

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

HYDERABAD | FRIDAY | 30 APRIL 2021

## WEATHER

Max: 39.3°C  
Min: 25.7°C  
RH: 26%  
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.  
Rain likely in some parts.  
Max/Min temp. 39/26°C

## ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarakaya  
Tithi: Chaitra Bahula Chaviti till  
7.14 pm  
Star: Jyeshta till 12.10 pm  
Varjyanam: Nil  
Durmuhratam: 8.26 am to  
9.16 am; 12.38 pm to 1.29 pm  
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

HIJRI CALENDAR  
Ramzan 17,1442 AH  
PRAYERS  
Fajr: 4.47 am  
Zohar: 12.23 pm  
Asar: 4.39 pm  
Magrib: 6.41 pm  
Isha: 7.53 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.36 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.50 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 10.16 PM

MOONSET TOMORROW 8.34 AM

## RAMZAN TIMINGS

IFTAR: 6.41 PM (TODAY)

SEHRI: 4.24 AM (TOMORROW)

## COUNTER POINT

Any wave?

## SHORT TAKES

**US tells citizens to leave India**

**Washington:** The US has advised its citizens not to travel to India or to leave as soon as it is safe and authorised the voluntary departure of family members of its staff in the Indian missions, saying the access to all types of medical care is becoming severely limited in India amid a massive surge in Covid-19 cases. The US has put India on Level 4 Travel Advisory.

■ Report on Page 9

**Char Dham yatra postponed**

**Dehradun:** Char Dham Yatra to the four famous Himalayan shrines in Uttarakhand, which was scheduled to begin in May, was postponed due to surge in Covid-19 cases. Announcing this here on Thursday, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat said conducting the yatra amid the raging pandemic is not possible.

■ Report on Page 7

**Settle claims in 60 mins: IRDAI**

**New Delhi:** Regulator IRDAI on Thursday directed insurers to decide on cashless Covid-19 treatment claims within 60 minutes of the receipt of final bill so that the hospital bed can be quickly made available to another waiting patient. The regulator issued this direction in view of a Delhi HC order asking the regulator to tell insurers to communicate their cashless approvals within 30 to 60 minutes.

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Covid patients stay thirsty, go hungry

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Court warns State to fill TSPSC seats



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'This new wave is more infectious & lethal'

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## HC slams SEC for polls in Covid time

Asks SEC if 'heavens will fall' if polls are put off

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

The decision to hold elections in these tense Covid-19 times is tantamount to a walk into the jaws of death, the Telangana High Court opined on Thursday. It criticised the State Election Commission (SEC) for going ahead with the election process in the municipal corporations of Greater Warangal and Khammam as also five municipalities.

A division bench of Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijayn Reddy asked the SEC whether sky would fall if the elections were postponed.

### COVAXIN PRICE CUT TO ₹400 PER DOSE FOR STATES

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Bharat Biotech, that manufactures Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin, on Thursday announced that it was cutting down Covaxin price for state governments, to ₹400 per dose.

The company had previously said it will sell each dose to state governments at ₹600, and at ₹1,200 to private hospitals that are offering the vaccination service.

In its announcement, Bharat Biotech said it is "deeply concerned with the critical pandemic circumstances that India is facing at this time", and decided to reduce the price recognising the challenges faced by the public health care system.

The court had asked it earlier also but Prasad on Thursday informed that the chief secretary will hold a meeting with district collectors and others on Friday morning. Subsequently, a decision would be taken based on the inputs gathered

government as the Union Home Ministry had asked the state government to impose local restrictions and implement strict containment measures to flatten the Covid-19 curve.

"We are not compelling or recommending the state to go for this or that, in view of Centre's advice. But, everyone should know the decision at least one day before. Do you feel there will be radical changes in one day," the CJ asked Prasad.

The court wanted to know the decision of the

"If you are so bent on clinging to your tasks, wasn't there any delay in conducting elections on time? Wasn't there any situation when a local body was administered by the special officer for the interim? We all witnessed that the state capital's Mayor post was not filled for more than a year and a half without conducting GHMC elections even when there was no Corona or a calamity. But, at the time of the serious surge in Covid-19 cases in the state, you rushed to conduct elections as if the sky will otherwise fall down. This was not a calibrated decision, whatever the

reasons be," the bench told SEC secretary Ashok Kumar. He appeared before the court on its direction to explain the reasons for conducting the elections in Covid times.

The bench asked SEC why it didn't stall the elections or postpone them by exercising the power vested in it under the statute, keeping in view the surge in Covid-19 cases.

Chief Justice Kohli said the SEC has not only put the lives of the voters as also of 7,695 government employees and 2,557 police personnel to risk.

■ Page 4: CJ reminded of poem to describe situation

### HC asks state for post-curfew plan

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

A division bench of Telangana High Court, comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijayn Reddy, sought to know what the State government intends to do once the night curfew ends on Friday.

The bench directed advocate general B.S. Prasad to inform it about the decision of the government by Friday morning.

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"We are not compelling or recommending the state to go for this or that, in view of Centre's advice. But, everyone should know the decision at least one day before. Do you feel there will be radical changes in one day," the CJ asked Prasad.

■ Page 4: Bench advises state to be alert

### MIXED RESULTS FOR KCR'S COVID TEST, SAYS CMO

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

The rapid antigen and RT-PCR tests conducted on Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao have given mixed results, according to a release from the Chief Minister's Office on Thursday.

The antigen test on Wednesday gave negative result, but the RT-PCR tests have not given any definite result on Thursday, it said.

The CM's personnel physician Dr Rao said, "Some times, the results would not be accurate as the virus' intensity is decreasing. The CM is hale and healthy and the RT-PCR test would be conducted again in two or three days."

**New Delhi:** Regulator IRDAI on Thursday directed insurers to decide on cashless Covid-19 treatment claims within 60 minutes of the receipt of final bill so that the hospital bed can be quickly made available to another waiting patient. The regulator issued this direction in view of a Delhi HC order asking the regulator to tell insurers to communicate their cashless approvals within 30 to 60 minutes.

### SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

Foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla on Thursday shared details of the amount of oxygen, medical equipment and drugs that India will be receiving from foreign countries to manage the second Covid wave that has left thousands dead and lakhs infected.

Describing the medical crisis as "unprecedented and exceptional", he said

that India is acquiring a total of 550 oxygen-generating plants, over 4,000 oxygen concentrators, 10,000 oxygen cylinders, 17 cryogenic tankers to store oxygen and lakhs of doses of anti-viral drugs remdesivir and Favipiravir from abroad.

The US will also be supplying 28 million litres of oxygen to India. Mr Shringla said that the current over three million active cases of Covid have "put considerable pressure on the health care system,"

and added that India is producing about 67,000 doses of Remdesivir daily while the requirement now is between two-three lakh doses daily. He also said that India's vaccine producing capabilities are being ramped up as India's domestic requirements are now "significant and pressing". The vaccines that are being acquired from abroad would be utilised for domestic needs, he said.

The statement is an indication that in the immediate future at least, India

### SPORTS | 12

Quinton guides Mumbai to victory

### TABLOID

'This new wave is more infectious & lethal'



## Exit polls give Mamata key edge, DMK ahead

Left to retain Kerala, BJP tipped to return in Assam, win Pondy

ASHHAR KHAN | DC  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

### SEATS PREDICTED BY EXIT POLLS

WEST BENGAL		TMC	BJP	ASSAM	
TOTAL SEATS	294	130-156	134-160	TOTAL SEATS	126
AXIS MYINDIA	130-156	134-160	134-160	AXIS MYINDIA	75-85
CNX POLLS	128-138	138-148	138-148	CNX POLLS	74-84
C VOTER	158	115	115	C VOTER	65
TODAY'S CHANAKYA	180	108	108	TODAY'S CHANAKYA	70+
TAMIL NADU	234	DMK+	AIADMK+	KERALA	140
AXIS MYINDIA	175-186	38-54	38-54	LDF	104
CNX POLLS	160-170	58-68	58-68	UDF	20-36
C VOTER	166	64	64	C VOTER	91
TODAY'S CHANAKYA	164-186	46-68	46-68	TODAY'S CHANAKYA	102+
PUDUCHERRY	30	UPA+	NDA+	AXIS MYINDIA	C VOTER
UPA+	6-10	11-13	8	CNX POLLS	11-13
NDA+	20-24	16-20	21	POLSTRAT	17-19

the TMC with emerge victorious, with 152 to 164 seats in the state, where a

total 292 Assembly constituencies went to the polls.

■ Page 4: Some exit polls predict extremely close finish in West Bengal

## TRS to win N'sagar bypoll, YSRC in Tirupati: Exit polls

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

between the ruling party, Telugu Desam and the Jana Sena-backed BJP.

There was a fierce battle in Nagarjunasagar where veteran Congress leader K. Jana Reddy contested against young TRS candidate Nomula Bhagat, son of the deceased MLA.

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao oversaw the poll preparations and scores of ministers and other elected representatives camped in Nagarjuna

for almost two weeks. "Though the initial mood was in strong favour of the TRS which had a margin of 20 per cent, the situation changed a few days before the polling day, thanks to strong consolidation of Reddy vote in favour of the Congress candidate," said Shivkesh Amuka, CEO of Mission Chanakya.

Panic prevailed in the locality, which is usually known as a less-trafficked bylane with shops scattered across the sides. A van owned by cash management firm Writer Safeguard carried cash to dispense at an ATM of HDFC bank in Patel Kunta park area. A gang ambushed the staff while they were unloading the cash chest, said Kukatpally police inspector T. Narasing Rao.

"They escaped with ₹5 lakh cash on a two-wheeler," he said.

Two staffers identified as Mirza Subani Ali Baig, 74, and Srinivas, were shot by the robbers, who carried a small pistol.

"While Ali Baig died while undergoing treatment, Srinivas is out of danger," added the police. Police said that the two robbers seemed to have followed the van till the ATM centre.

■ Page 5: Place was packed with people

■ Report on Page 2

# CLASSIFIEDS

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## FOUR WHEELERS

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## THREE & MORE

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LAUNCHING OFFER per Sq.yd 10,449/- open plots for Sale at Sadashivpuri, Dtp approved and all amenities contact : 9059910048, 9959896533 (HYMM/2122/C00960)

SHALI GARDEN Yatri Open Plot 565Sy/ South (102x100) Side X 50' Depth Corner Plot/ Can Be Sold as 205Sy/ 200Sy/ 165sy also. Ph: 9849023100. (HYMM/2122/C00767)

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## THREE & MORE

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## CHANGE OF NAME

**K.SURENDER** Kumar, S/o Late K.V.Rajaraop, R/o 9-30, Tirumalagiri, Hyderabad have lost my Original Sale Agreement, Lease Agreement, Extended Lease Agreement, MOU, Acknowledgment, Adhaar, PAN, License and Few Other Documents (Xerox) while traveling from Xerox Center to my home at Trimulagiri. If anybody found please inform: 9298651119. (S/2122/C00232)

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**I. MOHAMMAD** Mubashir S/o. Md.Muzammil R/o.19-2-23/14/72/1, Kalapathar, Hyd, have Lost My Passport No:B3096500. If Found Please Contact: 995950077. (HYCL/2122/C00283)

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# Patients go hungry at Tims

Food not given even to those suffering from diabetes, taking steroids

We are not getting food on time at Tims'

## DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

A Covid-19 patient at Telangana Institute of Medical Sciences (Tims) on Thursday took to social media to highlight how food was not being served on time for the patients.

The patient, who identified himself as Ramamurthy, also alleged that patients were dying, particularly from among those suffering from diabetes, because they are not getting the required nutrition on time. While saying that the available doctors and nurses were taking care



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## SHORT TAKES

## WOMAN DELIVERS GIRL CHILD AFTER COVID RECOVERY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Doctors at Aware Glenegles Global Hospital in LB Nagar, under the supervision of Dr Laxmi K, successfully delivered a baby girl from an expectant mother whose condition deteriorated after testing Covid-19+ve.

Mrs Soujanya, a 30-year-old pregnant woman from Karimnagar, was admitted to the hospital for advanced care. The woman tested Covid positive days before her due date and was put on blood thinners to avoid complications. The team of experts at the hospital initially treated the lady for Covid-19 and subsequently a baby girl was born in the 39th week of pregnancy.

## ONE HELD FOR SELLING FOREIGN CIGARETTES

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

In a joint operation, Hyderabad Task Force and Santoshnagar police on Thursday raided a general store and caught one person on charges of illegally selling foreign cigarettes, gutka and tobacco products.

The police teams, who raided Noor General Stores, seized foreign cigarettes, gutka and tobacco products worth ₹2 lakh and arrested the owner Syed Mazhar Hussain.

"He procured the banned tobacco products and foreign cigarettes from dealers in Bidar and sold it to customers in Hyderabad," A. Bhojya, inspector at Santoshnagar PS said. He added that the task force teams handed over the accused and the seized products for taking further action.

## COPS RESCUE 3 WOMEN FROM FLESH TRADE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

An organiser was arrested and three women rescued by Rachakonda Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) following an inter-state human trafficking racket bust at LB Nagar on Wednesday night.

According to police, the arrested person was identified as Debjyoti Das, 27, a resident of Fatulugada in Nagole and a native of Khanapur in West Bengal.

"He was maintaining and running an online dating app from where he collected money from customers. The rescued women are from West Bengal and Maharashtra," said police. The rescued women were shifted to shelter homes.

## 2 HELD FOR SALE OF REMDESIVIR ILLEGALLY IN CITY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Uppal police, along with Special Operations Team (SOT), nabbed two men for black-marketing remdesivir injections and seized three vials of the dose from their possession on Thursday.

The accused were identified as Kakumani Dilip (29), nursing staff at Pragma Hospital and Valamalla Madhu (22) lab technician at Sai Sanjeevani Hospital. They were nabbed near Nagole Metro station after a tip-off that they were selling the injections at exorbitant rates. Their associate, Pradeep, is reportedly absconding.

## No entry for attendants at Gandhi Hospital



Attendants of Covid-19 patients are seen pleading with police officers to allow them inside the Gandhi Hospital to feed their relatives who are admitted there. — S. SURENDER REDDY

## PUBLIC MEETINGS AT MACCA MASJID CANCELLED

ATHER MOIN DC  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Minorities welfare department has cancelled all permissions for conducting public meetings at Macca Masjid on Quran slated for Fridays during the month of Ramzan.

Earlier, the department had conditionally accorded permission to organize 'Jalsa-e-Younmil Quran' on the first, fourth and fifth Fridays of Ramzan to All India Majlis Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen. All India Sunni Ulama Board and Majlis Bachao Tehreek were allotted second and third Fridays respectively, subject to the Covid situation.

Meanwhile, on Thursday, the department's secretary issued orders cancelling all permissions accorded earlier in the wake of a surge in coronavirus cases. Superintendent of Mecca Masjid, Moulana Abdul Qadeer Siddiqui said all organisers have been informed about the decision.

The AIMIM has also postponed its public meetings on Fridays and opted to broadcast the Friday speeches of party president Asaduddin Owaisi and general secretary Ahmed Pasha Quadri at 2 pm across social media platforms.

## MASJIDS IMPOSE RESTRICTION ON FUNERAL PRAYERS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

The general fear of coronavirus was perceptible as many masjids in the city have been closing down immediately after the prayers. There are also restrictions on performing Slaat-ul-Janaza (funeral prayer) without the prior permission of the managing committee of the concerned masjid.

In normal days, anyone could bring the bier at any time to the masjid for performing funeral prayer. Now gates of several masjids have been closed for the bier of a Covid-19 victim.

To restrain Covid-19 victim's bier, a masjid in Chowni Gulam Murtza in the Old City has put a notice on its wall stating that the funeral prayer will be allowed at the timings of 5-time prayers and prior permission shall be obtained for biers. The Imam of the masjid is not bound to lead the funeral prayer on such biers. This kind of restriction forced people to perform funeral prayers either in their localities or in a graveyard.

## HC slams TS delay in filling TSPSC vacancies

## Bench orders state to vacate premises for better use

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

THE BENCH observes non-filling up vacancies in such an important institution like TSPSC as a gross denial on the part of the State.

Reacting sharply to the delay in filling up posts of chairman and members of Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC), the Telangana High Court on Thursday directed the state government to fill them up within four weeks.

Sounding sarcastic, the court said "If you cannot fill up the posts, then better wind up TSPSC and vacate its

premises so as to put it to better use. If not, we will pass a judicial order after the last officer retires to wind up the said institution."

A division bench, comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijayendra Reddy was dealing with a PIL filed by J. Shanker, complaining that the Chairman post and that of eight members were lying vacant for the past several months.

Satyam Reddy, senior counsel appearing for the petitioner, informed the bench that the only officer remaining will be retiring in August.

On being questioned by the court, Harender Prasad, special counsel representing the State, stated that he will get instructions from the government on filling

up of the posts.

The bench observed that non-filling up vacancies in such an important institution like TSPSC is a gross denial on the part of the State.

"We are upset by the gross inaction on the part of the State, which has made the institution virtually redundant".

The PIL was adjourned to the second week of June with directions to the State to implement its order within four weeks and file a compliance report.

## State delays recruitment drive

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

retired, the govt has not filled these vacancies.

Moreover, the state govt's new zonal system for jobs approved by the Centre that came into force recently mandates distribution of all sanctioned posts to every district based on population.

The vacancies thus arise later would have to be notified and filled.

When 33 new districts were created between 2016 and 2019 out of ten old districts in Telangana, the govt did not distribute the posts to new districts. It simply adju-

sted the existing staff of undivided districts in the new districts.

Under the new zonal system, 95 per cent of the vacancies in each district should be filled by the locals of the respective districts.

A clarity on vacancies in each department will come only after distributing all the sanctioned posts to all the 33 districts in proportion to their population. This process would take at least three months.

When TSPSC was formed in 2014, the state govt had appointed Prof Ghanta Chakrapani as its first chairman along with nine members. Of them, five retired in 2019. The chairman and three members retired in December 2020. With this, the commission is left with only one member, Prof Sailu Chinta, who is working as in-charge chairman.

Unless the state govt fills the vacancies, it cannot fill the 50,000 vacancies in various departments through exams and recruitment.

## BENCH ADVICES STATE TO BE ALERT

From Page 1

The bench also questioned the decline in Covid tests since April 26. "Your data and media reports only say that tests had come down by 10,000 on April 27 compared to the earlier day and on April 28, it was down by 8,000 tests. We are not relying on media or any other third party reports. Your report only says that tests have come down to around 80,000 from one lakh. Automatically, when tests are lowered, the infected cases will also come down correspondingly. It is nothing but wrapping up data," the court said.

Though the chairman and other members had

said that current situation reminded the court of the poem penned by Alfred Lord Tennyson titled 'Charge of the Light Brigade', where in the British Cavalry Unit, the Light Brigade comprising 600 soldiers, was directed to charge against the enemy even as such an act was suicidal and a blunder. It rode them into the jaws of death.

When Ashok Kumar informed the division bench that these elections are only confined and restricted to two municipal corporations and five municipalities, CJ Kohli cited the high number of Covid-19 positive cases in these areas.

The entire world knows of the war-like conditions going on since February 2021. Does the SEC not belong to this planet?

You gave the Notification on April 16. Some of the municipalities' terms have not been completed by March and mid-April. You have four months' time to conduct elections.

Is there such an urgency or statutory compulsion to hold a meeting of newly elected municipal councilors, as of a meeting of the Council of Ministers," the CJ asked counsel.

The Bench observed that the municipal elections on April 30 when the entire state is gripped by Covid-19 is a deliberate and ironic decision of the SEC. "It has really botched up the situation.

Warangal, Achampet, Ranga Reddy, Mhabubnagar, Nagarkurnool have

seen a spurt in Covid-19 cases. This is nothing but jeopardising the life of the citizens," the court said and directed SEC to file a report by May 5.

## CJI recollects poem to explain Covid situation

FROM PAGE 1

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## IN BRIEF

**Place was packed with people**

From Page 1

The place was packed with people. "The bargee barged inside the ATM and opened fire on the two men before decamping with the cash. The CCTV footage is being collected from the nearby cameras. Cases of murder, robbery and assault were booked against the men and an investigation is going on," senior officials said. Cyberabad Police commissioner V.C. Sajjanar visited the crime scene and inspected the case.

### ONE ARRESTED FOR HOARDING O2 CYLINDERS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

The West Zone task force team, along with drug control officials, nabbed a man for selling oxygen cylinders without valid permissions on Thursday and seized 19 cylinders from his possession.

The teams arrested Md Abdul Kareem, 32, following a raid at a godown, Ayesha Enterprises, said the police. It was revealed during an enquiry that Kareem was selling oxygen cylinders at Attapur.

"Kareem hatched a plan to sell them at higher rates after knowing about the shortage and brought them to his home at Dhankota, Golkonda. On credible information our teams apprehended him and seized the stocked up cylinders," DCP task force, P. Radhakrishna said.

# Stage set for today's municipal elections

1,539 polling booths set up with Covid-19 protocols

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

All eyes will be on elections to two municipal corporations (Warangal, Khammam) and five municipalities (Siddipet, Atchampet, Jachherla, Nakrekal, Kothur) adhering to Covid-19 protocol from 7 am to 5 pm on Friday.

Additionally, polling will also be held for Lingojiguda division in GHMC and for a ward each in Gajwel, Nalgondam Bodhan and Parkal municipalities.

As many as 11,59,112 voters will exercise their franchise. About 1,539 polling booths have been set up of which 676 have been identified as sensitive booths, where additional police forces are deployed.

Telangana State Election Commission (TSEC) commissioner C Partha Sarathi held a video conference on Thursday with district collectors, police commissioners, SPs, district medical and health officers and municipal commissioners on strictly enforcing Covid-norms both during polling and counting of votes following the directions of the Telangana High Court.

Wearing of mask has



Government staff carry polling materials to booths in Khammam on Thursday.

been made mandatory for voters and polling staff. Marking of six-feet distance should be made at the booths to ensure social distancing and sanitisers are to be placed at all booths.

Warangal corporation has the highest number of registered voters at 6,64,188 followed by Khammam corporation (2,88,411) and Siddipet

municipality (1,00,678).

The number of voters in other municipalities are Atchampet (20,684), Nakrekal (21,365), Jachherla (48,731) and Kothur (8,222).

Elections will be held through ballot papers. As many as 2,500 ballot boxes were transported to polling booths. Around 354 out of a total of 878 polling booths in

Warangal have been categorised as 'sensitive booths'. It is likewise with 192 out of 377 in Khammam, 58 of 130 in Jachherla, 20 of 54 in Nakrekal, and all 12 in Kothur. Additional police forces have been deployed to prevent any untoward incidents.

The counting of votes will take place on May 3.

— DC

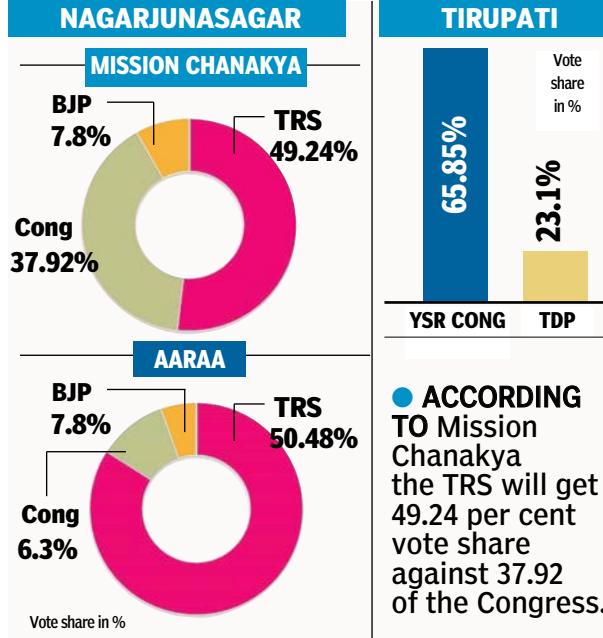
## 20,000 victory margin predicted for TRS

From Page 1

The poll management agency did extensive pre-poll and exit surveys interacting with about one lakh voters. The TRS will win the seat with a 20,000 margin and an 11 per cent vote difference between the TRS and the Congress, it concluded. According to Mission Chanakya the TRS will get 49.24 per cent vote share against 37.92 of the Congress while the BJP that gave up hope even before the campaign started will end up with 7.8 per cent votes. The TRS will get a majority of the votes in five mandals while Jana Reddy is projected to lead the show in Madugulapally and Tripuraram mandals.

Another agency Aaraa projected 50.48 per cent vote share to Nomula Bhagat against Jana Reddy's 39.93. The agency projected 6.31 per cent to BJP and 3.28 per cent to others. Aaraa projected a massive lead for the YSR Congress in Tirupati over its nearest rival Telugu Desam. The ruling party is projected to get a vote share of 65.85 per cent and TD a mere 23.1 per cent.

HMR Research Pvt Ltd projected that the TRS candidate will scrape through with 3.3 per cent margin or



● ACCORDING TO Mission Chanakya the TRS will get 49.24 per cent vote share against 37.92 of the Congress.

about 7000 votes. According to the agency, 38 per cent electorate felt good about the government functioning and 26 per cent found the performance average, while 34 per cent voters rated it as a key role.

A Vizag-based agency Out of the Box however predicted Jana Reddy's victory with over 7,000-vote margin while it said YSR Congress candidate Dr Gurumurthy will win with a majority of 3.5 lakh votes.

## Apollo Diagnostics conducts drive-thru Covid-19 tests

SANJAY SAMUEL PAUL | DC  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

"Drive-thru Covid-19 RT-PCR testing" is an innovative idea. It is designed for more safety and convenience of the general public in dire need for the test.

Apollo Diagnostics, a part of Apollo Hospitals, launched the 'Drive Thru Testing for Covid-19 RT-PCR at Jubilee Hills' on Thursday. The services will be for those living in the surrounding areas and it will have a capacity for holding 250 tests a day. More of such centres would be set up at various locations in the city.

Those desiring to undergo RT-PCR test have to follow five easy and safe steps. They need to complete the registration process at the entrance by scanning a QR code and will, in turn, receive a token number on their mobile.

They need to make the necessary payment online and proceed for testing.

A Phlebotomist will take the samples. A message



Apollo Diagnostics staffer carry out drive-thru tests Covid-19 in Jubilee Hills, in Hyderabad, on Thursday.

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## Uttam urges government to rescue Covid-hit poor

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29



● UTTAM REDDY said he was receiving phone calls from many people who are unable to get beds in hospital, facing lack of oxygen and Remdesivir.

patients in the state.

"We are doing our best to help the citizens to overcome the second wave. I thank doctors, nurses, frontline health and sanitation workers, who have been working in gruelling conditions to save lives of patients. A special mention to the Congress party volunteers who are tirelessly helping patients and their families. We shall win this together," he tweeted.

Uttam hoped that he would be out of the hospital in the next two to three days.

## LINGOJIGUDA GHMC BYPOLL TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

and nine others. There will be 57 polling booths across 24 locations. Apart from 358 persons on poll duty, the counting staff will comprise 53 officials for the 131 ballot boxes.

Apart from two flying squads and two static surveillance teams, provisions are in place for webcast and Covid-19 protocol.

First Corrigendum to e-Tender Call Notice  
No:MD/ACCT/SWK-R-1/12020/351 Dt. 01.04.2021  
Name of the work: "Manning Maintenance and Commercial Operation of PPTI Slipway and other Ancillaries on payment of Licence Fee for a Period of 5 years". Reserved Price for a period of 5 years: Rs.17,28,000/-  
Reference to the above tender, a pre-bid meeting was scheduled on Dt. 22.04.2021. Neither any query was received from any prospective bidder nor any bidder participated in the pre-bid meeting. Hence, there is no change of terms & conditions of the published tender documents. All bidders may be guided accordingly. For further details, please log on to the website: <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app/>.  
Dy. Conservator  
PPT/PR/24/2021-22, Dt/29/04/2021

## GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA Revenue (LA) Department

Collector/Joint Collector/Special Collector (LA/SDC/LA)

Preliminary Notification FORM VI

(See Sub-rule (1) of Rule -19 and Section-11(1) of the Act-30/2013)

Li.No.BR9/2021 Dated: 30-04-2021

Where it appears to the Government of Telangana/ Collector that total of Ac. 109.12 gts. Patta land required in the Gazinagar Village of Konda Mallepally Mandal Nalgonda District for public purpose, namely, Pendipalaka Balancing Reservoir of AMRP.

The Requisition authority while submitting a letter no. J1106/13/185/1A(Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests, dated 10/09/2013) to implement project with EIA, HESRA, per section 6(2) of the RFTCLARR Act 2013 the SIA is exempted.

The Joint Collector & Additional District Magistrate, Nalgonda is appointed as Administrator for the purpose of Rehabilitation & Resettlement of the affected families as ordered by Government vide G.O.Ms. No. 19 Reinstating (J.C & LA), dated 1.02.2013.

It is informed that 109.12 gts. of land is said to be located in the Gazinagar Village of Konda mallepally Mandal Nalgonda District a piece of land measuring more or less Ac. 109.12 gts. of standard measurement, whose detailed description is as mentioned below, is under acquisition.

Mandal: Gazinagar Village: Konda Mallepally

Sl. No. Classification Description of land i.e., Patta/Inam /Govt.

Area Under Acquisition (In Acres)

Name & Address of Person Interested

Other Particulars such as structures like walls etc.,

173 Patta/Dry 3.15

0.35 Md. Rizwan Qureshi S/o Gulam Qazzaq

1.00 Md. Junaid Qureshi S/o Gulam Qazzaq

0.35 Hafeez-Ur-Rahman S/o Abdul Rahaman Md. Akbar

0.35 S/o Gulam Jeelani

0.35 Md. Junaid Qureshi S/o Gulam Qazzaq

0.35 Syeed Ahmed Qureshi S/o Gulam Qazzaq

0.35 Jameel Ahmed Qureshi S/o Gulam Qazzaq

0.35 Khaled Ahmed Qureshi S/o Gulam Qazzaq

0.35 Fareed Ahmed Qureshi S/o Gulam Qazzaq

0.35 Md. Junaid Qureshi S/o Gulam Qazzaq

0.35 Md.

# DECCAN Chronicle

30 APRIL 2021

## Govt needs to provide free vaccination to all in India

The registration for the third phase of the vaccination programme against pandemic Covid-19 has started with some technical glitches in the registration portal that were promptly corrected. As per the government's account, more than 80 lakh people aged between 18 and 45 years registered themselves for the programme that starts on May 1. The government has made it mandatory for anyone to get a jab in the third phase to register with the portal. It has also said there will be no more free vaccination for this group, which makes up almost half of the eligible population.

The government had injected a lot of hope into the people whose lives and livelihoods were severely battered by the onslaught of the microorganism when it launched the world's largest vaccination programme on January 16 this year but most of the steps it has taken after that belied that hope. And worse, the latest decisions reflect poor understanding of the ground situation and a scornful neglect for the idea of universal vaccination against a deadly pandemic. The government has parliamentary clearance for spending money to get every eligible person vaccinated but has now passed that responsibility on to the state governments so far as its most productive section of the population is concerned. Worse, it has made the private sector an integral part of the programme with little regulatory protocols. The government's decision to allow the private manufacturers to fix the price of the vaccine doses, and then merrily grabbing the opportunity to make super profits, truly reflects the callousness with which it plans to wage the war on the pandemic.

**No elected central government in the world would dare force the elected bodies below them to compete with private companies for a product such as vaccines**

No elected central government in the world would dare force the elected bodies below them to compete with private companies for a product such as vaccines. There won't be many countries where the citizen's right to vaccination is linked to the acts of a philanthropist entrepreneur who himself is a beneficiary of governmental largesse.

The coordinates about which the people in the Union government work now defy all sense of democracy and decency and the constitutional principles which bind them to seats of power. The right to get vaccinated against a pandemic is nothing less than the right to life and the government is duty bound to protect it. Introducing a technological interface such as a registration portal is okay as long as it brings efficiency to how the government works; making it a condition to enjoy a fundamental right is not.

The Union government must rework its vaccination policy for the youth. Anything less than a universal vaccination programme for them is akin to discounting their right to life, and is unacceptable. Technology can be a tool for people to access it but it cannot be the sole determinant. Illiterate people have an equal right to the jab, and it is the government's job to ensure it. The financial burden must be borne by the Union government that has sought, and been granted, funds by Parliament for the purpose. Anything less will amount to undermining the survival of the future of the nation. The government can decide.

## Stop politics over oxygen

In the dire emergency caused by the coronavirus pandemic liquid medical oxygen has become a crucial national resource. The order to open Vedanta's Sterlite Copper smelter plant on the southern coast of Tamil Nadu and produce oxygen for medical use is a logical step to augment availability. When production is scaled up to around 1,000 MT a day, it can add about 10 per cent to national capacity. To facilitate such production is a national task and all politicians of Tamil Nadu, including the head honchos of the government of the day who opposed the oxygen operations in court, should climb off their hobby horse and cooperate in using that oxygen to help people sickened by the virus to breathe.

An oxygen crisis exists not in terms of production but in transportation as the nation has an inadequate number of tankers. It is a logistical nightmare to be able to rush lifesaving LMO to every nook and corner of the country and oxygen will soon be required everywhere in the face of the bewildering scale and speed of the spread of the disease. To undertake supply on a war footing is the executive's job but it should not be hampered by the play of politics in deciding how much oxygen will go to which state and when. The people are fed up already with political leaders playing havoc with a fair and equitable distribution of oxygen, life-saving drugs, ventilators, hospital and ICU beds, besides vaccines.

The First World has responded to India's crisis by sending oxygen concentrators, non-invasive ventilators and various other medical equipment that can help in the crisis. Political leaders and the executive they give directions to must ensure fair distribution so that patients can be helped in time and the mortality rate kept down. Having lost the battle against a second wave we must first ensure that the gravely ill receive treatment in time. The politics over who is right or wrong can wait and it's time to rein in ill-conceived comments about arresting those who criticise governments or spread rumours about the Covid-19 catastrophe.

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**Rajahmundry:** Venagiri, Dhawaleswaram 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, Vavilalapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433  
**Nellore:** Survey No.52/2, Burrapu Village, Venkatalachalam (M), Chennimalgundu Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581; Telefax: 0861-2348580  
**Chennai:** SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/48/50/51; Advt Fax: 044-22254765/22254766/4230525  
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Mahir Ali

## How far is Biden ready to go on guns, minimum wage, healthcare?

It is somewhat disconcerting to find myself almost in agreement with US Senator Lindsey Graham, a particularly odious representative of the Republican leadership that propped up the Trump presidency for four years, and seems determined to perpetuate its sordid legacy. But he was on the ball when he told *Fox News Sunday*: "AOC said his first 100 days exceeded her expectations. That's all you need to know."

Of course, what he meant by "That's all you need to know" is vastly different from the way many others would interpret New York congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's statement last Friday that the Biden administration has "definitely exceeded the expectations that progressives had".

When AOC entered the US Congress in 2018, contrary to the primary desires of the Democratic Party establishment — alongside Squad-mates Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayanna Pressley — she came across as a breath of fresh air: a legislator determined to challenge not just the egregious excesses of the Trump

administration but also the unsavoury realities of her own party's inclinations.

She had already done her bit by then for the unsuccessful Bernie Sanders campaign in 2016, and she did it again four years later. Last year's Sanders campaign, although hobbled again by the Democratic establishment, was more successful. At least in the sense that Biden advisers collaborated with Sanders associates in drawing up the election agenda.

Nonetheless, in the run-up to last November's election, it was logical to assume that, if elected, Joe Biden would go his own way — striving for bipartisanship, as was his wont during three decades in the Senate, and quite possibly achieving very little.

However, Mr Biden has managed to go reasonably far in his first 100 days — admittedly an arbitrary criterion that has been in vogue since the initial phase of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1933 inauguration. FDR assumed power during the depths of the 1930s depression, and tried to reboot the US economy through an unprecedented injection of govern-

ment resources.

It was a partial success — it actually took a world war to resurrect the US economy. Biden's efforts in the wake of Covid-19 have been compared with FDR's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, thwarted in large part by Johnson's Vietnam woes.

For all his flaws, Johnson did manage to legislate some of the most substantial provisions against racial discrimination since Lincoln's Emancipation Act 100 years earlier. Ever since, though, there have been efforts to claw back the advances, and Republican-guided voter suppression reached a new level of sorts in Georgia recently, after the state's voters gave Biden a tentative majority in the US Senate.

The President, meanwhile, has gone further in his stimulus packages than some of his detractors on the left expected, and has facilitated a considerably more substantial role in the Senate for Sanders than anyone might have anticipated. A partial consequence has been that, unlike in 2009 when the advent of Barack

Obama was followed by far too much of the "rescue package" being restricted to the economic culprits on Wall Street, the latest stimulus has sustained poorer households.

These are temporary measures, though. There is the prospect of a massive infrastructure package that would also seek to redress, in some measure, America's reliance on fossil fuels. Mr Biden recently presided over a virtual global summit ostensibly aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions more sharply than spelt out in the Paris agreement of 2015, but it has been pointed out that whereas the current administration is willing to pursue its goal through concrete measures, it has no objection to the rest of the world chasing the task through market mechanisms, which have hitherto proved grossly inadequate.

The Biden administration is also struggling with border immigration measures, and with foreign policy more generally: ties with China and Russia, in particular, remain dismal. The proposed withdrawal from Afghanistan, welcome at many lev-

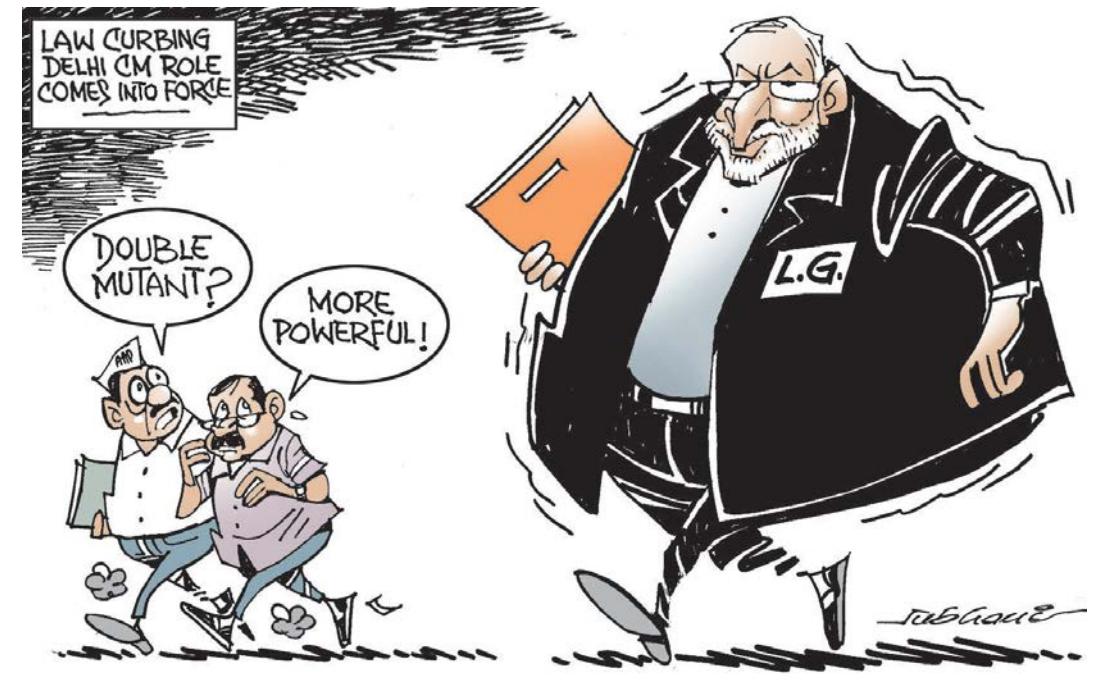
els, is likely to effectively entail handing back power to the Taliban without any official recognition of why the invasion 20 years ago was a grievous error.

But let's put foreign policy aside, even though US neocolonialism is an intrinsic part of America's postwar identity, not least in its Latin American "backyard". However even domestically, there's little hope of instituting a minimum wage of only \$15, let alone the kind of universal healthcare that is routine in comparable nations, or the kind of gun control that might reduce the regular mass shootings.

These three straightforward objectives are not even on Biden's agenda. And some of the items on his wish list face resistance not just from mindless Republicans but also from Democratic senators such as Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema. Yes, Joe Biden has exceeded expectations in his first 100 days, but where he will — or can — go from here remains an open question.

By arrangement with Dawn

Subhani



## India's grim reality out in the open as myths busted

Karan Thapar

### As I See It

**I**t wasn't so long ago that we convinced ourselves we are a superpower or, at least, one that's definitely in the making. We believed the evidence was long and compelling — the world's largest democracy, the sixth biggest economy, a 1.38 billion-strong domestic market, excellence in IT and the West's back office, an unbeatable cricket team, the home of Bollywood, one of the most successful diasporas and, of course, a Prime Minister on first name terms with all the world's top leaders. The RSS was convinced this was because we are a Hindu majority nation. The BJP was more specific. It was because of Narendra Modi.

Well, an invisible virus has punctured the bubble of our pretensions. As Covid-19 increased by nearly 400,000 cases a day — mathematically projected to possibly reach a million a day in two weeks' time — our friends have shut their doors on us. From Paris to Hong Kong, Canberra to Dubai, flights from India have been barred. Meanwhile, our "enemies" are reaching out. China has offered assistance. Charities in Pakistan were the first to write to our PM. Days later Imran Khan tweeted his offer to help. This is, of course, kindness but it's likely to rattle the government.

So what went wrong? There are many answers but the one that concerns me is the argument which suggests that we brought this on ourselves. I'm referring both to our earlier belief that we're something special and have conquered the virus and also our irresponsible refusal to plan and prepare for the

worst. In other words, our judgment. And before I go into detail, let me add it's judgment, more than size and power, that one expects of a superpower. That's where we have failed.

First, after the number of new infections started to remarkably, though inexplicably, shrink from September onwards, we claimed victory. Just as Europe and America were experiencing second or even third waves, far worse than the first, we convinced ourselves that our fate would be different. In January, Prime Minister Modi told the World Economic Forum that India has "defeated" Covid. Three weeks later, on February 21, the BJP passed the following resolution: "It can be said with pride that India not only defeated Covid under the able, sensitive, committed and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but also infused in all its citizens the confidence to build an "Atma Nirbhar Bharat".

The party unequivocally hails its leadership for introducing India to the world as a proud and victorious nation in the fight against Covid. In March, the health minister, who is himself a doctor, added his personal touch. He claimed to the Delhi Medical Association that "we are in the endgame of the Covid-19 pandemic in India".

This misplaced, unscientific, irrational and downright foolish conviction that we are special is the cause of the crisis we face today. As a result, we did not plan for a second wave. In fact, we shut down the special facilities created to handle the first. Empowered committees that recommended

enhancing oxygen production in April 2020 were ignored. Even when it was decided to do so, the tenders were not placed for eight months. Time, we felt certain, was on our side. So, of the 162 plants sanctioned by the health ministry, only 33 have been installed. Consequently, today, we're forced to shut down virtually all industrial use of oxygen while we are desperately trying to import 50,000 tonnes from any country willing to sell it quickly.

I'll touch on only one more example of our irresponsible incompetence. We boast of being the vaccine manufacturer of the world. Yet with our eyes wide open, we failed to ensure we can produce enough to vaccinate ourselves. Once again, the explanation is we either didn't bother to plan or weren't capable of doing it intelligently.

Consider this — as far back as May or June last year we knew that if 75 per cent of our people were to be given a two-dose vaccine, we would need two billion jabs.

That was elementary maths. We also knew that our existing vaccine production capacity could not produce anywhere near this number in the timeframe that we required.

So, what did we do? A superpower would have immediately increased its capacity. Doubled or tripled it, if necessary. We did nothing. We blithely carried on as if there was no looming problem. Now we have a crisis. And, once again, the world we are so eager to impress simply cannot understand how we let this happen.

**The picture which the world sees of India is not that of a potential superpower but an inept and flailing Third World country struggling but unable to handle a crisis it has inflicted on itself**

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

### LETTERS

#### VACCINATION MESS

The government is again making a mess of vaccination (*Covid-19 vaccine website crashes, DC, April 29*). How can hundreds of maidservants, drivers, security guards and others who do not have internet register on the CoWIN app? The app crashed on Wednesday. Hospitals can be asked to feed particulars after they give a jab.

**K. Gopal**  
Hyderabad

It is surprising that the Centre opened registration for vaccination to those above 18 when there are not enough stocks for the second dose to senior citizens. Arrangements must be made in this regard.

**Rama Kesavan**  
Hyderabad

**VACCINE CENTRES**  
When the situation is getting critical, why is the government not giving work from home facility? Every employee is afraid of working in office and employee's family members are also worried because they are prone to Covid. Some employees might have health problems.

**Saroja Kankipati**  
Secunderabad

#### VIRUS DEATHS

If the virus deaths are murder in Telangana state and the CM must be held responsible, what about the virus deaths in BJP-ruled states? (*Bandi: Virus deaths murder, DC, April 29*). Will the CMs there be held responsible?

**N. Nagarajan**  
Hyderabad

#### 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

**China supplying arms to Pak**

**RAWALPINDI, APRIL 29**  
Western diplomats said they believe Communist China is supplying military equipment to Pakistan and has agreed to outfit new units in the Western province to replace troops sent to suppress the Awami League in Bangla Desh.

They however did not have details on the amount or type of military equipment to be supplied.

They said the agreement followed an unannounced visit to Peking earlier this month by Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Sultan Khan, former Ambassador to China.



## IN BRIEF

## Raj CM tests Covid positive

Jaipur: Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Thursday said he has tested positive for Covid-19. The 69-year-old Congress leader had isolated himself on Wednesday after his wife Sunita had tested positive. "My Covid-19 test report too came positive today. I have no symptoms, and I am feeling fine. I will continue working while in isolation, following Covid-19 protocols," the Chief Minister said in a tweet in Hindi. Governor Kalraj Mishra, AICC general secretary in-charge of Rajasthan Ajay Maken, PCC president Govind Singh Datasra, state Transport Minister Pratap Singh Khachariyawas, Rajasthan BJP president Satish Poonia, Leader of Opposition on Gulabchand Kataria and others wished for Gehlot's speedy recovery. Meanwhile, former Barmer MP Manvendra Singh, his wife and daughter also tested positive for Covid-19. Manvendra Singh is the son of former Union minister Jaswant Singh, who passed away last year.

## NGO SEEKS WAIVER OF GST ON DRUGS, MEDICAL SUPPLIES

PARMOD KUMAR | DC  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

An NGO, the Public Policy Advocates, on Wednesday moved the Supreme court seeking to exempt levying of Goods and services Tax on the medicines and medical devices including equipment being used for the treatment of Covid patients in the second wave of pandemic.

Seeking exemption of GST on Remdesivir, Tocilizumab, Favipiravir and other similar generic medicines, the petition by the Public Policy Advocates has described as "unjustified" the levy of GST on the medicines essential for the treatment of Covid including medical grade oxygen, oxygen concentrators, ventilators, Bipap Machines, and other Covid patient care support equipment.

The application said, "the Right to Health in times of pandemic, assumes an ever more crucial significance since affordable healthcare and availability of drugs which are critical to fight moderate and severe cases of illness have to be given paramount importance. This would have the effect of preventing black marketing, hoarding of such drugs and other medical equipment, as well as would ensure that the same is available to the citizens at affordable cost."

The application has been moved by Pritika Kumar – the founder of the Public Policy advocates. The application has been moved in the suo motu matter being heard by the top court relating to the supply of essential medicines, oxygen, manner and method of vaccination, dual pricing of the vaccine and declaration of lockdown.

The top court which had in the last hearing of suo motu petition had said that it can't be "silent spectator" of the worsening Covid situation and the difficulties being encountered by people in getting drugs, oxygen, hospital beds for the treatment of Covid infected patients.

The petitioner has sought top court direction to GST Council to "expeditiously" convene its meeting to consider exempting from levy of GST – both at the Central and at the state level – the drugs and medical equipment being used for treating Covid patients.

In the interim, till the GST Council meets and takes a call, the petitioner organisation has sought direction to the Centre to issue "appropriate ad hoc guidelines, orders or notifications."

## HOLY SHRINES

## Portals of 4 temples will open as scheduled, only priests permitted

## Char Dham Yatra deferred amid Covid surge

Dehradun, April 29: Char Dham Yatra to the four famous Himalayan shrines in Uttarakhand, which was scheduled to begin next month, has been postponed in view of the massive surge in Covid-19 cases.

Announcing this here on Thursday, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat said conducting the yatra amid the raging pandemic is not possible. "Considering the rising cases of corona, it has been decided to suspend the Char Dham Yatra," Rawat told reporters.

However, the portals of the four Himalayan temples known as Char Dham will open as scheduled, he said.

Only priests will be allowed to perform daily prayers at the shrines and not devotees, the Chief Minister said.

"Though opening on schedule, no pilgrim neither from inside the state nor from outside will be allowed to visit the temples," he said.

Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri are the four famous shrines.

Kedarnath is slated to open at 5 am on May 17, Badrinath

at 4:15 am on May 18, Yamunotri at 12:15 pm on May 14 and Gangotri on 7:30 am on May 15.

Covid-19 cases have been rising drastically in Uttarakhand as in various other states.

They hit a new high in the state on Wednesday with 6,054 people testing positive and 108 succumbing to the virus.

This is the highest single-day spike in Covid cases and fatalities recorded by the state so far.

The state government had drawn much flak for organ-

ising the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar which according to many contributed to the second wave of Coronavirus.

Even the Uttarakhand High Court in an oral observation recently had asked the state government to publish the standard operating procedure for Char Dham Yatra saying it cannot be allowed to become another Kumbh.

It has also asked the state government to control the raging virus and save lives putting aside everything else.

Covid had cast its shadow on the Char Dham Yatra which is considered the backbone of the hill economy last year too delaying opening of the temples for pilgrims by several months.

The delayed opening of the temples for pilgrims coupled with restrictions such as mandatory negative RT-PCR test report, a daily cap on the number of devotees visiting shrines besides compliance with mask wearing and social distancing norms had severely affected the inflow of pilgrims.

— PTI

Covid pandemic is currently battering India leading to a severe shortage of hospital beds, oxygen and anti-viral drugs such as Remdesivir. India is now recording over three and a half lakh fresh Covid cases every day while the death toll is now crossing three thousand daily.

Desperate appeals for help have become the norm on social media as people helplessly watch many of their family-members and friends die for want of timely medical care.

A foreign envoy posted in India had also recently told media outlets that his heart bled seeing scenes of hospitals and people asking for hospital beds on social media.

Modi had also recently conceded that the second Corona "storm has shaken the country" when the nation had been full of enthusiasm and self-confidence after "successfully confronting the first wave of Corona".

The government has also conceded that the current over three million active cases of Covid have "put considerable pressure on the health care system".

Just a few days back, Twitter and other social media platforms removed about 100 posts and URLs after the government asked them to remove content that was critical of the handling of the current medical crisis or spreading fake news around the pandemic.

Reports citing Lumen database, an independent research project studying cease and desist letters concerning online content, suggested that more than 50 posts - including those by a Member of Parliament, MLA and filmmakers - were removed by Twitter on government request.

Government sources had said the social media platforms were asked to remove the posts and URLs (uniform resource locators) to "prevent obstructions in the fight against the pandemic" and disruption of public order due to the said posts.

They had added that the order was issued in view of the misuse of social media platforms by certain users to spread fake or misleading information and create panic.

## What India needs: 5L ICU beds, 3.5L medicos

Pune, April 29: Forecasting that the Covid-19 pandemic is only going to get worse, noted surgeon Dr Devi Prasad Shetty has said India will need an extra 5 lakh ICU beds, 2 lakh nurses and 1.5 lakh doctors in the next few weeks, and also suggested radical solutions to meet the mountainous challenge.

At present, India has only 75,000 to 90,000 ICU beds and almost all are already occupied — when the second wave of the pandemic hasn't even reached its peak yet, he said. India is reporting about 3.5 lakh cases a day, and some experts say the number could go up to 5 lakh cases daily at its peak.

While most of the newspaper headlines and prime time television coverage have been over the lack of

oxygen for the patients in ICUs, "I am having sleepless nights for the next headline, which is going to be that patients are dying in ICUs because there are no nurses and doctors to take care of the patients," he said.

"And this is going to happen. I do not doubt it now," said Dr Shetty, the chairman and founder of Narayana Health, a chain of 21 medical centres in India, in his online address at the Symbiosis Golden Jubilee Lecture Series in Pune recently.

He pointed out that for every patient who is tested positive, there are 5 to 10 people who are positive but not tested. That means more than 15 to 20 lakh people are getting infected every day in India even now. Statistically, five per cent of the positive

patients need an ICU bed, irrespective of their age. On an average, a patient in ICU spends at least 10 days there. "So you can just imagine what the scenario is. Know what we need to do? We need to create at least five lakh additional ICU beds in the next few weeks," he said.

"Unfortunately, beds do not treat patients. We need nurses, doctors and paramedics in that order," he said, pointing out that managing Covid patients successfully in ICUs depends mostly on nurses, not doctors. Even before the start of the pandemic, government hospitals across the country who are preparing for their exam scheduled to take place in the next few weeks.

He suggested that the ministry of health, along with the Indian Nursing Council, should consider

next few weeks who are dedicated to managing Covid for the next one year. Because the current pandemic is likely to last for about 4 to 5 months. And then we should be prepared for the third wave," he said.

Dr Shetty then proceeded to provide out-of-the-box solutions for meeting that need. He said India has about 2.20 lakh nursing students who have finished their three-year GNM (General Nursing and Midwifery) or four-year B Sc courses in various nursing schools and colleges across the country who are preparing for their exam scheduled to take place in the next few weeks.

He suggested that the ministry of health, along with the Indian Nursing Council, should consider

these students as graduates and deploy them to work in Covid ICU wards for one year, after which they will be given graduation certificates. They could also be given preference over others in government jobs, he said.

"Take the approach of drafting for the armed forces when there is an impending war with the enemy country ... This is not wartime.

"If that is done, I am convinced most of these girls and boys will join the fight against Covid. The battle cannot be won by doctors of my age. No war can be bought by fought by people of my age. You need young people. Most of them are vaccinated and they are naturally in a better position to fight Covid in case they get it.

He said there are also 1.30 lakh young doctors today, working not in Covid ICUs but preparing for NEET exams to get into post-graduate courses where only 35,000 positions are available. An online test for NEET should be conducted immediately and results declared in a few days.

After allowing the 35,000 seats, there will be still one lakh young doctors who are left out, who didn't get the PG seats. They should be offered a chance during the next year's PG selection if they work in the Covid ICU for one year, he said. Additionally, there are about 25,000 doctors who have finished their postgraduate training and haven't yet appeared for the exam. This batch of medical specialists should be told that they can skip

the exam and get the degree provided they work in the Covid ICUs for one year, he suggested.

Also, there are between 90,000 to one lakh doctors who graduated from overseas universities who haven't been able to pass a national entrance exam. "Identify 20,000 brightest of these kids and ask them to work in Covid ICU for one year for getting a permanent registration," he said.

"If we can do this successfully in the next few weeks, believe me, we would have conquered the Covid battle. Otherwise, the consequences can be very very serious, mainly because just admitting a patient in a Covid ICU and giving him some oxygen is not going to save their life," he concluded. — PTI

## Scramble everywhere



1) People wait to receive Covid-19 vaccine in Mumbai on Thursday as India set another global record in new virus cases even as the country geared up to open its vaccination rollout to all adults amid snags. — AP



2) Traffic Police personnel take part in a bike rally to spread awareness on Covid-19 in Chennai on Thursday.

— PTI



3) A health worker collects a swab sample from a BSF jawan during a rapid antigen testing campaign for the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) at Poonch, on Thursday.

— PTI

## Bombay HC for 15-day lockdown

## Maha extends lockdown-like curbs till May 15

SHAHAB ANSARI & BHAGWAN PARAB | DC  
MUMBAI, APRIL 29

The Bombay High Court on Thursday asked the Maharashtra government to consider imposing complete lockdown in the state for 15 days.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G.S. Kulkarni was of the opinion that a complete lockdown like last year was necessary in order to successfully contain the spread of Coronavirus in the state.

The bench also asked Advocate General (AG) Ashutosh Kumbhakoni if the state believed its current restrictions on the movement of citizens were working. The judges also asked him if people with only urgent business were on roads.

The bench clarified that it was not issuing any mandate, however they were of the opinion that the government should consider a lockdown like last year.

The HC also directed the Maharashtra government to ensure municipal authorities conducted an immediate fire audit of all hospitals, nursing homes and Covid care centres in Mumbai and a safety audit of medical facilities across the state.

Referring to Wednesday's fire in a private hospital in Thane district where four people died, the bench said, "We do not want any more fires in hospitals."

The bench said a patient does not have time to check if a hospital is fire-compliant or not. "We do not want hospitals turning

into Jatugrihas," the HC said, referring to the highly combustible house of lac that Durvodayana had built for the Pandavas in the Mahabharata.

The HC also said it was not trying to pin the blame for the raging pandemic on the state government or municipal corporation, but it was the society's "collective failure" and that citizens must also act responsibly.

"You want to have everything. You want Kumbh, you want marriages...are you waiting for the third wave?" it asked.

"At least for 15 days if people stay strictly indoors, like last year, we may expect better results. Please advise your government," the high court told this to the AG.

The HC was hearing a PIL, alleging improper management of Covid treatment in Maharashtra and seeking directions pertaining to shortage of Remdesivir, the key anti-viral drug, and oxygen supply.

Advocate General Kumbhakoni on behalf of the state and the senior counsel Anil Sakre on behalf of BMC told the HC that there was adequate stock of Remdesivir and oxygen for hospitals in Mumbai and a safety audit of medical facilities across the state would be conducted.

The court also directed them to also ensure there are no long queues at Covid vaccination centres and make arrangements for the safety of those working in crematoriums.

Meanwhile, the state government on Thursday

evening issued a new order extending Covid restrictions till May 15. People can travel only in emergencies. Shops and markets, except for emergency services, will be allowed to be open for only two hours till 11am every day.

Also, with the rise in cases and deaths showing no signs of decline, the Maharashtra government has extended the lockdown-like curbs in the state till May 15.

State chief secretary Sitaram Kunte on Thursday issued an order, which said, "Maharashtra is continuing to be threatened with the spread of Covid and therefore it is imperative to continue emergency measures to prevent and contain the spread of virus. The government finds it necessary to continue the enforcement of the current restrictions throughout the state till 15th May to break the chain of transmission effectively."

The strict curbs on movement of people and a host of other activities have been in force in the state since April 14 and were to end on April 30. Essential services have been exempted from the restrictions.

On April 21, the Maharashtra government had imposed more strict restrictions in the state under the 'Break the Chain' campaign. Under the curbs, all government offices (centre, state, local administrative), except emergency services related to the coronavirus pandemic, will open with only 15 per cent attendance.

## FB blocks #ResignModi posts, restores it later

DC CORRESPONDENT  
with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

Social media platform Facebook temporarily blocked posts containing hashtags calling on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to resign, then reinstated them on Wednesday, saying the action had been taken erroneously, according to international media reports.

"We temporarily blocked this hashtag by mistake, not because the Indian government asked us to, and have since restored it," Facebook spokesman Andy Stone was quoted as saying. According to these media reports, #ResignModi was blocked on Facebook for several hours amid national controversy and public anger over the Union Government's response to the ongoing Covid crisis.

The media reports said the Indian government had ordered U.S. social-media companies to block certain social media posts, saying Covid-related misinformation risked spurring a panic and were disrupting efforts to bring the pandemic under control. A second wave of the

Covid pandemic is currently battering India leading to a severe shortage of hospital beds, oxygen and anti-viral drugs about 100 posts and URLs after the government asked them to remove content that was critical of the handling of the current medical crisis or spreading fake news around the pandemic.

Reports citing Lumen database, an independent research project studying cease and desist letters concerning online content, suggested that more than 50 posts - including those by a Member of Parliament, MLA and filmmakers - were removed by Twitter on government request.

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## Portals of 4 temples will open as scheduled, only priests permitted

## Char Dham Yatra deferred amid Covid surge

Dehradun, April 29: Char Dham Yatra to the four famous Himalayan shrines in Uttarakhand, which was scheduled to begin next month, has been postponed in view of the massive surge in Covid-19 cases.

Announcing this here on Thursday, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat said conducting the yatra amid the raging pandemic is not possible. "Considering the rising cases of corona, it has been decided to suspend the Char Dham Yatra," Rawat told reporters.

However, the portals of the four Himalayan temples known as Char Dham will open as scheduled, he said.

Only priests will be allowed to perform daily prayers at the shrines and not devotees, the Chief Minister said.

## SHORT TAKES

**BENGAL ASKS CENTRE FOR 3.5 CR Doses**DC CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, APRIL 29

As West Bengal has witnessed a new record in daily spike at 17,403 cases with 89 more deaths in the fresh wave of Covid-19 pandemic, the Mamata Banerjee government has urged the Centre to immediately send 3.5 crore doses of vaccines for 1.5 crore people aged between 18 and 45 years in the state to kickstart third phase of vaccination drive for them from May 1.

On Thursday evening the state health department informed that the 17,403 fresh cases were detected with the 89 additional deaths in the last 24 hours. Among the new cases, 3,912 were reported from North 24 Parganas, followed by 3,901 in Kolkata which however saw 23 deaths, the highest among the districts.

The state government informed, "Government of West Bengal has requested Government of India to kindly arrange vaccine stocks and supply for the Government sector and the private sector hospitals in West Bengal in the following manner: 1) 2 crore doses for vaccinating 1 crore people in West Bengal in 18-45 year age group through the Government hospitals in WB. 2) 1 crore doses for vaccinating 50 lakh people in West Bengal through private hospitals in WB."

**FIR FILED AGAINST PARAM BIR SINGH**SHAHAB ANSARI | DC  
MUMBAI, APRIL 29

The Maharashtra police have filed an FIR against former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh and 27 other police officers on the basis of corruption charges levelled against them by an inspector of police.

The FIR has been registered at Akola in Vidarbha against Singh, DCP Parag Manare and 26 other policemen. The city Kotwali police in Akola registered the FIR against the police personnel under various sections ranging from criminal conspiracy, destruction of evidence and sections of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities Act), 1989.

The FIR has been registered on the complaint of police inspector Bhimrao Ghadge in which he has made a series of allegations of corruption against Singh and other officers.

These allegations have been made for a period when the former Mumbai CP was posted with the Thane police.

Akola police filed a Zero FIR (mode of lodging FIR in any police station irrespective of the offence committed in that area or any other area) at the Kotwali police station and it had been transferred to the Thane city police.

The FIR has been lodged under various sections ranging from criminal conspiracy, destruction of evidence and sections of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities Act).

**CONG MP SATAV ON VENTILATOR SUPPORT**

Pune, April 29: Congress leader Rajeev Satav, who had tested coronavirus positive last week, has been undergoing treatment at a private hospital here and kept on ventilator support, a party leader said on Thursday.

Satav, a Rajya Sabha member, is admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) of the Jehangir Hospital, he said.

Maharashtra Minister of State for Co-operation and Social Justice Vishwajeet Kadam said that Satav was hospitalised on April 23.

"Till April 25, he was responding well to the treatment and was stable. After some complications on April 25, he was admitted to the ICU and was put on ventilator support three days later," Kadam said.

A team of doctors is currently monitoring his health and fortunately, Satav is now responding to the treatment, he added.

According to Kadam, Congress president Sonia Gandhi, party leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi and Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray have enquired about Satav's health.

Dr S S Gill, medical director of Jehangir Hospital, said that Satav is now "hemodynamically stable" (term used to describe stable blood flow). — PTI



Nuns from Missionaries of Charity stand in a queue to cast vote at a polling station in Kolkata during the 8th phase of West Bengal Assembly polls on Thursday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

## Violence mars last phase of WB polls as over 76% vote

Last phase sees attacks on 3 BJP candidates allegedly by Trinamul men

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI & PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI | DC**  
KOLKATA/BERHAMPUR, APRIL 29

West Bengal recorded 76.07% polling at 35 seats spread over four districts in the eighth and final phase of the Assembly Election which saw attacks on three BJP candidates allegedly by the Trinamul Congress workers and street fights between the two rivals with bombs and sticks from Kolkata to the districts on Thursday.

While Birbhum topped among the four districts with 81.87% voting in 11 seats, it was followed by Malda with 80.06% polling at six seats and Murshidabad with 78.07% at 11 seats. Kolkata North, where seven hot seats went to the polls, again

recorded the lowest polling of the phase at 57.53%. An updated poll percentage is expected from the Election Commission on Friday.

Out of the 294 assembly seats, now only two Shamshergunj and Jangipur in Murshidabad are left to go to the polls on May 16.

Among the three BJP candidates, cars of Anirban Ganguly who fought from Bolpur and Tarakeswar Saha who contested from Nanoor were vandalised during their visits from Kolkata to the districts on Thursday.

Mr Mohanty, who is the CRPF Inspector General (Odisha Sector), said, "This is my first visit here. I felt good. I heard a lot about this place. It is my good luck to visit here. Since I am on election duty and tasked with supervision, I felt an urge to visit here. There is no problem in my visit as it is close to a booth. The conduct of the election has been good. We are assisting the state police as much as possible."

Both escaped unhurt. The district also wit-

nessed violent clashes between the TMC and BJP workers in spells, recovery of bombs at Khoirasol and Labhpur a senior Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officer, Sangram Keshari Mohanty, deputed on poll-duty there, visited famous Tarapith Temple in camouflage uniform with troops and offered puja to Goddess Kali.

Rattled by the controversy, the EC has sought a report with his explanation.

Meanwhile, BJP candidate Kalyan Choubey of Manikitala in Kolkata North claimed that TMC workers manhandled him and hit his car with sticks. In the morning two bombs exploded on the footpath in front of Mahajati Sadan on CR Avenue in Jorasanko.

No one was injured however. In Cossipore

Irked by his role, state BJP president Dilip Ghosh tweeted a video of his visit and puja and wrote, "During the peak polling time in Birbhum, the IG of the Central Forces (CRPF) is surprisingly seen offering puja at Tarapith. Is he aware of his own responsibility - and duty? If it is a cause of grave concern for common people."

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Belghachia, TMC Rajya Sabha MP Santanu Sen, who recently tested Covid-19 positive, was seen casting vote at a booth wearing a PPE.

In Murshidabad, a CPI(M) worker Kader Mondal (50) died and three others were injured after Domkal TMC candidate Jafikul Islam's long convoy allegedly hit them at Shahbazpur village hours before the poll began.

District CPI(M) leader Jamir Mollah alleged, "The villagers protested his visit and tried to block his convoy which led by Mr Islam, dashed them while speeding away at around 12.30 am on Thursday."

Mondal's family lodged a complaint at Domkal police station.

Mr Islam however called it a road accident by someone else's car.

### Mass Cremation



Relatives and family members perform last rites during mass cremation of Covid-19 victims at Swar Rekha Ghat cremation ground in Ranchi on Thursday. — PTI

**FIGHTING | COVID**

Villagers of Balaghat distt opened the 30-bed hospital in a girls college hosp

## Villagers set up Covid Care Centre

**RABINDRA NATH CHOURHURY | DC**  
BHOJPAL, APRIL 29

People in a Madhya Pradesh village have set up a Covid Care Centre through crowdfunding to ensure locals infected by the virus have access to medical facilities.

Police personnel reached there with an ambulance and material required for conducting the last rites and took the body to Ramghat where the cremation was performed. — PTI

ing from one hospital to another in the district to admit a woman Covid-19 patient. However, she could not be admitted to any Covid hospital in the district due to lack of bed. She was later admitted to a hospital in Indore", a village elder told this newspaper on Thursday.

Later, the villagers decided to open a Covid Care Centre in the area and approached the local administration to make provision of medical staff for the Centre.

"We have approached the local administration to hand us over the govern-

ment girls college hostel in the area to open the Centre. We have raised funds to create basic infrastructure in the Centre with provision of beds, oxygen concentrator machines, PPE kits for the patients as well as the doctors visiting the Centre. The Centre was opened on April 21", Lalborra gram panchayat sarpanch Aneesh Khan told this newspaper.

Several local social organisations, religious bodies and individuals including the local BJP MLA and former minister Gouri Shankar Bisen have

made contributions for setting up the Centre, he added. "Doctors and nurses from the nearby community health centre (CHC) of the state government visit the Covid care Centre twice daily to treat the patients.

As many as 27 Covid-19 patients were currently undergoing treatment in the Centre", said Dr Arun Lange, a key patron of the Centre.

"The Centre has a good recovery rate. At least three corona patients have been recovering every day. Doctors refer the critical patients to the district hos-

pital in Balaghat", Dr Lange, a private medical practitioner, said.

The Centre has 30 oxygen concentrator machines and at least half-a-dozen more are being procured, Mr Khan said.

"A Covid Care Centre has been opened in Lalborra at the initiative of the locals", Balaghat district chief medical health officer Manoj Pandey told this newspaper.

Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh has seen a slight drop in active cases in the last two days. The state had a total 97,276 active cases on April 26. The

active cases have dropped to 92,077 on April 28.

"This was the first time during the second wave of pandemic, MP saw a declining trend in active cases due to growth of recovery cases", state home minister Narottam Mishra said on Thursday.

The state has also recorded a slight dip in fresh cases on April 27 over the previous day.

The state reported 13,417 fresh cases on April 27 as against 13,417 fresh cases on April 26.

The fresh cases have almost remained stagnant at 12,762 on April 28.

## Assam cops gun down top Ulfa-I commander

**MANOJ ANAND | DC**  
GUWAHATI, APRIL 29

In a major breakthrough on the insurgency front, Assam Police on Thursday shot dead a commander of the banned United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (Ulfa-I) in an encounter in Western Assam's Bongaigaon district. Another Ulfa-I cadre was captured alive with a weapon. Another weapon and a grenade recovered in the PO (police operation). Further search is on."

About the incident Mr Mahanta further said, "We had intel that Ulfa western command was planning some high-profile kidnapping in collaboration with other anti-India forces, which now appears to be foiled. Today's successful operation is due to high quality police intelligence input that worked out precisely for on-ground action."

Security sources however claimed that encounter had no connection with the recent incident of kidnapping of three ONGC employees in Upper Assam. Informing that Assam police was chasing Dwipen Saud who was engaged in various extortion related activities and planning some major offensive to make his presence felt, security sources said that it was a major success for the police force on the insurgency front.

## Kerala sees over 30,000 cases for third day in row

**GILVESTER ASSARY | DC**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 29

Kerala on Thursday reported 38,607 new cases of Covid-19 taking the number of active cases to 2,84,086 even as Chief Minister Mr Pinarayi Vijayan announced that strict restrictions would be put in place in the state from next week.

The state also reported 48 deaths taking the death toll to 5,259. During the last 24 hours, 1.57 lakh samples were tested and the test positivity rate was 24.5 percent. As many as 21,110 persons recovered from the infection. The state reported 30,000 plus cases for the third consecutive day on Thursday indicating that the situation is aggravating very fast. Ernakulam district reported the highest number of cases – 5,369 followed by Kozhikode 4,990 and Thrissur 3,954.

As of now 5.93 lakh persons are under surveillance in the state including 5.69 lakh persons under home/institutional quarantine. The government has decided to enforce strict restrictions between May 4 and 9. The chief minister said the details of the restrictions would be announced later. The government has stopped all indoor and outdoor shooting of films, TV serials and documentaries. Vendors in markets including fish and meat markets have

been directed to keep a distance of four meters from each other and wear double masks. The chief minister appealed to the people to maintain maximum restraint on the counting day on May 2. Members, supporters of political parties, general public should strictly remain indoors on the counting day.

Only officials and party workers entrusted with responsibilities would be allowed to enter the counting centres.

Meanwhile, Kerala Government Medical Officers Association (KGMOA) the largest body of doctors in the state, has urged the government to impose two weeks total lockdown in the state. The KGMOA said test positivity rate in 7 of the 14 districts had crossed 24 percent and a total lockdown was inevitable to check the spread.

Almost 80 percent beds in government hospitals in Ernakulam, Kollam and Idukki districts are occupied and situation is almost similar in many other districts. There is severe pressure on private hospitals. Lockdown is necessary to prevent the situation from going out of hand.

However, the government on Thursday decided to enforce strict curbs in the state next week. The chief minister lockdown would be used as a last option.

The state reported 13,417 fresh cases on April 27 as against 13,417 fresh cases on April 26.

The fresh cases have almost remained stagnant at 12,762 on April 28.

## SHORT TAKES

## GERMAN WOMAN IN CUSTODY OVER KILLINGS

Potsdam, Germany: An employee at a clinic for disabled people outside Berlin was arrested Thursday on suspicion of killing four people at the centre and wounding a fifth, police said, with the motive still unclear.

The slain victims, two women and two men, were stabbed with a knife late Wednesday at the facility in the city of Potsdam, the daily Bild reported.

Those killed are believed to be patients at the care clinic, local newspaper *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten* reported. Police said earlier the dead were subjected to "intense, extreme violence", but did not give any details around the circumstances of the killings.

## CYPRUS TALKS FOR SETTLEMENT AT UN COLLAPSE

Geneva: Talks with rival Cypriot leaders failed to find common ground that could pave the way towards resolving the decades-old division of Cyprus, the UN chief concluded Thursday (April 29).

The United Nations is trying to mediate a deal for the eastern Mediterranean island, nearly six decades since it first deployed peacekeepers.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres travelled from New York to Geneva to oversee the three days of informal talks in various formats, but said they had not managed to overcome the differences between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot positions.

"The truth is that in the end of our efforts, we have not yet found enough common ground to allow for the resumption of formal negotiations in relation to the settlement of the Cyprus problem," Guterres told a press conference.

"But I do not give up," he said.

## AMAZON TO RAISE PAY FOR OVER 5 LAKH WORKERS

New York: Amazon said Wednesday that it plans to give more than 5,00,000 of its workers a raise as it seeks to attract new workers.

The online shopping giant, which already pays new hires at least \$15 an hour, said it will start increasing pay between 50 cents an hour to \$3 an hour starting next month.

Those getting raises include warehouse workers, who pack and ship orders, as well as those who work in Amazon's package sorting centers and other facilities.

Amazon said the pay raise is part of its push to hire more workers. The company has needed more people to get orders to shoppers during the pandemic as Americans increasingly shop online.

It hired 5,00,000 people in 2020 alone, bringing its total workforce to nearly 1.3 million people worldwide.

The pay announcement also comes after a failed union push at a Alabama warehouse, which put a national spotlight on working conditions at Amazon.

## POPULATION GREW IN 2020 SAYS CHINA

Beijing: China's population grew last year; the government said on Thursday, following a report that a census might have found a surprise decline, possibly adding to downward pressure on economic growth.

The National Bureau of Statistics gave no details in its one-sentence statement and said the population figure would be reported later. But the unusual decision to respond to the report by The Financial Times reflected the issue's political sensitivity.

The Financial Times said people familiar with China's 2020 census expect it to show the population, which edged above 1.4 billion in 2019, declined for the first time since famine in 1959-61 killed millions of people.

The ruling Communist Party has enforced birth limits to restrain population growth since 1980, but an outright fall would reduce the flow of workers into the economy when it is trying to shore up growth and reduce poverty.

"According to our understanding, in 2020, China's population continued to grow," the NBS said on its website.

China's population has long been expected to peak and decline in line with trends.



US vice-president Kamala Harris (left) applauds as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (right) and US President Joe Biden (Centre) bump elbows after he addressed a joint session of Congress in the House chamber of the US Capitol in Washington. — AFP

## Prez Biden calls white supremacy 'terrorism'

Says global terror networks have largely moved beyond US

### US on the move again, says Biden

Washington, April 29: In his first joint address to the US Congress, President Joe Biden identified white supremacy as a domestic terror threat that America must remain vigilant against.

While discussing his decision to withdraw American troops from war-torn Afghanistan, Biden noted global terror networks have largely moved beyond the country and that white supremacists posed a bigger threat than foreign actors.

"We won't ignore what our intelligence agencies have determined to be the most lethal terrorist threat to our homeland today: White supremacy is terrorism," Biden said in the House chamber, which just three months ago was attacked by the supporters of former president Donald Trump.

Biden said working-class Americans had been ignored, while the top one percent got richer, and that his plan would give them a chance.

"You feel left behind and forgotten in an economy that's rapidly changing. Let me speak directly to you," Biden said, before going on to promise Americans "good-paying jobs that can't be outsourced."

Biden, who was celebrating the eve of his 100th day in office, called the vaccine rollout one of "the greatest logistical achievements" in US history.

But Biden quickly pivoted to insisting that this

national effort must now focus on rebuilding the economy and fighting inequality with "the largest jobs plan since World War II."

In a line that could have come from his populist Republican predecessor Donald Trump, Biden said working-class Americans had been ignored, while the top one percent got richer, and that his plan would give them a chance.

"You feel left behind and forgotten in an economy that's rapidly changing. Let me speak directly to you," Biden said, before going on to promise Americans "good-paying jobs that can't be outsourced."

In every aspect of the prime-time television speech, Biden echoed his mantra that "America is back" — both in recovering from the Coronavirus disaster and in putting the turbulence of the Trump era behind. — PTI

In his 65-minute address, Biden spent the majority of his time to discuss his economic and infrastructure plans for the nation, his foreign policy vision for America's role in the world and the Coronavirus pandemic. — PTI

## Harris, Pelosi make history at first address to Congress

Washington, April 29: Vice President Kamala Harris and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi made history as they shared the stage during President Joe Biden's first joint session to Congress, marking the first time that two women sat behind a US president during an address to Congress.

But he underscored that "the struggle is far from over" and that "the question of whether our democracy will long endure is both ancient and urgent."

Harris, 56, who is also the first Indian-American and also the first woman of colour to become America's Vice President, sat behind on

the president's right side as he delivered his first speech to a joint session of Congress on Wednesday night.

Pelosi, 81, who became the first woman in her role in 2007, sat behind on the President's left.

Harris entered the House chamber on Wednesday night to a round of applause for Biden's address to Congress.

When asked about the significance of two women sitting behind the President for the address,

Harris replied, "Normal," to reporters in the Capitol as she led the Senate delegation to the House chamber.

Asked her view on the historic moment, Pelosi said, "It's about time."

"It's pretty exciting. And it's wonderful to make history. It's about time," Pelosi said hours before the speech. Pelosi already knows what it feels like to sit on the rostrum in the House chamber and introduce a president for speeches. — PTI

### Concessions beyond nuclear-specific sanctions may be halted

## US may rollback Iran sanctions

Washington, April 29:

The Biden administration is considering a near wholesale rollback of some of the most stringent Trump-era sanctions imposed on Iran in a bid to get the Islamic Republic to return to compliance with a landmark 2015 nuclear accord, according to current and former US officials and others familiar with the matter.

As indirect talks continue this week in Vienna to explore the possibility of reviving the nuclear deal, American officials have become increasingly expansive about what they might be prepared to offer Iran, which has been driving a hard line on sanctions relief, demanding that all US penalties be

removed, according to these people.

American officials have refused to discuss which sanctions are being considered for removal. But they have said they are open to lifting any sanctions that are inconsistent with the nuclear deal or that deny Iran the relief it would be entitled to should it return to compliance with the accord.

Because of the complex nature of the sanctions architecture, that could include non-nuclear sanctions, such as those tied to terrorism, missile development and human rights.

Biden administration officials say this is necessary because of what they describe as a deliberate attempt by the Trump

administration to stymie any return to the deal. Under the 2015 agreement, the United States was required to lift sanctions tied to Iran's nuclear program, but not non-nuclear sanctions.

Administration officials deny they will remove all non-nuclear sanctions, but have declined to identify those which they believe Trump improperly imposed on terrorism and other grounds.

"Any return to the JCPOA would require sanctions relief, but we are considering removing only those sanctions that are inconsistent with the JCPOA," said State Department spokesman Ned Price. "Even if we rejoin the JCPOA — which

remains a hypothetical — we would retain and continue to implement sanctions on Iran for activities not covered by the JCPOA, including Iran's missile proliferation, support for terrorism, and human rights abuses."

When President Donald Trump re-imposed sanctions after withdrawing from the deal in 2018, he not only put the nuclear sanctions back in but also added layers of terrorism and other grounds.

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## US advises its citizens to leave India as cases spike EU inches closer to Covid certificate

Washington, April 29:

The US has advised its citizens not to travel to India or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so and authorised the voluntary departure of family members of its employees in the Indian missions, saying the access to all types of medical care is becoming severely limited in the country amid a massive surge in Covid-19 cases.

The US has put India on Level 4 Travel Advisory, the highest level issued by the Department of State.

The current Level 4 Travel Advisory asks US citizens not to travel to India or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so due to the current health situation in the country.

The Department of State also authorised the voluntary departure of family members of US government employees in Mission India.

US Embassy New Delhi and Consulates General Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai will remain open and continue to provide emergency consular services.

"#India: Access to medical care is severely limited due to Covid-19 cases. US citizens wishing to depart should use available commercial options now. Daily direct flights to the US and flights via Paris and Frankfurt are available," the State Department tweeted.

In a health alert, the US Embassy in New Delhi said: "Access to all types of medical care is becoming severely limited in India due to the surge in Covid-19 cases."

"We urge US citizens to enrol in STEP (Smart Traveler Enrollment Programme) at step.state.gov in order to receive critical information from the Embassy related to health and safety in India," it said.

It asked American citizens to visit the Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare website for the latest information on travel restrictions. "New cases and deaths

from Covid-19 have risen sharply throughout India to record levels. Covid-19 testing infrastructure is reportedly constrained in many locations," the mission said in a statement.

A record single-day rise of 3,79,257 Covid-19 infections, 3,645 fatalities on Thursday pushed India's tally of cases to 1,83,76,524, death toll to 2,04,832.

"Hospitals are reporting shortages of supplies, oxygen, and beds for both Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 related patients. US citizens are reporting being denied admittance to hospitals in some cities due to a lack of space. Some states have enacted curfews and other restrictions that limit movement and the operation of non-essential businesses," it said. — PTI

## W.H.O.: POOR NATIONS GAVE 0.3% OF SHOTS

Lisbon, April 29: The head of the World Health Organisation says more than 1 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines have been administered globally but 82 per cent of them were given in high- and upper-middle-income countries.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus says just 0.3 per cent of all vaccines administered so far were given to people in low-income countries.

"That's the reality," Tedros told an online health conference hosted by Portugal on Thursday. — AP

## INDIA TELLS UN IT WAS DIFFICULT BUT DID VAX JOB

Paris, April 29: US pharmaceutical firm Moderna said on Thursday it expects to increase global production of its cutting-edge Covid vaccine to up to three billion doses in 2022.

The company said in a statement that it would make new funding commitments to increase supply at its manufacturing facilities in Europe and the United States.

lions.

The announcement comes as the spread of virus variants in countries like India have raised concerns about the world's ability to overcome the Coronavirus pandemic.

"As we follow the rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern, we believe that there will continue to be significant need for our mRNA Covid-19 vaccine and our variant booster candidates into 2022 and 2023," chief executive Stephane Bancel said in the statement.

The messenger mRNA vaccines hack into human cells and effectively turns them into vaccine-making factories.

— PTI

## Air pollutants in India sees a rise

Birmingham, April 29:

India, despite severe constraints and within its own limited resources, has tried to "walk the talk" on vaccine equity and shared Covid-19 vaccines with more than 80 countries, the country told the United Nations.

The UN Department of Global Communications (DGC), which spreads awareness around the world about the work the UN does, has actively encouraged further sharing of vaccine doses from all countries, Counsellor in India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations A. Amarnath said in the General Assembly's 43rd Session of Committee on Information.

India urged the Department to also "suitably highlight the efforts of Member States, international organisations, and vaccine producers, who have already done so, especially with those who need it most."

The study was led by the University of Birmingham and UCL and included an international team of contributors from Belgium, India, and Jamaica and the UK. The researchers published their findings in the journal Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics, noting that fine particles (PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2), both hazardous to health, are increasing in Kanpur and Delhi.

This contrasts with trends in the UK cities London and Birmingham, which show modest but ongoing declines in PM2.5 and NOx, reflecting the success of policies targeting sources that emit these pollutants.

— PTI

## SHORT TAKES

**AFGHAN LAST JEW EYES EXIT AHEAD OF TALIB RETURN**

**Kabul:** For decades, Zebulon Simenov refused to leave Afghanistan — surviving a Soviet invasion, deadly civil war, brutal rule by the Taliban and the US-led occupation of his homeland.

But enough is enough for Afghanistan's last Jew, and the prospect of the Taliban's return has him preparing to say goodbye.

"Why should I stay? They call me an infidel," Simenov said at Kabul's only synagogue, housed in an old building in the centre of the Afghan capital.

"I'm the last, the only Jew in Afghanistan... It could get worse for me here. I have decided to leave for Israel if the Taliban returns."

That appears likely given the deal struck by Washington to withdraw all US forces by later this year, and ongoing peace talks between the insurgents and the Afghan government.

**HAMAS GROUP REJECTS IDEA OF POSTPONING POLLS**

**Jerusalem, April 29:** The Islamic militant group Hamas has rejected the idea of postponing Palestinian elections ahead of a leadership meeting on Thursday in which President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party is expected to push for a delay, citing a dispute with Israel over voting in east Jerusalem.

Hamas is expected to perform well in the May 22 parliamentary elections because of widening divisions within Fatah. Seizing on the sensitive issue of voting in east Jerusalem could offer a pretext for Mr. Abbas to call off the first Palestinians elections in 15 years.

**EUROPE BACKS US GLOBAL MINIMUM TAX PROPOSAL**

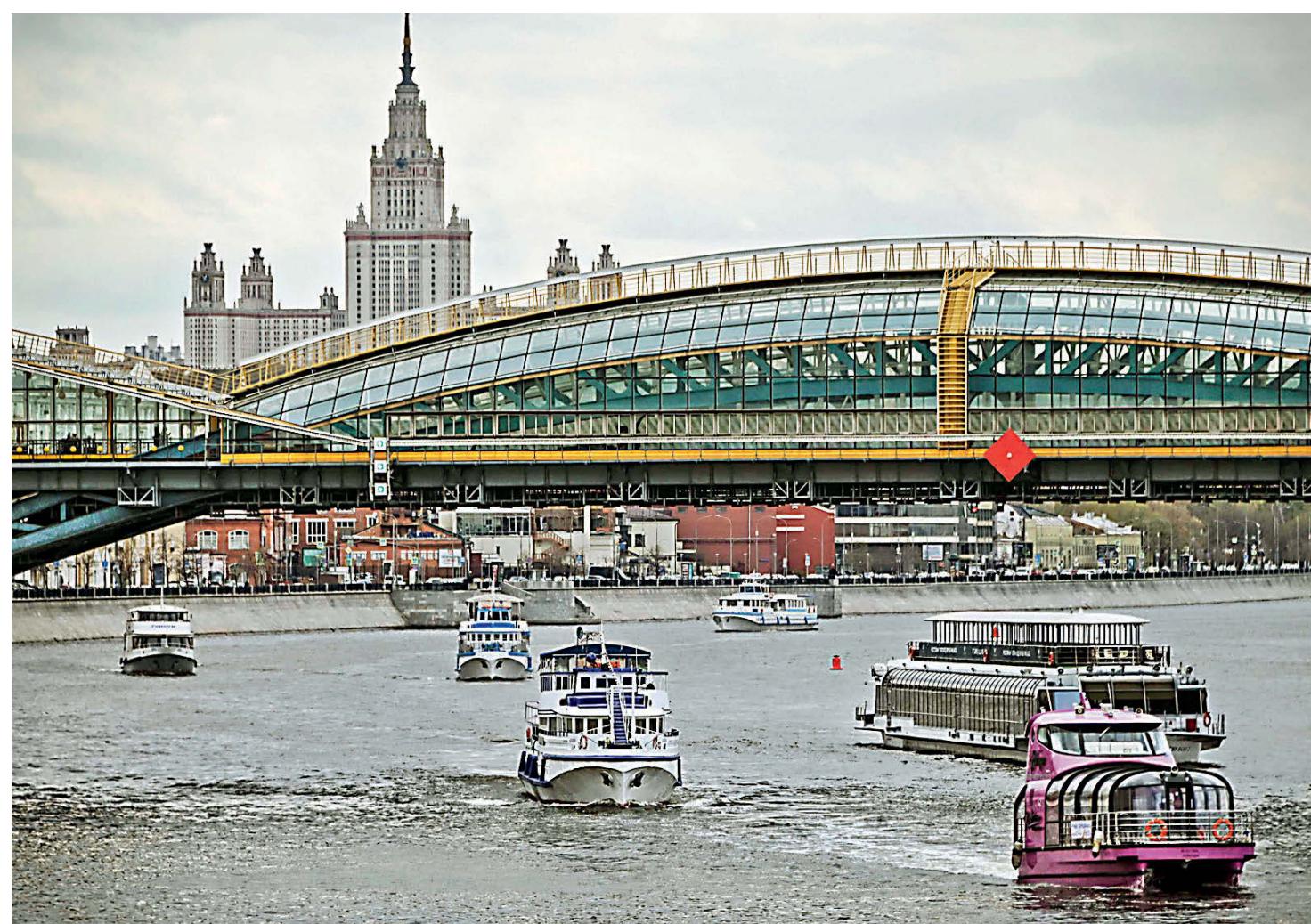
**Paris:** The European Parliament on Thursday welcomed a US proposal to introduce a 21 percent global minimum tax on corporations but said Europe should "go it alone" if the effort fails.

"Outdated international tax rules need to be overhauled, including a minimum effective corporate tax rate," a statement said after the non-binding resolution was passed with a big majority.

The US proposal is intended to stop what Washington calls a "race to the bottom" among countries to see who can offer the lowest rate and would unwind a historic rate cut in the US under former president Donald Trump.

Crucially, it would not only affect US tech giants such as Google and Facebook, but also non-digital big businesses such as LVMH or Volkswagen, which are European.

In Europe the idea is backed by France companies.

**Navigation season**

Leisure boats take part in a parade on the Moskva river, with the building of the Moscow State University in the background, celebrating the beginning of the navigation season in Moscow on Thursday. — AFP

**US warns against HK 'exit ban'****New immigration law in HK includes powers to stop people leaving the city**

**Hong Kong, April 29:** The United States said on Thursday it was "deeply concerned" by a new Hong Kong immigration law which includes powers to stop people leaving the city, raising fears Chinese mainland-style exit bans could be deployed there.

The law was passed on Wednesday by a city legislature now devoid of opposition, as Beijing seeks to quash dissent and make the semi-autonomous city more like the authoritarian mainland following huge and often violent democracy protests.

"We have long standing concerns about the PRC's arbitrary use of exit bans without due process of law, including against American citizens. We are

It grants the immigration chief powers to bar people from boarding planes to and from the city. "We are aware of this legislation and share widespread concerns in Hong Kong about its content, potential uses, and lack of oversight or accountability," a State Department spokesperson said in a statement on Thursday.

"We have long standing concerns about the PRC's arbitrary use of exit bans without due process of law, including against American citizens. We are

deeply concerned by the prospect of Hong Kong authorities adopting similar arbitrary measures," the spokesperson added.

Hong Kong's government says the law will not be applied to people leaving the city and is aimed at stopping illegal immigrants travelling to the business hub.

But the wording of the bill does not limit the power to arriving flights or immigrants and legal experts say it could also be deployed against anyone leaving Hong Kong.

In a potential recogni-

tion of those concerns, Hong Kong's government late Wednesday said it would draft subsidiary legislation specifying that the law would only be applied to inbound flights.

The US statement urged the Hong Kong government to honour this "public commitment" to not use the law "as a pretext to deny boarding for outbound passengers".

Britain's Foreign Office also issued a brief statement.

"The right of people to leave Hong Kong is guaranteed under the Basic

Law and should be upheld," a spokesperson said, referring to the city's post-handover mini-constitution.

So-called "exit bans" are often used by mainland China against activists who challenge authorities. They have also ensnared business figures involved in commercial disputes.

Local activists and lawyers from Hong Kong's influential Bar Association warn the bill gives "apparently unfettered power" to the immigration director to do the same, should they wish to. — AFP

**California Fire was to cover up a murder: Police**

**San Francisco, April 29:** A California fire that killed two people last year was intentionally set to cover up a murder, investigators revealed in a press briefing.

The Markley Fire was started in Northern California's Solano County on August 18, 2020 near where police found

the burned body of 32-year-old missing person Priscilla Castro.

Authorities had previously said Castro was reported missing after she went on a date with Victor Serriteno two days before the fire. She was not seen again.

"Based on an extensive, eight-month investigation, we believe Serriteno deliberately set the Markley Fire in an attempt to conceal his crime," Tom Ferrara, the Solano County Sheriff, said in a briefing on Wednesday.

Serriteno, who was arrested in September and accused of killing Castro, now faces additional charges of arson and the murders of both men. — AFP

**Germany must set climate goals before 2030 says court**

**Berlin, April 29:** Germany's top court ruled on Thursday the government has to set clear goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions after 2030, arguing that current legislation risks placing too much of a burden for climate change on younger generations.

The verdict was celebrated by climate activists from Germany and elsewhere who — with the support of large environmental groups — had filed four complaints to the Constitutional Court arguing that their rights were at risk by the lack of sufficient targets beyond the next decade.

Like other European Union countries, Germany aims to cut emissions 55% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels. Legislation passed two years ago set specific targets for sectors such as

heating and transport for that period, but not for the long-term goal of cutting emissions to 'net zero' by 2050.

The 2019 regulations "irreversibly pushed a very high burden of emissions reduction into the period after 2030," judges said in their ruling.

The court backed the argument that the Paris climate accord's goal of keeping global warming well below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit), ideally no more than 1.5 C (2.7 F), by the end of the century compared with pre-industrial times should be a benchmark for policymakers.

It ordered the government to come up with new targets from 2030 onward by the end of next year.

Lawyer Felix Ekdert, who brought one of the cases, called the verdict "groundbreaking" for

Germany. "Germany's climate policy will need to be massively adjusted," he said.

Fellow lawyer Roda Verheyen said that the decision would likely mean Germany's plans to phase out the use of coal by 2038 will need to be brought forward, in order to realistically achieve the country's long-term emissions target.

"A simple calculator shows that this will be necessary," she said.

Germany has managed to cut its annual emissions from the equivalent of 1.25 billion tons of carbon dioxide in 1990 to about 740 million tons last year — a reduction of more than 40%.

The current target would require cuts of 178 million tons by 2030, but a reduction of 281 million tons in each of the following decades. — AP



SPACE MISSION

**Beijing to send at least 10 more missions to build and supply the space station**

**Main part of China space station blasts off**

**Beijing, April 29:** China on Thursday launched the main module of its first permanent space station that will host astronauts long term, the latest success for a programme that has realised a number of its growing ambitions in recent years.

The Tianhe, or "Heavenly Harmony" module blasted into space atop a Long March 5B rocket from the Wenchang Launch Center on the southern island province of Hainan, marking another major advance for the country's space exploration.

The launch begins the first of 11 missions necessary to complete, supply and crew the station by the end of next year. China's space programme has also recently brought back the first new lunar samples in more than 40 years and expects to land a

probe and rover on the surface of Mars later next month. Minutes after the launch, the fairing opened to expose the Tianhe atop the core stage of the rocket, with the characters for "China Manned Space" emblazoned on its exterior. Soon after, it separated from the rocket, which will orbit for about a week before falling to Earth, and minutes after that, opened its solar arrays to provide a steady energy source.

The space programme is a source of huge national pride, and Premier Li Keqiang and other top civilian and military leaders

watched the launch live from the control center in Beijing. A message of congratulations from state leader and head of the ruling Communist Party Xi Jinping was also read to staff at the Wenchang Launch Center.

The launch furthers the "three-step" strategy of building up China's manned space programme and marks "an important leading project for constructing a powerful country in science and technology and aerospace," Xi's message said.

The core module is the section of the station where astronauts will live for up to six months at a time. Another 10 launches will send up two more modules where crews will conduct experiments, four cargo supply shipments and four missions with crews. — AFP



People watch a Long March 5B rocket, carrying China's Tianhe space station core module, as it lifts off from the Wenchang Space Launch Center in southern China's Hainan province on Thursday. — AFP

**US increasing army activity, alleges China**

**Beijing, April 29:** Activity by US military ships and surveillance planes directed at China has increased significantly under President Joe Biden's administration, a spokesperson for the Chinese Defense Ministry said on Thursday.

As an example, Wu Qian said the Navy destroyer USS Mustin recently conducted close-in observation of the Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning and its battle group.

That had "seriously interfered with the Chinese side's training activities and seriously threatened the safety of navigation and personnel on the both sides," Wu said. The ship was warned to leave and a formal protest was filed with the U.S., he said.

Activity by U.S. military ships was up 20% and by planes 40% in Chinese-claimed areas since Biden took office in January over the same period last year, Wu said.

The U.S. frequently dispatches ships and planes to operate in seas and airspace near China, promoting regional militarization and threatening regional peace and stability," Wu said at a monthly briefing held virtually.

China routinely objects to the US military presence in the South China Sea, which it claims almost in its entirety, as well as the passage of Navy ships through the Taiwan Strait.

The country recently marked the 20th anniversary of the collision

wouldn't help either.

"Unfortunately, it is impossible to work in these conditions. We're officially dismantling the network of Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption outlawed as extremist groups."

Also on Thursday, Navalny made his first public appearance in weeks, facing a court via video link from behind bars. The politician looked gaunt after a three-week hunger strike, but still was able to slam the Kremlin in an emotional speech.

His embattled team has faced a major challenge this month. The Moscow prosecutor's office petitioned a court to declare both the regional offices and Navalny's anti-corruption organisation as extremist groups, a label that would outlaw their activities, expose members and supporters to lengthy prison terms.

Leonid Volkov, who as Navalny's top strategist runs the regional offices, said on Thursday that preserving the network of "headquarters" in its current state "is impossible" because of the extremism charges but rebranding them

**Navalny's offices shut amid protest**

**Moscow, April 29:** A top ally of imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said on Thursday that the network of the politician's offices in Russia is being closed as authorities seek to have it and Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption outlawed as extremist groups.

Volkov's statement comes amid a sweeping crackdown on Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's fiercest critic, and his organisations. The politician is currently in prison, and dozens of his aides and associates have been under arrest, targeted for raids by law enforcement, or facing criminal charges.

While imprisoned, Navalny said he developed severe back pain and numbness in his limbs, and he spent more than three weeks on a hunger strike to protest authorities refusing to allow his doctor see him. Instead, they moved him to another prison with a hospital ward.

On Thursday, Navalny appeared in court via a video link from prison for an appeal of his conviction and fine for defaming a World War II veteran. The politician was convicted in February and ordered to pay a fine of 850 thousand rubles (the equivalent of \$11,500). — AP

**RELEASING TODAY**

**SAPTHAGIRI 70MM**  
11.00, 2.00, 5.30PM

**ANJALI 70MM-11.00, 2.00, 5.30PM**

**RK-2.00, 4.50PM||ICON-11.00, 5.10PM**

**PRESTON-1.20, 4.10PM**

**MUSARAMBAGH-2.00, 4.50PM**

**IRRUMMANZIL-11.00, 5.10PM**

**INORBIT-11.15, 5.10PM**

**GALLERIA-11.50, 5.00PM**

**FORUM-11.40, 2.30, 4.40PM**

**INOX**  
LIVE THE MOVIE  
**GVK-11.00, 4.30PM**  
**MP-11.00, 5.00PM||GSM-2.15, 5.00PM**

**BIG Cinemas**  
you matter  
**11.00, 1.40**  
**4.20PM**

**NOMA TALKIES**  
**1.20, 4.10PM**

**PLATINUM**  
WHERE CINEMA MEETS LUXURY  
**GACHIBOWLI**  
**1.00, 4.55PM**

**CONTACT:**  
**9030 16 1717**

+

+

## quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	49,765.94
Nifty 50	14,894.90
S&P 500*	4,189.98
Dollar (₹)	74.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.21
Euro (₹)	89.72
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,472,461
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.02
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.059
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.675
As of 8:30 PM IST	0.055

## US economy accelerated at 6.4% rate in Q1

Powered by consumers, the US economy grew at a brisk 6.4 per cent annual rate last quarter a show of strength fuelled by government aid and declining viral cases that could drive further gains, as the nation rebounds with unusual speed from the pandemic recession. The Commerce Department estimated that the nation's GDP accelerated in January-March from a 4.3 per cent annual gain in the final quarter of 2020.

## IFC to invest \$40 million in Upgrad



Online up-skilling platform Upgrad has concluded a funding round of \$40 million (about Rs 290 crore) from the World Bank arm IFC, bringing down the promoters' holding in the firm to 75 per cent. It had recently secured a \$120 million funding from Temasek Holdings. The equity infusion of \$160 million in two quick rounds takes the startup closer to unicorn status, valuing the six-year-old company at \$850 million.

## Axis board okays another term for Chaudhry



Private sector lender Axis Bank said its board has approved the re-appointment of Amitabh Chaudhry as its managing director and CEO for another three years with effect from January 1, 2022. Prior to joining Axis Bank in January 2019, Chaudhry was MD & CEO of HDFC Standard Life Insurance Company.

## BoM net profit rises to ₹165 cr; bad loans down

Bank of Maharashtra reported a more than two-fold rise in its standalone net profit at Rs 165.08 crore in the March 2021 quarter, from Rs 57.57 crore in the year-ago period, mainly due to a decline in gross NPAs. Total income increased to Rs 4,332.99 crore from Rs 3,198.30 crore. The bank's asset quality improved significantly as the gross NPAs dipped to 7.23 per cent of gross advances from 12.81 per cent a year ago.

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## ■ Q4, FY21 results can be reported till June 30 Companies get more time to file earnings

New Delhi, April 29: The Sebi on Thursday gave 45 days more for companies to file their fourth-quarter results and an additional one-month time to submit their annual results, as the regulator eased compliance requirements amidst the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The move comes after the regulator received representations from listed entities, industry associations and market participants requesting extension of timelines for various filings and relaxation from certain compliance obligations due to the virus situation and restrictions imposed by various state governments.

With respect to quarterly financial results, companies have been given 45 days till June 30, 2021 to file their March quarter results, the Sebi said in a circular.

Under the rules, companies are required to file their financial results within 45 days from the end of a quarter. As per that time frame, the deadline was May 15.

In the case of submitting results for the year ending March 31, the watchdog has extended the time till June 30 from the due date of May 30.

Normally, listed companies are required to file their annual results within 60 days from the end of a financial year.

In addition, a relaxation of one month till June 30 has been given for filing yearly secretarial compliance report.



Along with financial results, the Sebi has given a 45-day relaxation for companies to file their fourth-quarter statement of deviation or variation in use of funds report as well as an additional one-month time to submit their annual report in this regard.

In a separate circular, the regulator has eased compliance requirement for entities that have listed their debt securities or bonds.

Sebi said it has decided to grant relaxation to listed entities that have listed their non-convertible debentures (NCDs), non-convertible redeemable preference shares (NCRPS) and commercial papers (CPs) as well as municipal debt securities, from some compliance requirements.

The regulator has extended the deadline by 45 days till June 30 for submitting half-yearly financial results for NCDs, NCRPS and CPs while it has given another 30 days till June 30, for filing annual earnings.

Also, it has extended timeline by 30 days for filing annual results for entities that have listed their bonds under the Sebi Municipal Bonds norms.

Listed entities have been permitted to use digital signature certifications for authentication of filings/submissions made to the stock exchanges under the Sebi (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations for all filings until December 31, 2021.

The Sebi also extended timelines for compliance with certain regulatory requirements by trading members, clearing members and depository participants.

The deadline for maintaining call recordings of orders or instructions received from clients has been extended till June 30, 2021.

The regulator has given time till June-end to brokers for operating the trading terminals from designated alternate locations.

The Sebi has extended time till July 31 for submission of internal audit report and net worth certificate for the second half.

—PTI

## 'Fight' for chips may drag on till 2023, says Nokia CEO

KATI POHJANPALO  
APRIL 29

The global shortage of semiconductors that's plaguing automakers, data centre-owners and electronics manufacturers has turned into a "fight" that risks dragging on until 2023, according to the chief executive of Nokia Oyj.

"There's a fight going on. The shortage in general in the market could continue a year or even two," Pekka Lundmark said in an interview on Thursday. "This is not going to go away anytime soon."

Companies from Apple Inc. to Samsung Electronics Company and Honda Motor Company have flagged the chip supply shortage. Nokia management is spending growing amounts of time trying to address the problem, though the impact on the company's operations is "not material" for now, said Lundmark.

"You have to be in daily contact with your suppliers, make sure you are important to them," he said later in an interview with Anna Edwards on Bloomberg TV. "It is things like how important you are in the big picture, how strong your relationships are and how you manage expectations."

Chip shortage would complicate Lundmark's efforts to get Nokia back in the 5G game.

—Bloomberg



## Gold demand jumps 37% in March quarter

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, APRIL 29

Driven by consumer sentiments, gold demand jumped 37 per cent in the March quarter. However, demand will be dampened in the current quarter despite Akshaya Tritiya and the wedding season falling within the April-June period.

The demand for gold in January-March 2021 was 140 tonnes, up by 37 per cent compared to the low base of 102 tonnes in the same quarter of last year. Historically gold has seen March quarter demand of 160 and 190 tonnes in some of the years.

Jewellery demand was up by 39 per cent at 102.5 tonnes and investment demand by 34 per cent at 37.5 tonnes. Bar and coin demand saw the strongest first quarter since 2015.

—India's Q1 2021 gold



gold price of Rs 47,131 per gm was 14 per cent higher against the same quarter last year, but was 6 per cent lower than the December quarter. It was 16 per cent lower than the August 2020 peak of Rs 56,000/gm.

According to WGC, net bullion imports in the March quarter was 301 tonnes against 83.1 tonnes in Q1 2020, an increase of 262 per cent. Part of the imports was also meant for the Akshaya Tritiya and wedding season sales in the June quarter.

However, both these gold-buying events are expected to be lacklustre due to the surge in Covid-19 cases and lock-down and restrictions in some of the key markets.

"The outlook for the coming quarter is, however, cautious. As lockdowns are re-imposed in various regions," added Somasundaram.

## HUL reports robust volume growth

New Delhi, April 29: FMCG major Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) on Thursday reported a 13 per cent increase in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,190 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, riding on strong volume growth across categories.

HUL had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 1,938 crore in the year-ago quarter. Consolidated total income stood at Rs 12,542 crore against Rs 12,235 crore a year ago.

During the quarter, HUL

said it witnessed an "underlying" volume growth of 16 per cent.

Home care category saw a growth of 15 per cent driven by a robust recovery in fabric wash, while household care continued its strong performance delivering double-digit growth.

Foods and refreshment segment grew by 36 per cent, the company said, adding, "all our tea brands continue to grow in high double-digits. Ketchups, soups and ice creams also performed well with double-digit growths".

For the fiscal 2020-21, consolidated net profit was at Rs 7,999 crore compared to Rs 6,756 crore in 2019-20, a growth of 18 per cent. Consolidated total income was at Rs 47,438 crore versus Rs 40,415 crore. —PTI

## Samsung wrests back smartphone crown



"Nutrition volumes grew in double digits and we launched Rs 2 sachets in Horlicks and Boost. Our goal remains to drive penetration in this category," HUL said. Beauty and personal care grew by 20 per cent.

From July 1, a minimum of 20 per cent of the take home salary of the key employees of the asset management companies (AMCs) will have to be paid in the form of units of mutual fund schemes in which they have a role/oversight.

This has been done to align the interest of the key employees of the AMCs with the unitholders of the mutual fund schemes, a circular issued by the Securities and Exchange Board of India on Wednesday said.

This has been done to align the interest of the key employees of the AMCs with the unitholders of the mutual fund schemes, a circular issued by the Securities and Exchange Board of India on Wednesday said.

As per the circular, key employees of the AMCs include chief executive officer, chief investment officer, chief risk officer, chief information security officer, chief operation officer, fund managers, compliance officer, sales head, investor relation officers, heads of other departments, dealers of the AMC, fund management team and research team.

The Sebi move was also welcomed by a top private life insurance official, as he said, "Insurance regulators should also make it compulsory for all top executives of any life insurance company to compulsorily buy their traditional products to the extent of 20 per cent of their CTC."

Overall, global shipments surged 27 per cent to 347 million units in the first quarter as the Chinese economy opened up after the pandemic and a swift vaccine rollout in the United States raised hopes of an economic recovery.

South Korea's Samsung shipped 76.5 million smartphones in the quarter to grab a 22 per cent share of the market, Canalys said. The company on Thursday reported a 66 per cent surge in quarterly profit in its mobiles business, thanks to robust sales of its flagship Galaxy S21 smartphone series.

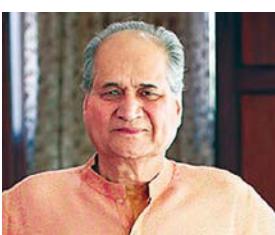
Canalys said Apple shipped 52.4 million iPhones in the January-March period, falling to the second spot with a 15 per cent share of the market.

Apple still grabbed record market share in the US, China, India and Japan, Counterpoint analyst Varun Mishra said, adding that the iPhone Pro Max was a top seller in the US.

Smartphone sales have surged over the past year as people worked from home. —Reuters

## Rahul Bajaj steps down as Bajaj Auto chairman

MICHAEL GONSALVES  
PUNE, APRIL 29



Rahul Bajaj has resigned as chairman of the Pune-headquartered Bajaj Auto, India's second biggest motorcycle maker. He will be replaced by Niraj Bajaj, a non-executive director of the company.

The senior Bajaj will, however, remain associated with the company as chairman emeritus.

Rahul Bajaj will step down as the non-executive director and the chairman of the company with effect from the close of business hours on April 30, 2021, Bajaj Auto said in an exchange filing on Thursday.

"Shri Rahul Bajaj has made a huge contribution to the success of the company and the group over the last five decades, has tendered his resignation considering his age,"

A Bajaj Auto statement said, "Rahul Bajaj, the Non-Executive Chairman of the company, who has been at the helm of the

company since 1972 and of the Bajaj Group of companies for the past five decades, has tendered his resignation considering his age."

Rahul Bajaj had stepped down as non-executive chairman of another group company, Bajaj Finance, in July last year.

A Bajaj Auto statement said, "Rahul Bajaj, the Non-Executive Chairman of the company, who has been at the helm of the

company since 1972 and of the Bajaj Group of companies for the past five decades, has tendered his resignation considering his age."

Rahul Bajaj has proposed to acquire the stakes of BigBasket for about \$1.2 billion. As per reports, the deal will provide exit to investors like Alibaba that holds around 29 per cent stake in the company.

BigBasket, Grofers, Walmart-owned Flipkart, Amazon and Reliance Industries' JioMart are the five big players in India's online grocery space.

The \$525 billion food and grocery market is expected to grow by 2023, as per a study by RedSeer Consulting.

The luxury end of the market has come alive in a city that became a haven for wealthy Europeans escaping repeated lockdowns at home and for others drawn by the ease of getting vaccinated from Covid-19. The Middle East's business and tourism hub provided an additional lure after a property downturn that started six years ago shaved more than a third off values.

"We've seen sentiment shift quite significantly and prices are increasing across the board now," said Taimur Khan, head of research at Knight Frank in Dubai. "On the top end of the market, it's mostly European money

## Employee stake in mutual fund schemes to raise accountability

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, APRIL 29

From July 1, a minimum of 20 per cent of the take home salary of the key employees of the asset management companies (AMCs) will have to be paid in the form of units of mutual fund schemes in which they have a role/oversight.

This has been done to align the interest of the key employees of the AMCs with the unitholders of the mutual fund schemes, a circular issued by the Securities and Exchange Board of India on Wednesday said.

As per the circular, key employees of the AMCs include chief executive officer, chief investment officer, chief risk officer, chief information security officer, chief operation officer, fund managers, compliance officer, sales head, investor relation officers, heads of other departments, dealers of the AMC, fund management team and research team.

However, a new generation mutual fund house is already adhering to a similar practice. "Ideally, in the fund management profession, the only way to

raise accountability is to ensure that the fund management team is investing their own monies along with those of the clients," says PPFA Mutual Fund.

Key employees of PPFA MF held 4,865 crore units worth Rs 203.74 crore on April 28, 2021.

"Having our own skin in the game demonstrates the willingness to link our financial well-being with yours. This also places an implicit onus on us to make optimum use of our time and abilities in order to enhance the scheme's performance and eschew the reckless behaviour that fund managers are sometimes accused of," PPFA MF says

## SHORT TAKES

## Umpire, referee pull out of IPL

**New Delhi:** India's top umpire Nitin Menon has pulled out of the ongoing IPL after his family was struck by a couple of Covid-19 cases, while his Australian counterpart Paul Reiffel's attempts at leaving hit a dead end because of his country's suspension of air travel with India.

It is learnt that Menon, a resident of Indore, has left the IPL bio-bubble after his wife and mother tested positive for Covid-19.

Match referee Manu Nayyar too has left the bio-bubble in Ahmedabad following the death of his mother on Wednesday night.

In Reiffel's case, the Australian government's imposition of a travel ban on flights to and from India in the wake of the rising COVID-19 cases here led to him being unable to leave the bubble after initial information suggested that he has made the move. — PTI

## RR, DC, Sachin in Covid relief cash

**New Delhi:** IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals on Thursday said it has raised ₹7.5 crore to provide immediate support to people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic through its foundation. Delhi Capitals also on Thursday pledged ₹1.5 crore in support of the national capital's fight against the pandemic.

"Players along with the team owners and team management have come forward to raise funds and have been working along with the Rajasthan

Royals' philanthropic arm Royal Rajasthan Foundation (RRF) in partnership with the British Asian Trust (BAT)," a release issued by the franchise said. Meanwhile, Sachin Tendulkar donated ₹1 crore to procure oxygen concentrators for Covid-19 patients. The health-care system is crumbling due to the crisis with hospitals struggling to provide oxygen and crucial medicines to the patients. — PTI

## Hasan, Shaheen skittle Zim for 176

**Harare:** Pakistan pace pair Hasan Ali and Shaheen Shah Afridi shared eight wickets between them to dismiss Zimbabwe for 176 on the opening day of the first Test in Harare on Thursday.

Hasan rocked the top order with figures of 4/53 while Afridi polished off the tail with 4/43 as the home batsmen struggled to cope with the pace generated on a slow pitch at Harare Sports Club.

Debutant Roy Kaia stood firm in the post-lunch session, top-scoring with 48 before falling leg-before to Hasan while Donald Tiripano chipped in with 28 and Milton Shumba, also playing in his first Test, scored 27. In the first session Hasan struck twice to give Pakistan an excellent start. — AFP

**Brief scores:** Zimbabwe 176 in 59.1 overs (R. Kaia 48; Shaheen Shah Afridi 4/43, Hasan Ali 4/53) vs Pakistan.

## Five up for India women coach job

**New Delhi:** Former chief selector Hemlata Kala is among five female candidates who have applied to become the Indian women's team's head coach, a position that has been held by men since 2017. Mamatha Maben, Jaya Sharma, Suman Sharma and Nooshin Al Khadeer are the others who have presented their candidature for the job.

Among the men, incumbent W.V. Raman has reappplied after his term ended with the home series loss to South Africa in March. — PTI

## Live on TV

**CRICKET**  
IPL: Punjab Kings vs Royal Challengers Bangalore from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

**FORMULA ONE**  
Portuguese Grand Prix: Practice 1 from 3.55 pm, Practice 2 from 7.25 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

**FOOTBALL**  
English Premier League:  
Southampton vs Leicester City from 12.30 am (Saturday) on Star Sports Select 2, HD

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## QUINTESSENCE

Sublime De Kock's unbeaten 70 brings Mumbai back to winning ways

**New Delhi:** April 29: Opener Quinton de Kock roared back to form with a blistering 50-ball 70 as Mumbai Indians beat Rajasthan Royals by seven wickets in their IPL game here on Thursday.

Put in to bat, Rajasthan rode on 42 by skipper Sanju Samson and Jos Buttler's 41 to post a competitive 171 for four but their efforts were overshadowed by de Kock, who struck six fours and two maximums to complete the task in 18.3 overs at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

Krunal Pandya also played a useful cameo, smashing 39 off 26 balls with the help of two fours and as many sixes.

Mumbai openers Rohit Sharma (14) and de Kock put up 49 for the first wicket. The South African fetched his first boundary, a cover drive, and then launched into left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman (1/37) for a four and a maximum. While Rohit played his trademark pull-shot to get a six in the fifth over.

De Kock hammered Chris Morris (2/33) for another maximum but Rohit perished in the sixth over, giving a dolly to Chetan Sakariya at mid-on.

Leg-spinner Rahul Tewatia (0/30) conceded three boundaries in the seventh over, two by Suryakumar Yadav (16; 3x4) and one by de Kock, as Mumbai got 14 runs.

However, Morris brought back Rajasthan by removing Surya, as Mumbai slipped to 83/2.

Krunal joined de Kock, who completed his half-century in 35 balls and then got a life. De Kock and Krunal added 63 runs for the third wicket and brought the side closer to a win. — PTI



Quinton de Kock of Mumbai Indians plays a shot against Rajasthan Royals in an IPL match at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi on Thursday. — IPL

## SCORECARD

**Rajasthan Royals:** Jos Buttler st de Kock b Rahul Chahar 41, Yashasvi Jaiswal c and b Rahul Chahar 32, Sanju Samson b Boult 42, Shivam Dube c and b Umrah 35, David Miller not out 7, Riyam Parag not out 8. Extras (lb-2, w-3, nb-1) 6. **Total (for 4 wkt, in 20 overs)** 171.  
**FoW:** 66-1, 91-2, 148-3, 158-4.

**Bowler:** Trent Boult 4-0-37-1, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-15-1, Jayant Yadav 3-0-37-0, Nathan Coulter-Nile 4-0-35-0, Rahul Chahar 4-0-33-2, Krunal Pandya 1-0-12-0.

**Mumbai Indians:** Rohit Sharma c Chetan Sakariya b Chris Morris 14, Quinton de Kock not out 70, Suryakumar Yadav c Jos Buttler b Chris Morris 16, Krunal

Pandya b Mustafizur 39, Kieron Pollard not out 16. Extras (lb-15, w-2) 17. **Total (for 3 wkt, in 18.3 overs)** 172.  
**FoW:** 49-1, 83-2, 146-3.

**Bowler:** Chetan Sakariya 3-0-18-0, Jaydev Unadkat 4-0-33-0, Mustafizur Rahman 3.0-37-1, Chris Morris 4-0-33-2, Rahul Tewatia 3-0-30-0, Shivam Dube 1-0-6-0.

## Covid | Effect

## FC GOA COACH, FOREIGN STAFF LEAVE INDIA

**Margao:** April 29: Indian Super League side FC Goa on Thursday allowed their foreign staffers, including Spanish head coach Juan Ferrando and some footballers, to leave the country ahead of their last AFC Champions League match in view of the restrictions imposed on flights from India.

As India grapples with the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, several countries, including Australia, Italy and Germany, have imposed travel bans on India.

The club said that it was a "pre-emptive measure in view of recent policies being taken by European and other countries in regards to travellers from India."

FC Goa would like to inform that the club's foreign contingent including the Head Coach and foreign staff have been advised to travel back home immediately," a club statement read.

"This comes as a pre-emptive measure in view of recent policies being taken by European and other countries in regards to travellers from India as the nation battles the second wave of Covid-19 which has engulfed the country," it added. — PTI

## VALLADOLID HOLD BILBAO TO STAY SAFE

**Madrid:** April 29: Valladolid twice came from behind to draw 2-2 with Athletic Bilbao and climb out of the Spanish league's relegation zone.

Shon Weissman scored an 85th-minute equaliser to give the visitors the point that lifted them to 17th place with five rounds left.

Valladolid are tied on 30 points with 18th-place Elche but are ahead on goal difference.

Athletic took the lead through Jon Morcillo in the 14th before Fabián Orellana levelled the match in the 70th and Raúl García put the hosts ahead again in the 76th.

The draw extended Valladolid's winless streak in the league to seven matches.

Athletic were looking to keep the momentum from the first half good and the second half was excellent in every department. We scored two goals away which is so important, but we have a hard job to do in six days," Guardiola told BT Sport.

"In general, we're satisfied for the performance but it is halfway. We still have 90 more minutes to beat them and PSG is a team where anything can happen."

After starting so well, PSG lost their way after half-time and had Idrissa Gana Gueye sent off in the 77th minute as a

shocking tackle on Ilkay Gundogan earned the midfielder a straight red card.

Having already failed to win at home to Manchester United, Barcelona and Bayern in this season's Champions League, the Parisians face a uphill struggle in England if they are to reach the final for the sec-

ond year running. It is, then, first blood to Emirati-backed City against Qatar-owned PSG in a tie that is also a battle of competing Gulf nations.

"We conceded two stupid goals," Marquinhos admitted to broadcaster RMC Sport.

Of the return leg, he added: "There is no point in us going there if we

don't believe we can turn it around."

After all the money pumped in by their owners from Abu Dhabi, City are eyeing a first ever Champions League final, and this was their first appearance in the semi-finals since 2016, when they defeated PSG in the last eight.

However, PSG can still

be optimistic about their prospects after sensational away performances against Barcelona and Bayern in the last two rounds.

PSG

coach Mauricio Pochettino

is hoping to once again get the better of Guardiola, just as he did when his Tottenham side beat City in the quarter-finals in 2019.

— AFP

● For Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff, Red Bull were guilty of failing to exploit their cars' evident speed advantage.

both championships almost felt like a get out of jail free card, because our rivals didn't maximise the opportunity we gave them," he told the German team's website. "And it just proves what a challenging season we have ahead of us and how

quickly things can turn around in Formula One."

The Algarve International Circuit holds a special place in Hamilton's heart as it was here six months ago that he notched up his 92nd Grand Prix win to surpass Michael Schumacher as the most successful F1 driver of all time.

And the Portimao track can play a part in another personal milestone. If Hamilton heads the timesheets after Saturday's qualifying it will be his 100th pole. History beckons for

Verstappen too — with victory lifting him into the championship lead for the first time in his career.

Last time out's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix was a chaotic classic which saw Lando Norris, toasting a sparkling third for McLaren but left Valterri Bottas feeling bitter after a crash with the Williams of George Russell led to an angry exchange between the pair.

Another leaving Imola frustrated was Verstappen's new teammate Sergio Perez. — AFP

## Stage set in Portugal for Lewis vs Max Act III

**Portimao (Portugal), April 29:** The third instalment of what is shaping up to be one of Formula One's finest title duels in years moves to Portugal's sun-blessed Algarve this weekend with Lewis Hamilton leading Max Verstappen by a single point.

That the seven-time champion tops the nascent drivers' standings is for once a surprise with Red Bull enjoying a rare speed superiority over the Mercedes.

But a Verstappen error contributed to Hamilton's

## S. KOREA INOCULATES TOKYO-BOUND ATHLETES

**Seoul, April 29:** South Korea began administering fast-track Covid-19 vaccines on Thursday to athletes, coaches and others expected to attend the Tokyo Olympics.

The Korean Sport and Olympic Committee said the first group of about 100 people received the first doses at a state-run hospital in Seoul at the start of the country's prioritized vaccination program for its Olympic delegation. They will be given second shots in the coming weeks.

A total of 930 athletes, coaches, officials and other support staff will be vaccinated ahead of the Tokyo Games, which is set to open on July 23. Athletes can receive the vaccines if they have already qualified for the Olympics or are in qualifying tournaments, so some may get vaccinated but not attend the games. — AP

IPL POINTS TABLE						
Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
CSK	6	5	1	0	10	+1.475
DC	7	5	2	0	10	+0.466
RCB	6	5	1	0	10	+0.089
MI	6	3	3	0	6	+0.071
KKR	7	2	5	0	4	-0.494
PBKS	6	2	4	0	4	-0.608
RR	6	2	4	0	4	-0.69
SRH	6	1	5	0	2	-0.264

## ORANGE CAP

Shikhar Dhawan, DC	<b>311</b>
Faf du Plessis, CSK	<b>270</b>
Prithvi Shaw, DC	<b>269</b>
Avesh Khan, DC	<b>13</b>
Rahul Chahar, MI	<b>11</b>

## PURPLE CAP

Harshal Patel, RCB	<b>17</b>
Avesh Khan, DC	<b