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Quinton guides Mumbai to victory

TABLOID

'This new wave is more infectious & lethal'



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HC slams SEC for local polls in Covid

Asks SEC if 'heavens will fall' if polls are put off

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

The decision to hold elections in these tense Covid-19 times is tantamount to a walk into the jaws of death, the Telangana High Court opined on Thursday. It criticised the State Election Commission (SEC) for going ahead with the election process in the municipal corporations of Greater Warangal and Khammam as also five municipalities.

A division bench of Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijaysen Reddy asked the SEC whether sky would fall if the elections were postponed.

"If you are so bent on clinging to your tasks, wasn't there any delay in conducting elections on time? Wasn't there any situation when a local body was administered by the special officer for the interim? We all witnessed that the state capital's Mayor post was not filled for more than a year and a half without conducting GHMC elections even when there was no Corona or a calamity. But, at the time of the serious surge in Covid-19 cases in the state, you rushed to conduct elections as if the sky will otherwise fall down. This was not a calibrated decision, whatever the reasons be," the bench told SEC secretary Ashok Kumar. He appeared before the court on its direction to explain the reasons for conducting the elections in Covid times.

The bench asked SEC why it didn't stall the elections or postpone them by exercising the power vested in it under the statute, keeping in view the surge in Covid-19 cases.

Chief Justice Kohli said the SEC has not only put the lives of the voters as also of 7,695 government employees and 2,557 police personnel to risk.

■ Page 2: CJ reminded of poem to describe situation

Exit polls give Mamata key edge, DMK ahead

Left to retain Kerala, BJP tipped to return in Assam, win P'cherry

ASHHAR KHAN | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

The results of a majority of the exit polls predict that Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamul Congress has a hurricane edge that could make her retain power for the third time in West Bengal, while the BJP-led NDA will be a key player in the state, giving a robust challenge to the TMC.











The DMK led by M.K. Stalin is projected to sweep to power in Tamil Nadu, replacing the AIADMK.

The Left Democratic Front is expected to retain power in Kerala, breaking the cyclic nature of the state.

The BJP is tipped to retain power in Assam and also coming to power in Puducherry as part of a coalition, in place of the Congress.

In West Bengal, most of the surveys predict that the ruling TMC will win at least around 150 seats, with the BJP putting up a formidable fight. The C-Voter survey data projects the TMC with emerge victorious, with 152 to 164 seats in the state, where a total 292 Assembly constituencies went to the polls.

■ Page 4: Some exit polls predict extremely close finish in West Bengal

SEATS PREDICTED BY EXIT POLLS					
WEST BENGAL			ASSAM		
TOTAL SEATS	294	 	TOTAL SEATS	126	 
AXIS MYINDIA	130-156	134-160	AXIS MYINDIA	75-85	40-50
CNX POLLS	128-138	138-148	CNX POLLS	74-84	40-50
C VOTER	158	115	C VOTER	65	59
TODAY'S CHANAKYA	180	108	TODAY'S CHANAKYA	70+	56+
TAMIL NADU			KERALA		
TOTAL SEATS	234	 	TOTAL SEATS	140	 
AXIS MYINDIA	175-186	38-54	AXIS MYINDIA	104	20-36
CNX POLLS	160-170	58-68	CNX POLLS	72-80	54-64
C VOTER	166	64	C VOTER	91	47
TODAY'S CHANAKYA	164-186	46-68	TODAY'S CHANAKYA	102+	35+
PUDUCHERRY					
TOTAL SEATS	30	 	AXIS MYINDIA	CNX POLLS	C VOTER
			6-10	11-13	8
			20-24	16-20	21
					POLSTRAT
					11-13
					17-19

COVAXIN PRICE CUT TO ₹400 PER DOSE FOR STATES

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Bharat Biotech, that manufactures Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin, on Thursday announced that it was cutting down Covaxin price for state governments, to ₹400 per dose.

The company had previously said it will sell each dose to state governments at ₹600, and at ₹1,200 to private hospitals that are offering the vaccination service.

In its announcement, Bharat Biotech said it is "deeply concerned with the critical pandemic circumstances that India is facing at this time", and decided to reduce the price recognising the challenges faced by the public health care system.

The court had asked it earlier also but Prasad on Thursday informed that the chief secretary will hold a meeting with district collectors and others on Friday morning. Subsequently, a decision would be taken based on the inputs gathered during the meeting.

The court wanted to know the decision of the

MIXED RESULTS FOR KCR'S COVID TEST, SAYS CMO

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

The rapid antigen and RT-PCR tests conducted on Chief Minister K Chandrababhai Rao have given mixed results, according to a release from the Chief Minister's Office on Thursday.

The antigen test on Wednesday gave negative result, but the RT-PCR tests have not given any definite result on Thursday, it said.

The CM's personnel physician Dr Rao said, "Some times, the results would not be accurate as the virus's intensity is decreasing. The CM is hale and healthy and the RT-PCR test would be conducted again in two or three days."

HC questions TS post-curfew plan

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

A division bench of Telangana High Court, comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijaysen Reddy, sought to know what the State government intends to do once the night curfew ends on Friday.

The bench directed advocate general B.S Prasad to inform it about the decision of the government by Friday morning.

The court had asked it earlier also but Prasad on Thursday informed that the chief secretary will hold a meeting with district collectors and others on Friday morning. Subsequently, a decision would be taken based on the inputs gathered during the meeting.

The court wanted to know the decision of the

■ ADVOCATE GENERAL B.S Prasad informed the court that the chief secretary will hold a meeting with district collectors and others on Friday morning. Subsequently, a decision would be taken based on the inputs gathered

government as the Union Home Ministry had asked the state government to impose local restrictions and implement strict containment measures to flatten the Covid-19 curve.

"We are not compelling or recommending the state to go for this or that, in view of Centre's advice. But, everyone should know the decision at least one day before. Do you feel there will be radical changes in one day," the CJ asked Prasad.

■ Page 2: Bench advises state to be alert

Doubts on May 1 rollout as vax falls short

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

The vaccine rollout in the fourth phase to cover all adult Indians above 18 is due to begin on Saturday. However, even as several states have said that they are ready to give the jab free to their citizens, they don't have sufficient stocks of the vaccine. Therefore, the rollout would have to be delayed. Across the country, there are signs of utter chaos and a visible shortage of vaccines.

Already, several people above 45 years who are due to get their second dose of the vaccine are unable to receive their shots. In Delhi, those due to get their second shot got

TS NUMBERS HIDE ENORMITY OF CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Fresh cases of Covid-19 in Telangana state fell marginally to 7,994 on April 28, down from 8064 on April 27. On April 26, the state health authorities reported an all-time high of 10,122 new cases.

However, the number of people dying from Covid-19 in the state continues to rise.

■ Report on Page 2

tions on Thursday. The Jharkhand and Kerala health ministers said vaccines are not available at this point. "It is the duty of the Centre to supply vaccines. We are placing the order, but vaccine companies are saying they will supply the vaccine only in May end or early June. This one-month delay will be dangerous. We need vaccines urgently to save

lives," Kerala health minister K.K. Shailaja said. Jharkhand health minister Banna Gupta too had similar complaints. "The Centre wants to give free vaccines but the Jharkhand government wants to buy vaccines, which too are not available," he said.

In Mumbai, officials said vaccinations for 18-plus people can start only after enough vaccines are made available, and this may not happen from May 1. Delhi too said it had run out of doses and was waiting for fresh supplies from the manufacturers. Tamil Nadu is awaiting its order of 1.5 crore doses but is uncertain if the vaccinations for 18-plus can start from May 1. Punjab and

Rajasthan too said they do not have enough stocks to start vaccinating the much larger younger age group.

However, the Centre said the total vaccine doses available as of Thursday was 1.27 crore, while the total consumption of vaccines from January 16 to April 29 was 15.11 crores. As per an estimate, so far about 11.5 per cent of the Indian population of 130 crore people have got vaccinated, of which only 2.50 crore people have had both doses.

"More than one crore Covid-19 vaccine doses are still available with the states and UT and they will receive over 20 lakh more doses within the next three days," the Union health ministry said.

EX-CRPF JAWAN SHOT DEAD IN BID TO STOP ATM ROBBERY IN HYD

NAVEEN KUMAR | DC
HYDERABAD APRIL 29

A 74-year-old former CRPF jawan was shot dead and another person sustained injuries while they made an attempt to resist an ATM robbery in Kukatpally on Thursday. The Cyberabad police is making an effort to trace the unidentified culprits.

Panic prevailed in the locality, which is usually known as a less-trafficked bylane with shops scattered across the sides. A van owned by cash management firm Writer Safeguard carried cash to dispense at an ATM of HDFC bank in Patel Kunta park area. A gang ambushed the staff while they were unloading the cash chest, said Kukatpally police inspector T. Narsing Rao. "They escaped with ₹5 lakh cash on a two-wheeler," he said.

Two staffers identified as Mirza Subani Ali Baig, 74, and Srinivas, were shot by the robbers, who carried a small pistol. "While Ali Baig died while undergoing treatment, Srinivas is out of danger," added the police. Police said that the two robbers seemed to have followed the van till the ATM centre.

■ Page 2: Place was packed with people

COVID | IMPACT Vaccines acquired from abroad to be used locally, India not in position to export vax in near future

India starts massive import of oxygen tools, drugs

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

Foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla on Thursday shared details of the amount of oxygen, medical equipment and drugs that India will be receiving from foreign countries to manage the second Covid wave that has left thousands dead and lakhs infected.

Describing the medical crisis as "unprecedented and exceptional", he said

that India is acquiring a total of 550 oxygen-generating plants, over 4,000 oxygen concentrators, 10,000 oxygen cylinders, 17 cryogenic tankers to store oxygen and lakhs of doses of anti-viral drugs remdesivir and Favipiravir from abroad.

The US will also be supplying 28 million litres of oxygen to India. Mr Shringla said that the current over three million active cases of Covid have "put considerable pressure on the health care system,"

and added that India is producing about 67,000 doses of Remdesivir daily while the requirement now is between two-three lakh doses daily. He also said that India's vaccine producing capabilities are being ramped up as India's domestic requirements are now "significant and pressing". The vaccines that are being acquired from abroad would be utilised for domestic needs, he said.

The statement is an indication that in the immediate future at least, India

will not be able to export vaccines in the significant way in which it had been doing in the past few months since the priority is to vaccinate the country's huge 1.2 billion population as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, Russia dispatched two special flights on Wednesday night carrying equipment and medicines while the US will operate three special flights — two on Friday and the third on Monday carrying urgently-needed

supplies for India. The three special flights from the US will supply a total of 28 million litres of oxygen, 2,000 Oxygen concentrators, hundreds of oxygen cylinders and 17 oxygen generation plants. The two flights from Russia carried a total of 20 oxygen generating plants and the anti-Covid drug Favipiravir. Japan too is expected to soon begin the supply of oxygen concentrators, ventilators and other pharmaceutical products to India.



Relatives wait to refill oxygen cylinders from Gurud-wara Singh Sabha in Greater Kailash, for Covid-19 patients in New Delhi on Thursday.

OTHER STORIES

Place was packed with people

From Page 1

The place was packed with people. “The duo barged inside the ATM and opened fire on the two men before decamping with the cash. The CCTV footage is being collected from the nearby cameras. Cases of murder, robbery and assault were booked against the men and an investigation is going on,” senior officials said. Cyberabad Police commissioner V.C. Sajjanar visited the crime scene and inspected the case.

bench advices state to be alert

From Page 1

The bench also questioned the decline in Covid tests since April 26. “Your data and media reports only say that tests had come down by 10,000 on April 27 compared to the earlier day and on April 28, it was down by 8,000 tests. We are not relying on media or any other third party reports. Your report only says that tests have come down to around 80,000 from one lakh. Automatically, when tests are lowered, the infected cases will also come down correspondingly. It is nothing but wrapping up data,” the court said. The court advised the State to be transparent and alert to the situation.

ONE ARRESTED FOR HOARDING O2 CYLINDERS

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

The West Zone task force team, along with drug control officials, nabbed a man for selling oxygen cylinders without valid permissions on Thursday and seized 19 cylinders from his possession.

The teams arrested Md Abdul Kareem, 32, following a raid at a godown, Ayesha Enterprises, said the police. It was revealed during an enquiry that Kareem was selling oxygen cylinders at Attapur.

“Kareem hatched a plan to sell them at higher rates after knowing about the shortage and brought them to his home at Dhankota, Golkonda. On credible information our teams apprehended him and seized the stocked up cylinders,” DCP task force, P. Radhakrishna said.

CJI RECOLLECTS POEM TO EXPLAIN COVID SITUATION

FROM PAGE 1

The Chief Justice said that current situation reminded the court of the poem penned by Alfred Lord Tennyson titled ‘Charge of the Light Brigade’, wherein the British Cavalry Unit, the Light Brigade comprising 600 soldiers, was directed to charge against the enemy even as such an act was suicidal and a blunder. It rode them into the jaws of death.

When Ashok Kumar informed the division bench that these elections are only confined and restricted to two municipal corporations and five municipalities, CJ Kohli cited the high number of Covid-19 positive cases in these areas.

“The entire world knows of the war-like conditions going on since February 2021. Does the SEC not belong to this planet? You gave the Notification on April 16. Some of the municipalities’ terms have not been completed by March and mid-April. You have four months’ time to conduct elections. Is there such an urgency or statutory compulsion to hold a meeting of newly elected municipal councillors, as of a meeting of the Council of Ministers,” the CJ asked counsel.

The Bench observed that the municipal elections on April 30 when the entire state is gripped by Covid-19 is a deliberate and ironic decision of the SEC. “It has really botched up the situation. Warangal, Achampet, Rangareddy, Mahbubnagar, Nagarkurnool have seen a spurt in Covid-19 cases. This is nothing but jeopardising the life of the citizens,” the court said and directed SEC to file a report by May 5.

● “The entire world knows of the war-like conditions going on since February 2021. Does the SEC not belong to this planet? You gave the Notification on April 16.

Patients go hungry at Tims

Food not given even to those suffering from diabetes, taking steroids

BALU PULIPAKA | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Hundreds of Covid-19 patients have not been fed on time at the Telangana Institute of Medical Sciences (TIMS), ever since the hospital management, on April 27, banned patient attendants from providing food for their loved ones admitted to the hospital for Covid-19 treatment. A patient in the hospital, who reached out to this correspondent on Thursday morning, was in tears reporting that another patient in a ward he was in, died from hunger. “That patient was a diabetic and did not get dinner last night, and breakfast this morning. He just died of hunger. Please help us get food on time,” the patient begged. “Please call the director, the doctors or anyone. We are hungry,” the patient pleaded.

With most patients at TIMS on high doses of steroids as part of the Covid-19 treatment, their hunger levels stay high, which in turn means they need to be fed well, and multiple meals if needed. Food, it was learnt, when served, was coming hours behind schedule.

Deccan Chronicle can also confirm that many patients were not provided their dinner on Wednesday night, well past midnight. Patients in entire floors

No water supply for patients and pts r coming out of rooms for water and begging for water and duty rmo mobile is off 😞

Food not supplied to 17 patients in 6th floor a wing
Patients complaint and some scoldninv too
Please take immediate action thank you

Frantic messages highlighting the plight of patients in Tims.

People are dying, say patients — Hosp. move to silence critics backfires.

were being made to wait for long hours for breakfasts, lunches and dinners. And even if, and when the hospital provided food, it is of ‘compromised quality’, as per information collected from multiple sources.

Even more worrisome were confirmations on Thursday from within the hospital about how patients were not even being provided drinking water.

“There is a severe shortage of staff, doctors, nurses, and patient attendants and things are going from bad to worse,” a member of the hospital said.

It was learnt that the current canteen contractor was expressing helplessness in finding people to work in a Covid-19 hospital, and because of this, is unable to have food delivered on time to all patients in all the floors of the hospital.

The TIMS management

decided to crack down on food being brought from the outside because the officials believed that patient attendants and families were complaining to the media about the deplorable conditions at the hospital. It may be recalled that *Deccan Chronicle*, on April 27, carried an expose, ‘Covid-19 patients exploited at Telangana’s TIMS hospital’, about how patients and their families were being put through the rind by staff working at the hospital demanding money for even basic services such as providing drinking water to the patients.

Instead of addressing the issue, the TIMS management, decided to cut off access to the hospital for patient families and as part of this exercise, banned delivery of food to patients by families.

Police say Tims hosp itself complained of staff graft

NAVEEN KUMAR | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Despite denials by the state-run Tims hospital of any wrongdoing by its staff like extortion of money from patients even for extending basic health services, the police have confirmed that the Tims management itself has lodged such a complaint.

Assistant commissioner of police at Madhapur Raghunandan Rao old *Deccan Chronicle* that the management approached the Gachibowli police with a complaint on April 27, provided the names of three helpers and asked the police to investigate the matter.

Following this, a case was booked under section 420 (cheating) and a probe launched.

It may be recalled that on April 27, *Deccan Chronicle* had in its report ‘Covid-19 patients exploited at Telangana’s TIMS hospital’ highlighted the plight of the patients at TIMS.

“The Tims management named staffers Md Imran, Md. Shafi Ahmed and Stephen, saying that they were charging money from

● THE EMPLOYEES were charging anything between ₹300 and ₹2,000 from the attenders.

● THEY ASKED money from patient attenders for providing basic needs

the attenders of patients undergoing treatment for Covid19 at Tims. These staffers were asking money from the patient-attenders (relatives) for helping the patients with basic needs like changing their clothes, washroom cleaning etc. Accordingly, we booked a case and placed them in police custody,” said sub inspector Srisaillam of Gachibowli police.

The employees were charging anything between ₹300 and ₹2,000 from the attenders.

The arrests were made following a complaint from Dr Nithin Kumar, the RMO at Tims, wherein he stated that Sai Securities Agencies has been providing patient care personnel to serve the patients and the government is providing them salaries through the agency.

As per the FIR copy, which is in possession of *Deccan Chronicle*, on April 27, Dr Nithin and Dr Vimala Thomas went for rounds on the sixth floor and noticed Md. Imran collecting money through Google pay and phonepe. Later, they went to the fifth floor.

They found Md. Shafi Ahmed and Stephen collecting money from patients through the merchant applications.

“The RMO requested us to take necessary action against the three men for illegally collecting money from patients even as the government is providing them a salary,” police said.

Meanwhile, cases were also booked against the management of the hospital by some patient-attenders, alleging that gold ornaments and valuables of their patients were missing. “We have received two such complaints in the last 15 days and booked cases. We will probe these matters. So far, no arrest was made. We are investigating the case,” said the Madhapur ACP.

Unauthorised Covid testing centre found in Cantonment

T.S.S SIDDHARTH | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Residents of Vasavi Nagar in the Secunderabad Cantonment Board limits have written a letter to the CEO of SCB, Ajith Reddy, with regard to an unauthorised Covid-19 testing centre in the area.

They said that the centre was located at plot no 39 in the colony and is an off-shoot of a diagnostic centre in Kukatpally.

“We are already having a shortage of containment zones. Under these circumstances, if people open unauthorised testing centres, it shows that they are out to make a

fast buck,” said T. Satish Gupta, a member of RWA.

On containment zones, Ajith Reddy told *Deccan Chronicle*, “We have no containment zones, as of now. But we are going to have mini-containment zones, which would cordon-off houses with Covid-19 cases.”

COVID | CARE

Health minister says Telangana faring much better than other states

Centre failed, let all down, alleges Etala

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Health minister Etala Rajendar on Thursday slammed the Central government saying it failed to alert the states on the severity of the Covid-19 second wave. India, he said, was not working like a single unit to combat Covid-19 as is being done by other nations.

He said he was only responding to criticism of Telangana state’s handling of the crisis by some ‘elder leaders’ in Delhi, as well as some BJP leaders here in the state. He said the state was far-

On containment zones: The situation is now beyond containment. Covid-19 is everywhere, urban and rural areas. Everyone must take care. This is not just in Telangana but everywhere in the country.

On people being sent away from testing centres for want to test kits: Covid is everywhere. People should assume any change in health is Covid-19, and consult their doctors and follow advice. Those suspected with Covid should get blood tests such as the one for D-Dimers (indicates possibility of formation of blood clots), and others done once in two or four or six days.

—Etala Rajendar

ing much better than many other states and the critics should look at the situation in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and else-

where, where their party is in power.

The health minister also made it clear that there was “no proposal as of

‘We are not getting food on time at Tims’

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

A Covid-19 patient at Telangana Institute of Medical Sciences (TIMS) on Thursday took to social media to highlight how food was not being served on time for the patients.

The patient, who identified himself as Ramamurthy, also alleged that patients were dying, particularly from among those suffering from diabetes, because they are not getting the required nutrition on time.

While saying that the available doctors and nurses were taking care



of the patients, he said the current mess contractor was unable to feed people on time. “If this situation continues, then I am afraid that many more patients will die of starvation,” Ramamurthy said in a WhatsApp message shared with *Deccan Chronicle*.

Tims replaces its diet contractor after plaint

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

The Telangana Institute of Medical Sciences (TIMS) on Thursday announced that it was replacing its diet contractor and will have a new one serving food to its patients from May 1.

There have been many complaints about the quality of the food now being provided to the Covid-19 patients at Tims. This was overcome until April 27 by patient families that were bringing food from home for their loved ones at the hospital.

However, the hospital banned beginning the evening of April 27, which in turn resulted in patients not being fed on time by the hospital.

On Thursday, TIMS Director Dr Vimala Thomas announced that a new diet contractor will take over from May 1. However, there

DC IMPACT

was no mention of alternative arrangements made for providing good quality food for patients till then.

She said TIMS, Gachibowli has treated thousands of Covid-19 patients including severe cases.

“Cleanliness and sanitation is maintained throughout TIMS. Good quality treatment and care is being provided to all the patients,” she claimed.

She added, “Being a Covid-19 positive hospital, patient attenders are not permitted to enter this highly infectious area and hence to give the status update of the patients, a dedicated phone with operators is being assigned and updates will be given via WhatsApp, especially to those admitted in ICUs.”

Case tally hides true TS spread

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Fresh cases of Covid-19 in Telangana state fell marginally to 7,994 on April 28, down from 8,064 on April 27. On April 26, the state health authorities reported an all-time high of 10,122 new cases.

However, the number of people dying from Covid-19 in the state continues to rise. The state health department reported that 58 people died from the disease in Telangana on April 28, up from 56 the day before. On April 26, as many as 52 were reported dead from Covid-19 in the state.

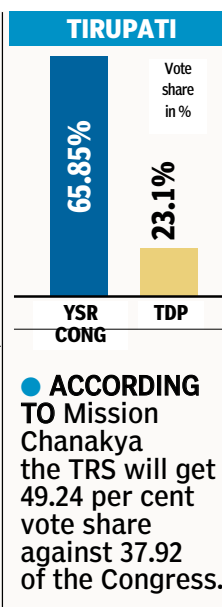
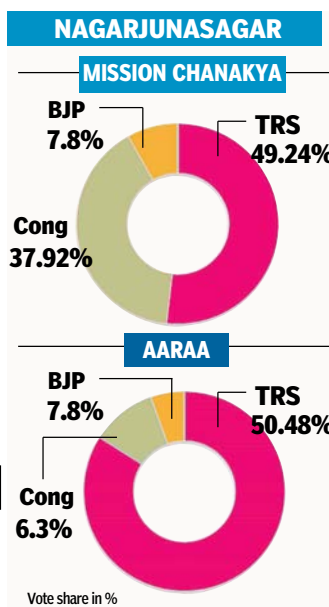
Meanwhile, Hyderabad city along with the rest of the GHMC area into which the Hyderabad district has been clubbed into for the purposes of counting Covid-19 cases, has reported its highest ever number of 1,630 fresh cases on Wednesday.

While the number of total cases being found in the state appears to be falling, what has not fall-

en is the number of people who are testing positive each day.

Irrespective of the number of tests — that have fallen steeply thanks to a severe lack of testing kits — being conducted in the state, the number of people being discovered as Covid-19 positive only keeps rising.

On April 22, according to the data provided by the state health department in its daily Covid-19 bulletins, one in 16.13 people whose tests results were available for the day, were found to be suffering from Covid-19. On April 28, one out of every 9.37 people whose test results were available, tested positive indicating an ever-increasing prevalence of Covid-19 in TS population. Medchal-Malkajgiri district had 615 new cases, followed by Ranga Reddy with 558, Nalgonda with 424, Sangareddy with 337, Nizamabad with 301, Siddipet with 269, Suryapet with 264, Mahbubnagar with 263, Jagtial with 238 new cases.



● ACCORDING TO Mission Chanakya the TRS will get 49.24 per cent vote share against 37.92 of the Congress.

20K victory margin predicted for TRS

From Page 1

The poll management agency did extensive pre-poll and exit surveys interacting with about one lakh voters. The TRS will win the seat with a 20,000 margin and an 11 per cent vote difference between the TRS and the Congress, it concluded. According to Mission Chanakya the TRS will get 49.24 per cent vote share against 37.92 of the Congress while the BJP that gave up hope even before the campaign started will end up with 7.8 per cent votes.

The TRS will get a majority of the votes in five mandals while Jana Reddy is projected to lead the show in Madugulapally and Tripuraram mandals.

Another agency Aaraa projected 50.48 per cent vote share to Nomula Bhagat against Jana Reddy’s 39.93. The agency projected 6.31 per cent to BJP and 3.28 per cent to others. Aaraa projected a massive lead for the YSR Congress in Tirupati over its nearest rival Telugu Desam. The

ruling party is projected to get a vote share of 65.85 per cent and TD a mere 23.1 per cent.

HMR Research Pvt Ltd projected that the TRS candidate will scrape through with 3.3 per cent margin or about 7000 votes. According to the agency, 38 per cent electorate felt good about the government functioning and 26 per cent found the performance average, while 34 per cent voters rated it as bad.

In the exit poll held by the same agency in Tirupati, 41 per cent voters felt Jagan Mohan Reddy’s performance as good and 29 per cent opined it was average and 26 per cent felt the governance was bad. Effective implementation of welfare schemes by the Chief Minister, as expected, played a key role.

A Vizag-based agency Out of the Box however predicted Jana Reddy’s victory with over 7,000-vote margin while it said YSR Congress candidate Dr Gurumurthy will win with a majority of 3.5 lakh votes.

Some polls predict close finish in WB

From Page 1

The BJP was projected to get 109-121 seats, and the Congress-Left-IFS alliance 14-25 seats. In the 2016 Assembly polls in the state, the TMC had won 211, the BJP had secured three seats and the Left and Congress had cornered 76 seats.

The Axis exit poll predicts an extremely close finish — with the TMC winning 130-156 seats and the BJP winning 134-160 seats. The survey further states that the voteshare of the TMC is 44 per cent while that of the BJP is 43 per cent.

In Tamil Nadu, the DMK led by M.K. Stalin is expected to make a clean sweep, with all exit polls predicting a landslide for the DMK. This is the first Assembly election being held after the death of political stalwarts J. Jayalalithaa and M. Karunanidhi, and it is expected to witness the return of the DMK-Congress alliance to power with a clear majority.

The Axis exit poll predicts an extremely close finish — with the TMC winning 130-156 seats and the BJP winning 134-160 seats. The survey further states that the voteshare of the TMC is 44 per cent while that of the BJP is 43 per cent.

In Tamil Nadu, the DMK led by M.K. Stalin is expected to make a clean sweep, with all exit polls predicting a landslide for the DMK. This is the first Assembly election being held after the death of political stalwarts J. Jayalalithaa and M. Karunanidhi, and it is expected to witness the return of the DMK-Congress alliance to power with a clear majority. Voting for the 234-seat Tamil Nadu Assembly was held on April 6 in a single phase. The survey data shows that a combination of 10-year anti-incumbency and the absence of a charismatic successor to J. Jayalalithaa is expected to lead to an electoral setback for the ruling AIADMK-led coalition.

The C-Voter survey shows that DMK-led alliance might secure 160 to 172 seats in the state, which has 234 Assembly constituencies. The ruling AIADMK-led alliance is expected to be restricted to 58 to 70 seats.

The Axis exit poll shows the DMK+ may get 175-195 seats and AIADMK+ to secure 38 to 54 seats.

In Kerala, it is a straightforward electoral battle between the incumbent Pinarayi Vijayan-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF). According to the exit polls, the ruling LDF is expected to retain the southern state and thus

● This is the first Assembly election being held after the death of political stalwarts J. Jayalalithaa and M. Karunanidhi, and it is expected to witness the return of the DMK-Congress alliance to power with a clear majority.

buck the trend of the UDF and LDF alternating in power every five years. Kerala went to the polls on April 6 to elect 140 legislators. According to the C-Voter survey, the LDF may get 71-77 seats and the UDF 62-68 seats. The Axis survey shows 104-120 seats for the LDF and 20-36 seats for the UDF.

The BJP is all set to retain power in Assam, according to all the exit polls. The party is ahead in all exit polls so far even after it faced protests over the CAA and NRC. The C-Voter survey projects 58 to 71 seats for the BJP-led NDA and 53 to 66 seats for the Congress-led UPA. The Axis poll predicts 75-85 seats for the NDA and 40-50 seats for the UPA. Assam has a 126-member Assembly.

The exit poll data shows the NDA winning in the Union territory of Puducherry, with an almost two-thirds majority. The exit polls projected 19 to 23 seats for the NDA, comprising the AINRC, BJP and AIADMK. The Congress and DMK, which constitute the UPA, are projected to win eight to 10 seats.

If the exit polls predictions hold on counting day, May 2, it will be a big relief for the BJP, with the party making gains in West Bengal, retaining power in Assam and winning Puducherry.

The Congress will have a lot to worry about as it could not win back power in Assam and in Kerala, that is now the state which party leader Rahul Gandhi represents in the Lok Sabha. Despite that, however, his party could not make a comeback in the southern state.



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OTHER STORIES

RECOVERED COVID PATIENT GIVES BIRTH TO A BABY

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Doctors at Aware Gleneagles Global Hospital in LB Nagar, under the supervision of Dr Laxmi K, successfully delivered a baby girl from an expectant mother whose condition deteriorated after testing Covid-19+ve.

Mrs Soujanya, a 30-year-old pregnant woman from Karimnagar, was admitted to the hospital for advanced care. The woman tested Covid positive days before her due date and was put on blood thinners to avoid complications. The team of experts at the hospital initially treated the lady for Covid-19 and subsequently a baby-girl was born in the 39th week of pregnancy.

MASJIDS IMPOSE RESTRICTION ON FUNERAL PRAYERS

ATHER MOIN DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

The general fear of coronavirus was perceptible as many masjids in the city have been closing down immediately after the prayers. There are also restrictions on performing Salaat-ul-Janaza (funeral prayer) without the prior permission of the managing committee of the concerned masjid.

In normal days, anyone could bring the bier at any time to the masjid for performing funeral prayer. Now gates of several masjids have been closed for the bier of a Covid-19 victim. To restrain Covid-19 victim's bier, a masjid in Chowni Gulam Murtuza in the Old City has put a notice on its wall stating that the funeral prayer will be allowed at the timings of five-time prayers and prior permission shall be obtained for biers.

MAN HELD FOR SELLING FOREIGN CIGARETTES, IN HYD

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

In a joint operation, Hyderabad Task Force and Santoshnagar police on Thursday raided a general store and caught one person on charges of illegally selling foreign cigarettes, gutka and banned tobacco products.

The police teams, who raided Noor General Stores, seized foreign cigarettes, gutka and tobacco products worth ₹2 lakh and arrested the owner Syed Mazhar Hussain.

"He procured the banned tobacco products and foreign cigarettes from dealers in Bidar and sold it to customers in Hyderabad," A. Bhojya, inspector at Santoshnagar PS said. He added that the task force teams handed over the accused and the seized products for taking further action.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING RACKET BUSTED IN HYDERABAD

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

An organiser was arrested and three women rescued by Rachakonda Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) following an inter-state human trafficking racket bust at LB Nagar, in Hyderabad on Wednesday night.

According to police, the arrested person was identified as Debiyoti Das, 27, a resident of Fathulaguda in Nagole and a native of Khanapur in West Bengal. "He was maintaining and running an online dating app from where he collected money from customers."

The rescued women are from West Bengal and Maharashtra," said police. Das was earlier arrested in 2016 for running a brothel house at Nagole.

"After being released on bail in 2018, he started a web designing channel in a rented house in Fathulaguda. After facing financial problems due to the lockdown, he contacted sex workers and began trafficking them from Kolkata and Mumbai to Hyderabad," said the police, adding that since March, he has been sharing pictures of women on Locanto.com to lure customers. He collected ₹2,000 to ₹15,000 from customers. He collected the amount through e-wallets and transferred them into his mother's account. The rescued women were shifted to shelter homes.

Villages impose lockdown to check Covid-19 spread

Coronavirus new strain is spreading rapidly in semi urban, rural areas

PULI SHARATH KUMAR
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 29

In order to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus, which has also infected thousands in rural areas in the past few days, the governing bodies of village panchayats and municipalities imposed a self-lockdown, declaring their respective villages as micro containment zones in Karimnagar district.

Despite stringent measures taken by the administrations of Karimnagar, Jagtial, Peddapalli, and Rajanna Sircilla to contain the virus' spread, the number of infections continue to rise in semi-urban and rural areas of these districts.

These districts have imposed a self-lockdown to keep a check on the rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus.

In Jagtial district, as many as 117 village panchayats and two municipalities imposed a self-lockdown, while 45 panchayats in Karimnagar district and 32 panchayats in Peddapalli district followed suit.

Apart from self-lockdown, orders were also issued to permit grocery stores to open for limited hours on alternate days. Shopkeepers were asked to follow Covid-19 guidelines and ensure that customers maintained physical distance. They were further instructed to not sell groceries to people who do not wear face masks.

Those found in violation of the lockdown will be slapped with a fine ₹1,000.

Vanga Venkatesham, president of Medipally sarpanch forum, appealed to the people to strictly follow orders and ensure cooperation. "Confine yourselves to your house and do not leave unless in case of an emergency. Take all necessary precautions while heading out," he said.

Meanwhile, municipal staff intensified sanitisation works in the villages with higher number of Covid-19 cases, and handed over essentials at the houses of infected people

● **APART FROM self-lockdown, orders were also issued to permit grocery stores to open for limited hours on alternate days. Shopkeepers were asked to follow Covid-19 guidelines and ensure that customers maintained physical distance. They were further instructed to not sell groceries to people who do not wear face masks.**



Municipal staff sanitises the villages of Dharmapuri mandal in Jagtial district. —BY ARRANGEMENT

Self-confidence, courage aids Covid recovery: Bandi

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 29

The Bharatiya Janata Party state chief and Karimnagar MP, Bandi Sanjay, appealed to the people to not panic over 'unnecessary myths' surrounding the Covid-19 situation, adding that there was no medicine better than courage and self-confidence.

Bandi, who met with district collector K. Shashanka on Thursday to review the situation of the district in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic, suggested that sufficient arrangements be made to accommodate the rising number of infected patients, and to ensure adequate supply of remdesivir, oxygen and other medicines in private as well as government hospitals.

"The Centre is ready to extend any help and support to face the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic. The district administration, along with health department, must prepare proposals accordingly. If there are any issues, I'll help resolve it," assured Bandi.



BJP State chief and Karimnagar MP, Bandi Sanjay Kumar reviews about the spread of Coronavirus with district collector, K. Shashanka in the collector chamber in Karimnagar on Thursday.

● **THE DISTRICT administration, along with health department, must prepare proposals accordingly. If there are any issues, I'll help resolve it," assured Bandi.**

Further, he stated that fake news and false propaganda about the virus has caused panic among people. "While some people, on the verge of recovery, are losing self-confidence after falling prey to such rumours, many others are opting for self-treatment as they've lost faith in doctors."

The number of positive cases is on the rise as people

are easily falling prey to the virus due to lack of awareness, he added.

Bandi also asked those with Covid-19 symptoms to follow suggestions made by doctors, and asked the patients in isolation centres and hospitals to not lose self-confidence, and face the situation with courage. They should develop mental strength in order to win the battle against Covid-19 and recover from it.

He also appealed to people to not leave their houses, unless in case of an emergency, and follow health guidelines such as wearing masks, sanitising hands, and maintaining physical distance.

KARIMNAGAR ZP CHIEF TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 29

The Zilla Parishad Chairperson of Karimnagar district, Kanumalla Vijaya has been tested positive for Coronavirus, on Thursday.

Vijaya was suffering from illness for the past few days, when she underwent Covid-19 test, she was tested positive for the virus. She was immediately admitted into the government civil hospital at the district headquarters.



Kanumalla Vijaya

Vijaya received applause from various sections of people for being joined in government

civil hospital to undergo Corona treatment unlike other political leaders who preferred to join in private hospitals.

She appealed to the officials, leaders and people who had been close to her to get tested for the virus and to be in isolation.

Meanwhile, the doctors who are giving treatment to Vijaya said that her health condition is stable and hoped for speedy recovery from the disease.

Uttam urges govt to rescue Covid-hit poor

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 29

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president N. Uttam Kumar Reddy on Thursday demanded the state government to include treatment of Covid-19 under Arogyasri in order to help the poor to undergo Corona treatment in hospitals.

Reddy, who has tested positive, posted a video message on Twitter from the hospital where he is undergoing treatment. He said the state government should not forget its responsibility of taking care of people, who are suffering due to lack of beds, oxygen and medicines.

"I am deeply pained that lakhs of my brothers and sisters suffering from Covid have been abandoned and rendered helpless due to the apathy of the government," the Congress MP said.

He said he was receiving phone calls from many people who are unable to get beds in hospital and are facing shortage of oxygen and Remdesivir. He stated that a control room set up by the party's state unit is actively coming to the aid of Covid patients in the state.

"We are doing our best to help the citizens to overcome the second wave. I thank doctors, nurses, frontline health and sanitation workers, who have been working in gruelling conditions to save lives of patients. A special mention to the Congress party volunteers who are tirelessly helping patients and their families. We shall win this together," he tweeted.

Uttam hoped that he would be out of the hospital in the next two to three days.



Police commissioner V.B. Kamalasan Reddy pays floral tribute to the dead body of police dog Litty in Karimnagar on Thursday. —DC

Police sniffer dog, Litty dies of illness

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 29

The Karimnagar Commissionerate Police Dog squad member, Litty (13) had died of illness here on Thursday.

The German shepherd breed joined the police department in 2009. It rendered notable services in identifying the bombs at several places across the state and saved the lives of many prominent people.

Commissioner of Police, V.B. Kamalasan Reddy, Additional DCP (Admin) G. Chandramohan and ACP Rithiraj paid tribute to the dead body of Litty and conducted final rites officially.

five dogs in the police dog squad, only four are remaining now, informed the incharge of police dog squad, Reserve inspector, Malleshwar.

Commissioner of Police, V.B. Kamalasan Reddy, Additional DCP (Admin) G. Chandramohan and ACP Rithiraj paid tribute to the dead body of Litty and conducted final rites officially.

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(S/2122/D00117)

NOTE TO VOTE Political parties resort to 'Operation Akarsh' to woo voters

All set for KMC elections today

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, APRIL 29

The stage is all set for Khammam Municipal Corporation elections that are slated for Friday.

This time around, all candidates are busy in 'Operation Akarsh the Voters' and are using various means to attract the electorate. Money distribution is the key and almost all parties are brazenly resorting to this practice. Money distribution in colonies and apartments has been in full swing and the ruling party is way ahead.

BJP district president G Satyanarayana alleged that money is being distributed by TRS leaders with the tacit support of local police.

Each voter is being given between ₹1,000 and ₹2,000 by the candidates. Reportedly, ruling party candidates have completed the process in almost 80 per cent of divisions that are going for polls.

Candidates from BJP and Congress are way behind as their winning

chances are slim. In around 20 divisions, the two parties are likely to give a good fight to TRS nominees. BJP has hopes of winning three to five divisions in Khammam while it could be between 10 and 15 for the Congress. TRS is aiming to win 50 to 55 divisions.

Interestingly, Congress, Telugu Desam and CPI-M have an understanding in 10 divisions while BJP and Jana Sena are contesting as alliance partners. TRS and CPI are sailing together in the elections.

About 2.86 lakh voters, including 1.49 lakh women, will cast their votes in 377 polling booths. About 50 booths have been identified as 'most problematic' and 17 as 'problematic'.

Nearly 1,700 cops are involved in election duties. Approximately, 2,274 employees, including 66 returning officers and 66 assistant returning officers, have been deputed for various polling booths. Polling will be held from 7 am to 5 pm

Minister using police to target Cong leaders: Bhatti

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, APRIL 29

Congress Legislature Party leader, Bhatti Vikramarka, accused state transport minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar and the Telangana Rashtra Samithi of turning the state police into 'ruling party workers', in Khammam. "Elections being held in Khammam municipal corporation are witnessed between Congress workers and the police," he said.

Bhatti, after submitting a memorandum given by DCC to the district election officer and the collector, R.V. Karnan, said that he had no confidence that elections in the state will be held in a free and fair manner.

He added that while Congress workers were



Bhatti Vikramarka

being harassed, threatened, and some even arrested by the police, such treatment wasn't meted out to TRS and BJP workers.

Stating that Congress leaders have been subject to harassment, Bhatti said "We have doubts if these elections are being held in a democracy, after the recent spate of incidents.

Setti Ranga Rao, who was supporting Congress in the 58th division, was taken into custody at 3 am and detained for

hours.

Another leader, Mustafa, was also arrested for just moving around in the streets of Khammam." He further alleged that Kumar was wandering in various divisions with the help of the police, and often held meetings inside apartments to influence voters. "This is nothing but a mockery of democracy," he added.

Bhatti asked Karnan to ensure that elections were held in a fair manner. It is the duty of the election commission to check these democratic practices, he said, adding that the election commission should take action against Kumar and the police for violating the election code of conduct, and provide security to Congress candidates.

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IN BRIEF

Raj CM tests Covid positive

Jaipur: Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Thursday said he has tested positive for Covid-19. The 69-year-old Congress leader had isolated himself on Wednesday after his wife Sunita had tested positive. “My Covid-19 test report too came positive today. I have no symptoms, and I am feeling fine. I will continue working while in isolation, following Covid-19 protocols,” the Chief Minister said in a tweet in Hindi. Governor Kalraj Mishra, AICC general secretary in-charge of Rajasthan Ajay Maken, PCC president Govind Singh Dotasra, state Transport Minister Pratap Singh Khachariyawas, Rajasthan BJP president Satish Poonia, Leader of Opposition Gulabchand Kataria and others wished for Gehlot’s speedy recovery. Meanwhile, former Barmer MP Manvendra Singh, his wife and daughter also tested positive for Covid-19. Manvendra Singh is the son of former Union minister Jaswant Singh, who passed away last year.

NGO SEEKS WAIVER OF GST ON DRUGS, MEDICAL SUPPLIES

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

An NGO, the Public Policy Advocates, on Wednesday moved the Supreme court seeking to exempt levying of Goods and services Tax on the medicines and medical devices including equipment being used for the treatment of Covid patients in the second wave of pandemic.

Seeking exemption of GST on Remdesivir, Tocilizumab, Favipiravi and other similar generic medicines, the petition by the Public Policy Advocates has described as “unjustified” the levy of GST on the medicines essential for the treatment of Covid including medical grade oxygen, oxygen concentrators, ventilators, Bipap Machines, and other Covid patient care support equipment.

The application said, “the Right to Health in times of pandemic, assumes an ever more crucial significance since affordable healthcare and availability of drugs which are critical to fight moderate and severe cases of illness have to be given paramount importance. This would have the effect of preventing black marketing, hoarding of such drugs and other medical equipment, as well as would ensure that the same is available to the citizens at affordable cost.”

The application has been moved by Pritika Kumar – the founder of the Public Policy advocates. The application has been moved in the suo motu matter being heard by the top court relating to the supply of essential medicines, oxygen, manner and method of vaccination, dual pricing of the vaccine and declaration of lockdown.

The top court which had in the last hearing of suo motu petition had said that it can’t be “silent spectator” of the worsening Covid situation and the difficulties being encountered by people in getting drugs, oxygen, hospital beds for the treatment of Covid infected patients.

The petitioner has sought top court direction to GST Council to “expeditiously” convene its meeting to consider exempting from levy of GST – both at the Central and at the state level – the drugs and medical equipment being used for treating Covid patients.

In the interim, till the GST Council meets and takes a call, the petitioner organisation has sought direction to the Centre to issue “appropriate ad hoc guidelines, orders or notifications.”

HOLY SHRINES

Portals of 4 temples will open as scheduled, only priests permitted

Char Dham Yatra deferred amid Covid surge

Dehradun, April 29: Char Dham Yatra to the four famous Himalayan shrines in Uttarakhand, which was scheduled to begin next month, has been postponed in view of the massive surge in Covid-19 cases.

Announcing this here on Thursday, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat said conducting the yatra amid the raging pandemic is not possible. “Considering the rising cases of corona, it has been decided to suspend the Char Dham Yatra,” Rawat told reporters.

However, the portals of the four Himalayan temples known as Char Dham will open as scheduled, he said.

Only priests will be allowed to perform daily prayers at the shrines and not devotees, the Chief Minister said.

“Though opening on schedule, no pilgrim neither from inside the state nor from outside will be allowed to visit the temples,” he said. Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri are the four famous shrines. Kedarnath is slated to open at 5 am on May 17, Badrinath

at 4:15 am on May 18, Yamunotri at 12:15 pm on May 14 and Gangotri on 7:30 am on May 15.

Covid-19 cases have been rising drastically in Uttarakhand as in various other states.

They hit a new high in the state on Wednesday with 6,054 people testing positive and 108 succumbing to the virus.

This is the highest single-day spike in Covid cases and fatalities recorded by the state so far.

The state government had drawn much flak for organ-

ising the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar which according to many contributed to the second wave of Coronavirus.

Even the Uttarakhand High Court in an oral observation recently had asked the state government to publish the standard operating procedure for Char Dham Yatra saying it cannot be allowed to become another Kumbh.

It has also asked the state government to control the raging virus and save lives putting aside everything else.

Covid had cast its shadow on the Char Dham Yatra which is considered the backbone of the hill economy last year too delaying opening of the temples for pilgrims by several months.

The delayed opening of the temples for pilgrims coupled with restrictions such as mandatory negative RT-PCR test report, a daily cap on the number of devotees visiting shrines besides compliance with mask wearing and social distancing norms had severely affected the inflow of pilgrims.

What India needs: 5L ICU beds, 3.5L medicos

Pune, April 29: Forecasting that the Covid-19 pandemic is only going to get worse, noted surgeon Dr Devi Prasad Shetty has said India will need an extra 5 lakh ICU beds, 2 lakh nurses and 1.5 lakh doctors in the next few weeks, and also suggested radical solutions to meet the mountainous challenge.

At present, India has only 75,000 to 90,000 ICU beds and almost all are already occupied – when the second wave of the pandemic hasn’t even reached its peak yet, he said. India is reporting about 3.5 lakh cases a day, and some experts say the number could go up to 5 lakh cases daily at its peak.

While most of the newspaper headlines and prime time television coverage have been over the lack of

oxygen for the patients in ICUs, “I am having sleepless nights for the next headline, which is going to be that patients are dying in ICUs because there are no nurses and doctors to take care of the patients,” he said.

“And this is going to happen. I do not doubt it now,” said Dr Shetty, the chairman and founder of Narayana Health, a chain of 21 medical centres in India, in his online address at the Symbiosis Golden Jubilee Lecture Series in Pune recently.

He pointed out that for every patient who is tested positive, there are 5 to 10 people who are positive but not tested. That means more than 15 to 20 lakh people are getting infected every day in India even now. Statistically, five per cent of the positive

patients need an ICU bed, irrespective of their age. On an average, a patient in ICU spends at least 10 days there. “So you can just imagine what the scenario is. Know what we need to do? We need to create at least five lakh additional ICU beds in the next few weeks,” he said.

“Unfortunately, beds do not treat patients. We need nurses, doctors and paramedics in that order, he said, pointing out that managing Covid patients successfully in ICUs depends mostly on nurses, not doctors. Even before the start of the pandemic, government hospitals across the country had a shortage of 78 per cent of medical specialists.

“Now, we need to produce at least two lakh nurses and at least one and a half lakh doctors in the

next few weeks who are dedicated to managing Covid for the next one year. Because the current pandemic is likely to last for about 4 to 5 months. And then we should be prepared for the third wave,” he said.

Dr Shetty then proceeded to provide out-of-the-box solutions for meeting that need. He said India has about 2.20 lakh nursing students who have finished their three-year GNM (General Nursing and Midwifery) or four-year B Sc courses in various nursing schools and colleges across the country who are preparing for their exam scheduled to take place in the next few weeks.

He suggested that the ministry of health, along with the Indian Nursing Council, should consider

these students as graduates and deploy them to work in Covid ICU wards for one year, after which they will be given graduation certificates. They could also be given preference over others in government jobs, he said.

“Take the approach of drafting for the armed forces when there is an impending war with the enemy country ... This is not peacetime. It is wartime.

“If that is done, I am convinced most of these girls and boys will join the fight against Covid. The battle cannot be won by doctors of my age. No war can be fought by people of my age. You need young people. Most of them are vaccinated and they are naturally in a better position to fight Covid in case they get it.

He said there are also 1.30 lakh young doctors today, working not in Covid ICUs but preparing for NEET exams to get into post-graduate courses where only 35,000 positions are available. An online test for NEET should be conducted immediately and results declared in a few days.

After allowing the 35,000 seats, there will be still one lakh young doctors who are left out, who didn’t get the PG seats. They should be offered a chance during the next year’s PG selection if they work in the Covid ICU for one year, he said. Additionally, there are about 25,000 doctors who have finished their postgraduate training and haven’t yet appeared for the exam. This batch of medical specialists should be told that they can skip

the exam and get the degree provided they work in the Covid ICUs for one year, he suggested.

Also, there are between 90,000 to one lakh doctors who graduated from overseas universities who haven’t been able to pass a national entrance exam. “Identify 20,000 brightest of these kids and ask them to work in Covid ICU for one year for getting a permanent registration,” he said.

“If we can do this successfully in the next few weeks, believe me, we would have conquered the Covid battle. Otherwise, the consequences can be very very very serious, mainly because just admitting a patient in a Covid ICU and giving him some oxygen is not going to save their life,” he concluded.

— PTI

Bombay HC for 15-day lockdown

Maha extends lockdown-like curbs till May 15

SHAHAB ANSARI & BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, APRIL 29

The Bombay High Court on Thursday asked the Maharashtra government to consider imposing complete lockdown in the state for 15 days.

A division bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G.S. Kulkarni was of the opinion that a complete lockdown like last year was necessary in order to successfully contain the spread of Coronavirus in the state.

The bench also asked Advocate General (AG) Ashutosh Kumbhakoni if the state believed its current restrictions on the movement of citizens were working. The judges also asked him if people with only urgent business were on roads.

The bench clarified that it was not issuing any mandate, however they were of the opinion that the government should consider a lockdown like last year.

The HC also directed the Maharashtra government to ensure municipal authorities conducted an immediate fire audit of all hospitals, nursing homes and Covid care centres across the state.

Referring to Wednesday’s fire in a private hospital in Thane district where four people died, the bench said, “We do not want any more fires in hospitals.”

The bench said a patient does not have time to check if a hospital is fire-compliant or not. “We do not want hospitals turn-

ing into Jatugrihas,” the HC said, referring to the highly combustible house of lac that Duryodhana had built for the Pandavas in the *Mahabharata*.

The HC also said it was not trying to pin the blame for the raging pandemic on the state government or municipal corporation, but it was the society’s “collective failure” and that citizens must also act responsibly.

“You want to have everything. You want Kumbh, you want marriages...are you waiting for the third wave?” it asked.

“At least for 15 days if people stay strictly indoors, like last year, we may expect better results. Please advise your government,” the high court told this to the AG.

The HC was hearing a PIL, alleging improper management of Covid treatment in Maharashtra and seeking directions pertaining to shortage of Remdesivir, the key antiviral drug, and oxygen supply.

Advocate General Kumbhakoni on behalf of the state and the senior counsel Anil Sakhre on behalf of BMC told the HC that there was adequate stock of Remdesivir and oxygen for hospitals in Mumbai and a safety audit of medical facilities across the state would be conducted.

The court also directed them to also ensure there are no long queues at Covid vaccination centres and make arrangements for the safety of those working in crematoriums. Meanwhile, the state government on Thursday

evening issued a new order extending Covid restrictions till May 15. People can travel only in emergencies. Shops and markets, except for emergency services, will be allowed to be open for only two hours till 11am every day.

Also, with the rise in cases and deaths showing no signs of decline, the Maharashtra government has extended the lockdown-like curbs in the state till May 15.

State chief secretary Sitaram Kunte on Thursday issued an order, which said, “Maharashtra is continuing to be threatened with the spread of Covid and therefore it is imperative to continue emergency measures to prevent and contain the spread of virus. The government finds it necessary to continue the enforcement of the current restrictions throughout the state till 15th May to break the chain of transmission effectively.”

The strict curbs on movement of people and a host of other activities have been in force in the state since April 14 and were to end on April 30. Essential services have been exempted from the restrictions.

On April 21, the Maharashtra government had imposed more strict restrictions in the state under the ‘Break the Chain’ campaign. Under the curbs, all government offices (centre, state, local administrative), except emergency services related to the coronavirus pandemic, will open with only 15 per cent attendance.

FB blocks #ResignModi posts, restores it later

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

Social media platform Facebook temporarily blocked posts containing hashtags calling on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to resign, then reinstated them on Wednesday, saying the action had been taken erroneously, according to international media reports.

“We temporarily blocked this hashtag by mistake, not because the Indian government asked us to, and have since restored it,” Facebook spokesman Andy Stone was quoted as saying. According to these media reports, #ResignModi was blocked on Facebook for several hours amid national controversy and public anger over the Union Government’s response to the ongoing Covid crisis.

The media reports said the Indian government had ordered U.S. social-media companies to block certain social media posts, saying Covid-related misinformation risked spurring a panic and were disrupting efforts to bring the pandemic under control. A second wave of the

Covid pandemic is currently battering India leading to a severe shortage of hospital beds, oxygen and anti-viral drugs such as Remdesivir. India is now recording over three and a half lakh fresh Covid cases every day while the death toll is now crossing three thousand daily.

Desperate appeals for help have become the norm on social media as people helplessly watch many of their family-members and friends die for want of timely medical care.

A foreign envoy posted in India had also recently told media outlets that his heart bled seeing scenes of hospitals and people asking for hospital beds on social media.

Modi had also recently conceded that the second Corona “storm has shaken the country” when the nation had been full of enthusiasm and self-confidence after “successfully confronting the first wave of Corona”.

The government has also conceded that the current over three million active cases of Covid have “put considerable pressure on the health care

system”.

Just a few days back, Twitter and other social media platforms removed about 100 posts and URLs after the government asked them to remove content that was critical of the handling of the current medical crisis or spreading fake news around the pandemic.

Reports citing Lumen database, an independent research project studying cease and desist letters concerning online content, suggested that more than 50 posts - including those by a Member of Parliament, MLA and filmmakers - were removed by Twitter on government request.

Government sources had said the social media platforms were asked to remove the posts and URLs (uniform resource locators) to “prevent obstructions in the fight against the pandemic” and disruption of public order due to the said posts.

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

DECCAN
Chronicle

30 APRIL 2021

Govt needs to provide free vaccination to all in India

The registration for the third phase of the vaccination programme against pandemic Covid-19 has started with some technical glitches in the registration portal that were promptly corrected. As per the government's account, more than 80 lakh people aged between 18 and 45 years registered themselves for the programme that starts on May 1. The government has made it mandatory for anyone to get a jab in the third phase to register with the portal. It has also said there will be no more free vaccination for this group, which makes up almost half of the eligible population.

The government had injected a lot of hope into the people whose lives and livelihoods were severely battered by the onslaught of the micro-organism when it launched the world's largest vaccination programme on January 16 this year but most of the steps it has taken after that belied that hope. And worse, the latest decisions reflect poor understanding of the ground situation and a scornful neglect for the idea of universal vaccination against a deadly pandemic. The government has parliamentary clearance for spending money to get every eligible person vaccinated but has now passed that responsibility on to the state governments so far as its most productive section of the population is concerned. Worse, it has made the private sector an integral part of the programme with little regulatory protocols. The government's decision to allow the private manufacturers to fix the price of the vaccine doses, and then merrily grabbing the opportunity to make super profits, truly reflects the callousness with which it plans to wage the war on the

No elected central government in the world would dare force the elected bodies below them to compete with private companies for a product such as vaccines

pandemic. No elected central government in the world would dare force the elected bodies below them to compete with private companies for a product such as vaccines. There won't be many countries where the citizen's right to vaccination is linked to the acts of a philanthropist entrepreneur who himself is a beneficiary of governmental largesse.

The coordinates about which the people in the Union government work now defy all sense of democracy and decency and the constitutional principles which bind them to seats of power. The right to get vaccinated against a pandemic is nothing less than the right to life and the government is duty bound to protect it. Introducing a technological interface such as a registration portal is okay as long as it brings efficiency to how the government works; making it a condition to enjoy a fundamental right is not.

The Union government must rework its vaccination policy for the youth. Anything less than a universal vaccination programme for them is akin to discounting their right to life, and is unacceptable. Technology can be a tool for people to access it but it cannot be the sole determinant. Illiterate people have an equal right to the jab, and it is the government's job to ensure it. The financial burden must be borne by the Union government that has sought, and been granted, funds by Parliament for the purpose. Anything less will amount to undermining the survival of the future of the nation. The government can decide.

Stop politics over oxygen

In the dire emergency caused by the coronavirus pandemic liquid medical oxygen has become a crucial national resource. The order to open Vedanta's Sterlite Copper smelter plant on the southern coast of Tamil Nadu and produce oxygen for medical use is a logical step to augment availability. When production is scaled up to around 1,000 MT a day, it can add about 10 per cent to national capacity. To facilitate such production is a national task and all politicians of Tamil Nadu, including the head honchos of the government of the day who opposed the oxygen operations in court, should climb off their hobby horse and cooperate in using that oxygen to help people sickened by the virus to breathe.

An oxygen crisis exists not in terms of production but in transportation as the nation has an inadequate number of tankers. It is a logistical nightmare to be able to rush lifesaving LMO to every nook and corner of the country and oxygen will soon be required everywhere in the face of the bewildering scale and speed of the spread of the disease. To undertake supply on a war footing is the executive's job but it should not be hampered by the play of politics in deciding how much oxygen will go to which state and when. The people are fed up already with political leaders playing havoc with a fair and equitable distribution of oxygen, life-saving drugs, ventilators, hospital and ICU beds, besides vaccines.

The First World has responded to India's crisis by sending oxygen concentrators, non-invasive ventilators and various other medical equipment that can help in the crisis. Political leaders and the executive they give directions to must ensure fair distribution so that patients can be helped in time and the mortality rate kept down. Having lost the battle against a second wave we must first ensure that the gravely ill receive treatment in time. The politics over who is right or wrong can wait and it's time to rein in ill-conceived comments about arresting those who criticise governments or spread rumours about the Covid-19 catastrophe.

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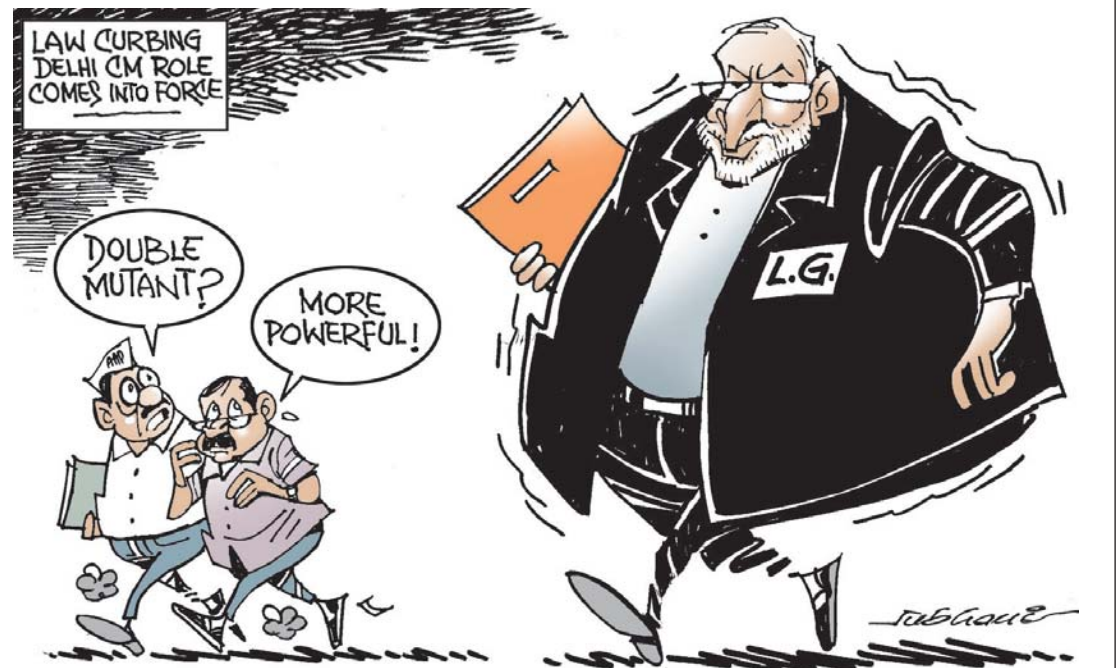
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Subhani



India's grim reality out in the open as myths busted



Karan Thapar

As I See It

It wasn't so long ago that we convinced ourselves we are a superpower or, at least, one that's definitely in the making. We believed the evidence was long and compelling — the world's largest democracy, the sixth biggest economy, a 1.38 billion-strong domestic market, excellence in IT and the West's back office, an unbeatable cricket team, the home of Bollywood, one of the most successful diasporas and, of course, a Prime Minister on first name terms with all the world's top leaders. The RSS was convinced this was because we are a Hindu majority nation. The BJP was more specific. It was because of Narendra Modi.

Well, an invisible virus has punctured the bubble of our pretensions. As Covid-19 increases by nearly 400,000 cases a day — mathematically projected to possibly reach a million a day in two weeks' time — our friends have shut their doors on us. From Paris to Hong Kong, Canberra to Dubai, flights from India have been barred. Meanwhile, our "enemies" are reaching out. China has offered assistance. Charities in Pakistan were the first to write to our PM. Days later Imran Khan tweeted his offer to help. This is, of course, kindness but it's likely to rattle the government.

So what went wrong? There are many answers but the one that concerns me is the argument which suggests that we brought this on ourselves. I'm referring both to our earlier belief that we're something special and have conquered the virus and also our irresponsible refusal to plan and prepare for the

worst. In other words, our judgment. And before I go into detail, let me add it's judgment, more than size and power, that one expects of a superpower. That's where we have failed.

First, after the number of new infections started to remarkably, though inexplicably, shrink from September onwards, we claimed victory. Just as Europe and America were experiencing second or even third waves, far worse than the first, we convinced ourselves that our fate would be different. In January, Prime Minister Modi told the World Economic Forum that India has "defeated" Covid. Three weeks later, on February 21, the BJP passed the following resolution: "It can be said with pride that India not only defeated Covid under the able, sensitive, committed and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but also infused in all its citizens the confidence to build an "Atma Nirbhar Bharat". The party unequivocally hails its leadership for introducing India to the world as a proud and victorious nation in the fight against Covid." In March, the health minister, who is himself a doctor, added his personal touch. He claimed to the Delhi Medical Association that "we are in the endgame of the Covid-19 pandemic in India".

This misplaced, unscientific, irrational and downright foolish conviction that we are special is the cause of the crisis we face today. As a result, we did not plan for a second wave. In fact, we shut down the special facilities created to handle the first. Empowered committees that recommended

enhancing oxygen production in April 2020 were ignored. Even when it was decided to do so, the tenders were not placed for eight months. Time, we felt certain, was on our side. So, of the 162 plants sanctioned by the health ministry, only 33 have been installed. Consequently, today, we're forced to shut down virtually all industrial use of oxygen while we are desperately trying to import 50,000 tonnes from any country willing to sell it quickly.

I'll touch on only one more example of our irresponsible incompetence. We boast of being the vaccine manufacturer of the world. Yet with our eyes wide open, we failed to ensure we can produce enough to vaccinate ourselves. Once again, the explanation is we either didn't bother to plan or weren't capable of doing it intelligently.

Consider this — as far back as May or June last year we knew that if 75 per cent of our people were to be given a two-dose vaccine, we would need two billion jabs. That was elementary maths. We also knew that our existing vaccine production capacity could not produce anywhere near this number in the time-frame that we required. So, what did we do? A superpower would have immediately increased its capacity. Doubled or tripled it, if necessary. We did nothing. We blithely carried on as if there was no looming problem. Now we have a crisis. And, once again, the world we are so eager to impress simply cannot understand how we let this happen.

The picture which the world sees of India is not that of a potential superpower but an inept and flailing Third World country struggling but unable to handle a crisis it has inflicted on itself

Consequently, the picture which the world sees of India is not that of a potential superpower but an inept and flailing Third World country struggling but unable to handle a crisis it has inflicted on itself. Hospitals are paralysed by the lack of beds and oxygen, patients are dying in ambulances and, sometimes, on the streets, pavements and open fields have been converted into crematoria, and everywhere we have helpless, crying, forsaken citizens, with no one to turn to.

This is the grim image the Western press now has of our country. But as far as our government is concerned, it's even worse. Because all of this is compounded by the dawning realisation that the leader they once thought was strong and decisive now appears to have been unconcerned by the challenge he faced or incapable of responding to it. Indeed, his own behaviour suggests he was either ignorant of how bad things could become or unwilling to believe it.

So, today, the world is horrified by what they see of India and deeply dismayed. The bragdocio has been stripped aside. The exposed reality is ugly and impossible to hide. Finally, there's also how we view ourselves. Our confidence in being special seems to have disappeared. This is not the exclusiveness that we sought. Television and the social media have brought home a different truth. We've been reduced to a nation that's more than frightened, we're in panic. The dream of achieving India's inevitable and irresistible destiny has metamorphosed into a nightmare where we know our own incompetence and irresponsibility is what haunts us. We long to wake up to a bright and beautiful morning. But when will this sleep of torment end?

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

VACCINATION MESS

The government is again making a mess of vaccination (Covid-19 vaccine website crashes, DC, April 29). How can hundreds of maidservants, drivers, security guards and others who do not have internet register on the CoWIN app? The app crashed on Wednesday. Hospitals can be asked to feed particulars after they give a jab.

K. Gopal
Hyderabad

It is surprising that the Centre opened registration for vaccination to those above 18 when there are not enough stocks for the second dose to senior citizens. Arrangements must be made in this regard.

Rama Kesavan
Hyderabad

VACCINE CENTRES

When the situation is getting critical, why is the government not giving work from home facility? Every employee is afraid of working in office and employee's family members are also worried because they are prone to Covid. Some employees might have health problems.

Saroja Kankipati
Secunderbad

VIRUS DEATHS

If the virus deaths are murder in Telangana state and the CM must be held responsible, what about the virus deaths in BJP-ruled states? (Bandi: Virus deaths murder, DC, April 29). Will the CMs there be held responsible?

N. Nagarajan
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN
DECCAN
Chronicle

China supplying arms to Pak

RAWALPINDI, APRIL. 29 Western diplomats said they believe Communist China is supplying military equipment to Pakistan and has agreed to outfit new units in the Western province to replace troops sent to suppress the Awami League in Bangla Desh.

They, however did not have details on the amount or type of military equipment to be supplied.

They said the agreement followed an unannounced visit to Peking earlier this month by Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Sultan Khan, former Ambassador to China.

Mahir Ali



How far is Biden ready to go on guns, minimum wage, healthcare?

It is somewhat disconcerting to find myself almost in agreement with US Senator Lindsey Graham, a particularly odious representative of the Republican leadership that propped up the Trump presidency for four years, and seems determined to perpetuate its sordid legacy.

But he was on the ball when he told Fox News Sunday: "AOC said his first 100 days exceeded her expectations. That's all you need to know."

Of course, what he meant by "That's all you need to know" is vastly different from the way many others would interpret New York congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's statement last Friday that the Biden administration has "definitely exceeded the expectations that progressives had".

When AOC entered the US Congress in 2018, contrary to the primary desires of the Democratic Party establishment — alongside Squad-mates Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayannah Pressley — she came across as a breath of fresh air: a legislator determined to challenge not just the egregious excesses of the Trump

administration but also the unsavoury realities of her own party's inclinations.

She had already done her bit by then for the unsuccessful Bernie Sanders campaign in 2016, and she did it again four years later. Last year's Sanders campaign, although hobbled again by the Democratic establishment, was more successful. At least in the sense that Biden advisers collaborated with Sanders associates in drawing up the election agenda.

Nonetheless, in the run-up to last November's election, it was logical to assume that, if elected, Joe Biden would go his own way — striving for bipartisanship, as was his wont during three decades in the Senate, and quite possibly achieving very little.

However, Mr Biden has managed to go reasonably far in his first 100 days — admittedly an arbitrary criterion that has been in vogue since the initial phase of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 1933 inauguration. FDR assumed power during the depths of the 1930s depression, and tried to reboot the US economy through an unprecedented injection of govern-

ment resources.

It was a partial success — it actually took a world war to resurrect the US economy. Biden's efforts in the wake of Covid-19 have been compared with FDR's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, thwarted in large part by Johnson's Vietnam woes.

For all his flaws, Johnson did manage to legislate some of the most substantial provisions against racial discrimination since Lincoln's Emancipation Act 100 years earlier. Ever since, though, there have been efforts to claw back the advances, and Republican-guided voter suppression reached a new level of sorts in Georgia recently, after the state's voters gave Biden a tentative majority in the US Senate.

The President, meanwhile, has gone further in his stimulus packages than some of his detractors on the left expected, and has facilitated a considerably more substantial role in the Senate for Sanders than anyone might have anticipated. A partial consequence has been that, unlike in 2009 when the advent of Barack

Obama was followed by far too much of the "rescue package" being restricted to the economic culprits on Wall Street, the latest stimulus has sustained poorer households.

These are temporary measures, though. There is the prospect of a massive infrastructure package that would also seek to redress, in some measure, America's reliance on fossil fuels. Mr Biden recently presided over a virtual global summit ostensibly aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions more sharply than spelt out in the Paris agreement of 2015, but it has been pointed out that whereas the current administration is willing to pursue its goal through concrete measures, it has no objection to the rest of the world chasing the task through market mechanisms, which have hitherto proved grossly inadequate.

The Biden administration is also struggling with border immigration measures, and with foreign policy more generally: ties with China and Russia, in particular, remain dismal. The proposed withdrawal from Afghanistan, welcome at many lev-

els, is likely to effectively entail handing back power to the Taliban — without any official recognition of why the invasion 20 years ago was a grievous error.

But let's put foreign policy aside, even though US neocolonialism is an intrinsic part of America's postwar identity, not least in its Latin American "backyard". However even domestically, there's little hope of instituting a minimum wage of only \$15, let alone the kind of universal healthcare that is routine in comparable nations, or the kind of gun control that might reduce the regular mass shootings.

These three straightforward objectives are not even on Biden's agenda. And some of the items on his wish list face resistance not just from mindless Republicans but also from Democratic senators such as Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema.

Yes, Joe Biden has exceeded expectations in his first 100 days, but where he will — or can — go from here remains an open question.

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

GERMAN WOMAN
IN CUSTODY
OVER KILLINGS

Potsdam, Germany: An employee at a clinic for disabled people outside Berlin was arrested Thursday on suspicion of killing four people at the centre and wounding a fifth, police said, with the motive still unclear.

The slain victims, two women and two men, were stabbed with a knife late Wednesday at the facility in the city of Potsdam, the daily Bild reported.

Those killed are believed to be patients at the care clinic, local newspaper *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten* reported. Police said earlier the dead were subjected to “intense, extreme violence”, but did not give any details around the circumstances of the killings.

CYPRUS TALKS
FOR SETTLEMENT
AT UN COLLAPSE

Geneva: Talks with rival Cypriot leaders failed to find common ground that could pave the way towards resolving the decades-old division of Cyprus, the UN chief concluded Thursday (April 29).

The United Nations is trying to mediate a deal for the eastern Mediterranean island, nearly six decades since it first deployed peacekeepers.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres travelled from New York to Geneva to oversee the three days of informal talks in various formats, but said they had not managed to overcome the differences between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot positions.

“The truth is that in the end of our efforts, we have not yet found enough common ground to allow for the resumption of formal negotiations in relation to the settlement of the Cyprus problem,” Guterres told a press conference.

“But I do not give up,” he said.

AMAZON TO RAISE
PAY FOR OVER
5 LAKH WORKERS

New York: Amazon said Wednesday that it plans to give more than 5,00,000 of its workers a raise as it seeks to attract new workers.

The online shopping giant, which already pays new hires at least \$15 an hour, said it will start increasing pay between 50 cents an hour to \$3 an hour starting next month.

Those getting raises include warehouse workers, who pack and ship orders, as well as those who work in Amazon's package sorting centers and other facilities.

Amazon said the pay raise is part of its push to hire more workers. The company has needed more people to get orders to shoppers during the pandemic as Americans increasingly shop online.

It hired 5,00,000 people in 2020 alone, bringing its total workforce to nearly 1.3 million people worldwide.

The pay announcement also comes after a failed union push at an Alabama warehouse, which put a national spotlight on working conditions at Amazon.

POPULATION
GREW IN 2020
SAYS CHINA

Beijing: China's population grew last year, the government said on Thursday, following a report that a census might have found a surprise decline, possibly adding to downward pressure on economic growth.

The National Bureau of Statistics gave no details in its one-sentence statement and said the population figure would be reported later. But the unusual decision to respond to the report by *The Financial Times* reflected the issue's political sensitivity.

The *Financial Times* said people familiar with China's 2020 census expect it to show the population, which edged above 1.4 billion in 2019, declined for the first time since famine in 1959-61 killed millions of people.

The ruling Communist Party has enforced birth limits to restrain population growth since 1980, but an outright fall would reduce the flow of workers into the economy when it is trying to shore up growth and reduce poverty.

“According to our understanding, in 2020, China's population continued to grow,” the NBS said on its website.

China's population has long been expected to peak and decline in line with trends.



US vice-president Kamala Harris (left) applauds as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (right) and US President Joe Biden (Centre) bump elbows after he addressed a joint session of Congress in the House chamber of the US Capitol in Washington. — AFP

Prez Biden calls white
supremacy ‘terrorism’

Says global terror networks have largely moved beyond US

Washington, April 29: In his first joint address to the US Congress, President Joe Biden identified white supremacy as a domestic terror threat that America must remain vigilant against.

While discussing his decision to withdraw American troops from war-torn Afghanistan, Biden noted global terror networks have largely moved beyond the country and that white supremacists posed a bigger threat than foreign actors.

“We won’t ignore what our intelligence agencies have determined to be the most lethal terrorist threat to our homeland today: White supremacy is terrorism,” Biden said in the House chamber, which just three months ago was attacked by the supporters of former president Donald Trump in an effort to overthrow the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.

“White supremacy is terrorism, and we’re not going to ignore that either. My fellow Americans, look, we have to come together to heal the soul of this nation, the president said.

In remarks, Biden acknowledged the January 6 attempted insurrection at the Capitol, saying it was an existential crisis that tested democracy.

“As we gather here tonight, the images of a violent mob assaulting this Capitol desecrating our democracy remain vivid in all our minds. Lives were put at risk many of your lives. Lives were lost. Extraordinary courage was summoned. The insurrection was an existential crisis a test of whether our democracy could survive. It did,” Biden said.

But he underscored that “the struggle is far from over” and that “the question of whether our democracy will long endure is both ancient and urgent.” — PTI

US on the move
again, says Biden

Washington, April 29: President Joe Biden triumphantly declared that the United States is “on the move again” in a rousing speech to Congress on Wednesday, calling for trillions of dollars to rebuild the post-pandemic US middle class and give new life to “forgotten” workers.

Lauding the success of mass vaccination against Covid-19, Biden told Congress and the nation on *primetime* television that “in America, we always get up.”

“America is ready for takeoff,” he said. “We are working again, dreaming again, discovering again, leading the world again.”

Biden, who was celebrating the eve of his 100th day in office, called the vaccine rollout one of “the greatest logistical achievements” in US history.

But Biden quickly pivoted to insisting that this

national effort must now focus on rebuilding the economy and fighting inequality with “the largest jobs plan since World War II.”

In a line that could have come from his populist Republican predecessor Donald Trump, Biden said working-class Americans had been ignored, while the top one percent got richer, and that his plans would give them a chance.

“You feel left behind and forgotten in an economy that’s rapidly changing. Let me speak directly to you,” Biden said, before going on to promise Americans “good-paying jobs that can’t be outsourced.”

In every aspect of the *primetime* television speech, Biden echoed his mantra that “America is back” — both in recovering from the Coronavirus disaster and in putting the turbulence of the Trump era behind. — AFP

U.S. TO MAINTAIN
STRONG MILITARY
IN INDO-PACIFIC

Washington, April 29: Declaring that “America is rising anew” under his leadership, President Joe Biden has told China that the US will maintain a “strong” military presence in the Indo-Pacific “not to start conflict, but to prevent one” as Beijing became more assertive in the strategically vital region. Using his maiden address to the joint session of Congress on the eve of his 100th day in office to make a strong case for huge new investments and tax reforms to overhaul the US economy and rebuild the middle class, Biden said, “we have acted to restore the people’s faith in our democracy to deliver.”

In his 65-minute address, Biden spent the majority of his time to discuss his economic and infrastructure plans for the nation, his foreign policy vision for America’s role in the world and the Coronavirus pandemic. — PTI

Harris, Pelosi make history
at first address to Congress

Washington, April 29: Vice President Kamala Harris and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi have made history as they shared the stage during President Joe Biden’s first joint session to Congress, marking the first time that two women sat behind a US president during an address to Congress.

Harris, 56, who is also the first Indian-American and also the first woman of colour woman to become America’s Vice President, sat behind on

the president’s right side as he delivered his first speech to a joint session of Congress on Wednesday night.

Pelosi, 81, who became the first woman in her role in 2007, sat behind on the President’s left.

Harris entered the House chamber on Wednesday night to a round of applause for Biden’s address to Congress.

When asked about the significance of two women sitting behind the President for the address,

Harris replied, “Normal,” to reporters in the Capitol as she led the Senate delegation to the House chamber.

Asked her view on the historic moment, Pelosi said, “It’s about time.” “It’s pretty exciting. And it’s wonderful to make history. It’s about time,” Pelosi said hours before the speech. Pelosi already knows what it feels like to sit on the rostrum in the House chamber and introduce a president for speeches. — PTI

US advises its citizens to
leave India as cases spike

Washington, April 29:

The US has advised its citizens not to travel to India or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so and authorised the voluntary departure of family members of its employees in the Indian missions, saying the access to all types of medical care is becoming severely limited in the country amid a massive surge in Covid-19 cases.

The US has put India on Level 4 Travel Advisory, the highest level issued by the Department of State.

The current Level 4 Travel Advisory asks US citizens not to travel to India or to leave as soon as it is safe to do so due to the current health situation in the country.

The Department of State also authorised the voluntary departure of family members of US government employees in Mission India.

US Embassy New Delhi and Consulates General Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai will remain open and continue to provide emergency consular services.

“#India: Access to medical care is severely limited due to Covid-19 cases. US citizens wishing to depart should use available commercial options now. Daily direct flights to the US and flights via Paris and Frankfurt are available,” the State Department tweeted.

In a health alert, the US Embassy in New Delhi said: “Access to all types of medical care is becoming severely limited in India due to the surge in Covid-19 cases.”

“We urge US citizens to enrol in STEP (Smart Traveler Enrollment Programme) at step.state.gov in order to receive critical information from the Embassy related to health and safety in India,” it said.

It asked American citizens to visit the Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare website for the latest information on travel restrictions.

“New cases and deaths

EU inches closer
to Covid certificate

Brussels, April 29:

The European Parliament on Thursday agreed its position on how a Covid certificate should work, bringing the EU closer to launching a document to open up travel within the bloc.

Europe intends to have a certificate showing the bearer’s vaccination status, Covid test results and/or evidence of having survived the disease up and running in June, in time for the continent’s summer vacation period.

While technical work has been ongoing to ensure the certificate is recognised across all 27 EU member states, final details have to be worked out involving capitals, the European Commission and the parliament.

The first change MEPs have called for to a commission proposal is the

name. Instead of a “digital green certificate” they want to call it an “EU Covid-19 certificate” — to avoid any implication of it becoming a “vaccine passport”.

They said the document should “neither serve as travel document nor become a precondition to exercise the right to free movement” and should only be in use for 12 months.

Stressing that the certificate should not result in discrimination, parliament demanded that Covid-19 tests for travel should be free of charge. The commission has said that this issue should be left up to member states.

The parliament’s negotiation position was announced on Thursday following a vote late Wednesday, with 540 MEPs in favour, 119 against, and 31 abstentions. — AFP

W.H.O.: POOR
NATIONS GAVE
0.3% OF SHOTS

Lisbon, April 29: The head of the World Health Organisation says more than 1 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines have been administered globally but 82 per cent of them were given in high- and upper-middle-income countries.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus says just 0.3 per cent of all vaccines administered so far were given to people in low-income countries.

“That’s the reality,” Tedros told an online health conference hosted by Portugal on Thursday. — AP

Moderna eyes 3 bn
vax shots in 2022

Paris, April 29: US pharmaceutical firm Moderna said on Thursday it expects to increase global production of its cutting-edge Covid vaccine to up to three billion doses in 2022.

The company said in a statement that it would make new funding commitments to increase supply at its manufacturing facilities in Europe and the United States.

The investments will double the manufacturing of drug substance at its Swiss partner Lonza and more than double output by Rovi in Spain. Production at Moderna’s US facilities would increase by 50 percent. Reaching the three billion mark will depend on the mix of its mRNA vaccine and potentially lower doses of Moderna’s pediatric vaccine and variant booster shots, the company said.

The company also raised its supply forecast for this year to between 800 million and one bil-

● **THE COMPANY** said in a statement that it would make new funding commitments to increase supply at its manufacturing facilities in Europe and the United States.

lion doses. The announcement comes as the spread of virus variants in countries like India have raised concerns about the world’s ability to overcome the Coronavirus pandemic.

“As we follow the rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern, we believe that there will continue to be significant need for our mRNA Covid-19 vaccine and our variant booster candidates into 2022 and 2023,” chief executive Stephane Bancel said in the statement.

The messenger mRNA vaccines hack into human cells and effectively turns them into vaccine-making factories. — AFP

United Nations, April 29: India, despite severe constraints and within its own limited resources, has tried to “walk the talk” on vaccine equity and shared Covid-19 vaccines with more than 80 countries, the country told the United Nations.

The UN Department of Global Communications (DGC), which spreads awareness around the world about the work the UN does, has actively encouraged further sharing of vaccine doses from all countries, Counsellor in India’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations A. Amarnath said in the General Assembly’s 43rd Session of Committee on Information.

India urged the Department to also “suitably highlight the efforts of Member States, international organisations, and vaccine producers, who have already done so, especially with those who need it most.” — PTI

Air pollutants in
India sees a rise

Birmingham, April 29: Levels of air pollutants in cities in India are on the rise, according to scientists using observations from instruments on satellites that scan the global skies every day.

Researchers used a long record of data gathered by space-based instruments to estimate trends in a range of air pollutants for 2005 to 2018, timed to coincide with well-established air quality policies in the UK and rapid development in India.

The study was led by the University of Birmingham and UCL and included an international team of contributors from Belgium, India,

Jamaica and the UK. The researchers published their findings in the journal *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics*, noting that fine particles (PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2), both hazardous to health, are increasing in Kanpur and Delhi.

Delhi is a fast-growing megacity and Kanpur was ranked by the WHO in 2018 as the most polluted city in the world.

This contrasts with trends in the UK cities London and Birmingham, which show modest but ongoing declines in PM2.5 and NOx, reflecting the success of policies targeting sources that emit these pollutants. — PTI

NUCLEAR | DEAL

Concessions beyond nuclear-specific sanctions may be halted

US may rollback Iran sanctions

Washington, April 29: The Biden administration is considering a near wholesale rollback of some of the most stringent Trump-era sanctions imposed on Iran in a bid to get the Islamic Republic to return to compliance with a landmark 2015 nuclear accord, according to current and former US officials and others familiar with the matter.

As indirect talks continue this week in Vienna to explore the possibility of reviving the nuclear deal, American officials have become increasingly expansive about what they might be prepared to offer Iran, which has been driving a hard line on sanctions relief, demanding that all US penalties be

removed, according to these people.

American officials have refused to discuss which sanctions are being considered for removal. But they have said they are open to lifting any sanctions that are inconsistent with the nuclear deal or that deny Iran the relief it would be entitled to should it return to compliance with the accord.

Because of the complex nature of the sanctions architecture, that could include non-nuclear sanctions, such as those tied to terrorism, missile development and human rights

Biden administration officials say this is necessary because of what they describe as a deliberate attempt by the Trump

administration to stymie any return to the deal. Under the 2015 agreement, the United States was required to lift sanctions tied to Iran’s nuclear program, but not non-nuclear sanctions.

Administration officials deny they will remove all non-nuclear sanctions, but have declined to identify those which they believe Trump improperly imposed on terrorism and other grounds.

“Any return to the JCPOA would require sanctions relief, but we are considering removing only those sanctions that are inconsistent with the JCPOA,” said State Department spokesman Ned Price. “Even if we rejoin the JCPOA — which

remains a hypothetical — we would retain and continue to implement sanctions on Iran for activities not covered by the JCPOA, including Iran’s missile proliferation, support for terrorism, and human rights abuses.”

When President Donald Trump re-imposed sanctions after withdrawing from the deal in 2018, he not only put the nuclear sanctions back in but also added layers of terrorism and other sanctions on many of the same entities. In addition, the Trump administration imposed an array of new sanctions on previously unsanctioned entities.

This has put the current administration in an awkward position: Iran is

demanding the removal of all sanctions.

If the US doesn’t lift at least some of them, Iran says it won’t agree to halt its nuclear activities barred by the deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

But if the Biden administration makes concessions that go beyond the nuclear-specific sanctions, Republican critics and others, including Israel and Gulf Arab states, are likely to seize on them as proof that the administration is caving to Iran. Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has led the charge among Trump alumni to denounce any easing of sanctions. — AP

SHORT TAKES

Umpire, referee pull out of IPL

New Delhi: India's top umpire Nitin Menon has pulled out of the ongoing IPL after his family was struck by a couple of Covid-19 cases, while his Australian counterpart Paul Reiffel's attempts at leaving hit a dead end because of his country's suspension of air travel with India. It is learnt that Menon, a resident of Indore, has left the IPL bio-bubble after his wife and mother tested positive for Covid-19. Match referee Manu Nayyar too has left the bio-bubble in Ahmedabad following the death of his mother on Wednesday night. In Reiffel's case, the Australian government's imposition of a travel ban on flights to and from India in the wake of the rising COVID-19 cases here led to him being unable to leave the bubble after initial information suggested that he has made the move. — PTI

RR, DC, Sachin in Covid relief cash

New Delhi: IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals on Thursday said it has raised ₹7.5 crore to provide immediate support to people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic through its foundation. Delhi Capitals also on Thursday pledged ₹1.5 crore in support of the national capital's fight against the pandemic. "Players along with the team owners and team management have come forward to raise funds and have been working along with the Rajasthan Royals' philanthropic arm Royal Rajasthan Foundation (RRF) in partnership with the British Asian Trust (BAT)," a release issued by the franchise said. Meanwhile, Sachin Tendulkar donated ₹1 crore to procure oxygen concentrators for Covid-19 patients. The healthcare system is crumbling due to the crisis with hospitals struggling to provide oxygen and crucial medicines to the patients. — PTI

Hasan, Shaheen skittle Zim for 176

Harare: Pakistan pace pair Hasan Ali and Shaheen Shah Afridi shared eight wickets between them to dismiss Zimbabwe for 176 on the opening day of the first Test in Harare on Thursday. Hasan rocked the top order with figures of 4/53 while Afridi polished off the tail with 4/43 as the home batsmen struggled to cope with the pace generated on a slow pitch at Harare Sports Club. Debutant Roy Kaia stood firm in the post-lunch session, top-scoring with 48 before falling leg-before to Hasan while Donald Tiripano chipped in with 28 and Milton Shumba, also playing in his first Test, scored 27. In the first session Hasan struck twice to give Pakistan an excellent start. — AFP

Brief scores: Zimbabwe 176 in 59.1 overs (R. Kaia 48; Shaheen Shah Afridi 4/43, Hasan Ali 4/53) vs Pakistan.

Five up for India women coach job

New Delhi: Former chief selector Hemlata Kala is among five female candidates who have applied to become the Indian women's team's head coach, a position that has been held by men since 2017. Mamatha Maben, Jaya Sharma, Suman Sharma and Nooshin Al Khadeer are the others who have presented their candidature for the job. Among the men, incumbent W.V. Raman has reapplied after his term ended with the home series loss to South Africa in March. — PTI

Live on TV

CRICKET

IPL: Punjab Kings vs Royal Challengers Bangalore from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FORMULA ONE

Portuguese Grand Prix: Practice 1 from 3.55 pm, Practice 2 from 7.25 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Southampton vs Leicester City from 12.30 am (Saturday) on Star Sports Select 2, HD

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QUINTESSENCE

Sublime De Kock's unbeaten 70 brings Mumbai back to winning ways

New Delhi, April 29: Opener Quinton de Kock roared back to form with a blistering 50-ball 70 as Mumbai Indians beat Rajasthan Royals by seven wickets in their IPL game here on Thursday.

Put in to bat, Rajasthan rode on 42 by skipper Sanju Samson and Jos Buttler's 41 to post a competitive 171 for four but their efforts was overshadowed by de Kock, who struck six fours and two maximums to complete the task in 18.3 overs at the Arun Jaitley Stadium. Krunal Pandya also played a useful cameo, smashing 39 off 26 balls with the help of two fours and as many sixes.

Mumbai openers Rohit Sharma (14) and de Kock put up 49 for the first wicket. The South African fetched his first boundary, a cover drive, and then launched into left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman (1/37) for a four and a maximum. While Rohit played his trademark pull-shot to get a six in the fifth over.

De Kock hammered Chris Morris (2/33) for another maximum but Rohit perished in the sixth over, giving a dolly to Chetan Sakariya at mid-on.

Leg-spinner Rahul Tewatia (0/30) conceded three boundaries in the seventh over, two by Suryakumar Yadav (16; 3x4) and one by de Kock, as Mumbai got 14 runs.

However, Morris brought back Rajasthan by removing Surya, as Mumbai slipped to 83/2.

Krunal joined de Kock, who completed his half-century in 35 balls and then got a life. De Kock and Krunal added 63 runs for the third wicket and brought the side closer to a win. — PTI



Quinton de Kock of Mumbai Indians plays a shot against Rajasthan Royals in an IPL match at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi on Thursday. — IPL

SCORECARD

Rajasthan Royals: Jos Buttler st de Kock b Rahul Chahar 41, Yashasvi Jaiswal c and b Rahul Chahar 32, Sanju Samson b Boult 42, Shivam Dube c and b Bumrah 35, David Miller not out 7, Riyan Parag not out 8, Extras (lb-2, w-3, nb-1) 6. **Total (for 4 wickets, in 20 overs) 171.** **FoW:** 66-1, 91-2, 148-3, 158-4.

Bowling: Trent Boult 4-0-37-1, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-15-1, Jayant Yadav 3-0-37-0, Nathan Coulter-Nile 4-0-35-0, Rahul Chahar 4-0-33-2, Krunal Pandya 1-0-12-0. **Mumbai Indians:** Rohit Sharma c Chetan Sakariya b Chris Morris 14, Quinton de Kock not out 70, Suryakumar Yadav c Jos Buttler b Chris Morris 16, Krunal

Pandya b Mustafizur 39, Kieron Pollard not out 16, Extras (lb-15, w-2) 17. **Total: (for 3 wickets, in 18.3 overs) 172.** **FoW:** 49-1, 83-2, 146-3. **Bowler:** Chetan Sakariya 3-0-18-0, Jaydev Unadkat 4-0-33-0, Mustafizur Rahman 3-3-0-37-1, Chris Morris 4-0-33-2, Rahul Tewatia 3-0-30-0, Shivam Dube 1-0-6-0.

PUNJAB HAVE TASK CUT OUT AGAINST RCB

Ahmedabad, April 29: Punjab Kings will have to play out of their skins to get their stuttering campaign back on track when they face a high-flying Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League here on Friday.

Smarting from a five-wicket defeat at the hands of Kolkata Knight Riders, it will not be an easy task for a struggling Punjab side to stand up to the challenge thrown by a RCB team, which has been firing on all cylinders.

Following four losses and two wins, Punjab are currently placed sixth in the league table with four points, whereas RCB are second with 10 points from five wins, only behind Chennai Super Kings on net run rate.

Apart from the sole loss against CSK, RCB have emerged as strong contenders for a maiden IPL title, with many of their players striking form as the tournament progresses. In their six games, the K.L. Rahul-led side have gone on to make the three low totals batting first — 106, 120 and 123. — PTI

SCORECARD

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VALLADOLID HOLD BILBAO TO STAY SAFE

Madrid, April 29: Valladolid twice came from behind to draw 2-2 with Athletic Bilbao and climb out of the Spanish league's relegation zone. Shon Weissman scored an 85th-minute equaliser to give the visitors the point that lifted them to 17th place with five rounds left.

Valladolid are tied on 30 points with 18th-place Elche but are ahead on goal difference.

Athletic took the lead through Jon Morcillo in the 14th before Fabián Orellana levelled the match in the 70th and Raúl García put the hosts ahead again in the 76th.

The draw extended Valladolid's winless streak in the league to seven matches.

Athletic were looking to keep the momentum from a win over leaders Atlético Madrid on Sunday. They sit in ninth place and still have an outside chance of qualifying for the Europa League.

The match was originally scheduled to be played two weeks ago. It was postponed because of Athletic's participation in the Copa del Rey final.

Barcelona can take over the league lead for the first time on Thursday with a win against Granada. — AP

Mahrez magic lifts Man City past PSG

Paris, April 29: Manchester City are in pole position to reach the Champions League final after coming from behind to beat Paris Saint-Germain 2-1 away in the first leg of their block-buster semi-final on Wednesday, with Riyad Mahrez curling in the winner from a free-kick.

Marquinhos had powered in a header to give PSG an early lead and the deserved advantage at half-time at the Parc des Princes.

However, City skipper Kevin De Bruyne's cross dropped in to pull City level just after the hour and Mahrez beat Keylor Navas from a 71st-minute free-kick to complete the turnaround, giving Pep Guardiola's side the advantage going into next Tuesday's return in Manchester.

"The last 10 minutes of the first half was good and the second half was excellent in every department. We scored two goals away which is so important, but we have a hard job to do in six days," Guardiola told BT Sport.

"In general, so satisfied for the performance but it is halfway. We still have 90 more minutes to beat them and PSG is a team where anything can happen."

After starting so well, PSG lost their way after half-time and had Idrissa Gana Gueye sent off in the 77th minute as a



Manchester City's Riyad Mahrez (left) celebrates after scoring against Paris Saint-Germain during their Champions League first leg semi-final in Paris on Wednesday. — AFP

shocking tackle on Ilkay Gundogan earned the midfielder a straight red card.

Having already failed to win at home to Manchester United, Barcelona and Bayern in this season's Champions League, the Parisians face an uphill struggle in England if they are to reach the final for the second year running.

It is, then, first blood to Emirati-backed City against Qatar-owned PSG in a tie that is also a battle of competing Gulf nations.

"We conceded two stupid goals," Marquinhos admitted to broadcaster RMC Sport.

Of the return leg, he added: "There is no point in us going there if we

don't believe we can turn it around."

After all the money pumped in by their owners from Abu Dhabi, City are eyeing a first ever Champions League final, and this was their first appearance in the semi-finals since 2016, when they defeated PSG in the last eight.

However, PSG can still

be optimistic about their prospects after sensational away performances against Barcelona and Bayern in the last two rounds. PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino is hoping to once again get the better of Guardiola, just as he did when his Tottenham side beat City in the quarter-finals in 2019. — AFP

S. KOREA INOCULATES TOKYO-BOUND ATHLETES

Seoul, April 29: South Korea began administering fast-track Covid-19 vaccines on Thursday to athletes, coaches and others expected to attend the Tokyo Olympics.

The Korean Sport and Olympic Committee said the first group of about 100 people received the first doses at a state-run hospital in Seoul at the start of the country's prioritized vaccination program for its Olympic delegation. They will be given second shots in the coming weeks.

A total of 930 athletes, coaches, officials and other support staff will be vaccinated ahead of the Tokyo Games, which is set to open on July 23. Athletes can receive the vaccines if they have already qualified for the Olympics or are in qualifying tournaments, so some may get vaccinated but not attend the games. — AP

COVID | EFFECT

FC GOA COACH, FOREIGN STAFF LEAVE INDIA

Margao, April 29: Indian Super League side FC Goa on Thursday allowed their foreign staff, including Spanish head coach Juan Ferrando and some footballers, to leave the country ahead of their last AFC Champions League match in view of the restrictions imposed on flights from India.

As India grapples with the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, several countries, including Australia, Italy and Germany, have imposed travel bans on India.

The club said that it was a "pre-emptive measure in view of recent policies being taken by European and other countries in regards to travellers from India"

"FC Goa would like to inform that the club's foreign contingent including the Head Coach and foreign staff have been advised to travel back home immediately," a club statement read.

"This comes as a pre-emptive measure in view of recent policies being taken by European and other countries in regards to travellers from India as the nation battles the second wave of Covid-19 which has engulfed the country," it added. — PTI