

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | SATURDAY | 17 APRIL 2021

WEATHER



Max: 36.8°C
Min: 24.1°C
RH: 26%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky, moderate rain likely.
Max/Min temp. 38/25°C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Shuddha Panchami till 8.30 pm
Star: Mrigashira till 2.31 am (Sunday)
Varjyam: 5.54 am to 7.42 am
Durmuhurtam: 6.02 am to 7.42 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HIJRI CALENDAR
Ramzan 4,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 4.57 am
Zohar: 12.26 pm
Asar: 4.38 pm
Maghrib: 6.38 pm
Isha: 7.47 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.32 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.58 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 9.28 AM
MOONSET TODAY 11 PM



WORLD | 5

US Senate puts off Vanita's nomination



SPORTS | 8

Sunrisers to take on Mumbai Indians today



TABLOID

Pawan tests Covid-19 positive



State running out of beds for Covid patients, warn officials

Gandhi Hosp, out of ICU beds, to send away all other patients

BALU PULIPAKA | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 16

Telangana state is fast running out of beds for Covid-19 patients. The deteriorating situation on Friday was such that the health department threw up its hands and ordered immediate conversion of Gandhi Hospital into a Covid-19 treatment-only centre. The hospital, which the government always claimed has enough beds to treat Covid-19 patients, on Friday ran out of them, particularly those on which patients can be provided with ventilator or CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) support.

The health department issued orders on Friday directing the Gandhi Hospital authorities to immediately stop all services except Covid-19 care. From Saturday, the hospital will stop all its outpatient services and begin shifting non-Covid-19 patients after stabilising all critically ill patients in various departments to other state-run hospitals.

As on Thursday evening, TS had, according to the state health department, 10,279 Covid-19 patients admitted to various government and private hospitals. This number does not take into account the Covid-19 patients admitted to hospitals in the state on Friday as the department releases its official data only a day later. The total beds available for Covid-19 patients, both in the government and the private sector, according to the bulletin for Thursday, incidentally is 27,775. The rush for admissions was such that the 249 ICU beds for Covid-19 patients in Gandhi Hospital, which the health department said were available as on Thursday 8 pm, were filled up by afternoon with a stream of Covid-19 hit people arriving at the hospital.

Page 2: Health infra in TS is overwhelmed: Officials



A display board atop the Gandhi Hospital's name board suggests 960 out of 1,000 beds with oxygen supply were vacant, while 369 beds out of 500 in ICU were available on Friday morning. However, by the evening, the hospital authorities declared that beds with ventilators and CPAP machines were full.

— DEEPAK DESHPANDE

PM takes stock of oxygen, vaccine output to be hiked

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

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

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

The PM reviewed in detail the current oxygen supply situation and projected use in the coming 15 days across 12 high-burden states — Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

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

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

Cylinder filling plants will also be permitted to operate for 24 hours, with the necessary safeguards. The government is allowing industrial cylinders to be used for medical oxygen after due purging. Similarly, nitrogen and argon tankers will be automatically allowed to be converted to oxygen tankers to overcome the potential shortage of tankers.

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

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Nagarjunasagar goes to poll today

TRS has edge; Congress fights to win bastion

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 16

The stage is set for the bypoll to the Nagarjunasagar Assembly constituency, with voting slated on Saturday from 7 am to 7 pm. Stakes are high for all three major parties, the TRS, the Congress and the BJP, though the chances are clearly not equal on polling eve.

The TRS, which managed to put the brakes on the BJP's winning march by wresting a Legislative Council seat from the saffron party and retaining another seat recently, is keen to continue its winning streak and retain the Nagarjunasagar seat. It is hoping that Nomula Bhagat, son of deceased MLA Nomula Narasimhaiah, will make his legislative debut shortly.

The Congress is making all the efforts to regain its lost bastion, Nagarjunasagar, from where its candidate K. Jana Reddy created a record by winning seven times. The party has received good response from the people during its campaign, in which several leaders participated, but is waiting for actual voting to figure out if it can manage a win.

The BJP, whose Mission 2023 received a jolt with the defeat in MLC polls, has fielded a lightweight, Dr P. Ravi Kumar. It is aiming to repeat the feat of the Dubbak Assembly bypoll, where it wrested a seat from the TRS and set a narrative of being the only viable alternative in Telangana state.

As many as 2,20,196 voters, comprising 1,09,128 male and 1,11,068 female voters, will decide the fate

Poll notice for 7 civic bodies shocks Oppn

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 16

The TRS is far ahead of its rivals both in terms of campaigning and announcement of candidates for the upcoming elections to the municipal corporations of Warangal and Khammam and five municipalities — Siddipet, Jacharla, Kothur, Atchampet and Nakrekal — on April 30.

While the TRS has finalised its candidates and released on Friday the first list for these elections, the Opposition parties are struggling to identify its candidates to take on the TRS. This is due to the sudden release of election notifications, which meant they did not get adequate time to plan things.

The filing of nominations commenced on Friday and the last day for nomination

The filing of nominations commenced on Friday and the last day for nominations is Sunday, April 18. With just two days left, the Opposition parties are running helter skelter.

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Page 2: Oppn had no clue on ward reservation

of 41 candidates in the fray. Two EVMs will be used in each polling booth to accommodate the 41 candidates. There are 8,151 postal ballot votes, of which 1,433 votes have already been posted.

The Election Commission has made wearing of masks mandatory for all voters and polling staff in the 346 polling booths. The EC has made elaborate security arrangements for the smooth conduct of the election by deploying 2,390

security personnel, comprising three companies of Central Armed Police Forces, numbering 290, TS Special Police 12th Battalion numbering 50.

Webcasting will be done from 210 polling booths while 130 micro observers, 44 sector officers and 44 route officers were appointed to monitor the polling process. Covid patients will be allowed to vote after 6 pm. The counting of votes will take place on May 2.

All temples in AP may bar entry of pilgrims yet again

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 16

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

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

The endowments department is planning to close these temples for a few days so as to break the chain of the virus spread.

Officials say the Lord Venkateswara temple in Tirupati was closed for a few months when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out last year. This was from March to July, 2020. Now, based on the recommendation of the state government, the TTD trust board will take a decision on closure.

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

ARCHEOLOGICAL MONUMENTS IN STATE CLOSED

DC CORRESPONDENTS KURNOOL/ANANTAPUR, APRIL 16

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

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

Officials from the archaeology department have also closed gates of Lepakshi and Lord Veralbhadr Swamy temples in Anantapur till May 15. Priests will offer pujas inside the temple premises. Similarly, entry towards the world's biggest Nandi statue was also restricted and gates were closed.

COUNTER POINT



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

SHORT TAKES

Monsoon to be normal, says IMD

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

Full report on Page 4

SC norms for cheque bounces

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

INSIDE

STATE... PAGE 2
Covid can spread by air, says Lancet

ACTING | TOUGH

Excise office defied HC order to release a seized vehicle last year

HC orders babu to feed 20 for a week

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 16

Making it clear that the apologies of officers alone won't prompt the court to let off guilty officers in contempt of court matters, the Telangana High Court ordered a modified form of punishment to another officer on Friday.

A division bench of the High Court on Friday directed Syed Yasin Qureshi, deputy commissioner of the Prohibition and Excise department at Mahbubnagar, to feed a minimum of 20 persons

The High Court had issued directions on August 24, 2020, to the officer to release the vehicle, in response to the contention that the jagery would be damaged if the vehicle is exposed to the sun and rain. But the officer did not release the vehicle.

After the contempt case was filed before the High Court, the excise department filed an appeal. When notice was served in the contempt case, the department released the vehicle on January 15, which is a delay of four-and-a-half months.

daily for a week by standing outside a mosque near his residence, to coincide with the breaking of fast ritual for Ramzan in the evening.

It also imposed on him a token cost of ₹1,000 for non-compliance of court orders.

A week ago the Nalgonda district collector was directed by the court to do social service and a retired civil supplies officer was ordered to feed orphans for two days in lieu of the punishments imposed on them.

The division bench comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijayen Reddy was dealing with the contempt appeal filed by Qureshi urging the court to set aside the punishment in a case of willful disobedience towards the court orders.

The single judge had imposed costs of ₹1,000 on the deputy commissioner for his "recklessness" in the matter of non-implementation of high court orders.

The original case related to the seizing of a vehicle loaded with jagery. The High Court had issued directions on August 24,

2020, to the officer to release the vehicle, in response to the contention that the jagery would be damaged if the vehicle is exposed to the sun and rain. However, the officer did not release the vehicle.

After the contempt case was filed before the High Court, the excise department rushed to file an appeal against the order issued on August 24. When notice was served in the contempt case, the department released the vehicle on January 15.

Page 2: Court warns of action if order not complied

IN BRIEF

TRS DECIDES TO STAY AWAY FROM GHMC BYPOLL

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 16

The Telangana Rastra Samiti on Friday decided to stay away from the byelection for the Lingojiguda division of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation to pave way for the unopposed election of the BJP candidate.

The seat fell vacant following the death due to Covid-19 of Akula Ramesh Goud of the BJP who won the December 2020 GHMC elections. Goud died in January 2021 even before taking oath as corporator, necessitating the byelection.

The Telangana State Election Commission (TSEC) on Thursday issued notification to hold election for Lingojiguda division on April 30. The BJP has decided to field late Ramesh Goud's son.

A delegation comprising former BJP MLC N. Ramchander Rao, late Ramesh Goud's wife and son met TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao at Pragathi Bhavan on Friday and requested him not to field a candidate from the TRS for the election, to pave way for the unanimous election of the BJP candidate.

Rama Rao took up the issue with party president and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, who gave his nod for the party to stay away from the election.

Rama Rao said the untimely death of Ramesh Goud even before taking oath as corporator was unfortunate and TRS had decided not to contest this poll in support of Ramesh Goud's family members.

The BJP and Ramesh Goud's family members thanked Chandrashekar Rao and Rama Rao for their decision to stay away from meeting on humanitarian grounds.

There has been a convention to allow a family member of a deceased elected representative to get elected unopposed.

OPPN HAD NO CLUE ON WARD RESERVATION

FROM PAGE 1

In this too, the Opposition was caught unawares. They had no clue as to which ward was reserved for which category.

The sudden issue of the poll notification reminded the Opposition parties of the GHMC poll notification in November 2018 when just three days' time was given for filing of nominations against the usual one week, and just a day's time was given for the withdrawal of nomination against the usual three days.

Opposition parties say the TRS has exploited the advantage of being the ruling party yet again as it could secure all the details on the reservations in advance from the SEC and it could thus take time and pick the right candidates in advance. It also started campaigning a month in advance.

TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao is the minister for municipal administration and urban development, as also IT. He toured all the poll-bound municipalities from April 2 to April 14, launched development programmes worth crores of rupees and sought votes based on them.

Interestingly, the SEC released the schedule on April 15, a day after Rama Rao completed his tour of all the municipalities.

● **OPPOSITION SAY** the TRS has exploited the advantage of being the ruling party as it could secure all the details on the reservations in advance from the SEC, it could take time and pick the right candidates.

KHAMMAM | MUNICIPALITY

Minister's wife in mayor race

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, APRIL 16

Political activity has picked up within the limits of Khammam Municipal Corporation (KMC) with parties busy with the process of selecting candidates for contesting from the 60 divisions of the civic body.

Ruling TRS has already entered into an alliance with CPI by giving the latter three seats. Parleys are on with CPI-M for a similar understanding. While local CPI-M leaders are opposing any alliance with TRS, the party high command is in favour of a pact with the

ruling party. Vansantha Laxmi, wife of transport minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar, is contesting from 20th division. It is expected that, once elected, she will be the next mayor of Khammam. A general category candidate can be the mayor of Khammam, as the seat is not under any reserved category.

Bharatiya Janata Party is expected to announce its list of candidates on Saturday. It has declared that it will contest all the 60 divisions.

Present mayor B. Muralikrishna declared that he will not be contest KMC polls as his ward has

been reserved for general women. Many TRS corporators have lost their divisions, as their divisions have been reserved for women this time. They want their wives to contest, so that they can retain their seats.

Seelamsetti Veerabhadram, whose wife is corporator from ruling party, is contesting again as a TRS candidate.

The transport minister has asked some of the existing candidates to file their nominations from their respective divisions. About four nominations have been filed on Friday. Candidates have, however, been asked not to expect any election

funds. They will have to fund their election on their own.

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has become the first political party in Khammam to announce its manifesto.

It has promised to increase self-employment opportunities by imparting vocational skills to youth and providing loans under various self-employment schemes. AAP has also promised to give importance to creating sports and recreation facilities in the town, supplying power at subsidised prices, empowerment of women and welfare schemes to differently able persons.

Vehicles for specially abled



IT minister K.T. Rama Rao and home minister Mahmood Ali join ministers Sabitha Indra Reddy and Malla Reddy to distribute three-wheelers and electronic goods to the physically handicapped people at IB stadium on Friday.

—DEEPAK DESHPANDE

BJP rushes leaders to Warangal, Khammam

To work on poll strategy to expose TRS 'failures'

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 16

The BJP is focusing its fight against the TRS in the forthcoming civic body elections to two corporations and a municipality. The party is rushing leaders to Greater Warangal and Khammam corporations and Siddipet municipality to work on poll strategy and "expose" the TRS government's "failures."

The party is eyeing a big victory in

Warangal, so that with a majority seats in its kitty so that its leader can be the next mayor.

Incidentally, the BJP does not have a single corporator in Warangal and Khammam. In Siddipet, of the two councillors one joined the TRS while the other has been made district party president.

Dubbak MLA M. Raghunandan Rao will oversee electioneering in Siddipet while former MP A.P. Jithender Reddy and former legislator

Chintala Ramachandra Reddy are being rushed to Khammam.

Party leaders are confident that the BJP can not only give a tough fight to the TRS but also bag a majority of seats in all three civic bodies. BJP leaders will focus on the "failures" of the government in handling the floods, neglect of local issues and grabbing of nalas.

BJP state president Bandi Sanjay stated that the TRS was always biased against Warangal

and Khammam and did not give compensation to flood-affected victims in Warangal.

Sanjay said that the anti-incumbency factor will work against the ruling party, whose leaders are facing several allegations like land-grabbing and diversion of funds meant for urban bodies.

Raghunandhan Rao stated that the fight in Siddipet municipality will be between TRS cash politics and BJP clean image.

VHR TELLS TRS TO DECLARE HEALTH EMERGENCY

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 16

Veteran Congress leader V. Hanumantha Rao on Friday accused the TRS government of being a mute spectator to the havoc caused by Covid-19, though it has been rampant not only in the capital but also in the entire state.

He said people have been suffering due to non-availability of vaccines. "No beds are available in government and private corporate hospitals. The government is not taking any concrete initiative to protect precious lives," he said.

The Congress leader said the TRS government seemed only interested in holding election after election.

He maintained that was unfair that the State Election Commission had issued the notification for holding municipal elections when the Coronavirus is on the rise and hundreds of people are getting struck by the virus.

"Is winning municipal elections more important to Chief Minister K. Chandrasekar Rao than saving the lives of people? KCR has become an addict to elections. I demand that the TRS government utilise the rooms in LB Stadium, Uppal Stadium and other places to accommodate Covid patients and provide necessary treatment to them," Hanumantha Rao demanded.

He pointed out that accommodation at Gachibowli stadium had earlier been used for treating Covid-19 patients. There are 60 rooms in Uppal stadium. The state government could also declare a health emergency and take over all spacious farm houses in Chevella, Ibrahimpattanam, Sangareddy, Patancheru, Keesara, and Medchal for treating Covid-19 patients.

Gandra condemns allegations against him made by sarpanch

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 16

Bhupalpally MLA Gandra Venkataramana Reddy condemned the allegations made against him by Rupireddypalli Village Sarpanch Bandari Kavitha and her husband Devender who approached the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) alleging life threat and seeking protection from the MLA.

Addressing mediapersons on Friday, Venkataramana Reddy said several village sarpanches, MPTCs and other public representatives met him at the Bhupalpally MLA camp office on the 4th of this month. "Public issues were discussed with them for about 1 hour during that time but I did not utter a single word



Gandra Venkataramana Reddy

against Rupireddypalli sarpanch Kavitha or her husband. I strongly condemn the allegations they are making against me. Such behaviour is unacceptable. Conspiracies are being hatched against me to tarnish the clean image I have and to affect my political growth," he said.

Gandra also criticized Teenmaar Mallanna, who

runs a channel on YouTube, for considering only one side of the story and demanding a public apology from him, and also publishing his phone number on social media.

"Without even trying to know what has really happened, he made claims that what was alleged was a heinous act by me. I have been giving all kinds of political opportunity to people from all walks of life in my constituency. Those around me, everyone who believed in me and voted for me were from all walks of life. I did not make such derogatory remarks," the MLA added.

He also warned that legal action would be taken against those who do not refrain from making indecent remarks against him.

Virus infections predominantly by air: Lancet

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 16

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

In their study, published by *Lancet* on April 15, researchers from the US, Canada and the United Kingdom, said there was enough evidence to surmise that the SARS-CoV-2 spreads through the aerosol route.

Ever since the pandemic broke out early last year, the predominant view has been that Covid-19 spreads only through droplets — microscopic liquid particles emitted by an infected person while coughing, sneezing or talking with virus taking a ride in those particles — that are inhaled by another person.

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

In their study published by *Lancet*, six experts from the three countries provided 10 reasons why they believe that the virus is airborne and spreads as an aerosol particle. Aerosol particles do not need a 'carrier', such as a droplet, for the virus to ride on. The paper 'Ten scientific reasons in support of airborne transmission of SARS-CoV-2' said one of their findings was that Covid-19 infections in hospitals have been documented even at places where healthcare professionals used personal protective equipment designed to protect against droplet but not aerosol exposure.

Bookies cash in, betting on fears of another lockdown

NAVEEN KUMAR | DC
HYDERABAD APRIL 16

Bookies are busy cashing in on the lockdown fears. They are betting on whether or not the state government will impose a fresh lockdown. As per the latest buzz, May 2 is the date of interest for the bookies.

Speaking about the betting rackets in the city, P. Radhakrishna Rao, DCP of the Commissioner's Task Force, said they were cracking down on the cricket betting crowd since the IPL season began. "We have booked six people in three cases for the IPL betting. As this is more organised, we are able to detect and bust the rings easily."

"Those betting on lockdown predictions are, however, unorganised and it happens either as a one-to-one case or in less-organised manner, making it difficult for us to track, trace and arrest them," said the official.

Those who place bets on matches and games said since the Covid-19 pandemic has forced cancellation of sporting events, bets are now being placed on the dates of a likely lockdown, the infection rate, the death toll etc.

"Usually the money placed on lockdown dates has a longer-term validity. Short-term bets

● **AS PER** latest buzz, May 2 is date of interest for bookies.

● **COPS ARE** cracking down on the cricket betting crowd since the IPL season began.

● **CITY COPS** are monitoring all the cyber operations

included infection and death counts in different cities. During the initial lockdown phase, the public was mostly placing their bets on when the restrictions would be lifted. If the odds are in favour of Coronavirus, it means you are betting that the cases will rise or the lockdown will continue," said a punter who placed bets in the last few months.

City police officials said that apart from keeping an eye on the usual punters and betting hubs during the IPL season, they are on the lookout for those placing bets on lockdown restrictions as well. "We do not know how the nature of betting has changed after the pandemic, but we will continue the crackdown against such crime networks. Our teams are monitoring all the cyber operations," police officials said.

Suspend TRS corporator for using fake caste certificate, says Congress

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 16

The BC cell of Congress party on Friday demanded that state government suspend Kola Malathi, TRS corporator from 6th Division of Karimnagar Municipal Corporation, for getting elected wrongfully in the municipal elections held in 2020.

Addressing media here, Karimnagar district president of Congress BC cell Puli Anjaneyulu pointed out that the 6th Division had been allotted to BC women in the municipal elections held last year. However, TRS party candidate Kola Malathi, who belongs to Reddy community, contested the seat by submitting a fake BC caste certificate and won the election.

Anjaneyulu maintained that local leaders came to know the facts only later and went to court seeking justice. Subsequently, a committee headed by district collector K. Shashanka inquired into the case and confirmed that Malathi had indeed submitted a fake caste certificate.

The Congress leader said due to pressure from BC welfare minister Gangula Kamalakara, Malathi has not yet been sus-

● **Anjaneyulu maintained** that local leaders came to know the facts only later and went to court seeking justice. Subsequently, a committee headed by district collector K. Shashanka inquired into the case and confirmed that Malathi had indeed submitted a fake caste certificate.

pended from being a corporator. He appealed to representatives of all BC unions to come on one platform and fight against such political discrimination.

Anjaneyulu said if the state government does not take immediate action against the corporator, the Congress party, along with BC unions, will intensify its agitation and teach a fitting lesson to the ruling party in the coming days.

Later, the Congress leader, accompanied by city unit Congress BC cell president Bonala Srinivas, submitted a memorandum to Municipal commissioner Valluri Kranthi demanding suspension of the 6th Division Corporator from her post.

HEALTH INFRA OVERWHELMED, SAY TS OFFICIALS

FROM PAGE 1

Gandhi Hospital, as per the department, has a total of 500 ICU beds capable of providing patients with ventilator and CPAP systems. In addition, the hospital has 1,000 beds equipped with oxygen supply and 390 general beds.

A circular issued by hospital superintendent Dr M. Raja Rao on Friday to heads of departments said they should "not admit non-Covid cases, but emergency and terminally ill patients should be stabilised and then transferred. Present cases in different wards should be cleared at the earliest and all beds should be made available for Covid patients."

Amidst very real fears expressed by health department officials that the healthcare infrastructure may not be able to cope with the rush of Covid-19 patients, many private hospitals too began reporting that their Covid-19 wards were full.

TS HIGH COURT WARNS OF ACTION

FROM PAGE 1

Hyderabad: There was a delay of four and a half months in implementation of the court order; and that too, only after the contempt notice was issued.

Taking serious note of this, the single judge bench imposed a fine of ₹1,000, which it said would be collected from the salary of the officer and paid to the state exchequer.

Challenging the orders of the single judge and saying that if such a cut was made from his salary it could affect his service record, Qureshi filed the contempt appeal. On Friday, he came with a request before the court that instead of paying the costs, he shall feed the needy people, and this was agreed to by the court.

The court made it clear that it won't be asking for a compliance report vis-a-vis his service of feeding the people but would take serious action if it came to know that the officer did not do what he was asked to by way of the amended punishment.

Covid: Second wave raises alarm bells in four district

Even after several warnings issued by officials many not observing Covid guidelines

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 16

Second wave of Coronavirus is spreading at an alarming rate in erstwhile Karimnagar district, registering more than 1,500 cases every day in Karimnagar, Jagtial, Peddapalli and Rajanna Sircilla districts.

Largely, people are also to be blamed for behaving negligently despite repeated warnings issued by health officials and public representatives. Many people are continuing to gather at public places, tiffin centres and restaurants, apart from attending wedding functions, without wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing.

As many as 1,576 persons tested Covid positive on April 14, with Karimnagar district accounting for 325 cases, Jagtial 728, Peddapalli 227 and Rajanna Sircilla district 296. The number has gone up to 1,805 on April 15 with Karimnagar recording 503 cases, Jagtial 746, Peddapalli 208 and Rajanna Sircilla district 348 cases.

Mohammad Azaam, a social activist, rues that people have not realised the threat being posed by the widespread second wave of Coronavirus. "Who will be responsible if an epidemic breaks out, resulting in large number of deaths," he asked. A health official, on condition of anonymity, told Deccan Chronicle that if the virus continues to spread for a few more days, the four districts of erstwhile Karimnagar will become as dangerous a spot like neighbouring Maharashtra. It will then become impossible to prevent spread of Covid-19.

"There will be no use of government taking stringent steps if people continue to behave irresponsibly," he observed.

● **OFFICIALS SAID** as many as 1,576 persons tested positive in these districts on April 14. In Karimnagar district, around 325 persons were infected while in Jagtial 728 persons tested positive, Peddapalli district reported 227 infections and Rajanna Sircilla district recorded 296 Covid positive cases on a single day.

Rapid spread of virus			
Districts	On April 14	On April 15	Total cases till date
Karimnagar	325	503	13,712
Jagtial	728	746	3,710
Peddapalli	227	208	6,921
Sircilla	296	348	2,364
Total	1,576	1,805	2,707

712 PERSONS BOOKED FOR NOT WEARING MASK

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 16

A total of 712 persons have been booked by the Mahabubabad police in the past 10 days (between April 6 and 16) for not wearing masks. The violators have been fined ₹1,000 each and cases have been registered against them.

Mahabubabad Superintendent of Police N. Koti Reddy said that wearing a mask in all public places, workplaces and public means of transport has been made mandatory.

Out of these, 120 persons paid a total of ₹1.2 lakh as a fine on the spot. The police personnel are on the vigil to detect those not wearing masks and also those who are not wearing them properly.

He said that the police department is creating awareness programs in villages by displaying banners and appealing to the people to wear a mask and protect themselves from the covid-19 virus.

He appealed to the people to follow all the Covid-19 protocols without fail and cooperate with the police in preventing the spread of the virus.

● **SP SAID** that the police department is creating awareness programs in villages by displaying banners and appealing to the people to wear a mask and protect themselves from the covid-19 virus.

ADIL COLLECTOR INSPECTS THERMAL TESTING CHECKPOST ON STATE BORDER

Adilabad: Additional collector M. David inspected the thermal testing set up at the check post in Ghanpur village of the Boath mandal on the state borders and inquired about the situation on Friday.

Additional collector asked the medical, revenue, and police official and staff to be alert and conduct tests without fail on people coming to Adilabad from bordering Maharashtra since more number of covid cases are reported in Maharashtra.

JOURNALIST DIES UNDERGOING COVID TREATMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIRMAL, APRIL 16

Sainath, 41, working as a journalist for a Telugu Tv channel in Bhainsa died while undergoing treatment for covid in Hyderabad on Friday morning. He was a native of Thanur mandal headquarters in Nirmal district. It is learnt that Sainath was tested positive for Coronavirus 15 days ago and was undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Hyderabad. Political leaders and journalist organisations expressed condolences to the member of the bereaved family.

OFFICIAL URGE PEOPLE TO FOLLOW COVID NORMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, APRIL 16

The Medical and health department officials insisting on people wearing masks and maintaining physical distance and avoiding mass gatherings to control the covid virus from spreading.

Covid positive cases and deaths are on the rise in the last one month in the old Adilabad district.

The negligence of the people was quite visible as far as following the covid norms are concerned in the old Adilabad district.

The medical officials that more number of people are contracted with coronavirus due to violation of covid norms such as not wearing masks and not maintaining a physical distance.

BHADRADRI COLLECTOR TEST COVID +VE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOTHAGUDEM, APRIL 16

Bhadradri-Kothagudem district collector M.V. Reddy said that he was tested Covid-19 positive on Friday and he is in home isolation. He asked the employees and others who met him for the last one week should go for Covid-19 test as a precautionary measure.

Ramanna inspects Covid ward in RIMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, APRIL 16

Adilabad MLA Jogu Ramanna on Friday personally inspected the Covid ward in the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Adilabad, and interacted with patients undergoing treatment for covid. Jogu Ramanna instructed the officials concerned to take steps to provide better treatment to the patients undergoing treatment.

Along with RIMS Director Banoth Balaram Naik, Ramanna went around the covid ward and inquired the patients about the facilities and treatment they were getting in the ward and tried to infuse the confidence among the patients and



MLA Jogu Ramanna in a PPE suit inspect the Covid ward in RIMS Adilabad on Friday.

asked them not to lose heart.



Health minister Etala Rajender inaugurates Paddy purchasing center at Huzurabad in Karimnagar district on Friday.

Cyber fraudster gang busted

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 16

A Kolkata-based gang that has been duping online shoppers with baits of gifts, has been busted by the Warangal Commissionerate police on Friday.

Thirteen members were arrested by the police and Rs 14.30 lakh has been recovered from them along with 15 smart-phones and scratch cards. Warangal commissioner of Police Tarun Joshi said the gang used to call people who made purchases on e-commerce sites and call them or send a scratch card with a claim that they have won gifts

like a car and bike for their purchase. However, they were asked to pay gift tax and road tax to claim the vehicles for which they are required to send the said amount to a bank account.

"They chose Kolkata as their base to carry out the scam in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and used fake mobile numbers to call the victims. Cases against these people were received in Intezargunj, Station Ghanpur, Zaffergadh, Geesugonda, Khanapur police stations. We assigned a task force team headed by DCP K Pushpa to crack the case. The accused were traced using the latest technology

and apprehended while leaving for Kolkata from the Warangal Railway station.

Arrested gang members include primary accused Ippa Raj Kumar, Thallapalli Damodar Gowd, Dasari Harish Gowd, Mekala Aditya, Akunuri Shravan Kumar, Gangadhar Rakesh, Porandla Vijay, Eeda Ravikumar, Darsha Ganesh, Sirikonada Vinod Kumar, Vollala Praveen, Gangadhari Ramchander who hail from Mancherial district and Adepu Siddharth who is from the Peddapalli district. Three accused Prajeet, Sanjeev and Prakash who hail from Kolkata are absconding.

TWO DIE AND TWO KIDS INJURED, IN ROAD ACCIDENT AT NSP CANAL IN KONIGERLA

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, APRIL 16

Brother and sister died and two kids sustained injuries in a road accident at NSP left canal in Konigerla mandal.

A lorry carrying cement and the two-wheeler collided at NSP left canal.

Devalla Venkanna, 34 and Turaka lakshmi, 28 died on the spot and Laxmi's sons

● **A LORRY** carrying cement and the two-wheeler collided at NSP left canal.

Venkatesh, 10 years and Upender 8 years sustained injuries. Investigation is on. Khammam MP Nama Nageswara Rao, who was travelling at the time, joined the injured in Khammam hospital.

13 FILE NOMINATIONS ON 1ST DAY FOR GWMC POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 16

On the first day for filing nominations for the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC), 13 candidates have filed their nominations at the two centres - LB College and University Arts and Science College - for receiving nominations.

The last date for receiving nomination will be April 18, and scrutiny of nominations will be held on April 19. The last date for withdrawal of nominations will be on April 22, and the date of the poll will be on April 30. The counting of votes will take place on May 3.

Those who filed their nominations on Friday are: Ganta Ravi Kumar-BJP

● **THE LAST** date for receiving nomination will be April 18, and scrutiny of nominations will be held on April 19.

34th Division; Chintakula Anil-BJP 27th division, Chippa Laxmi-Congress 23rd division; Banoth Sudhir-Independent 2nd division; Kommuni Suresh-TRS 39th division; Bollam Sridevi-TRS 32nd division; Repalle Sree Ranganath-Ind 4th division; Vikram Bommathi-Ind 6th division; Ravula Komala-BJP 30th division; Velpula Mohan Rao-TRS 31st division; Puppala Rajanikanth-AIFB 52nd division; Kranthi Kumar Reddy Malla-Ind 53rd division; Pathi Sampath Reddy-TRS 61st.

CPI (ML) SENIOR LEADER MADHU PASSES AWAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, APRIL 16

CPI (ML) New Democracy state deputy secretary Potu Rana Rao said that New Democracy Central Committee member and editor of Central Organ 'Class' Madhu demised at 4.30 am on April 16 due to brief illness.

Madhu, 78 years started his revolutionary life as an activist of student organisation during the united communist party. In 1973, he was a member of the AP State committee (Revolutionaries). He have been a central committee member of UCCRI(ML) from 1976 onwards.

IIT-H RESEARCHERS DEVELOP 'DUROKEA' TO FIGHT COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 16

A team of researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad (IIT-H) has developed a novel technology to combat the spread of the the Covid-19. It was launched on Friday at an online event in the presence of Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank'. The

'DuroKea' technology has been developed to ensure killing of 99.99 germs within 60 seconds, the research team said.

It leaves behind a long-lasting protective nanoscale coating up to 35 days or till the next wash. DuroKea products have been tested and certified by an Indian government accredited lab and field-tested at the IIT Hyderabad

campus. Talking about the product and the technology, Dr Jyotsnendu Giri of IIT-H's department of biomedical engineering, said: "Unlike silane-based long-lasting technology, our self-disinfecting DuroKea nanotechnology kills pathogens instantly and provides protection for longer periods, from several hours to several days."

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IN BRIEF

Keralite nun found dead inside well

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

C'GARH: TWO COPS HACKED TO DEATH IN SUKMA

Sukma, April 16: Two policemen were allegedly hacked to death by unidentified persons in Chhattisgarh's insurgency-hit Sukma district, police said on Friday. The bodies of assistant constables Dhaniram Kashyap and Punem Hadma, bearing injuries inflicted by sharp-edged weapons, were found lying on a road on the outskirts of Bheiji village around 5 pm on Thursday, a senior police official said. A police team was rushed to the spot soon after being alerted about the killings and sent the bodies for post-mortem, he said. "The jawans were posted at Bheiji police station, from where they had headed to a grocery store on a motorcycle around 3.30 pm on Thursday. They were later found dead with the motorcycle lying next to their bodies," he said.

J&K TEACHER HELD FOR ABETTING TERRORISM

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, APRIL 16

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

SANJAY BASAK | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No clubbing of polls due to 'logistical nightmare'

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

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

Some parties like Trinamul Congress have suggested that after the fifth phase on April 17, the

remaining three phases of elections should be held together in a single day on April 24 in view of the rising Corona cases in West Bengal.

However, home ministry officials argue that in view of the heavy security deployment changing the pattern now would be a "logistical nightmare" as massive mobilisation would have to be done which in turn could impact impartial elections. This time Assembly polls in Bengal are being conducted for the first time in eight phases for which an unprecedented one lakh central para-military forces have been used.

"All security arrangements have been made keeping in view the eight phases elections. Now if

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

However, both Election Commission and home ministry have decided that security personnel will try to spread more awareness on Corona and maintain proper Corona protocol at all polling centres in the coming days.

Elaborate Corona safety arrangements will also be made at the counting centres also for the counting day on May 2 not just in Bengal but also in other states which went to polls like Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

CPI-M used murder as a political instrument since 1978 in an organised manner."

The writer continued: "In 1997, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, in reply to an Assembly question, stated that between 1977 and 1996, 28,000 political murders were committed... It meant on average 25.7 murders were effected in a month. It meant the daily rate of murder was four. That is to say, one political murder took place every six hours for the entire 19 years between 1977 and 1996..." He also wrote of the Marichjhapi massacre, murders of monks and nuns of the Ananda Marg groups, the Bantala rape-murder case, the Suchapur mass murders, and Singur, Nandigram, among others.

Speaking to this newspaper, Roy claimed between 1977 and 2011, "there were at least 53,000 political murders". He spoke of the

2001 Chhoto Angaria massacre, in which 11 TMC workers were allegedly burnt alive by CPI(M) workers.

He referred to the killings of landless labourers allegedly by CPI(M) cadres near Nanor in Birbhum district in 2000. Roy reminded everyone of the killings of nine people by CPI(M) workers at Netai in Birbhum in 2011. It may be recalled that three years after the killings, then chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee admitted the Netai incident was a "grave mistake" committed by party workers.

Roy pointed out that history shows there's "no difference between a fascist and a Communist regime". On the issue of suppressing freedom of expression, Roy reminded that in 1993, then information and culture minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had dismantled the Press Corner in Writers

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

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

He also wanted to know why Jyoti Basu "did nothing to stop L.K. Advani's rath yatra as it entered West Bengal in 1993?"

He pointed out: "The moment it crossed over from Bengal to Bihar, it was (Bihar) chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav who stopped the rath in its tracks." Roy added that in each and every no-confidence motion against the Congress, "the Left had joined hands with the BJP".

AIUDF CANDIDATES FLY BACK TO ASSAM FEARING LOCKDOWN

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, APRIL 16

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

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

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

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

BJP J&K Panch among 3 held for extortion bid

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, APRIL 16

A deputy village headman belonging to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is among three persons arrested by the police from Jammu and Kashmir's Sopore area on charges of extortion. The police said that a manhunt has been launched for a Sarpanch of the saffron party who is also involved in the offense. The police in a statement here said that acting on a complaint received from a resident of Panzipora area of Sopore, about 50-km northwest of Srinagar, the trio was arrested and booked under Section 450 and 506 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 7/25 of the Arms Act.

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

The police said on the basis of the preliminary investigation and technical evidence, BJP Panch Merajuddin Rather, a resident of Minipora

● **THE POLICE** said on the basis of the preliminary investigation and technical evidence, BJP Panch Merajuddin Rather, a resident of Minipora

Krankshoon, Sopore, was called to the concerned police station for questioning.

ident of Minipora Krankshoon, Sopore, was called to the concerned police station for questioning. "During the questioning, he confessed the commission of crime with three more persons namely Muhammad Saleem Wani, a BJP Sarpanch and resident of Hardpora Achabal, Anantnag, Bashir Ahmed Lone, a resident of Nadihal and Muhammad Dilawar Khawaja, resident of Dacinpora Ruhama", the police said.

The police said that while Rather and two other accused have been arrested, Wani is still at large.

The police investigations have revealed that in order to extort money from the business family, Rather had entered into a criminal conspiracy with Lone and Wani and then contacted Khawaja for obtaining "some imitation weapons for committing the crime". The police said that these "weapons" have also been recovered during investigation and "further efforts are underway to unearth more linkages".

UK dept clears extradition of Nirav Modi

New Delhi, April 16: The United Kingdom's Home Department has cleared the extradition of fugitive diamondaire Nirav Modi, who is wanted in an over ₹13,000-crore bank fraud case, officials said on Friday.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 16

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WEATHER | REPORT

Rainfall in Odisha, Jharkhand, eastern UP, Assam, likely to be below normal

Monsoon to be normal this year: IMD

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

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

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

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

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

The LPA, the average of the season's rainfall across the country from 1961-2010, is 88 cm. The news augurs well for economy, battered due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The Southwest monsoon is one of the primary

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

This is the first time the IMD has made a specific forecast on spatial distribution.

Rajeevan said the IMD will also issue month-wise forecasts during the next four months and also for the homogenous regions of the country — IMD's four divisions — the Northwest India, East and Northeast India, Central India and South Peninsula.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Earlier this week, Skymet Weather, a private weather forecasting agency, had also predicted a normal monsoon. However, it had pegged the precipitation during the four-month season at 103 per cent of the LPA, which is on the higher side. Precipitation in the range of 96-104 per cent is considered to be in the 'normal category'. — PTI

IN BRIEF

Iran enriches uranium to 60%

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

Hackers held over Covid-19 scam

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

French mosque subsidy dropped

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

Indian's body found in NY river

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

PAK SUSPENDS SOCIAL MEDIA OVER PROTESTS

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

WHO worried as Covid cases double in just two months

Global health authority finds countries that avoid first outbreak are vulnerable

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AP

Pfizer plans third jab in 6-12 months

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

CEO Albert Bourla also said annual vaccinations against the Coronavirus may well be required.

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

EU UNLIKELY TO RENEW ASTRA ORDERS: FRANCE

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

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

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

— AFP



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

8 dead at FedEx facility, gunman shoots himself

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

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

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

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

INDIAN AMONG THOSE INJURED IN SHOOTING

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

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

— PTI

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

— AP

NO PROGRESS IN NORTH IRELAND ROW FOR EU-UK

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

RUSSIAN SPYING PUTS EUROPE ON HIGH ALERT

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

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

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

— AFP

Kremlin welcomes Biden call for talks

Moscow, April 16: The Kremlin said on Friday it was “good” that US President Joe Biden was seeking dialogue with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin but criticised the United States for a fresh bout of sanctions on Moscow.

Biden's offer earlier this week of a summit between the leaders amounted to a peace offering as tensions between Russia and the West were escalating over the conflict in Ukraine and the new penalties levied by Washington.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Friday

said that Putin has long talked about the importance of normalising relations between Moscow and Washington. “He has repeatedly said that we are ready to develop our dialogue to the degree that our counterparts are ready for this,” he said.

“It is indeed good that the points of view of the two heads of state coincide on this”.

But Peskov also blasted a new round of penalties imposed by Washington on Moscow Thursday, saying America's “addiction for sanctions remains unacceptable.”

— AFP

First friday of Ramzan



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

Ousted Myanmar MPs to form shadow government

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

Yangon, April 16: A “parliament” working in hiding to oust Myanmar's junta from power announced a new shadow government on Friday, with deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi at its helm alongside ethnic minority politicians.

The country has been in turmoil since the military detained Suu Kyi and seized power, triggering a massive uprising that the junta has sought to quell with lethal force. Besides demanding a return to democracy, protesters are also increasingly calling for more of a governing role for the country's minority groups — which have long seen their voices marginalised by the ethnic Bamar majority.

The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) — a group of lawmakers mostly from Suu Kyi's party attempting to govern underground via a shadow parliament — on Friday announced its leaders.

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

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

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

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

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

They were chosen based on results from the 2020 election, input from a nationwide anti-coup protest movement, and ethnic minority groups — including armed rebels in the country's border territories, said Min Ko Naing.

“We have to pull it from the root... we must try to eradicate it,” he said, referring to the junta as he raised a three-finger salute — the symbol of resistance.

— AFP

AUSSIE JUDGE RULES GOOGLE MISLED USERS

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

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

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

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

— PTI

ROYAL | FUNERAL

Congregation at Prince Philip's funeral to wear masks

Cousin to walk between William, Harry

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

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

of Edinburgh through Windsor Castle.

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

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

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

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

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

lockdown restrictions.

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

17 APRIL 2021

Bengal: EC misses chance to curb Covid during vote

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recovery vs inflation

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

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

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

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

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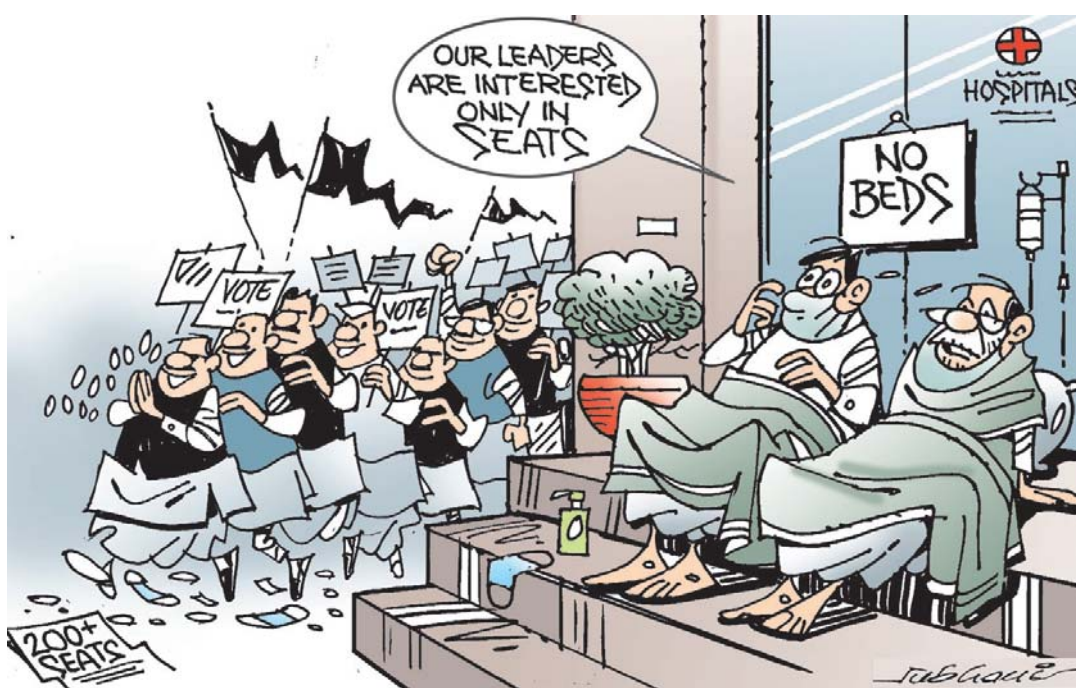
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Subhani



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



Shobhaa's Take

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

BRING DUST BINS

What is the GHMC is trying to prove by removing dust bins? (*A sight to (be)hold your breath, DC, April 16*). Now garbage has piled up everywhere. It is difficult to walk or drive on the roads. It is a very serious health hazard in this pandemic. I request the authorities to bring back the dust bins and lift garbage regularly.

M.A. Kaiser
Hyderabad

EXAMS CANCELLED

The cancellation and postponement of exams is welcome. However, it is surprising that the government is ignoring crowds at film halls, political meetings, etc.

Wg. Cdr. V. Sundaresan (ret'd)
Secunderabad

The TS government may be correct in cancelling public exams. However, it is not ideal for their learning. There is no urgency to conduct exams in May, they can be held in the second week of June. Instead of cancellation, the government could have postponed exams and taken a decision in the first week of June after a review.

C.K. Vinaya Chandra
Hyderabad

SELFISH POLITICIANS

Karan Thapar's article clearly shows that politicians are interested in people's votes and not their well-being (*Covid: Who'll pay price for irresponsible netas? DC, April 16*). When educational institutions are closed, board examinations are postponed or cancelled, why not elections be postponed.

S. Nageswara Rao
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Big farm credit project in AP

HYDERABAD, April. 16 The Rs. 341 million World Bank aided agricultural credit project will be implemented in Andhra Pradesh from May 10.

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

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



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

— From *The Pirhana Purana* by Bachchoo

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

quick BITES

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Mindtree Q4 net profit climbs 54% to ₹317 cr

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



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

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 16

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

financial institutions."

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

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

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

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

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 16

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

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

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



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

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

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

"Currently all e-pharmacy players are burning cash and to breakeven at the Ebitda level, they need to have an average order value of Rs 3,000-3,500 and cut operational costs drastically, which is possible only with an omni-channel

model," says Kartik Anantharaman, director of e-pharmacy and private label business at Medlife. According to him, the omni-channel model involves online players working with offline players, eliminating competition between the two and enabling collaboration by complementing each other's strengths. The omni-channel format also provides operating leverage, as e-pharmacy players can easily service more orders per day. Further, profitability is also dependent on the mix of bulk purchases and just-in-time purchases. To become profitable, the bulk purchases have to be at least 70 per cent and for this, companies need better clarity on demand and the prescription patterns of doctors.

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

CHINA'S Q1 GDP SURGES TO 18.3%

K.J.M. VARMA
BEIJING, APRIL 16

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

Honda Cars recalls 78,000 units of select models

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

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

MARUTI HIKES PRICES BY UP TO ₹22,500

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

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

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

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

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Vihari out on duck in county debut

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

Harman recovers from Coronavirus

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

Coleman to miss Oly despite ban cut

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

Roma, Man U in Europa last four

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

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

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

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

past an onrushing Pau Lopez.

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

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

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

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

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



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

Women team's plan chalked out

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

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

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

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

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

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

WOMEN'S IPL AND FTP

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

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

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

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

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

BIHAR CA SHOWCAUSED

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

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

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

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

DOMESTIC CRICKET

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

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

VALTERRI, HAMILTON RUBBER IN IMOLA PRACTICE

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

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

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

Verstappen was second in Bahrain and Bottas third. — AFP

Tokyo head says Olympics are on

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AP

MAIDEN GOLD MEDALS FOR VINESH AND ANSHU

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

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

Vinesh has notched up seven podium finishes at the Asian meet over the years, including three silver medals before this edition. Also standing on top of the podium was Divya Kakran (72kg) while Sakshi Malik (65kg) settled for a silver medal.

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

