


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | SATURDAY | 17 APRIL 2021

WEATHER

 **Max:** 37.0°C
Min: 24.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: 7 mm

Forecast: Humid and Partly Cloudy.
Max/Min temp. 37/24 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Shuddha Panchami till 8.30 pm
Star: Mrigashira till 2.31 am (Sunday)
Variyam: 5.54 am to 7.42 am
Durmuhurtam: 6.02 am to 7.42 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HUIRI CALENDAR
Ramzan 4,1442 AH
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.25 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.00 pm
Maghrib: 6.26 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.45 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.19 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 9.19 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 11.38 PM

RAMZAN TIMINGS
IFTAR: 6.28 pm (Today)
SEHRI: 4.21 am (Tomorrow)

COUNTER POINT



Don't vote for him, father... he is not wearing a mask!

SHORT TAKES

Monsoon to be normal, says IMD

New Delhi: The South-west monsoon, which brings 75 per cent of rainfall to India, is expected to be normal this year, IMD said on Friday. The Long Period Average will be 98 per cent with an error margin of plus and minus 5 per cent, said earth sciences secretary M. Rajeevan.

■ Full report on Page 4

SC norms for cheque bounces

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday came out with a slew of directions to ensure speedy disposal of cheque bounce cases and asked the Centre to amend laws to ensure clubbing of trials in cases which are lodged within one year against a person relating to the same transaction. It directed HCs to issue guidelines for trial courts to deal with cheque bounce cases.

8 dead in US shooting

Indianapolis: A gunman killed eight people and wounded several others before apparently taking his own life in a late-night attack at a FedEx facility near the Indianapolis airport, police said, in the latest in a spate of mass shootings in the US after a relative lull during the pandemic.

■ Full report on Page 5

Seers split over end of Kumbh

Dehradun: Seers of other akhadas in Haridwar on Friday demanded an apology from Niranjani Akhada for announcing the "conclusion" of the Kumbh Mela in view of a surge in Covid-19 cases, saying it did not have the right to do so. Niranjani Akhada had announced in Haridwar that the Kumbh Mela was over for them.



US Senate puts off Vanita's nomination

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Sunrisers to take on Mumbai Indians today

SPORTS | 8

TABLOID

Pawan tests Covid-19 positive



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Tirupati goes to poll today

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 16

Authorities have made elaborate arrangements for Saturday's by-election to the Tirupati (SC) Lok Sabha seat to ensure a smooth polling in seven Assembly segments of Chittoor and Nellore district that fall under the parliamentary segment. Polling will be held between 7 am to 7 pm.

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Election Commission has added 501 polling booths — 251 in Nellore district and 250 in Chittoor district, in addition to the existing polling stations that were set up

● Twenty-eight candidates, including independents are in the fray. The prominent ones being Dr M. Gurumurthy (YSRC), Panabaka Lakshmi (TD), K. Ratna Prabha (BJP-JSP), Chinta Mohan (Congress) and Nellore Yadagiri (CPI-M).

during the 2019 election, fulfilling the Election Commission of India's instructions of one polling station for every 1,000 voters. In total, as many as 2470 polling stations — 1056 PSs in Chittoor district, cover-

ing three Assembly segments, including Tirupati (382), Srikalahasti (362) and Satyavedu (312) and 1,414 polling stations in Nellore district, covering four Assembly segments, including Gudur (366), Venkatagiri (366), Sullurpeta (343) and Sarvepalli (339), have been arranged. Polling stations were divided into 260 sectors with 877 declared critical.

Approximately, 28 candidates, including independents are in the fray. The prominent ones being Dr M. Gurumurthy (YSRC), Panabaka Lakshmi (TD), K. Ratna Prabha (BJP-JSP), Chinta Mohan (Congress) and Nellore Yadag-

iri (CPI-M). There will be a mock polling around 6 am on Saturday.

As per Covid-19 guidelines, medical teams are being deputed at all polling stations. The EC has provided postal ballot facilities to the elderly (508 octogenarians), physically challenged (284) and election staff (3,195).

As per the data, around 12,87,734 votes of the total 16,50,453 electors were polled in the 2019 general election, recording a poll percentage of 78.99 per cent. The total number of votes in the LS constituency stands at 17,10,699—male 8,38,540, female 8,71,943 and others at 216.

Jagan seeks 60 lakh doses of Covid-19 vaccine for AP

Jagan thanks Modi for Tika Utsav, seeks more stocks for state

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has sought 60 lakh doses of Covid-19 vaccine for Andhra Pradesh to administer vaccine to meet the first-dose requirements of the listed age-groups.

The Chief Minister wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday, highlighting the successful conduct of the Tika Utsav in AP, as advised by the PM at the national level, under which 6,28,961 persons were vaccinated in the state a single day on April 14. Explaining the Coronavirus situation in the state, the CM expressed his thanks to the PM for the supply of 6.4 lakh doses of vaccine to AP in response to his earlier letter. Jagan said, "In accordance with your call for 'Tika Utsav', we have taken up vaccination on a large scale. I am happy to bring to your kind notice that we have vaccinated 6, 28,961 persons on a single day on 14th April 2021 during Tika Utsav. This is the highest single-day Covid vaccination numbers by any state in the country."

Stating that volunteers played an important role in making the vaccination drive a success, the Chief Minister said, "We could achieve this as we have leveraged the village and ward volunteer system which is a unique de-centralised governance mechanism wherein a dedicated volunteer takes care of the needs of 50 families. The volunteers have been roped in to mobilise eligible persons for the job."

"The district administration is also involved in this drive. Vaccination was carried out in one village or ward secretariat in the jurisdiction of each PHC, both in rural and urban areas with an objective to vaccinate all eligible people in that secretariat."

■ Page 2: AP can vaccinate 6 lakh people a day: CM



A health worker collects swab samples from a man for conducting Covid-19 tests at Swarnabharathi Urban Primary Health Centre at Resapuvaniapalem in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— DECCAN CHRONICLE

PM takes stock of oxygen, vaccine output to be hiked

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

As the daily fresh Covid-19 cases went over 2.17 lakhs and the death toll reached 1,185, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday chaired a comprehensive review meeting to ensure adequate medical grade oxygen supply in the country.

The meeting took place a day after India decided to import 50,000 metric tonnes of medical oxygen to reduce the shortage of supplies. Union minister Prakash Javadekar, meanwhile, tested positive on Friday.

The PM reviewed in detail the current oxygen supply situation and projected use in the coming 15 days across 12 high-burden states — Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh,

Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

The PM was informed that 4,880 MT, 5,619 MT and 6,593 MT have been allocated to these 12 states for meeting their projected demand as on April 20, April 25 and April 30 respectively.

The PM urged officials to ensure seamless and free movement of tankers carrying oxygen throughout the country. The government has exempted all inter-state movement of oxygen tankers from registration of permits to enable easier movement.

Cylinder filling plants will also be permitted to operate for 24 hours, with the necessary safeguards. The government is allowing industrial cylinders to

be used for medical oxygen after due purging. Similarly, nitrogen and argon tankers will be automatically allowed to be converted to oxygen tankers to overcome the potential shortage of tankers.

The Centre has also decided to double the production of indigenously-made Covaxin by May-June and nearly 10 crore Covaxin doses will be produced per month by September.

The Union ministry of science and technology said the capacities of Bharat Biotech in Hyderabad as well as other public sector units are being upgraded and financial aid is being provided as a grant to the tune of around ₹65 crores to Bharat Biotech's new Bengaluru facility.

HC ASKS CID NOT ACT AGAINST TD BOSS FOR 3 WEEKS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Friday extended its stay order by three more weeks on the probe being taken up by the Crime Investigation Department (CID) into alleged irregularities in the Amaravati land deals and posted the next hearing to April 20.

Former chief minister and Telugu Desam president N. Chandrababu Naidu and former minister P. Narayana, who were issued notices by the CID for an inquiry, filed a quash petition in the high court based on the First Information Report filed by the CID.

The state investigative agency had filed an FIR based on a complaint lodged by ruling YSR Congress (Mangalagiri) MLA Alla Ramakrishna Reddy alleging irregularities in Amaravati land deals. Accordingly, the CID served notices under Section 41 (a) of the Criminal Procedure Code on both of them. The High Court, however, issued a stay order on the probe for four weeks on March 19.

The court heard the petition on Friday and granted the extension of the stay order for three more weeks. The CID, therefore, cannot proceed further in its probe either by summoning Naidu or Narayana for questioning or take any action against them.

● The CID cannot proceed further in its probe either by summoning Naidu or Narayana for questioning or take any action against them.

All temples in AP may bar entry of pilgrims yet again

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

The Andhra Pradesh government is planning to close all major, medium and small temples for some time to check the spread of the Coronavirus in the state.

There are nearly 1,074 major temples in the state including the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams located in Tirupati, as also about 2,000 medium temples and hundreds of small temples. In the second wave of Covid-19, the number of devotees visiting the temples has drastically come down. This has resulted in a fall in the hundi collections, which would seriously affect the payment of monthly salaries to the temple staff.

The endowments department is planning to close these temples for a few days so as to break the chain of the virus spread. Officials say the Lord Venkateswara temple in Tirupati was closed for a few months when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out last year. This was from March to July, 2020. Now, based on the recommendation of the state government, the TTD trust board will take a decision on closure.

Endowments principal secretary G. Vani Mohan said, "We have written to the government on closure of all temples. As devotees from several places visit the temples, it might lead to a spread of the pandemic. We want to protect people's health."

ARCHEOLOGICAL MONUMENTS IN STATE CLOSED

DC CORRESPONDENTS
KURNOOL/ANANTAPUR, APRIL 16

Monuments and temples that are under the control of the Archaeological Department in Kurnool district like Konda Reddy Burj, and Yaganti Uma Maheshwar temple have already been closed with immediate effect and will remain so till May 15.

The monuments and temples closed in Kurnool district include Abdul Wahab Khan tomb, Kurnool, Kondareddy burruju, Uma Maheshwara Swamy Temple, Yaganti, Nandavaram temples, including Subramanya sculpture, Nandavaram, Adoni fort, Adoni and Andra and Asoka inscriptions at Jonnagiri, Rajulamandagiri. Yaganti temple, located in Banaganapalle mandal, is one of the oldest temples and is under the control of the Union government's Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Officials from the archaeology department have also closed gates of Lepakshi and Lord Veerabhadra Swamy temples in Anantapur till May 15.

Temple priests will offer pujas at temples inside the premises.

■ Page 2: Access to Nandi statue gets restricted

IN BRIEF

VONTIMITTA AND SOUMYANATHA TEMPLES CLOSED

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, APRIL 16

The Vontimitta Kodanda Ramalayam and Nandalur Soumyanatha Swamy temples in the district were closed on Friday on orders from the Archaeological Survey of India. The temples will be closed up to May 15. Along with these two temples, Gandikota was also closed. The annual Brahmotsavams of Vontimitta Kodanda Ramalayam, scheduled for April 21 to 30, might be held in solitude.

Officials of the Tirumala Tirupati Temple along with the district administration were keen on holding the Brahmotsavams this year.

The festivities are likely to be canceled as part of the measures by the government to prevent the spread of Coronavirus. The arrangements already made by the TTD for the celebrations have been in vain.

ACCESS TO NANDI STATUE GETS RESTRICTED

From Page 1

Similarly, entry towards the world's biggest Nandi statue was also restricted and gates were closed on Friday.

Another historic temple Hemavathi, Lord Siddeswara Swamy temple, built by Nolamba Pallavas in the 11th century where Lord Shiva appears in a human shape, in Amarapuram mandal was also closed.

The temple trust and committee members said devotees will not be permitted till a further decision is taken. Its executive officer Narasimha Murthy said the temple will be closed till May 15 and devotees will not be allowed for darshan.

Archaeological evidence stated that the pilgrim centre was built during the reign of Vijayanagara's Harihara Bukka Rayulu.

Archaeological Survey of India official Dhaka Reddy said that in view of coronavirus visitors will not be allowed into any ASI-maintained sites, temples, and museums.

Meanwhile, the Sri Satyasai Central Trust authorities were taking necessary preventive measures in and around Prasanthi Nilayam. The trust was permitting devotees only for darshan twice a day- 9.30 am and 6.30 pm. No devotees will be allowed for bhajans, music concerts and other rituals closer to Sri Satya Saibaba Maha Samadhi in Sai Kulwanth Hall.

Satyasai Central Trust managing trustee R.J. Rathnakar said the devotees will be allowed only for darshan while duly following Covid-19 norms.



Kakarlupudi Subbaraju

FORMER MLA SUBBARAJU PASSES AWAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

Senior CPI leader Kakarlupudi Subbaraju, former MLA, passed away at his residence here on Friday due to cardiac arrest. He first became a legislator in 1994 and served as chairman of the forum of former MLAs in Andhra Pradesh for a long time.

Subbaraju is survived by wife Devikadevi, daughter Umadevi and son Arun Kumar. His body has kept in the mortuary. His last rites will be performed after his son and daughter arrive from the US.

CPI leaders and political dignitaries have mourned the death of Subbaraju, who became a students' leader right in his school days. He became the AISF secretary when in college.

Later, he was secretary of CPI, Vijayawada, for more than 10 years and became a state-level leader of undivided Andhra Pradesh. He was a corporator of Vijayawada Municipal Corporation for two terms and became the deputy mayor of VMC, before getting elected as MLA from Vijayawada West.

Nandyal punters to invest crores on YSRC candidate victory margin

Betring ring organisers send surveyors to Tirupati bypoll segments to collect data

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, APRIL 16

Punters in Nandyal town were bullish about the outcome of Saturday's Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection.

While YSRC candidate Dr Gurumoorthy was the favourite, there were bets on the majority that he would secure.

Sridhar Reddy, a native of Nandyal said, the most favoured bet was for the YSRC candidate to get a 4-lakh vote majority. At least ₹6 crore have been committed on the outcome. The betting money has been deposited with a third party, he said.

Talk among political observers in Nandyal was that betting ring organisers had sent surveyors to all the Assembly segments of the Tirupati LS seat to collect data on the outcome.

Raghavulu, another resident, said that TD was trying to reduce the majority of the YSRC candidate to less than 2 lakh. The surveys of the private bettors reportedly indicate that segments in Nellore may record less margin for the YSRC candidate.

Janardhan Reddy, another resident, said that bettors were forming syndicates and pooling money in the range of ₹10 lakh to ₹50 lakh and investing the same in the business.

Mostly teachers, traders, and chit fund organisers were in the betting business, he said.

BETTING YET TO PICK UP IN KADAPA DISTRICT

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, APRIL 16

In Kadapa district, which is known for betting on election results, there was no big betting but scattered wages were being placed. The focus there too was on the margin of the YSRC candidate. Betting is going on to some extent in Kadapa and Proddard, though not at the level of the general elections.

According to reliable sources, the YSR Congress is expecting a majority of between 3 lakh and 3.8 lakh votes.

Currently, only a few lakhs were reportedly bet on the byelection majority. Intermediaries said that depending on the situation after the completion of polling on Saturday, the stakes may increase.

The Coronavirus fear on the one hand and the widespread campaign of the Telugu Desam leaders on the other are expected to have some impact. Therefore, many punters say that there is a possibility of betting on the margin changing after the election.



A polling official carry electronic voting machines and other materials from a distribution centre in Tirupati on Friday.

— DC



Polling officials carry electronic voting machines and other materials from a distribution centre, ahead of the Tirupati (SC) Lok Sabha byelection in Tirupati on Friday.

— DC

TD alleges bias in distribution of voter slips, complains to EC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

Telugu Desam state president K. Atchannaidu has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission, alleging gross violations by the ruling YSRC in Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection.

In a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner, he alleged that the ruling party is influencing booth-level officers (BLOs) by misusing its power to take undue advantages on the polling day. The voting takes place on Saturday.

Atchannaidu alleged that BLOs are not distributing voter slips to neutral voters and supporters of the TD in the constituency. This apart, village/ward volunteers are distributing voter slips instead of the BLOs directly. "Many voters are not aware of the location of their polling station and similar matters due to non-distribution of the voter slips to them. This might reduce the voter turnout."

The TD leader said it was important to ensure that voter slips are distributed to all the voters.

Mentioning the memo issued by the Election Commission against allowing outsiders in the parliamentary constituency after the campaign's end on April 15, Atchannaidu stated that the YSRC has been harbouring outsiders in various places across the constituency with ulterior motives. He alleged that a large number of outsiders are being brought in from neighbouring areas and districts in private buses during night hours for deployment in Tirupati constituency areas.

"For example, in Yerpedu mandal alone, around 500 persons from Punganur are staying clandestinely in various places."

Atchannaidu alleged

Outsiders entering constituency: Galla

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 16

Telugu Desam Parliamentarians Galla Jayadev and K. Ravindra Kumar have written to the Election Commission of India (ECI), requesting for deployment of additional security forces to weed out the outsiders who have allegedly entered the Tirupati Parliamentary constituency to vitiate the polling process.

In the letter written to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of ECI on Friday, Jayadev and Ravindra alleged that there was a huge influx of YSRC henchmen entering the Tirupati parliamentary constituency from the neighbouring Assembly segments and districts in order to vitiate the poll process.

"The outsiders that are already in Tirupati parliamentary constituency and their fraternity joining them tonight are bound to vitiate the poll process on April 17. These outsiders will impersonate absent/shifted/dead voters and will cast in the early hours of polling with fake Electoral Photo Identity Cards and other identification cards. Further, sinister designs are made to capture polling booths and instigate violence, and casting fake votes among

that Chandragiri YSRC MLA Chevreddi Bhaskar Reddy, minister for Panchayat Raj, Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy and several YSRC MLAs are vitiating the election atmosphere in the constituency by bringing in a large number of people from Chandragiri and



Galla Jayadev

others", they alleged in the letter to the CEC.

The parliamentarians also noted that the 23 State Surveillance Teams and 40 flying squads appointed for the polling need to work effectively and alleged that due to improper checking at the borders of the parliamentary constituency, a huge number of outsiders are being ferried into the constituency by the ruling YSRC.

"We came to know that more people will be ferried tonight from Punganur in buses, bearing numbers to the Tirupati parliamentary constituency. It appears that a section of the police and officials have connived with the ruling YSRC", they alleged.

Punganur respectively with a view to meddling in the election process and cast votes in a fraudulent manner.

He appealed to the Election Commission to ensure that no unfair practice is allowed from any side during and after the polling on Saturday.



A.B. Venkateswara Rao

shared with the investigators, he said.

11,278 OFFICIALS TO OVERSEE TIRUPATI LOK SABHA POLLING

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 16

Poll officials have collected Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and other polling materials from the respective distribution centres in Tirupati and Nellore on Friday, a day ahead of the polling day.

Around 11,278 poll officials will be on duty. They oversaw shifting of poll material to their respective polling stations in Tirupati, Srikalahasti, Satyavedu, Sarvepalli, Sullurpetta, Gudur and Venkatagiri Assembly segments. They will deposit the materials after completion of voting by Saturday evening. Alongside polling material, medical gear was distributed to poll officials as well as to the voters.

At the distribution centre in Tirupati, Municipal Commissioner P.S. Girisha asked polling officials to ensure strict adherence to Covid protocol.

As many as 11,278 polling officials, including 2,468 POs, 2468 APOs, 4,936 OPOs and 4,936 micro-observers, were deputed for Saturday's duty.

This is apart from the 10 per cent reserve staff (1128 poll officials), and 1,234 webcasting staff and 2,470 videographers. About 56 nodal officers and 265 sector and assistant sector officers were also deputed for poll duty.

Chittoor collector Hari Narayanan and Nellore collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu are overseeing the poll arrangements.

TD ASKS EO TO KEEP VOLUNTEERS AWAY FROM POLL DUTY

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 16

Telugu Desam leaders claimed to have lodged a complaint with the Election Observer Dinesh Patil in Nellore on Friday, seeking him to keep away the ward/village volunteers from the poll related duties during the polling for the Tirupati (SC) Lok Sabha byelection.

TD leaders from Nellore SK Abdul Aziz, K. Srinivasulu Reddy, P. Krishnaiyah, Ch. Venkateswara Reddy, J. Sudhakar and others, who met the observer and asked him to focus on the vulnerable situation in the entire LS constituency. They accused the ward/village volunteers of luring the voters on behalf of the YSRC leaders by distributing pamphlets and cash.

They alleged that the volunteers are engaged in distributing publicity material of the ruling party and also cash to the voters. They charged the ruling party of deputing volunteers for the electioneering and claimed that the volunteers are accepting the tasks due to pressures mounted on them by the ruling party leaders.

They appealed to the Election Observer to conduct the poll in a free and fair manner, giving no scope for the distribution of cash to the voters. They alleged that some police personnel were also involved in the malpractices and were trying to influence the voters on behalf of the YSRC leaders and asked the EO to keep a tab on such issues.

Ensure all facilities to Covid-hit: Jagan

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has instructed officials to ensure that oxygen facilities and all infrastructure facilities are available in Covid-19 hospitals, the food quality is good, sanitation is up to the mark and the medical institutions are adequately equipped with doctors and para-medical and medicines are in good supply.

Addressing collectors, superintendents of police and other officials during a review meeting on the Coronavirus situation, the Chief Minister said that 13,500 beds are available in Covid care centres and they should be increased to 50,000. Patients with no separate room for isolation in their houses should be shifted to Covid care centres.

The Chief Minister said that volunteers, ANM (auxiliary nurses midwives) and Asha workers should regularly monitor the condition of patients in home isolation. He said CCTVs and help desks should be present in Covid hospitals.

District collectors should ensure that calls to the 104 ambulance get attended immediately.

Collectors must conduct mock calls to test the working of 104 services. Patients should be provided with a bed or a Covid kit within three hours of the request, he said.

Covid treatment should be provided free in empanelled hospitals. Quality drugs and injections like remdesivir must be available in Aarogyasri hospitals.

The Chief Minister said that officials must ensure GO 77 and 78 are implemented, and stringent action must be taken against private hospitals which charge heavily for Covid treatment.

Collectors should monitor the availability of oxygen and the health minis-

CM SAYS VACCINE ONLY WEAPON TO FIGHT COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Friday said the only weapon against Covid-19 is vaccination and directed district collectors and superintendents of police to focus on vaccinating all people within the state.

Addressing collectors and SPs through video conferencing, the Chief Minister praised services of all government personnel – from district collectors and SPs to staff of village, ward secretariats – for working with dedication since last one year in containing the Coronavirus. He asked them to continue working with the same spirit.

Jagan Mohan Reddy said as vaccination is the only permanent solution for Covid-19, the state government is trying to get more doses for the state from the Centre, which is the regulatory authority for vaccines.

The CM said, "As many as 1.55 crore tests have been conducted in the state since last year. 9.37 lakh people have tested positive. The positivity rate in our state is 6.03 per cent and the recovery rate 96.19 per cent against the national average of 88.9 per cent. While the death rate in the state is 0.78 per cent, it is 1.24 per cent at the national level.

However, the second wave of Coronavirus has begun in the country and cases are on the rise in the state too. From December to April, virus positive rate has been 7.77 per cent.

ter and senior officials of health department will review the situation every day.

AP can vaccinate 6 lakh a day: CM

From Page 1

"Such a saturation approach not only focuses the entire district administration but also motivates people to get vaccinated through community mobilisation in the true spirit of Utka Utsav."

The CM explained, "We have not only established our capability of vaccinating over 6 lakh people per day but also set up a model for all the states to emulate. However, we could not continue the same drive as the vaccine

stocks have completely run out. If sufficient stocks of vaccines are made available, we are well poised to make your dream of vaccinating all vulnerable people a reality in the next three weeks."

The Chief Minister requested PM Modi to advise officials of the Union health ministry to supply vaccine to the state soon to ensure that the entire population above 45 years is vaccinated for the first dose in the next three weeks.

Nurses seek PRC implementation

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

A general body meeting of AP Government Nurses Association (APGNA) on Friday passed a resolution seeking that the state government fulfil its justifiable demands including implementation of PRC and cancellation of contract system.

The meeting held in Vijayawada was attended by APGNA leaders from 13 districts. Association president G. Manjula Devi said the meeting sought abolition of contract system, recruitment of nurses as permanent

staff, implementation of old pension scheme, time-bound promotions for nurses like other government employees, implementation of equal pay for equal work norm, additional staff in PHCs, and Covid care incentives.

APGNA general secretary Ascar Rao stated that nurses are facing a lot of difficulties while discharging their duties. In this regard, APGNA, led by its president K. R. Suryanarayana, will be meeting health minister Alla Kalikrishna Srinivas alias Nani seeking resolution of their problems.

there was no effort from his team in that direction. Hence I called him again on July 22, 2020 at his Delhi office and he agreed to direct his team to gather the available information. So far, there's no action."

"It is surprising that the CBI team has not taken any interest when a DGP-ranked police officer has been volunteering to provide information to help solve a serious murder case," he added.

deceased, the investigation was handed over to the CBI on March 11, 2020 by the AP High Court. This is being investigated by a team of the CBI under the supervision of Singh, the joint director of the CBI."

Venkateswara Rao said he contacted Singh telephonically and offered to share whatever information that was available with him. "Singh agreed to take the information but

Venkateswara Rao said, "It is pertinent to mention that one head constable and a home guard of the Intelligence department were among the first to arrive at the scene, even before the local Inspector and DSP reached the spot. But they were not allowed inside the house by the family members including YSRC leader Avinash Reddy."

He noted: "On a writ petition filed by the wife of the

MURDER | MYSTERY

My offer was ignored even as I gave the details of the case via phone: Venkateswara Rao

Suspended IPS officer says CBI not keen on probing Viveka case

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

Suspended IPS officer A.B. Venkateswara Rao has written a sensational letter to the CBI director vis-a-vis the sensational death of Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy in March, 2019. He was the brother of former chief minister late Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy.

The letter pointed out that a year had passed since the CBI probe into the

suspected. "The case was investigated by the state CID and later by a SIT, and yet the mystery was not solved."

He stated that since it was election time and there was a likelihood of a breakdown of public order, the state Intelligence department deployed its resources to gather information that might help the investigators solve the murder case quickly.

These details were

shared with the investigators, he said.

He noted: "On a writ petition filed by the wife of the

shared with the investigators, he said.

These details were

IN BRIEF

Red sanders seized, 9 held

Kadapa: The police on Friday arrested nine smugglers who were smuggling red sander logs in a forest near Obulavaripalle under Railway Koduru Police Circle. The police seized nine Red Sanders logs from them. Under the direction of Anantapur Range DIG Kranti Rana Tata, Task Force DSPs Giridhar and Muralidhar, Koduru RI Kripananda and team have been conducting cumbing in Seshachalam forest since Thursday evening. They reached Gavigattu on combing the Buduguntapalli, Kannegunta and Uralagattupodu.

SEB seizes NDP liquor in Tirupati

Tirupati: The Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) has seized 95.58 litres of non-duty paid (NDP) liquor during a house search conducted at Tadithopu in Tirupati rural on Friday. According to SEB assistant Excise Superintendent M. Sudheer Babu, acting on a tip off, the officers of Tirupati Rural SEB in the presence of official mediators conducted searches at a house in Tadithopu area in Tirupati rural limits. During the drive, the SEB sleuths detected 531 bottles of NDP liquor (Karnataka liquor-180ml), in the house and arrested the house one D. Munibanu, 32, in connection with the case. A case has been registered with Cr. No 26/2021 at the Tirupati Rural SEB station.

LIST OF COVID-19 HOSPITALS RELEASED

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 16

Keeping in view the spike in number of positive cases, the district administrations of Chittoor and Nellore has released a notified list of hospitals, both private and government hospitals, for Covid-19 patients to approach and avail treatment.

Nellore district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu on Friday issued orders in this regard, following the guidelines of the state government under the provisions of Epidemic Diseases Act, 2005. He said that about six hospitals were notified as Category-A (exclusively for treating Covid-19 patients) with a bed capacity of 1,104 in Nellore district. Government General Hospital (GGH) in Nellore, Kavali area hospital are the two government hospitals among the Category-A hospitals.

As many as 15 hospitals were declared as Category-B (hospitals for treating both Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 patients) with a capacity of 2,160 beds, while four were announced under Category-C to treat all non-Covid-19 cases only in these hospitals in the district, where around 3,426 beds are available.

District collector Chakradhar Babu instructed the hospital authorities to co-ordinate with nodal officers and directed all the managements of private hospitals to charge as per the rates mentioned by the government for treating Covid-19 patients.

He also asked the hospital authorities to look after the necessary facilities such as food, sanitation, medical services and other required arrangements for infected persons.

In Chittoor district, as many as 18 private hospitals were given permission to treat Covid-19 patients, in addition to the S.V.R. Ruia Government General Hospital in Tirupati and government hospitals in Chittoor and Madanapalli. The district authorities also arranged Covid-19 care centres in Tiruchanoor and Tirupati.

About 1,024 and 354 fresh Covid-19 positive cases were reported in Chittoor and Nellore districts respectively, in the last 24 hours as of Friday. Currently, there are 6,428 and 2,181 active cases in Chittoor and Nellore districts and the total count of Covid-19 cases, as on date, have crossed 98,032 and 66,379 respectively.

In Kurnool, as the Covid surge continues with 550 testing positive and two dead on Friday, district collector G. Veera Pandian said that 11 hospitals have been notified to take care of Covid-19 patients. Apart from the Kurnool government hospital, Nandyal and Adoni area hospitals, eight private hospitals were notified. Patients are admitted in six hospitals as of now, he said.

He directed the officials to increase contact tracing and testing of people.

AP doctors seek quarantine after week's Covid duty

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

Government doctors have urged the state government that they must be permitted to be in home quarantine for a week after working with Coronavirus-infected patients in government hospitals for a week. This will help contain transmission of virus through them, whether to patients, health staff or even their family members, they maintained.

Most doctors and other health personnel at various government hospitals and public health centres had worked for long hours dealing with Covid-19 cases during the first wave that commenced in April 2020. They got some relief only towards the end of the year when the number of Coronavirus cases came down.

However, they have become busy again with vaccinations from mid-January 2021 and subsequent surge in Coronavirus infections from March.

Feeling overly strained, nearly 10,000-strong contingent of doctors working with public hospitals and dispensaries want the state government to come to their rescue by allowing them to take one week home quarantine after a week's work. They feel this will enable them to take some rest and rejoin duty with more commitment towards treating Covid-infected patients.

Representatives of doctors have also cautioned

● They also expressed their displeasure that kin of only six of 10 doctors who died after being exposed to Covid-19 earlier have been paid their insurance amount of ₹50 lakh each.

that in course of providing treatment to the Coronavirus patients admitted in hospitals, they get exposed to the virus irrespective of the kind of protective gear they wear. They thus become carriers of the virus, which may or may not manifest itself depending on the viral load.

They also expressed their displeasure that kin of only six of 10 doctors who died after being exposed to Covid-19 earlier have been paid their insurance amount of ₹50 lakh each. They demanded that the state government release the relief amount to rest of the families too, apart from a government job on compassionate grounds.

AP Government Doctors' Association convenor Dr D. Jayadheer requested the state government to supply health personnel quality protective gear, including PPE kits, and ensure proper maintenance in government hospitals with regard to beds, medical equipment and other requisites for treating Coronavirus patients. He further asked people to maintain self-restraint and take all precautions to avoid becoming victims of the virus.

1,000 Covid-19 beds ready in EG

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 16

The East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that there are 3,258 Covid-19 active cases in East Godavari out of which 2,991 are in home isolation and 267 are getting treatment in Covid-19 hospitals in Kakinada, Rajamahendravaram and Amalapuram.

He told the media on Friday evening that 39,747 positive cases were reported in August-2020 with 24.06 per cent and it was decreased to 0.29 per cent by February-2021, but due to increasing covid second wave, the Covid-19 cases have increased to 9.13 per cent in March and April months and many cases were reported in Kakinada, Rajamahendravaram Urban, Anaparti, Rajanagaram, Amalapuram and Ramachandrapuram.

He said that the Covid-19 tests are being conducted at 4,000 to 5,000 per day in the district and GGH Kakinada, Government Hospital in Rajamahendravaram and KIMS hospital at Amalapuram were converted as Covid-19 hospital with 1,000 beds capacity.

He said that a special control room has been set up at the Collector's office and it works around the clock and the people can dial 0884-2356196 or 18004253077 numbers about Covid-19. He said that outpatient, gynaeac and paediatric departments and wards are

working as usual at GGH in Kakinada.

Mr Muralidhar Reddy said that the district stood first in the country in vaccinating 70,000 people in the district during vaccination drive from April 11 to 14. He said that as per government instructions, Covid-19 tests would be performed to contact persons of Covid-19 patients and having covid symptoms through focussed testing method.

He said that after confirmation of Covid-19, the person would get Covid-19 tests for home isolation within three hours and in case of emergency, bed can be provided at the hospitals.

He said that private hospitals would be given permission for giving treatment to covid patients as per the standards of the hospitals, after thorough checking. He said that three Joint Collectors are monitoring the Covid-19 cases and issues in the district.

Meanwhile West Godavari district collector Revu Muthyala Raju has formed committees in divisional, consisting of RDO, Deputy DMHO and DSP in West Godavari District to monitor the medical treatment charges for Covid-19 patients at private hospitals.

Reviewing the Covid-19 situation in Eluru on Friday with the officials, Mr Muthyala Raju said that if the private hospitals charge more than government fixed prices, action would be taken on such hospitals.

PRIVATE | ENTITIES

There are a total 2,443 CCTV cameras in Kadapa district, 888 under police

50% of CCTVs out of order in Kadapa

NAGESWARA RAO BALLEDA | DC
KADAPA, APRIL 16

Nearly 50 per cent of surveillance cameras set up by various private entities around companies, apartments and colonies across Kadapa district are out of order. Enormity of risk can be understood from the statement of police authorities themselves that a single CCTV camera is equivalent to 100 policemen.

Most of these CCTV cam-

eras have gone dysfunctional owing to their poor maintenance. Though at the call of police authorities many private bodies, including colonies and housing welfare societies, came forward and established surveillance equipment in their areas, they have not ensured that they are properly maintained.

As far as police department is concerned, it has installed public CCTV cameras only on major roads. Hundreds of cameras had been put in place

State records 6,096 Covid cases, 20 deaths

Chittoor continues to be the worst hit, fresh cases at 1,024

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

With no respite in the surge of fresh Covid-19 cases, Andhra Pradesh registered 6,096 and a record 20 deaths in the last 24 hours.

Out of 13 districts, 12 reported more than 200 fresh cases each, while West Godavari reported only 68.

The state health authorities reported on Friday that out of 35,962 samples tested, 6,096 persons were infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,56,06,163 samples tested so far in the state, 9,48,231 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 9,05,266 recovered while 35,592 are still active with the virus.

Chittoor district continues to be the worst hit by registering highest number of fresh cases at 1,024, followed by 750 in East Godavari, 735 in Guntur,

ADMHO, 35 OTHERS TEST +VE IN AGENCY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 16

Additional district medical and health officer Dr P. Leela Prasad and his wife tested positive and currently undergoing treatment at the district hospital in Paderu. In addition, 35 others tested positive during last 24 hours. Reports said 25 tested positive on Thursday and 10 tested positive from Ananthagiri mandal on Friday. Some of them were admitted into local hospitals and others were sent to Visakhapatnam.

The Agency having 2,000 cases since March 2020, became free from virus in

550 in Kurnool, 534 in Srikakulam, 491 in Prakasam, 489 in Visakhapatnam, 354 in Nellore, 313 in Anantapur,

November last year. For the first time, 25 cases were reported on a single day.

“Despite appeal and advisory, people even educated are moving to Agency after testing positive in Visakhapatnam,” Leela Prasad told DC.

We could send away 26 persons so far, but others sneaked in, stayed back and infected others. He said infection could be more but people having symptoms are not coming forward for testing. The agency has been receiving rains continuously since last four days and people are thinking that cold and cough was due to soaking in the rain.

299 in Vizianagaram, 246 in Krishna and 243 in Kadapa.

Chittoor district topped the state with the highest

number of cumulative active cases at 6,428, followed by 3,820 in Guntur, 3,633 in Visakhapatnam, 3,470 in Krishna, 3,258 in East Godavari, 3,122 in Srikakulam, 2,729 in Kurnool, 2,288 in Prakasam, 2,181 in Nellore, 1,695 in Anantapur, 1,360 in Kadapa, 1,187 in Vizianagaram and 421 in West Godavari.

Among the daily deaths, Chittoor again topped the state with five deaths followed by three in Krishna and two each in Anantapur, Kadapa, Kurnool, Nellore, Prakasam and Visakhapatnam.

The state health authorities discharged 2,194 Coronavirus infected patients after recovery in the last 24 hours.

AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,92,250 samples per one million population and registered a positive rate of 6.08.

Virus spreads by airborne route, says Lancet study

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 16

Making the worst fears about how Covid-19 spreads and how the disease-causing SARS-CoV-2 travels from one person to another, a study published by Lancet, the venerated medical journal, has said that the virus spreads “predominantly by the airborne route.”

In their study, published by Lancet on April 15, researchers from the US, Canada and the United Kingdom, said there was enough evidence to surmise that the SARS-CoV-2 spreads through the aerosol route. Ever since the pandemic broke out early last year, the predominant view has been that Covid-19 spreads only through droplets – microscopic liquid particles emitted by an infected person while coughing, sneezing or talking with virus taking a ride in those particles – that are inhaled by another per-

son.

The study comes just two days after the Telangana state Director of Health Dr G. Srinivasa Rao, in the wake of the severe surge in Covid-19 cases, warned of the dangerous situation and said it was no longer a stretch to say that the virus is now airborne.

In their study published by Lancet, six experts from the three countries provided 10 reasons why they believe that the virus is airborne and spreads as an aerosol particle. Aerosol particles do not need a ‘carrier’, such as a droplet, for the virus to ride on.

The paper ‘Ten scientific reasons in support of airborne transmission of SARS-CoV-2’ said one of their findings was that Covid-19 infections in hospitals have been documented even at places where healthcare professionals used personal protective equipment designed to protect

against droplet but not aerosol exposure.

They said there is an urgent need for safety protocol modifications as one of their findings shows that anywhere from 33 to 59 per cent of all Covid-19 transmissions in the world were not related to people coughing or sneezing.

“Direct measurements show that speaking produces thousands of aerosol particles and few large droplets, which supports the airborne route,” view, they said.

They also said that the dominant rate of infections occurring indoors than outdoors, and how transmission rates can be cut with good ventilation, supports the argument that Covid-19 spreads “predominantly” by the airborne route.

While saying that it is likely that the disease spreads through droplets, the researchers said “there is consistent, strong evidence.

TD MP SRINIVAS IN QUARANTINE AFTER COVID

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

Telugu Desam Vijayawada MP Kesineni Srinivas alias Nani has tested positive for Covid-19, he revealed this on Friday. The MP posted that he was diagnosed with Covid-19 on his Twitter handle. He said that he had minor symptoms and was currently in home quarantine and appealed those who met him recently to stay at home quarantine and recommended to get tested immediately if any symptoms surface.

Mr Srinivas tweeted, “Dear all, I’ve tested positive for #COVID-19 today with mild symptoms. I have quarantined myself at home and am taking all the necessary precautions. I would request all those who came in contact with me to isolate and get themselves tested at the earliest.”

● He said that he had minor symptoms and was currently in home quarantine and appealed those who met him

VIT to provide CA-compatible curriculum in AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 16

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Vellore Institute of Technology-Andhra Pradesh (VIT-AP) School of Business and Master Minds CA Academy will provide aspirants with additional training through their CA Integrated curriculum, official said on Friday after the signing ceremony.

Dr S.V. Kota Reddy, Vice-Chancellor, VIT-AP University said that this collaboration will enable job opportunities like Banks, Business Schools, Credit Organisations, Consultancies, Economic consulting jobs, Indian civil services, health departments, Insurance industry, securities industry and investments, Mortgage agencies etc for aspirants after they finish

the course.

“Students usually finish CA Foundation and Inter by the time they pass B.Com. Graduates of B.Com in Finance have a wide range of opportunities. The opportunities are not limited to the said fields. Once completed, the graduate may pursue further studies or may take up said job opportunities associated,” the Vice Chancellor of University added.

“Our B. Com (Finance) curriculum is blended to meet the standards and requirements of Professional Accounting and Finance Certifications. The programme is spread over six semesters and is compatible with CA Syllabus,” he further said. The director of Master Minds CA, M.S.S. Prakash said that the partnership will be a game-changer.

ITDA TO HELP TRIBAL PEOPLE MARKET MAHUA

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 16

Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) of Chinturu in East Godavari district is planning to help tribal people in marketing their Mahua products, so that the latter can get a good price. The agency will also study how value could be added these products. Mahuva flower (Pippa Puvvu – an intoxicating flower) is largely grown in the East Godavari agency area in Andhra Pradesh. Tribes collect these flowers till May end.

According to forest officials, Mahuva trees are spread over nearly 50,000 hectares. There are no restrictions on tribal people in collecting Mahuva flowers. They used to previously sell them to Girijan cooperative societies, which are no more buying them now. Tribes are thus selling Mahua flowers to traders in two ways.

The first is to sell at ₹29 per kg at the traders’ point. However, tribal people also sell these flowers in shandies through barter system. Instead of cash, they exchange the flowers for oil, rice or groceries. Under both these systems, tribals end up getting exploited by traders.

“To prevent tribal people from being exploited, ITDA is trying to provide marketing facilities for Mahua products. However, we are only in the initial stages and have not finalised the mode of sale yet,” said Velugu assistant project director A. Srinivasa Rao.



An artist dressed as Lord Venkateswara returns after a programme in Vijayawada on Friday.

— DC

IN BRIEF

Keralite nun found dead inside well

Kollam: A 42-year-old Catholic nun was found dead inside the well of the St Joseph convent at Kurepuzha in this south Kerala district on Friday, police said. The other inmates noticed the body of Mable Joseph, a native of Karunagappally here, inside the well of the sprawling convent campus in the morning. They carried out a search after she failed to turn up for the usual morning prayers. Police said prima facie it was a suspected case of suicide and other details could be known only after the post-mortem and investigation. A suicide note, suspected to be written by the deceased, was recovered from her room, they said. As per the note, no one was responsible for her death and she was ending her life due to health issues.

C'GARH: TWO COPS HACKED TO DEATH IN SUKMA

Sukma, April 16: Two policemen were allegedly hacked to death by unidentified persons in Chhattisgarh's insurgency-hit Sukma district, police said on Friday. The bodies of assistant constables Dhaniram Kashyap and Punem Hadma, bearing injuries inflicted by sharp-edged weapons, were found lying on a road on the outskirts of Bhejji village around 5 pm on Thursday, a senior police official said.

A police team was rushed to the spot soon after being alerted about the killings and sent the bodies for post-mortem, he said. "The jawans were posted at Bhejji police station, from where they had headed to a grocery store on a motorcycle around 3.30 pm on Thursday. They were later found dead with the motorcycle lying next to their bodies," he said.

J&K TEACHER HELD FOR ABETTING TERRORISM

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, APRIL 16

A schoolteacher who was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) from Jammu and Kashmir's northern Baniptore district earlier this week on charges of helping a West Bengal woman in abetting terrorism in various parts of the country at the behest of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) is likely to be flown out of the Valley for further interrogation, the sources here said.

The NIA had on Thursday said that the alleged LeT 'recruiter' Altaf Ahmed Rather was arrested by it from his native village in Baniptore in a case being investigated by it for the past one year.

The case relates to the arrest of one Tania Parveen, a resident of West Bengal, by the concerned police for her alleged association with LeT. An FIR in this regard was registered at the Police Station Badurai in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district under various sections of Indian Penal Code, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and Information Technology Act.

The NIA had re-registered the case against the accused at New Delhi on April 5, 2020 and took over the investigation of the case. Later the agency filed a chargesheet against Parveen.

It said that the probe has revealed that Rather, a schoolteacher in Baniptore, was a sympathiser of the LeT.



Polling officials collect EVMs and other election materials before leaving for election duties for the 5th phase of West Bengal Assembly elections, at Bidhannagar in Kolkata on Friday.

Ahead of 5th poll phase, CPM terms Didi 'fascist, intolerant'

CPM has accused Mamata of 'provoking' April 10 CoochBehar incident

SANJAY BASAK | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

The fifth phase of the West Bengal polls will be held on Saturday amidst the shrill campaign unleashed by the Left parties to project Trinamul boss and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee as "fascist and intolerant".

In fact, after the April 10 Sitalkuchi incident in which four people died in CISF firing at a polling booth, CPI(M) leaders have pursued the BJP line and accused Banerjee of "provoking" the violence. "The CPI(M) leaders and their social media warriors went on wilfully to reinforce the 'provocation' narrative that was circulated by the BJP", says Prof Aditya Nigam in his blog Kafila.online.

CPI(M) mouthpiece Ganashakti has relentlessly targeted Banerjee and repeatedly equated her with the BJP.

Some articles have openly talked about Banerjee's "fascist regime". Even CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury has described her as "fascist and intolerant".

Reacting strongly, TMC Rajya Sabha MP Sukhendu Sekhar Roy said: "Each and every milestone of the CPI(M)'s 34-year rule is drenched in blood."

He also claimed it was "not Mamata Banerjee, but the CPI(M), which helped the BJP make inroads into Bengal".

In an article "Census of Political Murders in West Bengal during CPI-M rule-1977-2009" published in Left-leaning weekly Mainstream, it was stated: "CPI-M adheres to the cult of violence. Its character is anything between a fascist party and a Mafioso. In fact, by their public activities, the CPI-M activists lean more towards a mafia organisation."

The 2010 article written by D. Bandhopadhyay said: "Devoid of any high ideology and believing in the cult of violence, the

No clubbing of polls due to 'logistical nightmare'

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Major redeployment of security forces at a short notice is one of the key reasons why Election Commission is not able to hold remaining four phases of Bengal elections in a single day as has been demanded by some political parties. Sources said home ministry has done a detailed assessment and is of the view that deployment of security forces in Bengal had been done according to polling over a period of eight phases and it would be a "logistical nightmare" now to change that schedule.

Some parties like Trinamul Congress have suggested that after the fifth phase on April 17, the remaining three phases of elections should be held together in a single day on April 24 in view of the rising Corona cases in West Bengal. However, home ministry officials argue that in view of the heavy security deployment changing the pattern now would be a "logistical nightmare" as massive mobilisation would have to be done which in turn could impact impartial elections. This time Assembly polls in Bengal are being conducted for the first time in eight phases for which an unprecedented one lakh central para-military forces have been used. "All security arrangements have been made keeping in view the eight phases elections. Now if

we change this at this stage we will have move around a lot of security personnel from one part of the State to another which would be a logistical nightmare," a senior home ministry official added.

However, both Election Commission and home ministry have decided that security personnel will try to spread more awareness on Corona and maintain proper Corona protocol at all polling centres in the coming days. Elaborate Corona safety arrangements will also be made at the counting centres also for the counting day on May 2 not just in Bengal but also in other states which went to polls like Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Buildings, claiming it was a "potential security threat" to chief minister Jyoti Basu.

Countering the CPI(M) propaganda blitz that it was Banerjee who had helped the BJP make inroads in West Bengal, Roy recalled the famous Shahid Minar rally in the mid-1980s where Jyoti Basu and BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee, along with others, held each other's hands in a "spirit of camaraderie".

He also wanted to know why Jyoti Basu "did nothing to stop L.K. Advani's rath yatra as it entered West Bengal in 1993?" He pointed out: "The moment it crossed over from Bengal to Bihar, it was (Bihar) chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav who stopped the rath in its tracks." Roy added that in each and every no-confidence motion against the Congress, "the Left had joined hands with the BJP".

drivers of the country's economy, which is largely based on agriculture and its allied activities. Large parts of the country rely on the four-month rainfall season for agriculture and also for filling reservoirs.

This is the first time the IMD has made a specific forecast on spatial distribution. Rajeevan said the IMD will also issue month-wise forecasts during the next four months and also for the homogenous regions of the country — IMD's four divisions — the Northwest India, East and Northeast India, Central India and South Peninsula.

AIUDF CANDIDATES FLY BACK TO ASSAM FEARING LOCKDOWN

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, APRIL 16

The candidates of All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), who had been moved to Jaipur due to horse-trading fears, on Friday came back to Assam, fearing an impending lockdown like situation which may not allow them to return to state even at the time of counting of votes on May 2.

As many as 17 candidates were shifted to Fairmont hotel in Jaipur exactly a week ago. They were expected to be in Jaipur till around May 2. The Congress was bearing the expenses of their stay in Jaipur.

Informing that the AIUDF candidates were worried about rising cases of Covid, sources in the party said that some of them expressed fear that if they catch Covid, it would be highly challenging for them to be the part of counting of votes in their respective constituency. "Some of them were of view that their presence on the ground was necessary in selection of counting agents and other representatives at each and every counting tables," said a functionary of the party while informing that the candidates visited Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot at his residence in Jaipur before proceeding to the airport.

AIUDF general secretary Aminul Islam, a candidate from Mankachar constituency had earlier said, "We have taken some time off. Of course, the risk of horse trading in Assam is high." Congress chief whip in Rajasthan Mahesh Joshi and party legislator Raife Khan were given the responsibility of the election contestants.

BJP J&K Panch among 3 held for extortion bid

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, APRIL 16

A deputy village headman belonging to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is among three persons arrested by the police from Jammu and Kashmir's Sopore area on charges of extortion. The police said that a manhunt has been launched for a Sarpanch of the saffron party who is also involved in the offense.

The police in a statement here said that acting on a complaint received from a resident of Panzipora area of Sopore, about 50-km northwest of Srinagar, the trio was arrested and booked under Section 450 and 506 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 7/25 of the Arms Act.

As per the complaint lodged by one Mudasir Ahmed Sheikh, three unknown persons in the dead of the night barged into his in-laws house in Hamadani Colony of Nadihal area brandishing weapons and then asked for a huge sum of money to be "dropped at" in south Kashmir. They also forcibly took two mobile phones from the family members and threatened them with dire consequences if they reported the incident to the police or informed anyone else about it.

The police said on the basis of the preliminary investigation and technical evidence, BJP Panch Merajuddin Rather, a resident of Minipora Krankschoon, Sopore, was called to the concerned police station for questioning. "During the questioning, he confessed the commission of crime with three more persons namely Muhammad Saleem Wani, a BJP Sarpanch and resident of Hardpora Achabal, Anantnag, Bashir Ahmed Lone, a resident of Nadihal and Muhammad Dilawar Khawaja, resident of Dachinpora Ruhama", the police said. The police said that while Rather and two other accused have been arrested, Wani is still at large. The police investigations have revealed that in order to extort money from the business family, Rather had entered into a criminal conspiracy with Lone and Wani and then contacted Khawaja for obtaining "some imitation weapons for committing the crime". The police said that these "weapons" have also been recovered during investigation and "further efforts are underway to unearth more linkages".

UK dept clears extradition of Nirav Modi

New Delhi, April 16:

The United Kingdom's Home Department has cleared the extradition of fugitive diamondaire Nirav Modi, who is wanted in an over ₹13,000-crore bank fraud case, officials said on Friday.

He had allegedly perpetrated the fraud in the Punjab National Bank in collusion with his uncle Mehul Choksi.

On February 25, a Westminster Magistrates' Court allowed Modi's extradition.

The findings of the court were sent to the UK Home Department as per which it cleared the extradition.

A senior official said prompt measures and legal actions taken by the Indian government and PNB helped in securing the extradition of Nirav Modi.

According to the government official, a scam of this magnitude had potential to create instability in the financial sector but the deft handling saved the entire public sector banking space from the crisis and litigation.

The then financial services secretary Rajiv Kumar, who is now Election Commissioner, had directed PNB to file an FIR with the CBI leading to unearthing of the case in January 2018.

Besides, a case was filed against the fugitive at the Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT).

The Mumbai DRT issued order for the recovery about ₹7,300 crore from Nirav Modi and others in 2019. Later, banks were allowed to seek passport details from the borrowers seeking loans of over ₹50 crore.

According to the Finance Ministry official, it was the Nirav Modi scam that led to this decision so that banks could take timely action and inform the relevant authorities to prevent fraudsters from fleeing the country.

Heads of public sector banks in October 2019 were given power to request for issuance of look-out circulars (LOCs) against suspects, even before enforcement agencies file FIRs against them, the official said.

Following the recommendation of an inter-ministerial panel under the then financial services secretary, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in October 2019 revised its 2017 guidelines to include heads of PSBs — the chairman or managing director and CEO — in the list of officials who can make requests for look-out circulars.

— PTI

SETBACK TO KERALA GOVT AS HC QUASHES CASES FILED BY CRIME BRANCH AGAINST ED

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 16

In a major setback to the CPM-led-LDF government in Kerala, the Kerala High Court on Friday quashed the cases filed by the crime branch against the officials of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with the allegations levelled by the prime accused in the gold smuggling case.

The HC annulled the FIRs filed by the Crime Branch pertaining to the claims made by key accused Swapna Suresh and Sandeep Nair that the ED officials had forced them to give statements against Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

Both the accused had earlier alleged that the ED officials had applied pressure on them to name top CPM leaders

including the Chief Minister in the gold smuggling and money laundering cases.

The HC directed the crime branch to hand over the details of the probe carried out so far, in a sealed envelope. It directed that any further action would be taken by the trial court in the case only after the examination of the documents.

Earlier, the ED had submitted an affidavit in the High Court stating that the crime branch had registered a case against the investigating officials with the ulterior motive of sabotaging the probe. This was done because they feared that the involvement of important people would come out in the public domain.

The affidavit had sought the scrapping of the case registered by the crime branch against the ED.

WEATHER | REPORT

Rainfall in Odisha, Jharkhand, eastern UP, Assam, likely to be below normal Monsoon to be normal this year: IMD

New Delhi, April 16: The Southwest monsoon, which brings nearly 75 per cent of rainfall to the country, is expected to be normal this year, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday.

The Long Period Average (LPA) will be 98 per cent with an error margin of plus and minus 5 per cent, said M. Rajeevan, secretary of the ministry of earth sciences.

Rainfall in Odisha, Jharkhand, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya is likely to be below normal, but normal or above normal in the rest of the country, he said

while releasing the first Long Range Forecast for the four-month rainfall period from June to September.

"The monsoon will be 98 per cent of the LPA, which is normal rainfall. It is a really good news for the country and will help India have a good agricultural output," Rajeevan said at a virtual press conference.

The LPA, the average of the season's rainfall across the country from 1961-2010, is 88 cm.

The news augurs well for economy, battered due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The Southwest monsoon is one of the primary

drivers of the country's economy, which is largely based on agriculture and its allied activities. Large parts of the country rely on the four-month rainfall season for agriculture and also for filling reservoirs.

This is the first time the IMD has made a specific forecast on spatial distribution. Rajeevan said the IMD will also issue month-wise forecasts during the next four months and also for the homogenous regions of the country — IMD's four divisions — the Northwest India, East and Northeast India, Central India and South Peninsula.

The country has recorded above normal rainfall for the last two rainfall seasons.

The La Nina and El Nino factors major influences on the Indian monsoon. The former is associated with the cooling of the Pacific waters and brings good rainfall while the latter is linked to the heating of Pacific waters and could lead to deficient precipitation.

"There are less chances of formation of an El Nino," Rajeevan said. He said in the recent years, the year after La Nina has usually seen a normal rainfall season. The Indian Dipole is

another major influence on the outcome of the monsoon. A negative IOD is associated with the heating of the Indian Ocean waters and a positive IOD is linked to the cooling of Indian Ocean waters.

The latest global model forecast indicates that neutral ENSO (El Nino Southern Oscillation) conditions are likely to continue over the equatorial Pacific and negative IOD conditions are likely to develop over the Indian Ocean during the ensuing monsoon season, IMD Director General M. Mohapatra said.

La Nina is favoured through March-May with

80 per cent chances of a transition to ENSO-neutral in April-June 2021 and continuing through the fall of 2021," Rajeevan said, implying these conditions are favourable for a good rainfall season.

Earlier this week, SkyMet Weather, a private weather forecasting agency, had also predicted a normal monsoon. However, it had pegged the precipitation during the four-month season at 103 per cent of the LPA, which is on the higher side.

Precipitation in the range of 96-104 per cent is considered to be in the 'normal category'.

— PTI

IN BRIEF

Iran enriches uranium to 60%

Dubai: Iran began enriching uranium on Friday to its highest level ever, edging closer to weapons-grade levels to pressure talks in Vienna aimed at restoring its nuclear deal with world powers after an attack on its main atomic site. A top official said only a few grams an hour of uranium gas would be enriched up to 60 per cent purity — triple the level it once did but at a rate far slower than what Tehran could produce. International inspectors already said Iran planned to do so above-ground at its Natanz nuclear site, not deep within its underground halls hardened to withstand airstrikes.

Hackers held over Covid-19 scam

Surabaya, Indonesia: Two Indonesian hackers have been arrested over an international scam in which \$60 million was stolen from a Covid-19 aid programme helping Americans left jobless by the pandemic, authorities said. Text messages were sent to 20 million Americans directing them to more than a dozen fake US government websites, police in the Southeast Asian nation said late Thursday. Thousands of victims supplied personal information, including social security numbers, to the fake sites in the hopes of securing \$2,000 offered under a real assistance programme for the unemployed, authorities said.

French mosque subsidy dropped

Strasbourg, France: A controversial plan to use public money for building a mosque in Strasbourg stalled on Friday after the Turkish backers of the project dropped their request for a subsidy. The pullback came after Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin accused the eastern French city, led by Green mayor Jeanne Barseghian, of supporting “foreign meddling” on French soil with a planned subsidy for the mosque. The public money, 2.5 million euros (nearly \$3 million), was to go to the Milli Gorus Islamic Confederation (CMIG), a pan-European movement for the Turkish diaspora.

Indian's body found in NY river

New York: The body of a 31-year-old Indian-origin mathematician working with cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence was found floating in the Hudson River here, according to a media report which said he was battling apparent mental illness. Shuvro Biswas' body was found floating in the Hudson River on Monday, the New York Post reported. Police sources said that there were no immediate apparent signs of foul play. Shuvro's brother said that he and his family were gutted by the news, noting that they had tried in vain to help Shuvro as he battled apparent mental illness. “We're all extremely devastated,” Biprojit Biswas, 34, was quoted by the newspaper as saying. “He's a really good guy. He's brilliant,” he said.

PAK SUSPENDS SOCIAL MEDIA OVER PROTESTS

Islamabad, April 16: Pakistan on Friday temporarily suspended the services of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp to stop their use to organise demonstrations following violent protests by a radical religious group that has now been banned by the government. The government banned Tehreek-i-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) on Thursday following three days of violent protest by it to force the government to expel the French ambassador over a blasphemous caricature published in France last year. The TLP had launched the country-wide protest on Monday after the arrest of its chief Saad Hussain Rizvi. The TLP supporters clashed with the law enforcement agencies in several towns and cities earlier this week, leaving seven persons dead and over 300 policemen injured. To stop the protests after Friday prayers, the Interior Ministry directed the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to suspend social media services for four hours from 11 am to 3 pm.

WHO worried as Covid cases double in just two months

Global health authority finds countries that avoid first outbreak are vulnerable

Geneva, April 16: The head of the World Health Organisation said Coronavirus cases are continuing to rise globally at worrying rates and noted that the number of new cases confirmed per week has nearly doubled during the past two months.

At a press briefing on Friday, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the number of new cases is approaching the highest rate of infection that we have seen so far in the pandemic.

Tedros said some countries that had been able to avoid widespread Covid-19 outbreaks are now seeing steep increases, citing Papua New Guinea as an example.

Until the beginning of this year, Papua New Guinea had reported less than 900 cases and nine

● **PAPUA NEW GUINEA** is a perfect example of why vaccine equity is so important, Tedros said.

deaths, Tedros said. The country has now identified more than 9,000 cases and 83 deaths, half of which were reported in the last month.

Papua New Guinea is a perfect example of why vaccine equity is so important, Tedros said, adding that the Pacific island nation has relied on vaccine donations from Australia and the UN-backed Covax initiative.

To date, Covax has shipped about 40 million vaccines to more than 100 countries, or enough to protect about 0.25 per cent of the world's population.

— AP

Pfizer plans third jab in 6-12 months

Washington, April 16: The head of Pfizer said in an interview aired on Thursday that people will “likely” need a third dose of his company's Covid-19 shot within six to 12 months of vaccination, while elsewhere defending the relatively higher cost of the jab. CEO Albert Bourla also said annual vaccinations against the Coronavirus may well be required.

“We need to see what would be the sequence, and for how often we need to do that, that remains to be seen,” Bourla said in an interview recorded on April 1.

“A likely scenario is that there will be likely a need

for a third dose, somewhere between six and 12 months and then from there, there will be an annual revaccination, but all of that needs to be confirmed,” he said, adding that variants will play a “key role.” “It is extremely important to suppress the pool of people that can be susceptible to the virus,” he said.

Researchers currently don't know how long vaccines provide protection against the Coronavirus.

Pfizer published a study earlier this month that said its jab is more than 91 per cent effective at protecting against the Coronavirus. — AFP

EU UNLIKELY TO RENEW ASTRA ORDERS: FRANCE

Paris, April 16: The European Union is very unlikely to renew its Covid-19 vaccine contracts with pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, a French minister said on Friday.

Denmark this week banned the use of AstraZeneca jabs over blood clot concerns, just as the EU said it was expecting 50 million Pfizer vaccine doses earlier than expected.

No final EU decision had been taken, French Industry Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher told RMC radio, but “it is highly probable” that no further AstraZeneca doses would be ordered. — AFP

NO PROGRESS IN NORTH IRELAND ROW FOR EU-UK

Brussels, April 16: Late night talks between the EU and Britain to resolve a row over border checks in Northern Ireland ended without a breakthrough, officials said on Friday.

European Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic and UK Brexit minister David Frost met late Thursday in Brussels as a wave of rioting has raised fears that fallout from Brexit is destabilising the British province.

The European Union has also accused Britain of violating the Brexit divorce deal by unilaterally delaying border checks in Northern Ireland until October and launched a lawsuit against London last month over the issue.

This legal action will continue “as long as necessary,” the EU said in the statement after the talks.

In the talks, Sefcovic insisted “that solutions can only be found through joint actions and through joint bodies,” the EU statement said. — AFP

RUSSIAN SPYING PUTS EUROPE ON HIGH ALERT

Paris, April 16: Three years after the mass expulsion of Russian diplomats from the West over the poisoning of Sergei Skripal, Moscow's representatives in Europe are coming under scrutiny again following a raft of new spy scandals.

From Austria to Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, Russian diplomats have been expelled from several European countries in the past few months over Moscow's increasingly aggressive spying tactics.

The issue has become all the more acute over alleged cyber attacks by Russia on the US, which Moscow has dismissed as nonsense but prompted the EU to issue a statement of solidarity. — AFP

First friday of Ramzan



Palestinians take part in the first Friday prayers of Ramzan at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site, in Old City of Jerusalem, on Friday.

— AFP

Ousted Myanmar MPs to form shadow government

● **BESIDES ETHNIC** Karen and Kachin leaders, the CRPH's list of appointed ministers also included prominent politicians from the Chin, Shanni, Mon, Karenni and Ta'ang minority groups.

day announced its leaders. Helming the so-called “National Unity Government” is Suu Kyi, in her position as state counsellor; and President Win Myint. Both are under house arrest and facing a barrage of charges from the junta.

They are flanked by a vice president who is ethnic Karen, said Min Ko Naing, a prominent democracy leader, in an address on the CRPH's official Facebook page.

“We have organised a government which has the largest number of ethnic minority groups,” he said. While Myanmar has

more than 130 official ethnic minority groups, the country's political fate has long been tightly controlled by the Bamar majority — first under a nearly five-decade junta regime which forced a so-called “Bamarisation” on minorities; and then under Suu Kyi's administration.

Besides ethnic Karen and Kachin leaders, the CRPH's list of appointed ministers also included prominent politicians from the Chin, Shanni, Mon, Karenni and Ta'ang minority groups.

They were chosen based on results from the 2020 election, input from a nationwide anti-coup protest movement, and ethnic minority groups — including armed rebels in the country's border territories, said Min Ko Naing. “We have to pull it from the root... we must try to eradicate it,” he said, referring to the junta as he raised a three-finger salute — the symbol of resistance. — AFP

AUSSIE JUDGE RULES GOOGLE MISLED USERS

Canberra, April 16: Google broke Australian law by misleading users about personal location data collected through Android mobile devices, a judge found on Friday.

The Federal Court decision was a partial win for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, the nation's fair trade watchdog, which has been prosecuting Google for broader alleged breaches of consumer law since October 2019.

Justice Thomas Thawley found that Google misled Android mobile device users about personal location data collected between January 2017 and December 2018.

This is an important victory for consumers, especially anyone concerned about their privacy online, as the court's decision sends a strong message to Google and others that big businesses must not mislead their customers, Commission Chair Rod Sims said in a statement. — PTI



Police and crime scene investigators work at the site of a mass shooting at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis, Indiana on Friday.

— AFP

8 dead at FedEx facility, gunman shoots himself

Indianapolis, April 16: A gunman killed eight people and wounded several others before apparently taking his own life in a late-night attack at a FedEx facility near the Indianapolis airport, police said, in the latest in a s-pate of mass shootings in the United States after a relative lull during the pandemic.

Five people were hospitalised after the Thursday night shooting, according to police. One of them had critical injuries, police spokesperson Genae Cook said. Another two people were treated and released at the scene.

FedEx said people who worked for the company were among the dead. A witness said that he was working inside the building when he heard several gunshots in rapid succession. “I see a man come out with a rifle in his hand and he starts firing and he starts yelling stuff that I could not understand,” Levi Miller told WTHR-TV. “What I ended up doing was ducking down to make sure he did not see me because I thought he would see me and he would shoot me.”

It was the latest in a recent string of mass shootings across the US. Last

INDIAN AMONG THOSE INJURED IN SHOOTING

New York, April 16: An Indian-origin man has said his niece was among those who were injured in a mass shooting incident at the FedEx facility in the US city of Indianapolis that left 8 people dead, according to a media report.

The Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) said at least eight people died and several others were wounded during the shooting on Thursday night. The girl, who was not named, was sitting in her car in the driver's seat when the gunfire erupted, her uncle Parminder Singh told local WTTV. “She called as I was asleep at home. She said there was a shooting in the FedEx. So we just drove from Brownsburg,” said Singh. She was wounded, he said. — PTI

month, eight people were fatally shot at massage businesses across the Atlanta area, and 10 died in gunfire at a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado. — AP

Jimmy Lai, 4 other activists imprisoned

Hong Kong, April 16: Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai was jailed for 14 months on Friday along with four other veteran democracy activists for their roles in protests that helped trigger a sweeping crackdown on dissent by China.

Lai was given two jail terms for separate rallies in August 2019, at the peak of a democracy uprising that paralysed the financial hub for months.

The jail terms were the first ever for the 73-year-old millionaire, who has spent decades using his media empire to support democracy in Hong Kong, a campaign that has seen him denounced by China as a “traitor”.

The sentences on Friday were the latest in a relentless and successful campaign by China since the protests to silence dissent.

Lai and four other campaigners were initially sentenced for leading a rally that organisers said attracted up to 1.7 million people.

Nine of Hong Kong's most prominent democracy campaigners had been found guilty of organising and participating in it.

Many of them have



Jimmy Lai

spent decades advocating non-violence in their ultimately fruitless campaign for universal suffrage.

Among the other defendants was Martin Lee, 82, a respected barrister known as the “father of democracy” in Hong Kong, who was once chosen by Beijing to help write the city's mini-constitution.

They also included Margaret Ng, a 73-year-old barrister and former opposition lawmaker.

Lee and Ng were given prison terms, but their sentences were suspended.

The rallies in 2019 often descended into clashes between riot police and a knot of hardcore participants, and posed the most concerted challenge to China's rule since the former British colony's 1997 handover. — AFP

ROYAL | FUNERAL

Congregation at Prince Philip's funeral to wear masks

Cousin to walk between William, Harry

London, April 16: The much-talked-about feud between the brothers, Princes William and Harry, was thrown into focus again as the running order for their grandfather Prince Philip's funeral on Saturday confirmed that they would not be walking side by side in the procession.

The cousin of the royals, Peter Phillips the son of Queen Elizabeth II's daughter Princess Anne, will walk in between as they follow the specially-designed Land Rover which will carry the coffin of Prince Philip the Duke

of Edinburgh through Windsor Castle.

There have been widespread reports of an estrangement between 38-year-old William, the second in line to the British throne, and his younger brother Harry, 36, ever since he stepped back from frontline royal duties and relocated to the US with wife Meghan Markle.

Details of the ceremonial funeral released by Buckingham Palace on Thursday confirmed the others in the procession to St George's Chapel as all four children of the late royal: Prince Charles the Prince

● **THE FUNERAL** Service will be conducted by the Dean of Windsor.

of Wales, Princess Anne the Princess Royal, Prince Andrew the Duke of York, and Prince Edward the Earl of Wessex and Forfar.

The congregation will wear masks for the Service and members of the Royal Family will wear Day Dress or Morning Coat with medals, the palace statement said, in reference to the scaled-back arrangements in keeping with the Covid-19

lockdown restrictions.

During the Service, a small choir of four will sing pieces of music chosen by the Duke of Edinburgh. The choir will be located in the Nave, away from the seated congregation, and in line with public health guidelines there will be no congregational singing.

The Funeral Service will be conducted by the Dean of Windsor, and is expected to last for approximately 50 minutes, it said.

The Queen will travel in the State Bentley in the procession, behind the family members on foot,

before entering by a side door to the chapel. Inside, she will be seated by herself under the social distancing guidelines.

The ceremony, which was originally designed for a gathering of 800, will have just 30 guests comprising close family and the other guests on the limited guest list include Prince Charles' wife Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, Prince William's wife Kate Middleton, all of Prince Philip's grandchildren and their spouses, and the children of the Queen's sister Princess Margaret. — PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

17 APRIL 2021

Bengal: EC misses chance to curb Covid during vote

Evidently, bureaucratic woodenness has triumphed over plain common sense. It is open to question, however, whether the victory has not been that of politics in dismissing the plea of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee for collapsing the remaining four phases of the Assembly election into one. The CM's urging came in the wake of the surging Covid-19 cases in the country.

As much as the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar, which the chief minister of Uttarakhand shows no inclination to cancel as he aspires to religious merit and evidently also political dividends that may flow from it, the Election Commission of India appears in no mood to cancel polling schedules more appropriate for normal times.

It is another matter that eight phases of polling in a not very large state wasn't exactly normal to start with, and has been a matter of criticism by all parties in the fray other than the BJP. The dissenters see in the eight-phase polling programme the hand of political considerations writ large.

It is another matter that eight phases of polling in a not very large state wasn't exactly normal to start with, and has been a matter of criticism by all parties in the fray other than the BJP

Ms Banerjee tweeted her pleading. The EC has not designed to reply because the suggestion was not made on official paper. It must look deep within itself and reflect if officially turning a deaf ear would have been its way if the prod had come from those on high in New Delhi. No prizes for guessing the right answer. The record of the EC in recent years has been a subject of adverse comment.

In a fiercely noisy election campaign in which bad language and worse sentiments have won the day so far, Ms Banerjee's suggestion was frankly a breath of fresh air. It was out of the box. It was genuinely constructive. It would have cut the time and scope for any potential violence. More importantly, it would have helped cut the transmissibility of the Covid-19 virus by checking poll-time crowds.

In fact, it is reasonable to wonder why the EC itself did not initiate such a splendid idea, find ways to overcome legal hurdles, if any, and help all parties reach a consensus on practicalities, urging them not to be politically short-sighted or naïve but look for what's good for the general public.

It is a pity that the Commission chose not to offer to reply. It gave out snippets of its thinking through the media. One, it was said that the proposal was made on social media, as though that makes it irrelevant. Two, it was explained by "sources" that there were legal difficulties since nominations were over. This hardly seems tenable since the issue at stake was polling, not nominations or withdrawals. Three, the point was also made that 150 companies of central paramilitary forces — or 15,000 soldiers — would be hard to find suddenly.

This does appear lame — even tawdry. Those numbers can be got together with the snapping of the finger if there is political will. The real point, however, is that the country is not at war with one half of the state of West Bengal where polling (for 159 seats) are due to be held by the end of the month. Remember, for comparison, that the US has only 3,000 soldiers in war-ravaged Afghanistan for counter-terrorism duties, and this has been the case for nearly a year.

The EC could have done better. It has missed the chance to reach for higher goals and distinguish itself.

Recovery vs inflation

Even though the year 2020 was lost because of the once-in-hundred years pandemic, people had harboured a glimmer of hope that 2021 would be better. While January and February did seem so, people's complacency brought back the coronavirus in full strength. As if the Covid-19 pandemic were not enough, economic data suggests a difficult time ahead. Wholesale Price Index (WPI) numbers that were released on Thursday showed that the rise in wholesale prices has touched an eight-year high at 7.39 per cent in March.

While it is true that WPI or wholesale inflation numbers are no longer used by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to determine lending rates, the retail inflation is better at 5.52 per cent. Though it is still within the inflation mandate of four per cent (plus or minus two per cent) given to the RBI, it could shoot up if supply constraints emerge because of local lockdowns.

The rising inflation and contracting industrial production present the most difficult conundrum for the Narendra Modi government. Since May 2014, the government has been careful not to stoke inflationary pressures in any manner, even if it meant sacrificing economic growth for some time. In its first term, it stopped raising the minimum support price for farmers, which was one of the key reasons for higher inflation during the UPA-2 government. Even during the lockdown, the government let most people fend for themselves without opting for unorthodox policies.

One of the tools that RBI employs to tame inflation is the higher interest rate. However, it cannot drop its accommodative monetary policy, if it has to spur economic growth at least back to the pre-Covid levels. The government and RBI have a difficult choice to make between taming inflation and boosting economic growth. Good luck, finance minister and RBI governor!

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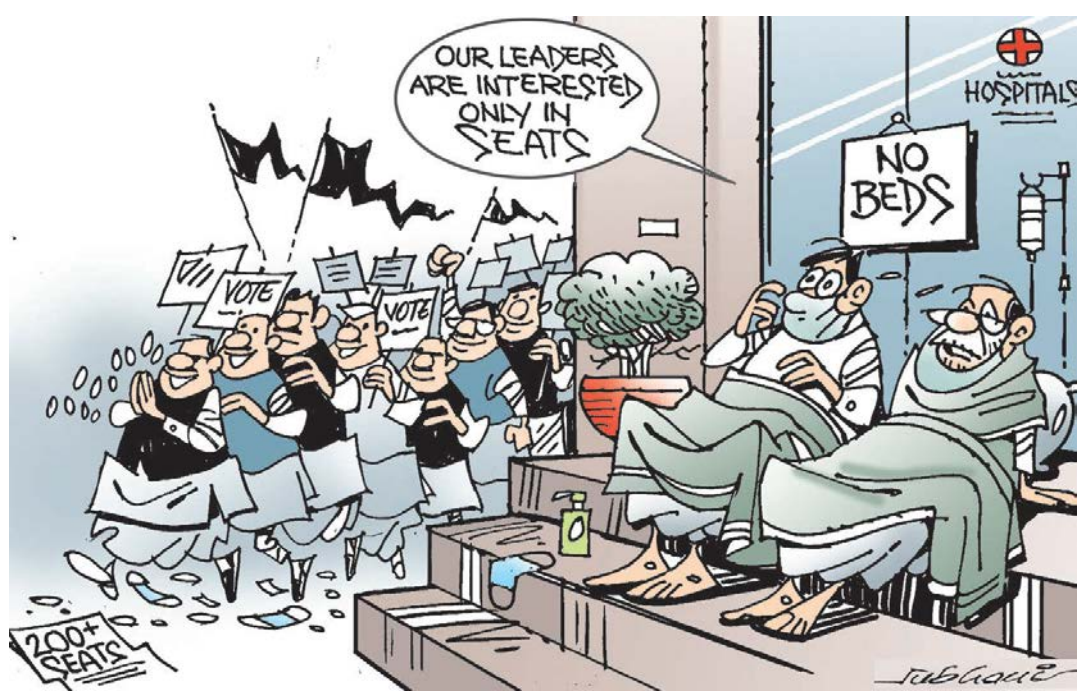
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Subhani



Kal Ho Na Ho: Inept govt messes up war on Covid



Shobhaa's Take

I read an interesting article in an American magazine, which talked about a Covid-19 condition known as "Mental Mist" — it sounds dreamy and poetic but in reality it's a lot harsher. Almost everyone in my immediate circle has been infected by the virus now. All of us know at least five others who are coping the best that they can, and perhaps only "mental mist" will see through this terrible second surge. Scientists and researchers aren't making things any better by warning us there are likely to be many more waves: the third one is already upon us! Here in Mumbai, we are dealing with CM Uddhav Thackeray's version of the latest lockdown, euphemistically called a "janata curfew" (borrowed from the PM's description last year). It's the same old lockdown with a more "user friendly" tag. We need all the "mental mist" we can get to help us cope once again with what is already a monumental tragedy. He has shrugged off all responsibility for the alarming numbers, declaring: "Now preventing the infection is very difficult, therefore strict enforcement is very important." No kidding, Sirji... You can happily police citizens but not admit and take responsibility for administrative failures earlier! Where were you for three critical weeks?

The second surge across Mumbai and Maharashtra is a different beast. We still don't know how different. Is it a mutant? If so, which strain? Will those of us who have taken the job be protected against this new strain? I think not! I know two people who contracted the virus nearly a month after their first jab — so much for "protection".

Seventeen lakh Mumbai-kars got the vaccine over a six-week period, if one accepts these numbers. There's now a severe shortage of just about everything, vaccines included. Senior citizens trudged miles to get their jabs only to come home disappointed. Two of my girlfriends are recovering in a South Mumbai hospital. A third is critical in a suburban hospital. We don't have enough oxygen and patients are dying, literally gasping for breath. The numbers trotted out by the authorities are grossly understated, and the reason is trite: "We don't want mass panic." But the dead are piling up, and how long can the awful truth be buried or burnt?

While the second wave was creeping up on Mumbai, our *netas* were busy with just one thing: dealing with a corrupt cop! All energy invested in "fixing" Sachin Waze and Anil Deshmukh (NCP home minister, who quit). Devendra Fadnis' relentless pressure on Uddhav Thackeray's rickety alliance to come clean (ha!) on the "Antilia" bomb scare ensured very little other work got done at the BMC and Mantralaya. Even those efficient bureaucrats who had done such a hands-on job to contain Covid last year sat tight for the past month, unable to act, since the CM was only worried about hanging on to his job. Without authorisation, with nobody to sign files, even the municipal commissioner (I.S. Chahal) had no choice but to wait it out, till we hit the emergency button! Our hearts go out to dedicated BMC staffers soldiering on regardless: thank you for your selfless service!

The migrant exodus has started, with no "rules" in place. Hardly anyone has

People who track government mess-ups blame the bureaucrats, specially the three musketeers who advise the PM

the all-important Covid-negative certificate, while bus operators are offering a package deal that comes with a fake cert (300 bucks). Frankly, irate citizens are asking: "Why the hell should we abide by lockdown rules when even the PM isn't bothering? Look at those mammoth-sized political rallies!" And look at the sadhus taking a holy dip at the Kumbh: 40 lakhs jumping into the river in the first *snan*. Read the asinine remarks of Uttarakhand's CM (Tirath Singh Rawat), who defended the complete flouting of Covid protocols at Haridwar: "The devotees have Ma Ganga's blessings." The videos of deliriously high Naga sadhus in their birthday suits dancing and singing their way to the ghats went viral, perhaps for the wrong reasons, even as news of Yogi Adityanath testing positive made the news. Rawat Saab nonchalantly claimed: "All Central government guidelines are followed at Kumbh, be it social distancing or other norms, everything is in place." The numbers of those who tested positive shot up from 1,863 to 10,770 at last count; one shudders to think what will follow when the sadhus and pilgrims go back where they came from. I am sending an SOS to Ma Ganga: Extra blessings desperately needed!

When citizens see the rule of law being selectively implemented, they lose all respect for authority. That's what's happening now in Mumbai, where a group of cops celebrate a colleague's birthday in style, lockdown be damned. A police van was used to transport *khaana peena* to the thana, where the happy bunch let their hair down and some took their shirts off! Alcohol was retrieved from the

celebration site, but so far no action has been taken against those naughty chaps: *theek hai* "pauri ho rahi hai", boss!

People who track government mess-ups blame the bureaucrats, specially the three musketeers who advise the PM. While he was busy investing all his time and energy in the West Bengal elections, our bright chaps goofed up with the entire vaccine rollout plan: the complicated international contracts and the crucial numbers involved. By trying to drive a hard bargain, we actually lost out! Apparently, when things started to slide in the second surge, the bureaucrats panicked and did what babus always do: opted for the CYA approach. Right now, chaos reigns and nobody knows where the buck stops. How on earth are we going to contain the second wave, when we do not have enough vaccines for our people? So much money and prestige lost — why? Because those "babu bullies" got the maths wrong, leading to a cancellation of major contracts and embarrassment in the international media. Several scathing articles have appeared since the debacle, mocking our earlier boasts of "Bending it like Beckham" (in the context of the economy). Too bad the Sensex tanked, based on the disastrous Covid forecasts.

No, we are not prepared to fight this war, regardless of what the government is claiming. Lies and more lies are being thrown at us daily. Like that fake video showing a deserted Haridwar and asking: What crowds? Where crowds? This clumsy attempt at shielding the government's monumental failure at tackling a national crisis is being seen as a crime against humanity. Such negligence! Such heartlessness!

Dealing with Covid is a lot easier than dealing with our callous *netas*.

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

BAN RALLIES

Karan Thapar has candidly analysed Coronavirus (*Covid: Who'll pay the price for irresponsible netas*, DC, April 16). One needs to realise that to mitigate the effects of the virus, an appropriate behaviour is essential. The writer was right in saying that the underprivileged and penurious are paying the price for political incompetence. Further, political rallies, religious gatherings and baths, roadshows will have to be banned till the pandemic is contained.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

After a tough year, we are back to square one in terms of shortage of beds, ventilators, flouting of Covid norms and now shortage of vaccines. The government and citizens have not learnt any lessons. With the sudden surge in daily cases, we are heading towards a major catastrophe. Still, it's not too late to start following Covid safety measures and reverse the curve.

Sajid Farooq
Kurnool

Majority of the ruling class today are thick-skinned and unmindful of people's welfares despite their manifestos. Blame games are the order of the day. How come, they put the onus on ECI for allowing elections during a pandemic? The governments should have gone for e-campaigns in lieu of rallies and Shaahi Snaans. Now, the situation is out of control.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Big farm credit project in AP

HYDERABAD, April. 16

The Rs. 341 million World Bank aided agricultural credit project will be implemented in Andhra Pradesh from May 10.

Together with an assistance of Rs. 183 millions from the World Bank, the lending agencies will make available to the farmers, under the project, finance to the tune of Rs 264.4 millions while the rest will have to come from the resources of the farmers themselves.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"The day dawns
Your Yoni yawns
The lingam says 'good morning';
The night has gone
But the game's still on —
That apple came with no warning."

— From *The Pirhana Purana* by Bachchoo

Racism exists in Britain, but it's not always 'institutional'

There were two "incidents" in my years at Cambridge University which I could possibly label "racist". On my first day, in conversation with my tutor, Meredith Dewey, he used an unfamiliar word. He asked if my room was comfortable and said: "The New Block has central heating, so we put all the wogs there."

I hadn't heard the "W" word before. I later asked my neighbour, Beresford, what it meant, and he said it was the abbreviation for "Worthy Oriental Gentleman". The insult, I realised was in the implicit patronisation. I am certain Dewey meant no offence. He was not a racist, but it was an imperial term he'd been brought up with and hadn't thought about. Not very many people, 40 or more years on, dare publicly pro-

nounce the word. Like the "N" word or the "P" word (used for all Asians), it's taboo.

That was verbal. The real incident of race discrimination I faced at university was in my second year when we had to live out of college in "digs". I applied for several and was turned away from many because the landladies didn't accept any "wogs" in their rooms.

One got over it.

London was another fettle of kitsch. Yes, there were the same elements of race-based abusive words and the refusal by landlords to rent out their bed-sitters and bartenders refusing to serve you in pubs. There were assaults, certainly through racist motives, some serious, as the time in 1973 when a petrol bomb was thrown into the ground floor of the building where I had a flat on the second and had to leap out of the window of a burning building.

Even so, these may have been racist, but couldn't be strictly classed as "institutional racism". My first experience of the meaning of that phrase was when I got a teaching job at a school which had been established as an amalgamation of three schools — Henry

Thornton, which was a grammar school, all white except for two Indian doctors' sons, Tennyson and Aristotle. The Tennysonians and Aristotelians were 90 per cent black with 10 per cent of white working-class boys. The amalgamated school was graded into 10 levels in each academic year. The division seemed institutionally pernicious as the top two grades were exclusively white and the bottom four almost uniformly black with the middle grades layered in a climbing graph of racial composition. There were no declared or transparent criteria for the classification. Of course, the school protested that the divisions were based on academic tests. After six months in the school, I was convinced they were not. It was an institutionally race-biased division.

Living and working in London and being a member of a radical political group, I was soon made aware that the police in every major city systematically picked on West Indians walking the streets and searched them, or invaded their gatherings, calling them drug raids.

It was not till the 1980s when, after the riots of black youngsters in Brixton in

London, in Liverpool and Birmingham and the murder of a teenager called Stephen Lawrence by racist thugs, that Westminster set up independent enquiries into the causes and possible remedies of what was clearly an urban war between the police and blacks.

One of the enquiries by an impartial member of the judiciary, characterised the police forces as "institutionally racist". Since that term entered the public vocabulary, it has been used to characterise very many institutions of Britain.

In the long shadow of the Back Lives Matter movement, BoJo's government recruited a Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. The commissioners were eleven people. Ten of them from Asian and black communities and were representatives of several professions. They produced a 258-page report which, when it was published on April Fool's day brought a tsunami of criticism. Not from the right-leaning press in Britain, which accepted and boasted about the report's contention that Britain had no institutions which could be, on statistical evidence, condemned as "institutionally racist".

The report was cautious in several ways but raised a storm of protest from black academics, writers, activists and liberal newspapers, some of whom questioned the "findings" and others who condemned it as a Tory government whitewash. I was made aware, gentle reader, of several of these objections. They were in the main not backed by statistical counter arguments to the report's findings, but assessments of the "mood" and the feelings of those who would speak for the black communities — if there is indeed still such a single entity.

Some of the negative reaction to the report, which said for instance that the Chinese, Asian and female black students excelled in schools and left white and black working-class boys scoring the worst in exams and meritocratic progress. The report concluded that this was not endemic institutional racism in the educational system but was attributable to vast social factors.

I admit I haven't read the report but will do. The fact that I know two of the commissioners and respect the acumen, honesty and view of at least one of them, inclines me at this point to sit on the fence. Ouch!

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,832.03	0.06
Nifty 50	14,617.90	0.25
S&P 500*	4,180.11	0.23
Dollar (₹)	74.35	0.76
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.46	0.85
Euro (₹)	89.06	0.77
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,431*9	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.82	0.18
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.088	-0.02
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.578	0.048

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Mindtree Q4 net profit climbs 54% to ₹317 cr

IT firm Mindtree said its consolidated net profit rose by 53.9 per cent to Rs 317.3 crore in the March quarter, against Rs 206.2 crore in the year-ago quarter, on the back of strong operational efficiency, and it expressed confidence in logging double-digit growth in FY22. Its revenue grew 2.9 per cent to Rs 2,109.3 crore from Rs 2,050.5 crore. In dollar terms, the net profit was up 53.4 per cent at \$43.3 million, while revenue was up by 3.5 per cent at \$288.2 million.



■ Little gain seen to elders from the move Plan to open NPS to 65+ gets split views

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 16

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) is contemplating hiking the maximum age of entry for the National Pension System (NPS) from 65 years to 70 years.

The Pension fund regulator is also thinking of allowing NPS subscribers who join after the age of 60 years to continue their NPS accounts till the age of 75. However, for others, the age of maturity will remain 70 years.

Financial planners are, however, divided over the benefits of people entering NPS at the fag end of their life, as they would have a limited time-frame to accumulate a decent corpus through this investment. Moreover, with 40 per cent of the total corpus mandatorily going towards buying annuities, their overall returns would be limited.

According to some experts, senior citizens would be better off investing their surplus in a mix of debt instruments, such as Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana, post office Senior Citizen Savings Scheme, fixed deposits, debentures, bonds and debt mutual funds.

Says Arnav Pandya, a certified financial planner: "It would have been positive if existing subscribers were given the option to contribute in NPS for a longer time. But the accumulation period is being increased for new sub-



scribers. Senior citizens who can invest in NPS for around 15-20 years can look at subscribing in NPS but those who have a lesser time horizon should refrain from NPS.

"This is because under NPS, 40 per cent of the corpus needs to be converted into annuity, which reduces the rate of return that a person would earn on their corpus, as you are forced to go to an insurance company and buy annuities. Also, if you are a senior citizen, you will invest only in debt, which would limit the scope of appreciation as compared to when you invest in equities. You are better off on your own investing in a range of debt instruments that give you a higher rate of return."

"So, for older people starting NPS just because the investment age is raised would not be the right strategy, as you need to give time for the corpus to accumulate. Such investors can look at a mixture of debt mutual funds, debentures, bonds, special deposits of banks and

financial institutions."

But Supratim Bandyopadhyay, chairman, PFRDA, says around 15,000 people above the age of 60 joined the NPS since the entry age limit was raised from 60 to 65 three years ago.

According to the chief executive officer of a pension fund house, "Senior citizens can earn decent returns, avail tax benefits and protect their capital by investing in NPS."

Sachin Shetty, a mutual fund and insurance distributor, said, "Life expectancy is rising and so are expenses. So far NPS has performed well. If a person is 60 years or more but is ready to hold money for the long term i.e. 10 years or more, then he should definitely invest in NPS to create a good corpus to meet rising expenses. However, since NPS is prone to market fluctuations, those with high investible surplus could diversify by investing a part of their surplus in Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana which is fetching over 7 per cent return."

Catch-22: More customers mean less revenue for e-pharmacies

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 16

Similar to other online services, e-pharmacies too have seen increased customer acceptance during the pandemic but their revenues have declined during the period. This, despite a four-to-five-fold growth in traffic witnessed by them.

E-pharmacies became more popular during the lockdown as many first-time buyers used them for buying both prescription and OTC drugs. These customers are sticking to e-pharmacy purchases even after the pandemic.

The average traffic per day had surged four-five times during the lockdown period, according to brokerage Motilal Oswal. In addition, customer conversion went up from 12-15 per cent pre-lockdown to 20-22 per cent after lockdown. But the average



order value came down drastically from Rs 3,500 to Rs 800 post-lockdown. As a result, average revenues of e-pharmacy players declined during the pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, 70 per cent of e-pharmacy business used to come from chronic therapies, such as diabetes, blood pressure and cholesterol. That trend shifted heavily towards Covid essentials post-lockdown and simultaneously chronic therapies' contribution came down to 40-45 per cent of

total online revenues. This led to a decline in average revenues. While private label and substitution can improve profitability, substitution of prescribed brand for private label is a costly affair with slim chances of success.

"Currently all e-pharmacy players are burning cash and to breakeven at the Ebitda level, they need to have an average order value of Rs 3,000-3,500 and cut operational costs drastically, which is possible only with an omni-channel model," says Kartik Anantharaman, director of e-pharmacy and private label business at Medlife. According to him, the omni-channel model involves online players working with offline players, eliminating competition between the two and enabling collaboration by complementing each other's strengths. The omni-channel format also provides operating leverage, as e-pharmacy players can easily service more orders per day. Further, profitability is also dependent on the mix of bulk purchases and just-in-time purchases. To become profitable, the bulk purchases have to be at least 70 per cent and for this, companies need better clarity on demand and the prescription patterns of doctors.

The road to profitability looks quite long for e-pharmacies now.

CHINA'S Q1 GDP SURGES TO 18.3%

K.J.M. VARMA BEIJING, APRIL 16

China's economy grew a record 18.3 per cent in the first quarter of 2021, riding on strong domestic and foreign demand and aided by recovery from a low base in early 2020, statistics released on Friday showed. The gross domestic product (GDP) reached 24.93 trillion yuan (about \$3.82 trillion) in Q1. This is the highest quarterly growth rate since China first began publishing GDP data in 1993. —PTI

Honda Cars recalls 78,000 units of select models

New Delhi, April 16: Honda Cars India Ltd (HCIL) on Friday announced the recall of 77,954 units of select models to replace faulty fuel pumps in an exercise it started last year. The fuel pumps, it said, may contain defective impellers that could over time result in engine stopping or not starting.

The recall impacts the Amaze, 4th generation City, WR-V, Jazz, Civic, BR-V, and CRV, manufactured between January 2019 and September 2020. HCIL said 36,086 units of

MARUTI HIKES PRICES BY UP TO ₹22,500

New Delhi, April 16: Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Friday said it has hiked prices of most of its models by up to Rs 22,500 with immediate effect to partially offset

the impact of the rise in input costs. Barring Celerio and Swift, all the models will be covered under the price increase exercise, MSI said in a regulatory filing. —PTI

Amaze made during Jan.-Aug. 2019 and 20,248 units of the 4th Gen City produced during Jan.-Sept. 2019 have been recalled. Similarly, 7,871 units of WR-V and 6,235 units of

Jazz made during Jan.-Aug. 2019; 5,170 units of Civic made in Jan.-Sept. 2019; 1,737 units of BR-V made in Jan.-Oct. 2019, and 607 units of CRV made during Jan. 2019 and Sept. 2020

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Vihari out on duck in county debut

Nottingham: India's Test specialist Hanuma Vihari had a forgettable English county debut for Warwickshire, failing to trouble the scorers against Nottinghamshire here. Vihari, who is set to play a minimum three games for the Birmingham-based county, struggled a lot while facing England international Stuart Broad during his agonising 40-minute stay in the middle. Vihari came in to bat in the second over of the Warwickshire first innings after Notts were bowled out for 273 in 88 overs. During fielding, Vihari bowled an over for 11 runs and also took a catch off his skipper Will Rhodes' bowling to dismiss Steven Mullaney. —PTI

Harman recovers from Coronavirus

New Delhi: Indian women's T20 captain Harmanpreet Kaur on Friday announced that she has recovered from Covid-19. Harmanpreet had tested positive and made it public on March 30. After more than two weeks, her RT-PCR report has come negative. "Happy to inform you all that I have tested -ve & I'm feeling better. My only message to y'all is to take care & be extra careful. The virus is real & it's dangerous. Follow all the protocols set up by the authorities. Wishing strength to the ones who are in the middle of the fight," Harmanpreet tweeted. —PTI

Coleman to miss Oly despite ban cut

Geneva: World 100 metres champion Christian Coleman's two-year ban for missing three doping tests has been reduced by six months to 18 months, the Court of Arbitration for Sport said on Friday. The 25-year-old American will still miss the rescheduled Tokyo Olympics this year as his ban runs until November 14. Coleman will, however, be eligible to defend his world indoor and outdoor titles next year. CAS "partially upheld" the Athletics Integrity Unit's ruling but found Coleman's "degree of negligence to be lower". —AFP

Roma, Man U in Europa last four

Paris, April 16: Roma lined up a blockbuster Europa League semifinal clash with Manchester United on Thursday after holding Ajax to a 1-1 draw to go through to the Last Four 3-2 on aggregate.

Edin Dzeko's strike 18 minutes from time ensured the draw and passage for Paulo Fonseca's side, who were on the back foot for most of the match, and a showdown with United who strolled into the semis 4-0 after a 2-0 win over Granada at Old Trafford. The other semifinal will see Arsenal face Villarreal, coached by former Gunners boss Unai Emery.

Italy's only remaining representative in Europe came into the clash at the Stadio Olimpico with a slender lead but two away goals from last week's first leg in Amsterdam.

Their European campaign looked in danger when Ajax teen Brian Brobbey was introduced for Antony at the break and the striker made an instant impact, racing onto Perr Schuurs pass three minutes after the restart and nipped the ball

past an onrushing Pau Lopez.

However after Dusan Tadic's strike for the away side six minutes later was ruled out for a foul on Henrikh Mkhitaryan in the build up, Dzeko tipped the tie in Roma's favour.

Meanwhile, United had few problems against Granada, who had a mountain to climb after losing the first leg 2-0 in Spain.

Edinson Cavani opened the scoring after just five minutes to put United ahead but Jesus Vallejo's last-minute own goal sealed the win for United, who could yet have an all-English final with Arsenal.

The Gunners will face Villarreal in a fortnight after thumping Slavia Prague 4-0 to go through 5-1 on aggregate.

Behind on away goals thanks to Tomas Holes' stoppage-time leveller at the Emirates Stadium last week, Arsenal ended Slavia's 23-match unbeaten run thanks to a six-minute blitz from Nicolas Pepe, Alexandre Lacazette and Bukayo Saka in the first half. —AFP



Manchester United's Alex Telles looks on as his teammate Paul Pogba (right) vies with Granada's Kennedy (left) during their UEFA Europa League quarterfinal second leg match at Old Trafford stadium in Manchester on Thursday.

Women team's plan chalked out

New Delhi, April 16: The BCCI Apex Council has decided, in principle, to field both the men's and the women's teams at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics if the game is included in the roster.

The women's team will also compete at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

The Apex Council that met virtually on Friday also decided that women's team led by Mithali Raj and Harmanpreet Kaur will tour Australia at the end of 2021.

That will be followed by New Zealand tour which will precede the Women ODI World Cup.

"The women's team will be playing in the Birmingham CWG. If finally cricket is a part of 2028 Los Angeles

Olympics, then both men and women's team will take part. This has been decided in principle," a senior BCCI functionary privy to developments of the day said on conditions of anonymity.

WOMEN'S IPL AND FTF

Just like last year, there will be a camp before the three-team Women's T20 Challenge and just after it's over, the squad will fly to England.

"The girls will play a full series in England. Once they come back, West Indies or Proteas women will again come for bilateral series.

"Once that's over, the team will be travelling to Australia for a white ball series and then will play another series in New Zealand. The New Zealand

bilateral (or tri-nation series) will be a pre-cursor to the ODI World Cup," he said.

Also the full fledged women's domestic season (50 over and T20) will be organised.

BIHAR CA SHOWCAUSED

The BCCI has showcased the Bihar Cricket Association for defying the parent body's diktat while holding an unsanctioned T20 League last month. Their president Rakesh Tiwary has been admonished and given a warning for defying orders.

"Bihar CA has a lot of problems. A committee has been formed and they are going to go there and help them in sorting out the administrative mess. They have been given a time of one month to get

their house in order or hence they will be barred from playing domestic cricket.

For all other state T20 leagues, some statutory procedure will be put in place and the final authority to grant permission will be with office bearers," he added.

DOMESTIC CRICKET

No concrete decision has been taken as the Covid situation in India is fluid.

"Obviously, we plan to hold the Ranji Trophy and all the tournaments in order but you can't escape the situation. The compensation package will also be worked out as it has been approved by the general body in Jaury," a senior BCCI functionary privy to developments of the day added. —PTI

VALTERRI, HAMILTON RUBBER IN IMOLA PRACTICE

Imola (Italy), April 16: Mercedes drivers Valtteri Bottas and Lewis Hamilton steered their way through two red flags on Friday to the best times of the first practice session for the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix.

Bottas was quickest round the legendary Imola circuit but was less than one-tenth of a second faster than his teammate.

Similarly there was a cigarette paper between Hamilton, who won the opening race in Bahrain, and Red Bull's Max Verstappen, the young pretender to the Briton's world crown.

Verstappen was second in Bahrain and Bottas third. —AFP

Tokyo head says Olympics are on

Tokyo, April 16: The head of the Tokyo Olympics on Friday was again forced to assure the world that the postponed Games will open in just over three months and not be canceled despite surging Covid-19 cases in Japan.

Organising committee president Seiko Hashimoto was asked at a news conference if there were any conditions under which the Olympics would be cancelled.

The question comes as the general secretary of ruling LDP political party, Toshihiro Nikai, raised the possibility the day before.

"There are a variety of concerns but as the Tokyo 2020 organising committee we are not thinking about canceling the games," Hashimoto said.

Nikai, the No. 2 person in the LDP party, was asked on Thursday in an interview if cancellation was still an option.

"Of course," he replied adding that if the Tokyo Games caused a surge in infections there would be no meaning to having the Olympics.

Nikai tried to backtrack later, and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga issued a statement Thursday saying there is no change to the govern-

ment position to do everything to achieve safe and secure Olympics. Hashimoto acknowledged Nikai's concern and suggested it was probably shared by the Japanese public. Polls show as many as 80 per cent in Japan oppose holding the Olympics during the pandemic.

"The fact that he (Nikai) is concerned is a point that we need to take seriously as Tokyo 2020," she said.

"His comment has reminded us of how tedious it was for us to feel confident or be fully prepared for delivering the games," she added.

In an editorial this week, the British Medical Journal questioned Japan and the IOC gone ahead with the Olympics. Organisers have said the Olympics will be safe and secure, which the editorial challenged. —AP

MAIDEN GOLD MEDALS FOR VINESH AND ANSHU

Almaty (Kazakhstan), April 16: Dominating the proceedings in a depleted field, Olympic-bound wrestlers Vinesh Phogat and Anshu Malik won their maiden Asian Championship titles after comfortable triumphs in their respective summit clashes here on Friday.

There was no stopping Vinesh in the absence of the Chinese and Japanese rivals as she cruised to the title without losing a point in the 53kg category.

Vinesh has notched up seven podium finishes at the Asian meet over the years, including three silver medals before this edition.

Also standing on top of the podium was Divya Kakran (72kg) while Sakshi Malik (65kg) settled for a silver medal.

India has a rich haul of seven medals from the women's event as the country won four gold, a silver and two bronze medals in this edition. Sarita Mor (59kg) had won gold while Seema Bisla (50kg) and Pooja (76kg) settled for bronze medals. —PTI

ORANGE

Nitish Rana, KKR

137

Sanju Samson, RR

123

Manish Pandey, SRH

99

PURPLE

Harshal Patel, RCB

7

Andre Russell, KKR

6

Avesh Khan, DC

5

Off the field

CSK batsman Ambati Rayudu with his daughter. — Instagram

Stokes to undergo surgery on Monday

England all-rounder Ben Stokes will be out of action for “up to 12 weeks” as his fractured left index finger will require surgery that will take place in Leeds on Monday. A repeat X-ray and CT scan revealed that the 29-year-old has a fracture in his left index finger, an injury that he picked up during the ongoing IPL. Stokes, who is currently in India with his franchise Rajasthan Royals, will fly home on Saturday. “Ben Stokes will be out for up to 12 weeks. He will have surgery in Leeds on Monday,” England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said.

The injury occurred while Stokes was fielding during Royals’ opening match against Punjab Kings.

Ishtant suffering from heel niggle

Ricky Ponting has revealed that Delhi Capitals’ experienced fast bowler Ishtant Sharma, who missed his team’s first two IPL matches, is suffering from a heel niggle. “Coming into the first game, Ishtant Sharma obviously had a heel niggle that we have been trying to work through,” Ponting said.

With Sharma missing out, Avesh provided Delhi Capitals the early breakthroughs, claiming five wickets in the last two games and Ponting was “ultra” impressed with him. “He has grabbed his opportunities with both hands. He has been around this franchise for few years,” he said.

Nortje is back after false test

Delhi Capitals pacer Anrich Nortje on Friday came out of his hard quarantine that was extended by a couple of days following a false Covid-19 positive report. The Proteas speedster, a star performer for DC in the last edition, had tested positive for Covid-19 while in quarantine. But was retested and came out negative in three RT-PCR results. “Our pace superstar is now out of quarantine. After a false positive result for Covid-19, Anrich Nortje tested negative thrice, and is now part of our team bubble. We can’t wait to see him in action,” DC tweeted from its official handle.

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CHAHARBUSTER!

On-song Deepak takes 4/13 as CSK thrash Punjab by 6 wickets

Mumbai, April 16: Chennai Super Kings defeated Punjab Kings by six wickets to register their first win in the Indian Premier League here on Friday. Opting to bowl, Deepak Chahar returned with impressive figures of four for 13 as CSK dished out a clinical bowling and fielding display to restrict Punjab to a below-par 106 for eight.

Chahar said there was a bit more seam than swing. “We bowled in the right areas. Last year was difficult for all of us and I had Covid. I had to stay in quarantine for at least 28 days and then after four days I had to play. This year we trained well and the last game was a bit of a wake-up call for us. Things went our way. I think the pitch will stay the same. I think we will have to score 107 and it’ll be easy for us,” he added.

Shahrukh Khan top-scored for Punjab with a 36-ball 47.

Chasing the paltry target, Moeen Ali made 46, while Faf du Plessis remained unbeaten on 36 as CSK reached home in 15.4 overs.

Mohammed Shami was the pick of the bowlers for Punjab with figures of 2/21.

Punjab skipper KL Rahul said: “When any team loses five wickets in the first six or seven overs. The pitch did play differently. It was more sticky and tacky than what it looked like. Deepak with his knuckle ball got a couple of wickets. Myself getting run-out. It wasn’t a 110-wicket, maybe 150-160.”

Earlier, Tamil Nadu’s power-hitter M Shahrukh Khan was the only Punjab batsman to make an impression, with a 36-ball 47 (4X4s, 2X6s) before falling to Sam Curran in the final over as CSK was all over their opponent.

Sam Curran (1/12), Moeen Ali (1/17), Dwayne Bravo (1/10) were the other wicket-takers for CSK.

Aiming to bounce back after being outclassed by Delhi Capitals in their opening match, CSK bowlers justified skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni’s

Chennai Super Kings pacer Deepak Chahar celebrates a Punjab Kings wicket during their IPL game in Mumbai on Friday. — IPL

decision to bowl first by reducing Punjab to 26 for four in the powerplay (first six overs).

Chahar engineered the Punjab slide in the very first over by sending back Mayank Agarwal (0) with a beauty which nipped away from middle stump to hit the off stump. Chahar kept up the pressure and increased CSK’s woes with his consistency

and conceded only two fours in his four-over spell.

In-form Rahul (5) was run-out by a brilliant direct throw from Ravindra Jadeja fielding at short-cover as the batsman tried to scramble for a single. Jadeja was in the act in the fifth over again, grabbing a superb catch diving full-length to dismiss Chris Gayle for 10 to

give Chahar his second wicket.

Nicholas Pooran bagged his second straight duck, pulling a short delivery straight into the hands of Shardul Thakur at long-leg.

Deepak Hooda (10), who played a blinder in Punjab’s first match against Rajasthan Royals, could not repeat his heroics, lobbing a simple catch

SCORECARD

Punjab Kings: KL Rahul run out (Jadeja) 5, Mayank Agarwal b Chahar 0, Chris Gayle c Jadeja b Chahar 10, Deepak Hooda c du Plessis b Chahar 10, Nicholas Pooran c Thakur b Chahar 0, Shahrukh Khan c Jadeja b Curran 47, Jhye Richardson b Ali 15, Murugan Ashwin c du Plessis b Bravo 6, Mohammed Shami (not out) 9, Riley Meredith (not out) 0. **Extras (w-4) 4. Total (for eight wickets in 20 overs) 106.**

FoW: 1-1, 2-15, 3-19, 4-19, 5-26, 6-57, 7-87, 8-101.

Bowling: Deepak Chahar 4-1-13-4, Sam Curran 3-0-12-1, Shardul Thakur 4-0-35-0, Ravindra Jadeja 4-0-19-0, Moeen Ali 3-0-17-1, Dwayne Bravo 2-0-10-1.

Chennai Super Kings: Ruturaj Gaikwad c Hooda b Arshdeep Singh 5, Faf du Plessis (not out) 36, Moeen Ali c Shahrukh Khan b Ashwin 46, Suresh Raina c Rahul b Mohammed Shami 8, Ambati Rayudu c Pooran b Mohammed Shami 0, Sam Curran (not out) 5. **Extras (lb-5, w-2) 7. Total (for four wickets in 15.4 overs) 107.**

FoW: 1-24, 2-90, 3-99, 4-99.

Bowling: Mohammed Shami 4-0-21-2, Jhye Richardson 3-0-21-0, Arshdeep Singh 2-0-7-1, Riley Meredith 3.4-0-21-0, Murugan Ashwin 3-0-32-1.

POINTS TABLE						
Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
RCB	2	2	0	0	4	+0.175
CSK	2	1	1	0	2	+0.616
MI	2	1	1	0	2	+0.225
DC	2	1	1	0	2	+0.195
RR	2	1	1	0	2	+0.052
KKR	2	1	1	0	2	+0.000
PBKS	2	1	1	0	2	-0.909
SRH	2	0	2	0	0	-0.400

I am getting paid to slog, says Chris

Mumbai, April 16: Chris Morris who played a key role in Rajasthan Royals’ successful chase against Delhi Capitals on Thursday said it was nice to know that his side can win from anywhere after being down in the dumps.

“There are guys that get paid to bat and guys that get paid to slog, and I know which I am. That’s why I play so much golf,” he said.

“I think the last game, that close game, we took a lot as a team. For us to get as close on the day, we took a lot out of that first game of ours,” he said.

Morris Capitals batsmen did not handle the bounce well but Royals bowlers hit the right length.

“That happens every now and then in the game of cricket. I thought Delhi played really well. Dave played a great hand and it went out way.

“I think the dew plays a part here. I think they hit the length a lot better than we did and they got a lot of guys skying with the extra bounce. But we would have taken a chase of 140-odd,” he added.

Even the presence of proven performers David Miller and Morris was not assuring enough for Rajasthan Royals skipper Sanju Samson, who thought the two destructive batsmen may not be

able to win their IPL match against Delhi Capitals here on Thursday.

Chasing 148 for their first win of the season, the Royals were reeling at 42 for five but the South African players pulled off a three-wicket win with Miller hitting 62 and Morris producing a breath-taking 36 off 18 balls.

“To be very honest. I thought that it was tough from 40 for 5. We had Miller and Morris, but I thought it was tough,” Samson said.

“It’s about reading the conditions. It was a little sticky at the start. Taking pace off is the strength of our fast bowlers and that worked out,” he said.

The Capitals skipper Rishabh Pant said his side did a good job but “we let them get over us in the end.” He said dew also played a role in the result of the match. “We could have bowled better. Dew got the better of us. I think we were 15-20 runs short. But there is something to gain from this match, the bowlers did well at the start. Hopefully in the future we can pull things off.

“In the second innings there was more dew than the first innings so we had to be doing our part, because the slower ball wasn’t stopping,” he said. — PTI

Not bowling Ash out was mistake: Ponting

Mumbai, April 16: Not giving off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin his full quota of overs was “probably a mistake”, Delhi Capitals coach Ricky Ponting conceded after his side went down by three wickets in the IPL clash against Rajasthan Royals here.

Ashwin conceded just 14 runs and no boundaries in his three overs after being brought in following the powerplay on Thursday night when DC were defending a modest 148.

With two left-handers — David Miller (62) and Rahul Tewatia (19) — in the middle, new skipper Rishabh Pant introduced Marcus Stoinis in the attack instead of continuing with Ashwin in the 13th over. The Australian conceded 15 runs which included three fours, taking RR from 58/5 to 73/5 to effectively shift the momentum.

“That’s certainly something that we will talk about when I get a chance to sit down with the team. He had bowled beautifully. Three overs, none for 14. Hadn’t even conceded a boundary,” Ponting said.

“He had a disappointing game in game one, but he has worked really hard in the last few days to make sure he adjusted and got things right in this game. “I thought he bowled beautifully. Probably a mistake on our behalf, and something we will be talking about later on.”

— RICKY PONTING DC coach

beautifully. Probably a mistake on our behalf, and something we will be talking about later on.”

The Royals needed 58 from the last five overs. Morris smashed four sixes in the last two overs during his quick-fire 18-ball 36 to take the team home with two balls to spare.

“We probably gave him (Morris) a few too many easy balls, a few too many slot balls if you like,” Ponting said.

“The length wasn’t quite where it needed to be. If you look at the replay of the game, if you bowled a reasonable yorker, he didn’t score off them.

“If it was back of a length, sort of, above stump high, he didn’t get hold of them either, especially with pace on the ball. We talked about how to bowl to him, but the execution probably wasn’t there.”

Ponting said dew was a factor in the second innings as bowlers found it difficult to grip the ball. — PTI

Sunrisers Hyderabad players are all ears as coach Trevor Bayliss speaks during a training session. — SRH

Tricky test for Warner & Co.

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 16

With a shaky middle-order proving to be their Achilles heel again, Sunrisers Hyderabad would be desperate to address the issue and taste first victory this season when they take on Mumbai Indians here at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Saturday.

Hyderabad were cruising in a chase against Royal Challengers Bangalore in their previous match before their inexperienced middle-order let the match slip through the fingers.

A disappointed Sunrisers captain David Warner had criticised his

Live on TV

Sunrisers Hyderabad vs Mumbai Indians from 7:30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD1

There have been calls for the inclusion of Kane Williamson in the XI, but the Kiwi has revealed that he is not 100 per cent fit yet.

Sunrisers lost both their games while chasing, while Mumbai’s lone victory came while defending a target.

The slow Chapeauk surface has proved tricky for the chasing teams. Warner doesn’t expect the wicket to get better. “The key is to execute through the middle, try and take early wickets in the powerplay and when batting it’s just to consolidate in the first six with minimal damage,” said Warner.

Defending champions Mumbai Indians recov-

ered from a slow start to the season with a stunning win over Knight Riders. Rahul Chahar, Krunal Pandya and Jasprit Bumrah helped Mumbai pull a rabbit out of the hat in their thrilling win.

As the pitch is expected to assist the spinners, Rahul and Krunal will continue to play key roles for Mumbai.

A big Rohit Sharma knock is due. The Mumbai skipper made a good start against Kolkata in the previous game, but failed to convert it into a half-century.

Ishan Kishan who got out for 1 against KKR hasn’t really fired for Mumbai this season.

HEAD to HEAD		
Matches	16	
MI	7	SRH 8
TIE	1	
● Mumbai beat Hyderabad in Super over after match ended in a tie at Mumbai in 2019.		
FOR THE RECORD		
● Krunal Pandya who has taken 48 wickets at an average of 32.20 in 71 innings needs two more to become the sixth bowler to complete 50 wickets for Mumbai.		
● David Warner who has smashed 196 sixes in 144 innings needs four more to become the sixth batsman to complete a double century in sixes in IPL.		
LAST YEAR’S MATCHES		
● Mumbai beat Sunrisers by 34 runs at Sharjah.		
● Sunrisers beat Mumbai by 10 wickets at Sharjah.		
STATS: S. PERVEZ QAISER		