

SHORT TAKES

SPECIAL TRAIN TO
YESHWANTPUR
LAUNCHEDDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 25

The Railways launched a weekly summer special express between Yeshwantpur and Guwahati.

Express launched its services from April 23 and will continue till June 25. The train that left Yeshwantpur will reach Guwahati at 6 am on 4th day of its journey.

In return direction, the train will leave Guwahati on every Monday at 7.35 pm from April 26 which will reach Duvvada on the 3rd day of its journey at 04.55 am and depart at 4.57 am and reach Yesvantpur at 4.30 am on the 4th day of its journey.

Meanwhile, for security reasons, it has been decided to short-terminate and short-originate the Visakhapatnam-Kirandul-Visakhapatnam express at Jagdalpur. The train leaving Visakhapatnam on April 25 and April 26 will be short-terminated at Jagdalpur. In the return direction, the train will start from Jagdalpur instead of Kirandul.

FEE CAP INCLUDES
MASKS AND
PPE KITS ALSO

FROM PAGE 1

The order stated that in the current second wave of Covid-19, many cases are being reported which have to be admitted and treated on the basis of CT/HRCT Scan and clinical picture without wasting any further time and to save precious lives. If this important diagnostic test is not affordable and accessible to the general public, then the disease will spread in the community leading to more cases and a resultant burden on the health infrastructure.

The AP government decided to make CT/HRCT accessible and affordable to all by regulating rates of CT / HRCT scan to a maximum of ₹3,000 including all consumables like PPE, mask, spreadsheets, etc. No hospital or diagnostic center in the State shall charge more than ₹3,000 for CT / HRCT Scan.

All the diagnostic centres, scanning centres and hospitals which are providing CT scan for suspected Covid positive cases directed to register on the [website:http://dash-board.covid19.ap.gov.in/ctscan](http://dash-board.covid19.ap.gov.in/ctscan). The government has also directed them to upload the name, phone number, CT / HRCT Image, and signed copy of the CT / HRCT Report for every CT / HRCT scan done. These details shall be made available to all hospitals in the state to access and make an admission on the basis of the image and report.

NO ENTRY AT
DURGA TEMPLE
AFTER 7.30 PM

FROM PAGE 1

As a precautionary measure, the temple administration has imposed curbs following a meeting between executive committee chairman Pyla Somi Naidu, executive officer D. Brahmaramba and priests.

Temple timings changed in view of night curfew being imposed from 10 pm to 5 am to contain the spread of Covid-19 and to restrain the spread of the disease on the temple premises.

Temple executive officer Brahmaramba said that the devotees coming to the temple for darshan should wear masks and maintain physical distance.

She explained that all the Arjitha Sevas will be performed in ekantham (solitude), and the devotees will be allowed for darshan from 6.30 am to 7.30 pm.

She said the devotees will be denied entry through the Ghat Road and Mahamandapam route after 7 pm, and the Antaralaya darshan for devotees has been cancelled.

The EO stated that ₹200 fine will be imposed for temple staff for violating rules.

Temple trust committee chairman Somi Naidu said that for every one hour Sodium Hypochlorite will be sprayed in the queue lines through which the devotees enter the temple premises.

- Antaralaya darshan for devotees has been cancelled
- the devotees will be denied entry through the Ghat Road and Mahamandapam route after 7 pm



Top: People in large numbers throng a medical store to purchase medicines for Covid and remdesivir injection near Ramnagar in Visakhapatnam on Sunday. Above: Busiest Jagadamba junction wears a deserted look due to the night curfew imposed by the state government to curb the spread of Covid in Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

Tough action against hosps
charging exorbitant fees

Toll free number to complain against private hospitals medical stores

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 25

“Tough action will be initiated against those private hospitals and medical stores who do not comply with regulations, and charge exorbitant rates for the treatment of Covid-19 patients,” said minister for panchayat raj and rural development Poddireddy Ramachandra Reddy on Sunday.

The minister said this after meeting with Deputy Chief Minister K. Narayana Swamy, district officials, and local legislators and discussing the measures being taken to contain the spread of Covid-19, and take stock of the facilities at hospitals.

Further, he sent out a stern warning that the government would not hesitate to take stringent action against those who sell Covid-19 vaccines and emergency drugs at prices higher than that fixed by the state.

“A committee, led by Y. Rishanth Reddy, ASP, Special Enforcement Bureau, will be formed to monitor prices across the district, and severe action will be taken against those who fail to follow the standard procedures set by the state and those errant hospitals would be placed under a blacklist,” he said.

The minister also instructed the health officials to announce the test results within a day. Further, he said that a toll-free number, which would allow the public to lodge complaints against private hospitals and medical stores, will soon be announced by the district administration.

Stating that there is a need to enhance bed capacity in many hospi-

People are stocking up
items fearing lockdownMD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 25

Imposition of night curfew amid rapidly rising cases of Coronavirus has led to fears among people that a lockdown could be in the offing. As a precautionary measure, they have started stocking essential commodities as well as medicines. This has led to mad rush at shops and stores throughout the state.

In fact, majority of traders are already in the lockdown mode, as they are closing their establishments early following imposition of night curfew from 10 pm to 5 am since Saturday.

Lockdowns have already been imposed in certain states and people fear AP will follow suit. There are messages going viral on social media that the state could witness a shutdown after May 2.

Chamber of Commerce representatives A. Aanjaneyulu and Vidyadhar Rao said trade

- Chamber of Commerce representatives say panic buying will continue until government does not clear the air about possibility of a shutdown.
- AP has been reporting around 11,000 new Covid-positive cases

associations have cut down on their business timings due to rising cases of Coronavirus. They said panic buying will continue until the government does not clear the air about possibility of a lockdown.

AP has been reporting around 11,000 new Covid-positive cases since past 10 days. On Sunday, as many as 12,634 Corona cases have been registered, apart from 69 new deaths.

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation on Sunday ordered closure of mutton, chicken, fish and prawns shops to prevent huge gatherings in front of these places, which

could spread Coronavirus. However, people of the city were seen rushing to nearby Nunna village to purchase these commodities. They believe mutton, chicken, fish and prawns constitute a healthy diet to build immunity against Covid-19.

K. Aanjaneyulu, a trader running a supermarket, confirmed that people are rushing to shops and stores to stock up essential commodities. Many of them are buying essentials, which will be sufficient to last for next two months. Aanjaneyulu said stocks at his store will exhaust soon.

Private employees D. Ramu and S. Raju said the first lockdown was imposed all of sudden in March 2020. This created a lot of difficulties for them. They said immunity-boosting foods are need of the hour, besides essential commodities. Hence they have come to the store to purchase commodities that last for at least two months.

tests have been conducted in the district since April 24, out of which 22,155 cases have emerged positive, adding that measures are being taken to set up Covid-19 care centres across the district.

About 3,65,312 persons have taken their first dose of the vaccine, and 51,112 have got their second dose in the district till date, he said.

RAPID COVID
SURGE CLAIMS
69 LIVES IN APDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 25

Andhra Pradesh is continuing to witness a swift surge in new infections, with the state reporting as many as fresh 12,634 cases and 69 additional deaths in past 24 hours.

As many as eight districts – Srikakulam, Chittoor, Guntur, Anantapur, Prakasam, Nellore, East Godavari and Visakhapatnam – showed a hefty single-day spike of new cases on Sunday. Srikakulam district had so far reported relatively lesser instances of the virus.

Cumulative tally of Covid-19 infections in the state has increased to 10,33,560, with the death toll spiking to 7,685. The daily Corona positivity rate came down to 20.09 per cent, as the number of samples tested increased to 62,885 in the past day. The overall positivity rate of 1.599 crore samples is 6.46 per cent.

Recovery rate has been 90.57 per cent, with 4,304 patients being discharged on Sunday. Recoveries have thus increased to 9,36,143. There are 89,732 active Coronavirus cases in the state, with majority of patients being in home isolation.

New deaths have been the highest in Krishna district, which reported 12 fatalities.

Kodandarama on
Garuda VahanamDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, APRIL 25

TTD organised the holiest and grandeur of all vahanas, Garuda Vahana, on Sunday night, the fifth day of the annual Brahmotsavams of Sri Kodandarama Swamy Temple. The festivities of vahana seva were conducted in ekantham inside the temple in view of the Covid-19 guidelines.

Garuda is not only a chariot but also a confidante, a friend, a pedestal and an iconic flag of Mahavishnu. The utsava idols of Sri Kodandarama Swamy on the majestic vahana are a cynosure for all devotees. Garuda Seva is held in reverence in over 108 countries across the world.

Lord Sri Ramachandra in Mohini alankaram held in ekantham on the fifth day, Sunday morning of the ongoing Brahmotsavams at the ancient Sri Kodandaramaswami temple. Mohini avatar is symbolic of Lord's mystic powers to rule over evil with his mesmerising

looks as Universal Damsel.

After the morning vahana seva the utsava idols of Swamy and His consorts were rendered traditional Snapana thirumanjanam. Temple AEO Muralidhar, superintendent Venkateshaiah, temple inspector Dhananjeyulu and other staff were present.

Sitarama Kalyanam today: SVBC to live telecast

The Sri Sitarama Kalyanam, the grand highlight of the ongoing Sri Ramanavami Brahmotsavams, will be conducted on Monday in ekantham due to the Covid-19 guidelines and will be live telecast by the SVBC.

The awe-inspiring celebrations awaited by the devotees across the globe will be held at the Kalyana Mandapam inside the famous Sri Kodandarama Swamy temple of Vontimitta. TTD has appealed to devotees to witness the majestic celebrations on the SVBC channel from their homes and beget the Lord's blessings.



Srirama rides Garuda Vahanam on Sunday.

Over 50 historical
sculptures in ruinsDC CORRESPONDENT
MAHBUBNAGAR, APRIL 25

More than 50 sculptures of historical importance representing Jaina, Saivite and Saktite religions were found scattered, and in a state of neglect, at Kankal village in Pudur mandal of Vikarabad district.

Based on the information given by president of the Naillamala Nature Foundation Patnam Krishnaraju, Dr E. Sivanagireddy, archaeologist and CEO, Culture Centre of Vijayawada and Amaravati, rushed to the spot to examine the sculptures.

Dr Reddy revealed that the sculptures found near the Ganesha, Veerabhadra and Pochamma temples included a two-headed Ganesha, a Saptamatraka Panel, a Parsvanatha Jaina idol, and a paadastal of Vardhamana Mahavira carved with lions, among others. He said that the different structures display the iconographical

and artistic styles of different dynasties that ruled Telangana.

Further, Dr Reddy said that there are two inscriptions, dating back to the twelfth or thirteenth century, in Telugu-Kannada script. One was at the Veerabhadra temple and the other at Namagadda temple.

Pallekurva Santosha Viranna said that these inscriptions were copied by the Department of Archaeology and Museums some 15 years ago, and they have been waiting for the historical consent from the department. She added that there was a stepped well on the outskirts of the village, which was in ruins and required immediate attention.

Further, she stated that sculptures were scattered in the fields around the village.

Based on the historical and archaeological significance of the sculptures, Dr Reddy appealed to the government to preserve them for posterity.

ILLEGAL | PROPERTY

Officials alleged that the owners of the property encroached the national highway
GVMC officials demolish TD leader Palla's buildingDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 25

Town planning officials of the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) demolished a five-storey commercial building which was being developed by prominent leader of the Telugu Dsam Palla Srinivas Rao and his family, at old Gajuwaka, early on Sunday morning.

The officials, who were accompanied by a large number of police personnel, alleged that the owners of the property

encroached the national highway for raising the building in old Gajuwaka to an extent of 636 square yards.

According to one official, the road's width, which was 80 metres according to the 2006 master plan, had now been reduced to 60 metres.

Rao and his brothers had a heated argument with the GVMC and police officials, alleging that the demolition was illegal. He said they had obtained a proper plan from the GVMC in 2019 and had followed all rules and regula-

- The road's width which was 80 metres according to the 2006 master plan, had now been reduced to 60 metres.
- The former Gajuwaka MLA and his brothers had planned to construct a five-storied commercial building

tions of the municipal body.

The former Gajuwaka MLA and his brothers had planned to construct a five-storied commercial

building with a cellar, and had finalised an agreement with a well-known jeweller for the lease of one floor of the building.

While addressing the media, Rao blamed Rajya Sabha member and national general secretary of the YSRC, V. Vijaya Sai Reddy for the demolition.

“Reddy had invited me to join the YSRC and offered me the post of mayor, which I declined. He developed a grudge against me and today, he got the building demolished,” he said.

Visakhapatnam East MLA Velagapudi

Ramakrishnababu told reporters at a press conference that the ruling YSRC government was only targeting the properties of TD leaders. “It has nothing to do with GVMC laws. The demolition was an act of vengeance,”

Ramakrishnababu said, while blaming Reddy. TD vice president Pasarla Prasad said they would pay back in their own currency after coming to power.

“It is mindless to go for demolitions at times of Covid-19 and night curfew,” he said.

SHORT TAKES

GAMBLING ON
RISE IN THE EG
DISTRICTDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 25

Police have faced criticism for failing to curb gambling in East Godavari district despite strict orders from Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and other senior police officials.

Recently, four police officials were suspended for failing to curb gambling, and for their involvement in it. Gambling, wherein people play cards, hold cockfights and other such activities, remains unchecked in several parts of the district, including Virava, Gokivada, Jamulapalli, Madhavapuram and Pithapuram.

Recently, cockfighting tournaments were organised on a large-scale on Rama Navami, even as the police buckled under pressure from the politicians.

As the gambling issue came to light, Eluru Range DIG K.V. Mohan Rao suspended Pithampuram circle inspector Ramachandra Rao and Pithampuram rural sub-inspector Pardha Saradhi for their involvement and failure to control gambling. In Mummidivaram, sub-inspector K. Nagarjuna and assistant sub-inspector G. Zamindar were suspended for playing cards.

In raids conducted on gambling dens during Sankranti, Rs 6.50 lakh was seized, but was allegedly not included in the case. Amalapuram DSP Y. Madhava Reddy inquired into the matter and submitted a report, following which the liable police officials were suspended.

According to some police personnel, the suspended officials had just yielded to political power, and when a police complaint was filed against them, the politicians failed to lend any support.

Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayeem Asmi said, "There will be no tolerance towards any anti-social activities, in particular, any type of gambling activities, and if any police officer is involved, they shall be strictly punished."

He said that society is suffering due to Covid-19 and asked the police officials to perform their duties responsibly. "All steps are being taken to curb gambling," he added.

Meanwhile, Mummidivaram circle inspector Janaki Ram conducted raids on gambling dens in Mattadipalem, Karriyani Revu and other areas, and has filed cases.

Law and order issues were also reported under Pedapudi police limits after clashes broke out between two groups. The police were criticised once again for failing to maintain law and order.

TENSION AT
ALLAMCHARLARA
JUPALEM VILLAGEDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 25

There was tension for some time on Sunday in Allamcharlara Rajupalem village of T. Narasapuram mandal of West Godavari District as there were clashes between the Forest Department and some of the village people over a piece of land. The T. Narasapuram police said that some of the village people entered into the land and cleaned it for cultivation. Knowing the information, the forest officials rushed to the spot and tried to prevent them and they claimed the land belongs to the forest department. The village people said that the land was given to them by the government which gave pattas also. In the process, there was jostling among them and the forest officials were ejected from the land. The forest department officials lodged a complaint with the T. Narasapuram police. The T. Narasapuram Station House Officer K. Ramakrishna said that cases were booked against seven persons in the village and case is being investigated. He said that an inquiry will be done on the land by verifying the records.

● There was jostling among them and the forest officials were ejected from the land. The forest department officials lodged a complaint with the T. Narasapuram police. The T. Narasapuram Station House Officer K. Ramakrishna said that cases were booked against seven persons in the village and case is being investigated. He said that an inquiry will be done on the land by verifying the records.



Montessori Educational Institutions charitable trust alumni Dr Ammanna, K.S.N. Prasad presenting medical equipment and Covid funds to collector A.M.D. Imtiaz at the camp office in Vijayawada on Sunday.

Coronavirus cases rise
rapidly in East Godavari

6 people died in past 24 hours, 952 cases recorded, active cases 9,394

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 25

The rapid rise in the number of Covid-19 cases has become a matter of great concern among officials and the general public in East Godavari district.

As per the government bulletin, six people had died in the past 24 hours, 952 cases were recorded and the total number of active cases rose to 9,394, on Sunday. Former Rajamahendravaram municipal councillor and her husband also passed away due to Covid-19.

Even as people affected with the virus scramble to find a bed at a Covid-19 hospital, many are suffering from respiratory issues, with some even struggling to breathe. Doctors are struggling to treat people whose oxygen levels drop drastically and are unable to provide oxygen due to respiratory problems.

According to some relatives of patients, hospitals are denying entry to those in a serious condition.

G. Harsha Kumar, the former MP from Amalapuram, appealed to the government to pay more attention to Covid-19 treatment, and also provide full information to patients about where they can avail said treatment.

He further said that more tests should be conducted, and people should be made aware of what to do in case of any emergency and where to get themselves tested.

Mr Kumar maintained that the government had failed so far in providing treatment to patients and said that the government is not able to confirm whether patients are suffering from Covid-19 or not. Meanwhile, East Godavari's district collector, D. Muralidhar Reddy, who inspected government hospitals at Rajamahendravaram on Sunday, said that there was no need for panic as even though there were 10,000 active cases in the district currently, this number was smaller as compared to the previously recorded 25,000 cases.

Advising people to remain cautious, he asked them to use masks, hand sanitizers, and maintain

Pvt hospitals' fees under scanner

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, APRIL 25

The district vigilance department has focused on allegations that several private hospitals in the district, including Kadapa, are charging exorbitant fees for corona treatment. Hospital bills are being checked by relatives of patients. Covid-19 patients are treated free of charge in government hospitals. As the number of patients increased, some private hospitals were also given permission to provide treatment under the Arogyasri scheme. This has led to allegations that

some private hospital managements were exploiting patients. Covid-19 patients were admitted to six hospitals in Kadapa, four in Proddatur and one in Rayachoti under the Arogyasri scheme in the district. A few other hospitals have also applied for corona treatments under Arogyasri. Permits are likely to be granted within one to two days.

There are allegations that some private hospitals that provide medical care have opened up to exploitation. There are allegations that they rob patients by intimidating them suffering from corona when they go to the

hospital tired and coughing. They are demanding a higher amount without providing treatment at the price prescribed by the government. If you want a bed in a hospital, it seems that it will not be given unless you deposit lakhs of rupees in advance. In Kadapa, one hospital is charging a deposit of ₹3 lakh, while another hospital is charging a deposit of ₹1.5 lakh and another ₹2 lakh, relatives of the patients said. Joint Collector Saikant Verma, who oversees Covid-19 treatments, inspected the two hospitals and fined each of them ₹5 lakh.

In this context, the district vigilance department has also focused on the performance of hospitals. Additional superintendent of Police, vigilance and Enforcement Borugudla Umamaheshwar speaking to Deccan Chronicle said that if the owners of private hospitals anywhere are charging more than the prescribed fees, the patient's relatives should file a complaint with the respective receipts. He said people can complain through WhatsApp to their mobile number to 8886564694 if they are in trouble anywhere through private hospitals.

JANA SENA PULLS
UP STATE GOVT FOR
ESCALATION OF COSTDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 25

Jana Sena demanded the Water Resources Minister P Anil Kumar Yadav to explain reasons for the escalation of Rs. 89 Cr estimated modernizing works of the Sarvepalli Canal in Nellore to Rs. 102 Cr despite ruling party claims over saving a huge amount of money through the Reverse Tender Process.

Pointing to plans to construct the retaining wall of the canal only up to Muthukur Gate, Jana Sena leader K Vinod Kumar Reddy expressed surprise over not extending the facility to Nellore rural constituency.

Speaking to media here on Sunday, he alleged that the ruling party leaders are more concerned on the welfare of the Benami contractors rather than the city development.

Vinod Kumar also found fault with the ruling party leaders for ignoring their assurance to clear encroachments on the irrigation canals that flow through Nellore city.

He lamented over the plight of people living on the banks of the canal as they would be displaced because of modernisation works.

Srikakulam district records
highest Covid-19 cases in stateDC CORRESPONDENT
SRIKAKULAM, APRIL 25

"There is no shortage of oxygen in the district, and efforts are being made to add more beds, keeping in view the growing number of Covid-19 positive patients," said district collector J. Niwas.

Speaking to the media after a meeting with nodal officials of the hospital, on Sunday, Niwas stated that medical professionals and others were told not to waste oxygen. He said that

help desks have been established at all hospitals to provide information to patients and their relatives. Dependents can also ask about the health condition of patients at these help desks.

He said there were 1,750 beds in the district, and 1143 are undergoing treatment. We will be adding another 200 shortly in Rajam, Palakonda, Tekkali and Srikakulam where more cases are being reported every day, he added.

Further, he stated that there were 80 patients on ventilator, and 278 on oxygen support.

The death toll is also less when compared to the number of positive cases, he said.

Over 1,680 positive cases were reported in the day, the highest in the state for the second consecutive day. Health officials said that while 9,726 people are in home isolation, 991 in Covid-19 care centres and 1,143 in hospitals. Total active cases are 11,860.

● Even as people affected with the virus scramble to find a bed at a Covid-19 hospital, many are suffering from respiratory and some struggling to breathe.

social distance. He also urged people to stay indoors and avoid unnecessary movement in public places.

Additionally, he advised the doctors to use oxygen only as per requirement as there was a nationwide shortage in supply. He said that 18 types of services were available for patients, and the government will give permission for Covid-19 treatment to more hospitals.

Traders shut shops
by 2 pm in NelloreDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 25

Amid a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases, traders volunteered to restrict their working hours from 6 am to 2 pm in Buchireddypalem civic body limits.

Commissioner Srinivasa Rao appreciated the traders for their initiative, adding

that a new Covid-19 care centre will be opened in Ramachandrapuram, near Buchireddypalem, as per the directions of the district collector.

Rao also urged Covid-19 positive patients to call the care centre in case of any emergency, at any time. The Covid-19 care centre can be reached at 91544 40101.

Police perform
last rites for two
orphaned bodiesDC CORRESPONDENT
VIZIANAGARAM, APRIL 25

The final rites of two people, who had passed away due to Covid-19 and ignored by their kin, was performed by the state police on Sunday.

Gurula police performed the last rites of an aged man after his relatives and locals backed away. K. Lakshmana Rao, the 70-year-old victim, was a native of Seetharamunipeta under Nellimarla mandal in Vizianagaram district.

The police said that Rao, who was found under a tree, was not in great shape. Although the head constable of the police station had given Rao food and water, the old man passed away on Sunday.

Due to fear of contracting the virus, neither his distant relatives nor the locals came forward to shift his body to the cremation grounds.

This was when the Gurula police, led by Sub-inspector P. Neelavathi, decided to step in, and arranged a make-shift

stretcher to shift his body to the burial ground. She also monitored the entire process at the burial ground.

The police then performed Rao's funeral, following all Covid-19 norms.

The sub-inspector appreciated the team for rising up to the occasion.

In another incident, a 45-year-old man, who died in a hospital with suspected Covid-19 symptoms in Srikakulam, was cremated by the police, with the help of the Red-cross organization, on Sunday.

A few weeks ago, a woman sub-inspector named K. Sirisha had carried the body of an 80-year-old homeless person for over one km as nobody claimed the body, at Adavi Kotturu in Srikakulam.

In March this year, Rambilli police in Visakhapatnam district carried a semi-decomposed, unidentified dead body, which was found washed ashore at Seethapalam, for over three km along the coast when locals had backed off.

Woman killed
in bus accidentDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 25

A woman was killed and three others sustained grievous injuries when a state-run Road Transport Corporation bus hit them on a busy road in Tirupati city on Sunday morning.

East Division Circle Inspector Siva Prasad Reddy said the driver of the APSRTC bus travelling from the Tirupati Railway Station to Tirumala lost its control as it entered into the Karnaal Veedhi.

It rammed into three two-wheelers and two electric poles, besides hitting some pedestrians.

Mr Reddy said the damage would have been more if the bus had not hit the third electric pole and came to a halt. A pedestrian – Ammulu (32), who was grievously injured as the bus ran

over her, has died on the spot, while her brother Reddy Prakash and one two others received serious injuries.

The injured persons were immediately shifted to the S.V.R. Ruia Government General Hospital and they were being treated now.

They were out of danger and based on their complaint, East division police have registered a case and took the driver Gopal of Alipiri bus depot into custody and further investigation is being done, CI Mr Reddy said.

Meanwhile, police suspect that the accident might have occurred due to the negligence of the driver and the passengers in the bus also alleged that the driver was unable to control his sleep and hit the electric poles.

Curfew impact



Bus stand wears a deserted look at the departure block due to Covid-19 in Vijayawada on Sunday. — DC

OIL | PRICING

Leaders thanked CM Jagan Mohan for defending farmers

Oil palm farmers welcome HC verdict

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 25

The national oil palm farmers' association and the AP oilpalm farmers' association have welcomed the high court verdict in support of the state government decision vis-a-vis revising the pricing structure for oil palm farmers.

Oil palm processing companies had challenged the government decision in court, saying that while this helped oil palm farmers it hurt their business.

The leaders of the two associations thanked chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, minister for agri-

● Oil palm processing companies had challenged the government decision in court, saying that while this helped oil palm farmers it hurt their business.

culture Kurasala Kannababu and others for defending farmers' interests in court. National oil palm farmers' association general secretary Dr K. Kranthi Kumar Reddy pointed out that the AP government had issued order on January 19 last, fixing the oil extraction ratio percentage (OER%) at 18.682 for the oil-year 2020-21 to help oil palm

farmers.

This was done as these farmers were incurring losses due to the low OER percentage.

Reddy said that during the term of the Telugu Desam government, the OER was less and hence oil palm farmers took up the matter with Jagan during his Padayatra. Jagan promised an increase of OER percentage and fulfilled the promise later by issuing the GO.

"The oil palm companies severely opposed the order and filed petitions in the high court. Then we requested the government to present strong arguments to help the farm-

ers," Reddy said.

He said the government and state's advocates succeeded in protecting the interests of the oil palm growers as is evident from the dismissal of the petitions by the high court.

A delegation of oil palm farmers met adviser on public affairs to the government Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy and thanked the Jagan government for its help to oil palm farmers to the tune of ₹200 crore.

They urged the government to immediately direct the companies to pay the arrears in view of the high court verdict without delay.



Shopkeepers and their family members argue with the police personnel as GVMC officials demolish the encroached shops on the beach road near Rushikonda in Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

— DC

SHORT TAKES

PT RAJAN MISHRA DIES OF COVID IN DELHI HOSPITAL

New Delhi, April 25: Renowned Hindustani classical vocalist Pt Rajan Mishra died due to Covid-19 complications at a hospital here on Sunday evening, his nephew said. He was 70.

Mishra, who along with his brother Sajjan Mishra was one of the foremost exponents of *khayal gayaki*, had a heart attack in the afternoon and then another in the evening, his nephew Amit said.

"Pandit Rajan Mishra ji passed away at around 6.30 in Delhi's St Stephen hospital. He had Covid-19 and was admitted to the hospital. He had taken the first dose of the vaccine about 15-20 days ago. He had a heart attack in the afternoon and he had another attack at around 5.30 pm," Amit said.

Mishra was a Padma Bhushan awardee. The brothers belonged to the Banaras gharana.

ODISHA SEES UNRELENTED SURGE IN CASES

AKSHAY KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 25

The Covid-19 surge in Odisha continued unabated on Sunday as the state recorded 6,116 new cases while seven patients succumbed to the disease.

The fresh surge pushed the state's Coronavirus positive tally to 4,07,457 while the death toll climbed to 1,988. The active cases in the state stood at 45,949 while 3,59,467 patients have recovered so far.

According to state health and family welfare department data, of the fresh cases spread across 30 districts, 3,546 were detected among people in quarantine and 2,570 were local infections.

Two fatalities were reported from Rayagada. One death each was reported from Ganjam, Kalahandi, Khordha, Puri and Sundargarh districts.

TMC CANDIDATE KAJAL SINHA PASSES AWAY

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, APRIL 25

The fresh wave of Covid-19 claimed the life of the third Assembly election candidate: Kajal Sinha of the Trinamul Congress while infected another: Babul Supriyo of the BJP in West Bengal as the daily spike in cases crossed 15,000 mark in the state with 57 fresh deaths in the last 24 hours.

According to the state health department, 15,889 persons have contracted Covid-19 in an all-time high during the second spell of the pandemic since Saturday when the figure of fresh infection stood at 14,281.

Out of 15,889 new cases, 3,774 alone are in Kolkata.

Sinha who contested from Khardah in North 24 Parganas was admitted to Infectious Diseases Hospital in Beliaghata on April 21 after he tested positive for the deadly virus.

Two days later he was put on a ventilator as his condition worsened. At around 9.45 am the 58-year-old died there.

BHOPAL: MAXIMUM BODIES CREMATED ON SINGLE DAY

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, APRIL 25

A crematorium here on Saturday witnessed cremation of a record number of bodies of Covid victims amid a spike in Coronavirus cases in Madhya Pradesh. A record number of 118 bodies were cremated in the Bhabhada Ghat crematorium on the outskirts of Bhopal on Saturday. Of them, 100 bodies were cremated with corona guidelines, according to the records of the crematorium.

"So many bodies have never been cremated in a single day in the history of Bhabhada Ghat crematorium", Mamtesh Sharma, secretary of the crematorium told this newspaper on Sunday.

He described how pyres were lighted in both the phase one and phase two sections of the crematorium literally round-the-clock since six in the morning till past night on Saturday.

"The horrific sight will shake even a hard soul. I have never seen such a mass funeral of bodies going almost round-the-clock in a crematorium", Sharma said.



Connaught Place street wears a deserted look during the Covid-induced lockdown in New Delhi on Sunday. With the positivity rate as high as 36 per cent in the past few days, the lockdown in the national capital was extended. — PTI

Delhi extends lockdown till May 3 as cases rise rapidly

Services of courier outlets, electricians, shops selling books permitted

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA & SUNIL THAPLIYAL | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday announced the extension of the ongoing lockdown in the national capital for another week, saying that the severity of Covid-19 was unabated, and the positivity rate has been as high as 36 per cent in the past few days.

The lockdown imposed on April 19 night will now continue till 5 am on Monday, May 3. Before the extension, it was due to end at 5 am on April 26. "We will have to watch the situation for a few more days on whether the cases decrease or increase," he said.

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority, in an order for extension of the lockdown, has allowed the services of courier outlets, electricians and plumbers, repair of water purifiers, and shops selling books and electric fans.

The Chief Minister said the onslaught of the Coronavirus has not subsided even as the govern-

3.52 lakh more cases added as 2,688 die, 28 lakh active

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

India on Sunday reported 3,52,541 new Covid-19 cases, 2,688 deaths and 2,14,712 discharges in the last 24 hours, as per Union health ministry. India's total tally of Covid-19 cases has climbed to 1,73,04,308, while active cases have crossed the 28-lakh mark, according to the Union health ministry.

The death toll has increased to 1,94,998. The active cases have increased to 28,09,308, this comprises

15.82 per cent of the total infections. The national Covid-19 recovery rate has further dropped to 83.05 per cent. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease has surged to 1,42,92,791, while the case fatality rate has further dropped to 1.13 per cent, the data said.

West Bengal registers highest single-day spike of 15,889 Covid-19 cases, 57 more fatalities. Kolkata alone accounted for 2,970. One of two persons undergoing RT-PCR tests in Kolkata and its suburbs is

turning out to be Covid-positive. In the rest of the state, one of four RT-PCR report is Covid positive. That is a five-fold jump from the beginning of the month, when only one of 20 tests was positive.

Maharashtra reports 66,191 new Covid-19 cases, 61,450 discharges, and 832 deaths in the last 24 hours. Active cases-6,98,354, Total discharges-35,30,060, Death toll-64,760. Mumbai recorded 5,542 new cases, its lowest single-day rise in infections so far this month, the civic body said.

per cent today," he said.

To keep a close watch on oxygen availability, the Delhi government has decided that manufacturers, suppliers and hospitals will update the supply and consumption data every two hours on a portal set up by it.

"This is to ensure the Delhi government knows where a shortage might be felt and is able to divert resources in that direction in time," he said.

He said the Centre had further increased Delhi's oxygen quota by 10 MT per day and hoped the chaotic

situation due to the oxygen crisis in Delhi will end in a few days.

"The Centre has increased Delhi's quota from 480 MT to 490 MT per day. But we are yet to receive the full quota. Currently only 330-335 tonnes per day supply is being received by us," he said.

The Chief Minister said his government is getting a lot of support from the Centre and both are properly coordinating to solve the oxygen supply problem. Kejriwal, who had written letters to the Chief Ministers of several states for helping Delhi with spare oxygen and tankers, added, "Negotiations have begun with some states and I will update you about any positive results as and when they come."

Noting that the ministers and officers of his government were working overnight to ensure steady oxygen supplies to hospitals, he said: "I do not claim all our efforts have reaped successful results. In some cases, we have failed, and in others we have managed to ensure oxygen supply to their destinations."

Yogi threatens to slap NSA on oxygen rumours

SANJAY BASAK | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

At a time when Uttar Pradesh has recorded over 35,000 new Covid cases and over 200 deaths in just 24 hours, the highest since the pandemic broke out a year ago, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath asserted that there was "no shortage of oxygen" in the state and asked officials to invoke the National Security Act and the "Gangsters Act" against all those spreading "rumours" on the social media and attempting to "spoil the atmosphere".

For the Chief Minister, who announced this at a virtual press conference with select journalists on Saturday, the actual problem is "black marketing and hoarding" of oxygen cylinders.

Claiming that there was "no shortage of oxygen at any Covid hospital, be it private or government", he said the "main problem is black marketing and hoarding, and stern action will be taken against the culprits". It was reported in a regional paper that the Chief Minister had said the "state government will pay for the treatment of those Covid patients who could not get hospital admission".

According to the local daily, the Chief Minister said those who failed to get admission into hospitals should get them-

● **YOGI SAID** main problem is black marketing and hoarding, and stern action will be taken against the culprits.

● **OFFICIALS TOLD** to invoke the NSA, Gangsters Act against all those spreading "rumours".

selves "treated on their own and the state government would bear the medical expenses".

The Chief Minister said it would be a "huge mistake to take Covid as a normal viral fever. I am also in its grip. I have been following all Covid protocols since April 13 while in isolation".

As the UP Chief Minister planned to tackle the oxygen crisis, reports indicated the country during the last 24 hours recorded 3,49,391 new Covid-19 cases and 2,767 deaths.

Reports of oxygen crisis in Delhi's hospitals continued to pour in. A private hospital indicated it had "barely an hour's supply".

A TV channel reported that New Delhi's Fortis Escort Heart Institute, "which has at least 100 patients on oxygen support, said it would not admit any more patients".

The oxygen situation remained grim at Lok Nayak Hospital, the largest Covid-19 facility in Delhi.



Relatives of a Covid-19 patient pleading to media for their support in providing oxygen for their relative admitted in the hospital in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

C'garh: Lockdown extended in 20 dists

DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, APRIL 25

The Bhopal government on Sunday announced to extend lockdown in 20 districts amid surge in Coronavirus cases in Chhattisgarh.

While lockdown has been extended from April 26 to May 5 in the districts of

Rajnandgaon, Dhamtari, Kanker, Kondagaon, Jashpur, Surajpur, Bemetra, Balrampur, Ambikapur and Narayanpur, total shutdown has been extended from April 26 to May six in the districts of Raipur, Durg, Mahasamund, Balod, Bilashpur, Jagdalpur,

Raigarh, Kawardha and Sukma.

Meanwhile, Chhattisgarh has reported more than 16,000 positive cases for the second day.

While the state reported 16,731 Coronavirus positive cases on Saturday, 16,750 positive cases were reported on April 22.

The state recorded 203 deaths on Saturday and 219 deaths on Friday.

"The infection rate has increased by four times in the last four weeks in Chhattisgarh", health minister T.S. Singhdeo said. The tally of positive cases in the state has reached 6,396.96 and the tally of toll due to the virus increased to 7,111.

Twitter, FB take down 100 posts

New Delhi, April 25: Twitter and other social media platforms have removed about 100 posts and URLs after the government asked them to remove content that was critical of the handling of the current medical crisis or spreading fake news around the pandemic.

Twitter said it has notified the impacted account holders of its action taken in response to a legal request from the Indian government, while Facebook did not comment on the issue.

Sources said the companies have complied with the order. However, it was-

n't immediately known what the removed posts were. Meanwhile, government sources said the IT ministry, on the recommendation of the ministry of home affairs, asked the social media platforms to remove the posts and URLs (uniform resource locators) to "prevent obstructions in the fight against the pandemic and disruption of public order due to the said posts."

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

in the society by using unrelated, old and out of the context images or visuals, communally sensitive posts and misinformation about Covid-19 norms.

Although reports suggested that the posts critical of government handling of the medical crisis were asked to be removed, sources said the government is open to criticism and suggestions in the collective fight against Covid-19.

However, they said it is necessary to take action against those users who are misusing social media during this grave humanitarian crisis for unethical purposes.

Twitter removed or restricted access to more than 50 posts in the past one month at the behest of the government, including tweets that criticised its handling of the pandemic. Other posts removed showed pictures and videos of a recent Maoist attack in Chhattisgarh.

Earlier this year, more than 500 accounts were suspended and access to hundreds of others in India blocked after the government ordered the microblogging platform to restrain the spread of misinformation and inflammatory content related to farmers' protests. — PTI

CSIR | SURVEYS

10.14% sero-positivity suggests India had large pool of recovered immune subjects

Recurrence of virus due to lack of antibodies: Report

New Delhi, April 25: The recurrence of Coronavirus outbreak in March could have been due to lack of "meaningful antibodies" in seropositive people after a peak in September last year, suggests a survey by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

The CSIR conducted a sero-survey on 10,427 people comprising the staff members of its 40 laboratories, including contractual employees, and their family members from 17 states and two union territories.

In 10,427 people, the average sero positivity was 10.14 per cent. The survey

suggested that the neutralising antibodies declined significantly after five-six months, making people prone to reinfections.

The cases in the country peaked in September 2020 and there was a nationwide decline of new cases starting in October, said Shantanu Sengupta, one of the lead authors of the paper. "Our data shows that while anti-NC (nucleocapsid) antibodies provide long-lasting evidence of viral exposure or infection, about 20 per cent of seropositive individuals lack meaningful neutralisation activity after 5-6 months."

"Using more stringent measures (more than 30

per cent inhibition of surrogate receptor-spike protein binding), the loss of neutralisation may be even higher. We speculate that this may be related to recurrence of outbreaks in March 2021 after the peak in September 2020," the paper said.

India is currently witnessing a massive surge in infections with logging a daily case count of over 3,00,000 on four consecutive days.

According to the paper, the aggregate sero-positivity of 10.14 per cent in its multi-centre study suggests India had a large pool of recovered immune subjects by September

2020, especially amongst its high contact workers and people using public transport, leading to a decline in new infections.

"However, the duration of such immunity may not be sufficient to prevent future outbreaks, even in highly affected regions, the paper said.

States like Maharashtra have witnessed an explosion of cases since March.

The present study, which recruited subjects from 24 cities in India, provides an important and timely snapshot of the spread of SARS CoV2 pandemic across India shortly before the peak of new cases, the paper said. — PTI

SERO-POSITIVITY 'LOWER' IN SMOKERS, VEGETARIANS; O BLOOD GROUP 'SAFER'

New Delhi, April 25: Smokers and vegetarians were found to have lower sero-positivity, while those with blood group 'O' may be less susceptible to Coronavirus, according to a survey by an top research body.

The pan-India serosurvey, conducted by the CSIR, studied the presence of antibodies against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes the Coronavirus, and their neutralisation capability to infer possible risk factors for infection.

The study, done by a team of 140 doctors and scientists, assessed 10,427 adult individuals working in more than 40 CSIR laboratories and centres in urban and semi-urban settings, and their family members. These people voluntarily participated in the study.

The survey suggested that despite Covid-19 being a respiratory disease, smoking might be acting as first line of defence due to its role in increasing the mucous production. — PTI

IN BRIEF

Five held over France attack

Paris, April 25: French authorities detained a fifth person on Sunday in an anti-terrorism investigation seeking to identify potential accomplices and motives after a police official was fatally stabbed.

French police killed the 37-year-old Tunisian attacker shortly after he stabbed the unarmed employee on Friday at the entrance of her police station in Rambouillet. Anti-terrorism prosecutor Jean-Francois Ricard said police are questioning a cousin of the suspect. The suspect's father, a couple who had provided him with an address for mail and administration, and another cousin were also being questioned, Ricard said.

China: 3 ships commissioned

Beijing, April 25: China has commissioned three main battle warships, including a nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, a large destroyer and the country's largest amphibious assault ship that can carry around 30 helicopters and hundreds of troops.

The ships were commissioned at a ceremony on Saturday attended by President Xi Jinping at Sanya, China's main naval base in the disputed South China Sea in Hainan province. The vessels commissioned included the Type 075 amphibious assault ships, which can carry an estimated 30 helicopters and hundreds of troops. It is China's largest amphibious assault ship.

European gear on China moon probe

Beijing, April 25: China will launch its next robot lunar lander in 2024, and it will carry equipment from France, Sweden, Russia and Italy, the official news agency reported.

Plans call for Chang'e 6 to land near the lunar south pole and collect samples for return to Earth, the programme's chief designer, Hu Hao, said at a conference Saturday, according to the *Xinhua News Agency*. The Chang'e landers are part of Chinese space exploration efforts that also include a probe that is preparing to land a robot rover on Mars. There are also plans for a crewed orbital station, landing a human on the moon and retrieving soil from an asteroid.

Fashion designer Elbaz dies at 59

Paris, April 25: Israeli fashion designer Alber Elbaz, best known for being at the helm of Lanvin from 2001 to 2015, has died at the age of 59, luxury conglomerate Richemont said.

In a statement released on Sunday, Richemont's chairman Johann Rupert said "it was with shock and enormous sadness that I heard of Alber's sudden passing.

Alber had a richly deserved reputation as one of the industry's brightest and most beloved figures.

"I was always taken by his intelligence, sensitivity, generosity and unbridled creativity. He was a man of exceptional warmth and talent, and his singular vision, sense of beauty and empathy leave an indelible impression," Rupert said.

PRO-TRUMP FILM 'ABSOLUTE PROOF' WORST AT RAZZIES

Los Angeles, April 25: The election-fraud film "Absolute Proof", singer Sia's heavily panned directorial debut "Music" and Rudy Giuliani, former New York City mayor, were the top winners at the 2021 Razzie Awards, given to the worst movies and performances of the year. The Golden Raspberry Awards, popularly known as the Razzies, were held a day before the Oscars night, as is the tradition.

"Absolute Proof", directed by My Pillow CEO Mike Lindell, which claimed that the 2020 presidential election was stolen from former President Donald Trump, was named the worst picture at the ceremony, reported *Entertainment Weekly*. The pro-Donald Trump film also bagged the worst acting title for Lindell for his appearance in the film as himself.

Sia's "Music", which was heavily criticised for its depiction of autism, took home three awards, including worst director, worst actress for Kate Hudson, and worst supporting actress for Maddie Ziegler.

Actor-filmmaker Sacha Baron Cohen starrer "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm" won two Razzie awards, both for Giuliani for his infamous cameo in the film. The film is nominated in two categories at the Oscars.

82 killed in Baghdad hospital fire

Initial reports suggest oxygen cylinder blast caused death of the Coronavirus patients

Baghdad, April 25: Iraq's Interior Ministry said Sunday that 82 people died and 110 were injured in a catastrophic fire that broke out in the intensive care unit of a Baghdad hospital tending to severe Coronavirus patients.

Negligence on the part of hospital authorities has been blamed for the Saturday night fire, which initial reports suggest was caused when an oxygen cylinder exploded in the ward of Ibn al-Khatib hospital.

Iraq's prime minister fired key hospital officials hours after the catastrophic incident. Among the dead were at least 28 patients on ventilators battling severe symptoms of the virus, tweeted Ali al-Bayati, a spokesman of the country's independent Human Rights Commission.

The commission is a semi-official body. Firefighters rushed to battle the flames that raged across the second floor of the hospital. Civil defence teams put out flames until the early hours of the morning. Ambulances transported dozens of wounded.

The Health Ministry said at least 200 people were rescued from the scene. Doctors at the scene were frazzled by the chaos unfolding around them. They said numerous burned bodies were carried out by paramedics from the hospital floor. The fire came as Iraq grapples with a severe second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic. Daily virus cases now average around 8,000, the highest since Iraq began recording infection rates early last year. At least 15,200 people have died of Coronavirus in Iraq among a total of at least 100,000 confirmed cases. In response to the fire, Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi fired the director-general of the Baghdad Health Department in the al-Rusafa area, where the hospital is located.

He also fired the director of Ibn al-Khatib Hospital and its director of engineering and maintenance, according to a statement from the Health Ministry and his office. After the fire first broke out, Al-Kadhimi held an emergency meeting at the headquarters of the Baghdad Operations Command, which coordinates Iraqi security forces, according to a statement on his Twitter account. In the meeting he said the incident amounted to negligence.

"Negligence in such matters is not a mistake, but a crime for which all negligent parties must bear responsibility," he said. He gave Iraqi authorities 24 hours to present the results of an investigation. — AP

Both Britain and the European Union (EU) on Sunday responded to India's urgent calls for help against the Covid storm ravaging the country, with Britain saying that "ventilators and oxygen concentrator devices due to leave UK today" for India and that the "first package is due to arrive in Delhi



Iraqis wait for their relatives who are patients with Covid-19 in front of the Al-Khatib Hospital in Baghdad, on Sunday, after a fire erupted in the medical facility reserved for the most severe Coronavirus cases.

— AFP

UK, EU respond to India's call for help to fight Covid

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

British PM Boris Johnson said, "We stand side by side with India as a friend

early on Tuesday, with further shipments later this week".

Britain said "nine airline container loads of supplies, including 495 oxygen concentrators, 120 non-invasive ventilators and 20 manual ventilators" are being sent to India this week and that "the support follows a request from India".

British PM Boris Johnson said, "We stand side by side with India as a friend

and partner during what is a deeply concerning time in the fight against Covid-19."

The EU too said that India had requested it for assistance, adding that it is "pooling resources to respond rapidly to India's request for assistance via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism", including Oxygen and medicines. The EU also said it "stands in full solidarity with the Indian people".

BANGLADESH DHAKA SHUTS LAND BORDERS WITH INDIA

Dhaka, April 25: Bangladesh will close its land borders with India for the next 14 days due to the unprecedented surge of Coronavirus cases in the neighbouring nation, Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen announced here on Sunday.

India logged a record of 3,49,691 new Coronavirus infections in a day on Sunday, taking its total tally of Covid-19 cases to 1,69,60,172. The death toll increased to 1,92,311 with a record 2,767 daily new fatalities, according to the Union Health Ministry data. Passenger travel from India to Bangladesh via land will remain closed from Monday. — PTI

Merkel: Preparing 'support' for India

Berlin, April 25: German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Sunday her government was preparing emergency aid for India as the country struggles to cope with an explosion in Coronavirus infections.

"To the people of India I want to express my sympathy on the terrible suffering that Covid-19 has again brought over your communities," Merkel said in a message shared on Twitter by her spokesman Steffen Seibert.

"The fight against the pandemic is our common fight. Germany stands in solidarity with India and is urgently preparing a mission of support."

There were no immedi-

FM: CHINA, US DIFFERENCES CONTINUING

Beijing, April 25: The differences between the US and China are continuing as Washington is yet to find the right way to deal with Beijing while holding on to misunderstandings, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said, warning that playing the "Taiwan card" is "playing with fire".

China hoped that the Biden administration would view its development objectively and rationally, and explore with China a new path of peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, Wang, also the State Councillor, said in a video conference. — PTI

ate details about the kind of aid Germany would offer. But *Der Spiegel* weekly, citing unnamed sources, on Saturday said Germany's armed forces had received a request to help organise oxygen supplies. With a new Coronavirus variant spreading through its 1.3 billion people, India has become the world's top Coronavirus hotspot in recent days, reporting 349,691 new cases on Sunday alone.

Germany will from Monday impose new travel restrictions on passengers coming from India in a bid to curb in the spread of the new variant. — AFP

SAUDI ARABIA RIYADH TO SHIP 80MT OF OXYGEN TO NEW DELHI

Dubai, April 25: Saudi Arabia is shipping 80 metric tonnes of liquid oxygen to India as the country is running low on supplies due to an unprecedented spike in Covid cases. It is being undertaken in cooperation with the Adani group and Linde company. "Embassy of India is proud to partner with Adani group and M/s Linde in shipping much-needed 80MT liquid oxygen to India. Our heartfelt thanks to the Ministry of Health," the Indian mission tweeted. — PTI

PAKISTAN ISLAMABAD'S RELIEF OFFER TO NEW DELHI

Islamabad, April 25: Pakistan has offered to provide relief support, including ventilators, to India to help the country fight the deadly wave of Covid-19 and said the two countries can explore possible ways of further cooperation to mitigate the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The Foreign Office in a statement late Saturday night said Pakistan was ready to send specific items quickly once the modalities were worked out. — PTI

Indonesia: Sub wreckage found

Banyuwangi (Indonesia), April 25: Indonesia's military on Sunday officially said all 53 crew members from a submarine that sank and broke apart last week are dead, and that search teams had located the vessel's wreckage on the ocean floor.

The grim announcement comes a day after Indonesia said the submarine was considered sunk, not merely missing, but did not explicitly say whether the crew was dead. Officials had also said the KRI Nanggala 402's oxygen supply would have run out early Saturday, three days after vessel went missing off the resort island of Bali. "We received underwater pictures that are confirmed as the parts of the

● AN UNDERWATER robot equipped with cameras found the lost submarine was lying in at least three pieces on the ocean floor at a depth of 838 metres (2,750 feet), said Adm. Yudo Margono, the navy's chief of staff.

submarine, including its rear vertical rudder, anchors, outer pressure body, embossed dive rudder and other ship parts," military chief Hadi Tjahjanto told reporters in Bali on Sunday. "With this authentic evidence, we can declare that KRI Nanggala 402 has sunk and all the crew members are dead," Tjahjanto said.

An underwater robot equipped with cameras found the lost submarine was lying in at least three pieces on the ocean floor at a depth of 838 metres (2,750 feet), said Adm. Yudo Margono, the navy's chief of staff. That's much deeper than the KRI Nanggala 402's collapse depth of 200 metres (655 feet), at which point water pressure would be greater than the hull could withstand, according to earlier navy statements. The wreckage is located 1,500 metres (yards) to the south of the site where the submarine last dove Wednesday, off Bali's northern coast, Margono said. The underwater robot was deployed by Singaporean vessel MV Swift Rescue provided the images,

while the Indonesian vessel KRI Rigel had scanned the area where the submarine was believed to have sank using multibeam sonar and a magnetometer, Tjahjanto said. The cause of the disappearance was still uncertain.

The navy had previously said an electrical failure could have left the submarine unable to execute emergency procedures to resurface. An American reconnaissance plane, a P-8 Poseidon, landed Saturday and had been set to join the search, along with 20 Indonesian ships, four aircraft and a sonar-equipped Australian warship. The German-built diesel-powered KRI Nanggala 402 had been in service in Indonesia since 1981. — AP

INTENSE | BIDDING

Pattern forgotten as Mint continued creating silver dollars 1st \$ coins prototype auctioned for \$8.4L

Washington, April 25: A piece of copper that was struck by the US Mint in Philadelphia in 1794 and was a prototype for the fledgling nation's money was auctioned off for \$840,000, considerably more than expected, an official said.

Heritage auctions spokesman Eric Bradley said the "No Stars Flowing Hair Dollar" opened at \$312,000 when it was put up Friday evening but "in

less than a minute, intense bidding quickly pushed the coin to its final auction price of \$840,000."

The coin, formerly owned by businessman and Texas Rangers co-chairman Bob Simpson, was expected to sell for \$350,000 to \$500,000, Bradley said. While it closely resembles silver dollars that were later minted in Philadelphia, it gets its name because it is missing stars.

Jacob Lipson of Heritage Auctions said earlier that starless coins are considered by collectors and institutions as "one-of-a-kind prototypes for the silver examples that would follow." Known as a pattern, the front features the flowing hair portrait of Liberty and the date 1794, while the reverse side shows a small eagle on a rock with a wreath.

Similar starless exampl-

es are part of the Smithsonian Institution's National Numismatic Collection.

The pattern was forgotten as the Mint continued the process of creating the nation's first silver dollars. "Coin collecting lore states the unique rarity was excavated from the site of the first Philadelphia Mint before 1876," Lipson said.

That was how the coin's first owner described its history at its first auction

appearance in 1890. The pattern is corroded and not in perfect condition, Lipson said, likely because it was buried at the site of the original Mint.

There are some scratches and other marks on its brown surfaces. It has traded hands eight times, according to the auction house, Simpson, 73, purchased it along with other patterns in 2008 to add to his large collection. — AP

Putin-Biden meet may be held in June

Moscow, April 25: A top aide to Vladimir Putin said Sunday that a possible summit between the Russian leader and his US counterpart Joe Biden could take place in June. Biden earlier this month offered a meeting between the two leaders in a neutral country, as tensions between Russia and the West escalated sharply over the conflict in Ukraine, new sanctions

on Moscow and the health of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

The Kremlin has said it is still considering the offer, but on Sunday, Putin's top foreign policy aide, Yuri Ushakov, said that planning is underway.

"June is being named, there are even concrete dates," Ushakov said on state-run television channel Rossiya-1. — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

26 APRIL 2021

CJI should make judiciary kinder, faster, transparent

A new chapter in Indian judiciary starts with Justice N.V. Ramana having taken oath as the 48th Chief Justice of India (CJI) on April 24, which can and should be glorious. Till his tenure ends on August 26, 2022, CJI Ramana must focus on addressing three crucial issues — humaneness of judicial processes and systems, especially in the criminal side of law and justice, with great stress on speed and efficiency, and openness and transparency.

The absolutely first area to priority is administrative. The CJI must ensure all the pending vacancies in the judiciary, especially in the higher echelons of the Supreme Court and the various high courts, must be filled within the first 90 days of his term on a war footing. This numbers-led priority is to ensure the judiciary is operating at maximum mandated capacity and to a full strength to focus on the next area of priority — speedy delivery.

Justice delayed is justice denied. Time gap has been an underlying weakness and area of concern with our judicial system for a long while now. Systems need to be created to ensure timely dismissal of cases and the recent suggestive directive

The expectation from CJI Ramana is that he will strive hard to humanise criminal justice and focus on ensuring higher regard for law and human rights amongst the law enforcement agencies

empowering high courts to hire retired justices to dispose pending cases is welcome and must be taken to a logical conclusion under stern supervision. There can be suggestions made to the government, a mandated litigator, to withdraw a large number of cases through a matrix of stake involved versus the time since the case has stretched. Automatic disposal of petty and routine cases can also go a long way in unburdening the judicial load.

The CJI will hearten the citizenry by ensuring the implementation of faster and timely disposal of criminal cases against politicians and bureaucracy and give them punishment.

A lesson that no one is too mighty to get away from the clutches of the law is an expectation that has waited long enough to be delivered with urgency, and who better than the author of this extraordinary hope-giving judgment to ensure its implementation? The highest expectation from CJI Ramana is that he will strive hard to humanise criminal justice systems and focus on ensuring higher regard for law and human rights amongst the law enforcement agencies, particularly the lathi-happy police.

Fake encounters too can and will likely become a thing of the past, if his record is anything to go by — with strongest action likely in custodial death cases. Ensuring police respond to sensitise their departments and officers regarding human rights would be a great achievement.

A larger effort is needed to make it clear to the government and officials that they cannot ignore judicial pronouncements, which could be one of the most significant contributions of this tenure.

Finally, the judiciary must make itself even more open and transparent in coming out with unambiguous guidelines to dealing with grievances and complaints against itself.

A judicial ombudsman is needed, comprising members of the bar, and of different states in composition at state-level and representatives of the government. Brothers and sisters of the judiciary must be able to handle all such instances in a way as to raise the respect for the blindfolded lady with a balance even higher.

At the start of CJI Ramana's tenure, history might well ask — if not here — where; if not now — when; if not you — who?

We're safe when all are safe

It is in the DNA of every pandemic that it is global, all the more so in a truly globalised world. It hardly makes sense for a nation to think that it can fight the pandemic all alone and be safe; it will not be long before it realises that the microorganism that causes the pandemic has reached its shores by means it can hardly block. Eliminating the virus from the face of the earth is an economic priority, too, as it would bring productive people back in action and the global economy back into black; not to forget the humanitarian angle as a pandemic devastates lives and often extinguishes them on a mass scale.

The US government's fight against pandemic Covid-19 has entered a decisive phase with close to 70 per cent of its population having been vaccinated. The country has the capacity to manufacture more as the vaccination programme advances and hence the demand in the country to help countries such as India where people have started dying in their thousands every day.

The US has spare vaccines which are part of the Indian vaccination programme and hence can be put in the logistics chain on arrival. There are also redundant quantities of anti-viral drugs such as Remdisivir, as well as oxygen, which could save lives in India.

It's not just in the case of the ready-to-serve products that Indian wants the US to take a global view. The Serum Institute of India which makes the Covishield vaccine had recently appealed to US President Joe Biden to relax the ban on the export of the raw materials for the vaccine but to no avail.

One cannot fault the US administration's policy that "it is not only in the US's interest to see Americans vaccinated; but it is in the interests of the rest of the world to see Americans vaccinated". The point of difference is that we will all be safe when we all are vaccinated; nationality hardly counts.

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Subhani



Mishandling elections in the time of a pandemic



Shikha Mukerjee

For voters and contestants, every election is necessarily different, because the ways in which the thousands of acts of omission, commission, violation and bad faith by the incumbent government or the challenger are in a constant state of change. For the Election Commission, tasked with conducting the process through which the voter chooses a representative who is adequate to fulfil the aspirations and expectations he or she has, every election is both different and the same.

The context in which an election is held is certainly material to the way the Election Commission undertakes the exercise of holding free and fair polls so that the people's sovereign will is exercised without obstruction or violation. If the EC fails to comprehend the context, then what follows is a super-spreader event of terrifying proportions in the state that has been victim of the whims of the poll panel in its refusal to recognise that the Covid-19 crisis could turn into a catastrophe.

Dismissive of the pleas of West Bengal's ruling party and the state government, of all other Opposition parties barring the BJP that the eight-phase six-week poll schedule would be seriously risky at a time when new mutant strains of the coronavirus were detected and whose impact had pushed Britain and Europe to declare new lockdowns, new protocols and manage a new crisis, the EC maintained it had no power to alter the schedule after it was announced or notified. It insisted it was entirely capable of ensuring its strict guidelines on how campaigning and voting should be done in Covid times were followed by all candidates and of course

their parties.

Having announced its guidelines, mobilised the largest force of security personnel drawn from every Central paramilitary force imaginable, adding up to over 1.5 lakh jawans and officers and innumerable support personnel, brought in over 200 general observers, added to the original 54 appointed as police observers, the EC flooded West Bengal with the paraphernalia necessary to do two things simultaneously — hold peaceful, free and fair polls over eight phases and ensure adherence to its Covid guidelines. It failed on both counts at an incredibly high cost to the public exchequer.

Citizens exposed to the virus through super-spreader events and shoddy observance of Covid protocols are paying twice over for the EC's failures and its outrageously unrealistic assessment of its own capacity to deliver a flawless election process. The death of two candidates from the virus, a large number of candidates ill or critically ill because of the infection and the final humiliating confirmation of its inadequacy as the order from the Calcutta high court lashed out that the role of the EC cannot be just "issuing circulars" and "holding meetings".

It took a searing indictment from the high court to get the commission to implement its own guidelines. It took a threat from the high court to ensure that big rallies were banned.

The Calcutta high court last week said the judiciary would step in and "act like T.N. Seshan", the legendary tough chief election commissioner, who had postponed and threatened to cancel elections in Bihar and West Bengal if political parties failed to follow the rules.

Through the weeks of disastrous mismanagement by the EC that has cost lives and skyrocketed state public health expenditure to cope with the outfall of the speed of the spread of the deadly virus, the then chief election commissioner Sunil Arora and current CEC Sushil Chandra said they were powerless to listen to reason and heed the context of this election in West Bengal, namely the danger of an even greater surge of the evolving virus.

The Election Commission dismissed the plea by Mamata Banerjee that the eight-phase election was very risky. It seemed to pay more attention to the BJP's jeers that the eight-phase election was necessary to ensure peaceful, free and fair elections. The Election Commission rejected the April 16 appeal by all political parties in the fray in West Bengal, besides the BJP, that the remaining three phases should be clubbed together. Defending the eight-phase polls, BJP candidate Swapna Dasgupta said anything else would affect the "democratic spirit" of the process. His assurance and that of his party that all Covid protocols would be maintained cut no ice with the Calcutta high court, as its indictment reveals.

In declaring that it couldn't change the schedule once it as notified, the Election Commission forgot that it has the power to do so and there is a precedent. In 1984, the Lok Sabha elections were held in all states, except Punjab and Assam. Elections there were held in 1985 because the circumstances called for it. In 1991, the EC decided that the Lok Sabha elections would be

Can it be a mere coincidence that Prime Minister Modi cancelled his final four rallies, out of a total of 18, minutes before the commission announced the ban on rallies?

rescheduled with new dates because after some states had voted, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated and there was turmoil. The Representation of the People Act is rigid, but the law isn't stupid. It does admit there can be an obstruction to the polling process after a natural calamity or any other sufficient cause.

As a result, West Bengal saw an unprecedented number of public rallies and meetings organised on a mega scale for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah, at least a dozen or more star campaigners from the BJP's very large and varied pool of leaders, including defence minister Rajnath Singh and UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath. A comparison of one day of campaigning by the BJP and Ms Banerjee is revealing; the BJP held at least nine major rallies, roadshows and meetings on one day while Mamata Banerjee managed only four.

As the challenger in West Bengal, the BJP's capacity to spread havoc without being restrained by the EC, outdid all other political parties on a daily basis. Can it be a mere coincidence that Prime Minister Modi cancelled his final four rallies, out of a total of 18, minutes before the commission announced the ban on rallies?

A pandemic on the scale of Covid-19 is unprecedented. If the EC failed to grasp this simple fact, so did the Prime Minister. Not till the nationwide oxygen shortage began killing patients in hospitals across India, ICU beds ran short and private hospitals went to court did the magnitude of the calamity impress itself on Mr Modi, whose office had earlier reportedly turned away Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray's desperate SOS for help. Can the democratic spirit freely exercise its franchise if disease and death stalk the voter? The EC will eventually have to answer this question.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

OXYGEN SHORTFALL

The number of patients dying due to lack of oxygen is heart breaking. All the deaths due to lack of oxygen happened in metro cities where high-end medical facilities are available. The reason for this cannot be attributed entirely to the overwhelming demand. The lack of preparedness by governments for the likely worsening pandemic has played the major part in the havoc. Kerala and AP did a good job in foreseeing the problem and reserving oxygen supply.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

FIRE SAFETY

Hospitals with NOC from fire safety department who have executed an undertaking should have been notified (*Covid hospitals yet to get NOC from fire department, DC, April 25*). But after notification, insisting that they adhere to safety norms and get an NOC from fire safety wing serves little purpose.

Jagannadham Chowdari
Srikakulam

CANCEL EXAMS

The demand of Nara Lokesh and that of many a parent/student for cancellation or postponing SSC and Intermediate examinations in AP is genuine and should have been considered favourably. Unfortunately, the state government is taking a risk in the name of providing 'quality' by conducting the examinations. The government has failed to contain the second wave and started night curfew to break the chain. If the number of tests increase, the actual Covid situation will look even more grim.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

1 dead, 55 hurt in rail mishap

HYDERABAD, April. 25 A nine-year-old girl was killed and 55 other passengers were injured, five of them seriously, when a passenger train collided with a goods train this evening between the Asifabad Road and Ralapat stations in the Kazipet-Balharshah section of Secunderabad Division of the South Central Railway.

Kishwar Desai
London Diary


A fitting farewell for Prince Philip; Cameron, Carrie graft entertains

The headlines here lately, about India, have been worrying. Many of them are about the Indian Covid crisis, and it is sad to see the terrifying predictions that are doing the rounds. While Boris Johnson thinks about sending respirators to India, many are wondering what happened to the great advantage India had last year. Now all we see are the burning pyres, and an ever-expanding body count. The question everyone asks is how could this have happened when India was doing so well? Yes, there had been a harsh lockdown earlier — but then that was the only way to deal with the enemy, who was unknown at the time. But now the bonds between the two countries are being sealed, ironically, by the "Indian" strain in the UK, and "British" mutant in India. The alarming difference is that while the UK is slowly opening up, India seems to be in the midst of a severe medical tsunami. Could it be also because the UK had vaccinated such a large proportion of its population?

The big event of the past fortnight has, of course, been the Royal funeral. The Monarchy is perfect-

ly adept at staging the most spectacular coronation (not seen, happily, since 1952), weddings (the most recent, of Harry and Meghan, was beautiful but is proving unforgettable for other reasons) and, of course, funerals. There has not been a Royal funeral since Elizabeth the Queen Mother died at the ripe old age of 101 a while ago.

The funeral for the Duke was planned well in advance and indeed he had participated in its arrangements, choosing the carriage specially designed by himself for the occasion. But as luck would have it, the Duke's funeral became unique because of Covid. And this brought to the fore the discipline maintained by the Royalty as it abides by the laws it is formally responsible for promulgating through it is the civilian government which thinks them up. For example, even through the Second World War, the Royal Family ate only the rations permitted to their subjects.

The sparseness of numbers at the funeral, the lack of street crowds, the location at Windsor rather than London gave the occasion its own special magic. He was after all 99, just one week short of his centenary. The Queen is, more or

less, universally respected and much loved by all but a few diehard Republicans. The Duke had to earn the respect given to him. The Press delighted in his more acerbic and "politically incorrect" views. He himself had joked about his "foot in the mouth" problem. But the sheer length of his presence on the public platform, discreetly walking a few steps behind his wife, won people over.

Most watched the ceremony on TV where the BBC yet again turned up trumps as it does on such occasions. It was a sombre but a beautifully staged occasion. Even so, it was the Queen sitting by herself in the chapel, which was the most dramatic sight. She had already placed her own written farewell into the coffin and then she sat quietly, the picture of dignity in grief. While the media wanted to make a fuss about Harry and William, the Palace managed to make them all behave themselves. And the emotion of the moment almost made everyone forget THAT interview.

In a mundane world, politics provides the entertainment. Not a week goes by without another corruption scandal. David Cameron, the former Prime Minister, has been caught lobbying for a company Greensill where he is the director. His text messages to Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor, asking for financial help, have been revealed. (When will these "leaders" learn what every teenager knows — that if you use your smartphone, there is no secrecy?) The Prime Minister himself is under attack by his former chosen Special Adviser Dominic Cummings (who had to be let go after he had antagonised everyone including Carrie Symonds, the PM's fiancée). He has now leaked more ammunition against his old friend alleging that Boris stopped a public inquiry when government rules were broken. Par for the course. But the target, more and more, seems to be the Prime Minister's fiancée — about whom stories are churned out every week. And now, under media scrutiny, Boris has had to pay 58,000 pounds for the redecoration of his residence at Downing Street, already undertaken by the young Ms Symonds. Yes,

the Prime Minister in the UK cannot use taxpayers' money to re-do the official home in London. Can such a rule ever work in India, hmmm?

But Boris has retained his amazing luck. While he has presided over the shambles of Covid mismanagement, he is doing very well thanks to the widely successful vaccination programme. The UK has become the envy of EU, if not the world, for its vaccination performance. Even Brexit has been forgotten for the while.

Actually Boris was supposed to be in Delhi today, on April 26. His earlier trip to Delhi for the Republic Day on January 26 had to be postponed due to Covid. But the two Prime Ministers seem to be fated never to meet in India (especially not if the date is the 26th) and the British PM has once again cancelled his trip. Call the astrologer!

Kishwar Desai's latest book, *The Longest Kiss: The Life And Times of Devika Rani, has just been published and she is the Chair of the Trust that set up the world's first Partition Museum in Amritsar*

quick BITES

INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	47,878.45	-0.42
Nifty 50	14,341.40	-0.45
S&P 500*	4,180.17	1.09
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 Friday/Saturday

Steel companies produce 3,474 t medi-oxygen/day

The steel industry produced 3,474 tonne of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) on Saturday, higher than its daily production capacity to meet the shortage of the life-saving gas. A steel ministry statement said on Sunday, there are 33 oxygen plants in the steel sector, of which 29 are tapped regularly. The total daily oxygen production capacity of steel plants is 2,834 tonne. The production of LMO was 3,474tonne on April 24.



Indian ops boost US giant's profit Flipkart to get \$1 bn more from Walmart

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 25

Walmart has decided to pump in around \$1 billion more to support the operations of Flipkart.

Walmart said its international segment's cash and cash equivalents of \$2.8 billion may not be freely transferable to the US due to local laws or other restrictions. Of this, approximately \$1 billion can only be accessed through dividends or inter-company financing arrangements, subject to approval of the Flipkart minority shareholders. This cash is expected to be utilised to fund the operations of Flipkart, Walmart said in its annual report.

Walmart's gross profit rate increased 50 basis points in financial year



2021 primarily due to Flipkart's improved margin mix and reduced fuel sales in the UK. This is against a 136-points reduction in gross profit in FY20 primarily due to Flipkart, as well as a change in merchandise mix.

Walmart finalised the valuation of assets and liabilities of Flipkart in the second quarter of FY20. As per this, Flipkart

has assets of \$24.1 billion, which comprise primarily of \$2.2 billion in cash and cash equivalents, \$2.8 billion in other current assets, \$5 billion in intangible assets and \$13.5 billion in goodwill.

Of the intangible assets, \$4.7 billion represents the fair value of trade names. The remaining \$0.3 billion of intangible assets primarily relate to acquired technology with a life of three years.

Flipkart has liabilities of \$3.7 billion, which comprise primarily of \$1.8 billion of current liabilities and \$1.7 billion of deferred income taxes and non-controlling interest of \$4.3 billion. The company began consolidating the financial statements of Flipkart in the third quarter of FY19, using a one-month lag.

BHARAT BIOTECH SEEKS NOD TO EXTEND SHELF LIFE OF COVAXIN

New Delhi, April 25: Bharat Biotech has written to the drug regulator, seeking extension of the shelf life of its indigenously developed vaccine, Covaxin, from six to 24 months, sources said on Sunday.

Bharat Biotech was given permission for sale and distribution of Covaxin with a shelf life of six months when stored at two to eight degrees Celsius.

"Now, we are herewith applying for the extension of shelf life from six months to 24 months when stored at 2-8 degrees Celsius," the firm said in its application to the Drugs Controller General of India.

Bharat Biotech has submitted updated accelerated and real-time stability data of Coaxin, in support of its claim. — PTI

Mkt momentum to be tested in event-heavy week

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 25

The equity market is lacking foreign and domestic institutional investors support, as the Covid-19 cases saw almost a vertical rise to above 3 lakh infections daily, leading to caution. The Indian currency has also weakened against the US dollar to the levels seen during the market crash last year.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) were net sellers of equities worth Rs 8,674 crore in April so far. The previous six months have been good for the market, as after September 2020 FPIs had turned net buyers in a big way.

Mutual funds also reduced equity buying in April so far to just Rs 1,251.72 crore against Rs 2,476.45 crore net buying in March. But domestic institutional investors, including mutual funds, insurance, banks and pension funds, were net buyers by Rs 7,960.71 crore.

With the rupee expected to weaken further this year, FPIs may not resume buying in a big way unless the currency stabilises.

"The Indian rupee, Asia's best-performing currency in March, is going to slide right back to levels last seen in the depths of the pandemic meltdown; the currency will drop toward 76.5 to a dollar by the end of the year," according to Parul Mittal Sinha, head of macro trading, India and South Asia financial markets, Standard Chartered.

"We do not see the volatility easing out in the



coming week too, thanks to scheduled data and events," said Ajit Mishra, VP-research, Religare Broking.

"The monthly expiry of April month derivatives contracts will keep the traders on their toes. On the data front, core sector data will be unveiled on April 30. The recent proposal by the US president to raise capital gains tax has started showing its impact in US markets which may cascade to others in the coming week.

Needless to say, the Covid-related updates will remain on the participants' radar," Mishra said. "Details of US President Joe Biden's proposed wealth tax will start emerging next week. Biden wants to raise the federal capital gains tax to 43.4 per cent for the richest of individuals, bringing combined state and federal rates in places such as New York and California to well above 50 per cent—the highest ever in US history. Expect volatility whenever these details emerge," said an analyst tracking Indian market.

The market will also react to earnings of many blue chips this week.

CHIP SHORTAGE: VW WARNS OF WORSENING SITUATION

April 25: Volkswagen AG has warned managers to prepare for a bigger production hit in the second quarter than the first due to a global chip shortage, the Financial Times reported.

"We are being told from the suppliers and within the Volkswagen Group that we need to face considerable challenges in the second quarter, probably more challenging than the first quarter," Wayne Griffiths, president of Volkswagen's Spanish brand Seat, said.

Griffiths called the shortage the "biggest challenge" the company faces at the moment.

He said production at Seat's Martorell plant outside Barcelona was currently "hand to mouth", with the brand deciding what cars to build only after it receives chips from suppliers, the report said.

Volkswagen has said it expects chip supply to remain tight in the coming months, adding it could not provide visibility for the full year.

The company has been unable to build 100,000 cars due to the shortage, CEO Herbert Diess said last month, adding the group would not be able to make up for the shortfall in 2021.

"The situation has been exacerbated i.e. by the blizzards that have occurred in Texas, as the large chip manufacturers based there had to stop or reduce their production. For that reason further adjustments to production cannot be ruled out", Volkswagen said in an emailed statement. — Reuters

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Amit settles for bronze in Russia

New Delhi: Olympic-bound Indian boxer Amit Panghal (52kg) settled for a bronze medal at the Governor's Cup in St Petersburg, Russia after going down to world champion and familiar foe Shakobidin Zoirov in the semifinals. Amit, a world championships silver-medallist, lost 5-0 to the Uzbek, who is also the reigning Olympic champion. This was the Indian's second loss to Zoirov after the 2019 world championships. In that event, he had lost to Zoirov in the finals. Both the boxers are bound for the Tokyo Games, to be held in July-August. Amit was the lone Indian to make the medal round. — PTI

Barty survives early scare to win title

Stuttgart, Germany: World number one Ashleigh Barty earned her third WTA title this year by beating Aryna Sabalenka in the final of Stuttgart's clay-court tournament on Sunday. After winning in Miami and a pre-Australian Open event in Melbourne on hard court, Barty added the Stuttgart title, her first tournament on clay this season. A day after her 25th birthday, the Australian rallied from losing the first set to claim a 3-6, 6-0, 6-3 win over Sabalenka, who needed a medical time-out after the second set for an adductor injury. — AFP

Nadal sets up final date with Tsitsipas

Barcelona: Rafael Nadal will face a red-hot Stefanos Tsitsipas in the Barcelona Open final after the 11-time champion eased past fellow Spaniard Pablo Carreno 6-3, 6-2 on Saturday. Nadal roared out to a 5-1 lead before Carreno pulled back a break. Carreno then had three break chances on Nadal's next service game, but the latter saved them all and closed out the set. The top-seeded Nadal improved to an 8-0 career record against Carreno. The second-seeded Tsitsipas advanced after beating Janik Sinner 6-3, 6-3 for his eighth consecutive straight-set victory including last week's title run at Monte Carlo. — AP

Andhra skaters on a roll

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 25

Andhra Pradesh skaters did very well at the 58th National Roller Skating Championship held in Chandigarh, Punjab, recently, returning with a clutch of medals from the tournament.

Rayudu Arun Kumar and Farheen Shaik won the gold in the Above 17 years pair skating as well as couple dance skating events while Preetam and Laasya took silver in the couple dance category.

Arun also won a bronze in the boys above 17 free dance skating, in which Harikamal took gold.

Harikamal also took silver in the above 17 figure event and was part of the Above 17 quartet team (Venu, Farheen, Anmisha, Harikamal) that won gold.

Anmisha, Samhitha, Siddi Vinayak were among the skaters who won multiple medals.

MEDAL WINNERS ■ Above 17 age group, figure event: Boys — Harikamal (silver), Sahith (bronze). Girls — Lasya (bronze). ■ 14-17 age group figure: Girls — Tanvi Vinayak (gold). Boys — Mohan Kiran (silver), Rishab (bronze). ■ Above 17, freestyle: Girls



Rayudu Arun Kumar (right) and Farheen Shaik perform on way to winning the Above 17 years pair skating event at the National Roller Skating Championship held in Chandigarh, Punjab.

— Anmisha (gold). Boys — Venu (silver), Rayudu Arun Kumar (bronze). ■ 14-17 freestyle: Girls — Samhitha (gold), Meghana (silver). Boys — Mohan Kiran (gold), Vaishnav (silver). ■ Above 17 inline: Girls — Anmisha (gold). Boys — Venu (bronze). ■ 14-17 inline: Girls — Meghana (gold), Samhitha (silver), Swetha (bronze).

Boys — Vaishnav (gold), Rishab (silver). ■ Above 17 pair skating: Rayudu Arun Kumar & Farheen Shaik (gold). ■ 14-17 pair skating: Vaishnav & Grishma (gold). ■ Above 17 free dance skating: Boys — Harikamal (gold), Rayudu Arun Kumar (bronze). ■ Above 17 couple dance skating: Rayudu Arun Kumar

& Farheen Shaik (gold), Preetam & Laasya (silver). ■ Above 17 quartet team: Venu, Farheen, Anmisha, Harikamal (gold). ■ 14-17 quartet team: Vaishnav, Vishal, Samhitha, Swetha (gold). ■ 11-14 boys freestyle: T. Nihal (gold), Sowrya Nathani (silver). ■ 11-14 girls freestyle: Siddhi Vinayak (gold), Greesham

(silver), Saheera Pondala (bronze). ■ 11-14 boys inline: Sowrya Nathani (gold), Kyvalya (silver). ■ 11-14 girls inline: Siddhi Vinayak (gold), Saheera Pondala (silver), Greeshma (bronze). ■ 11-14 boys figure: Tej Nihal (silver). ■ 11-14 girls figure: Siddhi Vinayak (bronze).

Bess hated game after bubble pain

London, April 25: England off-spinner Dom Bess has revealed that he had started "hating cricket" after his prolonged stay inside a bio-bubble during the Test tour of India earlier this year.

Bess got just five wickets from two Tests in the fourth-match series which India won 3-1. He was dropped after helping England to victory in the first Test in Chennai, only to return for the final match in Ahmedabad, where he went wicket-less during an innings defeat.

After spending around seven weeks inside the bio-bubble in India, the 23-year-old Bess is currently involved in the county season, looking to rediscover his form with Yorkshire.

"After India I had a good break away from it, because I really did start hating cricket," Bess was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

"It got too much at times, certainly in that bubble in India, there's a lot of pressure going on and it was really important for me to come back and get away from it," he said.

On returning from India, Bess had "two or three weeks off", getting to know his new home in Leeds and spending time with his girlfriend and the



Dom Bess

puppy they have adopted. "It was nice to see them and get away from it, because in India, in the bubble, everything was about cricket. And it's fine when you're going well, but when things aren't going well it is very tough," he said.

"But I only see what I had in India as a great positive. It's been a tough time really, but one hell of a learning curve for me. And it terms of where I see my game, I know what I've got to do. That's so exciting, knowing that I've still got so much work to do, when I'm so close as well, at times."

Bess said he learnt some really tough lessons in India and felt that should improve his chances of achieving success with England in the long run. — PTI

MAN UNITED HELD GOAL-LESS BY LEEDS; BURNLEY WIN BIG

London, April 25: Manchester United drew 0-0 with Leeds on Sunday to stay on track for a second-place finish in the Premier League after Burnley took a giant step towards survival.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men beat their bitter rivals 6-2 at Old Trafford in December but both sides looked short of energy and imagination in a lacklustre encounter at Elland Road.

The result takes United to 67 points after 33 games, 10 points behind champions-elect Manchester City but eight points clear of third-placed Leicester.

Manchester City, Manchester United, Leicester and Chelsea currently occupy the top-four

spots in the Premier League but just seven points separate Leicester from eighth-placed Everton.

Most of the teams have just five games to play. Earlier, Chris Wood scored a first-half hat-trick as Burnley pummelled Wolves 4-0 to lift themselves nine points clear of the Premier League relegation zone.

Chelsea took control of the battle to secure Champions League football next season as Timo Werner's goal earned a 1-0 win over West Ham on Saturday, while Liverpool conceded a stoppage time equaliser to draw 1-1 with Newcastle. Liverpool are now four points adrift of the top four. — AFP

Zidane's men slip in title race after draw at home

Madrid, April 25: Real Madrid handed the initiative back to Atletico Madrid in La Liga on Saturday by drawing at home to Real Betis, a result that raises doubts about the team's condition ahead of Tuesday's Champions League semi-final against Chelsea.

Eden Hazard was thrown on for the last 15 minutes of the 0-0 draw at Valdebebas in what was only the Belgian's second appearance in three months but Madrid could not find a way through.

Atletico are now two points clear at the top of La Liga and can extend

that advantage to five by winning away at Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

Barcelona could pull level on points with Real Madrid if they overcome Villarreal.

Real Madrid struggled for chances and the concern will be that numerous injuries and fatigue are catching up with Zinedine Zidane's side at a crucial moment in the season.

"It's two points dropped, that's obvious, we lacked a lot going forward, especially at the start of the game," said Zidane.

"We weren't sharp but that can happen. We have

to go again on Tuesday."

They play Chelsea at home on Tuesday in the first leg of the Champions League semi-finals and it is possible none of Toni Kroos, Sergio Ramos, Ferland Mendy, Fede Valverde or Lucas Vazquez, all absent due to injury, will return.

Hazard could feature against his former club after coming on for the final quarter of an hour but the fact Zidane waited so long to introduce him suggests he is still not considered match fit, having now played 30 minutes since the end of January. — AFP

AZAM FASTEST TO REACH 2000 RUNS AS PAK WIN

Harare, April 25: Pakistan captain Babar Azam became the fastest batsman to reach 2,000 Twenty20 international runs Sunday, achieving the feat in 52 innings, four fewer than India skipper Virat Kohli.

Azam lifted his T20 total to 2,035 runs by making 52 as Pakistan defeated Zimbabwe by 24 runs to win a T20 series 2-1 at Harare Sports Club.

Kohli has scored 3,159 runs in the 20-over format, but it took him 56 innings to pass the 2,000-run landmark.

Azam won the toss, opted to bat and the tourists made 165-3 in 20 overs as they sought redemption after a shock 19-run loss two days ago.

The batting of Mohammad Rizwan (91 not out) and Azam (52) and career-best bowling from Hasan Ali (4-18) ultimately ensured Pakistan would not suffer the humiliation of losing the series. — AFP

Brief scores: Pakistan 163/3 in 20 overs (Mohammad Rizwan 91 not out, Babar Azam 52; L. Jongwe 3-37) bt Zimbabwe 141/7 in 20 overs (Madhevere 59, Marumani 35, Hasan 4-18, Rauf 2-34).

