undemocratic path. Corrective action can begin even in a small way by looking first at why a few elderly academics and activists are in prison for interminable periods without even getting a trial, which in the Indian system inflicts inordinate delays and is the equivalent of extended imprisonment. It is no democracy which shows no inclination to support the right to dissent and, on the contrary, throttles it.

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KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax : 040-27805256
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-255284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234

Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/5A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P.), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285

Rajahmundry: Vernagiri, Dhawaleswararam Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433

Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemmudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Adv: Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

Coimbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph : 0422 2231255
Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08

Subhani

INSIDE...



OUTSIDE...



Ideology or competence: What do the voters want?



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

There are many versions of Murphy's Law. The most popular one states that if something can go wrong, it will. Among the many versions the oldest one is attributed to a British merchant, engineer and owner of ships, Alfred Holt, who told his fellow engineers in 1877: "It is found that anything that can go wrong at sea generally does go wrong sooner or later." That proposition became popular as Murphy's Law when an American aerospace engineer, Edward Murphy, declared: "Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong." From the sea to space, engineers devised systems that could be as failsafe as possible, forewarned by Murphy's Law.

As an analyst of Indian political, economic, social and governance systems I have long held the view that in India Murphy's Law works with a vengeance. Anything that can go wrong, invariably goes wrong. The unfortunate downside to that reality is that most Indians have come to accept a certain degree of incompetence in most systems. Given the generally high level of citizens' tolerance for incompetence, it rarely becomes an election issue.

Politicians are voted in and voted out for a variety of reasons, ranging from their charisma, caste, community, money power and so on, but rarely have they been voted out for incompetence. The Indian voter has come to live with power outages, limited access to drinking water, uncollected garbage in the neighbourhood, inadequate law and order, difficulty in securing access to education and healthcare, and so on. Rarely have any of these become issues that determine the outcome of elections. I

cannot recall the last time a politician went to the polls campaigning on a platform of competence, rather than loyalty or grievance based on caste, community or some other identity.

So, why should it surprise anyone that the voter has come to terms with the incompetent management of the Covid-19 pandemic and that this is not a defining issue in the ongoing elections to state legislatures? Caste and communal identity, allegations of corruption and nepotism seem to ignite political passions more during elections than the competence or incompetence of contending candidates in handling a pandemic.

India is no exception. Consider the fact that in the United States, Donald Trump secured more votes in the 2020 election compared to the 2016 election even though every medical professional in the United States will vouch for the fact that his administration's response to the Covid-19 pandemic was "incompetent". Mr Trump's incompetence did not defeat him. The unity of non-white voters finally did.

For all his continued popularity, at least as shown in the opinion polls, the fact is that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been at the head of an incompetent administrative response to the pandemic. One can argue about the relative responsibility of the Centre and the state governments and which of the states have responded more competently, one can differ on how one would define competence, but what is very clear is that the question of competence or incompetence in governmental response to the pandemic has not yet become a political issue.

In part this could be because, as the old adage

goes, *iss hamaam mein sab nangey hain*. In short, all political parties in government across different states have been equally guilty of an incompetent response. Many public health experts believe Kerala is an exception, but it is interesting that the Left Front's competence in dealing with the pandemic has not been an overt political issue in the recent elections.

As more and more evidence mounts up of administrative and political incompetence in dealing with the pandemic, it remains to be seen if Indian voters will just shrug their shoulders, throw up their hands, point to the gods above and quote Murphy's Law. Or, will they hold their elected representatives and governments accountable? In the last two years more doctors and nurses have died fighting the pandemic than soldiers in fighting the nation's enemies. While politicians become all patriotic when it comes to the death of soldiers and demand votes in the name of nationalism, why don't the deaths caused by incompetence stir voters' emotions?

There have been many examples of competent crisis management in the past and they stand in contrast to the present incompetence in dealing with the pandemic. As chief minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi took great pride, and rightly so, in his government's handling of the Kutch earthquake in 2001. Why has the same Gujarat state been so incompetent in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic? Will Gujarat's voters now punish their government for its incompetence?

Covid-19 mismanagement reveals either administrative incompetence or the fear of professionals to speak their mind to politicians in power. Either way, the citizen pays the price.

The Indian administrative system was built on the assumption that a meritocratic and technocratic bureaucracy would compensate for the lack of experience in governance of an elected political leadership. This assumption worked as long as the civil service was willing to speak its mind and politicians in power were willing to listen to them. When civil servants and professionals in government are either scared to speak their mind or have little to contribute and politicians imagine they know everything on anything, one ends up with incompetent response to administrative challenges.

For all its lack of democracy, the Chinese Communist Party has created an internal merit-based bureaucracy that allows political leaders to rise to the top only after proving their administrative and governance credentials at every step of the power ladder. The Chinese people have sacrificed democracy at the altar of meritocracy and the Communist Party of China has for long functioned like the Indian Administrative Service, creating a "mandarinate", so to speak. This has made China's response to Covid-19 crisis more professionally competent.

In India, the gap between political power and administrative competence has widened with an increasing number of elected politicians taking charge of day-to-day functioning of the government and an increasing number of civil servants either abdicating their responsibilities or doing the bidding of politicians in office without consideration for the merits of a policy or a decision. All this gets revealed in times of a crisis. Covid-19 mismanagement reveals either administrative incompetence or the fear of professionals to speak their mind to politicians in power. Either way, the citizen pays the price.

The writer is an economist, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His latest book is India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution.

LETTERS

VOTES, VOTERS

Voters are more important than votes. The government should ban all religious gatherings and political rallies. It must shut down gyms, swimming pools and religious places. States are requesting oxygen and vaccines but Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah are busy with the elections. Funds must be provided to vaccine firms to ramp up production. The age limits for vaccination must be removed.

Vikas Panchareddy
Hyderabad

The lack of concern shown by the government to address the health crisis has never been more evident as it is now. It is a shame that leaders consider opponents as enemies instead of the deadly virus.

Kshirasagara Balaji Rao
Hyderabad

VACCINE SHORTFALL

It is shocking that vaccine is not available for our own people (*TS runs out of vaccine, halts the drive for a day, DC, April 18*). Will the government at the Centre and state take steps to ensure its availability? We not only need vaccines but also hospital facilities quickly.

Dr G.V. Kumar
Hyderabad

The Centre must take steps to increase vaccine supply, even if it has to import them and step up production. Also, elections to civic bodies must be postponed to avoid rallies and people gathering.

P.R. Ravinder
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

AI's first Jumbo jet arrives in Bombay

BOMBAY, APRIL. 18
Air India's first Boeing 747, Emperor Ashoka arrived here this morning on its delivery flight to the tumultuous welcome of thousands of citizens at Bombay airport led by the airline Chairman J.R.D. Tata and State Governor Ali Yavar Jung.

The quiet giant 346-seater piloted by Capt. D. Bose and escorted by two IAF MIGs in formation flight and another MIG in the lead, touched down on the Bombay airport at 8.26 a.m. today.

Anand K. Sahay
Far & Near



The idea behind capturing power in any kind of way: fair or foul

The BJP may or may not win the Assembly elections in Assam. In West Bengal, its chances may be considered to be less bright than in Assam on account of the structural makeup of the state, notwithstanding the pre-Partition communal politics rampant in undivided Bengal. But winning a poll fair and square is not the metric any longer. We have seen popular verdicts being overturned in state after state to the BJP's benefit.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his principal operative, Union home minister Amit Shah, the saffron party's new *sutra* is to form a government in a state through any means. The capture of power is evidently crucial for erecting a scaffolding — a formal platform — for the systematic spread of ideas in the public realm through unrestrained heavy-duty propaganda, the rapid dissemination of communal politics through enabling instruments of State power (the police and the bureaucracy), and the unleashing of policy with a communal slant.

The last indubitably means going out of the way to disadvantage and

"other" those who are not the majority, leading to the making of such patently unjust policies — which defy the idea of equality before the law — the new normal in a sharp deviation from the political tradition whose roots were laid over 70 years ago.

The Westminster system of party politics, which is enshrined in our Constitution, has been stood on its head in the post-Atal Behari Vajpayee BJP. When the BJP fails to bag the numbers in an election, it simply sets up a trade mart in which MLAs become the commodity. The *gomash-tas*, or middlemen, and auctioneers are out in strength.

When elected legislators on party tickets other than BJP fail to take the bait (offered in the form of incentives), the punitive element kicks in and various agencies of the Central government raid and begin so-called investigations against the BJP's opponents. The law courts simply watch helplessly. The Election Commission has little to say. The governors of various states frequently don the garb of apparatchiks. The Speaker is happy to receive instructions remotely.

The RSS is the ideological mentor of

the BJP and several dozen allied organisations that are the repository of the notion of the "Hindu Rashtra" (the idea that the land mass of India — in its present political geography as well as in its mythological connotation — is the natural home of the Hindus of the world, where all others must resign themselves to the fate of being less equal).

The RSS lays claims to being exalted. Its propagandists and adherents have prided themselves on being seekers of a higher morality and ethical conduct in the family, society, and the "nation", the last being an expression which in its most recent manifestation in India has been so thoroughly weaponised as to cause unease among "citizens" — namely, those Indians who are not swayed by their religious identity alone in the running of public affairs and policymaking.

It was expected that the self-appointed custodians of the "culture" of the Hindus would object to such weaponisation in the interest of political hygiene and harmony in society. They have not done so.

When after an election, newly elected MLAs of non-BJP parties are pur-

sued with serious intent to switch sides so that the BJP may unfairly get to form the government and make a mockery of the people who voted for them and against the BJP, a small hint from the top levels of the RSS leadership may have done wonders. It would have worked as a discouraging factor. But the RSS top brass have little to say. The inference is that they approve of dishonourable conduct in the interest of making an ideological conquest.

Whether it is an election to a panchayat, a district board, a trade union, a social club, a professional association — and not just the state or national legislature — the BJP uses every trick in the book to "capture" the body. Only then can it pass rules, regulations, laws, to influence civil society as well as the government.

More, only then does it gain the formal legitimacy and the authority to direct the making of budgets and play the lead hand in the disbursement of funds to its favourite schemes and outfits. The stamp of approval is thus gained to promote unworthy communal agendas. The general media tom-toms this, rather than interrogate the phenomenon.

Awestruck by the energy brought to bear by the BJP to win all elections, big or small, some commentators have urged other parties to emulate the saffron party's methods. This is misconceived advice. It leaves out of account the fundamental proposition — that the BJP is unlike any other party that we know.

It sanctions the use of majoritarian force (which may be unseen), rather than the commonly understood constitutional methods. Ordinary civil society sometimes transforms into uncivil society under its gaze. This is a phenomenon that is anathema to a democratic order.

In both Assam and West Bengal, the political actors in the fray, as well as the general public, need to remain alert to the "capture" and "takeover" syndrome. A successful takeover bid may be expected to give rise to the unbridled spread of communal fires in (fragile) border states. The Congress and the Left parties have given little evidence of understanding the parallelogram of forces at work, especially in West Bengal. They may live to rue the day.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,832.03	0.06
Nifty 50	14,617.90	0.25
S&P 500*	4,185.47	0.36
Dollar (₹)	74.35	0.76
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.46	0.85
Euro (₹)	89.06	0.77
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,431▼	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.82	0.18
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.088	-0.02
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.578	0.048

* As of Friday/Saturday

Steel prices may take 2 yrs to cool down: JSPL MD

Steel prices might take at least two years to cool down as its demand is consistently increasing. In the current financial year, the demand for steel in India is also expected to exceed the production numbers, Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL) managing director V. R. Sharma told PTI. While the demand in FY22 will be in the range of 140-150 million tonnes, the country's production is expected to be somewhere around 125 mt, he said.



GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Srihari creates national record

Tashkent: Ace Indian swimmer Srihari Nataraj created a national record in 50m backstroke while winning his second gold of the Uzbekistan Open Championship here. The 20-year-old clocked 25.11 seconds to bag the top prize in the FINA-accredited Olympic qualifying event on Saturday night.

Indian swimmers enjoyed a rich haul of 29 medals — 18 gold, seven silver and four bronze — in the meet.

Krishna Poonia tests covid positive

New Delhi: Delhi Commonwealth Games gold medalist and sitting Rajasthan MLA Krishna Poonia on Sunday tested positive for Covid-19 and is undergoing treatment at a Jaipur hospital. The 43-year-old Krishna, who became the first Indian woman to bag an individual gold in the CWG by winning the discus throw event in 2010, is now admitted at the Rajasthan University of Health Sciences hospital. "She had cough and mild fever and she took a test on Saturday but the virus could not be detected. Today, we went to RHUS and doctors there took a CT scan from which it was diagnosed for Covid-19," her husband Virender Poonia said. — PTI

Federer confirms French Open entry

Paris: Roger Federer confirmed Sunday that he will play the French Open at Roland Garros this year having skipped the 2020 edition to recover from knee surgery. "Hi everyone! Happy to let you know that I will play Geneva and Paris. Until then I will use the time to train. Can't wait to play in Switzerland again," the 39-year-old said on Twitter. Federer, a 20-time Grand Slam winner, captured Roland Garros for the only time in 2009. In March, Federer competed at the Qatar Open in Doha, marking his first tournament since the 2020 Australian Open. — AFP

Govt holds 93% stake in Pune-based bank, may sell 51% now BoM seen as first selloff pick

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

With the bank privatisation process gaining speed, state-owned lender Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) has emerged out to be the first strong candidate for the government's proposed disinvestment plan. Weighing in all options, both Niti Aayog and the finance ministry officials have already discussed the pros and cons of privatisation, a top finance ministry source said.

"The government is actively looking for ways to elicit strong interest from investors for state-run banks that are up for privatisation. Though we have shortlisted four public sector banks, initially we received huge response



from the prospective investors for Bank of Maharashtra," the source said.

There is a wide media speculation that the four PSBs shortlisted are Bank

of Maharashtra, Bank of India, Indian Overseas Bank and the Central Bank of India. It is also expected that the government is considering mid-sized or small banks for

the first round of privatisation, and may later go with large banks for divestment.

The Bank of Maharashtra stock moved up nearly 70 per cent from mid-February when an agency report named the lender among the privatisation candidates. Last Tuesday, the BoM stock moved up nearly 20 per cent with high volumes on renewed market buzz about its privatisation.

Attempts made by *Financial Chronicle* to reach out to the bank's MD & CEO A.S. Rajeev proved futile. He had earlier told the media that BoM would aim at growing at 10 per cent per annum and that only Rs 1,000 crore loan book now against Rs 15,000 crore in 2016 were required to be restruc-

tured.

The government currently holds 93 per cent stake in the Pune-based BoM. Additionally, LIC holds 4 per cent. The remaining 3 per cent holding is with the public.

The government is likely to divest 51 per cent in the current round and reap the benefits of privatisation in the balance 42 per cent holding in later years.

As per a report by Denofwealth, Pune-based corporate giant Bajaj Group, which has a significant presence in the financial sector, could be a strong aspirant for the BoM buyout. Besides, two other corporates that are also reportedly throwing their hats into the ring are Tata Capital and Catholic Syrian Bank.

Global jewellery brands fear inventory delay

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 18

After a robust March quarter, international jewellery brands are now worried about "inventory delay" due to the surge in Covid-19 cases in India. They fear the delays could impact their full year sales.

US-based Signet Jewellers, in its quarterly update, said that it has evaluated the impact of inventory delays related to recent Covid-19 surges in India and other parts of the world.

"At this time, the company believes it has mitigat-

ed these short-term impacts; however, if the duration and magnitude of these inventory slowdowns intensify, there could be future negative impacts on the company's full year guidance," Signet cautioned.

Signet had posted stronger-than-expected conversion and average ticket values in the first quarter and also upped its full-year revenue guidance.

Similarly, French luxury goods Louis Vuitton's watches and jewellery division recorded revenue growth of 138 per cent in the March quarter com-



pared to the same quarter of 2020 and 80 per cent compared to that of 2019.

Russian diamond miner Alrosa too saw demand from end consumers for diamond jewellery showing robust growth across

key markets like the US and China owing to Valentine's Day and Chinese New Year and improved consumer sentiment.

This robust demand had reflected in the March exports of cut and polished diamonds, which grew 123.55 per cent compared to the same month in 2020.

However, chances of disruption in exports cannot be dismissed. Bharat Diamond Bourse was closed in the first week of April due to rising Covid cases in Mumbai. "BDB has been closed and if Mumbai port is also

closed, then it can affect the exports," said Prakash Pincha, chairman, eastern region, Gems and Jewellery Export Promotion Council.

Lower frequency of flights too can hit exports. According to an industry insider, the diamond certification process is causing the current delay in shipments and the backlog is swelling owing to fewer staff.

Part of the labour force in Surat's polishing units also have gone to their hometown to leave their family back there, fearing a lock-down, said Dinesh Navdiya of the GJEPC.

Nketiah saves Arsenal blushes

Eddie scores last-gasp equaliser to earn a 1-1 draw against lowly Fulham

London, April 18: Eddie Nketiah delivered a hammer blow to Fulham's bid for Premier League survival as the Arsenal striker's last-gasp goal rescued a 1-1 draw at the Emirates Stadium on Sunday.

Mikel Arteta's side were seconds away from a first ever home defeat against Fulham as they laboured to find a response to Josh Maja's second half penalty.

But Nketiah pushed Fulham closer to relegation deep into stoppage-time when he tapped in after the visitors failed to clear a corner.

It was a major setback for third bottom Fulham, who are six points behind fourth bottom Burnley and fifth bottom Brighton with just five games left.

After losing their previous four matches, Fulham were on course to mark Scott Parker's 100th match in charge with a memorable scalp.

Instead, they slipped closer to an immediate return to the Championship.

Next up for Fulham is a west London derby at Chelsea on Saturday before a decisive clash with Burnley on May 8.

Ninth placed Arsenal are nine points adrift of the top four and their best hope of reaching next season's Champions League is winning the Europa League.

Arteta's men face



Arsenal's Eddie Nketiah (right) scores against Fulham in an English Premier League match at the Emirates Stadium in London on Sunday.

— AFP

Villarreal in the semi-finals after cruising to a 4-0 victory at Slavia Prague in the quarter-final second leg on Thursday.

HEARTBREAK FOR FULHAM

The Spaniard made five changes to the side that thrashed Slavia, with Gabriel Martinelli among those to come in as Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang remained absent with

malaria.

Martinelli should have given Arsenal the lead inside 40 seconds when he ran onto Alexandre Lacazette's pass and clipped his shot just wide.

Martinelli threatened again with a low shot on the turn from Emile Smith Rowe's cross, but Alphonse Areola sprawled to his left to make a good save.

Arsenal thought they had taken the lead when Dani

Ceballos looped his header past Areola from Hector Bellerin's cross.

But the Spaniard was denied his first Premier League goal after VAR ruled Bukayo Saka's toes were in an offside position in the build-up.

Saka hit the outside of the near post with a cross-shot before Fulham received another helping hand from VAR in the 59th minute. — AFP

BLUES END CITY'S QUEST TO REACH FA CUP FINAL

London, April 18: Chelsea ended Manchester City's quest for a historic quadruple of trophies as Hakim Ziyech's goal earned a 1-0 win to take the Blues into the FA Cup final on Saturday.

A damaging day for City also saw them lose Kevin De Bruyne to an ankle injury just over a week away from the League Cup final, where they face Tottenham, and the first leg of their Champions League semi-final against Paris Saint-Germain.

Chelsea were good value for another impressive win under Thomas Tuchel and will be favourites for the German's first silverware in English football when they face Leicester or Southampton May 15.

Tuchel could land an even bigger prize in the Champions League just months after replacing the sacked Frank Lampard in January.

His side showed they can get the better of City in what would be a dress rehearsal for the Champions League final should the English clubs see off PSG and Real Madrid in the last four. — AFP

Messi wins Copa crown for Barca

Madrid, April 18: Lionel Messi scored twice, including a stunning solo goal, as Barcelona blew away Athletic Bilbao to win the Copa del Rey on Saturday, consigning their opponents to a second final defeat in two weeks.

The cup was won and lost in a whirlwind 12 minutes in Seville, which saw Barca score four times to clinch an emphatic 4-0 victory, with Messi at his devastating best.

It remains to be seen if his seventh Copa del Rey triumph is the last trophy Messi lifts in Barcelona colours but if this was to be a final flourish, the 33-year-old crafted a fitting farewell. "It's very special to be captain of this team where I have spent my whole life and very special to be able to lift this cup," Messi said.

His first goal, and Barca's third, started with the Argentinian in his own half before a charging run down the right and a surge forward into the penalty area gave him the chance for a simple finish.

With the club's new president Joan Laporta in the crowd, Ronald Koeman's first title as Barcelona coach should also significantly boost his chances of remaining in charge

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beyond the summer.

"To win a title is important for me," Koeman admitted afterwards.

Yet Laporta was noticeably evasive when asked about Koeman's future.

"He is doing well," he said.

Koeman took over a team at rock bottom, humiliated by an historic loss to Bayern Munich and wounded by the attempts of Messi to leave the club for free.

But this 31st Copa del Rey success for the club is a testament to progress made and Koeman will hope it not only helps convince Messi to stay but gives Barca momentum now in a neck-and-neck title race in La Liga.

"Despite the changes at the club and the young players, at Barca you have to always fight for trophies," Koeman said.

— AFP

VERSTAPPEN EMERGES ON TOP IN CHAOTIC IMOLA RACE

Imola (Italy), April 18: Max Verstappen kept his cool to claim a chaotic rain-hit Emilia Romagna Grand Prix on Sunday as seven-time Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton recovered from a rare mistake to sneak in second. Red Bull driver Verstappen muscled past pole sitter Hamilton on the first corner at Imola to set up his impressive first win of the season.

"I surprised myself. We worked really hard to make that better. In these tricky conditions we did a great job," Verstappen said.

Lando Norris in a McLaren took third for the Briton's second successive podium ahead of Charles Leclerc for Ferrari. The outcome of a compelling second leg of the Formula One season confirmed Verstappen's stature as a formidable obstacle to Hamilton's quest for an unprecedented eighth drivers' crown. After winning the season-opener in Bahrain and putting in the fastest lap on Sunday Hamilton leads Verstappen by one point ahead of the Portuguese Grand Prix next time out. — AFP

