

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VIJAYAWADA | SATURDAY | 24 APRIL 2021

WEATHER

Max: 37.0°C
Min: 26.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
37/26 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Shuddha Dwadasi till 7.11 pm
Star: Purnvaphalguni till 6.20 am; Uttaraphalguni till 4.21 am (Sunday)
Varjyam: 12.57 pm to 2.25 pm
Durmuhurtam: 5.57 am to 7.37 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HIJRI CALENDAR
Ramzan 11,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.35 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.15 pm
Maghrib: 6.25 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.45 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.25 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 03.45 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 04.19 AM

RAMZAN TIMINGS
IFTAR: 6.30 PM (TODAY)
SEHRI: 4.25 AM (TOMORROW)

COUNTER POINT



I am getting more oxygen under the tree than in the ICU!

SHORT TAKES

Justice Bobde retires as CJI

New Delhi: Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde said Friday he was leaving the Supreme Court with the satisfaction that he did his best in leading the institution and leaves with "happiness, goodwill and very fond memories". "I leave with the satisfaction that I did my best. I hand over the baton to Justice Ramana who will, I am sure, very ably lead the court," CJI Bobde said.

India adds 3,321 Covid-19 cases

New Delhi: India added a record over 3.32 lakh new coronavirus cases in a single day taking the country's tally to 1,62,63,695, while active cases crossed the 24-lakh mark, according to the Union health ministry data updated on Friday. The death toll caused by Covid-19 increased to 1,86,920 with a record 2,263 new fatalities.

RBI bars Amex on new customers

Mumbai: The RBI on Friday imposed restrictions on American Express Banking Corp and Diners Club International from onboarding new domestic customers onto their card networks over non-compliance with the central bank's norms on storage of payment system data.

Full report on Page 7

Centre sent WB's O2 to UP: Mamata

Kolkata: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday accused the Centre of diverting tonnes of oxygen from the state to others ruled by the BJP, such as Uttar Pradesh, after she skipped Prime Minister Narendra Modi's high-level meet with other CMs on Covid-19.

Full report on Page 4

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US defends curbs on Covid vax items

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SPORTS | 8

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Modi asks states to act against hoarding

PM asks states to prevent panic drug buying

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 23

As the shortage of medical oxygen exacerbates, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday urged states and Union Territories to get strict with hoarding and black marketing of essential medicines, injections and oxygen.

During a meeting with the Chief Ministers of 11 states and Union Territories which have reported the maximum number of cases, the Prime Minister said the Central government is working on all possible ways to reduce the travel time and turnaround time of oxygen tankers. For this, the railways has started Oxygen Express and empty oxygen tankers are also being transported by the Indian Air Force to reduce one-way travel time.

He said the Centre has provided more than 15 crore doses of essential medicines to the states free of cost and urged them not to neglect the safety of hospitals. He further said awareness must be increased to alleviate panic purchasing of medicines.

Though the PM's meetings with CMs are never aired live, the Delhi Chief Minister's Office telecasted Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's appeal to Modi during the meeting. Modi, however, did not appreciate the Delhi CMO's move. Terming the conduct "inappropriate," Modi said this is the first time a



Chief Minister has broken the protocol and showed live a meeting between the PM and CMs.

Mr Kejriwal apologised to the PM for this but his office issued a statement, saying "the CM address was shared live because there has never been any instruction, written or verbal, from the Central government stating that the said interaction could not be shared live."

"There have been multiple occasions of similar interactions where matters of public importance which had no confidential information were shared live. However, if any inconvenience was caused we highly regret that" the Delhi CMO said even as the Central government accused Mr Kejriwal of playing politics over oxygen.

Noting that the virus was affecting several states as well as tier-2 and tier-3 cities, the Prime Minister assured the Centre's full support to all the states in this fight and added that the health ministry is also in touch is monitoring the situation closely and issuing necessary advice to the states from time to time.

PATIENTS DIED IN MAJOR FIRE AT COVID CENTRE

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, APRIL 23

At least 14 Covid patients have died in a major fire accident at a Covid centre at Virar in Palghar district in the wee hours of Friday. The fire broke out at around 3 am in the ICU on the second floor of the four-storeyed Vijay Vallabh Hospital. There were 17 Covid patients in the ICU. The surviving patients under critical care have been moved to nearby hospitals in Mumbai.

SUPPLY OF FREE FOOD GRAINS VIA PDS TO BEGIN

New Delhi, April 23: The Central government on Friday decided to resume providing free food grains to 80 crore poor beneficiaries in May and June to help them tide over the economic hardship in the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, a move that would cost the exchequer around ₹26,000 crore. "We will provide 5-kg additional food grains for free to PDS beneficiaries under the PMGKAY for two months — May and June," food and PDS secretary Sudhanshu Pandey said. — PTI

GAUTAM REDDY TESTS POSITIVE FOR CORONA

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 23

Industries and IT minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy announced on Friday through Twitter that he has tested positive for Coronavirus.

"I have mild symptoms & upon testing, my report came as Covid positive. I am taking the required treatment and currently in isolation. Those who have met me in last one week, please follow Covid protocols, get tested & take care," he tweeted.

The minister had on Thursday attended a meeting to review oxygen supply across the state. He discussed ways and means to boost its production. After the meeting, he tweeted that areas of shortage had been mapped. Local units had been asked to enhance oxygen production, permission for which would be given within 24 hours.

CM: All women must be lakhiers

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 23

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Friday asserted that the state government is committed to welfare, economic progress and overall development of women in Andhra Pradesh.

"Every girl of the state should become a graduate, every sister a lakhier and the modern Indian woman of 21st Century must emerge from Andhra Pradesh," he declared after crediting ₹1,109 crore directly into accounts of 1.02 crore women belonging to Self-Help Groups (SHGs) as interest reimbursement under "YSR Sunna Vaddi" scheme. The deposit has been made under the scheme for the second consecutive year.

Speaking on the occasion, the CM asserted that the state government is determined to empower women and has thus

rolled out schemes like Sunna Vaddi, Aasara, Cheyutha and Jeva Kranthi to strengthen women in all aspects. He said SHG women had been burdened with over ₹3,000 crore as penal interest in the belief that the then Chandrababu Naidu government would waive off their loans as promised during 2014 polls.

Compared to this, YSRC government credited ₹1,400 crore under YSR Sunna Vaddi within the first year of coming to power; benefiting over 87 lakh women. The number SHGs under the scheme had also increased to 9.34 lakh from earlier 8.71 lakh because of confidence in the present government.

Jagan Mohan Reddy said, "As promised, we registered houses in the name of women, which created an asset of ₹5-8 lakh for them."

Page 2: 60% civic body posts gone to women: CM

STATE OPTS FOR NIGHT CURFEW TO STOP COVID

Curfew will come into force from tonight 10 pm to 5 am

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 23

Entire Andhra Pradesh will come under night curfew from 10 pm to 5 am from Saturday in a bid to curb the spread of Coronavirus in the state.

This was announced after Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy reviewed the Covid-19 situation in AP at an emergency meeting held at the CM's camp office in Tadepalli on Friday evening.

The CM further declared that the state government will administer Corona vaccine free of cost to all people aged 18 years and above in each of the 13 districts of AP.

Jagan Mohan Reddy directed officials to accordingly place orders with manufacturers for vaccines. As per an estimate, in all, 2,04,70,364 people across the state will have to be vaccinated.

All shops, restaurants and public spaces will remain closed during the curfew period. Further, to prevent crowds, rithu bazars will be decentralised and commodities made available at the ward level. The Chief Minister told



A 90-year-old man is being administered with the second dose of Covid vaccine by a health worker during the vaccination drive at Urban Primary Health Centre at Chinna Waltair in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

officials to focus on uninterrupted supply of oxygen and Remdesivir vials while ensuring that they are not black marketed. He said he has received complaints about hospitals overcharging patients for Covid treatment. He underlined that strict

action must be taken against such practices.

Jagan Mohan Reddy asked officials to conduct Class X, inter, degree and engineering examinations as per the schedule without causing any inconvenience to students. Those tests should be conducted

in total compliance with Covid guidelines.

Officials informed the CM that there is a delay in supply of oxygen due to insufficient number of vehicles.

Page 2: AP seeks oxygen from RINL's Vizag plant

Govt steps up Corona tests with TrueNat, RT-PCR kits

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA APRIL 23

The state government said on Friday that it will fast-track Covid-19 tests by resuming the TrueNat tests and enhancing the RT-PCR tests to check the rapid rise in Coronavirus infections.

State health authorities said they are making the necessary arrangements. TrueNat machines can be used for testing tuberculosis, hepatitis B or C etc

and these will be programmed to conduct Covid-19 tests.

Details have been sought by the authorities from districts with regard to the number of machines available for Covid tests, how many of them can handle two or four swab samples at a time, the requirement of software for the tests and the availability of human resources like lab technicians to run three shifts a day.

During the first wave of

the pandemic, lab technicians working in the state Aids control society and the revised national TB control programme as also those from the government were roped in for conducting the Covid tests on TrueNat machines. The same drill will be re-introduced now. Also, those working in the 104 Service would also be enlisted for the work.

Page 2: Lab technicians get paltry wages in state

CADILA GETS NOD FOR DRUG AGAINST COVID

New Delhi, April 23: Drug firm Zydus Cadila on Friday said it has received restricted emergency use approval from the Indian drug regulator for the use of Pegylated Interferon alpha-2b (PegIFN) in treating moderate Covid-19 infection in adults. A single dose subcutaneous regimen of the antiviral Virafin will make the treatment more convenient for the patients, it said.

Full report on Page 7

Punjab Kings beat Mumbai Indians



Players of the Punjab Kings celebrate the wicket of Quinton de Kock of Mumbai Indians during their IPL match at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Friday. Punjab won by nine wickets.

Full report on Page 8. — IPL

GRAFT | BUSTED

Complaints against five-time MLA led to his arrest; his wife also was served with a notice

ACB arrests ex-MLA Dhulipalla over dairy fraud

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 23

Former MLA and Telugu Desam leader Dhulipalla Narendra Kumar was arrested and jailed by the state Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Friday over allegations of serious financial and other irregularities in the Guntur-based Sangam Dairy.

An ACB team swooped down on Narendra's house at Chintalapudi village in Ponnur mandal along with

a large number of policemen in the early hours of the day, effected the arrest and brought him to Vijayawada.

Narendra Kumar is chairman of the Sangam Dairy, a post that had been bestowed on him by TD leader Chandrababu Naidu while as chief minister of undivided AP in 2010. The ACB has filed a case against him under Sections 408, 409, 418, 420, 45, 471, and 120B of the IPC.

The TD government had

MODUS OPERANDI

Dhulipalla Narendra Kumar, the chairman of Sangam Dairy, allegedly made false certificates about the land and took a loan of ₹116 crore by keeping the land as security.

Further, he transferred 10 acres of the Sangam cooperative society's land to his own trust in an illegal manner and without permission from the government, as per the case against him now.

converted the Sangam Dairy into a mutually aided cooperative society (MACS) and the new entity

was given complete ownership of the its properties, skipping counter-check by the cooperative depart-

ment. Taking advantage of the lack of supervision by the cooperative department, Narendra allegedly minted money from the dairy.

The dairy was set up on a 77-acre area. Narendra allegedly made false certificates about the land and took a loan of ₹116 crore by keeping the land as security. Further, he transferred 10 acres of the Sangam cooperative society's land to his own trust in an illegal manner and without

permission from the government, as per the case against him now.

The ACB received complaints about these, which led to the arrest and investigations. It issued notice under section 50(2) of the CRPC to Narendra's wife Dhulipalla Jyothirmmai.

Narendra has been MLA for five times from Ponnur constituency on a TD ticket — from 1994 to 2019. He lost the 2019 assembly elections to YSR Congress leader Kilari Venkata Rosaiah by

a margin of 1,112 votes.

ACB said a case has been registered under IPC Sections 408, 409, 418, 420, 465, 471 and 120B against him. Officials brought him to the Gollapudi ACB office and questioned him about the alleged irregularities in the dairy deals.

He was shifted to Vijayawada by a special vehicle and produced at the ACB court. It remanded him for 14 days and ordered his confinement at the sub-jail here.

IN BRIEF

HC ISSUES INTERIM ORDER ON SALE OF LAND IN VISAKHA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 23

The Andhra Pradesh High Court issued an interim order with regard to auction of government properties in Visakhapatnam, allowing tender process but not to finalise it and posted next hearing on July 15.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice A.K. Goswami and Justice C. Praveen Kumar heard a petition filed by Vijayawada-based K. Hima Bindu challenging the government orders issued inviting buyers for sale through online auction of 13.59 acres land in Visakhapatnam Beach Road and other properties. The petitioner also sought cancellation of the agreement between Mission Build AP and NBCC (India) Limited stating that it was illegal.

Petitioner's counsel B. Nalin Kumar argued that sale of government properties was illegal and said that when the court was moved earlier on the same issue, it issued an interim order and sought a similar order again.

Additional Advocate-General P. Sudhakar Reddy informed the court that the state government had taken up the programme to eliminate poverty and argued that it was improper to file petitions to stall the implementation of the programme.

The court issued the interim order and served notices to director Mission Build AP chairman, APIIC, CMD of NBCC Limited and revenue secretary.

APTDC RESUMES FOOD SUPPLY TO COVID HOSPITALS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 23

The AP Tourism and Development Corporation resumed its food supply to most of the Covid-19 hospitals in the state and shortly would be extending the facility to Covid-19 Care Centres opening from Monday.

Last year, the state government spent ₹25 lakh per day through AP Tourism Development Corporation, which supplied food packets in nine districts of the state. The active cases then were 93,204 and half of them were in hospitals.

This year it was proposed to supply for most of the 74,231 active cases.

Executive director of APTDC A. Malreddy told this newspaper on Friday that the collectors of East and West Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Kurnool and Anantapur have asked the corporation to supply food but they did not give the indent.

"Most likely we may supply from Monday when the Covid-19 Care Centres open all over the state," Malreddy said.

The price may vary from district to district. In Visakhapatnam, the cost could be ₹400 per day including breakfast, lunch, snacks, tea and dinner but it will come down to ₹240 in West Godavari where the collector sought only vegetarian food. The corporation makes no money from the food supply, he said.

The menu includes Ragi malt at 6 am, followed by breakfast of two south Indian varieties like Idli, Dosa, Uttapam, Upma and Pongal at 7 am, two chapathis, flavoured rice, plain rice, two vegetable curries, one cup of leafy dal, 100 grams of chicken, cup of curd, pickle, banana and a bottle of water. High tea with snacks is supplied at 4 pm and the dinner at 7 pm includes two chapathis, white rice, two boiled eggs, two vegetable curries, curd, banana and water bottle.

In Visakhapatnam, 400 packets will be supplied to KGH, 300 to VIMS, 1,500 to Covid-19 centre Mudarlovva and Bakkannapalem.

DENTIST FROM AP GETS NATIONAL POST IN BJP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 23

Senior BJP leader of Andhra Pradesh and famous dentist Dr Partha Sarathi has been appointed as the national secretary of BJP OBC Morcha.

Dr Partha Sarathi manages a country-wide chain of Dental Clinics in the name of "Partha Dental". The Central BJP party, National Working Committee of the BJP OBC Morcha at New Delhi took a decision by giving equal importance to all states in the country.

Dr Partha Sarathi said, "I shall put in my best efforts for the growth and progress of my party at all times."



People wait for their turn to get swab tested for Covid-19 pandemic at Sanjeevini Bus which was set up at the Government ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— DC

Duty docs found missing in Covid wards of Kurnool GGH

Substandard food being served to patients, says attendant

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, APRIL 23

Covid-19 patients undergoing treatment at Kurnool Government General Hospital (KGGH) have complained of insufficient medicare, saying that duty doctors were not coming to their wards and food supplied to them is of inferior quality.

"We are being treated as though we are untouchables," complained one of the patients. An attendant of a patient said food of substandard quality is being served to patients. Lentil soup given to them is watery, he said. The government is paying ₹290 per patient to the contractor who supplies food.

Another patient said toilets in the male ward are not being maintained

● The government is paying ₹290 per patient to the contractor who supplies food.

● Another patient said toilets in the male ward are not being maintained properly. All these aspects are playing on the minds of patients in KGGH. The situation is very discouraging, the patient stated.

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The number of Coronavirus cases in Kurnool district has risen sharply in the past two days, crossing the 1,000 mark. On Friday, 1,180 positive cases have been reported in Kurnool district, apart from four deaths.

Testing of nasal swabs at the VRDL Lab in Microbiology Department is too slow. It is taking a long time to know the result of

a test report. This aspect emerged when district collector G. Veera Pandian made a surprise visit to VRDL lab to know firsthand why test results are being delayed.

Hospital superintendent Dr Bhagawan conceded that with sharp increase in caseload, medical facilities at the Kurnool Government General Hospital are under strain. "However, we are ramping up services. We are making arrangements to add another 150 beds," he underlined. KGGH has

total bed strength of 1,200.

As of Friday, the hospital has 363 positive cases, 163 suspect cases and 22 patients on CPAP ventilators, the superintendent disclosed.

Asked about complaints of doctors not being available, Dr Bhagawan pointed out that these complaints pertain to the night shifts. "We are fixing the problem," he maintained.

As to the quality of food being supplied to Covid patients, he underlined that the menu is nutritionally designed with breakfast and two meals, and a snack in the evening. Dry fruits and nuts are being given to each patient as a snack.

"However, I have to myself verify the food quality," he stated.

LAB TECHNICIANS GET PALTRY WAGES IN STATE

FROM PAGE 1

Curiously, the state health authorities are availing the services of lab technicians working on contract basis in various wings of the government at meager wages even as they have to risk their health, while only a few lab technicians working with the government on a permanent basis are being involved for Covid tests.

It takes just an hour to get the Covid test report on a TrueNat machine.

Deputy Chief Minister and minister for health Alla Srinivasa confirmed the resumption of TrueNat tests by saying the state government was making all arrangements to conduct such tests in three days.

Nearly 10,000 Covid tests in TrueNat machines used to be done per day, he said, and felt the need to enhance the number of tests.

Similarly, the state government is also making efforts to enhance the number of RT-PCR tests in a day especially in all government medical colleges. The Dy CM said permission was given to recruit 113 technical personnel for conduct of RT-PCR tests. To conduct Covid tests in 14 VRDLs every day, recruitments will be made for posts of research scientist, research assistant, lab technician, data entry operator and office subordinates.

Maintaining that at present nearly 40,000 RT-PCR tests were being carried out in a day in the state, he said efforts were on to raise the tests to over 60,000 a day.

A health official said that there now wasordinate delay in getting reports of RT-PCR tests and this is resulting in the larger spread of the virus and there was also a stoppage of RT-PCR tests in some parts of the state as the swab samples were piling up at testing centres.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy releases YSR Sunna Vaddi Scheme from the camp office on Friday. Ministers Botsa Satyanarayana (right) and Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy (left) are also seen.

60% civic body posts went to women, says Jagan

FROM PAGE 1

"Similarly, a law was enacted to give 50 per cent of nominated posts to women. 60 per cent of posts in recent municipal polls have gone to women. To ensure safety of women, 18 Disha police stations have been set up across the state and the trial process accelerated," Jagan Mohan Reddy underlined.

The Chief Minister further said to empower

women, ₹18,750 financial assistance had been given under YSR Cheyutha to BC, SC, ST and minority women over the age of 45 years every year at an expenditure of Rs 4,604 crore. ₹6,792 crore had been spent on YSR Aasara scheme. The state government had also tied up with multinational companies like ITC, P&G and Amul for providing business opportunities to women.

The state government initiated prohibition on alcohol in a phased manner to prevent domestic violence by men under intoxication. Over 43,000 illegal liquor shops and 4,380 permit rooms had been closed, he pointed out.

Ministers Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy and Botsa Satyanarayana, principal secretary Y. Srilakshmi, SERP CEO Rajababu, MEPMA MD V. Vijayalakshmi and officials of various banks were present at the event of CM.

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COVID | HOSPITALS

Firemen issued guidelines and asked to get details of health facilities

Fire personnel put on high alert to avoid mishaps

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA APRIL 23

Fire service personnel in Andhra Pradesh are put on high alert at Covid hospitals and care-centres to ensure avoiding mishaps of the kind that took place in Maharashtra a day ago.

As the Covid caseload is high and large numbers of infected patients are being

admitted to care centres and hospitals, the power consumption will be more. Medical oxygen use will also be high in these facilities. This may result in electric short circuit and leakage, it is feared.

The firemen have been issued guidelines and asked to get details of health facilities in respective districts. They have to visit

● The fire personnel would give the phone numbers of nearest fire stations to the managements of the health centres. These centres will need to identify alternative health facilities in the vicinity in case a mishap happens and patients need be shifted.

health centres, check the condition of fire-fighting equipment and the presence of trained crew to operate such equipment and ensure Exit staircases are obstruction-free.

Naidu condemns Narendra arrest, demands unconditional release

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 23

Telugu Desam national president and former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Friday condemned arrest of former MLA Dhulipalla Narendra Kumar from his residence at Chintalapudi village in Guntur district without giving any prior notice to him.

Naidu termed Narendra arrest as illegal and part of a larger conspiracy to destroy Sangam Dairy to which the former MLA rendered invaluable services as its chairman.

The former chief minister said it is now amply clear that the Jagan Mohan Reddy government is hell bent on handing over Sangam Dairy to Amul company.

He further alleged that local dairies in AP are being crippled deliberately to benefit the Gujarat-based company.

The TD chief pointed out that there have been systematic attacks on all Andhra Pradesh companies and dairies ever since Jagan Mohan Reddy became the Chief Minister in 2019. He suspected that there is some secret deal between the YSRC government and an outside dairy like Amul to damage long-established dairies in AP.

Chandrababu Naidu demanded immediate and unconditional release of Dhulipalla and withdrawal of false cases filed against him.

Separately, MLC Nara Lokesh slammed the state government for targeting and harassing TD leaders instead of focusing on saving people from the second wave of Covid-19. He felt the former MLA has been targeted just because he has exposed inefficiencies of YSRC Government in many areas.

Lokesh said he had spoken to Narendra's wife Jyothirmayi, who narrated how 400 men including police had entered their residence without giving any prior notice and created terror.

Meanwhile, Telugu Desam politiburo member Reddeppagari Srinivasa Reddy (Vasu) has condemned the arrest of Narendra.

He said thousands of dairy farmers were supported by Narendra's family through the Sangam dairy.

When Narendra questioned the illegal cases and incompetence of the government, he became their target, Srinivasa Reddy alleged.

He said the government was targeting the TD leaders. He said the opposition's voice could not be stopped with such arrests.

CM is damaging AP interests: TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 23

MLA and Telugu Desam senior leader Gorantla Butchaiah Chowdary on Friday said that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was 'damaging' the interests of Andhra Pradesh, only to save himself from punishment in the CBI and ED illegal assets cases.

He expressed concern over a 'deep-seated conspiracy' of the Chief Minister to hand over the AP wealth to the Gujarat-based companies as part of his vested interests. He alleged that the arrest of Sangam Dairy chairman Dhulipalla Narendra Kumar was also part of the YSRC plan to extend undue benefits to the Amul company.

Chowdary deplored that the ruling YSRC was causing irreparable damage to the local dairies in AP ever since the Amul company began its operations here. He claimed that the local dairies were operating in the cooperative sec-

tor with active participation of the farmers.

He said that similarly, the Sangam Dairy has been functioning under a private management and a federation of farmers' associations.

Butchaiah Chowdary recalled how the Sangam dairy has been giving handsome bonus packages to the farmers in addition to providing educational and medical facilities to their families and further Vijaya Dairy has been doing the same in Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam.

The TD senior leader alleged that the CM was mortgaging the AP wealth to the Gujarat companies only to get undue favours from PM Modi under which already, several ports in AP have been handed over to Adani.

He alleged that even the Visakha Steel was being given on a golden platter to Adani and Reliance and now, the ruling YSRC began sabotaging the farmers' cooperative dairies in the state.

Kilari says Naidu, TD leaders creating chaos

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 23

YSR Congress MLA Kilari Venkata Rosaiah has sharply criticised former chief minister Chandrababu Naidu and other Telugu Desam leaders for "unleashing chaos" over the arrest of former TD MLA Dhulipalli Narendra Kumar in connection with serious financial irregularities in the Sangam Dairy.

Addressing the media here, the MLA said Narendra was arrested by the anti-corruption bureau (ACB) for committing serious power misuse in Sangam Dairy and for diverting funds of the cooperative entity to his trust for personal use.

Why should Naidu and Nara Lokesh support such a person, he asked.

Rosaiah said Chandrababu Naidu has destroyed cooperative dairies just to safeguard the interests of his Heritage chain of super stores.

Naidu used his office to shut down the Chittoor dairy and handed over other dairies in Ongole, Krishna, Guntur and Vizag to TD leaders to promote their personal inter-

ests, he alleged, and questioned Naidu as to how much share he had in these dairies?

The MLA said Sangam Dairy was set up over 77 acres and Narendra created fake certificates on these lands and took a loan of ₹116 crore, keeping this land as security, as per the ACB case. He asked Naidu how much he gained from these acts?

He quoted ACB report to say that Narendra had transferred 10 acres of Sangam Cooperative Society's land to his trust without taking permission from the government.

Refuting allegations of TD that the government is trying to make AMUL take over Sangam Dairy, the MLA said Gujarat-based Amul is a renowned cooperative society and it came to Andhra Pradesh with an agreement that the profits would be shared among the farmers of this state.

AP seeks oxygen from RINL's Vizag plant

From Page 1

Only 64 of them are available whereas at least 100-120 vehicles will be required to meet the current demand. Officials pointed out that 515 metric tonnes of oxygen is the requirement once all oxygen beds in the state are occupied. Currently, 284 metric tonnes of oxygen is being used on average in government and private hospitals.

In this regard, officials said they have requested the central government to supply 100 metric tonnes of oxygen to the state from RINL, Vizag; apart from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

A total of 21,581 beds are available in 208 Covid hospitals of the state. Of these, 11,789 beds are occupied. 2,506 people have been admitted to the hospitals during the last 24 hours, officials stated.

● A total of 21,581 beds are available in 208 Covid hospitals of the state. Of these, 11,789 beds are occupied. 2,506 people have been admitted to the hospitals during the last 24 hours, officials stated.

Deputy chief minister Alla Krishna Srinivas, ministers Botsa Satyanarayana, Kurasala Kannababu and Mekathoti Sucharitha, DGP Goutam Sawang, COVID Command Control

special officer K. S. Jawahar Reddy, principal secretary (Health) Anil Kumar Singhal, special chief secretary (Higher Education) Satish Chandra, principal secretary (Transport) M. T. Krishna Babu, principal secretary (School Education) Buditi Rajashekhar, health commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar and other officials were present at the meeting.

The Chief Minister earlier spoke to Bharat Biotech MD Krishna Ella and Hetero Drugs MD B. Parthasarathi Reddy over phone. He sought supply of Covid vaccine doses and Remdesivir injections from them as per requirement of the state.

The Chief Minister earlier spoke to Bharat Biotech MD Krishna Ella and Hetero Drugs MD B. Parthasarathi Reddy over phone. He sought supply of Covid vaccine doses and Remdesivir injections from them as per requirement of the state.

Regional fire officer G. Srinivasulu said, "We have issued a series of instructions to our personnel so that they will respond to any fire mishaps promptly."

SHORT TAKES

VASANTHOTSAVAM
AT SRIVARI SHRINE
IN EKANTHAMDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 23

As part of the Covid-19 guidelines, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) is organising the three-day annual Vasanthotsavam to Lord Venkateswara at Srivari Temple in 'Ekantham' (Solitude) from April 24-26.

As per the tradition, this festival is conducted in the spring season where the Lord Malayappa Swamy is worshipped with abundant budding flowers and an assortment of fruits offered as naivedyam. The highlights of the festival conducted during Chaitra Suddha Pournami is Daily Snapana Tirumanjanam for utsava idols of Lord Malayappa his consorts in the morning, Asthanam and procession of utsava deities on the four mada streets in the evening.

On the first two days, the utsava idols of Lord Malayappa and his consorts were offered Snapana Tirumanjanam and procession. However, on the third day all the Parivara devatas are also offered Snapana Tirumanjanam and procession. As part of these festivities, TTD has cancelled the Arjitha sevas, including Kalyanotsavam, Unjal Seva, Arjitha Brahmotsavam, and Sahasra Deepalankara seva on all three days.

WOMAN SETS KIDS,
HERSELF ON FIRE,
SON SURVIVESDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 23

A 27-year-old woman allegedly set herself and her two minor children on fire, at a burial ground in Nellore Palem centre in Atmakur mandal in the early hours on Friday. In the tragic incident, the mother Subbulu and her daughter Madhuravani died on the spot, while her son Mahesh managed to escape from the suicide bid.

According to the reports reaching here, Subbulu, 27, and her daughter Madhuravani, 5, and son Mahesh were the natives of Nellore district and they have been residing in Bellary town in Karnataka for a while now for their livelihood.

The family reached Nellore Palem centre at around 4 am on Friday from Bellary by bus and had their tea at the Centre. Later, Subbulu took her son and daughter to a burial ground near the Centre and allegedly poured sanitiser on the two and set them on fire.

However, Mahesh, who got panicked and managed to escape the alleged suicide bid, ran to the local vendors at the Centre and informed them about the incident. By the time vendors reached the spot, the mother and daughter duo were already dead. The local police, who registered a case, have shifted the bodies for autopsy and are investigating.

ENSURE COVID
TEST RESULTS IN
24 HOURS: MIN.DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 23

Pointing out at the delay in announcing the Covid-19 test results, minister for water resources Dr P. Anil Kumar Yadav directed the health department officials to announce the results within 24 hours after taking the samples.

The minister and Nellore district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu on Friday reviewed the Covid-19 situation in the district, at the new ZP hall in Nellore city. Addressing the officials, the minister said that there is delay in announcing the Covid-19 results and it is taking nearly three-four days.

He directed the officials to take measures for completing the backlog and start declaring results within 24 hours after taking the samples.

'ADMIT COVID
PATIENTS
IN 30 MIN'DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM,
APRIL 23

District collector V. Vinay Chand has asked the nodal officials to have full control over the Covid-19 hospitals both government and private and see that the patients get admitted in 30 minutes without much loss of time.

Addressing the officials at the review meeting held in collector office in Visakhapatnam on Friday, the collector told them that they need to extend better treatment and mostly avoid confusion currently being reported from all the hospitals.

They also need to have awareness on medicines, deployment of doctors and support staff and medical equipments.

The officials also must watch the hospital through CCTV and quickly respond to the phone calls.

Unseasonal rains



People have tough time with sudden rain in Vijayawada on Friday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

AP records 11,766 new
infections, 38 deaths

Five districts crossed 1,000 mark, total infections cross 10L

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 23

With no let up in daily surge in Covid-19 infections, Andhra Pradesh registered 11,766 and 38 deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported on Friday that out of 45,581 samples tested, 11,766 persons were infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,58,80,750 samples tested so far in the state, 10,09,228 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 9,27,418 were recovered while 74,231 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily cases, five districts crossed 1,000 mark while the remaining districts too crossed 100 mark. Chittoor continued to be the worst affected with 1,885 followed by 1,593 in Guntur, 1,201 in Anantapur, 1,180 in Kurnool, 1,052 in Srikakulam, 949 in Nellore, 910 in Visakhapatnam, 831 in Krishna, 796 in East Godavari, 448 in Vizianagaram, 370 in

Chittoor continue to
record highest casesDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 23

The surge in Covid-19 cases in Chittoor – the tail-end district of AP – continued even on Friday, with Tirupati witnessing 1,077 fresh cases in the last 24 hours – the highest number of cases reported in the pilgrim city since the pandemic began.

The hectic political activity in the run up to Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection held on April 17, coupled with negligence among the people in following the Covid-19 guidelines and the increased inflow to the pilgrim city from across the country seems to be the reason for the sharp hike in Covid-19 cases amid the second wave.

As per the data, the urban (855 cases) and rural (222 cases) limits of Tirupati together witnessed its highest single day count of 1,077 cases – this is 57.13 per cent of overall cases recorded.

Prakasam, 361 in Kadapa and 190 in West Godavari. Chittoor reported highest

● Nellore recorded the highest number of daily deaths at six followed by five in Chittoor, four each in East Godavari, Krishna, Kurnool, Prakasam and Srikakulam

Srikakulam, 7,806 in East Godavari, 7,094 in Kurnool, 6,931 in Guntur, 5,984 in Nellore, 5,958 in Visakhapatnam, 5,957 in Krishna, 4,308 in Anantapur, 4,142 in Prakasam, 2,728 in Vizianagaram, 1,745 in Kadapa and 975 in West Godavari.

Nellore recorded the highest number of daily deaths at six followed by five in Chittoor, four each in East Godavari, Krishna, Kurnool, Prakasam and Srikakulam, three in Visakhapatnam and two each in Guntur and Vizianagaram. Death toll rose to 7,579.

The state health authorities discharged 4,441 patients after recovery.

Microsoft to train 1.62
lakh students in stateDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 23

Microsoft is collaborating with Government of AP in imparting digital skills to 1.62 lakh students and unemployed youth across 300 plus colleges and skill development centres in the state.

Announcing this, IT minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy pointed out that for the purpose, AP government has entered into an MoU with IT giant Microsoft to skill up students and youth, so that they become employable by various companies due to their additional qualifications.

He underlined that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy wants every house to be "digitally connected". About 80 lakh houses will be provided

with digital connection in three years.

The minister said the focus will be on "remote learning", a major challenge during the Covid times. He disclosed that efforts are being made to provide computers and laptops to 1.30 crore people in the state.

Microsoft India president Anant Maheshwari said their vision is to build an inclusive, skill-based economy in the state. For the purpose, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Department of Higher Education (APHeD) and Microsoft have entered into a strategic partnership to create a holistic and scalable skilling experience that includes access to learning content on Microsoft Learn, educational webinars, and experiential learning, apart

from hands-on lab exercises and industry certification courses.

Anant announced that every learner will get free \$100 Azure credit for practical experiential learning, test preparation and certification to become a Microsoft Certified Professional. He pointed out that over 40 courses and certifications will be made available to students on Microsoft Learn, covering a broad range of emerging technologies, such as cloud computing, AI, data sciences, IOT and M365, among others. To enhance their employability, students and youth will also get access to over 8,600 courses on LinkedIn Learning. This will help them develop not just their technical skills but also their business knowledge and soft skills.

Covid-19 vaccine to be
given to HIV patientsDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 23:

The National Aids Control Organisation (NACO) directed the medical and health department officials to create awareness on Covid-19 vaccines among HIV infected persons to curb the virus. The Medical and Health department (leprosy and AIDS) officials have already suggested the voluntary organisations working for sexual workers and MSMs to encour-

age them to get vaccines without fail.

The Additional District Medical and Health Officer (Leprosy and AIDS) Dr R. Ramesh said that already many of the HIV infected persons who crossed above 45 years age got the vaccine in the health care centres in their respective areas and if anybody did not get a vaccine, they should also get it. He said that already the HIV infected persons are taking immunity effective drugs and the percent-

age of Covid-19 HIV patients is very low. Previously the persons used to be given drugs once in a month. But, after Covid-19 lockdown from last year, the drugs are being given to them once in every three months and they are also taking more cautions for not attracting the Covid-19 infection. He also said that there is no social stigma among the HIV persons in the society and they are mingling with the society without any fear.

Increase Covid-19
tests, officials toldDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 23

The Covid-19 Management and Vaccination District special officer, J. Syamala Rao, suggested the district officials should increase the Covid-19 tests from 4,000 to 6,000 per day by increasing VLM and TruNat machines for it.

He conducted a meeting on Covid management, vaccination, 104 call centre, home quarantine, home isolation, Covid hospitals, medicines, availability of beds and other issues through a zoom conference from col-

lectorate here on Friday.

The district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that there are 7,806 active cases in the district and TruNat labs set up at Tuni, Ramachandrapuram and Kothapet and the number of tests will be increased. He said that 3,000 beds are available at Bommaru quarantine centre and 2,000 beds at the Bodasakurru centre.

He said that 25,000 kits are available for home isolation and there is a shortage of Covaxin for the second dose.

He said that there is a requirement of 30 lakh doses of vaccine in the district.

O2 plant set up in
GGH KakinadaDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 23

In view of the rising Covid-19 cases, the authorities have set up an oxygen plant on the premises in Government General Hospital at Kakinada at a cost of ₹1.20 lakh. The plant has a capacity of 1,700 litres per day. The plant is working at a technology of "Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) and producing oxygen through air. Already, the oxygen plant supply company AIROX officials have completed the pipelines to all wards to supply the oxygen. The BC welfare minister Ch. Srinivasa Venugopala Krishna has inaugurated the plant on Friday. The plant will produce the oxygen with 95 per cent of cure air, said the plant

incharge Mr Vivekananda.

East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that at present the district is getting oxygen from Visakhapatnam and if there is any problem in supply, the new plant will meet the demand. He said that during this Covid-19 pandemic period, the oxygen is playing a vital role in surviving the lives of the patients and the district administration is taking steps for not facing any scarcity of the oxygen. The assistant collector Gitanjali Sarma, additional DMHO Dr N. Prasanna Kumar, Government General Hospital superintendent Dr R. Mahalakshmi, RMO Dr E. Giridhar, Oxygen Plant incharge Vivekananda and others were present in the inaugural function.

AIIMS offers free
tele consultancyDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 23

Mangalagiri-based All India Institute of Medical Sciences offers free tele consultancy under e-paramarsh health services programme and people are advised to register to avail such service from Monday to Saturday between 9 am and 11 am.

In a release from AIIMS on Friday, people are advised to contact mobile numbers of various departments for registration to avail the tele consultancy service from the doctors. For community and family medicine - 9494908320, ENT - 9494906407, general medicine - 9494908526, general surgery - 9494901428.

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SHORT TAKES

**‘UK VARIANT
LIKELY BEHIND
SURGE IN DELHI’**

New Delhi, April 23: The current wave of the Coronavirus pandemic in Delhi could have been fuelled by the UK variant as its prevalence in genomes sequenced nearly doubled from the second to the last week of March, Sajeet Singh, director of the National Centre for Disease Control, said on Friday.

Speaking at a webinar, ‘Genome Sequencing of SARS-CoV-19’, Singh said the UK variant of Coronavirus is also dominant in Punjab.

In Delhi, there are primarily two types of variants — B.1.617 and the UK strain — found in the genome sequenced samples, the NCDC director said.

The B.1.617 variant of Coronavirus is also known as the double mutant strain.

The UK variant was found in 28 per cent of samples in the second week of March.

In the last week of the month, 50 per cent of samples had this variant, Singh said.

“If we try to co-relate, the surge we are observing in Delhi, it directly co-relates to the type of variant which we are observing,” he said.

**MAMATA: CENTRE
DIVERTING OXYGEN
FROM BENGAL**

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, APRIL 23**

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday accused the Centre of diverting tonnes of oxygen from the state to others, ruled by the BJP, like Uttar Pradesh after she skipped Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s meeting with other states’ CMs on Covid-19.

At Durgapur in Burdwan West the Trinamul Congress supremo alleged, “Oxygen and medicines are unavailable here in the market. The oxygen, which was being supplied by SAIL to our state, is now being diverted to UP. Thus, the chain in Bengal is taken away to create scarcity of oxygen here. We have fixed the total oxygen, which is consumed at the industrial units, for its use in medical purpose. That means we have taken over the industrial oxygen for health purpose.”

She said, “As a result, we were able to arrange 5000 cylinders yesterday. Altogether we have 20,000 cylinders in stock now. I have also spoken to another for providing us the oxygen supply because the central government wants to kill Bengal every possible way. Where would I get my share of oxygen from since SAIL has been directed to supply it to UP? I also need to look into it. How can one state’s share be given to another? If there is a need, no discrimination should be made. I also have no objection in that case.”

The Chief Minister’s grievance assumes significance as the state government stated, “Ministry of Health & Family Welfare Department, Govt. of India recently on 21st April, 2021 allotted 200 MT of oxygen from different plants located in West Bengal to outside the state. As per the current patient load and the rising trend of the infections, it is expected that the consumption level in West Bengal will radically rise to roughly 450 MT per day in the next couple of weeks.”

Delhi: 25 Ganga Ram hosp. patients die as need for oxygen gets frantic

More than 500 patients, including 150 on high flow oxygen support admitted in the hosp

New Delhi, April 23: Twenty-five of Sir Ganga Ram Hospital’s “sickest” Covid-19 patients died in 24 hours and the lives of 60 more hung in precarious balance, officials said on Friday, as the scramble for oxygen got increasingly frantic in hospitals across the national capital.

Sources said low pressure oxygen could be the likely cause of the deaths in Ganga Ram, one of the city’s biggest and most high-profile hospitals where healthcare staff was reduced to manually ventilating patients in its ICU and emergency department.

The hospital announced the deaths shortly after 8.00 am.

After the unprecedented crisis of the morning, an oxygen tanker did reach Ganga Ram in Central Delhi at 9.20 am but it was enough to last up to about five hours depending on consumption, an official at Ganga Ram said.

“It is wrong to say the deaths occurred due to oxygen shortage. We provided oxygen to patients manually when the pressure dipped in the ICU,” SGRH chairman Dr D.S. Rana said.

More than 500 Coronavirus patients, including around 150 on high flow oxygen support, are admitted in his hospital.

“Ventilators and BiPAP machines are not working effectively. Lives of another 60 ‘sickest’ patients are at risk. Major crisis likely,” a senior official at the hospital said.

The oxygen emergency was mirrored at the Max Hospitals as well.

Though no deaths were reported, Max Healthcare sent out a SOS on Twitter at 7.43 am, saying that Max Smart and Max Hospital Saket had less than an hour of oxygen left for about 700 patients admitted.

Indian Spinal Injuries Centre in Vasant Kunj also posted on Twitter at 4.20 pm that it was left with only one hour of oxygen and asked for help at the earliest.

A senior official of the Batra Hospital said the oxygen situation at their facility is extremely poor. Sources at the Holy Family hospital also said that they had received emergency oxygen supply from the Delhi government but the “stock can last for six hours”. Meanwhile, Dwarka-located Aakash Healthcare managed to refill their cylinders through small vendors across the city.

St Stephen’s hospital in Tis Hazari also said they had received a oxygen tanker in the morning.

Faced with a staff shortage and resource crunch, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences also discontinued contact tracing of exposed healthcare workers and quarantine of asymptomatic contacts.

Only symptomatic healthcare workers (HCWs) will be tested and only those testing positive will be isolated and managed as per the clinical condition. —PTI



Mass cremation of Covid-19 victims at Old Seemapuri Crematorium as Coronavirus cases surge across the country, in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

Maha: 14 Covid patients dead in hospital ICU fire

**SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, APRIL 23**

At least 14 Covid patients died in a major fire at a Covid centre at Virar in Palghar district in the wee hours of Friday. The fire broke out at around 3am in the ICU on the second floor of the four-storeyed Vijay Vallabh Hospital. There were 17 Covid patients in the ICU. The surviving patients under critical care have been moved to nearby hospitals in Mumbai.

Maharashtra home minister Dilip Walse Patil ordered a thorough probe by the Maharashtra Director General of police (DGP). The Maharashtra government also announced ₹5 lakh compensation to the legal heirs of the deceased. The government will also provide ₹1 lakh to persons

who have serious injuries.

According to the sources, the cause of fire seems to be a short circuit in an air conditioning unit of the hospital.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray expressed grief over the incident. He directed the administration to make arrangements for the treatments of those people who were taking the treatments at Vijay Vallabh Hospital.

“The cause of the fire should be investigated properly. The administration has been instructed to see whether the appropriate fire safety measures were taken in the hospital and conduct a proper inquiry in it,” Thackeray said.

Surendra Singh Raj of Satyamev Jayate, an NGO based in Vasai and Virar, alleged that most of hospitals including this hospi-

tal in Vasai and Virar did not have fire safety equipment, fire alarm and smoke detectors.

Relatives of the victims reached the hospital soon after they got to know of the incident and demanded that stringent action be taken against those responsible for the tragedy.

TV visuals showed the smoke-filled ICU in a disarray after the blaze, with the ceiling falling off in some places, beds and other furniture strewn around and kin of the deceased waiting outside the hospital.

In his tweet in Marathi, the state home minister said, “A fire broke out in the intensive care unit of Vijay Vallabh Hospital in Virar, killing 13 patients. The incident is very unfortunate and painful. A heartfelt tribute to the victims of the accident!”

Govt resumes free foodgrain services

New Delhi, April 23: The government on Friday decided to resume providing free food grains to the poor in May and June to help them tide over the economic hardship in the second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic, officials said.

“We will provide 5-kg additional food grains for free to PDS beneficiaries under the PMGKAY for two months — May and June. This time, we are not providing pulses under this scheme,” food and public distribution secretary Sudhanshu Pandey said.

The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY) was announced in 2020 for three months till July and later extended till November to combat the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the poor. —PTI

Under the scheme, additional 5 kg wheat and rice along with 1 kg pulses to each family per month was provided to beneficiaries registered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). But this year, only grains will be given.

Free grains — which will be distributed on the same pattern as earlier — will be given to 80 crore beneficiaries. The free grains will be over and above the monthly entitlement under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), he said.

About 80 lakh tonnes of food grains will be required to meet the demand for two months. The move, in line with the Prime Minister’s commitment to the poor, will cost the exchequer over ₹26,000 crore, he added including on account of interstate transportation of food grains, he added.

DCGI nod for hepatitis drug for virus

● THE COMPANY has received restricted emergency use approval from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for the use of ‘Virafin’, PegIFN in treating moderate Covid-19 infection in adults, Zydus Cadila said in a regulatory filing.

Covid-19. The company has received restricted emergency use approval from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for the use of ‘Virafin’, PegIFN in treating moderate Covid-19 infection in adults, Zydus Cadila said

in a regulatory filing. PegIFN has very well established safety with multiple doses in chronic Hepatitis B and C patients for many years. A single dose subcutaneous regimen of the antiviral Virafin will make the treatment more

convenient for the patients, the filing said. When administered early on during Covid, Virafin will help patients recover faster and avoid much of the complications.

It will be available on the prescription of a medical specialist for use in a hospital/institutional setup, Zydus Cadila said.

“The fact that we are able to offer a therapy which significantly reduces the viral load

when given early on can help in better disease management. It comes at a much-needed time for patients and we will continue to provide them access to critical therapies in this battle against Covid-19,” Cadila Healthcare MD Sharvil Patel said.

Shares of Cadila Healthcare, the listed entity of the Zydus Group, closed at ₹571.20 per scrip on BSE, up 3.43 per cent from its previous close. —PTI

RESCUE | OPS

IAF has swung into action to airlift oxygen containers, medicines

AFMS to import oxygen generation plants

**PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 23**

Amid reports of shortage of oxygen in the hospitals during the second wave of Covid-19 across the country, Armed Forces Medical Services has decided to import oxygen generation plants and containers from Germany to cater to the shortage.

Some 23 mobile oxygen generation plants are being airlifted from Germany. These will be deployed in military hospitals catering to the Covid patients. These oxygen generating plants are expected to reach within a week.

Each plant has a capacity to produce 40 litres of oxygen per minute and 2,400 litres an hour. At this rate it can cater to 20-25 patients round the clock. The advantage of these plants is that they are easily portable. Earlier this week, Defence

minister Rajnath Singh had directed the Armed Forces and other stakeholders to go ahead with procurement of critical medical requirements under emergency powers of procurement. As per the orders issued on Friday, Director General Medical Services (Army/Navy/Air Force) has been sanctioned emergency procurement powers of ₹5 crore, Maj Gen rank medical officers ₹3 crore and Brigadier rank medical officers ₹2 crore.

This is a pro-active measure taken by defence ministry to enable AFMS to provide medical services to the personnel of the Armed Forces as well as aid the civil administration. Armed forces hospitals are also seeing a rush due to the second wave of Covid-19.

In Delhi, Indian Army’s Base Hospital Delhi Cantt has been converted into an exclusive Covid facility for

● **IN A significant** defence ministry is giving extension to Short Service Commissioned Doctors in AFMS till December 31, 2021 to tide over current surge in medical services.

● **IT IS to be noted** that IAF is only transporting empty oxygen tankers to filling stations in other states to save time on one way.

Indian Armed Forces and veterans. Its capacity is being increased from 250 to 1,000 beds. All OPDs has been shifted and function at Army Hospital Research and Referral.

Also, in a significant decision defence ministry is giving extension to Short Service Commissioned Doctors in AFMS till December 31, 2021 to tide over current surge in medical services. This will augment strength of AFMS by

238 more doctors. Indian Air Force (IAF) has also swung into action by carrying out sorties from various parts of the country to airlift oxygen containers, cylinders, essential medicines, equipment required for setting up and sustaining Covid hospitals and facilities in the fight against fresh surge in Covid-19 cases.

The IAF Transport aircraft and helicopters have been pressed into service.

These include transport aircraft C-17, C-130J, IL-76, An-32 and Avro. Chinook and Mi-17 helicopters are on standby. Tasks undertaken include airlift of doctors and nursing staff from Kochi, Mumbai, Vizag and Bangalore for various hospitals at Delhi.

The C-17 and IL-76 aircraft of IAF have started airlifting big empty oxygen tankers from their place of use to the filling stations across the country to speed

up the distribution of much needed oxygen. It is to be noted that Air Force is only transporting empty oxygen tankers to filling stations in other states to save time on one way and they come back through road or railways. This is because its not safe to fly tankers filled with liquid oxygen.

In addition to this, the C-17 and IL-76 have transported large quantity of load comprising bio safety cabinets and autoclave machines for setting up of an additional Covid test facility at Leh. The IAF transport and helicopter assets are on standby to be deployed at short notice.

Last year, in the initial days of COVID-19 outbreak, the IAF ran several sorties to deliver medicines, medical and other essential supplies required to combat the pandemic as well as brought back stranded Indian nationals from abroad.

Want of oxygen kills 5 in MP hosp.

**RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, APRIL 23**

Five Covid-19 patients undergoing treatment in the intensive care unit (ICU) of a private hospital in Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh died reportedly due to lack of oxygen, triggering a public outcry. The incident took place in a private Covid hospital at Ukhari in Jabalpur city on the intervening night of Thursday-Friday.

50 Covid-19 patients were admitted in the ICU of the hospital when the incident took place. According to the police, some relatives of the patients admitted to the Covid hospital rushed to the medical facility after learning about alleged disruption in oxygen supply in the ICU ward. They staged noisy protests at the hospital when they found that five

patients died due to reported lack of oxygen.

Police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control, a senior district police officer told this newspaper unwilling to be quoted.

“We arranged oxygen-filled cylinders to supply oxygen to the patients admitted in the ICU, following instructions by Jabalpur district superintendent of police Sidharth Bahuguna”, the police officer said.

The measure saved the lives of other patients, he added. Meanwhile, Jabalpur district collector Karmaveer Sharma ordered a probe into the incident. He constituted a 4-member team to probe the incident. The five deceased patients were Pramila Tiwari, Gautam Tiwari, Anand Sharma, Gautami Roy and Devendra Kuraria.

NOT STOPPING HCs FROM HEARING COVID CASES: SC

**PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 23**

Peeved over its criticism on taking suo motu cognizance of the worsening Covid situation and gaps in its management, the Supreme Court on Friday said that it did not stop the High Courts from hearing Covid related cases or thought of transferring them to itself.

Apparently displeased over its criticism, by a section of senior lawyers, based on the “perception”, that top court after taking suo motu cognizance of the prevailing “health emergency” will transfer to itself all the Covid related matters being heard by the HCs, a bench comprising Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, Justice L. Nageswara Rao and Justice S. Ravindra Bhat said, “You have imputed motives to us without reading the order.”

The hearing was adjourned to April 23, 2021, as Centre needed time to file its response to notice on the suo motu proceedings that was issued yesterday (April 22, 2021).

The court accepted senior lawyer Harish Salve’s request seeking to recuse from being amicus curiae to assist the court in the matter.

The court had on Thursday (April 22) appointed Salve as amicus curiae in the matter. The court had said that on Friday it will hear Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and Salve only.

Pointing to Supreme Court Bar Association, President, Vikas Singh, Justice Rao said, “You have read the order. Is there any intention to transfer the case? Even before reading the order, there was criticism about something which was not there in order. This is how the institution is being destroyed.”

KERALA: CPM CALLS FOR STIR ON JAB POLICY

**GILVESTER
ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
APRIL 23**

The ruling CPM in Kerala has decided to organise protest against Centre’s new vaccine policy even as the state on Friday yet again recorded biggest single day spike with 28,477 cases. The total number of active cases in the state has gone up to 1.60 lakh.

At a press conference here, CPM acting secretary A. Vijayaraghavan said that his party has decided to hold demonstrations across the state on April 28. As part of the protest party workers will stand outside their homes holding placards against Centre’s vaccine policy which places huge financial burden on the states besides giving a free hand to the companies to charge at will.

At the prescribed rate of ₹400 per vaccine, the state would need a whopping ₹1,300 crore to provide free vaccine to the designated population. He said the new vaccine policy was a declaration of war against the people of the country. The CPM has appealed to party workers, sympathisers and fellow travellers to contribute liberally towards the Chief Minister’s Disaster Relief Fund (CMDRF).

Kerala records biggest single day rise

Meanwhile, 1,30,617 samples were tested across the state on Friday and the test positivity rate was recorded as 27.78 percent. The state reported 27 deaths taking the death toll due to Covid-19 to 5,055.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said restrictions amounting to lockdown would be enforced on Saturday and Sundays. All government, private and commercial establishments will remain closed on April 24 and 25. However, essential services will function as usual.

DECCAN Chronicle

24 APRIL 2021

No time to lose, ramp up vaccine production now

The Supreme Court's reference to the various high courts hearing matters related to the supply of drugs and other medical essentials as "creating some confusion" and "diversion of resources" is a bit perplexing but its direction to the Union government to place before it a "national plan" on the way it proposes to face the challenge is welcome. How the government will be taking on the virus given the way it has been spreading the length and breadth of the county, choking and extinguishing lives and disrupting and decimating livelihoods is a question most right-thinking people in the country are asking now. The news of people dying for want of oxygen in a country which is priding itself as the pharma hub of the world is unacceptable; and police in a state obstructing trucks lifting oxygen cylinders for hospitals in another state signals the poor coordination at the national level in the face of a crisis that was long waiting to happen.

As of now, the facts on the ground are disturbing — we are facing a shortage of all the stuff that is needed to save lives — critical drugs, oxygen, hospital beds, intensive care units, ventilators and vaccine. India, which had reported the second largest number of cases in September-October last year, showed a remarkable improvement in the following months with the daily numbers coming to a few thousands. The numbers started spiralling only in March this year, giving the government time to plan for a situation should it go out of control.

From the looks of it, the government has faltered on every count, except making fancy noises. It launched a vaccination programme, calling it the world's largest. It was true, because we were to vaccinate about 100 crore people. But none asked the question nor the government bothered to answer as to where the vaccine will come from to inoculate all these people. Almost four months

have passed since the Drugs Controller General of India approved two vaccines — Covishield and Covaxin — but the production has not increased by one dose even now

have passed since the Drugs Controller General of India approved two vaccines — Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute of India and Covaxin, by the Bharat Biotech International for emergency use — but the production has not increased by one dose even now. It was only a couple of days ago that the company was given ₹3,000 crores which it would use to expand production which will take roughly three months. The same is the case with the other manufacturer, who was granted ₹1,500 crores.

It is in this background that we should view the government's announcement of opening up vaccination for all those who are aged above 18. This is a welcome step but the government must also ensure that we have enough vaccine to administer to the newly eligible group of people. The government must, as the Supreme Court suggested, draw up a time-bound plan to ramp up production of vaccine, drugs and oxygen and distribute them. It has this week asked two public sector companies to manufacture Covaxin; it must follow up on this decision, use the compulsory licensing route, if necessary, and rope in other manufacturers so that we have the drugs, vaccines and other essentials to save lives. There is no time to waste.

Resetting the green agenda

A silver lining has been spotted amid the gathering clouds of global warming. Inspired by a champion in Joe Biden's United States rejoining the fight against climate change, Japan, Canada, Britain and EU, have promised to cut emissions by half before the end of the 2020s. China and Russia kept aside their differences with the US to pledge cooperation in cutting back on coal and petroleum emissions and India pointed to its agreement with the US to help with the effort

at reigning in the carbon footprint. Biden's emphasis on the "moment of peril" representing an economic opportunity seemed to have struck a chord.

The US resolve to aim at a 52 per cent cut below 2005 levels is extremely ambitious and is certain to face big political hurdles in the form of the Republicans who deny the science behind climate change and are likely to turn the clock back if they were to return to power in 2024. There will be a steep economic cost in committing to the cuts which envisage converting all vehicles to electric, using natural gas in coal-fired power plants and afforestation, besides developing cutting edge technologies in carbon capture. The industrialised nations have a historic responsibility to set things right and they seem more prepared to face it now.

Handling the ground realities may be tougher even as the US, historically the largest emitter, and China, currently the biggest polluter, get down to the task that may require enormous funding and new paradigms in energy use from solar and wind resources. In per person terms, India may be expending only one seventh of an American's energy use but it has a role to play in balancing its economic needs. The Coronavirus pandemic may have enforced cuts but those are bound to lift as the world economy reboots. The only metric science advocates to save the planet is zero emissions and it is moot whether man can achieve that when he is so enamoured of consumption.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

Kaushik Mitter
Editor

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Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08

Subhani



The God business is good business all across India

Mohan Guruswamy

There has been a palpable rise in religiosity all across the country, evidenced by the visible accretion of places of worship and with it an aggressive assertion of identity either by appearance, statues, processions and loud calls to worship and music. This should worry us. The US National Intelligence Council's Global Trends Report finds a co-relation between religiosity and poverty. It found an inverse relationship in countries where the percentage of people who prayed daily was high and low per capita GDP. Clearly, if you are too obsessed by damnation, you are condemned to live it here and now!

This rise in religiosity is across the religious spectrum. Following the increasing employment of Muslim youth in the Middle East and the flow of oil money into India, we saw a surge in the number of mosques. The mosques had their effect on Muslim attitudes. Christians were well placed during the British era and churches got prime locations. The flow of missionary money still continues, and more houses of God are manifestations of this. True, no great churches have been built but there is a profusion of small churches all over the country. Both these religions are institutionally well organised and regulated. But the Hindu response to this has been pretty *laissez-faire* with unregulated expansion.

I was recently in the rural areas of Telangana and noticed that even small villages now have two or three temples, when very clearly one could do. This is not just because of the wide choices of gods available to Hindus; it owes more to the fragmentation of Hindu society into myriad castes, *gotras*, *jatis* and clans. Many of them are side by side and it seems

that they are actually competing with each other. I have been noticing how the growth of temples and their embellishment are a response to each other. In this respect, they are not very different from sari, jewellery and sweetmeat shops.

There is also another very basic, more worldly, reason for this profusion of temples. We are increasingly seeing a profusion of extra-constitutional civic organisations that informally sanction or condone economic activity in villages, like we have been seeing with resident welfare associations in urban areas, where incomes are derived from "licensing" parking agents, fruit vendors and petty services. The village committees too have discovered such income streams, quite a few of them patently illegal like sand mining, uncensored liquor vending, etc.

Religion is now, not just increasingly a part of our politics, but also, and even more so, of our economics. Tourism contributes as much as 9.6 per cent of our GDP, with domestic tourism accounting for 88 per cent of it. In 2019 the number of foreign tourists who came to India was around 90 million. By contrast, domestic tourism totalled over 1,400 million visits, clearly suggesting that its implied economics are far bigger than the foreign business. It also suggests that very many of our people make several trips for tourism every year. While the concentration of the Centre's tourism promotion efforts focuses on the Delhi-Agra-Jaipur "Golden Triangle", the highest number of foreign tourist arrivals (20.1 per cent) are in Tamil Nadu. Delhi draws half that.

The southern states see the most foreign and domestic tourist traffic because of the number of important religious places like Tirupati and Madurai. The location of Tirupati

Under the CPI(M) government, Kerala temple boards actually advertise the magical powers of their stone idols. After all, what else can be expected from a philosophy that derives inspiration from mummified corpses in Moscow's Red Square?

within it makes Andhra Pradesh India's biggest domestic tourist destination. Religious tourism is now very big business. What does this suggest? Must we be worried?

A Pew Global Attitudes survey shows that more than 25 per cent of Indians reported having become more religious over the past 4-5 years. The trend is valid across religions and in keeping with other attitudinal surveys. Between 2007 and 2015, the share of respondents in India who perceived religion to be very important increased by 11 per cent to 80 per cent now. A NSSO report shows that average expenditure on religious trips has more than doubled during this period. Clearly, this is a rapidly expanding business sector and also, given the trends, the sky is the limit (no pun intended).

While the economic activity and employment it generates is a cause for happiness all around, we must also ponder about the other ramifications of this growing religiosity. The growth of blind faith, superstition and aggressive religionising (my two-bit coinage) presents a clear and present danger to India evolving as a modernised society which values reason and tempers collective behaviour. The building of temples is a profitable business. That's why unscrupulous entrepreneurs and social scoundrels build more shrines, increasingly usurping public spaces. And we know from experience that once the gods and religious figures get installed in a place, they cannot be dislodged. A good share of our traffic bottlenecks are due to them.

Sant Kabirdas posed this

telling question in a simple and beautiful verse: *Pathar puje hari mile, to main puju pahar/ tante te chakki bhalii, pis khayee sansar?* Sadly, the truth now is that a stone idol (now increasingly often made of POP and plastic, sometimes from China) offers a better rate of return (RoR) than a *chakki*, that calls for enterprise rather than irrational faith. Thus, with religiosity and religionising big business now, it is increasingly common to see governments promoting "religious tourism".

Actually, there is increasingly an unstated and subtle competition now implying that my idol is better than yours. The Venkateshwara temple at Tirumalai is India's biggest money-spinner. This Vaishnavite shrine attracts 40 million devotees each year. Telangana has now embarked on promoting the Yadagirigutta temple near Hyderabad to become a religious tourism draw. This is also a Vaishnavite temple, but devoted to a different avatar of Vishnu, and manifestations of that avatar — Jwala Narasimha, Gandabheranda Narasimha and Yogananda Narasimha. Under the CPI(M) government, Kerala temple boards actually advertise the magical powers of their stone idols. Communism was supposed to make us rational and believe God was a figment of mankind's fervid imagination. After all, what else can be expected from a philosophy that derives inspiration from mummified corpses in Moscow's Red Square and Beijing's Tiananmen?

Jawaharlal Nehru, our first PM and foremost founding father of the new India, then contemplated the new India to be guided by reason and infused with the scientific temper. Instead, we are now increasingly a people driven by dogma and blind faith. Religion and blind faith are our biggest fault-lines and the cause of much social friction and breakdown of orderly public behaviour and order.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

LETTERS

VACCINE PLAN

The Centre should acquire different vaccines, maintain a pool and supply them to people through states for free. If the market is allowed a free run in deciding the price and supplies, profit making will come into play inadvertently, leading to derailment of the programme. The citizen's right to life can only be guarded when the government is in a leading position. It cannot abdicate its responsibility in a war like situation.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

Pushing the responsibility to states at a critical time is not justifiable. The Union government is duty bound now to protect the lives of people and the sinking economy.

P. Ramakrishna
Rajahmundry

The Centre cannot wash its hands on vaccine policy. Commitment to providing an affordable vaccine to all is coming a cropper. Centre needs to intervene quickly to cap the prices so that profiteering and black marketing can be curbed.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

UNSUNG HEROES

The Telugu Desam was late in sympathising with private teachers (*TD seeks Corona package for private teachers like in TS, DC, April 22*). Since the lockdown, private teachers have been doing somersaults to make both ends meet.

Dr Syed Sarmad
Kurnool

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Manned Soyuz-10 to develop space station launched

MOSCOW, April. 23 Three Soviet cosmonauts blasted into orbit today aboard Soyuz-10 and began manoeuvring to develop the world's first permanent space platform. All indications pointed toward a link up attempt with the 'salute' space station, launched on Monday, and possibly more cosmonauts in orbit this week-end aboard Soyuz-10. The presence of two veterans of previous Sovuz missions among the crew strengthened the belief that this might prove to be an important mission.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"Two could be counted coincidence And three a play of chance Four is stretching it too far Five has definitely crossed the bar By six we resort to causal sense — the dancers must define the dance."

— From **Pate Pay Pair** by Bachchoo

Richard Dawkins is our world's best-known atheist. In the West, where he lives, publishes and pronounces, this is not a crime. I am sure the religious believe that he will get what's coming to him when he dies. But not on earth.

It wasn't always thus. One story goes that the playwright Christopher Marlowe was on the verge of being arrested and executed for his atheistic remarks but contrived to disappear and reinvent himself as the author of Shakespeare's plays. (That's my story, anyway, in my novel called *Black Swan*, which... *How many times have I told you not to advertise your trashy books here?* —Ed)

In other societies in our diverse world, a proselytising atheist would probably have his or her head chopped off. In the West, there are no punish-

ments threatened for saying that God doesn't exist, that virgins don't give birth, that God doesn't dictate books, that the earth goes around the sun, that vaanar armies of the Indian epic were probably *adivasis* (*sure of that last one?* —Ed) — and other pronouncements from which the taboo has been removed. But even in these societies new heresies are born.

This observation, gentle reader, has been occasioned by the fact that Prof. Dawkins has been stripped of the "Humanist of the Year" award he was given in 1996 by the American Humanist Association. They withdrew it because Prof. Dawkins had tweeted messages denying that people could choose their gender.

Prof D is an evolutionary biologist and knows that every human being is born with either XX chromosomes, contained in each of more than thirty trillion cells in their bodies, which make them grow as females, or XY chromosomes, which determine that they are male. That's biology. It can't be changed, not by hormone treatment or by surgery to chop off penises and testicles and devise artificial vaginas or by the surgical removal of breasts.

Obviously, if one ignores biology and asserts that people can choose their gender by saying so, then men who assert that they are women and vice versa have to be accepted as such. But assertion has never been the criterion for truth.

Prof. Dawkins recognises that unarmful assertion has to be respected. "Is trans woman a woman? Purely semantic! If you define gender by chromosomes, then, no! If by self-identification, yes. I call her 'she' out of courtesy."

Reacting to the news that his award had been withdrawn, Prof. Dawkins said he'd erase it from his CV but couldn't find it as he had no record or recollection of receiving it.

The continuing debate about the recognition of people who assert that they have transitioned to the opposite gender has had several feminists objecting to trans-women entering women's toilets and changing facilities, being sent to women's prisons and participating in women's sporting events. The trans lobby has denounced these feminists as reactionary bigots. Joining or informing the debate was the case of Keira Bell,

who sued the Tavistock Clinic for encouraging her as a teenager to undergo hormone blocker therapy, claiming that she was much too young as a pre-teenaged girl to take an informed decision about transitioning to being a male. Other similar cases have been launched by parents who claim that their children have been misled by institutions which facilitate "gender transformation".

In the debate, advocates of transgender point out that some males, estimated at one in 500 or one in a thousand, have an extra X chromosome. In most males with an extra X, there seem to be no symptomatic effects, though in some there is a decreased creation of testosterone — which doesn't according to most medical science amount to any "trans" state of being. A male is a male for all that.

One of the pernicious fallacies I have heard in India is that our population of eunuchs, known as "*hijras*", are transgender. A learned medical practitioner tells me that *hijras* are born males whose testicles are trapped in infancy in their bone structure and therefore don't develop. This makes their bodies produce male and female hormones

and they manifest secondary sexual features of both genders — but are bodily male with penises. The reason we don't find *hijras* in, say, Europe, is because infants receive medical attention from nurses and doctors and the obstruction to the testicles' descent and growth is detected and easily dealt with.

As Prof. Dawkins recognises, people who are trans should be afforded the courtesy of being recognised as such out of fundamental decency. That there should be no socio-political discrimination against such people goes without saying.

I don't think someone like Michael Jackson actually imagined that he was born in the wrong-coloured body. Nevertheless, he underwent all sorts of treatment to change his features, to lighten his skin and to make his hair Caucasian rather than Afro. His efforts could be seen as insulting to black features and identity but there were no voiced objections.

Evolution has determined that we don't live inside but are our bodies. That some don't want to be their bodies has in this day and age to be tolerated if not respected.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	47,878.45	-0.42
Nifty 50	14,341.40	-0.45
S&P 500*	4,184.37	1.19
Dollar (₹)	75.02	-0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.13	0.07
Euro (₹)	90.46	-0.24
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,273.24	0.05
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.76	0.55
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.035	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.574	0.018

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Reliance buys UK country club Stoke Park

Reliance Industries Ltd has bought Britain's iconic country club and luxury golf resort, Stoke Park, which featured in James Bond movies, for 57 million pounds (about Rs 592 crore). The acquisition adds to Reliance's current stake in Oberoi hotels and hotel/managed residences in Mumbai that it is developing. Over the past four years, Reliance has announced \$3.3 billion in acquisitions.



Breach of RBI's data storage norms Amex, Diners barred from adding clients

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 23

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday imposed restrictions on American Express Banking Corp and Diners Club International Ltd from on-boarding new domestic customers onto their card networks over non-compliance with the central bank's norms on storage of payment system data. The ban will come into effect from May 1. The ban, however, will not impact existing customers, the central bank said in a statement.

American Express Banking Corp and Diners Club International Ltd are payment system operators authorised to operate card networks in the country under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.

Imposing the restrictions on American Express and Diners Club, the RBI said, "These entities have been found non-compliant with the directions on Storage



of Payment System Data." In April 2018, all payment system providers were directed to ensure that within a period of six months the entire data (full end-to-end transaction details / information collected / carried / processed as part of the message / payment instruction) relating to payment systems operated by them is stored in a system only in India.

They were also required to report compliance to the RBI and submit a board-approved system audit report (SAR) conducted by a CERT-In empanelled auditor within the time-lines specified.

Again, in June 2019, the RBI said all data related to payment transactions must be stored in India and such information, if processed abroad, should be brought back within 24 hours.

"The entire payment data shall be stored in systems located only in India," the RBI said, adding, "The data should be deleted from the systems abroad and brought back to India not later than one business day or 24 hours from the payment processing, whichever is earlier."

The RBI had also clarified that the data stored in India can be accessed or fetched when required for handling disputes or so.

Cadila gets nod to use hepatitis drug for Covid

New Delhi, April 23: Zydus Cadila on Friday said it has received restricted emergency use approval from the drug regulator for using Pegylated Interferon alpha-2b (Peg-IFN) in treating moderate Covid-19 infection in adults.

The drug firm had sought the DCGI's approval for the hepatitis drug's additional indication for treating Covid-19. The company has now received restricted emergency use approval from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for the use of 'Virafin', PegIFN in treating moderate Covid-19 infection in adults, Zydus Cadila said in a filing.

PegIFN has very well-established safety with multiple doses in chronic Hepatitis B and C patients.

A single dose subcutaneous regimen of the antiviral Virafin will make the treatment more convenient for the patients, the filing said.

When administered early on during Covid, Virafin will help patients recover faster. It will be available as a prescription drug for use in a hospital/institutional setup, Cadila said. — PTI

Market ends in red for the third week

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 23

The market registered third successive week of decline as Covid-19 cases continued to rise.

During the holiday-truncated week, the Sensex slumped 953.58 points, or 1.95 per cent, while the Nifty-50 tanked 276.50 points, or 1.89 per cent.

The big fall in the Sensex on Monday by 882 points was not challenged by the bulls effectively though the market closed in the green on Thursday, gaining over 375 points.

Nifty-50 and Sensex ended 65 and 202 points lower on Friday, closing at 14,341 and 47,878, respectively. But the broader markets ended in the green, with Nifty Mid-Cap 100 and Nifty Small-cap 100 rising 0.3 per cent and 0.4 per cent, respectively.

On Friday, foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth Rs 1,360.76 crore but the domestic institutions were net buyers by Rs 1,995.59 crore, as per the provisional data.

"A deadly wave of coronavirus infections raises concerns over business recovery," said Deepak Jasani, head of retail research, HDFC Securities.

Reports of a possible increase in capital gains tax in the US took a toll on the global equities, which also impacted the Indian market just before the weekend close as traders didn't want to carry risks, with Mondays, of late, witnessing bear attacks.

The earnings season has not boosted market sentiments, as it did in the previous quarter, since big IT companies and banks have reported mixed financial performance so far and the market is more focused on the likely fall-out of full blown pan-India endemic.



HCL Technologies' March 2021 quarter operating performance, with a 6 per cent decline in consolidated net profit, missed expectations due to salary hike and the special one-time bonus, according to analysts. The company on Friday proposed an interim dividend of Rs 10 per share to mark the \$10 billion annual revenue milestone.

Joseph Thomas, head of research, Emkay Wealth Management, said, "The markets continued to remain extremely subdued with losses during the course of the whole week, across sectors and segments. The main reason for the downtrend is the rising cases of the virulent pandemic. While the fundamentals support a robust economy, it is too early to assess the potential damages."

"But the probability of the resurgence of the pandemic impacting growth and therefore earnings, is quite high for the first two quarters of this year," Thomas said.

Honda to go all-electrical by 2040, put \$46 bn in R&D

SHIHO TAKEZAWA APRIL 23

Honda Motor Company set what it called a challenging target for all of its sales to be electric vehicles by 2040 as it tries to keep up with the global EV race and revive profits under the new leadership of Toshihiro Mibe.

The Japanese company also said it will invest about 5 trillion yen (\$46 billion) in research and development over the next six years, "regardless of fluctuations in our sales revenue."

Automakers around the globe are rushing into the EV sector as the industry shifts to electrification and self-driving cars. Among them, Jaguar Land Rover has vowed to go fully electric by 2025, and Volvo by 2030.

Honda's new goals include EVs accounting for 40 per cent of sales in North America and China by 2030 and 80 per cent by 2035. It has a 20 per cent goal for Japan by 2030 and 80 per cent by 2035. Japan's target is different because it is a huge consumer of hybrids, Mibe said. The carmaker wants to achieve an operating profit margin of 7 per cent even as it shifts to EVs, he said.

Toyota Motor Corp. has been able to assuage investors' concerns on EVs with the introduction of its "bZ4X." — Bloomberg

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Virus emergency in Tokyo and Osaka

Tokyo: Only three months before the postponed Olympics are set to open, Tokyo and Japan's second largest metropolitan area of Osaka have been placed under emergency orders aimed at stemming surging cases of the Coronavirus. The measures, which take place during Japan's "golden week" holiday period, are meant to limit travel and keep people out of public places. They are to end on May 11, just ahead of a widely reported visit to Hiroshima by International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach. Bach said this week that the visit, reported for May 17-18, is still in the "planning phase." — AP

Laxmikant extends his stay at Hyd FC

Hyderabad: Indian Super League side Hyderabad FC handed a one-year extension to experienced goalkeeper Laxmikant Kattimani, the club announced on Friday. The Goa-born custodian has inked a fresh deal till the end of the 2021-22 season. "I have now spent two years with the club and I am really happy here. I know the club and the people involved pretty well and it was an easy decision for me to extend my time with Hyderabad FC," Kattimani was quoted asaying in a media release. Laxmikant has been with Hyderabad FC since its inception. — PTI

Nadal rallies past Cameron, in semis

Barcelona: Rafael Nadal brushed aside Cameron Norrie 6-1, 6-4 to ease into the semifinals of the Barcelona Open on Friday and moved closer to a record-extending 12th title at the event. After Nadal breezed through the first set, Britain's Norrie won back a break in the second. Nadal, however, took the advantage right back and closed it out when he converted on a second match point by smashing a forehand just inside the line. Nadal will face Pablo Carreno or Diego Schwartzman on Saturday for a spot in the final. Nadal needed three sets to get past Kei Nishikori and Ilya Ivashka in the first two rounds. — AP

Magical Messi on the double

Leo's brace fires Barcelona to victory over Getafe, Atletico beat Huesca

Madrid, April 23: Lionel Messi gave up the chance for a hat-trick on Thursday as Barcelona held off a late fightback from Getafe to win 5-2 and stay in the race at the top of La Liga.

Messi scored twice and could have had a third in injury-time at Camp Nou but deferred a penalty to Antoine Griezmann, who completed what was in the end a comfortable victory.

After beating Athletic Bilbao to lift the Copa del Rey last weekend, Barca are now in the hunt for the double, sitting five points behind Atletico Madrid but still with a game in hand.

Atletico had earlier brushed aside Huesca 2-0 to register back-to-back victories for the first time since January and with Real Madrid also seeing off Cadiz on Wednesday, there is no margin for error now in a thrilling battle for the title.

None of Spain's leading trio appear to have been affected by an incredible few days off the pitch, which saw Real Madrid, Atletico and Barcelona all sign up for the hugely controversial European Super League on Sunday.



Barcelona's Lionel Messi (right) duels for the ball with Getafe's Damian Suarez during their Spanish league match at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Thursday. — AP

Atletico withdrew from the breakaway competition on Wednesday but Barca and Real Madrid remain part of a project that would transform the fabric of European football.

Getafe were wearing t-shirts in protest against the European Super League, even as they gave Barcelona a guard of honour to mark the Catalans' cup success. Messi now has 33 goals in all competi-

tions and 25 in the league, one more than the total scored by the whole Getafe team. Getafe are not safe yet, four points the gap above the bottom three.

Messi got to work in the eighth minute, slid

through by a piercing pass by Sergio Busquets and sending a shot into the far top corner, despite a touch by Getafe goalkeeper David Soria.

Yet Getafe were level four minutes later as Angel met Marc Cucurella's cross and the ball cannoned off the unsuspecting Clement Lenglet and flew in.

Another own-goal restored Barca's lead with Sofian Chakla failing to spot Soria coming out before passing the ball beyond the goalkeeper and into his own net.

The game looked secure when Messi made it three. Lenglet's looping header gave him the chance to volley left-footed against the far post but the ball arrowed back to the striker, who finished from the angle with his right.

Getafe teed up a nervy last 20 minutes when Ronald Araujo trod on the ankle of Enes Unal, who scored the penalty to give the visitors hope. But Barcelona pulled away with two late goals, Araujo heading in a corner from Messi, who then passed up the chance to score his third by giving Griezmann his first. — AFP

ARCHERS ATANU, DEEPIKA MARCH INTO SEMIFINALS

Guatemala City, April 23: Country's top archery couple Atanu Das and Deepika Kumari battled heavy winds to storm into their respective semifinals of the recurve section as India continued to make giant strides in the World Cup Stage 1 here.

Returning to the World Cup after almost two years, Das and Deepika, who got married last year, also paired up to advance to the bronze playoff in the recurve mixed event on Thursday night to keep India in the hunt for five medals.

Deepika displayed some incredible shooting to down German archer Michelle Kroppen in straight sets. — PTI

SNAP SHOTS

Sachin lands eighth gold for India

Indian boxer Sachin (56kg) on Friday added an unprecedented eighth gold to the country's historic medal haul at the youth world championships in Kielce, Poland, a day after all seven women swept the top honours in an astonishing performance.

Sachin rallied to defeat Kazakhstan's Yerbolat Sabyr 4-1 in a gritty performance by the end of which his confident opponent was left with a bloodied face and exhausted body.

The Indian was off to a spirited start and was definitely impressive with his counter-attacks but the Kazakh clinched the opening round 3-2.

Sachin intensified his attacks after the break with his right straights fetching him the points. He drew level by getting a split verdict in his favour in the second round. The final round belonged to the relentless Sachin as Sabyr ran out of steam. India thus ended their campaign with 11 medals — eight gold and three bronze medals to claim the top spot in overall standings. This was an improvement on two gold, two silver and six bronze medals claimed at the event's 2018 edition. Earlier, Gitika (48kg), Babyrojisana Chanu (51kg), Poonam (57kg), Vinka (60kg), Arundhati Choudhary (69kg), Thokchom Sanamachu Chanu (75kg) and Alfiya Pathan (+81kg) ensured a perfect finish to the women's campaign. — PTI



Krish Tyagi and Apurva Vemuri pose with their trophies after receiving them from cricketer Mohammed Asaduddin (right) at the SMTA in Hyderabad.

Krish and Apurva champs at SMTA

Krish Ajay Tyagi and Apurva Vemuri emerged winners in the boys and girls sections respectively at the AITA Super Series tennis tournament for Under-16 years held at Sania Mirza Tennis Academy in Hyderabad.

Krish had it easy as he beat Shivaraj Chandan in straight sets at 6-0, 6-3 in the final while Apurva dropped the first set before coming back to defeat Abhaya Vemuri 4-6, 6-2, 6-4.

THE RESULTS

Boys final: Krish Ajay Tyagi bt Shivaraj Chandan 6-0, 6-3. Semifinals: Krish Tyagi bt Debasis Sahoo 7-6 (5), 1-6, 6-4; Chandan Shivaraj bt Bharat Phulwaria 6-1, 6-3. Quarterfinals: Debasis Sahoo bt N. R. Darwin Marx 6-1, 7-6 (0); Krish Tyagi bt Venkat Rishi Batlanki 6-2, 6-2; Chandan Shivaraj bt Anoop Keshavamurti 3-6, 6-0, 6-2; Bharat Phulwaria bt Vatsal Manikantan 6-2, 6-4.

Girls final: Apurva Vemuri bt Abhaya Vemuri 4-6, 6-2, 6-4. Semifinals: Abhaya Vemuri bt Manognya Madasu 6-2, 6-3; Apurva Vemuri bt Saumya Ronde 5-7, 6-2, 6-3. Quarterfinals: Abhaya Vemuri bt Avani Chitale 6-0, 6-1; Manognya Madasu bt Aaditi Bhat 6-2, 6-3; Saumya Ronde bt Malishka Kuramu 6-4, 6-1; Apurva Vemuri bt Raja Sarvagnya Kiluru 6-2, 6-2.

