

# DECCAN Chronicle

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



## WEATHER

Max: 35.8°C  
Min: 22.2°C  
RH: 44%  
Rain: Nil  
Forecast: Rain or thunderstorms likely.  
Max/Min temp. 36/23°C

## WORLD | 5

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

## SPORTS | 8

**Angry Kohli rapped for kicking chair**

## TABLOID

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

## N'sagar bypoll campaign ends; advantage TRS

**L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC**  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

The month-long high-decibel campaign by political parties for the Nagarjunasagar Assembly bypoll ended on Thursday.

TRS leaders claimed that the huge size of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao's public meeting at Halia on Wednesday boosted the chances of the TRS in the bypoll. The vigorous campaigning by ministers, TRS MLAs, MLCs, MPs and other leaders for the past one month has given the TRS a clear edge over its rivals, they claimed.

The TRS is banking on the votes of the thousands of beneficiaries of the state government's welfare schemes in the constituency, to retain the seat with a huge majority.

All the parties have chalked out their booth management strategies for the polling on April 17. The main focus for the TRS and other parties is on ensuring a higher turnout of voters. The TRS has appointed cadres to distribute voter slips door-to-door, based on the

● **TRS LEADERS** claimed that the huge size of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao's public meeting at Halia on Wednesday boosted the chances of the TRS in the Nagarjunasagar bypoll.

list of beneficiaries of the TRS welfare schemes. The details of beneficiaries of welfare schemes like Rythu Bandhu, Rythu Bima, Aasara pensions, free sheep distribution, ration cards, Ayogyasri, fee reimbursement, scholarships, gurukul educational institutions etc were provided to cadres, whose duty is to seek votes in return for the TRS candidate, by personally meeting them and explaining matters. An in-charge was appointed for every 25 voters, whose duty is to ensure that voters reached polling booth and cast their vote.

The TRS, Congress and the BJP selected persons from dominant castes in villages to mobilise voters from their communities to the booths.

■ **Page 2: Great demand for BC leaders**

## 7 civic polls on April 30, results to be out May 3

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

The Telangana State Election Commission (TSEC) issued notification on Thursday for polls to two municipal corporations and five municipalities. The polling will be held on April 30 and the counting on May 3.

Up for polls are the municipal corporations of Greater Warangal and Khammam as also the municipalities of Atchamper, Siddipet, Nakrekal, Jachcherla and Kothur. This apart, the election for the Lingojiguda division under GHMC limits will also be held. The seat fell vacant due to the death of BJP corporator soon after the GHMC polls in December 2020.

The nomination process will start on Friday and the last day of nominations is April 18. The scrutiny of nominations will take place on April 19 and the last date of withdrawal is April 22.

The notification came as a surprise, just like the GHMC election notification in November 2020.

While the opposition parties were expecting

## LINGOJIGUDA POLL NOMINATION TO START TODAY

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

The state election commission on Thursday announced the schedule for the by-election to Lingojiguda GHMC ward, slated for April 30.

■ **Report on Page 2**

these polls in May after Nagarjunasagar assembly bypoll result on May 2, the ruling TRS has sprung a surprise by recommending the holding of the elections even before the result of Nagarjunasagar bypoll is out.

These elections will mark the end of the elections in Telangana from village-level to national level and there will, in normal course, be no other election in Telangana until the December 2023 assembly polls.

■ **Page 2: Elections to help gauge pulse of voters**

## SSC exams cancelled, Inter 2nd year exams postponed

**'Objective criteria' to assess SSC students, Inter 1st year students to be promoted**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

Ending the weeks of confusion and uncertainty, the Telangana government on Thursday announced cancellation of the SSC examinations for all schools in the state.

This, it said, is owing to the fresh spike in Covid-19 cases.

The Intermediate second year examinations have been postponed, the government announced, adding, a review meeting will be held in the first week of June to decide on the fresh dates for the examination.

This announcement has come as a major relief to over 16 lakh students appearing for SSC or Inter first and second-year exams.

Over 5.5 lakh students were to sit for SSC exams. Some nine lakh students from both Intermediate levels had registered for the exams.

All intermediate second-year students with backlogs will be given the minimum passing mark for the backlogs only. A 25 per cent weightage on intermediate marks will not be considered for Eamcet this year.

The government also announced that all intermediate first-year students will be promoted without exams. The exams will be held at a future date.

Meanwhile, the SSC students will be assessed on the basis of objective criteria developed by the state SSC board. Any student not satisfied with the marks given to him or her will have the opportunity to sit in an exam "as and when the conditions are conducive," the government said.

The announcement comes a day after the CBSE announced cancellation of its Class 10 exams and postponement of Class 12 exams across the country.

The state education department held a meeting on Thursday and took the decision after obtaining the nod from the government.

Students and their parents across the state had been demanding the cancellation of the exams, keeping in view a surge in Covid cases and citing the lack of preparedness on their part due to the absence of classroom teaching throughout the year.

Some students even started an online petition to push their cause, addressed to the chief minister, which had fetched over 25,000 signatures over the past few weeks.



A large number of people queue up to take the Covid-19 test at the Fever Hospital in Hyderabad on Thursday. As the number of virus mutations keeps rising, many people are reporting symptoms of the virus infection.

— S. SURENDER REDDY

## Neet PG put off as Covid daily tally crosses 2 lakh

**VINEETA PANDEY | DC**  
with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

Due to the spike in 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, he added.

"In light of the surge in #COVID19 cases, GoI has decided to postpone #NEETPG2021 exam which was earlier scheduled to be held on Apr 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.

Meanwhile, with several states reporting shortage of medical oxygen, an inter-ministerial empowered group of Central government officers initiated actions to address shortage and panic. The government has decided to import 50,000 MT of medical oxygen to address the shortage as the empowered group initiated mapping of 12 high burden states to oxygen sources. Reliance Industries and

BPCL have diverted oxygen from their refineries to the government hospitals, free of cost.

India on Thursday registered over two lakh fresh cases of Covid-19 with over 1,038 deaths.

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

## 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 the 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. The Congress demanded the EC to take note safety protocols at poll rallies. — PTI

## 25% Covid beds to be added

**BALU PULIPAKA | DC**  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

The Telangana state health department has decided to increase the number of beds available to Covid-19 patients at all government hospitals treating Coronavirus infected patients by 25 per cent.

The decision to increase bed strength comes in the wake of increasing complaints from people about the lack of beds for treating Covid patients, especially those requiring serious and critical care in

intensive care units (ICUs). The department will also be asking private hospitals to increase the beds being made available to Covid patients in view of the fast-rising cases in the state.

As on Wednesday, according to the daily data released in the Covid9 bulletin by the department, the state-run hospitals in all districts treating Covid patients, have a total of 9,281 beds available for them. Of these, 5,503 beds are equipped with oxygen supply, while another

1,773 beds are in the Intensive Care Units with the capability to provide ventilation and continuous positive air pressure (CPAP) equipment to help patients in serious and critical condition to breathe.

Among private hospitals treating Covid cases, the bulletin says there are 13,294 beds of which 4,668 have oxygen connectivity, and another 3,654 were capable of accommodating patients requiring CPAP machines or ventilators.

It may be recalled that on Wednesday, the Director

of Health Services warned that if the current rate of infections continues, then the day when hospitals run out of beds for patients, may not be far off.

The issue of increasing bed strength was among those discussed at a meeting chaired by Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar here on Thursday and attended by top health department officials. It was also resolved to ask private hospitals to put off elective surgeries so doctors and staff can focus on Covid patients.

**NO | ACCOUNTABILITY** GHMC giving excuses, not getting stay orders secured on illegal buildings vacated, says court

## Raze illegal buildings from the foundation, says HC

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

The Telangana High Court on Thursday pulled up the GHMC for its insincere, "namesake" actions against unauthorised constructions in the capital.

The corporation staff is seen to be in cahoots with those engaged in illegal constructions, the court said in a direct indictment.

Saying that the GHMC's operations on this count were nothing more than eyewash, the court cited the civic body's steps like issuing notices in a casual

manner against illegal constructions and undertaking a sham of demolitions by "making small holes in the slabs."

The court said the civic body is citing excuses and doing no serious follow-up to vacate the stay orders obtained by those doing illegal constructions.

A division bench of Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijaysen Reddy has ordered the GHMC to be diligent in performing its duties in future and advised it to show no sympathy in the demolition of illegal constructions.

"Drilling small holes in the slabs will not do. Illegal constructions should be demolished wholesale, and the drilling should come down to their foundations," the bench said.

The court also ordered that those who owned illegal constructions should be made to bear the expenses incurred by the civic body for such demolitions, as contemplated in law.

"The civic body's demolitions should be photographed or photographed to show that the constructions have been fully brought down to the

● **A DIVISION** bench of Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijaysen Reddy has ordered the GHMC to be diligent in performing its duties in future and advised it to show no sympathy in the demolition of illegal constructions.

ground," it ordered.

The High Court asked the principal district judges of trial courts within the GHMC limits to ensure faster closure of petitions in which interim orders had been passed by way of restricting the GHMC from

not taking actions against any unauthorised construction.

The bench was dealing with two petitions filed by G. Nageswar Rao and G. Praveen Kumar, seeking an order to stop the demolition of certain building floors that were constructed illegally.

One of the petitioners had got permission from the GHMC to construct a two-storied building at Kukatpally but it built an additional three floors illegally.

When GHMC sent a demolition notice, the

owner approached a civil court seeking a stay.

A single bench judge referred the case to the bench of the Chief Justice to convert this and take up the issue as public interest litigation (PIL) on illegal constructions in the city.

The last time the case came up, the bench had sought details of circle-wise illegal constructions identified by the GHMC and the action taken against them.

The court also sought to know how many notices had been issued by each

circle against illegal constructions and how many of them had approached the courts.

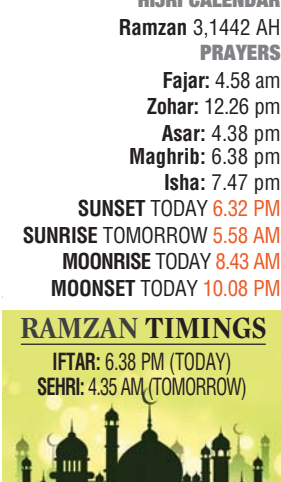
"If and when adverse orders were issued in the trial courts, did the GHMC make attempts to vacate those orders," the division bench had wanted to know.

The bench had also sought details of the action taken against the erring staff and officials who were negligent towards unauthorised constructions.

■ **Page 2: Few zonal chiefs respond on GHMC staff**

## ASTROGUIDE

**Plava:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Chaitra Shuddha Chaviti till 6.04 pm  
**Star:** Rohini 11.38 pm  
**Variyam:** 2.36 pm to 4.24 pm;  
5.54 am to 7.42 am (Saturday)  
**Durmuhurtam:** 8.32 am to 9.22 am; 12.40 pm to 1.30 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 10.30 am to 12 noon  
**HJRI CALENDAR**  
**Ramzan** 3,1442 AH  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 4.58 am  
**Zohar:** 12.26 pm  
**Asar:** 4.38 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.38 pm  
**Isha:** 7.47 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.32 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.58 AM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 8.43 AM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 10.08 PM**



## 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).

### Bobde bats for woman as CJI

**New Delhi:** The Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde on Thursday batted for more women judges in higher judiciary saying that time has come for a woman Chief Justice of India. However, Chief Justice Bobde regretted that the women lawyers when offered judgeship decline it citing domestic and parental responsibilities.

■ **Report on Page 4**

### 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.

■ **Report on Page 7**

### India, France ink Gaganyaan pact

**New Delhi:** Space agencies of India and France on Thursday signed an agreement for cooperation for the 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.

■ **Report on Page 4**



## IN BRIEF

## Polls to help gauge pulse of voters

From Page 1

Hence, these elections will help all parties to gauge the pulse of the voters. Elections will be held for 248 divisions and wards in the above corporations and municipalities.

While GWMC has 66 divisions, KMC has 60 divisions. There are 20 wards in Atchampet, 43 in Siddipet, 20 in Nakrekal, 27 in Jadcherla and 12 in Kothur municipalities. The elections will be held through ballot papers. As many as 11,26,221 voters — including 5,53,862 male and 5,72,121 female — will be entitled to exercise their franchise.

## GREAT DEMAND FOR BC LEADERS

From Page 1

As the Nagarjunasagar constituency is dominated by BCs, there was a great demand for appointing BC leaders as in-charges for booth-level management. While there a total of 2,19,745 voters in the constituency, the BC voters comprise 1,03,886, forming almost half of the total voters.

After BCs, the ST voters constitute the largest chunk, at 35,706, followed by SCs 33,821, OCs 32,606, minorities 6,687 and others 7,039. As Yadav vote bank is strong and the highest in the constituency at 36,646 voters, all the parties are laying special focus to lure this community with the help of local Yadav leaders.

All the parties are relying heavily on the distribution of cash and liquor through caste leaders and local leaders in respective booths to lure voters in the final two days before polling on April 17.

## INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE CANCELS EXAMS

From Page 1

Following up on the CBSE announcement, the International Baccalaureate (IB) on Thursday cancelled its examinations across the country citing the surge in Covid-19 cases.

Students under the IB coursework will be awarded marks and predicted grades for this session on the basis of the awarding model that the board had outlined in February. The students, parents and teachers should talk to IB coordinators of their respective schools for more details.

“The IB has informed schools of our decision not to hold examinations in India due to the rising cases of Covid-19, and following ongoing conversations with our schools, associations and education boards,” an official statement by the International Baccalaureate said.

According to the board, India will follow the non-examination route for the diploma programme, the career-related programme and the alternative task for the middle years programme.

## DGP SAYS 180 NUMBERS ON LOAN APPS FOUND

**Hyderabad:** In a PIL seeking action against loan apps, the Director-General of Police filed a counter-affidavit before the court stating that 180 mobile numbers have been identified, which were used to lure gullible people with promises of providing loans. He submitted that action would be taken against the culprits once they are identified and nabbed.

## NOMINATIONS FOR GHMC BYPOLL TO START TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

The state election commission on Thursday announced the schedule for the by-election to Lingojiguda GHMC ward, slated for April 30. The nomination process for the by-election, necessitated by the demise of BJP corporator, will be from April 16 to 18.

In case of a re-polling, it will be held on May 2 and counting of votes will be taken up the next day. Besides this, municipal polls will also be held on April 30.

## KCR taking credit for Centre's schemes: BJP

## Bandi says CM is habituated to breaking his promises

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar has alleged that Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao took credit for the welfare schemes of the central government by covering their brands with his own photo and name.

The BJP chief stated this while participating in a roadshow on the last day of campaign for the Nagarjunasagar bypoll with former MP Vijayashanti at Halia on Thursday. The BJP leaders on the roadshow sought votes for the party nominee Dr Ravikumar.

Bandi said chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has a habit of breaking the promises he makes to the people on occasions. He asked the chief minister why had the state government failed to open the Nizam sugar factory as was promised by KCR before the assembly elections.

“The BJP gave a formidable challenge to the ruling TRS at the Dubbaka bypoll and the GHMC polls. Now, the BJP wants the CM to state clearly as to how much funds the government had sanctioned for the Nagarjunasagar constituency and how much more could be expected from him now,” he said.

The BJP leader claimed that the Union Government had given ₹398 crore for the Nagarjunasagar constituency for its developmental activities. Of this, a sum of ₹105 crore was given by Center under the PM Kisan scheme, he said.

He asked the chief minister to explain why he did not respond to the directive from the Union ministry of tribal welfare

## Sonia sacrificed Cong. for TS, says Jana Reddy

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

Congress candidate for Nagarjunasagar assembly bypoll Kunduru Jana Reddy on Thursday came down heavily on TRS chief and chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao for the sharp criticism he made against him as well as the Congress party at Wednesday's Halia rally. Jana Reddy rubbished the Chief Minister's claim that he had achieved Telangana state by putting his life in the jaws of death.

It was Congress chief Sonia Gandhi who boldly decided to grant statehood for Telangana even as she knew it would affect the future of the Congress party in the two new states, Jana said.

Addressing a press conference, Jana said Telangana Congress leaders too had put their

political future at stake to convince Sonia Gandhi for the bifurcation.

Referring to K. Chandrashekar Rao's criticism that Jana Reddy did nothing for the development of Nagarjunasagar constituency despite serving as MLA and minister for 30 years, Jana Reddy said, “Either K. Chandrashekar Rao should be blind or ignorant. I have brought in roads, provided irrigation canals and drinking water, as also power supply and all other infrastructure facilities in every village.

Can KCR tell us what the TRS did in the last six years? Except for continuing with the Congress schemes by renaming them to fool the people, K. Chandrashekar Rao did nothing in the last six years.”

Jana said though he had challenged the TRS

several times to come for an open debate on Nagarjunasagar development, no leader responded.

This showed that they were only spreading lies, he said.

Jana rejected KCR's criticism that he had compromised on Telangana's interests in return for posts in his vast political career. “We as Congress ministers and MLAs from Telangana region tendered our resignations to bring pressure on the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre to grant statehood for Telangana.

I was offered the CM post but I rejected it fearing that it may weaken the Telangana statehood movement. We had withdrawn our resignations only after Sonia Gandhi gave us an assurance that ‘Telangana state will be created at any cost,’ he said.

She appealed to the people to once again raise the slogan of Veera Telangana for removal of K. Chandrashekar Rao from power.

Vijayashanti alleged that KCR made many promises before the last assembly polls but failed to fulfill these. She cited instances like the promise to grant three acres of land for each Dalit family, as also double-bedroom houses for them, the promise on Bhagiratha water and grant of unemployment dole to jobless youths.

Wednesday, the BJP leader said.

The Podu lands problem was a creation of chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao and now he is promising to solve the problem, he said.

Bandi alleged that the TRS and the Congress concluded in a by-poll to defeat the BJP candidate but the people knew what the BJP was and voted for it. He appealed to the voters to do the same for the BJP in this by-poll too.

BJP leader Vijayashanti said KCR will be removed from power with the peo-

## KCR PUSHED TS INTO DEBT TRAP: KOMATIREDDY

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

Congress leader and Bhongir Lok Sabha MP Komatireddy Venkat Reddy alleged that the TRS government led by Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao had pushed revenue-surplus Telangana state into a debt trap with its misrule during the past seven years.

He urged voters to defeat the TRS in the Nagarjunasagar Assembly bypoll on April 17 and teach a fitting lesson to Rao and to save Telangana from the “family and dictatorial rule” of Rao.

Campaigning for party candidate K. Jana Reddy on Thursday, Komatireddy said while Sonia Gandhi had granted statehood to Telangana state to stop suicides of Telangana youth due to unemployment, Rao failed to provide employment due to which youth continue to commit suicides.

He alleged that Rao made ₹4 lakh crore debt for his selfish interests in the last seven years.

He criticised Rao for not sanctioning funds to complete balance Srisaillam project tunnel works though major part of the works were completed during Congress regime itself.

“KCR is discriminating Nalgonda.

He is focussed only on taking up irrigation and development works only in his home district Medak. This is the ideal opportunity for Nagarjunasagar voters to teach fitting lesson to KCR for ignoring Nalgonda all these years. They should defeat the TRS and open the eyes of KCR,” he remarked.

## MINORITY MIN RELEASES BOOK ON LAST NIZAM

ATHER MOIN DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

Minister for minorities welfare Koppala Eshwar on Thursday released an Urdu book titled ‘Shoukat-e-Osmania’ (Grandeur of Osmania), revolving around the last Nizam Mir Osman Ali Khan and has been compiled by Urdu Academy. He said Mir Osman Ali Khan was a secular ruler, who had undertaken many developmental and welfare works and had constructed Osmania Hospital, Osmania University and the High Court. Eshwar appreciated the Academy for highlighting the services rendered by the last Nizam in social and educational fields. He said Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao is administrating the state on secular values. As one fascinated by Urdu language, Rao has been promoting Urdu in the state.

## TSSPDCL techie held for taking bribe

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

The Divisional Engineer (Commercial) from the corporate office of the TSSPDCL was arrested by the ACB official on Thursday for demanding and accepting a bribe amount of ₹35,000.

The accused, Gajawada Manoar, the Divisional Engineer (Commercial) from the office of Chief General Manager (Commercial) of TSSPDCL was caught red handed in his office chambers while accepting ₹35,000, ACB officials said.

“He had demanded the said amount from the complainant Bollaram Bal Narsimha, Electrical Contractor for doing an official favour, which was to

● IN CASE of demand for bribe by any employee of the energy department or by any public servant, the public are requested to contact Toll Free Number of ACB i.e., 1064 for taking action

process the file pertaining to sanction of extension of supply of 5 KW Non-Domestic load under LT Category-II for a real estate venture situated in Bibinagar Mandal, Yadadri Bhongir district,” officials said, adding that the tainted currency was recovered from the possession of the accused officer.

He was arrested and produced before the Principal Special Judge for SPE and ACB cases, Hyderabad.

The case is under investigation. In case of demand for

## STATE GOVT ALLOWS MUSLIM EMPLOYEES TO LEAVE OFFICE AT 4 PM FOR RAMZAN

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

The state government has allowed Muslim employees working in government departments, its undertakings, corporations, boards to leave their offices at 4

pm during the Ramzan.

The Chief Secretary on Thursday issued a circular stating that this facility would run through the holy month and last up to May 13. However, they have to be present during exigencies.

## Few zonal chiefs reply on GHMC staff

From Page 1

It sought these details from 30 circles of the GHMC, which fell in six zones. Curiously, only the zonal commissioners of Khairatabad, Secunderabad and Kukatpally provided these details.

The Khairatabad zonal commissioner stated that his officers had detected 166 unauthorised constructions in 2019 and 145 of these were demolished.

“Some 21 cases are pending due to the trial court orders,” he stated and submitted that regular monitoring was being done by the staff of each circle to inspect the illegal constructions since 2019.

The Kukatpally zonal commissioner reported that 123 illegal constructions had been identified in five circles of the zone in 2019, and 119 of these were demolished. Four such were pending due to the status quo orders issued by courts. The commissioner also stated that charge memos have been issued against four staff members for negligence.

The Secunderabad zonal

commissioner said in his response that 139 unauthorised constructions had been identified in 2019, of which 28 were demolished while 111 were pending due to interim orders issued by the city civil court.

Justice Vijayen Reddy brought to the notice of the CJ that the highest number of status quo orders was issued by the trial court pursuing cases in the Amberpet circle. He also detailed the CJ about the ground realities of the so-called demolition works done by the GHMC officials.

“Symbolically, they made small holes in the slabs, and later, after winning sympathy from all sides, the illegal constructions will be completed,” Justice Reddy told the chief justice, explaining the modus operandi of the illegal builders and the GHMC officials.

Expressing serious concern over this, the bench directed the GHMC that all the zonal commissioners should submit the photographs of the demolished buildings.

## GANG OF 5 HELD FOR MURDER, WEAPONS SEIZED

**Hyderabad:** he Saidabad police on Thursday arrested a gang of five men who were involved in a murder case reported earlier this week. The officials seized knives, mobile phones and motorcycles from their possession.

According to the police, the arrested persons were identified as Mohammed Imran, 28, Basheeruddin Qureshi, 25, Syed Arshad, 21, Syed Irfan, 22, and Mirza Wasim Baig, 25, all residents of

Karwan.

“Parimal Kanodia, husband of the victim Manjula Kanodia, had borrowed ₹11 lakh from one Mehraj Begum on the pretext of investment in pharmaceuticals business.

However, after paying profit for a few months, he started avoiding repayment, irking the men,” said the police, adding that a few months ago, Kanodia went absconding.

## Revise ‘outdated’ HMDA master plan, says Kishan

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G. Kishan Reddy on Thursday wrote a letter to Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao on the need to review the HMDA master plan to make it relevant to the current requirements.

He said many complaints had come to his notice that the development plans in HMDA were not being implemented as expected by the government.

The Union Minister opined that the scope was large and people were suffering due to a lack of proper understanding at the field-level or coordination with the concerned local bodies.

He also said that the farmers had also brought to his notice that the master plan was not in their favour and their interests were being damaged in terms of converting the lands into different zones. He noticed that the farmers have to wait for a long time to convert their lands to other zones like res-

● KISHAN REDDY stated that they want to see an effective implementation of DPMS for building permits. He said steps should be taken to construct bridges at Ghatkesar, Gowdavalli, Nagulapalli and Shamshabad on the ORR service roads where railway lines meet. He sought an early completion of all radial roads.

idential, industrial and commercial. He said that this is creating an opportunity for illegal constructions.

He recalled that after the formation of Telangana, the government had repeatedly said that it would review the HMDA master plan and formulate a comprehensive master plan in favour of the farmers and stated that this was not even a costly affair. He said there was a need to make changes keeping in mind the best interests of farmers and poor and middle class people.

Reddy expressed the opinion that farmers felt that it

would be beneficial to convert all lands in the Outer Ring Road area into residential and zonal areas except lands related to environmental protection. He mentioned that there was a need to form a joint operation involving local organisations in order to curb illegal constructions.

Kishan Reddy stated that they want to see an effective implementation of DPMS for building permits. He said steps should be taken to construct bridges at Ghatkesar, Gowdavalli, Nagulapalli and Shamshabad on the ORR service roads where railway lines meet. He sought an early completion of all radial roads.

The Union minister stressed the need to complete service roads in Rajendranagar, Shamshabad, Narsinghi, Patan Cheru, Shambipur and other places. He demanded immediate repairs to the main ring road and service roads. He said that planting trees and removing shrubs on ORR dividers should be done in a proper manner.

## BIZ | CLOSURE

## Algorithms failed as commuters did not patronise

## RTC scraps ‘Vajra’ buses

SANJAY SAMUEL PAUL, DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

Vajra AC buses, which were introduced by Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao in May 2017, will soon be a thing of the past.

The mini bus service was introduced to make it convenient for the passengers to be picked from their home or pick-up points and reach bus depots without hassle.

The latest is that these buses are to be scrapped. The TSRTC Union is blaming the management for going ahead with the

● TSRTC UNION is blaming the management for going ahead with the decision.

● TSRTC BOUGHT 86 such 21-seater air-conditioned mini buses, spending `40 crore.

decision despite employees stating that the service would not be feasible.

TSRTC bought 86 such 21-seater air-conditioned mini buses, spending ₹40 crore. Initially, there was a provision for online book-

ing by an app and making it simpler for the driver to locate the passenger.

All these algorithms failed as commuters did not patronise the service for varied reasons, thereby failing to generate the expected revenues. In fact, the maintenance became burdensome for the corporation.

Telangana RTC Mazdoor Union general secretary M. Thomas Reddy said “Vajra buses, which were not required at that point in time, were bought only for the sake of commissions

tured to her to stop it straightaway.

By evening the police advised her to wind up the hunger-strike she got down from the stage and started a padayatra.

The police stopped her and took her to her Lotus Pond residence.



Y.S. Vijamma and Y.S. Sharmila participate in a protest near Dharna Chowk against the TRS government on Thursday.

—DEEPAK DESHPANDE



## OTHER STORIES

## 15-YEAR-OLD GIRL INJURED AS PISTOL MISFIRED

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KOTHAGUDEM, APRIL 15

A 15-year-old girl Laxmikala, studying tenth class sustained a bullet injury at her leg in Arlapenta village in Dammapet mandal in Bhadradi-Kothagudem district on Thursday.

Rambabu, a tribal, when cleaning his country-made pistol in a cashew garden the pistol misfired and the bullet hit on the leg of Laxmikala, who was in the adjacent cashew garden. Parents of Laxmikala lodged a complaint on the incident.

The tribals used to keep country made pistols to hunt wild animals.

## CONTAINER LORRY CATCHES FIRE, TWO KILLED

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

Two persons were charred to death after a moving container lorry went up in flames after ramming into another truck on the Outer Ring Road near Himayatsagar on Thursday morning. Rajendranagar police booked a case. Sources said the mishap occurred when the lorry carrying a load of fisheries products from Narsapur in Andhra Pradesh to Hyderabad collided with another vehicle.

The deceased were identified as Suraj Kumar and Murtunujan Yadav, the driver and a cleaner respectively, and were said to be residents of Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh, police said.

"The large container with a load of prawns coming from Narsapur in Andhra Pradesh collided with a container lorry en route to Hyderabad. Due to the impact, a fire broke out and engulfed the driver's cabin, leaving no space for its driver and cleaner to escape," police said, adding that upon receiving information, they rushed to the spot and extinguished the flames with the help of the fire brigade. A case has been registered and is being investigated into.

## NOMINATIONS FOR GHMC BYPOLLS TO START TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

The state election commission on Thursday announced the schedule for the by-election to Lingojiguda GHMC ward, slated for April 30. The nomination process for the by-election, necessitated by the demise of BJP corporator, will be from April 16 to 18.

In case of any re-polling, it will be held on May 2 and counting of votes will be taken up the next day. Besides this, municipal polls will also be held on April 30. Elections will be held for Warangal and Khammam municipal corporations besides five municipalities of Siddipet, Achampet, Jadcherla, Nakrekal and Kothur.

## Officials gear up for municipal elections

66 wards from Warangal, 60 from Khammam, 43 from sSiddipet

DC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, APRIL 15

The state election commission has on Thursday released the notification for holding elections in two municipal corporations and five municipalities along with Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) on April 30.

The social reservation of divisions was also finalised earlier in the day by electoral officer Rajeev Gandhi Hanumanthu. In Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation which underwent delimitation to increase the number of division from 58 to 66, two wards were reserved for Scheduled Tribes (STs) while the division 65 has been reserved for ST - Women, division 2 is reserved for ST - General.

The number of wards reserved for Backward Classes (BC) is 20. BC - Women are going to contest in 10 divisions whereas the remaining ten would be open for BC - general candidates.

17 wards were reserved for General-women and the remaining 16 wards were unreserved.

Officials have already begun making arrangement for the polling process. Of the total 6,52,966 voters under the GWMC, 3,22,918 are male, 3,29,872 are female and the remaining 176 belong to the third gender.

878 polling stations were prepared so that the number of voters do not exceed 800. Two centres for receiving the nominations were prepared at LB College for 34 divisions and University Arts and Science College for 32. Arrangements are being made for the counting process to be held on May 3 at the Delhi Public School.

The electoral officer Rajeev Gandhi Hanumanthu said they have appointed observation teams to keep a check on the violation of the model code of conduct.

Each team constitutes one Tahsildhar, one ASI, one constable and one videographer. Two such teams were appointed for each area so that sustained they work in two shifts.

● 878 polling stations were prepared so that the number of voters do not exceed 800. Two centres for receiving the nominations were prepared at LB College for 34 divisions, University Arts and Science College for 32 divisions.



Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar addresses the media during a press conference in Warangal on Thursday.

## Will win GWMC polls: Chief Whip

DC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, APRIL 15

The TRS leadership has appointed former Hyderabad Mayor Bonthu Rammohan and TSUC Chairmen Gydari Balamallu as the party in-charges for the ensuing elections to the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC).

Announcing the appointment during a press conference here on Thursday, Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar said the TRS is confident of retaining the GWMC in the ensuing election. He noted that the government has taken up several developmental works worth around Rs 3,000 crore in the urban local body (ULB).

"The government has ensured drinking water

supply on daily basis to all the households in the city. Telangana is way ahead of other States in the country in the implementation of welfare and developmental programmes. With the kind of development Warangal has been witnessing, the people would surely support the TRS," he stated.

Vinay said that Warangal will see more development if the people repose their faith in TRS candidates. "All the Corporators in the previous body had worked well to develop their respective Divisions," he said.

Warangal East MLA Nannapuni Narendar and Farmers Debt Relief Commission Chairman Nagurla Venkateshwarlu were among others present.

## 21 WARDS RESERVED FOR WOMEN IN SIDDIPET MUNICIPALITY POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
SIDDIPET, APRIL 15

With the announcement of elections for Siddipet Municipality, the aspirants of various political parties who are interested to contest intensified their lobbying to get tickets.

Siddipet Municipality is divided into 43 wards. Of which 21 are reserved

for women. There are a total of 1,00,653 voters in 53 wards. 50,767 are female, 49,875 are males and 11 members are others.

The officials identified 129 polling centres in 43 wards three for each ward at a distance covering 0.03 kilometres and allotted around 800 voters for each polling centre.

## RESERVATIONS IN KHAMMAM DONE ACCORDING TO AJAY: DURGA PRASAD

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, APRIL 15

DCC president P. Durga Prasad said that the reservations in the divisions Khammam Municipal Corporation were made in a most unscientific way by the officials. He said that the officials took the decision for the convenience

of the ruling party and it did not take proper methods. "It seems that the officials made the reservations on the advice of Minister for Transport P. Ajay Kumar. The rule of law is not followed in it", he said. The people of Khammam Municipal Corporation will teach a lesson to TRS in the Corporation elections.

## 46 DIVISIONS IN KHAMMAM GO TO QUOTA THROUGH LOTTERY SYSTEM

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, APRIL 15

District election officer and collector R.V. Karnan said that 46 divisions against 60 divisions in Khammam Municipal Corporation have been reserved under various categories in the Corporation election to be held on April 30.

He said that the State Election Commission has reserved three divisions for STs, seven for scheduled castes and 20 for backward classes. Another 16 divisions were allocated to general women and 14 for were placed in unreserved category.

"The rule of reservations has been announced through lottery system in the presence of representatives of political parties by the officials of Khammam Municipal Corporation as per the orders issued by Municipal Administration and Urban Development department on August 2, 2019 under section-7 of Telangana Municipality Act-2019," he said, adding that all the earlier notification on it were made null and void with it.

Giving the details on the reservations, district election officer said that 32nd division is allotted to ST women and 1 and 8 divisions to the ST general. Likewise, the divisions like 22, 42 and 59 were given to SC women and 40, 43, 52 and 60 divisions for SC general. Ten wards including 28, 29, 30, 33, 34, 38, 46, 47, 48 and 57 divisions were gone to BC women and 2, 7, 14, 16, 19, 24, 25, 31, 44 and 51 divisions to the BC general category.

Under the General Women category, the divisions like 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 37, 53, 54, 55, 56 and 58 have been allocated. The divisions including 3, 4, 6, 13, 23, 26, 27, 35, 36, 39, 41, 45, 49 and 50 were declared as unreserved category. The representatives from recognized political parties attended the meeting.

The Collector said that the State Election Commission made all the arrangements to conduct polls in a peaceful way. Elections will be held from 7 am to 5 pm on April 30 and counting will be done on May 3. The officials will receive nominations from April 16 and April 18 is the last date for nominations submission.



Minister for BC Welfare, Food and Civil Supplies Gangula Kamalakar inaugurates paddy purchasing centre at Cherlabutkur village of Karimnagar, on Thursday. Collector K. Shashanka is also seen.

—DC

## Govt. to procure 1.32L metric tonnes of paddy, says Gangula

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 15

The minister for Backward Class welfare, food and civil supplies department, Gangula Kamalakar, inaugurated the first procurement centre established by the state government in association with the PACS (Primary Agriculture Credit Society) for purchasing food grains produced in the Rabi season at Cherlabutkur in Karimnagar on Thursday. Kamalakar said that when the other state governments are shutting down the purchasing centres in their respective states, due to Coronavirus, But for the welfare of the farming sector, Chief Minister, K. Chandrasekhar Rao

ordered to open purchasing centre across the state. In view of that an action plan is prepared for procuring 1.32 lakh metric tonnes of food grains in 45 days by establishing 6,400 procurement centres across the state.

While in Karimnagar, 351 procurement centres are opened from today (April 15) onwards with an estimation of procurement of about 4.34 lakh metric tonnes of food grains in the district.

Orders are given to the officials of the concerned department to follow the Covid-19 guidelines strictly at the procurement centres and to purchase the food grains.

Kamalakar said that with the supply of water through Kaleshwaram project under SRSP 11-R

along with uninterrupted power supply, the farmers of Cherlabutkur village were able to reap more than 20,000 quintals of food grains this year.

The farmers are asked to bring their produce in lorries as per the tokens which will be allotted to them by the concerned agriculture officials. Minister urged the farmers to dry food grains properly without exceeding the moisture content more than 17 percent.

With the guarantee given by the state government, the banks readied ₹20,000 crore for paying to the farmers after two to three days of purchasing the food grains from them. Unlike any other state government, the TRS government fixed the minimum support price (MSP)

## HC SEEKS DETAILS OF CHILDREN MISSING FROM TS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

The Telangana High Court on Thursday directed the State government to place details about how many children have gone missing in each police station limits in the State and how many have been tracked so far and how many of them were reunited with their families.

A division bench, headed by Chief Justice Hima Kohli, was dealing with PILs related to constitution of Child Welfare Committees in all the 33 districts of Telangana.

The state government submitted that CWCs have been constituted in 30 districts and urged for closing the PILs.

## MAN HURT IN ROAD ACCIDENT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 15

A man was injured in a road mishap and narrowly escaped a fatal accident when he lost control of the car he was driving on the Outer Ring Road at Kothalguda in Shamshabad on Thursday. The car turned turtle following the mishap. According to the police, the incident occurred around noon.

## IN LOVING MEMORY



Dr. K.S. NARAYAN REDDY (Retd. Principal & Professor of Forensic Medicine - Osmania Medical College) D.O.B: 17-7-1930. D.O.D: 9-04-2021

From: K. PRADHYUMNA REDDY Ph: 9849025455

(B/2122/D00008)

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RTP-14C/21	76155/12/201/2021/3703

## RAIN | EFFECT Many quintals of food grains that were brought to market yards damaged

## Sudden rains cause havoc in Huzurabad

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 15

The heavy rains accompanied with gusty winds and thunderstorms which occurred in the last two days caused a huge loss to the farmers with the damage of not only the standing paddy and maize crops but also the harvested crop here in Huzurabad revenue division of Karimnagar district.

The farmers cultivated the crops in maximum acres of land to the previous season in Karimnagar district. In Huzurabad division, they cultivated paddy and maize crops in about 84,000 acres of land. Of which 20, 000 acres of paddy crop were harvested while the standing crop is in around 40,000 acres of land. When the farmers were expecting good yield from crops, the unseasonal rains which occurred in the last two days dashed their hopes.

Around 4,000 acres of paddy and maize crop cultivated in Huzurabad, Jammikunta, Veenavanka, Saidapur, Ellandakunta and Shankarapatnam mandals are damaged.



The paddy fields which were damaged due to rain in Thokalapally village of Huzurabad in Karimnagar district.

In Saidapur mandal, the farmers cultivated paddy in 16,000 acres of land and maize in around 3,000 acres of land. Due to unexpected rainfall which was recorded 12.2 mm, the standing maize and harvested paddy crops were damaged in maximum acres of land in the mandal. Whereas in Ellanthakunta

mandal, around 155 acres of paddy crop and 130 acres of maize crop was damaged due to sudden rainfall.

The farmers of Kothapally village are left in hapless condition as their harvested paddy crop around 30 tractors which was kept in the agriculture market for drying was washed away with

rain water into SRSP canal. A private teacher Mohammad Ankus who started a poultry farm with the shut down of education institutions was badly hit with sudden death of around 300 birds in his poultry farm with unexpected rains with thunderstorms.

● harvested paddy crop around 30 tractors which was kept in the agriculture market for drying was washed away with rain water into SRSP canal.

The farmers who were expecting a good yield this season were shocked with unexpected rains.

Farmers alleged that the government announced of opening paddy procurement centre but did not take any steps till date. Several quintals of food grains that were brought to agriculture markets yards were damaged due to unexpected rains. The produce was kept in the open areas outside the market yards without proper covering, they added.

The leaders of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) and Bharatiya Janata Party inspected the fields which were damaged due to unexpected rains. They demanded the state government to bail the farmers out of their problem by sanctioning compensation immediately to the damage that occurred.

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## SHORT TAKES

## CONG. WANTS SPL PACKAGE FOR DABBAWALAS

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC  
MUMBAI, APRIL 15

Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole on Thursday sought a relief package for taxi drivers, flower vendors, salon workers and Mumbai's dabbawalas among others. Patole wrote a letter in this regard to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray stating that these sections of the society should be incorporated in the relief package which has been announced by the state government.

Two days ago, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had announced several sops from monetary reliefs to free distribution of food grains for the vulnerable sections including registered auto drivers, construction workers and hawkers. In addition to this, financial assistance will be provided to the economically weaker sections below the poverty line families, women, senior citizens, widows, disabled and tribal communities. Close to seven crore beneficiaries of Food Security schemes in Maharashtra would be given free food grains including 3 kg wheat and 2 kg rice per person for a month.

In his letter to the Chief Minister, the Congress state president said that during *Sanchar Bandi* (curfew), vegetable vendors, flower vendors and flower cultivators are going to be hit badly.

## STATES TOLD TO MAKE GOOD USE OF MEDICAL OXYGEN

**New Delhi, April 15:** The Centre on Thursday asked states to make rational use of medical oxygen and ensure there is no wastage while stressing that there is sufficient stock of oxygen in the country.

Medical oxygen is a critical component in the treatment of Covid-19 affected patients. An inter-ministerial Empowered Group (EG2) of officers was constituted during the Covid pandemic in March 2020 to ensure the availability of essential medical equipment including medical oxygen to the affected states, the Union health ministry said.

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

Besides, states have been asked to set up control rooms to ensure smooth supply of oxygen to the districts according to need and review requirement of cylinders, tankers etc. the ministry said in a statement.

A detailed daily mapping of sources for supply of medical oxygen to the affected states is under preparation to ensure uninterrupted oxygen supply, it said.

The exercise will be carried out on the basis of detailed daily deliberations between officers of department for promotion of industry and internal trade, health ministry, various critically affected states.

## 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 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 to the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) headquarters.

ISRO has asked CNES to help prepare for Gaganyaan missions and to serve as its single European contact in this domain.

"Under the terms of the agreement, CNES will train India's flight physicians and CAPCOM mission control teams in France at the CADMOS 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 agreement provides for the CNES to support implementation of a scientific experiment plan on validation missions, exchange information on food packaging and the nutrition programme, and above all the use by Indian astronauts of French equipment, consumables and medical instruments.



A health worker collects swab sample from a woman for Covid-19 test at MCD dispensary in Jangpura. — PTI



Devotees wait in a long queue to offer prayers on the occasion of Bengali New Year on Thursday. — PTI



People, not adhering to norms, walk at the Heritage Street near Golden Temple. — PTI

## 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) gatherings will be allowed. People going to airports,



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. — PTI

## 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.

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, groceries, fruits, vegetables

and dairy products will also have to seek a curfew pass for their movement.

Kejriwal said the reason behind the weekend curfew was that on these days,

people often indulged in recreation and other such activities that could be "curtailed" and "curbed" without much inconvenience to them.

## ‘Tika ustav’ another sham by govt: Rahul

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi once again lashed out at the BJP-led central government over the Covid-19 'mismanagement'. He alleged that the "tika ustav" was just another sham by the government and further that there are no beds, ventilators or vaccines available.

Through his official Twitter handle, he tweeted, "There are no tests, no beds in hospitals. There are no ventilators, no oxygen. There are no vac-

cines also. The utsav is a pretense".

Gandhi's attack comes in the wake of India reporting an unprecedented increase in Covid-19 cases with over 2,00,000 cases being reported on Thursday, the biggest single-day hike since the beginning of the pandemic.

Rahul Gandhi has been actively using social media and other platforms to highlight the 'deficiencies' of the central government in managing the outcome of the Coronavirus pandemic.

## J&amp;K defers shifting of ‘Darbar’

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 15

The Jammu and Kashmir authorities have deferred 'Darbar move', the biannual shifting of the civil secretariat or the seat of the government and other offices from winter capital Jammu to summer capital Srinagar in view of the surge in Covid-19 cases.

The 'Darbar' was scheduled to close in Jammu later this month and reopen in Srinagar on May 10. But now the secretariat will function at both Jammu and Srinagar "in an equitable manner", Lieutenant

Governor, Manoj Sinha, said on Thursday.

"In view of sharply rising cases of Covid in J&K, the Govt has taken few important decisions ensuring safety of employees. Darbar move deferred because of Covid, Secretariat to function in both Srinagar & Jammu, office functioning not to be affected because of e-office," he tweeted.

He added, "Secretaries will function from both locations in an equitable manner. Office functioning will not be affected as files to move electronically between both Secretariats in e-Office."

## MAHA OPPOSES OPENING OF JAIN TRUSTS TO DISTRIBUTE ‘PIOUS FOOD’

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC  
MUMBAI, APRIL 15

A day after the Bombay High Court refused permission to a city mosque to open up for Ramzan prayers, the Maharashtra government opposed a petition by two Jain Trusts seeking permission for devotees to collect food from the trust's premises during the nine-day-long Ayambill fast.

A division bench of Justice S.C. Gupta and

Justice Abhay Ahuja have deferred the hearing till Friday on two petitions filed by two Jain Trusts seeking an urgent relief by allowing devotees to take away "pious boiled cooked food" from the premises of the trust for nine days between April 19 and April 27.

The main prayer of the petitioners was to quash the state dictat and allow them and other 48 Jain Trusts to open their temples with SOPs in place.



Prem Singh Patel

## MP MINISTER STIRS ROW, SAYS ‘PEOPLE GET OLD, THEY MUST DIE’

RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY | DC  
BHOPAL, APRIL 15

An 'uncharitable' comment by a minister in Shivraj government on spiraling Covid-19 deaths in Madhya Pradesh has sparked a huge row here with Opposition Congress calling it 'shockingly insensitive'.

State animal husbandry minister Prem Singh Patel while seeking to downplay the sudden spurt in fatalities due to Coronavirus infections in MP, said "people get old, they have to die".

He was speaking to reporters in Barwani in MP late on Thursday. "Deaths are occurring. Nobody can stop death. People get old, they have to die", Patel said.

The minister's comment comes at a time when the situation has worsened in the state with hospitals running out of beds for patients and mortuaries and crematoriums overflowing with bodies of the Covid-19 victims.

## DIET | PLAN

## Pet food makers cite ambiguous biz environment, absence of uniform framework

## India's 29 million pets facing shortage of food

**New Delhi, April 15:** India, which has an estimated pet animal population of 29 million, is facing a shortage of pet foods, a government body said on Thursday and urged the industry to boost local production by taking advantage of the existing central schemes.

Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) chairman O.P. Chaudhary, addressing a webinar organised by industry body PHDCCI, said the industry players can avail credit facility given under the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Scheme

(AHIDS) for setting up animal feed manufacturing facilities.

However, pet food makers such as Mars International India and Royal Canine India said higher taxes, ambiguous business environment, absence of uniform framework and quality standards are major hindrances for the sector's growth.

"On an average, India requires 30,000 tonnes of pet foods. In India, there are pet food manufacturers but not sufficient enough to meet demand and quality," Chaudhary said while addressing the

webinar on the pet food industry.

Some quantity of pet foods are imported but are costly to reach the people at affordable prices, he said, adding that the scarcity of pet foods was faced during the Covid-19 lockdown last year and the government had intervened.

Asserting that a balanced nutritious diet is key to keep the pets healthy, Chaudhary said, however, pet foods are not reachable to every Indian pet owner because of the cost and availability.

Overall, animal nutrition is a concern for

Indian livestock sector as there is about 35-40 per cent shortage of animal feed and fodder, he added.

Stating that the pet industry in India is growing at a faster rate, the AWBI chairman said the government is taking measures to address the demand-supply gap and assisting the private sector to invest in setting up of animal feed plant under the ₹15,000 crore worth AHIDF scheme.

Under the scheme, up to 90 per cent credit is given at a lower rate form scheduled banks to the individuals, MSME (Micro, Small

and Medium Enterprises), FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations) and Section 8 companies for infrastructure development, he said.

"The pet food industry can avail the opportunities to manufacture pet food in India and meet the demand," he added.

Further, the chairman said animal feed is not regulated in India at present. "There is no system in place for meeting licensing norms. Therefore, it is the high time to establish the pet food plants." He also said that raw materials required for pet

food is available in the country. India is producing 8.1 million tonnes of meat, out of which chicken meat is 50 per cent.

"The offals are wasted and same can be utilised for pet food manufacturing. Not only chicken and meat, India is sufficiently producing foodgrains which can also be utilised," he added.

According to AWBI Secretary Sujit Kumar Dutta, there is a huge opportunity in research and development of pet foods as many are demanding vegetarian pet foods. — PTI



IN BRIEF

Taiwan transport minister resigns

Taipei, April 15: Taiwan's government on Thursday said it had accepted the resignation of its transport minister following a train crash earlier this month that killed 49 people, the island's deadliest in decades. The April 2 crash was caused by a railway maintenance truck that slid down an embankment and onto the track moments before a high-speed train passed by. The accident, which left more than 200 injured, plunged Taiwan into mourning.

Lawmaker caught naked

Ottawa, April 15: A Canadian Parliament member was caught stark naked in a virtual meeting of the House of Commons. William Amos, who has represented the Quebec district of Pontiac since 2015, appeared on the screens of his fellow lawmakers completely naked Wednesday. A screenshot obtained by *The Canadian Press* shows Amos standing behind a desk between the Quebec and Canadian flags, his private parts hidden by what appears to be a mobile phone in one hand.

Xi to attend climate summit

Beijing, April 15: Chinese President Xi Jinping will join an online French-German climate summit "at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron", Beijing's foreign ministry said Thursday. The virtual discussions with the key European Union nations — to be held on Friday — come as US envoy John Kerry is in China for environmental talks. Kerry is not expected to meet with Xi, on a trip which has so far taken place behind closed doors.

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."

U.S. to sell F-35s to the UAE

Washington, April 15: President Joe Biden's administration indicated Wednesday it was moving forward with a \$23 billion sale of F-35 fighter-jets to the UAE but was considering restrictions and would not deliver them soon. The State Department shortly after Biden's inauguration in January ordered a review of the massive arms package, which was approved by former president Donald Trump. Responding to a lawsuit seeking to block the sale, the State Department said it planned a "robust and sustained dialogue" with the UAE.

CHAUVIN WON'T TESTIFY 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 why he kept pressing down on Floyd.

WHO: Europe surpasses 1 million Covid-19 deaths

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

Novartis, Roche team up on drug

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 Singapore 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

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

COPS CHARGE MAN WITH AXE NEAR QUEEN RESIDENCE

London, April 15: British police say they have charged a London man who was spotted carrying an axe near Buckingham Palace. The city's Metropolitan Police force said private security guards working on The Mall, a main road outside the palace, detained a suspect Tuesday evening after they were alerted to reports of a man carrying what appeared to be an axe. Police said 46-year-old Vladyslav Dryhval was charged Thursday with possessing an offensive weapon and possessing a bladed article. Dryhval was remanded into custody and was due to appear at Westminster Magistrates' Court Thursday. Police said there were no reports of injuries and that it was not being treated as terrorism-related. Buckingham Palace is Queen Elizabeth II's official London residence, though the monarch has stayed at Windsor Castle during the pandemic. — AP

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. 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. Interior minister Sheikh Rashid announced on Wednesday to ban the TLP and officials said that Prime Minister Imran Khan and his cabinet endorsed the summary by the interior ministry to outlaw the group. The trouble began after police arrested the TLP chief Saad Rizvi on Monday ahead of the April 20 deadline by the group to expel the French ambassador. — PTI

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 activities. 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 economical-

Kremlin: Sanctions won't 'help' Putin-Biden potential summit

Moscow, April 15: The Kremlin said Thursday that planned US sanctions against Russia in retaliation for alleged election interference and hacking will not "help" a potential summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his United States counterpart Joe Biden. Biden in a phone call with Putin on Tuesday invited him to hold a summit on neutral ground, as tensions between the West and Russia have escalated in recent weeks over the

ly impactful manner on Russia if it continues or escalates its destabilising international action," the White House said.



This photo taken and received from an anonymous source via Facebook on Thursday shows protesters marching during a demonstration against the military coup in Mogoke in Myanmar. — AFP PHOTO / ANONYMOUS SOURCE

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-

Ousted Myanmar envoy appeals for UK govt help

London, April 15: The ousted Myanmar ambassador to Britain has appealed to the British government to help him as he faced eviction from his London residence. Kyaw Zwar Minn had to spend a night in his car last week after his country's military attache barred him from the embassy in central London. He told reporters from behind the padlocked gates of his residence in northwest London on Thursday that he is not going to

go today and intends to stay despite orders from his former staff that he has to move out. The former diplomat had called for the release of former elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was detained after the military took power in a coup on Feb. 1. Asked what he would do over the next few days, he replied: Who can tell? The last time they seized the embassy without warning, so I need to be careful. He did not elaborate on

what kind of help he wanted from the British government. Britain Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said last week he condemned the bullying actions of the Myanmar military regime in London. More than 700 people in Myanmar have been killed in a brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protesters and others opposed to February's coup. — AP

Blinken in Kabul to sell Biden 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 and end America's longest war. Blinken sought to assure senior Afghan politicians that the United States 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 by the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that led to the US invasion in 2001. "I wanted to demonstrate with my visit the ongoing commitment of the United States to the Islamic Republic and the people of Afghanistan," Blinken told Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as they met at the presidential palace in Kabul. "The partnership is changing, but the partnership itself is enduring." "We respect the decision and are adjusting our priorities," Ghani told Blinken, expressing gratitude for the sacrifices of US troops. Later, in a meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the National Reconciliation Council, Blinken repeated his message, saying that "we have a new chapter, but it is a new chapter that we're writing together." "We are grateful to your people, your country, your administration," Abdull-

OZ TO WITHDRAW LAST 80 TROOPS IN SEPTEMBER

Canberra, April 15: Australia would complete its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in Sep. in line with the United States and other allies, the PM said Thursday. Australia's contribution to the Nato-led mission had once exceeded 15,000 personnel, but only 80 remain. "In line with the United States and other allies and partners, the last remaining Australian troops will depart Afghanistan in Sep.," PM Scott Morrison said, without nominating a day. "The decision represents a significant milestone in Australia's military history," he added. President Joe Biden plans to withdraw the last 2,500 US troops from Afghanistan before the 20th anniversary of the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the US that triggered the campaign. — AP

ah said. Nato immediately followed Biden's lead on Wednesday, saying its roughly 7,000 non-American forces in Afghanistan would be departing within a few months, ending the foreign military presence that had been a fact of life for a generation of Afghans already reeling from more than 40 years of conflict. — AP

COVID | CURBS

Harry lost honorary titles when he gave up royal duties last year

Philip funeral: Seniors to skip uniforms

London, April 15: Senior royals must wear civilian clothes to Prince Philip's funeral, defusing potential tensions over who would be allowed to don military uniforms. Queen Elizabeth II's decision means Prince Harry won't risk being the only member of the royal family not in uniform during Saturday's funeral for his grandfather, who died last week at the age of 99. Members of the royal family often wear uniforms to public events by virtue of their honorary

roles with the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. But Harry lost his honorary military titles when he decided to give up frontline royal duties last year. As a result, protocol suggests that Harry, an army veteran who served two tours of duty in Afghanistan, may only wear a suit with medals at royal functions, Britain's *Press Association* reported. The decision also sidesteps another potential controversy after reports that Prince Andrew con-

sidered wearing an admiral's uniform to his father's funeral. Andrew retains his military titles even though he was forced to step away from royal duties after a disastrous interview with the BBC about his acquaintance with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The funeral is scheduled to take place Saturday at Windsor Castle, with attendance limited to 30 because of Coronavirus restrictions. Philip, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh, served in the

Royal Navy for 12 years and maintained close ties to the armed forces throughout his life. Military personnel will have a large role in honouring him Saturday despite the attendance limit. Members of the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the Royal Air Force and the British Army plan to take part in the funeral procession. Philip's coffin will be carried to St. George's Chapel on a specially adapted Land Rover, which he designed himself.

Military personnel rehearsed for the event Wednesday at Army Training Centre Pirbright, near London. One of the four Royal Marine buglers who will play "The Last Post" at the service said it was an "honour and privilege" to perform the role. "It's incredibly important. We feel nervous," Sgt Bugler Jamie Ritchie. "We feel the pressure, but we're channelling that and we're using that and we're going to deliver an outstanding performance." — AP



## DECCAN Chronicle

16 APRIL 2021

### Biden's Afghan exit will hurt India, aid Pakistan

US president Joe Biden's decision to go beyond his predecessor Donald Trump's deadline of May 1 this year for all US forces to pull out of Afghanistan is not unexpected. The Americans people have been long fed up with their longest war which has cost trillions of dollars and 2000 soldiers. The US got Osama bin Laden (hiding in Pakistan with the support of the Army) and that's when the grudge match really ended.

The nation-building project in Afghanistan, beloved of many US Democrats and just a few Republicans too may be, was not going anywhere. So, there appeared no point hanging in there. There were no strategic dimensions to remaining engaged in Afghanistan either. In the current US assessment, if the Taliban were to once again be back in the saddle in Kabul as is more than likely, there is little chance they will seek to cross the oceans and attack the American mainland as the al-Qaeda under bin-Laden had done. America currently has more pressing strategic concerns than Afghanistan — namely China, Russia, Iran, climate change, the Covid pandemic.

**India may be required to do much diplomatic footwork, especially in relation to the Taliban**

When Mr Biden was vice-president to President Barack Obama, he was among those whose advice was to retain a small counter-terrorism force in Afghanistan. That advice is now evidently deemed obsolete. But why did the Biden administration not adhere to the Trump deadline? Nothing would have been lost by doing so.

The reasons appear mainly to do with optics. Pulling out a large body of soldiers and rolling up a vast military infrastructure, even when no rearguard fighting may be on the cards, takes time-consuming planning. Besides, sticking to the deadline set by a predecessor who has turned ignominious may not bring credit in domestic politics. Besides, extending the deadline entails no extra costs for America.

From the Taliban perspective, with Pakistan's help if they have held on for so long after being ousted from power in 2001, what is a few months more? The Taliban know they have nothing to lose. In fact, the extra four months may work to the Taliban's advantage as it give them more time to launch more vicious attacks, one of whose (intended) outcomes may be to push domestic Afghan factions into submission before the much-touted "interim" government is brought into some kind of shape through talks. That shape is overwhelmingly likely to be the one that the Taliban want.

The US was desperately after a "responsible" withdrawal. Historically, the Americans wanted to look good in comparison to the Soviet Union, the withdrawal of whose troops from Afghanistan in the late 1980s was widely deemed ignominious. But the Afghans aren't likely to be fooled by appearances. The international community neither.

The US pullout, which hardly offers America any political gains in the region, may be expected to make the position of Pakistan, China and, to some extent, even Russia, firmer than hitherto. India, in contrast, may be required to do much diplomatic footwork, especially in relation to the Taliban. Historically, after the Taliban interregnum India had aligned its position with that of the government in Kabul. It may be obliged to stick to that broad line even after the return of the Taliban, no matter in what form. New Delhi has a difficult task on its hands.

### Let all follow CBSE's example

With the daily caseload of Covid-19 infections crossing two lakhs, an unprecedented and alarming milestone as yet, on Thursday, the country needs to pull up its socks and fight the virus with all available tools. Precious time has already been lost in augmenting the healthcare system or streamlining the inoculation programme by ensuring adequate availability of vaccine. Any fresh move could take time. In the meanwhile, the government must take whatever steps it can, expeditiously. One major step has been taken when the Central Board of Secondary Education put off the Class 12 examinations and scrapped the ones in Class 10. The government must now see to it that the other national and well as state boards follow suit and eliminate the chances of the pandemic spreading through examination halls.

The government must also target the other potential superspreader events such as religious, political and social gatherings. West Bengal has four more phases of the polling, and electioneering is in full swing with mammoth rallies. The government must check with the Election Commission how it may be possible to curtail electioneering. India has some religious festivals every season; the Kumbh Mela in which millions of devotees attend is under way. Healthcare experts have been demanding restrictions on it but none has been imposed yet. The government must, in consultation with the state government in Uttarakhand and the organisers of the festival, explore the possibility of cutting the duration of the festivities short and impose stricter controls on the attendees. The Muslim community has entered into the annual fasting period, which normally ends with a community feast every day and with grand gatherings at the end of the month. The government must consult the community leaders and see how the events do not end up spreading the virus. The absence of a concerted, coordinated and result-oriented approach could land the nation in a larger mess than what it had found itself in when the virus came with the first wave.

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Subhani



## Covid: Who'll pay price for irresponsible netas?



Karan Thapar

As I See It

Nowhere are politicians perfect. They all make mistakes. Though they may atone for them later, usually in defeat, they're almost always disinclined to apologise. But I'm not put off by that. If you want them to take decisions, some are bound to be wrong. That's a fact of life. But what irks me is irresponsibility. In particular, refusing to take tough decisions because it does not politically suit them to do so. For this there can be no excuse and little forgiveness.

Faced with the raging second surge of Covid-19, which is relentlessly soaring at nearly 200,000 cases a day, our politicians have behaved irresponsibly. Worse, they continue to do so. Undeterred by criticism from the media and grave warnings from doctors and public health experts, they are now passing the buck.

What am I referring to? The electoral rallies with several lakh people that were held till very recently in Kerala, Assam and Tamil Nadu and which will continue to dominate the political horizon in West Bengal for the rest of this month. But I am also talking of the Shahi Snans, which have started in Haridwar and will continue for another two weeks. Like the political rallies, these religious baths will attract hundreds of thousands of people, if not millions, and there will be no social distancing and precious little mask wearing.

The rallies and *snans* could easily become super-spreader events. Some perhaps already have. Others are likely to follow. But even if by some miracle that doesn't happen, is it worth the risk? That may sound like

a rhetorical question but, quite frankly, it is not.

So why are they permitted? Let's take the political rallies first. They are an easy, simple and time-tested way of attracting large crowds and addressing them at one go. They also attract television attention and newspaper coverage. Therefore, they get talked about and that, it's hoped, will create political momentum. This is why politicians are so reluctant to abjure them.

In comparison, virtual campaigning is more difficult, the response isn't easy to assess, and it doesn't create any buzz. Therefore, citing the excuse of democracy, our politicians have continued to physically campaign as if the Covid-19 pandemic belongs to another and far-off world.

In fact, when questioned they've either been defiant, or they have blamed the Election Commission. This is what Hemanta Biswa Sarma said earlier this month: "There is no Covid in Assam...there is no need to wear a mask in Assam. Why wear masks unnecessarily and create a panic?". Incidentally, he is the state's health minister.

Days later, at a press conference in West Bengal, Union home minister Amit Shah was asked how he justified massive political rallies when the virus was surging past 100,000 cases a day. (Since then, it's crossed a yet higher peak of nearly 200,000 a day.) Without a blush or a moment's hesitation, he said the question should be asked of the Election Commission. It has set the rules and guidelines and his rallies are fully in accord with them. Sadly, I don't recall any journalist asking Mr Shah if this is an adequate answer from the nation's home minis-

ter or simply an irresponsible attempt to pass the buck.

A day later the commission spoke out but almost sotto voce and certainly ineffectively. As a national newspaper put it, the commission "will not hesitate in banning rallies and meetings if precautions are not adhered to". Not surprisingly, they weren't, and equally unsurprisingly the commission retreated to its earlier convenient silence. And so the irresponsibility continues.

Now, let's come to the *shahi snans*. When Tirath Singh Rawat took over as chief minister of Uttarakhand, he dispensed with his predecessor's insistence on a prior Covid test before participating in a *snan*. "Nobody will be stopped in the name of Covid-19 as we are sure that faith in God will overcome the fear of the virus", he glibly though very confidently told another national newspaper. Days later he tested positive.

Meanwhile, one newspaper, quoting government officials, said one crore people were expected to visit Haridwar on April 14, which was Baisakhi, whilst two crore more were anticipated between April 11 and 14.

Photographs and WhatsApp clips showed that in fact happened. I fear they could soon realise the truth of the old cliché "God helps those who help themselves".

The government will tell you that banning or even restraining the long-awaited and deeply loved

**The government will tell you that banning or even restraining the long-awaited and deeply loved religious events is hard to do. Of course it is. It could make governments unpopular. But then who said being PM during the worst crisis of the century is easy?**

religious events is hard to do. Of course it is. It could make governments unpopular. In a democracy, no one wants that. But then who said that being Prime Minister or chief minister during the worst health crisis in a century is easy? Yet, if British PM Boris Johnson could enforce stringent curbs over Christmas and Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel during Easter, do Prime Minister Modi and CM Rawat lack the strength to behave similarly? If Mr Johnson and Ms Merkel can take unpopularity on the chin, are our *netas* made of weaker stuff? Or could it be that our lot have deliberately chosen not to act because not only is it easier not to do so but that will also ensure that they remain the darling of the masses?

Finally, just one question remains: how heavy a price will we pay for this irresponsibility? We know the damage the rallies and *snans* could do can only be estimated two weeks later. That's not too far away. But chances are... it won't be the politicians who will suffer. It will be the poor people of India. The former will bask in their electoral triumphs or boast of their administrative expertise. The latter could end up infected, with sickness and possibly worse to follow.

And then? Before you answer, remember, this is India. I doubt if anyone will hold the errant politicians to account. They come from all our political parties and they'll all get away with it. But it's likely to be very different for the majority, who are poor. If they get infected, fall ill and even die, who will care for and mourn them? They've paid the price of political incompetence for generations, possibly centuries. And as they've always done, they'll pick themselves up, place their faith in God and carry on. I doubt if this time will be any different.

*The writer is a television commentator and anchor*

#### LETTERS

##### RESTRICT GATHERINGS

I request all religious heads to stop mass gatherings in this pandemic. All political parties where polls are being held also had mass gatherings and we would unfortunately see many of them infected. The political parties should stop them. Unless people cooperate, more cases would surface and no government agency can handle this.

**Shahbaz Husain**  
Hyderabad

##### VACCINE MIXING

With more age groups joining the vaccination programme, it is important that all three vaccines are made available in adequate numbers. People also need to know if they must take the same vaccine taken in the first shot or switch to another vaccine depending on availability. For a huge country like India, given the shortage of vaccines, people cannot wait for vaccine taken in the first jab. It can lead to time elapsing for vaccines.

**N. Nagarajan**  
Hyderabad

##### COVID CARE

With Covid second wave reaching epic proportions, I request the GHMC to close or seize all roadside eateries, chai stalls, paan shops, and liquor rooms. The public must eat and drink only homemade food before the scenario turns fatal.

**Joseph Cherian**  
Secunderabad

#### 50 YEARS AGO IN

### DECCAN Chronicle

#### Bill to revise ST structure likely

HYDERABAD, April. 15 The Chief Minister, Mr. K. Brahmaananda Reddi, said here today that a legislation revising the Sales Tax structure would most probably be introduced in the June session of the State Assembly.

Speaking at the 54th annual meeting of the Federation of Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, he said that the Government was awaiting the report of the Bhootalingam Committee. The committee had been appointed to study the existing Sales Tax structure and suggest revision to take it broad based.

Kamal Davar



### Ramping security or building trust: How best to tame India's Maoists?

The audacious ambush by Naxals in the Bijapur badlands of the Chhattisgarh state, killing 22 Special Forces policemen and injuring 30 others on April 3, 2021, brought forth the discomfiting reality of India's inadequate preparedness in dealing with its most serious internal security affliction, namely, the Naxal-Maoist challenge. That these avoidable casualties are attributed to an operation which was mounted by our own forces to nab the charismatic young Naxal leader, Madvi Hidma, in the Tekulguda region of Bastar — a hotbed of Naxal activities since decades — makes this tragic incident all the more embarrassing for those who conceived and mounted it.

The video released by the Naxals, of the release ceremony of police commando, Rakeshwar Singh Minhas, captured by them in this botched-up police operation with a large turnout of cheering local villagers should warn the Indian state to streamline its strategy to combat Left Wing Extremism (LWE) — the generic and official name for the Naxal-Maoist insurgency.

Though some in the security establishment have felt that over the years the Maoist-Naxal threat has reduced considerably with the "Red Corridor"

shrinking gradually, the official statistics of India's ministry of home affairs do not convey the same improvement in the internal security operations to counter LWE. MHA figures reveal that only 46 districts are now seriously affected by LWE while 90 districts over 11 states are covered under the special security-related expenditure scheme of the government. The official MHA website also conveys that between 2004 and 2019, 8,197 civilians have been killed by the Naxals, mostly tribals, after brutal tortures as they were branded as "police informers". In addition, between 2018 and November 2020, 460 Naxals were eliminated whilst 161 security forces personnel lost their lives in the same period.

During the past 15 years or so, the deadly dimensions of Naxal-related violence have manifested many times, surprising our security forces dealing with the Naxal insurgency, primarily in states like Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Odisha, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkand and Bihar. It cannot be ever forgotten how in one of the largest Naxal attacks on security forces personnel, Maoists had killed 75 CRPF personnel in Dantewada district on April 6, 2010. Similarly, on May 25, 2013,

25 senior Congress leaders including former Union Minister Vidya Charan Shukla were massacred in Darbha Valley in Chhattisgarh. The Naxals have successfully snatched weapons from security personnel after killing them, continue employing high-intensity IEDs at will in various innovative ambushes and even managed to hijack a train! The list of Naxal successes is, unfortunately, rather exhaustive.

It will be prudent for India's security establishment to factor in the reality that the burgeoning Maoist-Naxal threat has a distinct external dimension with the wily Chinese supplying arms and ammunition to the Naxals through the "Red Corridor" via our North-East and the Nepal border. These insurgents derive their inspiration from the late Chinese Communist supremo, Mao Zedong, who had once declared that "revolutionary warfare is never confined within the bounds of military action because the purpose is to destroy an existing society and its institutions and replace them with a completely new structure". It is not surprising thus that the Naxal movement, which emerged from the cauldron of agrarian unrest in an unknown West Bengal village of Naxalbari has, over the years, acquired a separatist

and a grave violent orientation.

Though, unquestionably, governments at the Centre and states have brought in some improvements in the fight to counter LWE, yet the recurrence of deadly incidents, occurring off and on, should propel the Centre to conceive and implement a National Strategy. Basic factors, including shameful economic and social disparities that exist in our nation, may give rise to rural and urban unrest but remain largely unaddressed in most of the states. Some well-meaning people have argued that a major root cause of growing Naxalism has been the willful reluctance of the states and the Centre to not promulgate the Ninth and Fifth Schedules of the Constitution which enforces relevant land laws and which will benefit the tribals and poor inhabiting the forests. However, to merely attribute the spread of LWE to poverty and lack of development will be a rather simplistic formulation.

As the Centre and state governments reach out to the poor and hapless to alleviate their sufferings, Naxal leadership must be contacted to give up their armed struggles, embrace the amnesty announced by the governments and join the national mainstream. In the past, unfortunately, it has been experi-

enced that the LWE leadership has not only refused the administration's peace and rehabilitation efforts, but also deliberately targeted developmental activities of the government in the remote areas. Schools, hospitals, post offices and even the labour force engaged in some construction works have been violently attacked.

With alacrity, the Centre will have to re-energise its security strategies to combat the Naxals. Better training, modern light equipment and weaponry for the police and the central forces earmarked for these operations have to be ensured. Above all, ground-level intelligence structure using locals needs to be re-invigorated. High-tech gadgetry including sophisticated communication and monitoring equipment, helicopters and drones need to be extensively fielded. The Indian Army must train police and paramilitary commandos in special operations and leadership skills at the combat levels. Finally, synergy between the Centre and states machinery to effectively combat the highly motivated Naxals is paramount.

*The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, was founder of the Defence Intelligence Agency and deputy chief of the Integrated Defence Staff*



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 seen in Wholesale Price Index-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 Toffer.

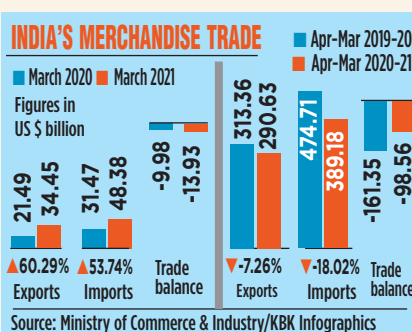
Cleartrip will continue to operate as a separate brand, retaining all employees while working closely with Flipkart to further develop technology solutions to make travel simple for customers.

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

Ebix, 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 Britanny 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

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 Herczeg.

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



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

## THE RESULTS

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

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



