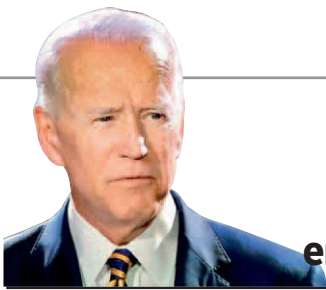


# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
VISAKHAPATNAM | FRIDAY | 16 APRIL 2021



## WEATHER



Max: 35.4°C  
Min: 23.4°C  
RH: 71%  
Rainfall: Nill

Forecast: Drizzle.  
Max/Min temp.  
35/23 9C

## WORLD | 4

**US expels 10 Russian envoys, imposes curbs**

## SPORTS | 6

**Angry Kohli rapped for kicking chair**

## TABLOID

**Ranveer's proposed film lands in trouble**

## Centre gets HC notice on sale of Vizag Steel Plant

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday served notices to the Central government to file its response within four weeks on its decision to privatise Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP).

A division bench comprising Justice Joymalya Bagchi and Justice Ganga Rao heard a petition filed by a retired IPS officer, V.V. Lakshmi Narayana, challenging the Union Cabinet's decision on divesting its stake in VSP. Petitioner's counsel Adi Narayana Rao argued that the decision to privatise VSP was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs without taking into consideration various alternatives available to turn around VSP as suggested by both the state government and the petitioner and that no discussion was taken up on the criteria for selecting public sector entities

for privatisation. Counsel informed the court that the plant was having the latest infrastructure and the right to life of thousands of farmers, who parted with their lands for setting up the plant, was infringed upon as most of them were not given permanent employment as assured by the company at the time of land acquisition.

He referred to the case of Narmada Bachao Andolan, where the Supreme Court reiterated the importance of fulfilling the promise which was made at the time of acquiring the land.

Advocate-General S. Sriram submitted that the state government has written a letter to the Centre suggesting several alternatives for the revival of the RINL and requested for a review of the Union Cabinet's decision to sell VSP. After hearing the counsels, the court posted the hearing after four weeks.

## Centre to boost oxygen supply

To import 50,000 MT medical oxygen and increase domestic production

VINEETA PANDEY | DC  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

India on Thursday crossed the two-lakh mark for new Covid-19 cases with over 1,038 deaths. The country now has over 15 lakh active cases. Of this, Maharashtra alone accounts for nearly 40 per cent of the total active caseload.

According to Union health ministry officials, Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh are among the states where double mutant coronavirus strain — coded as B.1.617 — was found. Experts believe this double mutant variant could be the main reason for the rapid spread of Covid under the new wave.

"It is reasonable to say that the variant (double mutation) is of concern because it has been found in a significant number of people. And it is not just because it has been found in a certain number of people but we know that these particular mutations have (also) got physiological effects on our context," Principal scientific adviser to Prime Minister K. Vijay Raghavan told a media house in an interview.

With several states reporting a shortage of medical oxygen in view of rising Covid cases, an inter-ministerial empowered group of central government officers on Thursday initiated actions to address shortage and panic.

The government has decided to import 50,000 MT of medical oxygen to address the immediate shortage as the empowered group initiated mapping of 12 high burden states to oxygen sources.

Reliance Industries Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd have diverted oxygen from their refineries to the government hospitals, free of cost.

Maharashtra topped the list of states that consumed vast amounts of oxygen followed by Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, and Rajasthan. These states are also reporting the most number of daily cases.

According to officials, India's daily production capacity of medical oxygen (7,127 MT) and stock (50,000 MT) is "comfortably more" than the daily consumption (3,842 MT) at present.

According to officials at the Union health ministry, with increasing cases, medical oxygen consumption will need to keep pace with the requirements of the states.

For this, the current oxygen stocks in the country, including the industrial oxygen stocks with the manufacturing plants, is more than 50,000 MTs.

Along with the ramped up production of the oxygen manufacturing units and the surplus stocks available, the present availability of oxygen is sufficient.



A health worker conducts Covid-19 test at Indira Gandhi Stadium in Vijayawada on Thursday. — DECCAN CHRONICLE

## Keep a tab on pvt hospital charges, CM tells officials

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday directed officials to provide beds to Covid-19 patients within three hours and make arrangements to make Remdesivir injections and oxygen cylinders available to hospitals for treatment.

During a review meeting on Covid-19 and Coronavirus vaccination organised in view of a sudden spurt in cases in the state, he directed the officials to ensure that treatment was provided through 104 services and asked them to give wide publicity to it.

"The patients should be admitted to hospitals or advised for home isolation based on suggestions of doctors," the Chief Minister said.

He also praised the officials for administering

● Jagan Mohan Reddy told the officials to allot the 1902 toll-free number for grievances and that people should call 104 for any queries on Covid-19.

6.21 lakh doses of Coronavirus vaccine in one day and said he would write a letter to the Central government for more Covid vaccine stocks.

He added that ambulance services should be provided and the treatment should be expedited with the help of ASHA workers. He said the health of the people in home isolation should be followed up.

Jagan Mohan Reddy told the officials to allot the 1902 toll-free number for grievances and that people should call 104 for any

queries on Covid-19.

He also directed the officials to fix prices for treatment in private hospitals and ensure they don't overcharge and that there should not be any scarcity of beds for Covid patients. He said the charges for treatment should be displayed at all hospitals and the details on whom to complain, if the hospitals charge more, should be displayed in hospitals prominently.

The Chief Minister also directed the officials to maintain a record on the availability of beds in Arogyasri-empanelled hospitals and private hospitals.

He also said that a special focus should be laid on hospital care, sanitation and quality food in hospitals and added that quality of medication and providing medicine at the time are also important.

## NEET PG EXAMS POSTPONED DUE TO COVID SPIKE

New Delhi, April 15: In view of a spike in the number of Covid-19 cases, the National Eligibility-Cum-Entrance Test (postgraduate), which was scheduled to be held on April 18, has been postponed, Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said on Thursday.

The decision was taken keeping the well-being of the young medical students in mind, the health minister added.

"In light of the surge in #Covid19 cases, Government of India has decided to postpone #NeetPG2021 exam which was earlier scheduled to be held on April 18. Next date to be decided later. Decision has been taken keeping wellbeing of our young medical students in mind," Vardhan said in a tweet. — PTI

## CONG CANDIDATE DIES DUE TO COVID IN WEST BENGAL

Kolkata, April 15: Congress candidate Rezaul Haque, who tested positive for Covid-19 two days ago, died at a hospital here early on Thursday, health department sources said.

Haque, 46, the party's nominee from Samsheganj Assembly constituency in Murshidabad district, was initially admitted to a private hospital in Jangipur on Wednesday following bouts of breathing trouble, they said.

He was later referred to a medical facility in Kolkata after his condition deteriorated at night. Haque died around 5 am, the sources said.

Meanwhile, the EC countermanded polling for the Samsheganj seat and said the future course of action over voting would be decided soon. "The entire electoral exercise for the constituency will be conducted from scratch for this seat," EC said. — PTI

## COUNTER POINT



No need. I am going to a safe place... my leader's election rally!

## SHORT TAKES

### SC: Give deadline to appoint judges

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Centre to apprise it of a reasonable time frame within which it can respond to the recommendations made by its collegium for appointment of judges as the government said that it will adhere to the timeline fixed in the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP).

### UP poll: Ballot boxes snatched

Agra (UP): Four people were injured and two ballot boxes were snatched in a clash between two groups during polling for the Uttar Pradesh panchayat election on Thursday. SP (East) Ashok Venkat said the incident was reported in Rihawali village of Agra Rural constituency. He said the clash broke out between supporters of candidates.

### Olympics may be cancelled

Tokyo: Storm clouds were once again gathering over the Tokyo Olympics. Top politician Toshiro Nikai, the ruling party's number two, said the games must be cancelled "without hesitation" if the virus situation is too severe. Although officials dismissed Nikai's remarks, public opinion is turning against the event with towns cancelling torch events.

### India, France ink Gaganyaan pact

New Delhi: Space agencies of India and France on Thursday signed an agreement for cooperation for the country's first human space mission Gaganyaan, the French space agency CNES said. The agreement was announced during French foreign affairs minister Jean-Yves Le Drian visit.



Dr M. Gurumurthy, YSRC candidate for the Lok Sabha bypoll in Tirupati, along with MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy, campaigns in Tirupati on Thursday. — DC

## Campaign comes to end in Tirupati

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

After campaigning for the prestigious Tirupati (SC) Lok Sabha bypoll came to end on Thursday, all political parties have begun analysing reports from the ground level. The election is scheduled to be conducted on Saturday, April 17.

The ruling party's candidate Dr Maddila Gurumurthy is set against four-time MP and former Union minister Panabaka Lakshmi from the Telugu Desam, former Karnataka chief secretary K. Ratna Prabha from the BJP-Janashakti combine, six-time MP Chintu Mohan from the Congress and N. Yadagiri from the CPI(M).

In the 2019 elections, Durga Prasad secured 7,22,877 votes and won against the TD's Lakshmi by a margin of 2,28,376

votes. She secured 4,94,501 votes, followed by Chintu Mohan (Congress) and B. Srihari Rao (BJP) got 24,039 and 16,125 votes respectively.

Buoyed by the massive victory that the YSRC secured in the panchayat and civic body elections in the state, the ruling YSRC appears to be confident about its victory.

However, senior leaders including Y.V. Subba Reddy, Dy. CM Narayana Swamy, minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy and others have camped in the constituency and monitored party campaigns. Accompanied by the YSRC's local legislators, Dr Gurumurthy covered their respective Assembly segments and organised many public meetings.

■ Page 2: Oppn parties put all efforts to win LS poll

## NATURE | AT RISK

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, APRIL 15

With the development activity increasing in the vicinity of Kakinada Deep Water Port, the habitat of migratory birds has come under threat. The migratory birds, as a result, changed their routes towards Uppada shore and Yanam.

The mudflats near Kakinada Deep Water Port were a rich habitat for the migratory birds. The mud-

flats were known as the Central Asian Flyway for the birds as it had Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary and some of the other creeks nearby.

After travelling for months, more than 110 varieties of different species come to the Kakinada coast and Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary in the winter season. But the Kumbhabhishekam habitat was disturbed after the expansion of the seventh berth and other develop-

ment activities in the vicinity of mudflats.

Previously, these birds, especially Indian Skimmer and Great Knot, used to roam near the port, but the number of these birds has been gradually dwindling," said environmentalist K. Mruthyunjaya Rao.

He said the season for Indian Skimmer was almost over and a few birds were visible at present on the coast. "These birds will come to the coast

from Chambal and Mahanadi from July," he said.

"In the summer, the river gets almost dried up and the sand bars, merged with each other, will lead to an increase of human ingress, dogs and other carnivores, trampling by cattle, threatening these species," he said.

He said that the governments should protect the important creek, which is an important habitat for migratory birds and sug-

gested the government should carry out further studies in the Godavari Estuary.

According to sources, 250 Indian Skimmer, which is mostly found in the Chambal River in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and are in the red list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, were found last year, but this year the number dwindled to 230. They breed in rivers during the summer from March to May.

## Unseasonal rains hit horticulture hard

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

Unseasonal rains, accompanied by gales, damaged several horticulture crops in nearly 1,696 hectares with an estimated loss of ₹64.13 crore in parts of Andhra Pradesh.

Based on preliminary reports, horticulture crops like banana, cashew nut, cocoa, papaya, oil palm, coconut and several varieties of vegetables suffered great damage or loss in parts of five districts

including Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, West Godavari, Guntur and Kadapa.

Horticulture authorities assessed the number of farmers affected in the rains and gales to be 7,331 and input subsidy worth ₹4.08 crore to be given to the eligible affected farmers whose crops suffered damages in more than 33 per cent area of their land-holding.

■ Page 3: Gale broke electric poles into half in state



## IN BRIEF

**HC TO HEAR MPTC, ZPTC POLL PROCESS ON APRIL 19****DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

The Andhra Pradesh High Court to hear a batch of petitions on MPTC/ZPTC election process on April 19.

The High Court held hearing on a batch of petitions filed by the Telugu Desam and others challenging the election notification issued for conduct of MPTC/ZPTC polls on the norm of four weeks gap from the date of issue of notification to conduct of polls for implementation of poll code, on Thursday. The HC posted the next hearing in the case to April 19 to hear the arguments from all the parties on the issue.

**EX-MLA GETS BAIL IN POLICE OFFICER ABUSING CASE****DC CORRESPONDENT**  
SRIKAKULAM, APRIL 15

Former Amadalavalasa MLA and TD leader Kuna Ravi Kumar surrendered to the police and later obtained bail from Rajam court in Srikakulam on Thursday.

The police filed a case against Ravi Kumar for allegedly abusing a DSP-rank police officer in Ponduru during Parishad elections. Two days ago, a posse of police personnel raided his house in Srikakulam town and conducted searches. Since then he has been absconding.

**VOLUNTEERS TOLD TO RENDER THEIR SERVICES TO NEEDY****DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

The Village /Ward volunteers were told to render their services to the needy sections of the society.

Minister for endowment Vellampalli Srinivas Rao along with YSRC East in-charge Devenini Avinash, Vijayawada mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi and VMC Commissioner Prasanna Venkatesh presented Seva Mitra, Seva Ratna and Seva Vajra awards.

Srinivas Rao said that AP is the first state to introduce a volunteer system. Amazed at the services being rendered by volunteers, other states are toeing the line, he said. He stated that there is no corruption in the volunteers system.

Avinash objected to the comments made by Naidu while terming volunteers as gunny-bag coolies.

He assured volunteers about resolving their issues by taking them to the notice of the Chief Minister.

**CID ISSUES NOTICE TO UMA FOR DISTORTING JAGAN'S WORDS****DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

The CID has issued notices to former minister and Telugu Desam leader Devenini Umamaheshwara Rao, seeking his presence before it for a hearing at its Kurnool office following a complaint that he distorted chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's words.

The notice was attached to the wall of his residence in Gollapudi Thursday morning. In the complaint, Rao is accused of distorting the words of the CM and showing morphed videos through a Tablet/I-phone on April 7 during the Tirupati byelection.

Rao alleged the summons were politically motivated and sought 10 days' time to appear before the CID.

Advocate N. Narayana Reddy, president of the YSRC legal cell's core committee for Kurnool district lodged the complaint with the CID. Following this, a case was registered under sections 464, 465, 468, 469, 470, 471, 505 and 120 (b) of IPC.

The CID notice asked Rao to attend the inquiry along with the electronic gadget and videos in the CID office at 10.30am on April 15.

Rao said he was not worried over fake cases being foisted on him and claimed that he showed the words of CM Jagan from the original videos. He said that he had criticised the "hypothecation" of Krishna river waters by the YSRC government under which AP would lose its rights on the river water.

"At present, I am busy in the election campaign and bye-election work in Nellore district. Hence I am unable to attend the inquiry. I would require 10 days' time to attend the hearing," he wrote back to the CID.

# TD's defeat is imminent in Tirupati bypoll: Peddireddy

**Stone-throwing incident was stage-managed by Naidu, says minister****DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

Claiming that the Telugu Desam's defeat is imminent in the forthcoming Tirupati (SC) Lok Sabha byelection, panchayat raj minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy alleged that the stone-throwing incident was stage-managed by TD chief Chandrababu Naidu to gain sympathy among people.

Addressing the media here on Thursday, Peddireddy reiterated his challenge to Naidu that YSRC MPs would resign in case the party loses in Tirupati bypoll and that the TD MPs should quit otherwise.

"The Opposition leader and his son Nara Lokesh don't have guts to take up my challenge. But Lokesh posed a drama, challenging the CM to swear at Alipiri on the allegations regarding Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy murder case. As both the father and son duo have no courage to seek votes in the byelection, they are trying to divert people's attention with these cheap tactics", the minister said.

Accusing the TD chief of trying to gain sympathy among the public by staging a stone-throwing drama, Peddireddy said there was no evidence of stone throwing found in the footage, retrieved from the CC cameras in the vicinity where Naidu addressed the public meeting. He added that a TD activist Akula Venkatesh said it was not a stone, but the shirt he threw on Naidu.

"Naidu should give an explanation on the video that went viral on social media, in which TD state president K. Atchannaidu spoke against the party and Nara Lokesh, while saying that there is no confidence in the leadership of Naidu and Lokesh among the TD leaders," he asked.

Peddireddy said the BJP-Jana Sena combine has been trying to secure more votes than NOTA in the byelection.

Claiming that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has implemented more welfare schemes and development works in the last 22 months and gave good governance when compared to 14 years governance of Naidu, the minister said that the YSRC chief is working with welfare and development as his agenda in the state. He urged the people of Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency to vote for Dr M. Gurumurthy and make him win with a huge majority.



Panchayat Raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy addresses the media during a press conference in Tirupati on Thursday.

## Oppn spreading false propaganda: Sajjala

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

Asserting that the 22-month governance of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will ensure YSRC win in the Tirupati byelection, government adviser (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said that opposition parties are confined to false propaganda rather than publicising achievements during their regime.

Speaking to the media here on Thursday, Ramakrishna Reddy said that running out of issues for campaign, opposition parties have been targeting the Chief Minister personally and spreading communal hatred.

He slammed TD, BJP and Pawan Kalyan for not fulfilling promises made during the 2014 elections,

including special category status. He said BJP and TD should tell what they have done for the state or explain the reasons why they did not fulfill the promises made.

The YSRC leader slammed TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu and Congress while highlighting their shortcomings during the election campaign for Tirupati Lok Sabha seat which came to an end on Thursday evening.

Speaking to the media here on Thursday, the minister said the TD has done nothing for Tirupati parliament segment to claim credit and the situation is no different with respect to the Congress and the BJP.

Stressing that the former chief minister targeted other parties to cover his lapses, he took a dig at him for maintaining silence on leaked video footage of TD state president K.

## Chinta calls Naidu, Jagan corrupt leaders

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

Calling former chief minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu and present Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy as corrupt leaders, Congress Working Committee (CWC) special invitee and party candidate for Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection Chinta Mohan questioned how they both could earn thousands of crores within a short span of time after they came into power.

Speaking to the media here on Thursday, he claimed that his party had spent only ₹3 lakh for cam-

paigning in the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection while Telugu Desam and YSRC are spending ₹20 and ₹30 crores respectively.

He took a jibe at both Naidu and Jagan, stating that they both have backstabbed the Congress.

"When the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made Naidu the minister, he backstabbed her as well as his father-in-law and TD founder-president N.T. Rama Rao. Now, Jagan has already committed 99 mistakes and he is on the edge of his 100th mistake by distributing money to the voters", he alleged.

# Oppn parties put all efforts to win bypoll

FROM PAGE 1

Among the opposition parties, the Telugu Desam had put in all efforts to win the seat amid its waning reputation in the just concluded local body elections. Former chief minister Chandrababu Naidu, his son Nara Lokesh and other senior TD leaders have completed many rounds of campaigns, covering all the assembly segments. The TD chief organised at least one public

meeting in each of the seven Assembly segments.

The father-and-son duo also launched a scathing attack on the YSRC, digging out the Viveka murder case, pointing out the rising prices of essential commodities. TD nominee Lakshmi took various local issues to target the state government during her campaign, while the Congress candidate Chinta Mohan was also at par in the campaign with other contestants.

On the other hand, BJP has focused on the Hindutva agenda by targeting the YSRC candidate. Lacked with the secondary cadre, the BJP was said to be lagged behind in terms of electioneering when compared to other parties — except a few impressive public meetings took part by JS chief Pawan Kalyan and some senior central leaders of BJP.

However, they managed to target their rival candidate and YSRC chief based on their religious affiliation. The YSRC's Gurumurthy filed his nomination as a person belonging to a Scheduled Caste Hindu.

However, the BJP leaders accused him of giving incorrect information about his religion in his nomination papers and accused him of converting to Christianity and demanded election authorities to disqualify his candidature.

Launching a scathing attack on the ruling YSRC over various issues, including the spate of attacks on the Hindu temples across the state, rising prices of essentials and alleged illegal mining of sand, Telugu Desam chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu called upon the people of Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency to take advantage of the byelection and vote for his party to safeguard the future of AP.

Addressing the media at a press conference here on Thursday, the former chief minister said that the Tirupati Parliament

**TIRUPATI | BYPOLL**

## Sanctity of temple town has been destroyed, alleges TD chief

## Naidu calls upon voters to safeguard AP future

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

Launching a scathing attack on the ruling YSRC over various issues, including the spate of attacks on the Hindu temples across the state, rising prices of essentials and alleged illegal mining of sand, Telugu Desam chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu called upon the people of Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency to take advantage of the byelection and vote for his party to safeguard the future of AP.

Addressing the media at a press conference here on Thursday, the former chief minister said that the Tirupati Parliament

byelection is not just limited to temple city, but people should use it as a 'Vajrayudham' — a diamond weapon — to teach a befitting lesson to the ruling party.

"We all should recall what the YSRC leaders have done to the state during their two-year rule. Now, the onus is on the Tirupati electorate to protect the state, as the victory of TD in this byelection will not only change the political face of the state but also solve many issues", he added.

Claiming that he had seen hundreds of JCBs and tippers plundering sand in the river-belt between Uthukotai,

## 17.11 LAKH VOTERS TO CAST VOTE IN TIRUPATI BYPOLL ON APRIL 17

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA/NELLORE, APRIL 15

Nearly 17.11 lakh voters are expected to cast their vote in the Tirupati bypoll scheduled to be held on April 17.

AP Chief Electoral Officer K. Vijayanand told mediapersons here on Thursday that 17,11,195 voters, including 8,38,540 women, were expected to exercise their franchise at 2,470 polling stations set up for the bypoll.

Explaining about the arrangements for conduct of bypoll, the CEO stated that in the wake of prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic, a polling station was set up for every 1,000 voters and added that for the first time, voters aged above 80 years to get the facility of postal ballot.

Meanwhile, in Nellore, officials under the directions of district collector and Tirupati LS Constituency Returning Officer K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu are gearing up for the Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll.

The parliament segment consists of Sarvepalli, Gudur, Venkatagiri, and Sullurpeta assembly segments in Nellore and Satyavedu, Srikalahasti, and Tirupati constituencies in Chittoor district.

In view of summer and Corona protocol, Election Commission extended the polling hours up to 7 pm from 7 am for the benefit of voters. The presiding officers would conduct mock polling at 6 am to check the EVMs before going ahead with actual polling.

Medical teams are also being deputed for all the polling stations for medical assistance to voters.

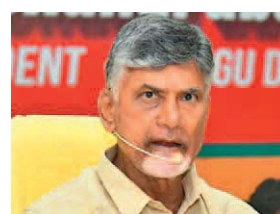
For the first time, web-casting is being arranged in 50 per cent of the total 2,470 polling stations to keep a close watch on the polling booths. Similarly, videographers have been hired to cover the polling in all the polling locations.

Returning Officer Chakradhar Babu said there are going to be Ballot units since there are 28 candidates in the fray and in addition to NOTA.

According to the RO, 10,850 polling personnel are being deputed for election duties and all of them have been vaccinated considering the risk of infection.

With regard to security arrangements, 23 companies of central troops, 3 companies of special forces besides the civil police personnel are being deployed for monitoring the law-and-order situation at the polling stations. Special forces are being sent to 877 locations identified as critical polling stations.

The Returning Officer advised the outsiders involved in the campaign in any constituency to leave the place immediately while pointing to screening by police from 7 pm on Thursday as the campaign came to an end.



N. Chandrababu Naidu

Surukupalli and Nandam, while he was coming from Satyavedu, Naidu alleged that the YSRC mafia has been digging sand up to 60, 70 feet, despite the Green Tribunal put a stay on sand digging.

"During the two years rule of YSRC, the prices of essentials have been increased to many folds,

## TD complains to EC, alleges police bias

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

The Telugu Desam has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against some police officials, alleging that they were showing bias towards the ruling YSR Congress in the Tirupati byelection and sought action against them.

The TD team, led by its MLC Paruchuri Ashok Babu, submitted the complaint to the chief electoral officer on Thursday evening.

The complaint said, "As the polling day for Tirupati parliamentary constituency byelection approaches, the ruling YSRC has intensified the implementation of its sinister designs."

It said that as part of threatening the Opposition Telugu Desam, the YSRC has clandestinely entered into an agreement with a section of the police force. As per this, the police are threatening polling agents of TD. "For instance, sub-inspector Sekhar Babu of Ojili mandal and circle inspector Narasimha Yadav of Vakadu have been summoning TD village-level leaders outside the village and demanding of them to avoid appointing their booth agents."

Further, the police offi-

cials were threatening the TD leaders that the YSRC will be in power for another three years and anything could happen to them.

"Similarly, Siva Kumar Reddy, Inspector of Police, Yerpedu, has been working in favour of the YSRC and is threatening the TD leaders with dire consequences if they continued with the party."

They claimed that in the recently concluded local body elections, the same Inspector had filed numerous false cases against TD leaders and activists.

In this context, the TD urged the chief electoral officer to deploy additional security forces in all booths in Yerpedu mandal as "a section of the police force is working in connivance with the YSRC."

The TD leaders alleged that the YSRC government has been misusing village/ward volunteers by deploying them for the ruling party's election campaign. "Village/ward volunteers are actively campaigning in favour of YSRC and are threatening voters that the people would lose their state government benefits if they do not vote for the YSRC."

"The YSRC leaders have grabbed postal ballots from government staff after obtaining their signature," the TD leaders said.

## PUBLIC TOLD TO CONTACT ELECTION OBSERVERS TO LODGE COMPLAINTS

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NELLORE, APRIL 15

Nodal Officer to Election Observers for the bypoll to Tirupati Parliament Constituency has appealed to the public to bring any complaints regarding the byelection to their notice.

According to the Nodal Officer, Dinesh Kumar, IAS, General Observer, has been staying in Room No. 417 at Haritha Hotel in Nellore. His phone number is 9701487685 and mail address is

dineshpatel.election@gmail.com.

Expenditure Observer Anand Kumar, IRAS, has been staying at Room No. 523 in Minerva Grand Hotel at Nellore. He can be contacted on mobile number 7780697430 and email: anand16may@yahoo.com.

Similarly, Police Observer Rajeev Kumar, IPS, has been staying in Room No. 401 at Haritha Hotel in Nellore. His mobile number is 9908468319 and his email is: adgphome-guard@gmail.com.

## BJP asks ECI to ensure fair polls

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

Andhra Pradesh BJP complained to the Election Commission of India seeking its intervention to prevent misuse of the state government machinery for conduct of bypoll to Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency in a free and fair manner.

BJP state president Somu Veerajra wrote a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner on Thursday alleging that the ruling YSRC government was abusing the government machinery to obtain illegitimate political gains in the bypoll scheduled to be held on April 17. He alleged that the ruling party was misusing the village/ward volunteers though appointed by the state government in every gram panchayat and urban ward, in the guise of delivering government services to the local residents at their doorstep.

The BJP senior leader said that the volunteers were taking part in door-to-door campaign by distributing a letter written by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to the voters seeking their votes for the YSRC's nominee in the bypoll.

He requested the ECI to order removal of volunteers from their villages/wards till the completion of election process, to deploy central paramilitary forces, to video record the polling at the polling stations and to disqualify YSRC nominee Dr M. Gurumoorthy on the grounds that he professes a religion other than Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist in violation of the Constitution (SC) Order, 1950.

In another letter addressed to the CEC, the AP BJP president sought disqualification of the YSRC nominee Dr M. Gurumoorthy, alleging that he was canvassing in the bypoll by appealing to the voters on religious sentiments and said that an election pamphlet was brought by him displaying the image of Lord Venkateswara prominently on it, in violation of certain provisions in the Representation of People's Act, 1951.

He also alleged that the lands of common people and government are being occupied illegally by the private persons backed by the ruling party.



## SHORT TAKES

NGT EXPERT PANEL  
IMPOSES ₹17.08 CR  
FINE ON ONGCDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

National Green Tribunal constituted expert committee recommended for imposition of fine on ONGC to the tune of Rs 17.08 crore for a series of violations in exploration of oil and gas in Krishna-Godavari basin located in both the East and West Godavari districts in AP.

In the matter of Venkatapathi Raja versus Union of India represented by the secretary, Union ministry of environment and forests, New Delhi, the NGT constituted an expert committee to take up a joint inspection on violations. The expert committee comprising Amalapuram Sub Collector Himanshu Kaushik; Narasapuram Sub Collector K.S. Viswanathan; Scientist-C Dr C. Pal Pandu from Union ministry of environment and forests; prof. M. Deepa, department of chemical engineering, Andhra University; P. Ravindranath, senior environmental engineer, APPCB, Visakhapatnam and Scientist-D Mahima T, Central Pollution Control Board, Chennai.

The petitioner filed an application at NGT, Southern Bench, Chennai alleging that air, sound, soil and water pollution were being caused on account of activities being carried out by M/s GAIL India Limited and M/z ONGC in KG Basin in Godavari districts in AP.

The committee observed non-compliance to the several norms on various issues recommended to the NGT to impose fine to pay towards environmental compensation to the Central Pollution Control Board. Accordingly, ONGC's Tatipaka Group Gathering Station to pay Rs 7.28 crore, Kesanapalli GGS to pay Rs 4.11 crore and Odalarevu GGS to pay ₹5.68 crore.

CPCB SCIENTIST  
VISTS TYCHE  
INDUSTRIESDC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, APRIL 15

The team headed by Central Pollution Control Board Scientist T. Mahima visited Tyche Industries on Thursday at Sarpavaram, in the aftermath of two persons died and four were injured when a reactor blasted in the company last month.

The National Green Tribunal has appointed a team, headed by Integrated Regional Officer of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Dr P. Suresh Babu.

Central Pollution Control Board Scientist Mahima, Chief Factories of Inspector R.Trinadha Rao, Kakinada RDO A.G.Chinni Krishna, AP Pollution Control Board East Godavari Environmental Engineer A.Ramarao Naidu and others inspected the factory and inquiry on environmental issues. They visited the blasting place and observed the surroundings. They interacted with the victims and inquired about the incident. Mahima said that a report would be submitted to the NGT on April 30.

ADIKAVI NANNAYYA  
VARSITY TO START  
ONLINE CLASSESDC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, APRIL 15

In view of the increasing Covid-19 cases, the Adikavi Nannayya University will start online classes to the students. The Vice Chancellor of the University Registrar Professor T. Ashok said that the online classes will start from April 16. He said that University students are asked to vacate the hostels and go back home and attend online classes. He said that after decreasing Covid-19, the students will be allowed to colleges and university for their education and until then they should attend online classes.

CID INSPECTS  
GOVERNMENT  
HOSPITALSDC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, APRIL 15:

The CID team led by its DSP A.B.G. Tilak conducted inspections in government hospitals at Rajamahendravaram and Kakinada on Thursday in the aftermath of irregularities in drug stores in the state. The officials enquired about the details of previous drug transactions and stocks and verified the records.

Staff shortage hits KGGH  
as Covid caseload surges

Kurnool district reported 626 positive cases and two deaths

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL APRIL 15

Kurnool General Hospital is under stress as corona positive cases are on the rise. On Thursday, the district reported 626 positive cases and two deaths. The KGGH has 363 Covid-19 patients under treatment as 60 of them are in serious condition. The hospital requires at least 100 male and female ward boys immediately, the in-charge superintendent. Dr Bhagawan raises a red flag. He said there is no Covid-19 control room to monitor the surge in cases, he said.

The KGGH Superintendent Dr Narendranath Reddy who tested positive a few days back has not delegated duties to his deputies. The hospital administration is struggling to handle the surge of cases as already 303 positive cases and 60 critical cases under oxygen supply are being treated here. Kurnool general hospital superintendent in-charge Dr Bhagawan said already 500 beds are kept ready and 150 more beds would be added as it is feared that the explosion of cases would choke the patient's services.

There is a severe shortage of male and female words boys. Dr Bhagawan however said permission to recruit ward boys has been sent to the district collector and awaiting the instructions. Lack of Covid-19 control rooms in the district is having an impact in handling the rising number of Covid admissions in the hospital. The hospital staff is under constant threat of being turned positive for Covid-19 as one Gynecology head and an assistant proffer and a few house surgeons were also quarantined, he said. On the other hand, 626 cases in a day is the highest number reported in the district during the second wave.



People come out of the Government ENT Hospital while the Covid-19 tests are not done due to the unavailability of Reagent kits for RT-PCR Covid test in Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

AP REVIVES COVID COMMAND  
AND CONTROL CENTREDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

In the wake of rise in Coronavirus cases, the state government revived the State Covid Command and Control Centre with immediate effect.

The state government issued an order on Thursday reviving the Covid Command and Control Centre by appointment of special officers for Covid-19 management and also for vaccination in the state.

Principal secretary, transport, roads and buildings M.T. Krishna Babu to look after quality monitoring of food and sanitation in Covid hospitals and Covid Care Centres.

Principal secretary, Covid management and vaccination, M. Ravi Chandra to take care of primary contact tracing and testing and testing on demand facility. Commercial tax commissioner Peeyush Kumar to monitor the help desk and CCTV.

## COVID PATIENT DIES BY SUICIDE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 15

A 55 year old Covid patient, currently undergoing treatment at the CSR Block (Covid ward) at King George Hospital died by suicide by jumping from the fourth floor of the building in

Visakhapatnam on Thursday. KGH superintendent Dr P. Mythili said the woman was admitted along with three others recently. The other three were discharged on Thursday and making arrangements to leave for home. She was alone in the ICU ward and jumped from the building.

Avenging daughter's rape, man  
hacks six of a family in VizagDC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 15

Avenging daughter's rape and subsequent blackmail, a middle-aged man hacked to death six members of a family including two infants in Juttada village under Pendurthi mandal in Visakhapatnam in the early hours of Thursday.

The accused was identified as Battina Appala Raju, the victims' neighbour. Appalaraju wanted to kill B. Vijay Kiran, who raped his daughter, and his family members but ended up killing all his family members.

The deceased were identified as Vijay Kiran's father Bamidi Ramana

(57), Kiran's wife Bamidi Usha Rani (30), Kiran's son B. Uday (2), Kiran's daughter B. Urvashi (six months), Allu Ramadevi (53), mother of Usha Rani and Nakettlu Aruna, relative of Usha Rani. The victims were found in a pool of blood.

The police said Vijay Kiran allegedly raped Appala Raju's daughter (20-year-old victim) in 2018. A case has been registered against Vijay Kiran and the case is under trial. The rape victim reported that the accused Vijay Kiran, a married person, moved very closely with Appalaraju family and called the victim to his house and offered sedative laced soft drinks to her. He

later allegedly raped her several times.

Kiran's wife Bamidi Usha Rani blackmailed the rape victim by showing her semi-nude photos and demanded money from her. Maniyala Vinay, Bammidi Sai, Pilleni Durga Prasad and Challa Nagaraju also co-operated the rape accused and blackmailed her for money.

Later the complainant's brother Bathina Vijay Prasad noticed WhatsApp messages in his sister's phone, immediately challenged the Vijay Kiran family. But they threatened to kill him. The police filed a charge sheet against the accused Vijay Kiran and the case is pending in the court.

LANDLORD  
ATTACKS BANK  
STAFF IN  
SRIKALAHASTIDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

In a bizarre incident, a landlord who leased out his premises to Andhra Bank and Union bank of India - located adjacent to each other near Srikalahasti's I town police station, has allegedly attacked the bank manager and security staff, who were on duty, on Thursday.

According to the police, following the amalgamation of Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank into the Union bank of India last year, the management has decided to vacate one among the two branches (Andhra Bank and Union Bank) located side by side in the Srikalahasti town. The bank officials have decided to continue the existing Andhra Bank premises and surrender back the Union bank of India premises to the common landlord M. Prasad and communicated the same to the latter in March this year. However, he asked the bank officials to continue their operations from the Union bank of India premises and vacate the Andhra Bank premises.

BODY STUFFED  
IN LUGGAGE  
BAG FOUND  
IN KUPPAMDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

A chopped body of a man with his head cut off and stuffed into a luggage bag was found dumped on the side of Kuppam-Krishnagiri highway close to Nadumuru Gurukul high school near Kuppam town in Chittoor district on Thursday morning.

According to the police, passers-by noticed a luggage bag covered with a plastic cover lying in a suspicious state near the bridge close to the Gurukul school. On an information about the suspicious bag, a police team reached the spot and retrieved the bag only to found the lower part of the body of a man.

"Upon opening the bag, lower part of a man in his late 20s or early 30s was found inside. We did a thorough search in the vicinity but not found the remaining body parts including the head. We found no clues at the spot and working out on it. We have informed our counterparts in nearby Tamil Nadu and Karnataka as part of Standard Operation procedure", Kuppam CI Sridhar said.

The Police shifted the half-chopped dead body to government hospital for an autopsy. They also informed the same to their Tamil Nadu and Karnataka State counterparts at Krishnagiri, Tirupattur and KGF Police Stations. The Kuppam Police have registered a case on this and further investigation is being done.

Gale broke electric  
poles into half in state

FROM PAGE 1

The authorities claim that the gale was so powerful that they broke electric poles in the middle, and uprooted the stems of banana crops in parts of Chagallu, Denduluru, T. Narasapuram and Dwaraka Tirumala mandals in West Godavari. The banana plantations in parts of Kadapa, Guntur and Vizianagaram also bore the brunt.

The horticulture authorities claim that the chilli farmers saved the harvested crop which was kept on platforms for drying by covering them with tarpaulin

clothes in anticipation of the rainfall. Horticulture commissioner S.S. Sreedhar directed the officials in the affected districts to estimate the extent of crop damage due to the rains and gales and submit a final report soon.

Horticulture additional director K. Balaji Naik said, "We have received preliminary crop damage reports from five districts in the state due to rains with gales and we are taking necessary measures to provide input subsidy to the eligible affected farmers to help them resume cultivation."

## DOCTOR GETS DISTINGUISHED FARMER AWARD

**Vijayawada:** A practicing doctor who also follows innovative methods in natural farming in his agricultural fields have been bestowed with the Visishta Rhythu (distinguished farmer) award from NG Ranga Agriculture University. Dr Yeraguti Sambasiva Reddy is a famous doctor in Guntur city. He raises crops in his 15-acre farm land in his native village Kunkalagunta in Nekarikallu

mandal of Guntur district. The NGRAU presented the award for his highly commendable efforts in natural farming. University officials said Dr Reddy was taking a lot of interest in agricultural activities and invented a new equipment, at a cost of just ₹500, by way of making a few changes to the Inapa Gorru (drill plough) that would ease the works of agriculture coolies.

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<b>JAGADAMBA 4K DOLBY QUARTET SPEAKERS</b> DAILY 4 SHOWS 	
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<b>GREATER VISAKHAPATNAM MUNICIPAL CORPORATION</b> Expression of Interest Rc. No.5194/03/2007/AO(F) Dt:14-04-2021 Date of issue of RFP : 16-04-2021 at 11.00 AM onwards Documents submission Start Date : 16-04-2021 at 11.00 AM onwards Last Date & Time of Bid Submission : 29-04-2021 upto 3.30 PM Opening of Bid Documents : 29-04-2021 at 4.00 PM 1) Name of the work : Engaging Chartered Accountant for preparation of Annual Accounts and Reconciliation of all Receipts with DCBS of GVMC. 2) Tender Schedule Cost plus GST Non Refundable : Rs.2500/- Plus GST Rs.450/- 3) Tender Deposit : Rs.50,000/- 4) Security Deposit : The Lowest Agency/Firm shall Deposit Rs.1,00,000/- towards Performance Bank Guarantee and Security Deposit at the time of the agreement. Job Chart will be attached to the RFP. 5) Period : 24 Months The RFP Document can be downloaded at <a href="http://www.gvmc.gov.in/wss/">http://www.gvmc.gov.in/wss/</a> Note: For any other details required in respect of above Expression of interest contact: Additional Commissioner (Finance), GVMC in office working hours. COMMISSIONER	
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## SHORT TAKES

INDIA, FRANCE  
SIGN PACT ON  
GAGANYAAN

New Delhi, April 15: Space agencies of India and France on Thursday signed an agreement for cooperation for the former's first human space mission. Gaganyaan, a move that will enable Indian flight physicians to train at French facilities.

French space agency CNES said under the agreement, equipment developed by it, tested and still operating aboard the International Space Station (ISS) will be made available to Indian crews.

The CNES will also be supplying fireproof carry bags made in France to shield equipment from shocks and radiation, it said.

The agreement was announced during French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian's visit to the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) headquarters in Bengaluru.

Indian Space Research Organisation's has asked CNES to help prepare for the Gaganyaan mission and to serve as its single European contact in this domain, the French space agency said.

"Under the terms of the agreement, CNES will train India's flight physicians and CAPCOM mission control teams in France at the CAD-MOS centre for the development of microgravity applications and space operations at CNES in Toulouse and at the European Astronaut Centre (EAC) in Cologne, Germany," the CNES said.

The training of astronauts is a critical aspect of the human space mission project. Flight physicians or surgeons are responsible for astronaut's health before, during and after the flight. Currently, all space physicians are from the Indian Air Force.

France has a well-established mechanism for space medicine. It also has the MEDES space clinic, a subsidiary of CNES, where space surgeons undergo training.

## Weekend lockdown in Delhi till April 30

■ Gyms, malls, auditoriums to remain closed ■ Restaurants to operate home-delivery services

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced a curfew this coming weekend and the closure of malls, gymnasiums and auditoriums till April 30 as part of sweeping restrictions to break the chain of the Covid-19 infection in the city. According to an official order, the weekend curfew will be effective from 10 pm on April 16 (Friday) to 5 am on April 19 (Monday), even as gymnasiums, auditoriums, malls, spas, entertainment parks and assembly halls will remain closed in the national capital till April 30.

Cinema halls will function with only 30 per cent capacity. However, officials said a decision to extend the weekend curfew will be taken after reviewing the Covid-19 situation next week. There will be no in-house dining in restaurants, the Chief Minister said at an online press conference a day after the city recorded the biggest single-day jump of 17,282 Covid-19 cases.

However, the restaurants will be allowed to operate home-delivery and take-away services, he said, adding that bars will remain closed till April 30. The Chief Minister made these announcements after he met Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal. He said the essential services and weddings will not be affected by the weekend curfew and passes will be provided to those attending weddings.

In its order, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) said during the weekend curfew, the movement of people for wedding-related (up to 50 people) and funeral-related (up to 20 people)



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a roadshow campaign for state Assembly polls, amid the rise in Covid-19 cases across the country, in Kolkata on Thursday.

## EC rules out clubbing poll phases

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
& PRANMOY  
BRAHMACHARI | DC  
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE,  
APRIL 15

Undeterred by the exponential rise in daily cases of the Coronavirus disease across the country and West Bengal, the Election Commission of India (EC) ruled out a possibility of clubbing the remaining phases of the ongoing Assembly elections in the state due to lack of availability of another 1,500 companies

of the Central paramilitary forces.

"There is no such plan of clubbing" the three poll phases, the Election Commission said after new Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra took stock of the ground reality from various poll observers deputed in the state and chief electoral officer West Bengal Ariz Aftab in a video conference.

At the meeting, opinions were also sought from them about the deployment and distribution of

the Central forces in case of clubbing the last three poll phases after the state recorded daily new Covid-19 cases at 6,769 till Thursday with 22 fresh deaths in the last 24 hours, sources said.

This time, election to the West Bengal Assembly is being held in eight phases. Polling for four phases have ended and the fifth phase will be held on Saturday. Polling for the sixth, seventh and the eighth phase will be held on April 22, April 26 and April 29, respectively.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday evening also appealed to the EC to club the "remaining phases" of the polls into one, within few hours of the central poll panel's decision to go ahead with the existing poll schedule even after the deadly virus claimed a Congress candidate's life and infected two others, including one from the TMC in the state. She also stressing that her party had opposed the prolonged eight-phase poll schedule.

gatherings will be allowed. People going to airports, railway stations and ISBTs will be allowed to proceed

on the production of valid tickets. However, those going for vaccination will be required to apply for a

curfew pass. Mediapersons have been exempted from the weekend curfew. People dealing in food, gro-

ceries, fruits, vegetables and dairy products will also have to seek a curfew pass for their movement.

## WORLD

## SHORT TAKES

Russia threatens  
Ukraine: Kiev

Kiev, April 15: Ukraine's foreign minister said Thursday that Russia was flagrantly threatening Ukraine with destruction, as Western countries raise the alarm over an escalation of the separatist conflict.

Foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba said during a press conference that Russian pundits and officials are "openly threatening Ukraine with war and the destruction of Ukrainian statehood." "We condemn Russia's aggravation of the security situation, Moscow's actions and statements aimed at escalating military tensions and undermining diplomatic efforts to resolve the Russian-Ukrainian conflict," Kuleba said.

"The red line of Ukraine is the state border. If Russia crosses the red line, then it will have to suffer," he added. Kiev has been fighting pro-Russian separatists in two breakaway regions in the east of the country since 2014 when Moscow annexed Crimean peninsula.

No Chauvin at  
Floyd trial

Minneapolis, April 15: The defence at the murder trial of former Officer Derek Chauvin in the death of George Floyd wrapped up its case Thursday without putting Chauvin on the stand, presenting two days of testimony to the prosecution's two weeks.

Chauvin informed the court that he would not testify, saying he would invoke his Fifth Amendment right not to take the stand. "Is this your decision not to testify?" Judge Peter Cahill asked. "It is, your honour," Chauvin said.

Some prosecution rebuttal testimony was expected to follow Thursday. Closing arguments are set for Monday, after which the racially diverse jury will begin deliberating at the barbed-wire-ringed courthouse, with Minneapolis on edge against a repeat of the protests and violence that broke out last spring over Floyd's death.

The question of whether Chauvin would testify was the subject of weeks of speculation. The risks were high: Testifying could have opened him up to devastating cross-examination, with prosecutors replaying the video of the arrest and forcing Chauvin to explain.

WHO: Europe surpasses  
1 million Covid-19 deaths  
Novartis, Roche  
team up on drug

Geneva, April 15: A top official from the World Health Organisation says Europe has surpassed 1 million deaths from Covid-19 and the situation remains serious, with about 1.6 million new cases reported each week in the region.

Addressing recent concerns about vaccines, Dr Hans Kluge also said the risk of people suffering blood clots is far higher for people with Covid-19 than people who receive AstraZeneca's Coronavirus vaccine.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to Greece, Kluge did point to early signs that transmission may be slowing across several countries and cited declining incidence among the oldest people.

He said the proportion of Covid-19 deaths among people over 80, who have been prioritised for vaccines, had dropped to nearly 30% the lowest level in the pandemic.

For now, the risk of suffering blood clots is much higher for someone with Covid-19 than for someone who has taken the AstraZeneca vaccine, he said.

Let there be no doubt

LEATHER LINING  
IN GANESHA BAG:  
BRAND SORRY

London, April 15: A global fashion brand known for its bedazzled handbags issued an apology and ceased the production of a Ganesha clutch bag with leather lining after protests by Indian diaspora groups in the United Kingdom.

Judith Leiber said it would replace the lining with synthetic after concerns were raised about the use of leather alongside the image of a Hindu deity, given the sanctity of the cow for Hindus. "We are deeply sorry to hear that our Ganesh bag has caused offence to the Hindu community," said Lela Katsune, President of Judith Leiber Couture. —PTI

Zurich, April 15: Novartis announced Thursday it will join forces with fellow Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche to produce tocilizumab, a drug being tested for its effectiveness against Covid-19-linked pneumonia.

It is the third time Novartis has made its production capacities available to a competitor during the Coronavirus pandemic, as several laboratories strike unprecedented partnerships to fight the global crisis.

Novartis is already collaborating with BioNTech and CureVac in producing Covid-19 vaccines.

The new tocilizumab deal will see Roche's manufacturing expertise transferred to the Novartis Drug Substance Singapo-

re production site during the second quarter of 2021.

"Novartis is fully committed to collaborating with Roche in offering our proven biologics production capabilities," said Steffen Lang, the firm's technical operations chief.

"As one of the world's largest producers of medicines, Novartis can mobilise its manufacturing capabilities on multiple fronts." Sold as Actemra or RoActemra depending on the market, tocilizumab is a treatment for rheumatoid arthritis which is also being tested in clinical trials investigating its safety and efficacy against Covid-19-associated pneumonia.

—AFP

about it, the AstraZeneca vaccine is effective in reducing Covid-19 hospitalisation and preventing

deaths, he added, saying WHO recommends its use for all eligible adults.

—AFP

French nationals  
in Pak told to leave

Islamabad, April 15: The French embassy here on Thursday advised all French nationals in Pakistan to temporarily leave the country after violent protests by a radical religious group that has now been banned by the government.

The Tehreek-i-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) took to streets on Monday to launch violent protests to force the government to expel the French ambassador over blasphemous caricatures published last year. Though no French citizen was reportedly targeted so far but the embassy has urged all the French citizens to leave Pakistan, apparently as a precautionary measure.

● THE TEHREEK-I-LABAIK Pakistan took to streets on Monday to launch violent protests to force the government to expel the French ambassador over blasphemous caricatures published last year.

Due to the serious threats to French interests in Pakistan, French nationals and French companies are advised to temporarily leave the country, the embassy said in an email message to its citizens in Pakistan. It said that the departures will be carried out by existing commercial airlines. —PTI

Myanmar troops shoot  
at health staff, 1 killed

Protesting medicos flee for safety to a nearby mosque

Yangon, April 15: Myanmar's military opened fire on protesting healthcare workers Thursday, killing at least one bystander as the demonstrators fled for safety to a nearby mosque.

The country has been in turmoil since the military seized power from civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb. 1, triggering a massive uprising that the junta has sought to quell using lethal force.

But protesters have continued taking to the streets, this week using the Myanmar New Year holiday of Thingyan as their latest rallying point as the normal festivities have been cancelled.

In Myanmar's second-largest city Mandalay, a demonstration by medical workers Thursday turned violent when soldiers opened fire, sending them running to the mosque.

"They were shooting everywhere... they were targeting the Sule mosque compound because people in there were hiding protesters," said an eyewitness.

A 30-year-old man who lived in the compound was shot dead, and at least two others were injured, said a doctor who treated the wo-



This photo taken and received from an anonymous source via Facebook on Thursday shows protesters marching during a demonstration against the military coup in Mogok in Myanmar.

— AFP PHOTO / ANONYMOUS SOURCE

unded. "The man who died was shot from the back and it penetrated through his chest," he said.

A medic who participated in the protest said he saw the arrest of six nurses and doctors during the crackdown. "We lost contact with some medical team members as well," he said. Myanmar's health-

care workers have been at the forefront of a nationwide civil disobedience movement, refusing to return to work under a military regime. Their absence has left many of the country's hospitals unstaffed during the pandemic.

Civil servants from other sectors have followed suit, bringing the operation of

the country's banks, schools, railway operations, and businesses to a halt.

The junta has tried to force people back to work, and on Thursday, state-run media reported that at least 20 doctors participating in the movement will be charged for attempting to "deteriorate peace and stability". —AFP

Retaliation: US expels  
10 Russian diplomats

Washington, April 15: The United States announced sanctions and the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats Thursday in retaliation for what Washington says is the Kremlin's US election interference, a massive cyber attack and other hostile activity.

President Joe Biden's broadside against Russia came the same week as he offered to meet President Vladimir Putin for their first summit — a meeting US officials say remains "vital" so that the two

countries can deescalate. In an executive order, Biden widened restrictions on US banks trading in Russian government debt, expelled 10 diplomats who include alleged spies, and sanctioned 32 individuals accused of meddling in the 2020 presidential election.

Biden's order "sends a signal that the United States will impose costs in a strategic and economically impactful manner on Russia if it continues or escalates its destabilising international action," the

White House said. The Kremlin said Thursday that sanctions would not "help" momentum for a summit and once the White House unveiled its measures, the Russian foreign ministry warned a Russian response was "inevitable."

"The United States is not ready to come to terms with the objective reality that there is a multipolar world that excludes American hegemony," spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

—AFP

BLINKEN IN KABUL  
TO SELL TROOP  
WITHDRAWAL PLAN

Kabul, April 15: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on Thursday to sell Afghan leaders and a wary public on President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all American troops from the country.

Blinken sought to assure senior Afghan politicians that the US remains committed to the country despite Biden's announcement a day earlier that the 2,500 US soldiers remaining in the country would be coming home.

—AP



quick  
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,803.68	0.53
Nifty 50	14,581.50	0.53
S&P 500*	4,160.59	0.87
Dollar (₹)	74.91	0.21
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.34	0.12
Euro (₹)	89.76	0.09
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,301,159	0.003
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.62	0.06
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.126	-0.03
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.588	-0.048

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

WPI inflation  
spikes to 7.39%  
in March

The wholesale price-based inflation shot up to over 8-year high of 7.39 per cent in March on rising crude oil and metal prices. The low base of March last year, when the data was computed with a low response rate due to the lockdown, contributed to the spike in inflation in March 2021. The WPI inflation was 4.17 per cent in February 2021 and 0.42 per cent in March 2020. This is the third month of uptick-based inflation.

■ UAE Exchange, Repco among applicants  
8 apply for SFBs,  
universal banksFALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, APRIL 15

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday said that four applicants each have applied for 'on-tap' licences to start universal banks and small finance banks under the private sector. The four that have applied for universal bank licences are Abu Dhabi-based remittance house UAE Exchange, government-owned multi state co-operative named Repco Bank, Flipkart co-founder Sachin Bansal-led NBFC MFI called Chaitanya India Fin Credit Pvt Ltd and ex-Citi Banker Pankaj Vaish & others.

This is not the first time that UAE Exchange is attempting a banking foray. It had applied for a universal banking licence in June 2017 as well.

Applicants for small finance banks are VSoft Technologies Private Limited—a provider of banking and payment solutions to financial institutions—Calicut City Service Co-operative Bank Limited, Akhil Kumar Gupta and Dvara Kshetriya Gramin



Financial Services Private Limited.

Set up in 2002, Calicut City Service Co-operative Bank caters to customers in the city of Kozhikode in Kerala. In March 31, 2019, the cooperative bank had 1.48 lakh members. It has 24 branches across the city. Dvara Kshetriya Gramin Financial Services, incorporated in 2008, by Dvara Trust provides financial services in rural areas. Details about Akhil Kumar Gupta were not available.

The applications will now be evaluated by the standing external advisory committee, set up by the RBI last month, under former deputy governor Shyamala Gopinath.

In the last round, the RBI gave two universal banking licences in April 2014 to

IDFC First Bank and Bandhan Bank. It gave 10 SFB licences in 2018, including to Janalakshmi, Ujjivan, RGVN (North East), among others.

The RBI had issued guidelines for on-tap licensing of universal banks in the private sector on August 1, 2016 and of SFBs on December 5, 2019.

By the 2016 guidelines, entities seeking universal bank licences must be individuals/entities with at least 10 years senior-level experience in banking and finance, private companies or groups with at least 10 years of good track record. Groups or companies seeking licences must have assets of Rs 5,000 crore and their non-financial businesses don't account for 40 per cent of these assets.

Farm jobs  
increase by  
9 mn in FY21SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

Employment in agriculture went up by 9 million in March 2021, a year after the pandemic struck the nation. Rural India has seen a churn as people who lost non-farm jobs have gone for farm jobs, finds private think-tank CMIE.

As people lost jobs, they moved from one kind of job to another in hunt for a new occupation. Large numbers eventually migrated to agriculture. As a result, employment in agriculture at the last count, in March 2021, was higher by 8 per cent compared to year-ago numbers.

Over 6 million salaried jobs were lost in rural India in 2020-21 and most of these would have migrated to farming. Rural India also saw nearly 3 million business persons being rendered unemployed.

However, productivity of this additional employment is low. Agricultural output is estimated to have increased by 2.3 per cent in almost each of the four quarters of 2020-21. The 8 per cent increase in labour implies a sharp fall in labour productivity.

"We believe that this huge influx of labour into agriculture during 2020-21 is largely disguised unemployment. It hides the greater employment challenge in March 2021 than the 5.4 million net jobs lost at the end of March 2021," said Mahesh Vyas, CEO, CMIE.

Travel M&A begins: Flipkart  
to buy Cleartrip in distress saleSANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

Marking the beginning of mergers & acquisitions in the pandemic-hit travel sector, Flipkart is acquiring online travel aggregator Cleartrip in a distress sale.

The e-commerce major on Thursday announced its decision to buy 100 per cent of Cleartrip's shareholding. The deal could be a mix of cash and equity and will see Cleartrip valued at \$40 million.

Cleartrip had raised \$75 million so far and was reportedly valued at \$300 million in 2016. Concur Technologies, DAG Ventures and Gund Investment are the key investors of



Cleartrip, which reported revenues of Rs 319 crore and loss of Rs 14 crore in FY20, according to Tofler.

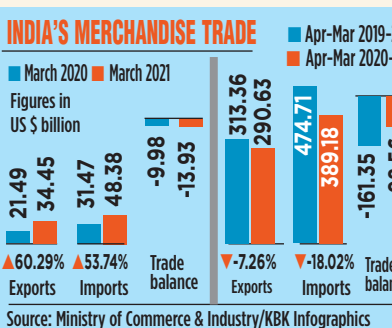
Cleartrip will continue to operate as a separate brand, retaining all employees while working closely with Flipkart to further develop technology solutions to make travel simple for customers.

Cleartrip, founded in 2006, has been competing with MakeMyTrip, Yatra,

Ebiz, and Booking.com. Most of the online travel aggregators have been suffering losses even before pandemic due to heavy competition and thin margins. The pandemic further hit the travel as well as hospitality industry badly. According to HVS Anarock, these industries will increasingly witness mergers and acquisition in 2021 owing to the financial stress.

"The Flipkart Group is committed to transforming customer experiences through digital commerce. This investment will help strengthen our wide range of offerings for customers," said Kalyan Krishnamurthy, CEO, Flipkart Group.

## BUSINESS BRIEFS



## WIPRO Q4 NET PROFIT UP 27.7%

New Delhi, April 15: Wipro on Thursday posted a 27.7 per cent jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,972 crore for the March 2021 quarter, and exuded confidence of sustaining strong growth momentum in the coming quarters. Wipro had posted a net profit (attributable to equity holders) of Rs 2,326.1 crore a year ago, as per Ind-AS.

Its revenue from operations rose by 3.4 per cent to Rs 16,245.4 crore from Rs 15,711 crore in the same period last fiscal. Wipro—which gets a bulk of its topline from IT services—said it expects revenues from that unit to be in the range of \$2,195 to \$2,238 million in the June 2021 quarter. This translates into a sequential growth of 2-4 per cent.—PTI

## AMBANI SENDS OXYGEN TO MAHA



Mukesh Ambani

April 15: Mukesh Ambani is diverting oxygen produced at his refineries to help India battle a savage coronavirus outbreak that's paralysed the commercial capital. Reliance Industries Ltd, has started supplying oxygen from Jamnagar to Maharashtra at no cost, a company official said. Maharashtra will get 100 tonnes of the gas from Reliance, Eknath Shinde, urban development minister, said in a tweet. RIL is diverting some oxygen streams meant for its petcoke gasification units after making it suitable for medical use, the official said.

—Debjit Chakraborty/Bloomberg

## GAMES

## SHORT TAKES

Chess wizard  
Anand bereaved

Chennai: Five-time world chess champion Viswanathan Anand's father, K Viswanathan, died here on Thursday following brief illness. He was 92 and breathed his last at a city hospital, family sources said.

A former General Manager of the Southern Railway, Viswanathan is survived by two sons and a daughter.

Anand's wife Aruna described him as a great support to the celebrated chess player.

"He was a great support to Anand. He witnessed all of Anand's world championship victories," Aruna said.

"A simple man, he made sure his son had the right values. He took great pride in his achievements," she added. —PTI

Djokovic bows out  
of Monte Carlo

Monte Carlo: World number one Novak Djokovic crashed out of the Monte Carlo Masters in the last 16 on Thursday following a shock 6-4, 7-5 defeat by Britain's Dan Evans. Djokovic, the Monte Carlo champion in 2013 and 2015, was broken five times by the 33rd-ranked Evans and suffered his first loss of the year, having won the Australian Open for the ninth time in February. "To be honest this has been one of the worst matches from my side I can recall in the last few years," said Djokovic. "I felt awful on the court overall. Nothing worked. Just one of those days." —AFP

Aditi gets off to  
season's best start

Kapolei, US: Indian golfer Aditi Ashok carded three birdies in her first five holes to get off to her best start of the 2021 LPGA season with a 3-under 69 in the first round of the Lotte Championship. Aditi, playing her fifth event of the year, was under 70 for the first time this year and that should augur well for the 23-year-old from Bengaluru, who has made the cut in all four previous starts this year. Teeing off from the tenth, she birdied the 10th, 13th and 14th and turned in 3-under. Aditi was four shots behind co-leader Brittany Altomare and Filipina Yuka Saso (64). —PTI

## Olympics could be cancelled

Tokyo, April 15: A senior Japanese politician said cancelling the Tokyo Olympics over the coronavirus remains a possibility on Thursday, as a surge in cases renews concerns about the Games with less than 100 days to go.

Toshiro Nikai, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's number two, said the Olympics must be cancelled "without hesitation" if the virus situation is too severe.

A year after their historic postponement, the 2020 Olympics remain beset by pandemic problems, with parts of the torch relay forced behind closed doors and public support consistently low.

Organisers and Olympic officials insist the Games

will go ahead safely, but Nikai said Thursday that all options were on the table. "We need to make a decision depending on the situation at the time," he told the private TBS television network.

"We need to cancel it without hesitation if they're no longer possible," added Nikai, who is the LDP's secretary general.

Asked if he considered cancellation an option, Nikai said: "Yes of course. If infection spreads because of the Olympics, I don't know what the Olympics is for."

He added however that he sees the Games as an "opportunity", and it was "important for Japan to foster excitement with

● Toshiro Nikai, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's number two, said the Olympics must be cancelled "without hesitation" if the virus situation is too severe.

support from the public".

"We definitely want to make a success. In order to do so, there are various issues to solve. It's important to solve them one by one."

'MIGHT BE NO  
SPECTATORS'

The comments were quickly dismissed by an unnamed LDP official, who told the Jiji news

agency: "The Games will not be cancelled."

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said she had "been told that the comment meant it is an option".

"I take it as a message of strong encouragement that we contain the coronavirus by all means," she said.

Japan's vaccine minister meanwhile mooted the possibility of a total bar on spectators at the Games.

"We'll hold the Olympics in a form that is feasible," the *Asahi* newspaper quoted Taro Kono as saying.

"There might be no spectators."

Nikai's remarks come with fresh worries in Japan about what experts have called a fourth wave of infections.

Record numbers of cases have been reported in Osaka in recent days, and the government has been forced to authorise new restrictions just weeks after lifting a virus state of emergency.

Compounding the problem is the comparatively slow roll-out of the vaccine in Japan, which has so far only approved the Pfizer/BioNTech version.

Around 1.1 million people in the country of 126 million have received a first dose of vaccine so far, with the roll-out only expanding to the elderly this week. Despite the problems, Olympic organisers insist the Games can be held safely and have released virus rulebooks to allay public fears.

—AFP

SARITA FIGHTS  
BACK TO KEEP  
ASIAN TITLE

Almaty, April 15: Scripting a sensational comeback, an aggressive Sarita Mor reeled off nine straight points in the summit clash to retain her Asian Championship title in 59kg while Seema Bisla (50kg) and Pooja (76kg) settled for bronze medals here on Thursday. Sarita, who won gold at the 2020 championship, lagged 1-7 after a botched up challenge but turned it around with a tremendous fight back against Mongolia's Shoovdor Baatarjav.

Attempting a move at 1-3 on the edge of the mat, Sarita lost her balance, allowing her rival to get one point. However, the Mongolian's coach challenged the call to get her ward four points.

From there on, there was no stopping Sarita. She effected a take-down, following it up with an expose and then one more take down on the edge of the circle to make it 7-7.

At that juncture, time running out fast, the Mongolian camp challenged the call and lost that to give an extra point to Sarita, who won 10-7.

—PTI

## Foden fires Man City into semis

Dortmund (Germany), April 15: Manchester City set up a blockbuster Champions League semi-final against Paris Saint-Germain as Phil Foden's second-half winner sealed a 2-1 victory at Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday to send the Premier League leaders through 4-2 on aggregate.

England midfielder Jude Bellingham gave Dortmund an early lead, but a second-half Riyad Mahrez penalty and Foden's powerful strike moved City into the last four of Europe's top club competition for the second time.

Having also scored the 90th-minute winner to give City a 2-1 victory in last week's first leg in Manchester, England international Foden again broke Dortmund hearts. "We are finally in the semi-finals and we're really happy," Guardiola told Sky with his team bidding to win four titles this season.

"The guys deserve it because what they have achieved this season is incredible."

Guardiola was full of praise for Mauricio Pochettino's PSG after they reached the last four by squeezing past holders Bayern Munich on away

## THE RESULTS

Borussia Dortmund (Bellingham 15)	1
Manchester City (Mahrez 55-pen, Foden 75)	2
(Manchester City win 4-2 on aggregate)	
Liverpool	0
Real Madrid	0
(Real Madrid win 3-1 on aggregate)	

goals.

"We saw yesterday how strong they (PSG) are, Neymar is an excellent player and they have eliminated the world's best team," said Guardiola.

"It's time to celebrate and drink a lot of wine, then prepare to face Chelsea (in the FA Cup semi-finals on Saturday)." City had bowed out at the quarter-final stage in each of the last three seasons, and had to come from behind at Signal Iduna Park as Dortmund shrugged off their indifferent Bundesliga form to take the lead on 15 minutes.

Four days after scoring his first Bundesliga goal, Bellingham also hit the back of the net for the first time in the Champions League. —AFP



Manchester City's Phil Foden (right) celebrates after scoring against Borussia Dortmund in their Champions League quarterfinal second leg match in Dortmund, western Germany, on Wednesday.

—AFP

Hardik promoted  
in BCCI contracts

New Delhi, April 15: The star trio of India captain Virat Kohli, his white-ball deputy Rohit Sharma and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah retained their top bracket BCCI contracts, worth ₹7 crore each, while all-rounder Hardik Pandya earned a promotion despite an injury-plagued season.

A total of 28 cricketers were awarded central contracts in four categories on Thursday.

At this moment in Indian cricket, there are only three certainties across formats and the scenario hasn't changed with Kohli, Rohit and Bumrah being the elite of elites.

All-rounder Pandya is one of the notable promotions to Grade A, which is worth ₹5 crore, despite the fact that he endured a back injury which has prevented him from bowling for much of the last year. He was in Grade B last year.

"Hardik is very much in line to play Test matches in England and will be one of the most important players after our A+ cricketers when we play the T20 World Cup. So Hardik's promotion is about what he brings to the team. That's what the selectors have factored in," a senior BCCI official said on conditions of anonymity.

LIST OF BCCI'S  
ANNUAL CONTRACTS

**GRADE A+ (₹7 crore):** Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah.

**GRADE A (₹5 crore):** R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Shikhar Dhawan, K.L. Rahul, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, Rishabh Pant, Hardik Pandya.

**GRADE B (₹3 crore):** Wriddhiman Saha, Umesh Yadav, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Shardul Thakur, Mayank Agarwal.

**GRADE C (₹1 crore):** Kuldeep Yadav, Navdeep Saini, Deepak Chahar, Shubman Gill, Hanuma Vihari, Axar Patel, Shreyas Iyer, Washington Sundar, Yuzvendra Chahal, Mohammed Siraj.

Rookies Shubman Gill and Mohammed Siraj have got their maiden central contracts worth ₹1 crore in Grade C while Shardul Thakur has been elevated to group B. The trio has been rewarded for lion-hearted performances during India's historic Test triumph in Australia this year.

Among the demotions, pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar has dropped to Grade B, which is worth ₹3 crore, while Kedar Jadhav has been dropped for good. —PTI

ALL-WIN DAY FOR INDIAN  
BOXERS AT YOUTH WORLDS

New Delhi, April 15: It was a second successive all-win day for Indian boxers at the youth world championships in Kielce, Poland with two from the women's contingent advancing to the quarterfinals after clinching dominating triumphs.

Poonam (57kg) and Vinka (60kg) won their bouts comprehensively to make the last-eight stage on Wednesday. While Poonam defeated Hungary's Beata Varga, Vinka sailed past Bosnia and Herzegovina's Tara Bohatjuk.

In the men's draw, Asian youth silver-medallist Ankit Narwal (64kg) advanced to the second round after a comprehensive 5-0 win over Slovakia's Miroslav Herceg.

In the 91kg category, Vishal Gupta notched up a comfortable unanimous victory over Bulgaria's Georgi Stoev to enter the round of 16. Also entering the pre-quarters was Vikas (52kg) after getting the better of Bulgaria's Yassen Radev 5-0.

—PTI



