

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | SUNDAY 18 | APRIL 2021

WEATHER



Max: 38°C
Min: 22°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Chithirai 5
Tithi: Shasti
Star: Tiruvathirai
Rahukalam:
4.30 pm to 6 pm
Yamagandam:
12 noon to 1.30 pm

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.55 am
Zohar: 12.18 pm
Asar: 3.29 pm
Maghrib: 6.20 pm
Isha: 7.32 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.22 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.55 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 10.18 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 11.36 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+2,10,146)	(+1,070)
1,47,32,072	1,76,745

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+9,344)
TN: 9,80,728 13,071

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

14,08,92,648

DEATHS

3,016,797

COUNTRIES,
AREAS WITH
CASES 219

worldometers.info

US nurse charged with threatening to kill Kamala Harris

Houston: A 39-year-old nurse in US' Florida has been arrested for allegedly threatening to kill Vice President Kamala Harris, according to media reports on Saturday.

Niviane Petit Phelps was arrested following an investigation by the US Secret Service, CNN reported.

Kamala Harris, 56, is the first woman, the first Black American, and the first South Asian American to be elected as the Vice President of the United States of America. — PTI

COUNTER POINT



Let us loot vaccines and oxygen from the hospital!



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Pay heed now, don't regret later: Vijayabaskar



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Raul Castro steps down

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MSD is the heartbeat of CSK, says Fleming



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Use full national capacity to fight pandemic: Modi

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, APRIL 17:

With the daily caseload of Covid-19 infections hits a new high every day for days on end, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday called for utilising the entire national capacity across private and public sectors to produce vaccines, amid concerns in various states about lack of essentials such as ventilators, oxygen and medicines.

The meeting came in the midst of a huge surge in Covid-19 cases across the country. A record single-day rise of 2,34,692 cases and 1,341 fatalities have pushed India's Covid-19 tally to 1,45,26,609 and the death toll due to the viral disease to 1,75,649, the health ministry said earlier on Saturday.

The number of active coronavirus cases in the country has also surpassed the 16-lakh mark, the ministry's data updated at 8 am showed.

Chairing a meeting to review the status of preparedness to handle the Covid-19 situation, Mr Modi said local administrations needed to be proactive and sensitive to people's concerns. These remarks assume significance in the backdrop of reports of Covid-19 patients and their families accusing the authorities in several states of apathy in providing treatment.

Mr Modi said there is no substitute for "testing, tracking and treatment", and that early testing and proper tracking remain key to reducing mortality.

"Together India had defeated Covid-19 last year and India can do it again, with the same principles



Prime Minister Narendra Modi chairs a Covid-19 review meeting via video conferencing in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

but faster speed and coordination," Mr Modi said.

Directing officials to ensure close coordination with states, he said all necessary measures must be taken to ramp up the availability of hospital beds for Covid-19 patients and that additional supply of beds through temporary hospitals and isolation centres should be ensured.

He also spoke about a need to utilise the full potential of India's pharmaceutical industry to meet the rising demand of various medicines and reviewed the status of the supply of Remdesivir and other medicines.

PM directed all officials to make efforts to utilise the entire national capacity, in the public as well as the private sector, to ramp up vaccine production.

Registering a steady increase for the 38th day in a row, the tally of active Covid-19 cases climbed to 16,79,740 accounting for 11.56 per cent of its total caseload.

Chennai corp sets up 12 screening centres

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 17

Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has introduced 12 advanced screening centres in the city with a view to reducing the caseload of Covid-19 infections which continues to register a spike every day.

GCC commissioner G. Prakash told reporters here on Saturday that these centres were a proven model and it will help the authorities manage the crisis effectively. "An individual who tested positive for Covid-19 need not go to a hospital right away," he said. "Our volunteers will take them to these centres in our vehicles. A few immediate inspections including X-

Ray, blood pressure, blood platelets count and oxygen saturation level will be done at the centres under a post-graduate doctor. All asymptomatic persons will be sent home right away and those who show minor symptoms will be referred to Covid-19 Care Centres. Only serious cases will be admitted to hospitals."

The process will take place in a smooth and safe manner as each centre functions under the supervision of the government medical colleges and hospitals in the city, Mr Prakash said.

He said the administration was trying to increase the daily sample collection from 20,000 to 25,000 so that they could expedite containment activities.

78% vote in fifth phase of WB poll

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, APRIL 17

Voting for the fifth phase of elections to the West Bengal Assembly was held on Saturday amid sporadic incidents of violence. Early reports said at least 78.36 per cent voters exercise their franchise across 45 assembly constituencies. "By and large polling has been peaceful in Bengal today apart from a few incidents of violence," Chief electoral officer Aariz Aftab said. — PTI

Vaccinate 25-plus, scrap GST on medicines, Sonia tells PM

New Delhi, April 17: With the country witnessing a massive rise in Covid-19 cases, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Saturday accused the Modi government of "gross unpreparedness" and "ad hocism" in managing the crisis and suggested reducing the immunisation age to 25 years and providing income support to people.

Chairing the meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), she also called for making all equipment, medicines and instruments required for treating Covid-19 free of

the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

The Congress has always believed that fighting the Covid-19 pandemic is a national challenge that should be kept above party politics and it hopes suggestions put forth would be considered in the spirit of true democratic traditions, she said.

Accusing the Centre of giving preferential treatment to some states, Ms Gandhi said it maintains "thundering silence" on requests of states ruled by the Congress and other opposition parties.

"Taking on these chal-

lenging times as Indians rather than as political opponents will be true Rajadharma," she said at the meeting.

Considering that India has one of the highest infection rates, she also asked whether the export of vaccines should be held back and priority be given to protect Indians.

"How is boasting about our generosity to other countries going to help thousands of our people who are dying," she said. She said the Congress has extended hands of cooperation since February-March last year. PTI

KEEP KUMBH SYMBOLIC, SEER TELLS DEVOTEES

Dehradun, April 17: Joona Akhara Mahamandaleshwar Swami Avadheshanand Giri on Saturday appealed to people to attend the ongoing Kumbh Mela in Haridwar in limited numbers in view of the surge in coronavirus cases.

Responding to an appeal by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to keep the participation in Kumbh symbolic, Giri said, "Faith is a big thing,

but human lives are far more important."

"We must all realise that the strain of coronavirus was not as aggressive or fatal earlier as it is at present. So my appeal to the emotional devotees is that they should attend the Kumbh fair in limited numbers," he told reporters in Haridwar. He also appealed to seers to keep their participation in the event symbolic in order to save others' lives. — PTI



LALU GETS BAIL, MAY WALK OUT OF PRISON NOW

NAYYAR AZAD IDC
PATNA, APRIL 17

The Jharkhand High Court on Saturday granted bail to Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Yadav in a fodder scam case pertaining to the illegal withdrawal of Rs. 3.97 crore from the Dumka treasury in the 1990s when he was the chief minister of Bihar.

He was granted bail by Justice Ajaith Kumar Singh on grounds that he has served more than half of the five-year jail term he was awarded. He has been instructed to furnish a bail bond of Rs. 1 lakh and a fine of Rs. 10 Lakh, his lawyers said. He has also been asked not to leave the country without the permission of the court.

Mr Yadav was earlier granted bail in Chaibasa and Deoghar treasury cases on similar grounds. He will be able to walk out of jail once he is released from All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi, where is he now undergoing treatment after his health condition deteriorated. Mr Yadav, who has been in jail since December 2017, was shifted to Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences, Ranchi, in March 2018.

Chennai bids tearful farewell to comedian Vivekh

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 17

The untimely death of popular actor and social activist Vivekh at the age of 59 on Saturday after he suffered a massive heart attack left the Tamil film fraternity and fans in deep grief. Vivekh breathed his last at 4.35 am. He was cremated with police honours at the electric crematorium at Mettukuppam in the evening.

The actor, a Padma Shri recipient and who has acted in over 200 films with top Tamil heroes, is known for his work on social issues and the environmental protection front. He actively campaigned and involved himself in planting saplings and afforestation. He also collaborated with the government in disseminating

The actor, a Padma Shri recipient and who has acted in over 200 films with top Tamil heroes, is known for his work on social issues and the environmental protection front. He actively campaigned and involved himself in planting saplings and afforestation

significant social awareness messages to the public on TV including the latest on preventing coronavirus spread.

It was heart-wrenching to note that his tweets, which he had posted to condole the death of former President

A.P.J Abdul Kalam, going viral. The post of Vivekh, which is in Tamil, roughly translates as, "A simple, selfless and clean life too will end someday. However, many die away! But only a few will live on even after death". An admirer of the late president, he was actively engaged in planting one crore tree saplings through his Green Kalam initiative.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, DMK president M.K. Stalin, actor Rajinikanth, Makkal Needhi Maiam leader Kamal Haasan were among those who expressed shock and grief over his death and conveyed their condolences to the bereaved.

On Friday morning, an unconscious Vivekh was brought to the SIMS hospital in Chennai. He reported-

ly suffered a cardiac arrest due to a 100 per cent blockage in the heart vessel. The hospital said in a statement that the actor was revived and underwent an emergency coronary angiogram followed by angioplasty. He was then put on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) support at the intensive care unit.

Dr Raju Sivasamy, vice-president of SIMS Hospital, said Vivekh's condition was not related to the vaccine he took on Thursday. "He suffered an acute coronary syndrome with cardiogenic shock. This is a separate cardiac event. It may not be due to Covid vaccination." He also confirmed that he was not infected with the deadly virus.

Vivekh is survived by his wife Arulselvi and two daughters Amrithanandini and Tejaswini.



Tamil Nadu police personnel pay salute near the mortal remains of actor Vivekh during his funeral ceremony, in Chennai, Saturday. — PTI

1961 2021

Comedian who put on his thinking cap with elan

‘Chinna Kalaivanar’ Vivekh was a fine human being

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN | DC

Green Kalam initiative

Vivekh, a native of Kovilpatti, was born in Madurai in 1961 and was named Vivekanandhan. A postgraduate in commerce from Madurai's American College, Vivekh joined as a clerk in the secretariat in Chennai. With his innate comedy sense, he was keen to pursue his talents and started performing standup comedy at Humor Club. A chance watch by K. Balachander landed him a small role in his film Manadhil Urudhi Vendum in 1987. He essayed Suhasini's brother in the film. Impressed with his comedy timings, KB later offered him a slightly bigger comedian role in Pudhu Pudhu Arthangal and Oru Veedu Iru Vaasal in 1990.

Later he was often seen as one of the friends of the lead actors for almost a decade. Vivekh had to wait till 1996 to establish himself as the sole comedian who could help carry the film. Thereafter, in the late '90s he began to appear in increasingly prominent roles and tasted success acting alongside heroes like Ajith and Prasanth. He subsequently became amongst the busiest actors in 2000 and 2001, featuring in over fifty films in two years.

His notable films as a comedian then included Kushi, Priyamanavale, Minnale, Mani Ratnam's Alai Payudhe, Dum Dum Dum and Mugavari. Though in 2001, K. Subash planned a film with Vivekh playing the lead protagonist, it did not materialize.

He continued his good work as a comedian and won several awards and honors in the subsequent years. He received Tamil Nadu State Award for Best Comedian for films like Run, Unnaruge Naan Irundhal, Parthiban Kanavu, Anniyan and Sivaji. He

Vivekh, a great admirer of former President Abdul Kalam and environmental activism launched the initiative Green Kalam in 2010 with the aim of planting a billion saplings across Tamil Nadu. In a television interview, Vivekh once recalled his meeting with Kalam, after he won the Padma Shri in 2009. "He asked to read his poetry on page 49 in his diary. It was about trees, indicating the dangers posed by global warming," Vivekh had said. It was after this meeting only Vivekh launched the initiative.

Through his social media handle he mobilized volunteers, particularly from schools and colleges, to join the initiative. In an earlier interview with DC, Vivekh had said,

"We are not insisting on planting trees just because of global warming. Hinduism, Christianity and Islam had insisted the necessity of tree saplings. Especially in Hinduism, Atrium & Pupil trees are worshipped as Lord Ganesh while Neem Trees are worshipped as Goddesses. Only by planting trees would we be able to overcome global warming. Even if each individual plant and protect a single tree it will save the globe, which will benefit several generations". The actor alone had planted more than 33 lakhs saplings in the state.

He won International Tamil Film Awards for Run, Saami, Kuruvi and Vedi. In 2009, he received the top civilian honor Padma Shri for his contribution to Tamil cinema from the central government.

Very few like legendary humorist Kalaivanar succeeded in imparting messages through their comic act. After decades, Vivekh could do that seamlessly and effortlessly and thus earned the sobriquet Chinna Kalaivanar for his humour in films laced with messages. He sent strong messages through his comedy in several films. Some of the best comedy scenes where he simply excelled and repeatedly aired on TV channels.

He played the role of an orthodox Brahmin in Hari directed Vikram's Saamy. He laid stress on equality and also the need to follow traffic rules. Although it may not all have been politically correct, the comedy track in the film was a huge hit.

The 'Take Diversion' comedy from Vijay's Thirumalai, where

Vivekh plays an unemployed youth in search of a job brought the roof down. The humor is relevant and uproarious even to this day. With Chennai's forever incomplete roads and 'take diversion signs' that we come across all over the city.

Kadhal Sadu Gudu, Dhool, Anniyan, Sivaji, Padikathavan, Uthama Puthiran Singam are the other films which were hot favorites of his fans.

He has starred alongside most of the top stars of Tamil cinema including Rajinikanth, Vijayakanth, Sathyaraj, Prabhu, Karthik, Vijay, Ajith, Suriya, Vikram, Simbu and Dhanush. He has also played the hero in critically acclaimed films Naanthea Bala, Palakattu Madhavan and a crime thriller Vellai Pookkal shot entirely in the US. He was last seen in the blockbuster Dharala Prabhu in a key character.



Celebs condole the death of Vivekh

PM MODE: The untimely demise of noted actor Vivek has left many saddened. His comic timing and intelligent dialogues entertained people. Both in his films and his life, his concern for the environment and society shone through. Condolences to his family, friends and admirers. Om Shanti.

CM PALANISWAMI: He lived his personal life too with a commitment to social welfare. He is a role model to youngsters.

VENKAIAH NAIDU: Saddened to learn about the untimely demise of noted Tamil film actor Vivek. He endeared himself to the masses through his impeccable comic timing and energetic screen presence. My deepest condolences to his family, friends, and fans. Om Shanti.

STALIN: I hail his environmental protection work but nature has taken away the talented star so soon.

RAJINIKANTH: I am deeply saddened by the demise of Chinna Kalaivanar, social activist and my dear friend Vivek. I can never forget the days I spent with him during the shooting of 'Sivaji'. My heartfelt condolences to his bereaved family and pray for his soul to rest in peace".

KAMAL HAASAN: My friend Vivek did not stop his duties by just entertaining people with his acting but went beyond that and strived to repay them by his social service. As a protégé of the great Abdul Kalam, he served as the green warrior of Tamil Nadu and his passing is an irreplaceable loss to the Tamil people."

From our readers...

The sudden demise of actor, comedian and social activist Vivekh is a shock not only to his fans but to the entire humanity. He carved a niche for himself by conveying social awareness and messages through his comedy which could be enjoyed by the young and the old.

All trending news could be found as a message in his comedy. He was simple, helpful, down to earth and an embodiment of humanity. Lovingly called as Chinna Kalaivanar

his contribution as a social worker is unparalleled by any other actor. A recipient of Padma Shri, and also honoured with Filmfare and Kalaivanar awards. His comedies ridiculing superstitious beliefs were appreciated by everyone which made one ponder. He was a sagalakala vallavan of comedy that will remain immortal and unmatched in future. May his soul rest in peace.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

Planted lakhs of trees

In the sudden death of the comedian Vivekh, the Tamil film world had lost a great personality. This is an irreparable loss to Tamil cinema world. His death is unfathomable when the dust on the loss of SPB has not sunk in yet. At this time his loss is irreparable. His dialogues carried strong messages to society and the people. He was a follower of the ideals of the late Abdul Kalam. He has planted lakhs of trees, which is really a yeoman service to humanity.

RIP Vivek.
Srivana Ramachandran, Chennai

Tragic demise

While the doctors who attended Vivekh had categorically stated that the sudden attack is not due to the Covid 19 vaccine the actor had taken the previous day, still, the vaccine will cast a shadow of doubt in the minds of the fans and public.

V.S. Jayaraman, Chennai

A tragedy that has cast doubts over vaccines



G. Babu Jayakumar

Just spamming

The untimely death of actor Vivekh, which came as a shock not just to Bollywood and film fans but the entire State of Tamil Nadu, is also a setback to public healthcare. For the tragedy has cast certain doubts over vaccines with skeptics going a bit overboard in pointing fingers at the entire vaccination drive itself. Now that the State is mourning the loss of a matinee idol who had made them think even as he regaled

them with his jokes, the blame game has not yet gone full blast. But the whippers have already started in and out of social media. Doubters will have a heyday in the days to come.

Vivekh was turning out to be an affable Health Ambassador for the State. He openly took his first dose of Covaxin vaccine at a government hospital to drive home the point that all is well with such public facilities and that there was no need for

the people to show any hesitancy in going for the jab. For the government and healthcare authorities wanting to promote vaccination among the masses, Vivekh was godsend as his was a popular face that can influence people's thinking. So the authorities ensured that Vivekh's message reached as many people as possible through the media.

As the second wave of Coronavirus threatened to possess a potency to wreak more havoc than the first one, the official perception was that the vaccine might help bring its intensity down. So the government wanted to popularize it and make people go for it. But in an era in which rumours and speculations do their rounds through WhatsApp forwards and other such digital

means, fears can spread like wildfire. Particularly when science is pitted against politics and not just religion as it had been in earlier times.

For every scientific advancement made, there are a million naysayers. It was in such a context the Union government dilly dallied on letting vaccines in and also caused the raising of more doubts over their safety among the members of the public. That even spawned a campaign scoffing at vaccination itself. Since the campaign did not question the efficacy of the vaccine alone but its safety itself, breaking the myths that swirled around it became difficult. Since a clear vaccine hesitancy prevailed in the State, many politicians and even flam-

boyant bureaucrats took to taking vaccines in front of the cameras and even publicizing it.

It is to take that exercise of removing the fear over the vaccine to the next level that Vivekh was roped in as an ambassador. Not only did the actor take the vaccine in front of whirring cameras, he also spoke in favour of vaccination. In his tweet he thanked the doctors of the hospital. Of course championing causes was not new to Vivekh, who had proved his social consciousness in several ways. His tree planting drive even drew the attention of former President A P J Abdul Kalam. In fact he had been doing a lot of service to the needy quietly without any publicity too.

As a doctor recalled on Facebook how he had met

Vivekh at an event organized by a self-help group of kidney patients on dialysis and found out that the actor had been helping many of them without much ado. Very recently, on April 5 he put out a video urging people to follow Covid-19 norms while casting their vote the next day. Prior to that, through his message, he asked people to exercise their franchise without fail. He had said that voting was the right and duty of every citizen.

He had tweeted on the need for water conservation, on the medicinal qualities of gooseberry, calling it a poor man's apple and so on. He was popular in the State and the people also loved him as a good and socially conscious human being. A proof of his popularity was in the crowds that lined up outside

his house to pay their tributes to him, some of them with saplings in hand. So, the authorities made use of him to promote the vaccination drive, which they felt was necessary to fight the spread of Coronavirus that seemed to be unstoppable. But after he was rushed to hospital within hours of taking the vaccine, cynics started raising doubts. The hospital and even the Health Secretary tried their best to dispel the doubt over the vaccine triggering a heart attack the same day. With death following up the heart attack quickly, not only the State lost one of its legendary sons but also an opportunity to allay the fears over vaccination.

A man with a scientific temper, Vivekh had mocked superstition through a spate

of comedy scenes in which had been the hero. By openly questioning the hanging of a lime fruit as a talisman to protect a massive lorry when the vehicle had so many other parts, he not only tickled the funny bones of movie-goers but also compelled them to think. He would have made the people think and decide positively on the vaccine, too.

But now with many people trying to blame the vaccine for Vivekh's death itself, the fight against the spread of Coronavirus might get weakened. It is now the responsibility of the medical community to explain with proper scientific evidence how heart attacks can strike anyone, anytime and that vaccines do not trigger them. That's the challenge.

IN BRIEF

No mask, pay ₹500 fine: S Railway

Chennai, April 17: Southern Railway on Saturday said a fine of ₹500 would be imposed on passengers who do not adhere to Covid-19 standard operating procedures (SOPs) while on a railway station premises or on a train journey. The new rule will extend for six months until further notice, a press release said here. A station master or the station manager, Railway Protection Force personnel and an officer not below the rank of ticket collector have been authorised to collect the fines. —PTI

Corona: Pay heed now, don't regret later, says minister

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC
PUDUKOTTAI, APRIL 17

Health minister Dr. C. Vijayabaskar on Saturday warned that the people will have to face a huge challenge in the coming days, if they went careless in adopting anti-covid norms. Addressing a press conference here soon after inspecting the counting centre in the Government College for Girls, Dr. Vijayabaskar said during the Covid-19 first wave in the state, the government created a strong basic infrastructure to fight against the Covid, and officials of the health department are now ready to face any situation.

Corpn's fever clinics in city yet to rev up

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 17

When active cases and test positivity rate in the city continue to spiral, the number of fever clinics being conducted by the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC), across 15 zones as part of its Advanced Tour Programme for early detection of Covid-19 infection, is still under the 300-mark.

According to a senior GCC official, the number of fever clinics they had conducted on April 15 was just 176, nearly half of the camps that were held a couple of months ago across the city. On Saturday the civic body conducted 237 clinics and on Friday around 290.

The much-acclaimed programme, which helped the GCC administration to successfully flatten the curve of the first Covid-19 wave, has been credited with the declining trend of Covid-19-related deaths in the city.

The civic body was conducting an average 350 fever clinics daily across the city by the end of January, but it came down to 260 by February end.

As per the data provided by GCC on February 21, a total of 1, 04,402 fever clinics were conducted in Chennai from May 8, 2020

9,344 new Covid cases, 39 deaths

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 17

Registering an all-time high in single-day Covid-19 cases, Tamil Nadu crossed the 9,000-mark with 39 deaths on Saturday. The data provided by the state health department shows a total 9,344 cases, a jump from 8,449 cases on Friday.

This takes the total tally in the state to 9,80,728 with a death toll of 13,071 including 4,387 in Chennai. Chennai registered 884 new cases. With this, the district recorded a total 2,80,184 cases so far. While the district recorded 11 death cases on Friday, it doubled on Saturday.

The Chengalpattu dis-

trict reported 807 new cases and three deaths. The total cases in the district now stand at 64,617.

Meanwhile, the number of daily cases in Coimbatore crossed the 600 mark though the district was reporting cases between 500 and 600 for several days.

While Chennai, Coimbatore and Chengalpattu continue to add over 500 cases each every day, Kancheepuram, Madurai, Selam, Thiruvallur, Thothukudi, Tirunelveli and Tiruppur crossed the 200-mark. As many as 13 districts registered 100-plus cases.

The contribution of Chennai and surrounding

districts including Thiruvallur and Chengalpattu reached 4,080, increasing from 3,884 cases on Friday.

The active cases in the state reached a new peak on Saturday with 65,635, a surge from 61,593 on Friday. The total active cases in Chennai district marked 23,625, a jump from 22,420 on Friday.

Kanyakumari, Madurai and Salem reported two deaths each and Trichy three.

Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Kancheepuram, Thanjavur and Vellore also reported deaths. A total of 99,050 persons took RTPCR tests on Saturday. So far 2,07,39,160 individuals tested in the state.

clinics is one of many activities though it is a proven model. So we decided to intensify the clinics in the coming days', said Prakash.

The fever clinics were introduced in May last year after the GCC came to the conclusion that at least 20 percent of Covid-19 deaths in the city took place due to the failure on the part of residents in revealing symptoms to the health workers who visited their homes as part of surveys.

Sanitary workers should not be disturbed for another three months: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 17

The Madras high court has directed the Greater Chennai Corporation, not to disturb the persons/employees, who have been engaged now for the purpose of sanitary work and conservancy, cleaning streets and lakes for a period of three months, as the information from the government is that Corona virus is on the increase and that there is a second wave.

Justice S. Vaidyanathan gave the directive while passing interim orders on a petition filed by Uzhaipor Urimai Iyakkam, which sought a direction to the Greater Chennai Corporation and the State government to pay the minimum/scale of the permanent Conservancy/Sanitation workers to the National

Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) workers, working in Zone-7, Unit-20, Division-92 of the Greater Chennai Corporation with retrospective effect.

According to the petitioner, it was representing Conservancy/Sanitary workers, numbering 1,457, working in Ambattur Zone-7 on non-permanent basis under the NULM. The workers have been engaged on contract basis/outourcing and therefore, they were entitled to equal pay for equal work and shall not be disengaged by any means, the petitioner added.

The standing counsel for Chennai corporation submitted that there was a scheme namely NULM and two persons were entrusted with the work and each worker has been engaged through them, by signing with the contract

and they were not direct employees.

The judge said the issues as to whether a) the workers/members of the petitioner-Iyakkam have engaged for several years, b) there was going to be outsourcing or c) they were employees of Contractors or not, cannot be gone into at this stage for the purpose of granting interim relief. The persons/employees, who have been engaged now for the purpose of sanitary work and conservancy, cleaning streets and lakes shall not be disturbed for a period of three months from today, as the information from the government was that coronavirus was on the increase and that there was a second wave. Hence, the services of these persons were indispensable for the purpose of safety and health of

every citizen of the state, the judge added.

The judge said in this case, this court has not gone into the question of appointment on direct labour. As far as the employees, who have been engaged through the contractors were concerned, their services can be utilised and need not be disengaged till the date of next hearing, so that after filing of counter, quietus can be given to. "In the meantime, it is needless to mention, it is open to the petitioner-Iyakkam to approach the authority under the Tamil Nadu Industrial Establishments Conferment of Permanent Status to Workmen Act, by making the Contractors as a party to the list, so that a decision can be arrived at in respect of the issue raised by the Petitioner-Iyakkam. This court makes it very clear that

if there is a contract between the corporation and any third parties, the same shall continue, without prejudice to the rights of both the parties in the petition. It is further made clear that if any person has not reported for work, as contended by the petitioner, they can get the details so that there is no need to make payment for those persons. No permanent employee on the Roll of the corporation will be treated as outsourcing employees. Status of the employees as on date shall be protected and in case those persons are employed through the contractors and if they do not report for work, as may be informed by the contractors, those persons need not be paid, the judge added and posted the matter to July 1, for further hearing.



Peaceful re-polling in Velachery on Saturday.



—DC

RE-POLL IN VELACHERY BOOTH PEACEFUL

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APR 17:

Re-polling in the single booth (No 92) of Velachery Assembly constituency concluded peacefully with 186 of the total 548 men casting their votes through Saturday.

Election in the booth on April 6 was countermanded and re-polling was ordered after an EVM and accessory equipment were found to be taken in a scooter illegally after the conclusion of polling on the day of general elections.

Based on the reports given by the election officers, the Election Commission of India ordered a re-poll in the men's booth. Political parties and candidates were informed of the re-polling and some of them even canvassed for votes by calling on the voters.

₹2.90 cr worth gold seized by customs

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 17

Chennai air customs seized 6 kg gold worth Rs. 2.90 crore on Saturday here at the airport.

According to the statement from the Commissioner of customs, based on intelligence that gold was likely to be smuggled from Dubai by concealing in aircraft, Air India flight A1-906 which

arrived from Dubai was rummaged. Two heavy packets wrapped with white adhesive tapes were found concealed under one of the seat cushions of the aircraft, which had 6 gold bars weighing 1 Kg each with foreign markings "SAM 1 KILO FINE GOLD 999.9" totally weighing 6 kg valued at ₹2.90 crore were recovered and seized as unclaimed under Customs Act. Probe is on.

Pragadeeswarar temple closed

Ariyalur, April 17: The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on Friday, ordered closure of its lone monument in the district, Sri. Pragadeeswarar temple at Gangaikondacholapuram, due to Covid-19 restrictions.

ASI sources said they closed down the monument, a replica of Big temple, Thanjavur, as per request of the local district adminis-

tration. The temple was closed after completing the daily rituals on Thursday and making arrangements for the routine pujas as per the temple agama rituals. A large number of visitors and devotees not knowing the closure of the temple, returned disappointed on Friday.

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HC seeks explanation from Chennai District Collector

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 17

The Madras high court has directed R.Seethalakshmi, District Collector of Chennai, to give an explanation in writing as to why action should not be recommended to be taken against her for having not signed the affidavit and permitted somebody on behalf of the Collector to sign the affidavit, which was sworn in, in the name of the Collector.

Justice R.Suresh Kumar gave the directive while hearing a case relating to encroachments.

The judge had on March 23, 2021, on noticing the possession of a property was not handed over to the Tamil Nadu State Housing Board on account of encroachment by several persons and despite direction issued to file a status report regarding details of encroachment, the same has not been filed, took a serious view of the matter and directed the District Collector, Chennai to file a status report. Pursuant to the same, when the case came up for hearing on April 16, 2021, one Abisegam, Additional Personal Assistant for Collector, Chennai District (Land Administration) filed a status report of the District Collector.

The judge said on perusal of the said status report, this court finds that it was in affidavit format filed by R.Seethalakshmi, IAS, District Collector of Chennai. However, the said report has not been signed by the District Collector. When this court passed an order to file a report before this court by the District Collector and also in pursuance of the same, the District Collector has chosen to



file the report in the affidavit format, it should have been signed by the District Collector. But, this court, on seeing the report in the affidavit format, was wondering to note that, the District Collector has not at all signed the report and no date has been mentioned and at the bottom of the affidavit/report, somebody has signed on April 13, 2021 stating that "For Collector". "This kind of proxy report in the name of the Collector should not have been filed before this court, when there was a specific direction by this court to the District Collector to file a report", the judge added.

The judge said moreover when a report was prepared in the affidavit format in the name of the District Collector, the person who sworn the affidavit should also sign and shall file. On her behalf or on his behalf, nobody can be authorized to sign in the sworn affidavit. Therefore, without fulfilling the basic requirements in filing a report in affidavit format, since the report has been filed in a cavalier and careless manner by the District Collector, this court wants to seek an explanation as to why appropriate action shall not be recommended to be taken against the District Collector by the authority concerned in the hierarchy of administration of the state government, the judge added and gave the above directive.

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OTHER STORY

Puducherry registers 715 fresh cases

Puducherry, April 17: Puducherry registered 715 fresh coronavirus cases during the last twenty-four hours ending 10 am on Saturday, raising the overall infection count to 47,108.

Three more persons —two in Puducherry and one in Karaikal— succumbed to death taking the toll to 705.

While there were 4090 active cases, as many as 42,313 persons were discharged after recovery so far.

Director of the Department of Health and Family Welfare services here, S Mohan Kumar said the 715 new cases were identified at the end of examination of 4,748 people and these patients were spread over Puducherry 567, Karaikal 88, Yanam 35 and Mahe 25.

The Director said 198 patients were discharged during the last twenty-four hours from hospitals.

The fatality and recovery rates were 1.50 percent and 89.82 percent respectively.

As many as 7.24 lakh samples have been tested so far and of them, 6.59 lakh samples turned out to be negative.

He also said 29,952 health workers and 17,672 front-line workers have been vaccinated so far and 1,00,664 coming either under the senior citizens category (above 60 years) or those above 45 years with co-morbidities have been vaccinated against the scourge since March 1. —PTI

● **Director of the Department of Health and Family Welfare services here, S Mohan Kumar said the 715 new cases were identified at the end of examination of 4,748 people and these patients were spread over Puducherry 567, Karaikal 88, Yanam 35 and Mahe 25.**

Rahman the composer is a bit too strong in 99 Songs

Movie review

99 SONGS

CAST: Ehan Bhat, Edilsy Vargas, Lisa Ray

Direction: Vishwesh Krishnamoorthy

RATING: 3/5

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

99 Songs springs to life with a rather horrifying admission: a dad tells his son that beyond all vices and bad habits, it is music that is the worst. An appalling statement to make, it nonetheless will get you interested right away. The son in question is Jay (Ehan Bhat), and his love of music has not and does not require any reason. However, in being forced to confront naysayers such as his dad, an epic journey to create a masterpiece of 100 songs begins.

The movie initially is a romance with Jay being barred from meeting his girlfriend, Sophia (Edilsy Vargas.) Her dad Sanjay Singhania (Ranjit Barot)

sees music as just another useful tool, and that pursuing such dreams will be at the expense of others. His challenge: compose a song that would change the world, and until then, Jay is not to talk to or meet his daughter. The challenge of course was accepted.

As you may expect, 99 Songs feels like a musical tour de force, with the visuals and editing presented as if a music video were 2 hours long. A.R. Rahman and his team consisting of director Vishwesh Krishnamoorthy have given us a smooth and glossy presen-



tation, and when combined with the epic score, will keep us engaged for the time being. But the problems of continuity and cohesiveness also begin here, as Jay, his father, and Sophia are rarely given time to breathe their characters to life. It is not a

As the film progresses, it takes on a more global vibe with magnificent visuals tied together by a spectacular score. As a viewer, you will eventually settle down to enjoy all the thematic elements for their own sake. The grandiosity of the tale and the ethereal feel are often reinforced by numerous little curiosities. Like when Jay meets Sheila (Lisa Ray), a jazz musician who shows him that music is something sensual and one doesn't need to stick to a few genres. Elements of how one becomes passionate in music are also shown in Jay's upbringing.

Overall, 99 Songs struggles to find a storyline and stick to it. However, if you can soak in the music and visuals for their own sake, then a couple of hours will fly by without much of a pause.

Thanjai: Ryots advised to raise black gram crops

G. SRINIVASAN | DC THANJAVUR, APRIL 17

Collector M. Govinda Rao has appealed to farmers here to take up Chithirai Pattam black gram cultivation by purchasing seeds from agriculture extension centres with 50 per cent subsidy.

In a press release, the collector said that the season now is conducive for raising chithirai pattam black gram. One kilo of black gram seeds ie varieties ADT 5, Vamban 6 and Vamban 8 is sold at Rs 97. Farmers can purchase this at 50 per cent subsidy. Chithirai pattam black gram will also enrich soil and act as fertiliser for the next cultivation of paddy, the collector added.

Robot-assisted cancer surgery unit launched

DC CORRESPONDENT, CHENNAI, APRIL 17

Apollo Proton Cancer Centre on Friday launched a dedicated robot-assisted cancer surgery unit that will offer patients with comprehensive cancer care under one roof.

Dr. Ajit Pai, Senior Consultant, Lead GI Surgical Oncologist and Robotic surgeon, Apollo Hospitals said that the major advantage of Robotic Surgery was less damage to healthy tissue and reduced risk of wound infection. It will also help to minimise blood loss during surgery, faster return of urinary continence and sexual function, quicker return of bowel movement, reduced hospital stay, faster recovery, less pain, and less visible scars', he said.

their livelihood. The meeting wanted MGN-RES to be implemented in all village panchayats and the number of days increased from 100 days to 200 days, and daily wages increased from ₹273 to ₹600.

They said the meeting also expressed concern over the acute drinking water shortage in many places across the state and appealed to the government to take steps on a war footing to sort out the water issue. Strongly condemning the Centre's hike in fertilizer prizes, the meeting also wanted the hike to be rolled back immediately.

Sangam treasurer Sankar, state secretaries M. Chinnadurai, A. Palanisami, vice-presidents K. Pakrisamy and P. Vasanthamani, were among others who participated.

The unit, which completed its first robotic procedure on a 40-year-old patient on Friday, is equipped with the advanced fourth-generation 'Da Vinci Surgical System' and a dedicated team.

This technology provides the surgeon with a 10x magnified, high definition, and 3D image of the body. The controls in the console allow the surgeon to manipulate special surgical instruments that are smaller, as well as more flexible and maneuverable than the human hand. The robot helps replicate the surgeon's hand movements while minimizing hand tremors. The surgery is thus conducted with enhanced precision, dexterity, and control even during the most complex procedures, said Dr. Pai.

MOVIES

THE ASIAN AGE | SUNDAY | 18 APRIL 2021 | NEW DELHI

OUR CRITIC'S RATING

Outstanding ★★★★★ | Great ★★★★ | Good ★★★ | Okay ★★ | Poor ★ | Truly Terrible TT

In a special league of dreary, bad films

The Big Bull

CAST: Abhishek Bachchan, Ileana D'Cruz, Sohumi Shah, Nikita Dutta, Saurabh Shukla, Samir Soni, Mahesh Manjrekar, Ram Kapoor

DIRECTOR: Kookie Gulati

RATING: ★

Streaming on Disney + Hotstar

SUPARNA SHARMA

Bollywood is a star-driven film industry. What that means and often results in are films like *The Big Bull* where just the fact that a big star has been engaged is enough, all else be damned. "All else" includes writing — story, screenplay and dialogue, direction, production design, background score.

Star-driven enterprises serve a very significant purpose. Inept writers, directors, production houses remain gainfully engaged by riding on the power of a star.

Abhishek Bachchan is a star who can act. He has just been beset by too many bad choices after a few good ones initially. This time round, however, he signed up with a director and writer who are in a special league of their own when it comes to being bad.

Bollywood has a large, prospering league of bad which ranges from films that are bad in unique, new ways — where it's obvious that some thought, effort went into making it — to woeful, listless films which are bad in ways that many other previous films have been bad.

The first kind of films can be fun-bad, while the other is dreary.

To illustrate, Ram Gopal Varma's Daud would fall in the fun-bad category, and *Department* in mournfully bad. Director Vijay Krishna Acharya's Tashan is in the first category, but his Thugs of Hindostan is in the I'd-rather-die-than-watch-this category.

The Big Bull is a pool of mournful stupidity. A life-sucking bad film. The sort that leaves you in need of a cold shower and cold beer to wash it all away.

Leading this turgid enterprise is Kookie Gulati the director. He was set off on this listless path by a story and screenplay that he co-wrote with Arjun Dhawan.



Mr Kookie had earlier directed an atrocity called Prince (2010) that still feels like a fresh scar on my brain. Now I have two scars courtesy Mr Kookie.

Based loosely and irresponsibly on the life and crimes of Harshad Mehra, The Big Bull opens with reporter Meera Rao (played by Ileana D'Cruz and based on Sucheta Dalal) talking about Hemant Shah (Abhishek Bachchan) to a hall full of millennial MBA students.

Cut to flashback in a chawl where Hemant, in full-sleeve printed shirts, used to live with his brother Viren (Sohumi Shah), mother (Supriya Pathak) and angst about not being rich. That feeling was made worse by the father of the girl next door he liked, Priya (Nikita Dutta) her daddy

wanted a well-settled son-in-law.

We are told two things about Hemant. Three, actually.

1. That Hemant had "the world's best *bhai aur dost*". We meet the *bhai*, but see the *dost* fleetingly.

2. Hemant keeps saying, "*Mujhe dheere chalna aata hain hai*" — and yet the film he is in is an excruciatingly slow crawl.

3. Hemant doesn't drink, but only till he can afford the best daru. Later in life, he drinks.

With these character traits, Mr Kookie & Co. try to stitch together a chronology of the rise and fall of the stock broker, but they remain vague on details and are often incoherent, as if a terrible arts student was suddenly asked to sit for an economics exam.

The film, neither clear nor really interested in what actually happened, tells us Harshad Mehta's story in the sort of sketchy way that the arts student would try to fill up the answer-sheet — with gibberish, throwing in some "economics sounding" words at random.

Hemant wants to become a stock broker and for this he gets a bank receipt in an underhand manner and starts playing the stock market. The amount of the bank receipts increases, and so does Hemant's game.

He then manipulates the price of a company's share price and uses union leader Rana Sawant (Mahesh Manjrekar) to tip him off about which auto plant will be shut so that he can make more money in shares.

This is insider trading and Mannu

Malpani (Saurabh Shukla), chairman of SEBI, doesn't like it. But he can't do much.

The film conveys all this through dull generalities. To show that Hemant was a master manipulator and the king of the share market, it makes him stand, arms akimbo, staring and smiling at the trading floor often. To show that he is always planning his next move, Hemant has to keep tapping his fingers.

In between there is romance with Priya, which means that several songs arrive at frustratingly predictable moments.

Soon Hemant gets very rich, pays Rs 26 cr income tax and the CBI and I-T guys get after him.

Hemant suspects that it is one of his employees and so he invites them

all to his house and then asks them to take off their clothes and jump into his pool.

Half-naked office employees covering their man-boobs as Hemant stares down at them with a sulky pout is, perhaps, when the film hits the high note of absurdity.

Kookie & Co seem incapable of taking facts and then turning them into a screenplay. If they were capable of doing that they would have just binge-watched Hansal Mehta's Scam 1992. They probably did watch it and decided it was all too much and that they'd rather go with a bullshit story and hero's pointless bluster.

Abhishek Bachchan's twitter handle is @juniorbachchan and so there is no getting away from the comparison. But, he has a personality that is entirely his own.

Chota Bachchan is all goodness, warmth and decency. So much so that when he tries to be evil or creepy, he has to ham it.

The film gives Abhishek a shitty start — a pouty, pretentious pose in a nightgown — that seals his character's fate and tells us that we should not expect acting, just posturing.

The film is also confused between its love for Abhishek and the story it wants to tell. While The Big Bull wants to show Abhishek as a good guy, a "dreamer" who helped many people make money, the story of Hemant — a manipulator of people and money who had little regard for rules — keeps peeing on its party.

So the film can only muster the courage to make its star sit with a manspread and thrust his stomach out to convey indecency and greed. Sometimes it also makes him laugh out loud, without any reason or explanation.

Usually, even in bad films, there are actors who can act. No such luck here.

Sohumi Shah is a decent actor but he has been given nothing here except to be the voice of nagging worry.

Supriya Pathak has spent so much time in the world of Tarak Mehta Ka Ulta Chashma and Khichdi that she now seems incapable of doing anything else.

Ileana D'Cruz has mastered the art of speaking without letting her lips move. Despite that she is not bad. It says a lot about a film and its actors if Ms D'Cruz is the one redeeming thing that comes to mind.

SHORT TAKES

C'garh: Naxals kill panchayat secretary

Raipur: Suspected Maoists on Saturday brutally killed a local panchayat secretary in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar district of Narayanpur, police said. The body of Harak Choudhury, secretary of Pochwada gram panchayat under Orchha block in Narayanpur district was spotted near the culvert in the village of Rohtad by the local villagers. A Maoist pamphlet in which Naxals owned the responsibility of killing the panchayat secretary was found stuck in the body, police said. According to the police, the slain tribal had gone to Rohtad village under the gram panchayat in connection with some official works and was attacked by a group of Naxals armed with sharp weapons and sticks while he was returning to Pochwada in the morning. Maoists later threw the body near the culvert in the village of Rohtad.

'Won't end protest against farm laws'

Ghaziabad: Farmers can sacrifice their lives but will not end the protest against the farm laws, said BKU national president Naresh Tikait while accusing the Centre of extending a step-motherly treatment to them. Addressing a monthly mahapanchayat at the Delhi's Ghaziabad border here, the BKU leader alleged that even after five months of protest by them, the government is not paying any heed to their demands. The government has thrown the matter in abeyance after saying that it is a phone call away, said the leader. The BJP-led Centre is working for capitalists, that is why it is extending a step-motherly treatment to the protesting farmers, he said, adding that the government should fulfil their demand of scrapping the three laws and give a written assurance on the MSP for crops. — PTI

Dog tied to scooter, dragged in Kerala

Malappuram: In yet another act of cruelty against canines in Kerala, a pet dog was tied to a two-wheeler and dragged along a road at Edakkara in Malappuram district on Saturday. Police have registered a case. A video of the incident has gone viral. The animal's agony came to an end after some people forcibly stopped the scooter in which two people were riding. The dog had some injuries on its legs, police said. The incident comes four months after a pet dog was tied to a car and dragged along the road in Kochi in December last year. The video of the incident, taken by an eyewitness, had gone viral following which police had arrested a man, who had driven the vehicle. — PTI

CBI TO APPROACH INTERPOL FOR RCN AGAINST MISHRA

New Delhi: The CBI is all set to approach the Interpol to get a 'Red Corner Notice' (RCN) issued against Bijay Mishra, brother of TMC leader Binay Mishra who is a close confidant of party MP Abhishek Banerjee, in a cattle smuggling case. Sources said, "The agency is expected to approach Interpol in this regard on Tuesday. The issue was recently discussed by the senior officials of the CBI at the agency headquarters here." A lookout notice has already been issued against absconding Mishra by the CBI. The agency has already questioned several senior officers of the Bengal police. "If required, the agency may question two more senior officials of state police. Besides, the role of three more state-level politicians is also under the scanner of the agency", sources said. The CBI named Binay Mishra as a co-accused in its supplementary chargesheet filed in the cattle-smuggling case in the month of February. Binay Mishra is believed to be very close to Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee's nephew, Abhishek Banerjee. In its chargesheet filed before a special CBI court in Bengal's Asansol, the agency had shown Binay Mishra as absconding. On February 18, the CBI filed a chargesheet in the case against Border Security Force (BSF) Commandant Satish Kumar and six others for their alleged involvement in a cattle-smuggling racket operating at the India-Bangladesh border.

■ Sporadic incidents of clashes between TMC and BJP supporters were reported from some parts of state

Bengal polls: Over 78% voter turnout in 5th phase

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, APRIL 17

The fifth phase of the Assembly Election covering 45 seats in six districts of West Bengal recorded 78.36% voters turnout on Saturday amid sporadic incidents of violence during which a Trinamul Congress worker was shot at in an attack allegedly by the BJP activists in Nadia.

Till the reports last came till 5 pm, while Jalpaiguri, Kalimpong and Darjeeling of North Bengal reported 81.73%, 69.56% and 74.31% polling respectively, Nadia, North 24 Parganas and Burdwan East in South Bengal clocked 81.57%, 74.83% and 81.72% polling serially. A revised figure is expected from the Election Commission on Sunday.

In North 24 Parganas, 16 seats that went to the polls included Dum Dum, Bidhannagar (Salt Lake), Kamarhati and Rajarhat New Town. Though the EC described the fifth phase as "peaceful," incidents of attacks and counter-attacks between the ruling TMC and BJP workers took place at various places in the three South Bengal districts.

At Santipur in Nadia, a TMC worker, Santu Baul, was shot at when he was returning home after casting his vote. He suffered bullet injuries on his left hand. The ruling party

blamed the BJP for the shooting. Its workers however clashed with the BJP workers at Gayeshpur, hurled bombs and attacked their homes. Chaitanya Acharya, a BJP worker, was injured. At Kamarhati where former TMC minister Madan Mitra contested, his rival candidate Raju Banerjee of the BJP claimed that his car was attacked by TMC workers in Belghoria. Mr Mitra however fell ill after supervising the polls amid heat in the constituency throughout the day. In the morning allegations surfaced against the central paramilitary forces of opening

fire again, this time at Kurulgachha in Deganga of North 24 Parganas. The villagers blamed the Central Reserve Police Force jawans posted at booth no 215 for the firing in the air. The EC sought a report immediately from the district administration. The Barasat district police in its inquiry report to special police observer Vivek Dube stated however that no proof of firing was found after looking into the matter with the CRPF officials.

Meanwhile, the EC adjourned the polling at two Murshidabad seats: Shamshergunj and Jangipur after the deaths of two candidates: Rejaul Haque Biswas of the Congress and Pradip Nandi, a Sanjukta Morcha candidate from the RSP of the Left Front due to Covid-19.

Meanwhile, the EC adjourned the polling at two Murshidabad seats: Shamshergunj and Jangipur after the deaths of two candidates: Rejaul Haque Biswas of the Congress and Pradip Nandi, a Sanjukta Morcha candidate from the RSP of the Left Front due to Covid-19. While Biswas was a candidate at Shamshergunj, Nandi was fielded at Jangipur.

At many places, voters were seen without masks amid the resurgent coronavirus, raising concerns. The security forces ensured social distancing at the booths, while election officials provided masks, hand sanitiser and polythene glove to the voters. West Bengal on Saturday registered its highest single-day spike of 7,713 Covid cases, taking the tally to 6,51,508, bulletin released by the state health department said.



Women shows their Voter ID card as they stand in a queue to cast their vote at a polling station during 5th phase of state Assembly election at Salt Lake in Kolkata on Saturday. — PTI

Didi blames EC of scuttling her Assembly poll campaign

AGE CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, APRIL 17

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, on Saturday, blamed the Election Commission (EC) of scuttling her Assembly poll campaign, at the behest of the BJP, by curtailing the daily campaign time from 7.00 pm to 10.00 am and extending the silence period from 48 hours to 72 hours for the remaining three phases in the wake of a massive spike in Covid-19 cases in its fresh wave in the state.

The TMC supreme told the EC at a party rally in Galsi of Burdwan East, "You are working according to the wishes of the BJP. If anything big happens, you will be responsible. Already two candidates have died at two seats in Murshidabad where we won earlier. Though they belonged to two different parties, I feel sad for them because I do not want any death." "You deliberately curtailed the campaign period, at a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign rally at Galsi in Purba Bardhaman district on Saturday. — DECCAN CHRONICLE

and Union home minister Amit Shah did not have their rallies, to stop me," she added.

Tearing into the Central poll panel, she also claimed, "As the remaining phases include urban areas like Kolkata, we will not be able to campaign because the door-to-door campaign is held in the day time while rallies are held in the evening there."

Ms Banerjee alleged, "We wanted the remain-

ing poll phases to be clubbed so that people do not get infected. But it was not done. Instead, the time for campaign has been curtailed. Why? When the areas under the control of BJP—though they will not win there this time—went to polls, eight-to-ten days were given to them. But now the silence period has also been increased in all the remaining phases. We lost four days of our campaign in total."

BJP and TMC move poll body in audio clip issue

Kolkata, April 17: Both the BJP and the Trinamul Congress on Saturday approached the West Bengal CEO with their demands on the purported audio link in which chief minister Mamata Banerjee is heard suggesting a rally with bodies of those killed in CISF firing during polling on April 10.

While the saffron party urged chief electoral officer (CEO) Aariz Aftab to take note of the purported audiotape claiming it could lead to untoward situations in the next phases of the Assembly elections,

the TMC demanded action against those who released it "violating rules". Aftab said that the audio clip was sent to the EC which is looking into the matter.

A controversy erupted on Friday after the BJP released the purported audio clip in which Banerjee is heard telling the TMC nominee of Sitalkuchi to hold a rally with the bodies of the four persons killed in CISF firing during the fourth phase of polling.

Ms Banerjee at an election rally on Saturday alleged that her phone is

being tapped and said she will order a CID probe into it. The purported audiotape was released on the eve of the fifth phase of polling to influence voters and the BJP's Information Technology cell was behind it, former Union minister Yashwant Sinha, who led a TMC delegation, told reporters after meeting the CEO.

Mr Sinha said that it was against the election model code of conduct and the party urged the CEO to take it up with the EC and take action against those who are behind it. — PTI

EU pulls up India on rights abuses

'CAA is discriminatory in nature against Muslims & dangerously divisive'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, APRIL 17

In a shocker for India just days after a bilateral human rights dialogue with the European Union (EU), the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, by an overwhelming majority vote of 61 out of 71, "expressed concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in India" including reports that "human rights defenders and journalists in the country lack a safe working environment" and "concerns about the difficult situation faced by Indian women and minority groups and caste-based discrimination."

The committee's recom-

mendations also mentioned reports that "voice alarm regarding India's CAA"

mentioned reports that "voice alarm regarding India's CAA," uttered anti-India and pro-freedom slogans off-camera thus inviting penal action under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967." No such charge against her was mentioned in the police's April 16 statement, which had said that during the search operation launched by the security forces in Karewa Mohalla of Frisal village of Kulgam the search party was "obstructed" by her.

High Commissioner for Human Rights is fundamentally discriminatory in nature against Muslims and dangerously divisive."

It further noted that the "EU is closely following the situation in Kashmir and reiterates its support for stability and de-escalation between India and Pakistan."

The EU Committee "highlighted India's rising regional and

geopolitical influence, as the country has strengthened its position as an economic and military power and rapidly grown as an important trading partner for the EU." It called for "improving and deepening the EU's relationship with India as a strategic partner."

It "also expressed concern at the deteriorating relationship between India and China, and the role of China's expansive policy and substantial military build-up in the area."

These were part of a "set of recommendations for the European Union on improving its bilateral partnership with India in view of the upcoming EU-India Leaders' meeting" in Portugal on May 8, which is expected to be attended by the PM Modi.

Agency cautions users against certain WhatsApp weaknesses

New Delhi, April 17:

Country's cyber security agency CERT-In has cautioned WhatsApp users about certain vulnerabilities detected in the popular instant messaging app that could lead to breach of sensitive information.

A "high" severity rating advisory issued by the CERT-In, or the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, said the vulnerability has been detected in software that has "WhatsApp and WhatsApp Business for Android prior to v2.21.4.18 and WhatsApp Business for iOS prior to v2.21.32."

The v2.21.4.18 and v2.21.32 denotes the versions of the WhatsApp messenger that are downloaded by users for using

arbitrary code or access sensitive information on a targeted system," the advisory issued on Saturday said.

Describing the risk in detail, it said that these vulnerabilities "exist in WhatsApp applications due to a cache configuration issue and missing bounds check within the audio decoding pipeline."

"Successful exploitation of these vulnerabilities could allow the attacker to execute arbitrary code or access sensitive information on a targeted system," it said. The advisory added that users of the app (application) should update the latest version of WhatsApp from Google Play store or iOS App Store to counter the vulnerability threat. — PTI

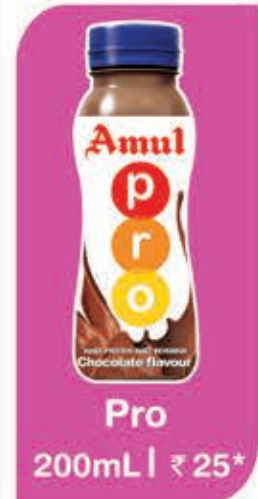
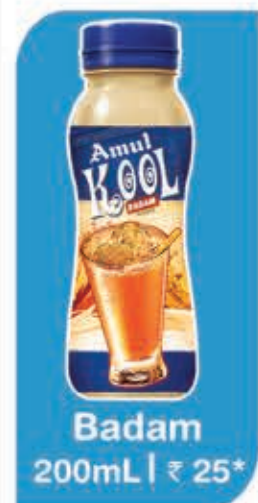
35-year-old man held for passing sensitive info

New Delhi, April 17:

The Delhi Police has arrested a 35-year-old man for allegedly passing sensitive information about Army deployment to a foreign intelligence agency, officials said on Saturday. The accused has been identified as Harpal Singh, a resident of Tarn Taran in Punjab, they said.

"A highly motivated and radicalised man was arrested for passing sensitive information to foreign intelligence agency. He conveyed details related to Army movements, location of Army and BSF posts and bunkers on the outskirts of India at India-Pakistan border," a senior police officer said. — PTI

Amul



*MRP (incl. of all taxes), Conditions apply.

DECCAN Chronicle

18 APRIL 2021



Ranjona Banerji
Off the beaten track

Being a sport! The story of my fitness journey

After you reach a certain age and size, in my case at least, your thoughts turn to another age and size, largely imaginary. For instance, when I was little, I was very thin. This is true. I have photographic evidence. I also had no actual talent as an athlete, but I was athletic enough to be made to run various races, jump over sandpits and poles and once, with luckily no major casualties, chuck a javelin. The third leg of the “house” team, if you will, and this carried on over three “houses” in three schools and two cities.

Once I was pushed into a race outside my training or comfort zone — 400 m, because there was no one else to make up the numbers. My preferred race was the 100 m sprint. The school’s sports consultant, of whom we were in awe because he had been to the 1976 Montreal Olympics and wanted Nadia Comaneci in person, said that my hamstring muscles were not long enough for my legs, so I had a funny stride. Not good for longer runs. Anyway, desperation made the house hamstrung. And in I went. After 300 metres, my heart burst out of my 13-year-old chest and I am not ashamed to say that a friend’s sister (in a similar situation for another house) and I, walked the last 100 m together, chatting. Since we finished the race, we were not disqualified. Heads, um, held high!

The one thing I could not do was swim except for an ungainly life-saving dog paddle. Luckily then no one ever threw me into a swimming pool for some greater sporting glory. The swimming coach, whom we called Bumblebee because he had a large yellow and black motorbike and kept bellowing at us in the CCI swimming pool in Bombay (1970s, that was its name then) managed to hammer a mediocre breaststroke into me before we buzzed off to a new school in Calcutta.

School finished and thus finished organised exercise. You may not believe it now but in the 1980s, hardly no one dedicated their lives to treadmills, yoga mats and smoothies. Plus, we were undefeatable. We worked hard and played harder. There was no time for dumbbells.

As it turned out, the dumbbells were us. All that confidence was highly misplaced. And by the time you realized that time and hormones were against you, the tyres on the cars on the roads had nothing on you and your stomach, arms, thighs, hips et cetera. That’s when you wake up at the crack of dawn and walked all over Aarey Milk Colony where the best exercise was running away from laughter clubs. I tried a few gyms. A friend found an excellent place in Ahmedabad where all you had to do was lie on a series of moving tables which exercised different parts of your body. Don’t laugh. It was brilliant and actually worked.

A couple of close friends and I, in our mid to late 40s, signed up for an exercise regime. This was zeal plus hubris. Also, when your vision goes a bit, you can’t really focus on the mirror any more and you miss all those wrinkles. So having scoffed at middle-aged ladies in salwar kameezes and sneakers huffing and puffing in suburban Mumbai’s parks, we joined a gym. Not the treadmill sort. But the calisthenics and exercise sort. Why humans put themselves through this is one of life’s mysteries. Anyway, we mountain-walked and pulled long rubber bands and cross-trained and then hobbled out after an hour with not one part of our bodies working.

The zeal was such that we were horrified when we attended an afternoon “old ladies” class — all the old ladies were at least five years younger than us — and saw that they spent all their time lying on their mats flirting with the young male instructors. We shuddered in self-righteous wrath as we finished all our exercises, and never went to an afternoon class again. Instead, we sacrificed lunch and went straight from yoga to the gym. Plus, we walked all over suburban Mumbai scorning every hopeful passing auto.

At the end of the year, all we had to show for it were collapsed muscles, dodgy knees, sprained ankles and broken toes. The only worthwhile part of this exercise was the yoga.

In between I did walk up and down some hills around my parents’ home, full of self-righteousness.

Now when 60 stares at you in the face and the tyres cannot be dislodged and who the hell wants to carry those dumbbells, and the hills are so pretty to look at, technology comes to the rescue! You install some free fitness app on your phone. You carry your phone everywhere. It counts every useless step you take. From refrigerator to chocolate cake to sofa to put the plate in the sink and at the end of the day, you have walked 5 km, used up 2,500 calories and done 9,622 steps. Or some such nonsense. You are happy. You smile beatifically at the phone. The phone is thrilled at the attention and you reset for the next day. I did away with the “heart points” or whatever because I never collected any.

When my sister and I were young, teenagers, we used to watch Jane Fonda exercise videos and eat chips.

I am not so callous nor so arrogant now. I don’t eat while I watch those exercise ads on Instagram. I just switch to the food pictures after 10 minutes of fit young people contorting into some rebel poses.

Let my fingers do the walking?

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on media affairs, politics and social trends. She tweets at @ranjona.

Subhani



Second wave gives the lie to Modi’s ‘decisive’ image



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya’s View

The time has come to call a spade a spade. And, this spade is about the government’s spectacular unpreparedness in anticipating the second wave of the pandemic, and the woeful absence of strategy and planning to cope with it. It is not as if the unexpected happened. Global experience shows that a second wave — more vicious and infectious than the first — was to be expected. A responsible government, not lulled into complacency by its own propaganda of how well it had handled the pandemic, would have — beyond dramatic gestures — diligently prepared for it. The truth is that the government did not.

A key difference between the first and second waves is that now we have vaccines as a significant weapon to fight the onslaught of the virus. The government itself made much of the fact that India is the vaccine capital of the world. What then led to the deplorable condition that when we needed the vaccines the most, they were — and are — in short supply? The government squandered away the natural advantage India had by exporting or gifting millions of vaccines. It did not give the required monetary support in time to indigenous producers like the Serum Institute of India so that they could ramp up vaccine production, even when it had an earmarked budgetary allocation of Rs 30,000 crores to handle the pandemic. And, it unforgivably delayed the introduction of new vaccines like Sputnik and Johnson &

Johnson, by not speeding up or abridging trials and approvals. Where imports were planned there are reports of major mess-ups leading to cancellations of major contracts. What we are now seeing is incoherent and improvised action when the crisis is upon us, rather than a planned anticipation that was the need of the hour.

Contrast this with what other governments like the UK and the USA have done. In America the government not only gave credit liberally to vaccine producers, but guaranteed them an assured buy-back at remunerative prices so that they could pay back the loans extended to them. The result is there to see. One-third of Americans are vaccinated, and the entire country will be vaccinated by the middle of the year. The UK, too, imported vaccines from every source that it could. We, on our part, gave away what we had, and did precious little to boost production at home for which we had the capacity.

There is a shortage, too, of oxygen, ventilators, testing kits and hospital beds. While it is true that the demand has gone up exponentially, a wise

It begs all rational thinking why the EC is not agreeing to club the balance three phases of the Bengal Assembly elections and hold them on one day. Mamata Banerjee endorses this proposal. Why doesn’t the PM do so, too?

Shri Krishna in the Bhagwad Gita tells Arjuna to do his duty irrespective of consequences. Our theory of dharma also includes a particular category — aapad dharma — which kicks in times of crisis or emergency...

government would have prepared for the demand in anticipation of the inevitable by increasing production and capacity prior to the second wave hitting us. There is little accountability in this bureaucratic muddling, and total opacity in how the money has been spent thus far in the PM Cares Fund.

The administrative listlessness of the government can be seen in its inability to take stern measures even in the face of the second wave. Why else would have permission have been given to the Kumbh Mela celebrations at Haridwar, where some 40 lakh sadhus and devotees took the plunge in the long-suffering Ganga? All norms of social distancing or masks were thrown to the wind, even as our netas smiled at the devotion of what they assume is their “vote-bank”. Hinduism certainly does not sanction this abdication from duty. Shri Krishna in the Bhagwad Gita tells Arjuna to do his duty irrespective of the consequences. Our theory of dharma also includes a particular category — aapad dharma — which kicks in times of crisis or emergency and allows individuals and leaders to take hard decisions for survival. The Modi government likes the label of a “decisive” government, but its actions are quite to the contrary.

The same lackadaisical approach holds true for the government’s defence of political rallies in the

ongoing state assembly elections. Both leaders and the crowds they want so desperately to get seem to believe that Covid does not exist. The Prime Minister lectures to the nation about “do gaz ki doori” and “mask hai zaroori”, but when it comes to electioneering all such advice is thrown out of the window. There is no point in saying that other political parties do the same. If you are in the hot seat you have to set the benchmark for Covid-appropriate behaviour and uphold it through your actions. It also begs all rational thinking why the Election Commission is not agreeing to club the balance three phases of the Bengal Assembly elections and hold them on one day. Mamata Banerjee endorses this proposal. Why doesn’t the PM do so, too? If he does, I am convinced — for obvious reasons — that the EC will agree.

The second Covid wave has vividly shown the glaring gulf between image and delivery of the Modi Sarkar. This is not politicking over a crisis. This column is written in anguish at a crises that could have been mitigated by better preparation and handling, and anger at the long list of omissions and commissions that account for TV screens exploding with visuals of grieving citizens whose loved ones have died for lack of oxygen or a hospital bed, or who have returned empty handed from vaccination centres. Our health workers deserve our enduring gratitude, but what can we make of a health minister who expostulates that states are indulging in cheap politics when they ask for vaccines which are verifiably in short supply? Beyond a point, bluster does not work. It is time to call a spade a spade.

The writer, an author and a former diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

KAMAL IS RIGHT

Kamal Hasan speaks correctly about why the Government fails to get quality and long life warranty from contractors who are paid in crores for public works. He has cited the collapse, of a wall built around Ukkadam lake in Coimbatore due to some minor volume of rain though the contract was worth several lakhs. Highways are eroded and roads cave in or potholes develop at various points presenting all kinds of problems to vehicular traffic. The government should demand quality assurance of works undertaken by contractors and also display the details of the firm or individual contractors in prominent places with details of the contract given. Contractors should not be allowed to escape their social responsibility by hiding behind secret clauses in the contract. Kamal’s example of even an electric shaver being sold with a warranty cannot just be ignored.

Kooduthuraiyan, Coimbatore

BLAME IS ON EC

This has reference to your editorial EC misses chance. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s suggestion to club the remaining four phases of Assembly election into one, by itself, cannot be considered free of politics. An 8-phase poll was decided very early on but Ms Banerjee had criticised it even then. Of course, issues of violence and more importantly the new mutants of the covid virus came up later. Polling necessitates more Central and State police personnel. Also, there is no study whether a single phase poll can help curb Covid. Parties should not be politically short-sighted or naive but must look for what’s good for the general public. While the Election Commission can do its bit, it is for the parties themselves and perhaps the media to play bigger roles.

Vijayachandran Pandalam, Email

KUDOS TO CSK

Congrats to CSK for their easy win over Punjab Kings by six wickets, thanks to Deepak Chahar’s dream spell of 4 for 13 runs and the foolish run out of Punjab Captain KL Rahul. Though CSK won the match easily, achieving the low target of 107, I feel there are some grey areas that are to be ironed out by Dhoni and his think tank. When they have an experienced and dynamic opener in Robin Uthappa, it is a surprise they persist with R. Gaikwad, who is struggling to score runs. So is the case with Ambati Rayudu. Why can’t they try out Cheteshwar Pujara, who can be even considered to open with Uthappa or Faf du Plessis. It would be nice if Dhoni were to promote himself to No.4 or 5 position to give stability. Hope they continue with the winning spree to qualify for the playoff this year.

M. Srikanth, Chennai

Anita Katyal
Political Gup-Shup



Modi’s ‘Didi’ jibe offends women; what AAP shares with Owaisi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s war cry “*Didiii O Didiii, Arrey Didiii*” (referring to Mamata Banerjee) at all public rallies in poll-bound West Bengal has predictably angered the Trinamul Congress, more so as it has become a source of inspiration for eve-teasers. Roadside Romeos have apparently been mimicking the Prime Minister, using the same catcall, when they see women on the streets of Kolkata. Many of them have even been arrested by the police on charges of harassment. Five women have filed an FIR at the Amherst Street police station while the Bengal Citizens Forum has lodged a strong protest, saying the catcalls were a penal offence. The Forum also took out a protest march and submitted a complaint to the Election Commission, which is still pending. Women leaders belonging to the TMC have also slammed the Prime Minister, saying this was not just an insult to an elected chief minister but to all women.

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was personally reluctant to impose a lockdown but he was liter-

ally pushed into doing so by his bureaucrats who did some plain speaking to him about the need for drastic measures given the alarming spike in Covid-19 cases in the state. Though Mr Chouhan did go by the advice of his officers, informal instructions were conveyed to the lower rung bureaucracy that the lockdown need not be implemented strictly and that people moving out should not be penalised. And the Damoh constituency where a bypoll was held last week, was deliberately exempted from adhering to the lockdown to allow political parties to organise their election rallies. They were helped in this effort by the local election commission officials who went to town with the slogan, “*Corona se nahi darenge, madan hum zaroor karenge*”, urging voters to come out in large numbers on polling day. Incidentally, while Mr Chouhan was battling the alarming rise in infections, his health minister Narottam Mishra was busy overseeing the Assembly poll in West Bengal. Mr Mishra reached his home state a few days before the bye-election in Damoh which happens to

be his stronghold.

Delhi chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal has a lot in common with AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi. Either it is deliberate or inadvertent, but the leaders end up helping the Bharatiya Janata Party by entering an electoral fray resulting in the weakening of the Congress. Mr Owaisi did so in Bihar and Mr Kejriwal in the Gujarat local elections. In fact, there is talk that the two parties even receive covert funding from the BJP. Currently, AAP is focusing on expanding its footprint in Uttarakhand. To that extent, it has initiated a vigorous recruitment drive and is positioning itself as a credible alternative in the hill state. Interestingly, Mr Kejriwal is concentrating on the Kumaon region, which is where the Congress has strong roots, and not on Garhwal which is known to be the BJP’s fiefdom. Given the anti-incumbency against the BJP in Uttarakhand, the Congress has a chance of coming back to power here. But Mr Kejriwal could well

end up playing spoilsport, much to the BJP’s delight.

There appears to be no end to the raging battle in the upper echelons of the prestigious India International Centre even four years after eminent jurist Soli Sorabjee was forced to step down as the Centre’s president though he retains his position as life trustee on the IIC board. Mr Sorabjee’s tenure was cut short in 2017 following a spate of allegations of financial impropriety and bungling in the admission of members. A fresh attempt was made recently at the IIC annual general meeting to debar Mr Sorabjee and Justice Srikrishna from holding any office. It is not clear why this matter was raised after four years. The resolution was, however, not approved as several members pointed out that such a drastic action could not be taken in the absence of the two trustees and without giving them an opportunity to have their say. It must be mentioned that an enquiry committee was set up to probe the charges against Mr Sorabjee but little is

known about its report.

The surprise victory notched up by the Tripura scion Pradyot Kishore Deb Barman’s fledgling party in the recent election to the Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, proved to be a major embarrassment for the Congress. Not only did the party finish fourth but Mr Barman who had been the Tripura Congress president left following differences with the party’s Northeast in-charge Luizinho Faleiro. Apparently, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had got in touch with Mr Barman last year when he was in the US and asked him to rejoin the Congress. Mr Barman was willing to do so but was unable to get in touch with Rahul Gandhi as he had changed his phone number on his return from America and his staff was not very helpful in organising a meeting with the Nehru-Gandhi scion. Mr Barman then decided to float his own party.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

IN BRIEF

Natanz attack suspect named

Tehran, April 17: (AP) Iran state television has named a suspect in the attack that damaged centrifuges at its Natanz nuclear site and says he fled the country. The report Saturday named the suspect as Reza Karimi. It showed a passport-style photograph of a man it identified as Karimi. The report also aired what appeared to be an Interpol "red notice" seeking his arrest. The arrest notice was not immediately accessible on Interpol's public-facing database.

Raul Castro steps down

Havana, April 17: Raul Castro said he is stepping down as Cuban Communist Party leader, leaving without a Castro guiding affairs for the first time in more than six decades and handing control to a younger generation. The 89-year-old Castro made the announcement in a speech Friday at the opening of the eighth congress of the ruling party, the only one allowed on the island. The reins will now pass to 60-year-old Miguel Diaz-Canel, who has already served as Cuba's president since 2018.

Russia detains Ukrainian consul

Moscow, April 17: Russia detained a Ukrainian diplomat for allegedly receiving classified information from a database of the country's main security agency.

The Federal Security Service, or FSB, said Saturday that Alexander Sosonyuk, Ukraine's consul in St Petersburg, was taken into custody on Friday during a meeting with a Russian in which he received "information of a classified nature contained in the databases of law enforcement agencies and the FSB".

The FSB statement, reported by Russian news agencies, didn't give further details. Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko said Sosonyuk has been released from custody and is on Ukrainian diplomatic property.

Worldwide Covid death toll tops a staggering 3 million

True number is higher because of possible government concealment

Rio de Janeiro, April 17: The global death toll from the Coronavirus topped a staggering 3 million people Saturday amid repeated setbacks in the worldwide vaccination campaign and a deepening crisis in places such as Brazil, India and France.

The number of lives lost, as compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is about equal to the population of Kyiv, Ukraine; Caracas, Venezuela; or metropolitan Lisbon, Portugal. It is bigger than Chicago (2.7 million) and equivalent to Philadelphia and Dallas combined. And the true number is believed to be significantly higher because of possible government concealment or the many cases overlooked in the early stages of the outbreak that began 16 months ago in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019.

Around the world, the trajectory of the virus and the race to bring it under control vary widely from country to country.

Even as the US and Britain see their vaccination drives hit their stride and they begin to contemplate life after the pandemic, other places both rich and poor — France and India among them — are lagging behind in putting shots in arms and have imposed new lockdowns and other restrictions as cases soar.

Worldwide, deaths are running at over 12,000 per day on average and new cases at more than 700,000 a day. The US toll alone is over 560,000, accounting for more than 1 in 6 of the world's Covid-19 deaths, by far the highest reported by any country. The US is followed by Brazil, Mexico, India and Britain.



People take part in a protest in the central Puerta del Sol to protect the national health service during and after the pandemic, in Madrid, on Saturday. — AP

USTR discusses TRIPS waiver proposal for vax

Washington, April 17: US Trade Representative Katherine Tai, in a virtual meeting with GAVI's CEO Dr. Seth Berkley, discussed, among other things, the proposed waiver of certain provisions of the WTO's agreement on Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) for Covid-19 pandemic, the USTR said in a statement.

The TRIPS Agreement is a

with Berkley on Friday, Tai discussed increasing vaccine production, global health issues and the proposed waiver of certain provisions of the World Trade Organisation Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) for Covid-19 pandemic, the USTR said in a statement.

The TRIPS Agreement is a

minimum standards agreement, which allows members to provide more extensive protection of intellectual property if they so wish.

Tai expressed her appreciation for the important role GAVI has played in securing and distributing vaccines for developing countries through COVAX and other initiatives, it said.

PIO SCIENTIST IDENTIFIES GENES THAT FIGHT VIRUS

Washington, April 17: US researchers led by an Indian-origin scientist have identified a set of human genes that fight SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes Covid-19, a study that could help in understanding the factors that affect disease severity and suggesting possible therapeutic options. —PTI

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Sports Minister Rijju is Covid +ve

New Delhi: Sports Minister Kiren Rijju on Saturday said that he has tested positive for Covid-19 but is feeling "fit and fine". The 49-year-old posted the development on his Twitter page. "After getting repeated test for Covid-19, today my report has come out positive," Rijju wrote in his Twitter handle. "I'm taking the advice of the Doctors. I request all those who have come in my contact recently to be observant, exercise self-quarantine and get themselves tested. I'm physically fit and fine," he added. Rijju was in Uttarakhand on Friday to inaugurate a Water Sports and Adventure Institute in Tehri. — PTI

Ravi retains title; silver for Bajrang

Almaty, Kazakhstan: Indian wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya retained his Asian Championship title with a solid performance but Bajrang Punia settled for a silver medal after withdrawing from the much-awaited final against Takuto Otoguro due to an elbow injury, here on Saturday.

Ravi Dahiya, though, gave India the first freestyle gold medal of this edition with a commanding show. Bajrang said that he did not want to aggravate the condition of his right elbow. He said he started feeling the pain during the quarterfinal against

Tsitsipas makes Monte Carlo final

Monaco: Stefanos Tsitsipas defeated Dan Evans 6-2, 6-1 in the semifinals of the Monte Carlo Masters on Saturday and will face Andrey Rublev or Casper Ruud for the title. Fourth seed Tsitsipas needed just over an hour to dispatch Britain's Evans. Tsitsipas has yet to drop a set in Monte Carlo this week and is through to his third Masters 1000 final. He finished runner-up in Canada in 2018 and Madrid the following year. Rublev and Ruud meet in the second semifinal later on Saturday. Rublev ended Rafael Nadal's bid for a 12th Monte Carlo title in

NEWCASTLE HAMMER WEST

Diop, Joelinton and Willock heroics pip West Ham; Spurs held by Everton despite Kane's double

Newcastle (United Kingdom), April 17: Newcastle moved closer to Premier League survival after Joe Willock's late goal capped a thrilling 3-2 win against 10-man West Ham that dented the visitors' bid for a top four finish in the Premier League.

Steve Bruce's side had squandered a two-goal lead in the closing stages at St James' Park, but Willock came off the bench to snatch a priceless winner.

Newcastle are nine points clear of the relegation zone with just six games remaining in a turbulent season on Tyneside.

The Magpies had taken control in the first half thanks to Issa Diop's own goal and a blunder from West Ham keeper Lukasz Fabianski for Joelinton's strike.

West Ham defender Craig Dawson was sent off for two bookings in between those goals.

But the Hammers set up a tense finale when Diop got one back before Jesse Lingard equalised with a penalty 10 minutes from full-time.

On-loan Arsenal midfielder Willock settled a pulsating encounter with his thunderous header, putting Newcastle in position to avoid relegation.

Staying up would be an impressive achievement for Bruce, who has battled with dressing room rifts and distracting takeover talk.

The defeat was a big blow for West Ham as they chase an unexpected place in next season's Champions League.

David Moyes' side



Tottenham Hotspur's Harry Kane (left) scores his team's second goal against Everton during their English Premier League match at Goodison Park in Liverpool on Friday. — AFP

remain fourth, but Chelsea are just one point behind with a game in hand, while fifth-placed Liverpool would go above the Hammers if they beat Leeds on Monday.

In another match, England forward Harry Kane suffered a worrying ankle injury ahead of next week's League Cup final after scoring twice in

Tottenham Hotspur's 2-2 draw away to Everton in the Premier League on Friday.

Gylfi Sigurdsson also grabbed two goals for Everton in a result that did little for either side's European hopes.

Kane, expected to lead England's attack in this year's coronavirus delayed European Championships,

went off in stoppage time towards the end of the match after rolling his ankle when challenged in the box at an Everton corner.

Kane's 20th league goal of the season put Spurs ahead in the 27th minute at Goodison Park only for Sigurdsson to equalise soon afterwards from the penalty spot.

Amid a second wave of Covid-19 cases across India, the BCCI is still hopeful of conducting the domestic season across age-groups in men and women's categories after a curtailed last season.

With India playing the T20 World Cup in October and the mega IPL auctions in the offing next year, it is understood that all stakeholders want to start off with two white ball tournaments — Mushtaq Ali T20 (Vijay Hazare Trophy) championships being held in the wake of pandemic. For women, only the National One-Day meet was organised.

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Hamilton revs up to 99th career pole in Emilia GP

Imola (Italy), April 17: World champion Lewis Hamilton edged out the Red Bull duo to claim pole position for the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix on Saturday.

It was Hamilton's 99th career pole and although there is a Red Bull directly behind the Mercedes driver, it will be Sergio Perez rather than Max Verstappen.

Hamilton edged Perez by 0.039 seconds and was 0.087 faster than Verstappen, who is expected to be his main challenger this season.

"I didn't expect to be ahead of two Red Bulls, they've been so quick this weekend," Hamilton said.

Hamilton's teammate Valtteri Bottas had a scrappy final lap and will start from eighth on the grid after finishing 0.487 slower.

Lando Norris will start just ahead of Bottas. The McLaren driver was heading for the front row after a superb final lap but had his time deleted because of exceeding track limits.

Charles Leclerc qualified in an encouraging fourth for Ferrari but his team-

mate Carlos Sainz failed to make it into the final part of qualifying, known as Q3, and will start 11th on the grid.

Pierre Gasly and Daniel Ricciardo will start fifth and sixth, respectively, while Esteban Ocon and Lance Stroll round out the top 10.

Earlier in the day, Verstappen posted the fastest time in the final practice as the Red Bull driver was nearly half a second faster than the rest of the pack. He was 0.456 ahead of Norris and 0.557 clear of Hamilton. — AP

Afghanistan: US may up troops before recall

Washington, April 17: The US will likely increase its troop presence in Afghanistan temporarily over the coming weeks and months in order to fulfill President Joe Biden's order to safely withdraw all forces from the country by Sep. 11, the Pentagon said Friday.

Pentagon chief spokesman John Kirby declined to provide specifics and said details are still being worked out.

But he said it's logical to assume that you may need some logistics help, maybe some engineering help, you may have to add some force protection capabilities again temporarily just to make sure that the drawdown goes in a safe, orderly and effective way. Biden announced Wednesday that the US would pull all of its more than 2,500 troops out of Afghanistan by Sep. 11 the 20th anniversary of the al-Qaida terror attack on the US that had triggered the US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

NATO announced it would follow the same timetable for withdrawing more than 7,000 allied forces. The president's decision defies a May 1 withdrawal deadline that was agreed to by the Trump administration as part of a peace agreement with the Taliban. Instead, Biden said that the US withdrawal would begin on May 1.

BCCI HOPEFUL OF DOMESTIC SEASON

New Delhi, April 17: The BCCI plans to kick-start its 2021-22 domestic season in September this year with the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament and has also allocated a three-month window to the Ranji Trophy from December after the marquee event had to be cancelled last season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, the Duleep Trophy, Deodhar Trophy and Irani Cup are not a part of the tentative calendar prepared by the cricket operations team. Apart from this, five women's competitions have also been dropped from the roster.

The 2020-21 season was a severely truncated one with only the National T20 (Mushtaq Ali) and ODI (Vijay Hazare Trophy) championships being held in the wake of pandemic. For women, only the National One-Day meet was organised.

Amid a second wave of Covid-19 cases across India, the BCCI is still hopeful of conducting the domestic season across age-groups in men and women's categories after a curtailed last season.

With India playing the T20 World Cup in October and the mega IPL auctions in the offing next year, it is understood that all stakeholders want to start off with two white ball tournaments — Mushtaq Ali T20 (Vijay Hazare Trophy) championships being held in the wake of pandemic. For women, only the National One-Day meet was organised.

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Off the field



Ben Stokes bids adieu to his Rajasthan Royals teammates.

Sams in RCB bubble after negative test

Australian all-rounder Daniel Sams on Saturday joined the Royal Challengers Bangalore's bio-bubble after returning with two negative RT-PCR results more than a week after testing positive for COVID-19. The 28-year-old had arrived in India on April 3 with a negative COVID-19 report but tested positive during the second test on April 7 and was in quarantine since then. "We are pleased to inform that Royal Challengers Bangalore, all-rounder Daniel Sams, has joined the RCB bio-bubble on 17th April 2021 with negative reports for COVID-19," RCB said in a statement.

"RCB medical team was in constant touch with Sams to ensure his safety and declared him fit after all the required examinations as part of the BCCI protocols."

Chahar earns rich praise from Shastri

Deepak Chahar's best IPL performance 4-1-13-4 on Friday earned rich praise from national head coach Ravi Shastri. "Proven fact. Genuine swing both ways with control can undo the best. Super variations. Brilliant," Shastri tweeted. Chahar recalled how a random fan's social media comment hurt him. "Expectations are high here and you have to perform in every game. so this is for that man, who made the comment, if I would not have played, this performance might have not come," Chahar said.

Padikkal is great talent, says Lara

Devdutt Padikkal needs to "iron out" a few technical things but the legendary Brian Lara is confident that the Royal Challengers Bangalore left-hander would better his performance during this IPL with a few Man of the Match awards. The 20-year-old Padikkal was one of the finds of the last IPL, scoring 474 runs with five half-centuries and contributing handsomely to RCB's campaign.

"A few little things to iron out. I hope he did that in the break and comes back really storming hard for this IPL," Lara said.

This year, he missed RCB's opener as he was recovering from a bout of COVID-19 virus.

"He's (Padikkal) such a great talent. Last year, he got a couple of (5) fifties, he batted well, he supported Virat Kohli very well," Lara

FIELD DAY FOR MUMBAI

Hardik hits bull's eye twice as Mumbai run Sunrisers out

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 17

Hardik Pandya showcased his top-class fielding skills as Mumbai Indians beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by 16 runs here at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Saturday.

Chasing 151, Sunrisers were bowled out for 137. Rahul Chahar and Trent Boult took three wickets each, but it was Hardik's two crucial run-outs that changed the complexion of the match.

Sunrisers' inexperienced middle-order failed to raise to the occasion once again as they slumped to their third consecutive defeat.

Powerplay fetched Sunrisers 57 runs with opener Jonny Bairstow dictating the terms.

Bairstow (43 off 22 balls) who was striking the ball like a dream plotted his own downfall. The Englishman was out hit-wicket while trying to paddle sweep left-arm spinner Kunal Pandya.

The required run-rate shot up as Mumbai conceded just seven runs between overs seven and 10. At the half-way mark, Sunrisers needed 77 off 60 balls.

The biggest turning point was David Warner's dismissal. Hardik unleashed a stunning throw from point to catch Warner short of the crease. As an upset Warner (37 off 34 balls) walked back to the dressing room, Sunrisers found themselves in a familiar situation. The onus was once again on their mudling middle-order.

Vijay Shankar raised some hopes by clubbing Krunal for back-to-back sixes as the 16th over earned Sunrisers 16 runs. The equation became 31 off 24.

Then, Hardik hit the bull's eye yet again to run out Abdul Samad. With the pressure mounting, Vijay perished soon with Sunrisers still requiring 17 runs off seven balls.

Earlier, Kieron Pollard's brilliant cameo powered Mumbai to a competitive total of 150 for five. Pollard who was dropped on 18 by Vijay went on to frustrate Sunrisers by making 35 off 22 balls. He finished the innings with a flourish by hitting back-



Hardik Pandya (second from right) celebrates with teammates after effecting a brilliant run-out to dismiss Sunrisers' David Warner.

— IPL

SCORECARD

Mumbai Indians: Quinton de Kock c sub (J Suchith) b Mujeeb Ur Rahman 40, Rohit Sharma c Virat Singh b Shankar 32, Suryakumar Yadav c & b Shankar 10, Ishan Kishan c Bairstow b Mujeeb Ur Rahman 12, Kieron Pollard (not out) 35, Hardik Pandya c Virat Singh b Ahmed 7, Krunal Pandya (not out) 3. **Extras (lb 6, nb 1, w 4) 11. Total (for five wickets in 20 overs) 150.**

FoW: 1-55, 2-71, 3-98, 4-114, 5-131.

Bowling: Bhuvneshwar 4-0-45-0, Khaleel Ahmed 4-0-24-1, Mujeeb Ur Rahman 4-0-29-2, Abhishek Sharma 1-0-5-0, Vijay Shankar 3-0-19-2, Rashid Khan 4-0-22-0.

Sunrisers Hyderabad: David Warner run out (HH Pandya) 36, Jonny Bairstow hit wicket b KH Pandya 43, Manish Pandey c Pollard b Chahar 2, Virat Singh c Yadav b Chahar 11, Vijay Shankar c Yadav b Bumrah 28, Abhishek Sharma c Milne b Chahar 2, Abdul Samad run out (HH Pandya) 7, Rashid Khan lbw b Boult 0, Bhuvneshwar Kumar b Boult 1, Mujeeb Ur Rahman (not out) 1, Khaleel Ahmed b Boult 1. **Extras (lb 3, w 2) 5. Total (in 19.4 overs) 137.**

FoW: 1-67, 2-71, 3-90, 4-102, 5-104, 6-129, 7-130, 8-134, 9-135.

Bowling: Trent Boult 3.4-0-28-3, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-14-1, Adam Milne 3-0-33-0, Krunal Pandya 3-0-30-1, Rahul Chahar 4-0-19-3, Kieron Pollard 2-0-10-0.

to-back sixes of Bhuvneshwar Kumar in the final over. After a solid start, Mumbai made 53 in powerplay. Warner brought Shankar into the attack and his change of pace worked wonders. Vijay dismissed Rohit Sharma (32 off 25 balls) who was looking in fine touch.

MSD THE HEARTBEAT OF CSK: FLEMING

Mumbai, April 17: Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming has called skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni the team's heartbeat and said the desire to do well even after playing 200 matches is a testament to his attitude towards the game and the franchise. Dhoni has been leading the side since the inaugural edition of the league in 2008.

"His longevity has to be mentioned and appreciated... to play 200 games and still have a desire to do well is a testament to his attitude towards the game and franchise," Fleming said after CSK beat Punjab Kings by six wickets win in the ongoing IPL here on Friday.

"I think the franchise has grown and MS has grown with it, so it is a great relationship and great fun," the former New Zealand skipper added.

Terming Dhoni the heartbeat of CSK, Fleming said, "He is the heartbeat of CSK, there's no doubt about it. Whether it's performance, guidance or leadership, you run out of things to say about him."

He said the manner in which the team bounced back after the first game was impressive and praised Man of the Match Deepak Chahar for his efforts (4/13). "Really impressed with the way he bounced back after the first game. Without doubt, when Deepak gets a little



CSK skipper M.S. Dhoni talks to Punjab Kings youngster Sharukh Khan after their match on Friday.

— IPL

bit of swing and a little bit of movement, he is one of the finest around. His ability to swing the ball is one. But his control and skill set is also very high."

— PTI

DC hold edge over Punjab

Mumbai, April 17: Delhi Capitals skipper Rishabh Pant will aim to display better tactical acumen in Catch-22 situations against a 'blow-hot-blow-cold' Punjab Kings in what promises to be a battle of brittle middle-orders in an IPL match here on Sunday.

Both teams are coming into the 'Norrther Derby' of IPL after enduring defeats in their previous games but Delhi Capitals are definitely a better side on paper.

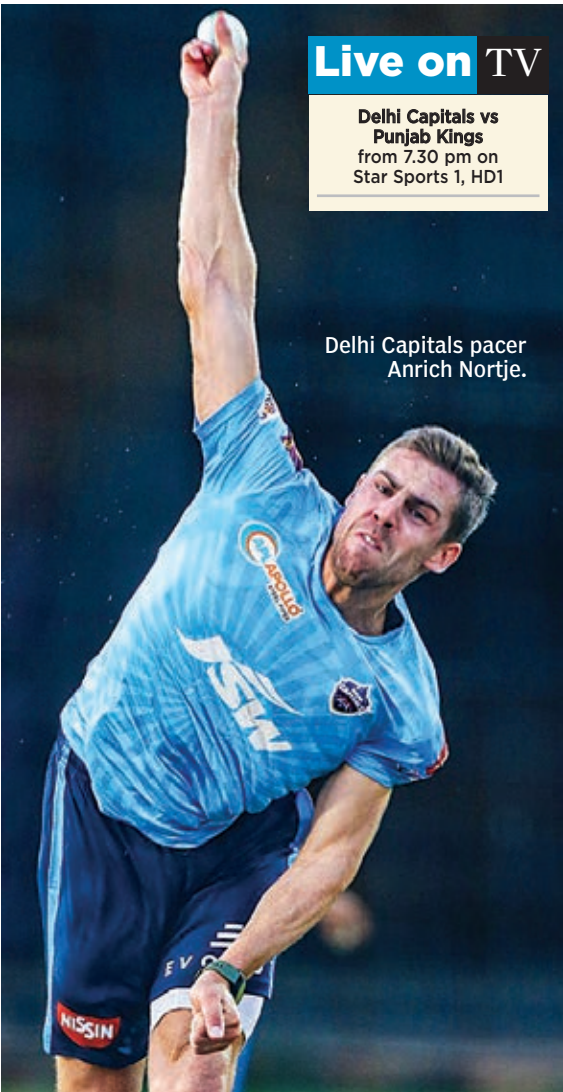
Pant, relatively inexperienced in terms of IPL captaincy, lost the plot in the last game where he didn't finish his best bowler Ravichandran Ashwin's quota and instead used Tom Curran's friendly medium pacers.

As coach Ricky Ponting pointed out, he would expect a better "on his feet" thinking from the young captain.

The likely addition of Anrich Nortje in the playing XI will only bolster Pant's bowling attack which lost its bearings during the last match with Curran's lack of pace on a slow track being cannon fodder for Chris Morris and David Miller.

Punjab Kings, on the other hand, suffered an inexplicable batting collapse against Chennai Super Kings with Deepak Chahar's extra bounce and slight seam movement causing the damage. This was after a healthy 200 plus total in the opening game.

The nature of the Wankhede track is posing a few questions under lights for top-order batsmen as the last two games have shown with underlying moisture aiding quali-



Live on TV

Delhi Capitals vs
Punjab Kings
from 7.30 pm on
Star Sports 1, HD1Delhi Capitals pacer
Anrich Nortje.

ty fast bowling.

So, KL Rahul versus Kagiso Rabada and Chris Woakes bowling to Chris Gayle could be as enticing as Prithvi Shaw encountering the guile of Mohammed Shami and Shikhar Dhawan trying to unsettle a disciplined Arshdeep Singh.

Jaydev Unadkat and Rajasthan Royals have shown that despite massive improvements, there are still some chinks in Shaw's armoury and Arshdeep could be used to expose that.

Both teams are top heavy in batting with DC dependant on Shaw, Dhawan and Pant for doing the bulk of scoring

HEAD to HEAD

Matches 26
PBKS 15 DC 11

FOR THE RECORD

● KL Rahul who has scored 4,938 runs in 141 innings needs 62 runs to become the 11th Indian and 70th batsman overall to score 5,000 runs in T20s.

● R. Ashwin who has taken 249 wickets in 246 innings needs just one wicket to become the third Indian and 23rd bowler overall to take 250 wickets in T20s.

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

● Delhi beat Punjab in Super over after the match ended in a tie at Dubai.

● Punjab beat Delhi by 5 wickets at Dubai.

STATS: S. PERVEZ QAISER

while the same job profile is held by KL Rahul, Chris Gayle and Deepak Hooda in the Punjab line-up.

Even the weaknesses of both the teams are pretty similar.

If Ajinkya Rahane's lack of power-hitting and Marcus Stoinis' indifferent show is affecting the DC middle-order, Mayank Agarwal's prolonged bad-patch coupled with Nicholas Pooran's susceptibility to short balls over his shoulder are not great news for Punjab either.

The middle-orders' struggles in both the dugouts will make it an engrossing contest with DC bowlers expected to hold sway in Nortje's presence.

In case of Punjab Kings, save Mohammed Shami, the two high-priced pacers — Jhye Richardson and Riley Meredith — haven't exactly set the stage on fire.

— PTI

Bangalore look to continue fine run

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 17

Royal Challengers Bangalore are riding on a crest of a wave after winning two out of their first two games this season. They would be keen on posting a hat-trick of wins when they lock horns with Kolkata Knight Riders here at the M.A. Chidambaram stadium on Sunday afternoon.

With RCB finding an unlikely bowling hero in left-arm spinner Shahbaz Ahmed and 'million-dollar' Glenn Maxwell ending his five-year drought for an IPL half-century, Virat Kohli's team appear to have the right combination in their playing XI.

Maxwell's dramatic change in IPL fortunes has been credited to Kohli's admirable leadership. Kiwi Kyle Jamieson, who has added teeth to RCB's pace bowling unit, too praised Kohli for helping him adapt to Indian conditions.

"He (Kohli) is such an experienced leader. He is a skilful leader and the way that he approaches the games certainly complements the way I like to go about things. He is competitive, he is aggressive and likes to take the game on, which is something I like to adopt as well," Jamieson said.

The afternoon game (3:30pm start) is expected to change the dynamics at Chepauk which proved to be a nightmare for chasing teams in the previous games. However, spin will remain the most-potent weapon on a slow surface.

Kolkata are coming off a disappointing result after

Live on TV

Kolkata Knight Riders vs
Royal Challengers Bangalore
from 3.30 pm on
Star Sports 1, HD1

HEAD to HEAD

Matches 26
KKR 14 RCB 12

FOR THE RECORD

● Eoin Morgan who has scored 6,921 runs at an average of 29.7 in 297 innings needs 79 more to become the fourth Englishman and 22nd batsman overall to score 7,000 runs in T20 matches.

● Virat Kohli who has scored 5,944 runs at an average of 38.10 in 186 innings needs 56 more to become the first batsman to complete 6,000 runs in IPL.

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

● RCB beat Knight Riders by 82 runs at Sharjah.

● RCB beat Knight Riders by 8 wickets at Abu Dhabi.

STATS: S. PERVEZ QAISER

dominating the game for a major part of it. KKR would be eager to see skipper Eoin Morgan hitting the top form. He hasn't touch the double-digit this season. West Indian all-rounder Andre Russell who was brilliant with the ball hasn't performed well with the bat for KKR either. Having scored back-to-back half-centuries, left-handed opener Nitish Rana is KKR's biggest contributor.

Kolkata's spin trio of Harbhajan Singh, Varun Chakravarty and Shakib Al Hasan managed to keep the opponent batsmen at bay in powerplays.

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