

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | SATURDAY 24 | APRIL 2021

WEATHER



Max: 36°C
Min: 24°C
Rainfall: 6%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Chithirai 11
Tithi: Dhuvadhasi
Star: Uthiram
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
Yamagandam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.39 am
Luhar: 12.13 pm
Asar: 3.13 pm
Maghrib: 6.23 pm
Isha: 7.36 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.34 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.06 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 4.03 PM

MOONSET TOMORROW 5.20 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+3,25,233)	(+2,415)
1,65,82,740	1,89,344

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+13,776)
TN: 10,51,487 13,395

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

14,59,28,474

DEATHS

30,92,337

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

Govt plans to import O2 from Singapore, UAE

New Delhi: With several states flagging scarcity of medical oxygen amid a surge in COVID-19 infections, the government is in talks for the import of high-capacity oxygen-carrying tankers from Singapore and the UAE and directed states to revive closed oxygen plants for augmenting its production. The move came after Union Home Minister Amit Shah reviewed the coronavirus situation in the country on Friday, a home ministry statement said. In separate letters, the Centre asked all states to prepare a list of oxygen producers in their respective jurisdiction and directed them to ensure uninterrupted supply and transport of oxygen in the places where there is a demand. With a view to make available additional tankers for movement of oxygen, the home ministry is coordinating lifting of high-capacity tankers from abroad, including Singapore and the UAE, by Indian Air Force transport planes, the statement said.

COUNTER

POINT



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

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Stalin's call to help each other



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Minority groups laud US report for tagging India

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Natarajan to undergo knee injury



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Vol. 11 No. 117 Established 1938 | 8 PAGES| ₹4.00

25 patients die for lack of oxygen in Delhi hospital

■ 14 patients in Mumbai Covid care centre killed in fire

DC CORRESPONDENTS
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, MUMBAI, APRIL 23

Exposing the fatal chinks in the country's health-care infrastructure, 25 of Delhi's Sir Ganga Ram Hospital's "sickest" Covid-19 patients died in 24 hours and the lives of 60 more hung in precarious balance, officials said on Friday, as the scramble for oxygen got increasingly frantic in hospitals across the national capital. In Mumbai, at least 14 Covid patients died in a major fire at a Covid centre in Virar, Maharashtra's Palghar district, in the wee hours of Friday. The fire broke out at around 3 am in the ICU of the four-storeyed Vijay Vallabh Hospital which had 17 Covid patients. According to the sources, the cause of fire seems to be a short circuit in an air conditioning unit. Sources said low pressure oxygen could be the likely cause of the deaths in Ganga Ram, one of the



Mass cremation of COVID-19 victims at Old Seemapuri Crematorium as coronavirus cases surge, in New Delhi, Friday.

city's biggest and most high-profile hospitals where healthcare staff was reduced to manually ventilating patients in its ICU and emergency department. The hospital announced the deaths shortly after 8.00 am.

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

consumption, an official at Ganga Ram said. "It is wrong to say the deaths occurred due to oxygen shortage. We provided oxygen to patients manually when the pressure dipped in the ICU," SGRH chairman Dr D.S. Rana said.

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

TN GETS 2 LAKH MORE DOSES OF COVISHIELD

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23:

Tamil Nadu on Friday received two lakh doses of Covishield, the vaccine against Covid-19, manufactured by Pune-based Serum Institute of India.

The consignment arrived at the Chennai airport at around 12 pm. Sources said the vaccines will be taken to the directorate of medical and rural health services in Teynampet, from where the vials will be dispatched to districts.

The state has so far received 57, 85,720 doses of vaccines. The state had received six lakh doses of Covishield three days ago and is awaiting five lakh doses of Covaxin, manufactured by Bharat Biotech.

States stopping drug sales, CM tells Modi

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Friday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure an advance supply of 20 lakh doses of vaccine as an assured supply of at least 10 days consumption to enable the vaccination drive, which was gaining pace in the State, to go on unaffected.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, he objected to the directions issued by the national and certain state regulators restricting Remdesivir sales only within the state where the drug was being pro-

duced, which he said would be "very damaging to the availability of such valuable life-saving drugs in place of need."

"Any restrictive orders by individual states should be strictly barred to ensure easy accessibility of Remdesivir," he said, urging the Centre to take up the issue with states where companies have their production facilities. On the need of making available vaccines in advance, he said vaccination drives in individual sites should not be affected and persons coming for the second dose should be assured of vaccination on the date and site they report.

Don't rush to hosp., corpn tells residents

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

The Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) administration on Friday urged the residents should not rush to hospital immediately on testing positive for Covid-19 with no symptoms.

GCC commissioner G. Prakash said only patients who are in a serious condition need to be taken to hospitals. "Otherwise, the system will collapse," he said. "Doctors will have no time to attend even serious cases if the caseload increases, resulting in unnecessary loss of human lives." Those who are with severe symptoms can be treated at five

medical colleges in the city. Asymptomatic cases are requested to isolate themselves in their homes, he said.

A peak of the second wave was expected by the end of May, he said. Up to 85 per cent positive cases do not have routine symptoms including fever, and hence there is no need to panic, he said. "We have opened 12 screening centres where people with mild symptoms can visit and get proper advice from health officials."

Out of 3,700 people who tested positive on Thursday, about 1,200 people were brought to screening centres and the rest were either sent to state-run or private hospitals," he said.

Poor to get 5 kg rice in May, June

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

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

The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY) was announced in 2020 to combat the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the poor. Under the scheme, additional 5 kg wheat and rice along with 1 kg pulses to each family per month was provided.

Armed forces to import O2 plants

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 23

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

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

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

No bar on HCs in Covid cases: SC

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 23

Peeved over facing criticism for having taken suo motu cognisance of the worsening Covid situation in the country and gaps in its management, the Supreme Court on Friday said it did not stop the high courts from hearing Covid-related cases or thought of transferring them to itself.

Apparently displeased over the criticism by a section of senior lawyers based on the "perception" that the top court, after taking suo motu cognisance of the prevailing "heath emergency", will transfer to itself all the Covid-related matters being heard by the high courts, a bench that comprised Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde and Justices L. Nageswara Rao and S. Ravindra Bhat said: "You have imputed motives to us without reading the order."

Manufacture oxygen at Sterlite plant, SC to TN

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs

NEW DELHI, APRIL 23

The Supreme Court on Friday said Tamil Nadu cannot cite law and a possible law and order problem against making the Sterlite plant in Thoothukudi operational again for manufacturing medical oxygen at a time when the country is struggling for oxygen supply to the sick.

The top court had on Thursday agreed to hear the petition of Vedanta, who owns the pant, that it would produce 1,000 tonnes of oxygen and give it free for treatment of Covid patients.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde suggested that Tamil Nadu manufacture the oxygen and asked the state government to submit a plan by Monday.

"Why don't you fulfil your responsibility in

manufacturing oxygen? Just because you have a problem with Vedanta, you will not manufacture oxygen? What kind of argument is this? We are not interested whether Vedanta or A, B, or C runs it. We are interested in ensuring Oxygen is produced. It is not a question of Vedanta. People are dying. You (state) can produce oxygen," the court said.

CS Vaidyanathan, appearing for Tamil Nadu, had said that the reopening of the oxygen plant could be an invitation for law and order problems since the public opposes it. "There is total lack of confidence there," he said, adding that 13 persons had lost their lives earlier (in a police firing in May 2018).

"Yesterday, you did not tell us about the law and order situation. The situation would have been different. Have you filed this on oath?" the bench asked

Mr Vaidyanathan, who said he would file an affidavit.

Colin Gonsalves, appearing for the organisation of affected families, said the state government can take over the unit and produce oxygen. "We have absolutely no problem if the state of Tamil Nadu takes over the plant and produce oxygen."

"Why are they not producing oxygen when people need it? The whole point of this exercise is that people in the country need it (oxygen)," the bench said, adding that Tamil Nadu might have surplus oxygen but the issue is about the whole country. "The national assets of the country should be equally distributed among the citizens," the bench said.

Vedanta's Sterlite copper smelter unit at Thoothukudi has remained closed since May 2018.

Kejri telecasts PM's meet live

New Delhi, April 23: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's televised comments during the interaction with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday regarding pandemic situation in the national capital and acute oxygen crisis in hospitals has triggered a row, with the Union government officials accusing him of "playing politics".

The officials also accused him of descending to a "new low" with his decision to broadcast the "private conversation" of the meeting.

"His entire speech was not meant for any solution but for playing politics and evading responsibility. All chief ministers spoke about what they are doing to improve the situation but he had nothing to say on what he is

doing," a source said, suggesting that his remarks, which were made public, have not gone down well with the central government.

Responding to the sharp reaction of the Union government officials, the chief minister's office (CMO) issued a brief statement, saying "today, the CM address was shared live because there has never been any instruction, written or verbal, from central govt that the said interaction could not be shared live."

During the meeting, Mr Kejriwal said the Centre should take over all oxygen plants through the Army and requested Mr Modi to direct chief ministers of all states to ensure smooth movement of oxygen tankers coming to the national capital. —PTI

Pun-jab floors Mumbai



KL Rahul (right) scored an unbeaten 60 and put on a 79-run stand for the second wicket with Chris Gayle (43 not out) as Punjab Kings drubbed Mumbai Indians by nine wickets in an IPL game in Chennai on Friday.

— IPL

CAMPAIGNING FOR SEVENTH PHASE OF ELECTIONS ENDS IN WEST BENGAL

Kolkata, April 23: Curtains came down on Friday over the campaigning for 34 assembly seats in West Bengal which are scheduled to go to the poll on April 26 in the seventh phase of election being held amidst the surge in coronavirus cases across the country.

The campaigning for the seventh phase ended 72 hours before the polling on April 26.

A total of 86,78,221 voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in the 34 constituencies spread across Malda (Part I), Kolkata

Dakshin, Murshidabad (Part I), Paschim Bardhaman (Part I) and Dakshin Dinajpur districts.

Polling will be held between 7 am to 6.30 pm as in other phases at 12,068 polling stations in nine assembly constituencies each in Murshidabad and Paschim Bardhaman districts, six each in Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda districts four in Kolkata Dakshin.

Polling for two assembly seats in Samsarganj and Jangipur have been declared void following the deaths of two candidates there. —PTI

Modi hints at merging last phases of Bengal polls

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, APRIL 23

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday wrapped up his long campaign for the Assembly Election in West Bengal in a virtual address with an advice to the voters that is likely to trigger a speculation in the political circle about whether the remaining two phases — seventh and eighth — of polls would be clubbed due to an explosion of Covid-19 cases in the state.

Mr Modi, who had kick-

started his poll campaign on February 7 from Haldia in East Midnapore, toured the state nearly 12 times since then and addressed two rallies on April 17 during the fifth phase of polls in his last visit here, suggested to the people to go out "only once" though the polls are scheduled on April 26 and 29.

"Now only two phases of polls are left to be held in Bengal. From the perspective of polls, it would have been my last rally if I could have come to you physically for thanksgiving.

● **Two phases of polls would be clubbed due to an explosion of Covid.**

Virtually anyway, it is my last campaign rally also," the PM said in his virtual rally for the voters of Kolkata, Birbhum, Malda and Murshidabad.

Keeping the rising Covid-19 cases in mind, he observed, "So far people of Bengal cast their votes very well. The polling has been so heavy that can be an inspiration for the

nation. I appeal to you to continue this in the next phases also. Though only two phases are left, you have to go out only once to cast your votes. You will cast your votes while ensuring that you follow the Covid-19 protocol."

His suggestion came close on the heels of the ruling Trinamul Congress' demand to the Election Commission to club the remaining phases of polls due to massive spike in Covid-19 cases.

Mr Modi also pinned his hope for the BJP to come to

power in the state and repeated his wish to attend the oath-taking ceremony.

"Bengal will win. BJP will win. We will win altogether. Bengal will make progress a lot. It will be a Sonar Bangla. You are taking a big and solid step towards Sonar Bangla on May 2 in the life of Bengal. The new government will be built by the BJP. On its swearing-in ceremony, I will remain present to convey my thanks to you."

Surprisingly, Mr Modi however neither uttered Didi, which became an

integral part of his past campaign rallies, in his jibe to TMC supremo and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee nor took the name of her party during his speech over 30 minutes. His attacking comments on both were also missing in what appeared to be a rare instance.

Instead, the PM, staying focussed on the poll promises in the BJP manifesto, tried to convince the people of a future growth and development of the state if the BJP comes to power.

OTHER STORIES



Coronavirus affected seven streets in Vellore closed with metal sheets.

— K. Senthil Nathan

Fix labour issues, say AITUC workers

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, APRIL 23

The local unit of the Tamil Nadu AITUC building workers association has appealed to the district administration to convene a monitoring committee meeting of the Tamil Nadu unorganized construction and physical labour welfare board, to solve pending problems of construction workers, especially for their online registration.

In a memorandum to Collector S. Divyadarshini, K. Suresh and C. Shanmugam, association president and secretary, submitted that the registration and their renewal applications were filed online only, and hundreds of such petitions remained stagnant, due to absence of internet connectivity.

They said that this situation had for the last one year resulted in the blocking of marriage and educational assistance, death solatium and pension of the members. The online application of the members sent to the Labour welfare officer (Social Security) which were sent to the respective VAOs for verification, were still pending there from January this year, and because of this the members have not even received their identity cards, they added.

They appealed to the Collector to convene the monitoring committee meeting immediately and set right the pending issues.



DMK president M. K. Stalin distributes Kabasura Kudineer at Kolathur.

— DC

Stalin's call to help each other

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

DMK president M. K. Stalin gave a call to his cadre to help each other and also protect themselves during this time of pandemic when the second wave of coronavirus was taking a heavy toll.

Corona prevention kits and the medicinal drink 'kabasura Kudineer' were

distributed to people in the Assembly constituencies of Egmore, Thiru Vi Ka Nagar, Villivakkam and Kolathur by Stalin on Friday under the party's initiative 'Avoid Fear, Succeed through Science'.

The kits containing sanitiser, facemask, soap and a crate of 30 eggs were distributed at the event organised by the DMK with top leaders taking part in it.

In his letter to DMK cadre, Stalin said Corona 2.0 was more frightening than the first wave and stressed on the importance of vaccination in preventing the spread of the virus.

Expressing the hope that there would not be a need for a lockdown after May 2, he advised the people to follow the Covid-19 protocols, particularly avoid crowding.

Exempt us from lockdown, say photo, videographers

Tiruchy: Members of the district video and photographers association have appealed to the district administration to allow them to attend marriage receptions and other functions during the night

lockdown. In their petition to the collector on Friday, they pointed out that there are 1,200 members in the association, and their livelihood depended in covering marriage receptions and

other functions which are all mostly held during the night, that too on Sundays. Hence, they urged the district administration to permit their movement during the night lockdown period.

Rope in residents welfare assns for door step vaccination



Sanjay Pinto

Eligibility, availability and ability to get it are three separate issues at play with the opening up of Covid19 vaccination to all adults in India. A back of the envelope calculation for double dose vaccination of roughly 600 million citizens above 18 years would be 1.2 million doses. A waiting period and a consequential scramble cannot be ruled out. Here's the rub. How many senior citizens, or the disabled would be in a position to trudge to crowded vaccination centres in the sweltering summer heat and wait in a queue?

The average time for the vaccination process per individual is 45 minutes to an hour, where people can be seen removing their masks to click selfies, drink coffee or huddled together in ani-

JUSTICE FOR ALL

mated conversations, many with a misconceived notion of immunity right after the first jab. Health experts opine that an exposure of 15 minutes without physical distancing and proper masking can lead to the spread.

If these vulnerable sections, many with co-morbidities, are subjected to this violation of safeguards, does it not put them at risk? What about those who are bed-ridden? They may be permanently indoors but often their outsourced care-takers and attendants come from outside, exposing them to the infection, warranting urgent vaccination for them.

If citizens above 80 years can be given the facility of postal ballots to exercise their right to vote, why can't they be given door step vaccination to safeguard their guaranteed fundamental right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution, which includes the right to health and related preventive meas-

ures?

It is heartening that First Bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy of the Madras High Court in Meenakshi Bala-subramanian Vs Union of India (2021) had reportedly directed the authorities to ensure priority in vaccination for the disabled, and special facilities at vaccination centres in line with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

Petitions were filed in the Mumbai and Delhi High Courts seeking door to door Covid vaccination. I do admit that the scope of judicial review of policy decisions may be limited.

However, in matters of public health and in emergency situations, the High Courts or the Supreme Court can exercise their power under Article 226 or Article 32 respectively of the Constitution to direct the authorities to consider bonafide suggestions of concerned citizens in public

interest. The State's duty to "improve public health" under Article 47 of the Constitution, must obviously encompass the need to preserve life, which when endangered by a deadly virus, necessitates unhindered access to available vaccines.

The successful pulse polio immunisation programme in the country over the years may be cited in this context. While it is conceded that vaccination through drops of a time tested formula for a small age group is different from an emergency vaccine in an injectable form, there is documented evidence of our capacity to pull off such large scale exercises.

I advocate the roping in of Residents' Welfare Associations to augment the vaccination drive. Yes, there will be challenges. But a few gated communities have already tied up with the local health and municipal authorities to have eligible residents vaccinated at the building premises, with no reported adverse experience

in such exercises. As a matter of abundant caution, the mandated observation of patients for half an hour post vaccination and the need for a clinical environment to deal with the possibility of anaphylaxis in some individuals can be met with the positioning of ambulances with duty doctors and nurses at these sites.

Prior registration of association members may also ensure elimination of wastage of doses. At some level, there may also be 'peer pressure' within a community to get vaccinated. Physical distancing, masking and hand washing can be enforced at the association level more effectively.

With the health infrastructure bursting at its seams during this second wave, it is imperative to have all willing hands on the deck. With all precautions, it's worth giving community participation a shot.

(The writer is an advocate at the Madras high court, columnist & author)

Teynampet, Anna Nagar zones most worrisome

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

While the city is battling the intense second wave of Covid-19, two zones — Teynampet and Anna Nagar — continue to be a major cause of concern as they report over 3,000 active cases daily.

Chennai is adding over 3,500 cases daily for the last several days. On Thursday, the city had contributed 3,789 new cases across 16 zones.

According to the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) data, Teynampet topped the table with 3,298 cases followed by Anna Nagar close behind with 3,208 cases on Thursday.

Six other zones, meanwhile, have crossed the 2,000 mark in active cases, posing the possible threat of an outbreak. The tally of the top zones is: Thiru Vi. Ka. Nagar (2,838), Kodambakkam (2,616), Ambattur (2,263), Royapuram (2,068), Tondiarpet (2,163) and Adyar (2,129).

Teynampet is still on the top among zones with maximum cases of deaths with 556. Anna Nagar and Kodambakkam have also crossed the 500-mark in the death toll.

The zones Tondiarpet, Royapuram, Thiru. Vi. Ka. Nagar, Ambattur and Adyar have recorded more than 300 death cases while Madhavram, Valasaravakkam, Alandur and Perungudi reported over 100 deaths so far. The total death toll in the city reached 4,473 on Thursday.

However, the GCC administration has so far administered 12,68,289 doses of Covid-19 vaccine since January 16. On Thursday alone 25,415 beneficiaries in the city took the jab.

Meanwhile, the GCC administration, in view of

Daily Covid case count crosses 13K

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

Touching a new peak in the Covid19 tally in the state, daily cases count has crossed the 13k mark on Friday, recording another jump.

According to the data provided by the Health department, the state added a total of 13,776 new cases. The same figure on Thursday was 12,652. Death toll also mounted to 78 that is a jump from 59 on Thursday.

With this, the total Covid-19 tally in the state has touched 10,51,487 while death toll is 13,395 including 4,512 in Chennai. Chennai registered 3,842 new cases and 37 deaths. The count in the district on Thursday was 3,789 new cases and 24 deaths. Now, total new cases in the district touched 30,154.

New cases in

Chengalpattu district, which had recorded 906 cases, have gone up to 985 and 10 people succumbed to the Covid19. Total cases in the district now are 71,474.

Number of daily cases in Coimbatore has also gone up on Friday with 889 taking a surge from 689. Six districts including Chennai, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Coimbatore, and Chengalpattu, and Thiruvallur districts reported 500plus cases.

While Selam recorded over 400 cases, 12 other districts crossed the 200mark. Apart from this, 12 districts reported more than 100 cases in the day. The contribution of Chennai and surrounding districts including Thiruvallur and Chengalpattu on Friday 5,634 that is a rise from 5,205 on Thursday.

Figure of active cases in the state recorded yet

another rise touching nearly 1lakh cases. On Friday the state reported 95,048 cases, which is a jump from 89,428 on Thursday. The total active cases in the Chennai district now stands at 31170 that is a spike from 30401 on Thursday.

While Kanyakumari, Kancheepuram and Thiruvallur districts reported four deaths each, C u d d a l o r e, Ramanathapuram, Selam, Tenkasi, Thanjavur and Vellore district reported two cases each.

Dharmapuri, Dindigul, Erode, Krishnagiri, Thirupathur, Trichy and Villupuram districts reported deaths.

A total of 1,22,900 persons were subjected to RTPCR tests which is a dip from 1,13,144 persons on Thursday. At least 2,14,02,442 individuals tested so far in the state.

surging cases, has relaunched widespread containment measures including door-to-door screenings and surveys with over 20,000 volunteers across the zones. The door-to-door screening as well as fever clinics had immensely helped the administration for flattening the curve during the first wave by early detection and isolation.

As part of the containment strategy, the volunteers are sent to residences on a daily basis across the zones to screen individuals.

They collect all details including his co-morbid condition such as hypertension, respiratory problems, diabetes, kidney diseases, heart conditions and cancer. If a person is

found unwell with comorbid conditions, the volunteers will help them to get immediate health assistance from nearby Covid-19 health centres. Asymptomatic persons will be given support for home isolation. If there is no space at home for self-isolation, they will be referred to the Covid Care Centres.

According to the GCC officials, the city administration has set up 1,119 micro containment zones across the city. Royapuram has 210 streets with more than six cases and 52 streets with more than 10 active cases. There are some streets which have more than 30 active cases like one near DAV Girls School that has 38 cases.

Meanwhile, the GCC has introduced hefty fines to check violation of Covid-19 protocol.

As per officials, public spitting will attract a fine of ₹500 while those who do not wear masks in public spaces will be fined ₹200. Gatherings without following the social distancing will attract a fine of ₹500 individually.

Commercial establishments including spas and gyms will have to pay Rs 5,000 if they operate without standard operating procedures. The individuals who fail to follow the stipulated guidelines in containment zones will be fined ₹500. Vehicles or commercial establishments that fail to follow these guidelines will also be fined.



Corona patients waiting with oxygen cylinders before admission at Government Omandurar hospital on Friday.

— DC

SHRC helps 6 to start fuel outlets in Tenkasi district

A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

The State Human Rights Commission has come to the help of six persons who wanted to set up petrol and diesel retail outlets in Tenkasi district. They approached the SHRC after the highways department denied them a no objection certificate (NOC) three years ago.

In the complaint, K. Kaleeswari, G. Varadharajaperumal, S. Mariappa, A. Kaliraj, V.R. Aravindharaja and A. Annamalai stated that they were allowed to set up petrol pumps through the lottery systems. They invested a lot of money by obtaining a loan and started the initial groundwork to set up the business in different locations. The locations were verified and approved by the respective oil corporations. They sought NOCs from various government departments such as revenue, police, fire

SHRC member D Jayachandran said the fire and rescue services, police and revenue departments had issued NOCs. Due to denial of NOC by C. Sathiyamoorthy, they were not able to start the business

service and highways.

But they did not get the NOC from the highways department due to the Indian Road Congress (IRC) 12-2009 norms. C. Sathiyamoorthy, divisional engineer, highways, Tenkasi district; T. Santhi, superintending engineer, highways, Tirunelveli District; and C. Sathiyamoorthy, deputy superintending engineer, highways, Tirunelveli circle stated that the land was not fit for setting up petrol and diesel retail outlets as per the IRC 12-2019 norms. However, R. Suyambukrishnan, senior draughting officer, highway, Tenkasi district granted an NOC. So, they sought the commission to direct the offi-

cials to grant them NOC.

In the reply, C. Sathiyamoorthy and T. Santhi stated that they acted in accordance with the IRC 12-2009 norms.

SHRC member D Jayachandran said the fire and rescue services, police and revenue departments had issued NOCs. Due to denial of NOC by C. Sathiyamoorthy, they were not able to start the business. Their right to life and dignity was affected. The complainants were running from pillar to post for getting the NOC from Sathiyamoorthy for months, which amounts to violation of their human rights.

Recommending the Tamil Nadu government to pay a compensation of Rs 1.5 lakh to the complainants, the SHRC asked the government to issue the NOC to set up retail outlets within four weeks. The commission also recommended disciplinary action against C. Sathiyamoorthy and T. Santhi.

Consider plea against dumping garbage into canal in Dharmapuri, HC tells TN

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

The Madras high court has directed the Dharmapuri district collector and Dharmapuri municipality commissioner to consider and dispose of a representation, which sought to take action against the municipality workers for dumping and burning the garbage thereby causing health hazards and to restrain the municipality from dumping garbage in the Mohamed Ali Club road region in Dharmapuri.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy gave the directive while disposing of a petition filed by Kaspar.

The bench said the petitioner complains of dumping of garbage at a canal near Mohamed Ali Club Road, Dharmapuri. He stated that from January

Regular water channel not to be shut till completion of new irrigation project in Erode

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

The Madras high court has disposed of a Public Interest Litigation on the basis of the state's representation that the regular channel serving the petitioner and other downstream agriculturists will not be shut down completely during the time taken for construction of the new irrigation project in Erode district, but such

2021, the municipality was dumping all the waste and garbage collected from the region of Pennagaram road into the canal on the northern side of the shopping complex situated at



regular channel may be shut for limited temporary periods when absolutely unavoidable.

Mohamed Ali Club road in Dharmapuri. As a consequence, the petitioner complains that there was significant air pollution, which was aggravated by the burning of such

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy disposed of the PIL filed by N.Senthil Kumar, which sought to quash the tender notification dated November 13, 2020, and consequently direct the authorities to revise the tender notification after getting the views of the farmers as to the release of water for irrigation.

garbage. The petitioner states that a detailed representation was submitted to the authorities on February 17, 2021, and except for a communication of March 8, 2021, from

the district environmental engineer, Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board to the Dharmapuri municipality commissioner, no action has been taken, the bench added.

The bench said state government pleader V.Jayaprakash Narayanan, who accepted notice, pointed out that action would be taken on the representation of the petitioner. Accordingly, without examining the merits of the matter, the petitioner was permitted to carry a fresh representation to the district collector and Dharmapuri municipality commissioner within two weeks. Upon receipt thereof, the said respondents were directed to consider such representation and dispose of the same by a speaking order, after providing a reasonable opportunity to the affected parties within eight weeks, the bench added.

IN BRIEF

Fake edible oil unit unearthed in Tiruchy

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, APRIL 23

Officials of the state Food safety and drugs administration department led by district-designate officer Dr. R. Ramesh Babu, unearthed a bogus edible oil packing unit at Sangiliyandapuram in Tiruchy city, on Thursday.

Dr. R. Ramesh Babu said, acting on a tip-off, an official team consisting of food security officers Vasanth, Muthuraja, Stalin and Mariappan, raided the premises and found that the people there were packing palm oil in the name of refined sunflower oil. Besides sealing the unit, they seized 5,410 liters of the palm oil, and are further investigating, Dr. R. Ramesh Babu added.

DMK objects to change in EVM counting rules

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

The DMK objected to the withdrawal of the instruction in the handbook for returning officers that the penultimate round of EVM counting should be taken up only after completion of postal ballot counting.

The Chief Electoral Officer through a letter dated March 16 to the District Election Officers and Returning Officers of Assembly constituencies had given some advisories that went against the norms in the handbook, DMK's organisation secretary R. S. Bharati said in a representation to the Chief Election Commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer on Friday.

As per the CEO's letter, 'the EVM counting can go on irre-

spective of the stage of Postal Ballot counting, Bharathi said, adding that it was in violation of handbook rules, which read as follows: "The penultimate (one before the last) round of counting of votes recorded in EVMs shall not commence till the counting of postal ballot is completed in all respects."

The CEO's letter "is in contradiction with the Handbooks issued by the Election Commission of India which govern the conduct of the present elections and the counting processes thereunder," the DMK leader said.

Bharati also objected to the revision of "the commission's instruction for mandatory re-counting of all postal ballot papers on the ground that the margin of victory is less than the

number of postal ballots."

Now it has been "revised to the effect that where the margin of victory is less than the number postal ballot papers rejected as invalid at the time of counting, all the rejected postal ballot papers shall be mandatorily re-verified by the Returning Officer before the declaration of result," he said.

Bharathi requested the Election Commission to 'immediately instruct all the concerned officials who are in-charge of the counting of votes of the General Assembly Elections Tamil Nadu, 2021, to withdraw the Letter No. 4500/2021-2 dated 16.03.2021 and issue a clarification in this regard, with a view to ensure a free and fair electoral process.'

He said the revision of the instructions in the handbook had

led to chaos and confusion among the Candidates, their Agents, Returning Officers and Counting Agents and that variation from the handbooks will definitely lead to confusion and unnecessary disputes being raised during the process of counting.

Also he said that the reasons assigned by the ECI and CEO to increase the number of tables for counting of postal ballots to three were unfounded and untenable, he said, adding that his party apprehended that if the EVM counting was allowed to be completed without completing the counting of Postal ballots, it would pave way for malpractices and there was a danger of Postal ballots being rejected/accepted illegally to suit one person's electoral victory/ defeat.

Corona negative certificate must in counting centres

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

Though the prevailing Sunday lockdown rule would not be applicable on May 2 when the votes polled on April 6 for the Assembly would be taken up for counting in 75 centres across the state, no one would be allowed into the counting centres without a coronavirus negative certificate.

The Coronavirus test should have been taken less than 72 hours prior to entering the counting centres, outside of which, too, needless crowding of people would not be allowed, Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo told the media on Friday.

All preparatory work to start the counting at 8 am on May 2 was on and the District Collectors were coordinating with the

health officials with regard to following the Covid-19 protocols, he said.

Explaining that 14 tables would be laid out in a single hall for counting of votes, he said that the tables would be placed as per 'social distancing' norms. If a hall was not big enough to hold 14 tables with proper spacing, an additional hall could be used for it, he said.

Meanwhile, Puthiya Tamilagam leader Dr K Krishnasamy called on the CEO and demanded that the counting process be stopped. Alleging large scale distribution of money during the April 6 elections, he wanted an enquiry by a Supreme Court judge.

After imposing President's Rule in the state, those who distributed money should be taken to task and only then a re-election should be held, he said.

WORLD BOOK DAY



World Book Day is celebrated every year on April 23 commemorating the birth anniversary of renowned playwright William Shakespeare. It was celebrated without any fanfare this year owing to the spread of Covid. Youngsters are engrossed in reading at Connemara public library in Chennai on Friday.

—N. Sampath

Sterlite: Public hearing norms flouted, say participants

ARULOLI. M | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, APRIL 23

What should prevail -- the rule of law or the rule of mob? was the question raised by Dhanalakshmi of Thoothukudi, who was attacked outside the collectorate here for expressing her opinion in support of re-opening the Sterlite plant for oxygen production, at the public hearing held here, on Friday.

The situation was reportedly tumultuous inside the hall where Thoothukudi Collector Senthil Raj chaired the hastily planned public hearing. Participants belonging to both the sides complained that the public hearing was not arranged as per the EIA public hearing guidelines - 1999.

"This is not at all a fair public hearing," said Maharajan, a local MDMK functionary and an anti-Sterlite activist. According to him, "The basic principle of a public hearing is that there should be no

exclusion and all those interested parties should be allowed to present their views in person to the presiding officer, which was completely not followed. The collector preparing a 20 member list of his choice of participants is flawed."

Those who support the idea that Sterlite could be allowed to reopen to produce medical oxygen also blamed the collector choosing 14 of the anti-sterlite activists, while enlisting only just six persons from the industrial fraternity, whose voice got muffled by the shoutings of the anti-Sterlite activists. They also attempted to attack the 60-year-old president of Tuticorin Stevedores' association, T. Velsankar, who along with two others - Members of Thoothukudi District Tiny and Small-Scale Industries Association (THU-DITSSIA), expressed their support for Sterlite manufacturing oxygen. They were safely taken out by the

police to a nearby separate room.

This incident, according to advocate Victor, is a complete violation of the public hearing guidelines that insists on conducting such a hearing in a non-adversarial manner. Collector Senthil Raj, who was presiding officer of the public hearing, is also said to have acted in favour of the anti-Sterlite activists, as even before hearing the opinion of the participants, he came out with a statement that the Tamil Nadu government's stand against re-opening Sterlite has not changed.

On top of all, advocate Victor said that the public hearing which was decided just the previous evening, and held in haste, effectively amounts to interference in the hearing by the Supreme Court, especially since the state administration has been put on notice, as it is part of the hearing in the Apex Court.

Massive fire breaks out at Madambakkam dumping ground

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

A massive fire broke out at Madambakkam town panjayat dumping ground on Friday morning.

According to sources, people residing in nearby Gandhi Nagar, Thiruvalluvar Nagar, Ambika Nagar, Cholan Nagar, Rajaji Nagar, faced breathing problems as the smoke entered their houses.

Firefighters from Tambaram fire station was pressed into service to douse the fire. After a two-hour-long struggle the situation was brought under control.

Selaiyur police registered a case regarding the incident. Sources said that there are chances the fire broke out due to hot weather. There are cases of fire incidents at dumping ground after every two to three months.

46.8 kg khat leaves seized by customs, aeronautical engineer arrested

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

Khat leaves worth ₹1.17 crore weighing 46.8 kg smuggled from Kenya through foreign post was seized by Chennai Air Customs at the Foreign Post Office.

Based on an official statement from the department of customs, on information that some narcotics drug is likely to be smuggled through postal parcels arriving from Africa, five parcels which had arrived from Nairobi, Kenya were detained at Foreign Post Office Chennai.

The first parcel was declared to contain 'flower vases'. On opening the parcel eleven wooden vases wrapped in white foam sheet were found inside, on cut opening the top a pink polybag was found inside in which khat leaves were concealed. The top of all eleven vases were cut open and khat leaves were recovered from all.

The other four parcels were declared to contain 'rosemary' and 'dried spices'. On opening the

parcels a silver opaque polybag was found inside in which five pink polybags containing dried leaves suspected to be Khat leaves were concealed.

In total, 46.8 kg of khat leaves worth ₹1.17 crore were recovered and seized under the NDPS Act-1985.

A 27-year-old aeronautical engineer working in a IT company in the city has been arrested.

Khat (Catha edulis) also known as Miraa is a stimulant drug and is prohibited under Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act. Khat is an evergreen shrub mainly cultivated in East Africa and South Yemen. It contains alkaloids cathinone and Cathine, amphetamine-like stimulants, which cause euphoria. Khat is mainly chewed for its soporific effect but some boil it in water and drink it like tea and has a dependence producing ability.

Earlier in March 2020, 15.6 kg khat leaves worth ₹40 lakh were seized which had arrived from Addis Ababa Ethiopia at FPO Chennai. Further investigation is on.

Air India's Chennai-Dubai flight makes emergency landing due to technical snag

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

A Dubai-bound Air India flight with 152 passengers on board made an emergency landing at the Anna International airport here

within a few minutes of its take-off for Dubai due to a technical snag, sources said on Thursday.

According to airport sources, the Air India flight developed some technical snag because of which it had

to be brought back to the airport here, after its departure at 19 hours.

After the engineers failed to rectify the snag, another Air India special flight flew the passengers to Dubai at 2230 hours.

Corpn collects ₹4.12 crore fine from pandemic rule flouters

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 23

Greater Chennai Corporation has collected ₹4.12 crore till date as fines from individuals and well as commercial establishments found flouting pandemic norms such as not wearing masks and not maintaining physical distancing.

It was mentioned by a statement

from the GCC that as a part of intense drive against the shops and the individuals, who have violated Covid-19 containment norms such as wearing masks, maintaining physical distancing, fumigation of the shops, the corporation imposed penalty on several commercial establishments and collected a fine of ₹4.12 crore till Friday (22.04.2021).

No oxygen scarcity in Thanjavur: Collector

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, APRIL 23

Collector M. Govinda Rao on Friday took a second dose of vaccine against corona at the Thanjavur medical college hospital here on Friday, in the presence of TMCH dean, Dr. Ravikumar, and Dr. Maruthudurai, former dean.

Later, the collector told presspersons that there was

no oxygen scarcity in the district. Availability of oxygen is monitored and ensured. He also said that 23,121 persons have tested positive for corona so far in the district during the second wave, and a total of 1,272 persons are under treatment.

Treatment is being given at the Thanjavur medical college hospital, five government hospitals, 14 primary

health centres. Asymptomatic persons are being treated at Covid care centre at Vallam, and at Covid care centres at Pattukottai and Kumbakonam. Twelve private hospitals have also been identified for treatment of corona patients.

"If more than three persons test Corona positive in an area, the area is declared

as a 'containment zone'. There are 64 containment zones in Thanjavur district," the collector said. He also said that there are 4,313 beds out of which 2,301 are at hospitals and 2,012 in Covid care centres in the district.

There are 934 beds with oxygen facilities and 317 ICU beds. A total of 3,500 persons are tested every day. A total of 1,20,000 persons have been

vaccinated so far, said the collector.

The release said the intention of the GCC is not to shore up revenue but to ensure that people follow rules as the pandemic has not yet ended. GCC would continue to impose penalties on those who refuse to wear facemasks and on those shops failing to maintain social distancing.

Now, summer bloom spills fragrance across hills



Bloom of Nishagandhi flowers in Ooty.

—DC

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, APRIL 23

Bloom of the rare 'Nishagandhi' flower, which blooms only in the night, that too once a year, has begun to bring a rare summer attraction to Ooty this year. Its bloom now can be seen at the glass house at Tamizhagam guest house premises.

Nishagandhi, also known as 'Princess of Night' flower, 'Bethlehem Lily' and also 'Brahma Kamal' flower is indeed a rare, legendary, mythological flower which features in a few Indian folktales also.

Horticulture department sources here said that Nishagandhi is a rare sort of

cactus flower which blooms during night hours once a year.

"The horticulture department is growing a few 'Nishagandhi' plants in the glass house at Tamizhagam guest house here. The brilliant pink colour flowering variety has just begun to bloom. This is a summer attraction this year. When it blooms, it emits a good fragrance. But, its bloom and fragrance lasts for a few hours in the night. So, many cannot see it bloom, sources added.

Dr. S. Rajan, noted taxonomist and former field botanist at the Central Ayush wing here, said that the 'Nishagandhi' flower is native to Central America, but spread across the globe. Quite a few folktales are attached to

this flower that makes it a legendary and mythological flower. It is believed to bring good luck to those who happen to see it bloom. The petals of these flowers usually have large star-like flowers with fragrance to help the pollinators locate this flower bloom in the night hours. This flower, which is also known as 'Night blooming Cereus', is being used by traditional herbalists as a natural treatment to tone the heart muscle, reduce blood fat and cholesterol, and increase circulation, he added.

It is being used in homeopathic treatment for digestive ailments with flatulence and pain associated with cramps, added Dr Rajan.



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SHORT TAKES

KERALA: CPM CALLS FOR STIR ON JAB POLICY

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 23

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

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

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

Kerala records biggest single day rise

Meanwhile, 1,30,617 samples were tested across the state on Friday and the test positivity rate was recorded as 27.78 per cent. The state reported 27 deaths taking the death toll due to Covid-19 to 5,055. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said restrictions amounting to lockdown would be enforced on Saturday and Sundays.

NEWS OF HER DEATH SHOCKS SUMITRA

DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, APRIL 23

Former Lok Sabha speaker and senior BJP leader Sumitra Mahajan was on Friday shocked when misinformation on her death was circulated in social and other media, leading to pouring of condolence messages mourning her 'demise'.

According to Ms Mahajan's office, a WhatsApp message ran the fake news about her death late on Thursday evening inspiring other social media networks as well as some mainline visual media to run the story.

Later, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and BJP national spokesman Sambit Patra posted condolence messages mourning her death in their Twitter accounts, leaving Ms Mahajan, who was currently recuperating from fever in a private hospital in Indore in Madhya Pradesh, shell-shocked.

Her younger son Mandar Mahajan later issued a statement saying that her mother was very much in good health. "My mother is fine. She has even tested negative for coronavirus", a video-recorded statement by Mr Mahajan said. According to the former speaker's public relations officer Rajesh Agrawal, Mr Tharoor rang up Mr Mahajan expressing his regret over his wrong tweet on the former LS speaker.

AVALANCHE IN UTTARAKHAND'S CHAMOLI DISTRICT

Gopeshwar (U'khand), April 23: An avalanche occurred in an area close to the Niti valley in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on Friday.

Information was received about a part of a glacier collapsing beyond the Sumna Chawki near Malari in the Niti valley. Border Roads Organisation (BRO) officials, who were on their way to the spot, said.

No contact has so far been established with the area due to heavy snowfall, they added.

A BRO official confirmed the sliding down of a glacier in the area, where labourers are engaged in road-construction work.

A BRO team was rushed to the spot but there is no clue yet on the damages caused, the official said.

● **A BRO OFFICIAL** confirmed the sliding down of a glacier in the area, where labourers are engaged in road-construction work.

HOW THE TRAGEDY UNFOLDS



Relatives react during the cremation of a Covid-19 victim at Bhairav Ghat Hindu Crematory, as coronavirus cases surge, in Kanpur on Friday. - PTI



1) Cremation of Covid-19 victims at Nigambodh Ghat Crematorium in New Delhi on Friday.

2) Disposed PPE kits after being used in Covid-19 bodies' cremation at Nigambodh Ghat crematorium in New Delhi on Friday.

3) Health workers and family members, wearing protective suits, carry the body of a person who died of Covid-19, at Cremation Ground in Jammu on Friday.

4) Family members and relatives bury a Covid-19 victim, amid a surge in coronavirus cases, at a burial ground in New Delhi on Friday.

- PTI

Cong netas now moved to resort

Assam Congress wants to save them from poaching

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, APRIL 23

Fearing poaching of candidates, Assam Congress has shifted its candidates of assembly polls into a resort in an obvious attempt to insulate them from being lured away by the ruling party which the opposition feels is going to fall short of majority.

The Congress had fielded 95 candidates in the three-phase polls that ended on April 6. It left the remaining 31 seats to its coalition partners in the 10-party Mahajot, or grand alliance.

Though, officially they deny facts remain that it was the "manoeuvring ability" of BJP minister Himanata Biswa Sarma, who once in Congress was a nightmare for the BJP too, is now haunting opposition the most.

The political observers point out that the memory of 2010 Rajya Sabha polls in which four Assam BJP MLAs - Rumi Nath, Shambhu Singh Mallah, Kartik Sen Sinha and Abhijit Hazarika were lured away by Himanta Biswa Sarma then a Congress minister, on the day polling was held, is still afresh in the mind of Congress leaders who

don't want to leave anything to chance. The Congress had snatched away a sure RS seat of opposition in 2010.

This was more visible when Rupjyoti Kurmi, the party's three-time MLA from Mariani constituency, told reporters that the BJP has been sending feelers to a few candidates. "Everybody knows what happened in Goa and Manipur. The BJP will try to buy some victors among us or brow-beat the opposition MLAs with threats of implicating them in some cases or the other," he said.

However, Congress spokesperson Bobbeeta Sharma played down the issue and told reporters, "The candidates want to stay together for a few days in a relaxed environment away from public contact." The last phase of polling, the All India United Democratic Front had packed off most of its 20 candidates in a chartered flight to a resort in Rajasthan. They returned a few days back due to Covid situation. Another constituent of the Congress led grand alliance-the Bodoland People's Front, has also sent its candidates to some Congress ruled states.

Delhi, 9 states account for 75 % of Covid cases

New Delhi, April 23: Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Rajasthan reported 75.01 per cent of the new Covid-19 cases registered in a day, the Union Health Ministry said on Friday.

India added a record 3,32,730 new coronavirus cases in a span of 24 hours, taking the country's infection tally to 1,62,63,695, according to the ministry data updated on Friday.

Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases at 67,013. It is followed by Uttar Pradesh with 34,254 fresh infections, while Kerala reported 26,995 new cases, the ministry said.

India's active case count has reached 24,28,616 and now comprises 14.93 per cent of the country's total infections. A net increase of 1,37,188 cases was recorded in the total active Covid-19 cases in a day.

Five states - Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala - cumulatively account for 59.12 per cent of total active cases.

Delhi and 11 states - Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Rajasthan - are displaying an upward trajectory in daily new cases, the ministry said.

India's cumulative recoveries have surged to 1,36,48,159 with 1,93,279 recoveries being registered in a span of 24 hours.

The National Mortality Rate has been falling and currently stands at 1.15 per cent, the ministry said.

A total of 2,263 coronavirus-related deaths were reported in a span of 24 hours.

Delhi and nine states account for 81.79 per cent of the new deaths. Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (568). Delhi follows with 306 daily deaths, the ministry said.

On the other hand, the cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has crossed 13.54 crore as part of the world's largest vaccination drive.

Cumulatively, 13,54,78,420 vaccine doses have been administered through 19,38,184 sessions, as per the provisional report till 7 am, the ministry said. — PTI

HIGH PRAISE

A-G congratulates Chief Justice of India for steering the court during the pandemic in March

I leave with the satisfaction that I did my best: Bobde

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 23

Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde on Friday said that he is leaving the top court with a satisfaction that he did his best in leading the institution and leaves with "happiness, goodwill and very fond memories."

"I leave with the satisfaction that I did my best. I hand over the baton to Justice Ramana who will, I am sure, very ably lead the court," CJI said in his farewell speech on his last working day in the Supreme Court.

Saying that he is experiencing mixed feelings as

he is bidding farewell to the Supreme Court, Chief Justice of India said, "I leave this court with happiness, goodwill with very fond memories of wonderful arguments, excellent presentation, good behavior, commitment to the cause of justice from not only Bar but all connected with it."

Having spent 22 years on the bench as judge starting with Bombay High Court, CJI said that his stay in the Supreme Court has been his richest experience.

"Camaraderie with my brother judges has been wonderful", he said

Bobde recalled the transition to the virtual mode through video-conferencing as the Coronavirus pandemic broke out during his tenure and called for ironing out many unsatisfactory things about the virtual hearings. He thanked the registry for helping make a success of the virtual hearing.

The Attorney General K.K.Venugopal congratulated CJI for steering the Court during the pandemic in March last year when the bar thought the court would close down.

"But then CJI rose to the occasion and started virtual hearing and almost

50,000 cases have been disposed of. It's a great achievement," Venugopal underlined.

As Attorney General Venugopal said that Chief Justice of India should have a minimum of three year tenure, Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Vikas Singh said that 65 years is no age for a top court judge to retire and advocated amendment to constitution to increase it.

Hailing CJI for his involvement with the issues, Vikas Singh said, "Till the last day you were concerned about what is happening. You had taken

up such a contentious matter of Covid on the last day too. This shows the involvement of the judges to ensure oxygen supply can be maintained in the hospitals."

The Chief Justice of India was a judge for 21 long years, elevated to the Bombay High Court on March 29, 2000 as additional judge and sworn in as Chief Justice of Madhya Pradesh High Court on October 16, 2012.

He was elevated to the Supreme Court on April 12, 2013 and took the oath as the Chief Justice of India on November 17, 2019.

Perhaps Bobde's only regret would be that during his tenure, though vacancies were there, there was no appointment of judges to the top court.

He wished to elevate Justice B.V. Nagathna of the Karnataka High Court that would have paved the way for her to become India's first woman Chief Justice of India.

However, Bobde could not carry other members of collegiums to back him.

The Chief Justice of India also could not get Tripura Chief Justice Akil Kureshi, originally from Gujarat High Court, brought to the Supreme

Court as he was tossed around even to become the Chief Justice of Gujarat or Maharashtra High Court as a Modi government's aversion towards him for remanding to police custody Home Minister Amit Shah, who was then a Gujarat minister, in 2010 in the case of an alleged encounter of Sohrabuddin Sheikh.

Again Justice Akil Kureshi had upheld then Gujarat Governor Kamla Beniwal's decision to appoint the state Lokayukta, without consulting then Chief Minister Narendra Modi.

DAYS PASSED AND IN THE DEPTHS OF THE JUNGLE, TUBMAN AND THE APES HUNTED FOR FOOD--

HE CREEPT STEALTHILY TOWARD A GRAZING DEER--AND SPRANG!

HE SETTLED DOWN TO FEAST, BUT WAS SUDDENLY DISTURBED BY SOME WATERY NOISE OVER A WALL.

DICK CROCKETT

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DECCAN Chronicle

24 APRIL 2021

No time to lose, ramp up vaccine production now

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

As of now, the facts on the ground are disturbing — we are facing a shortage of all the stuff that is needed to save lives — critical drugs, oxygen, hospital

Almost four months have passed since the Drugs Controller General of India approved two vaccines — Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute of India and Covaxin, by Bharat Biotech International, but the production has not increased by one dose even now

beds, intensive care units, ventilators and vaccine. India, which had reported the second largest number of cases in September-October last year, showed a remarkable improvement in the following months with the daily numbers coming to a few thousands. The numbers started spiralling only in March this year, giving the government time to plan for a situation should it go out of control.

From the looks of it, the government has faltered on every count, except making fancy noises. It launched a vaccination programme, calling it the world's largest. It was true, because we were to vaccinate about 100 crore people. But none asked the question nor the government bothered to answer as to where the vaccine will come from to inoculate all these people. Almost four months have passed since the Drugs Controller General of India approved two vaccines — Covishield manufactured by Serum Institute of India and Covaxin, by the Bharat Biotech International for emer-

gency use, but the production has not increased by one dose even now. It was only a couple of days ago that the company was given ₹3,000 crores which it would use to expand production which will take roughly three months. The same is the case with the other manufacturer, who was granted ₹1,500 crores.

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

Resetting the green agenda

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

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

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

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The God business is good business all across India

Mohan Guruswamy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sant Kabirdas posed this

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

CALLOUS ACT

Apropos your report, 24 Covid patients die after oxygen tank leak in Nashik. Really, distressing to learn about the deaths caused due to the leakage of oxygen from a tanker which subsequently led to interference in the supply. As our country claims to be developed I'm yet to understand how far it can be true. It's unbelievable that a hospital has failed to facilitate a backup in case of such a crisis. It's either callousness or mismanagement on the part of the hospital personnel. Whenever these incidents happen very little is done to avoid such mishaps instead, the politicians try to politicise every issue and try to cover up their governance. It's a pity that lives don't matter in this country.

Jacqueline Netto, Chennai

WELCOME OFFER

The Sterlite Copper was closed with so much hullabaloo by all hues of Tamil Nadu politicians with a vengeance. When it started operations, none had raised a voice and it was allowed to manufacture copper which was in demand. Its management has now volunteered to meet the urgent oxygen need and supply. Yet neither the state government nor the Centre reacted. Why? The politicians in power may not like or even hate the Sterlite copper company but its offer of oxygen should be welcomed and accepted. Instead of searching elsewhere, the Centre, considering the Tamil Nadu 'netas' lukewarm attitude, should negotiate with Sterlite Copper and get the much sought-after oxygen, which is in great demand as many Covid infected patients are dying. They should not shirk their responsibility but readily accept its offer.

A. Seshagiri Rao, Chennai

EXCESSIVE SPEEDING

The directive of the Madras high court to the two-wheeler manufacturers to produce them with speed controllers is a very good and timely decision. There is no gainsaying the fact that most two-wheeler road accidents take place on account of reckless driving and uncontrollable speed at which they are ridden by youths in the age group of 18-25 who want to prove and exhibit their 'bravery' by flouting traffic rules. Many families have lost their dear sons due to this craze for bravado that has landed them only in irremediable loss of life and lifelong incapacitation due to mutilation of limbs. This directive for the manufacture of two-wheelers must have been issued long ago.

V. Girjalakshmi, Coimbatore

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



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

— From **Pate Pay Pair** by Bachchoo

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



quick BITES

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Reliance buys UK country club Stoke Park

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



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

EFALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 23

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

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

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



of Payment System Data."

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

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

Again, in June 2019, the

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

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

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

Cadila gets nod to use hepatitis drug for Covid

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

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

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

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

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

Market ends in red for the third week

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 23

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

SHIHO TAKEZAWA APRIL 23

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

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

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

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

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

— Bloomberg

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Virus emergency in Tokyo and Osaka

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

— AP

Green bags maiden Australian contract

Melbourne: Allrounder Cameron Green landed his maiden national contract but big names, including Matthew Wade and Travis Head, missed out as Cricket Australia on Friday announced a 17-strong list of contracted players for the upcoming season. Green was the only new name in the contract list which has been trimmed down to 17 players from 20 in previous years. However, Joe Burns, Mitchell Marsh and Marcus Stoinis along with former Test vice-captain Head and wicketkeeper-batsman Wade failed to get a deal for the 2021-2022 season. — PTI

Nadal rallies past Nishikori, in last-8

Barcelona: Rafael Nadal needed to go the distance for the second successive day in Barcelona before beating Japan's Kei Nishikori to make the last-eight and stay on course for a 12th title at the tournament. The World No.3 triumphed 6-0, 2-6, 6-2 over 2014 and 2015 champion Nishikori and next faces Britain's Cameron Norrie, a fellow left-hander, for a place in the semifinals. Nadal, who suffered a surprise quarterfinal exit at the Monte Carlo Masters last week, had also required three sets to beat Belarusian qualifier Ilya Ivashka, ranked at 111, in his Barcelona opener on Wednesday. — AFP

Magical Messi on the double Leo's brace fires Barcelona to victory over Getafe, Atletico beat Huesca

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Messi got to work in the eighth minute, slid

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

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

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

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

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

Pugilist Sachin lands 8th gold

New Delhi, April 23: Indian boxer Sachin (56kg) on Friday added an unprecedented eighth gold to the country's historic medal haul at the youth world championships in Kielce, Poland, a day after all seven women swept the top honours in an astonishing performance.

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

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

Sachin intensified his attacks after the break with his right straights fetching him the points. He drew level by getting a split verdict in his favour in the second round.

The final round belonged to the relentless Sachin as Sabyr ran out of steam.

India thus ended their campaign with 11 medals — eight gold and three bronze medals to claim the top spot in overall standings.

This was an improvement on two gold, two silver and six bronze medals

claimed at the event's 2018 edition.

On Thursday, Gitika (48kg), Babyrojisana Chanu (51kg), Poonam (57kg), Vinka (60kg), Arundhati Choudhary (69kg), Thokchom Sanamachu Chanu (75kg) and Alfiya Pathan (+81kg) ensured a perfect finish to the women's campaign.

Earlier, Asian youth silver-winner Ankit Narwal (64kg), Bishwamita Chongthom (49kg) and Vishal Gupta (91kg) ended with bronze medals following semifinal losses in the men's draw.

Sachin is the first Indian male boxer since 2016 to finish on top. It was his namesake Sachin Siwach, now a senior camper, who fetched a gold in that edition.

India fielded a 20-member team — 10 men and as many women — in this year's event which featured 414 boxers from 52 countries.

"This has been an amazing effort from our youth boxers especially when the players had to be confined at home for most part of the last year and only make do with online training sessions," said Boxing Federation of India President Ajay Singh. — PTI

ARCHERS ATANU, DEEPIKA MARCH INTO SEMIFINALS

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

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

Defying severe winds at the Sports Complex Los Arcos here, Deepika, who qualified as the number three seed, displayed some incredible shooting to down German archer Michelle Kroppen in straight sets. She will next face Alejandra Valencia of Mexico in her quest for a gold medal on Sunday

Meanwhile, Das was a bit lucky in the quarterfinal as his Candian rival Eric Peters had a miss in the last set as the Indian wrapped it up 6-4 to keep himself in line for his first ever individual podium.

His previous best was a fourth-place finish in Antalya in 2016. — PTI

Leicester ride on Vardy heroics, rout West Brom

Leicester, April 23: Jamie Vardy ended his two-month goal drought as Leicester blitzed West Brom 3-0 on Thursday to strengthen their grip on a Premier League top-four place and snuff out the Baggies' revival.

Brendan Rodgers' men were wobbling after losing their previous two top-flight matches but produced a dazzling attacking display against the insipid visitors at the King Power Stadium.

First-half goals from Jamie Vardy, Jonny Evans and Kelechi Iheanacho gave West Brom a mountain to climb and Leicester kept a firm grip

on the match after the break.

Third-placed Leicester now have a valuable four-point lead over Chelsea and West Ham, with just six games to go.

Rodgers praised Leicester's attitude, saying he was only focusing on his own team in the battle for a Champions League spot.

"Jamie Vardy has done it throughout his career and Kelechi Iheanacho is now showing his qualities — he can still improve as he is still making too many mistakes, but he is getting in there," he told BT Sport.

"This group will some-

times lose games but they are so honest and they want to be better. When you have that it is the dream ticket. It is all you can ask for as a coach," he added.

James Maddison made his first start since February as the FA Cup finalists took a firm grip on the match and they could easily have scored five or six goals in a one-sided opening 45 minutes.

West Brom had beaten Chelsea and Southampton to give themselves a glimmer of hope that they could survive but they remain in 19th spot, nine points from safety, and look doomed. — AFP

Insigne scores twice as Napoli blitz Lazio

Milan, April 23: Ten-man Atalanta missed the chance to move second in Italian league on Thursday with a 1-1 draw against Roma.

But Napoli thrashed Champions League rivals Lazio 5-2 to boost their hopes of a return to elite European football next season.

Bryan Cristante rifled in a long-distance equaliser to rescue a point for Roma in a game where both teams finished with 10 men.

The visitors had dominated taking the lead after 25 minutes through Ruslan Malinovskyi in the Stadio Olimpico.

Napoli move just three points behind second-

placed Milan. Lazio dropped to five points behind Napoli in sixth.

Roma are a further three points behind in seventh with their Champions League hopes dwindling.

Lazio's five-match winning streak ended but they are still not out of the Champions League running with a game in hand.

Napoli took the lead through a Lorenzo Insigne penalty on seven minutes awarded following a VAR review, the first of a brace on the night for the team skipper.

Matteo Politano, Dries Mertens and Victor Osimhen also found the back of the net in Napoli's win. — AFP

It is understood that he never fully recovered from the injury caused by the heavy workload he endured on the tour of Australia. "He went for rehabilitation at the NCA but it is now evident that even when he was declared fit to make a return against England, he was not 100 per cent match ready. Now he could be out for a longer period as he had rushed his comeback without doing proper rehab," the source said. —PTI