

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
ANANTAPUR | WEDNESDAY | 28 APRIL 2021



WORLD | 5

China holds South Asian FMs meet



SPORTS | 8

Brett Lee donates bitcoin for Covid relief

TABLOID

IPL - To play on, or draw stumps?



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WEATHER



Max: 38.0°C
Min: 18°C
RH: 49%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 38/18 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava; Uttarayana

Tithi: Chaitra Shuddha Pournami till 9 am; Chaitra Bahula Dwitiya till 1.35 am (Thursday)

Star: Visakha till 5.14 pm

Variyam: 8.47 pm to 10.12 pm

Durmuhurtam: 11.48 am to 12.38 pm

Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm

HIJRI CALENDAR

Ramzan 15, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.08 am

Zohar: 12.05 pm

Asar: 4.11 pm

Maghrib: 5.47 pm

Isha: 7.02 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 06.08 AM

SUNSET TODAY 06.33 PM

MOONSET 06.38 AM

MOONRISE 08.24 PM

RAMZAN TIMINGS

IFTAR: 6.35 (Today)

SEHRI: 4.51 (Tomorrow)

COUNTER POINT



Don't worry! They are busy with account holders of Twitter, Facebook...!

SHORT TAKES

Australia ends fights to India

Melbourne: Australia on Tuesday suspended all direct passenger flights from India with immediate effect until May 15 due to the "very significant" spike in Covid-19 cases, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced. Morrison also launched an immediate support package for the country in its fight against the coronavirus crisis.

Kumbh Mela finally ends

Dehradun/Rishikesh: The last 'shahi snan' at the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar on Tuesday was a subdued affair with seers keeping the ritual symbolic in view of a surge in Covid-19 cases. Till 10.45 am, 670 seers took the royal bath and some more are expected to take it in the day at Har ki Pauri on the banks of the Ganga, officials said.

Justice Bindal is Calcutta CJ

New Delhi: Justice Rajesh Bindal was on Tuesday appointed as the acting chief justice of the Calcutta High Court, a law ministry notification said. Justice Bindal is the senior-most judge of the Calcutta HC. He has been appointed as acting chief justice with effect from April 29.

AP slaps more curbs on gyms, social events

50% capacity in buses and movie theatres

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

Tightening restrictions on congregation of people to slow down the spread of Coronavirus, the Andhra Pradesh government on Tuesday ordered the closure of all gyms, spas and sport complexes with immediate effect.

It has also imposed curbs on all gatherings and congregations, including marriages by allowing only up to 50 participants and all participants should comply with Covid-appropriate behaviour by wearing masks, sanitising hands

ENROLL FOR COVID JAB



Registration for Covid vaccine for those aged 18 and above opens today at cowin.gov.in

and maintaining social distance.

The government in its order said that only up to 20 participants are permitted to attend funerals and related activities.

Public transport, however, is permitted with 50 per cent occupancy leaving alternate seats vacant and no standing of passengers to be allowed.

Both the staff and passengers are supposed to wear masks and have to sanitise hands frequently. Boarding and disembarking should be done with proper physical distance.

All movie theatres should leave alternate seats vacant to maintain social distance and a distance of five-feet must be maintained amongst the staff in all government and private offices.

FOREIGN NATIONS COME FORWARD TO BAIL OUT INDIA

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

The United States is expected to soon approve the supply of filters as part of the vaccine raw materials required for the manufacture of Covishield vaccines in India and may also release 10 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to foreign nations, including India, as soon as the Food and Drug Administration gives its approval in the coming weeks, government sources said Tuesday.

Media reports from Washington quoted a US official as saying the United States would despatch a "Strike Team" comprising of public health experts to India.

As India faces a ferocious second Covid storm, several nations, including the US, Britain, France, Germany, Gulf nations, South-east Asian nations and Australia are sending crucial medical supplies and equipment to help India fight Covid-19. Russia is expected to send help soon.

A high-level inter-ministerial group under the Centre has "established a procedure" for the immediate clearance of materials being received from foreign nations, which will ensure the "material would be dispatched promptly to hospitals.

SC: Why different prices for vaccine

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

The Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the Central government to clarify the basis and rationale on which Covid-19 vaccines are being priced in the country.

A three-judge bench noted that different vaccine manufacturers were quoting different prices for their vaccines at a time when the country is passing through a national crisis. It urged the government to examine the necessity of invoking provisions under the Patent Act to regulate prices of Covid vaccines if necessary.

"Regarding pricing on vaccination, different manufacturers are quoting different prices. There are powers under the Patents Act. This is a pandemic and a national crisis," of the bench of Justices D.R. Chandrachud and Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Ravindra Bhat remarked

and ordered that the "Union shall clarify the projected requirements of vaccine due to enhancement of coverage. Modality to be put in place to ensure that shortage and deficit would be looked into. Centre to clarify basis and rationale for pricing of vaccine."

While asking the Centre to inform it about the requirement of oxygen, its availability, steps to augment its production and distribution, the Supreme Court reiterated that it did not intend to stop different high courts from taking up Covid-related matters and that it will only concentrate on eliminating systemic problems which require nationwide coordination.

STATE RECORDS 64 DEATHS IN JUST ONE DAY

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

Andhra Pradesh registered 11,434 fresh Coronavirus infections and 64 deaths in the last 24 hours.

State health authorities reported here on Tuesday that 11,434 out of 74,435 samples tested were found infected with Coronavirus.

■ Full report on Page 3

WAITING FOR BED, BABY DIES IN AMBULANCE

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 27

Waiting for a bed, a one-and-half-a-year old child died of Covid-19 in an ambulance near CSR Block of King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

■ Full report on Page 3

Jagan asks officials to fill vacant medical positions

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday ordered immediate filling up of all vacancies in the health department so as to cope with the Corona spread. He has also advised officials to provide beds to Covid-19 patients within three hours.

He asked officials to hold walk-in interviews to fill the vacancies in health department and complete the recruitment in 48 hours.

Jagan held a Spandana

review meeting with district collectors and SPs on the Covid-19 situation on Tuesday. He said there must be effective working of 104 call centers to offer medical services to Corona patients and that the district joint collectors should personally monitor all Covid hospitals in their spheres.

"Set up adequate Covid care centres," the CM told officials, adding the collectors should ensure all the facilities in these centers and there should be no scarcity of beds.

The officials informed him that 59 such centers

are functional in the state with a total bed strength of 33,327.

The CM asked officials to take strict action against anyone spreading rumours. An official bulletin will be released every day and everyone should depend on the same data vis-à-vis Covid situation in the state.

Jagan asked district collectors and SPs to be on high alert in coming months in view of the rapid spread of the second wave.

■ Page 2: Lockdown wiped out ₹1 lakh cr, says CM

DOUBLE CHECK

Court seeks details on hospital beds, test data

HC quizzes AP over Covid plan

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

The Andhra Pradesh High Court asked the state government to submit details on the measures it is taking to handle the spread of Coronavirus pandemic.

A division bench of Chief Justice A.K. Goswami and Justice C. Praveen Kumar heard a petition filed by APCLA joint secretary Mohan Rao seeking details

the number of Covid tests every day and the timing of release of the test reports, the status of medical oxygen availability and whether oxygen manufacturing plants were set up as per directions issued earlier by the Centre.

Government pleader C. Sumon submitted the details to the court. Later, the court directed the state to submit details to petitioner's counsel and to the court

and posted the case for next hearing to Wednesday. In a separate development, the court heard a 'quash petition' filed by ex-MLA Dhulipalla Narendra on the ACB filing a case against him in relation to alleged irregularities in the Sangam Dairy. A single judge bench headed by R. Raghunandan Rao heard counsels from the petitioner and the state government and reserved the verdict.

EC bans victory rallies on May 2

Says only 2 persons must accompany winner

SANJAY BASAK | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 27

It is perhaps too little, too late. After being severely castigated by the Madras and Calcutta High Courts over the second wave of Covid-19, the Election Commission on Tuesday banned all victory rallies by political parties and candidates after the Assembly election results are declared on or after May 2.

After being reprimanded by the courts, the EC, which had ordered an unprecedented eight-phase election in West Bengal, said: "No victory procession after the counting on 2.5.2021 shall be permissible. Not more than two persons shall be allowed to accompany the winning candidate or his/her authorised representative receive the certificate of election from the returning officer concerned."

The eighth and last phase of the West Bengal election will be held on Thursday, April 29. Voting is already over in Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and the Union territory of Puducherry.

On Monday, the Madras High Court in a stinging

● A survey conducted by an English-language television news channel on Tuesday showed the steep spike in Covid-19 cases in the poll-bound states.

● In Kerala, the Covid cases had gone up by 130 per cent, while in Tamil Nadu it was by 56 per cent. The channel claimed the cases had shot up by 215 per cent in Assam, while it was 86 per cent in West Bengal.

remark had said the EC "should be put up on murder charges... for being the most irresponsible institution".

The Madras High Court also said that it would "stop the counting if we do not find before May 2 a blueprint on how proper maintenance of Covid protocols will be maintained so that this state does not succumb to your idiosyncracies any further..."

The EC has been directed to submit a detailed report to the high court on April 30.

A survey conducted by

an English-language television news channel on Tuesday showed the steep spike in Covid-19 cases in the poll-bound states.

In Kerala, the Covid cases had gone up by 130 per cent, while in Tamil Nadu it was by 56 per cent. The channel claimed the cases had shot up by 215 per cent in Assam, while it was 86 per cent in West Bengal. In Uttar Pradesh, following the recent Kumbh Mela, the Covid-19 cases had seen a staggering rise of 47 per cent.

At this point, India is reporting well over three lakh Covid cases and over 2,000 deaths a day.

While Covid-19 cases were on the rise, politicians continued to address mammoth rallies in the poll-going states. Top leaders ranging from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, home minister Amit Shah, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee and the Left leaders addressed several rallies in West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. Despite repeated appeals, the EC refused to club the election dates in West Bengal.

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IN BRIEF

JAGAN EXPRESSES GRIEF OVER DEATH OF SATYANARAYANA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has expressed grief over the death of senior Congress leader and former Andhra Pradesh minister M. Satyanarayana Rao. He expressed profound sympathy to the family.

Satyanarayana Rao was recently admitted to the Nims for treatment of Coronavirus infection. He died on Tuesday morning while receiving treatment.

His hometown is Vedira in Ramadugu mandal of Karimnagar district in Telangana.

He was the general-secretary of the AICC, a three-time MP and a minister in the YSR Cabinet in 2004. He also served as the Joint Andhra Pradesh RTC chairman and PCC president. He was very close to former CM late Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy.

YSRC MLA Malladi Vishnu expressed shock over the death of Satyanarayana. He said that the late leader has stood by Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy during his Padayatra.

Telangana State Chief minister KCR expressed his condolence.

"MSR had a unique style of politics as a staunch Telangana supporter, as an MP and as a state minister. He was known for his straightforward nature," read the tweet from the CM's office.

The Telangana CM has advised TS chief secretary Somesh Kumar to ensure the final rites of MSR are held with state honours.

LOCKDOWN WIPED OUT ₹1 LAKH CR, SAYS CM JAGAN

From Page 1

"If the government loses one rupee due to the lockdown, the common man will lose ₹4. The lockdown had cost the government 20,000 crore in 2020, which means a loss of about ₹80,000 crore to the people."

On oxygen supply, the chief minister said 320 to 340 metric tonnes of oxygen is being supplied every day to state hospitals, and this is adequate at present.

"Those with SPO2 level less than 94 should be provided with oxygen," the CM noted.

Jagan said permission will be granted to only 50 people for marriages and officials must ensure people do not gather at gyms, parks and swimming pools. All the financial and commercial activities should continue but by adhering to Covid protocols, he said.

The chief minister said seven crore vaccine doses are being manufactured in the country per month, of which one crore was of Covaxin and the remaining the Covishield. Vaccination of two doses is completed for 11.30 lakh people and single dose for 45.48 lakh people in the state, all of age above 45. Vaccination will also be given to people above 18-45 years.

Jagan said district collectors should oversee the functioning of the 104 call center and ensure effective functioning. The 104 number should be registered in the minds of the people as a one-stop solution for all issues related to Covid.

He said beds should be arranged to Covid patients within three hours of calling the 104 center and an adequate number of doctors should be available for each of these call centers.

On beds in hospitals, the Chief Minister said collectors have identified a total of 355 hospitals across districts for treatment of Covid with a bed capacity of 28,377 in which 17,901 beds are occupied.

Treatment in these hospitals is completely free and medicines and health care will be extended to patients free of cost.

The Chief Minister said Joint Collector (Village/Ward Secretariat development) should completely focus on tackling the Covid situation in the districts. "The joint collector should ensure good sanitation facilities, quality food supply, availability of doctors and paramedical staff, setting up of help desks etc. They should monitor the performance of Aarogya Mitras through CCTV cameras. They should also coordinate with call centres and ensure all works are done on time."

The chief minister said Covid hospitals at district level should be divided into clusters and in-charges should be appointed for them. District-level Flying Squads should be set up by also including the medicine regulatory department officials in it.

For Covid treatment



A critically ill Covid-19 patient is shifted to VIMS Hospital in an ambulance for better treatment in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday. — P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Coronavirus spreads to agency area in EG

Movement of people to other places should be restricted: Experts

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 27

Covid-19 has spread to the agency area of Rampachodavaram and Chinturu mandals vigorously in East Godavari district, with more than 225 active cases and the infected patients being treated.

Three villages - Mothugudem, Kalleru and Kammuru - in Chinturu mandal were declared as containment zones due to severity of the Covid-19 pandemic. 21 children, studying at Kalleru Ashram School, are infected with Covid-19 while 15 villagers are also suffering from the virus. Two or three employees of the area, working in other places like Bhadrachalam, Jagdalpur and Visakhapatnam have visited the village during weekend holidays and got the virus to the area.

The officials opine that the virus spread into the area because of those employees.

Noticing the situation, Rampachodavaram ITDA project director Venkata Ramana has imposed sev-



A health worker gives vaccination to a woman outside the Giripuram health centre in Vijayawada on Tuesday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

eral restrictions like reducing the business hours to 7 pm and closing shandy markets and preventing crowds in public places and others.

Venkata Ramana said that all necessary steps are being taken to render good medical treatment to the patients and at the same time organising awareness programmes to curb the virus. He said the

RT-PCR tests are being conducted at Primary Health Centres and the medical and health department personnel are giving medicines to home quarantine patients from time to time. However, he said that more than 110 cases reported and unfortunately two patients died in the division.

It is said that there is no Covid-19 testing centre in

the Chinturu Division. There was a proposal of setting up a covid-19 centre in the area, but it has not been materialised yet.

In the Rampachodavaram agency area division, nearly 105 active cases prevail. Many people in Rampachodavaram agency division are moving to other places like Rajamahendravaram and nearby places of Rampachodavaram and Visakhapatnam border areas, villages on way to Bhadrachalam and other places, which may increase the chances of spreading the virus.

The experts say that the movement of people to other places should be restricted for some time to curb the virus.

Assistant Project Officer of ITDA of Rampachodavaram Naidu said that a health care centre has been set up at Rampachodavaram, linking all PHCs. He said that the centre is coordinating 18 PHCs and action is being taken from time to time. He said that already vaccination is being done in the area.

MLA announces lockdown in Chandragiri constituency

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 27

Government whip and Chandragiri MLA Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy on Tuesday sprang a surprise by announcing lockdown in his constituency.

At a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy were considering lockdown as a last resort, the ruling YSR Congress MLA took the initiative and announced that the shops would be allowed to open between 6 am and 10 am. "We will not allow any public movement after 10 am," he announced at a media conference in Tirupati. The lockdown will come into force in next three days, he added.

Bhaskar Reddy's unilateral decision on lockdown earned him a pat from the Opposition parties who

BJP DEMANDS HEALTH EMERGENCY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 27

The vice-president of state BJP unit and former MLA P. Vishnu Kumar Raju demanded that the government impose a health emergency in the state due to the Covid-19 spreading like wildfire all over.

He said the patients were in panic for not finding beds in the hospitals, Covid-19 related medi-

cines in the medical shops, standing long for hours for testing and vaccination. "There is lack of proper planning in handling the situation," the BJP leader said.

He strongly condemned the government for deploying employees for demolition of alleged illegal buildings and shops when their services were required for Covid-19 management.

wanted the Chief Minister to learn a lesson on or two from his whip. The Chief Minister was targeted by the Opposition for going ahead with conducting SSC and other public examinations. The MLA also announced that he would donate Rs 25 lakh to set up 100 oxygen beds in Chandragiri gov-

ernment hospital and 50 beds in Naravaripalli Primary Health Centre. Incidentally, former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu hails from Naravaripalli. "Measures are being taken to set up bulk cylinders at these hospitals for an uninterrupted supply of oxygen," said the MLA.

Jagananna Vasati Devena set for launch today

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy conducted reviews of various welfare schemes and government departments during a meeting with district collectors on Tuesday. He said the Jagananna Vasati Devena would be launched on April 28, followed by Rythu Bharosa and Matsyakara Bharosa on May 13 and May 18 respectively. Payment of insurance premium for kharif 2020 will start on May 25.

While explaining the progress of house site pattas, the officials said that a total of 30,28,346 are to be distributed, of which 94 per cent or 28,54,983 have been distributed so far. Of 17,053 Jagananna colonies, pattas have been distributed to 16,450. Distribution of pattas is pending in Nellore, Guntur, Vizianagaram, Kadapa, East Godavari, and West Godavari districts.

The CM directed officials to complete the distribution within the next 15 days. He also held discussions regarding the status of fresh applica-

● **TENDER PROCESS** had been completed for 311 of the required 353 buildings. Further, the officials also stated that of the 55,607 anganwadi centres in the state, 27,438 were functioning in rented spaces.

tions for house sites and construction of new houses.

While the target for April is 2.50 crore work days, only 1.89 work days had been completed as of April 26, the CM said and directed the officials to ensure one crore work days are completed in every district in the next two months. Wage component needs to be improved in Nellore, Guntur, Krishna, West Godavari and Kurnool districts, he added.

He said that while 10,929 village secretariat buildings had been approved and construction had started, only 6,057 buildings were near-completion. Stating that construction had been delayed in Kadapa, Chittoor, Visakhapatnam, Nellore, Krishna, and Anantapur districts, he directed authorities to

ensure the construction of all buildings by the end of June.

Under Rythu Bharosa Kendras, 10,408 buildings had been approved, of which 2,649 were near-completion, the officials said. Construction of all buildings is expected to be completed by July.

While 8,585 buildings were approved for Dr Y.S.R. Health Clinics (rural), only 1,755 have been constructed. Officials stated that work was delayed in Anantapur, Visakhapatnam, Kurnool, Kadapa, East Godavari, and Guntur districts, adding that construction was expected to be completed by the end of August. There was also a need for 560 urban health centres in the state. Tender process had been completed for 311 of the required 353 buildings.

Further, the officials also stated that of the 55,607 anganwadi centres in the state, 27,438 were functioning in rented spaces. Under the Nadu Nedu scheme, work on construction of 4,706 new Anganwadi centres and renovation of 3,928 was underway.

CM EXPRESSES CONDOLENCES ON KANAKA'S DEMISE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy expressed condolences over the demise of Vemuri Kanaka Durga, wife of *ABN Andhra Jyothi* MD Vemuri RadhaKrishna, who passed away on Tuesday morning.

In a statement, the Chief Minister prayed that God should give courage to V. RadhaKrishna and his family members during these difficult times.

V. Kanaka Durga, 63, who was director of Andhra Jyothi passed away on Tuesday morning due to illness. As per the reports, she was unwell and was being treated at a hospital for the past few days.

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu expressed shock over the death of Vemuri Kanaka Durga. He conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family members and recalled how Kanaka Durga used to look after the welfare of the employees of their organisation.

TD state president K. Atchannaidu also expressed his grief over the passing away of Kanaka Durga.

Govt hands over Sangam dairy to APDDCL

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

After former Telugu Desam MLA Dhulipalla Narendra was arrested by the Anti-Corruption Bureau, and a preliminary report was submitted, the Andhra Pradesh government handed over Sangam dairy to the government-run AP Dairy Development Corporation Limited, and issued orders on Tuesday.

Narendra, who was the former chairman of Sangam dairy, was arrested on charges of illegalities. Meanwhile, the sub-collector of Tenali has been appointed to look after the dairy's operations with immediate effect.

Animal husbandry department special chief secretary Dr. Poonam Malakondaiah issued the order, which stated that the milk commissioners and registrar of milk cooperatives had submitted that certain irregularities, including misuse of government assets, had been committed by then chairman Narendra and Sangam dairy. Accordingly, the govern-

ment had requested the ACB to inquire into the allegations.

ACB's inquiry report declared that there was prima facie evidence concerning the involvement of the then chairman, then managing director, and other officials of Sangam dairy, along with then district cooperative office, Guntur, in transferring 10 acres of government land to a trust, which was set up in memory of Narendra's late father. Narendra allegedly used title deeds of properties belonging to the government and raised huge sums of money through loans.

In order to protect the interests of milk producers, employees and consumers, the unit's day-to-day activities shall continue unobstructed. Additionally, Tenali's sub-collector shall be present in the unit's premises to ensure that all operations continue smoothly.

Narendra had earlier filed a quash petition in the AP High Court, challenging the cases filed by the ACB. The HC had reserved its verdict.

TD alleges YSRC conspired to hand over AP dairies to Gujarat

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

TD leaders objected to the transfer of the dairy when the matter was still pending. Former minister and TD politburo member Nakka Anand Babu criticised the Jagan Mohan Reddy government of 'hatching a conspiracy' to destroy the dairy and hand it over to Gujarat-based Amul industries out of political vendetta.

Anand Babu said that lakhs of farmers, who depended on the Sangam dairy, would now be shattered because of the government's thoughtless activities.

He further alleged that the current regime was adopting backdoor meth-

● **ANAND BABU** FURTHER alleged that the current regime was adopting backdoor methods, in order to crush the dairy, even as the case was still pending.

ods, in order to crush the dairy, even as the case was still pending. Babu also deplored that while the Chief Minister and his ministers do not care about farmers whatsoever, they were also destroying other organisations that were helping the dairy farmers.

"For decades, the Sangam dairy has been taking up many novel activities to give better deals to the farmers.

It is a well-reputed dairy in the entire state but the current government just wants to crush all good organisations" he alleged, adding that local dairies in the state were being encroached, only to transfer their business to Amul illegally.

Anand Babu also claimed that there was a conspiracy to transfer AP companies and their properties to Gujarat-based companies. He said the Chief Minister was doing this solely to secure the blessings of the Prime Minister so as to escape from his CBI and ED cases, under which the management of several ports in the state have been handed over to a Gujarat-based company.

ANIMAL CARE

Joint action plan soon to handle stray elephant menace, submit it to Centre for its nod

Plan to set up elephant corridor in Koundinya

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

Forest officials in an inter-state virtual meet have proposed to set up an elephant corridor in Koundinya forest to prevent elephants entering the human habitations and also to protect them. Forest officials from Tamil Nadu and

Karnataka attended a virtual meet held under the aegis of AP forest department on Tuesday. AP principal chief conservator of forests N. Prateep Kumar said that though the AP government had taken steps to prevent elephants to stray into human habitations from the forests, some of them from the

neighbouring states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were entering the AP forest and added that due to lack of food and water, elephants from Koundinya elephant sanctuary were straying into villages while some of them were getting electrocuted as some farmers set up electric fencing to protect their crops.

The officials said that the elephants from Tamil Nadu were reaching Koundinya forests in AP as the TN forest teams were opening fire on herds of elephants to disperse them while elephants from Karnataka too reaching the AP forests via Kup-pam.

The senior officials from the three states in the meet-

ing have come up with a series of suggestions and have resolved to meet at regular intervals and to solve the issue with coordination. They have opted to set up an elephant corridor as Koundinya forest is located in parts of three states and to appoint a nodal officer from each state. They have also planned to come up

with a joint action plan benefitting all the three states to handle the stray elephant menace and submit it to the Centre for its consent.

Karnataka chief conservator of forests (wildlife) Vijay Kumar Gopi, Tamil Nadu chief conservator of forests (wildlife) Munjamil Abbas and other senior officials were present.

IN BRIEF

WOMAN'S BODY
SHIFTED ON BIKE
IN PALASADC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 27

After futile attempts to get an ambulance or a vehicle, a man and his brother-in-law were forced to carry their mother's body on a motorcycle for a distance of 18 km. The incident took place in Palasa mandal of Srikakulam on Tuesday.

Reports said 50-year-old woman G. Chenchu of Killoyi tribal hamlet under Mandasa mandal in Srikakulam district fell ill. Her son Narendra and son-in-law Ramesh took her to Neelamani Durga Hospital in Palasa Town of the district for treatment, where she was referred to a diagnostic centre for a CT scan.

The woman underwent the CT scan but died before the report arrived. Later, the doctor going by the scan report said that the woman had Covid-19 symptoms. Hoping to arrange an ambulance or any other vehicle, the family kept waiting with the body before ferrying it to the cremation ground on a bike.

The revenue officials said that the last rites of the woman were performed as per the Covid-19 protocol.

AKKA MAHADEVI
JAYANTI AT
SRISAILAMDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL APRIL 27

Akka Mahadevi Jayanti, the 12th century Sivasarani, who devoted her life to Srisailla Mallikarjuna, was performed in Srisailla on Tuesday.

A proficient scholar in Kannada and Sanskrit, she was credited with composing several hymns on the Lord Shiva.

She had spent 12 years in penance and was in meditation at caves now known as Akka Mahadevi caves, known for Siddha powers. It is believed whoever sits in meditation in the Akka Mahadevi caves would see a total transformation.

A true ascetic, Mahadevi is said to have refused to wear any clothing—a common practice among male ascetics, but shocking for a woman. Legend has it that due to her true love and devotion with God her whole body was protected by hair.

CORONAVIRUS
CASES ON THE RISE
IN ANANTAPURDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, APRIL 27

Rise of positive cases among students of Class X and Intermediate at KGBV residential schools and hostels of other schools and junior colleges reported. Further, teachers were suffering in big numbers as more than 75 teachers reportedly tested positive and three of them died in a span of week.

More than 50 students from various institutions tested positive and the concerned schools were closed for sanitation. While the government has postponed the Class X examinations to next month while no clarity on intermediate examinations, the schools and junior colleges have been spreading virus in rural parts.

Nodal teams observed that the majority of teachers travel from towns mostly Anantapur, Hindupur and Kadiri areas to their schools through various modes of transport every day.

Student unions led by AISF here on Tuesday staged a protest demanding the government to cancel examinations for both Class X and Intermediate to save students.

NO DARSHAN AT
PUTTAPARTHIDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, APRIL 27

In the wake of alarming rise of Covid positive cases, Sri Satya Sai Central Trust announced discontinuing of daily darshan of Sri Satya Saibaba Maha Samadhi at Sai Kulwanth Hall in Prasanthi Nilayam in the district.

Devotees will not be permitted for darshan inside Sai Kulwanth Hall from April 28 till further decision by the Trust. The Sri Satya Sai Central Trust authorities took a decision following an increase in the number of Covid-19 positive cases in various parts of the country. Trust authorities announced that regular rituals like bhajans, harathi and other offerings will be continued.



Elderly people wait for their turn to get administered with the second dose of Covid vaccine at Urban Primary Health Centre at Chinnawaltair in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

State faces uphill task to
transport liquid oxygen

Shortage of tankers to bring oxygen from other states

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN |
DC
VIJAYAWADA APRIL 27

Andhra Pradesh faces an uphill task to transport liquid medical oxygen to filling stations and hospitals here from other states due to shortage of cryogenic oxygen tankers.

Daily demand for medical oxygen to treat the Coronavirus patients in the state ranges from 340 tonnes to 360 tonnes. At times, this goes up to 390 tonnes. AP is maintaining the stocks of nearly 480 tonnes of medical oxygen a day. This means the quantum that is available is sufficient for the time being.

However, as the number of Coronavirus patients is rising rapidly, with many of them requiring medical oxygen, the available stocks may get exhausted.

● Daily demand for medical oxygen to treat the Coronavirus patients in the state ranges from 340 tonnes to 360 tonnes. At times, this goes up to 390 tonnes.

● AP is maintaining the stocks of nearly 480 tonnes of medical oxygen a day.

● Only about 60 oxygen tankers are available for transport of medical oxygen, be it from other states to here or for internal distribution to hospitals

● Transportation of LMO from states like Odisha to AP has become a major problem

The Centre has allotted liquid medical oxygen to AP, some 150 tonnes, from Angul in Odisha, 68 tonnes from Bellary in Karnataka, 10 tonnes from Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu, 100 tonnes from RINL, Visakhapatnam, 60 tonnes from Liquinox in Srikakulam and 40 tonnes from Ellen Berries in Visakhapatnam.

Though the total daily quantum of medical oxy-

gen thus allotted comes to 428 tonnes, the state is facing a tough task to transport this from Odisha, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, for want of oxygen tankers.

AP health authorities say it takes three to four days for the tankers to reach the supply from Odisha to this state for its local supply. Only about 60 oxygen tankers are available for transport of medical oxygen,

be it from other states to here or for internal distribution to hospitals within AP.

Unless AP manages to get more cryogenic oxygen tankers and receive additional quantum of medical oxygen, the state may not be able to meet the increasing demand for the oxygen in hospitals treating Coronavirus patients.

AP state nodal officer for medical oxygen S. Shan Mohan said, "Transportation of LMO from states like Odisha to AP has become a major problem for us due to want of adequate number of cryogenic oxygen tankers. If the number of patients rises, we cannot ensure supply of adequate quantum. "The state government has requested the Centre for allocation of additional quantum of medical oxygen."

KGGH is fast filling up
with Covid-19 patientsDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL APRIL 27

With rising Covid cases, the Kurnool General Hospital would be converted into Covid Hospital, said hospital superintendent Dr G. Narendranath Reddy. Out of 1,200 beds, 750 are occupied by Covid patients.

A cause of concern is patients are suddenly turning critical as their lungs are turning bad, he said.

Dr Narendranath Reddy said that the hospital has total bed strength of 1,050 but 1,200 beds can be adjusted. Already 609 people were undergoing medical treatment for Covid-19 as in-house patients against the total 688 beds availability as per Monday records of the hospital.

If the hospital has to make 1,000 beds for Covid patients alone then it has to shift patients from various wards even Gynic, Paediatric and Neurosurgery. Already,

● The hospital has total bed strength of 1,050 but 1,200 beds can be adjusted. Already 609 people were undergoing medical treatment for Covid as in-house patients against the total 688 beds

the hospital authorities were using several wards to provide medical treatment to the Covid-19 patients, particularly at general medical wards, plastic surgery, ENT and others. However in view of strengthening services to the patients, the hospital is now running only emergency services and no admissions were taken for general medicine, plastic surgeries, ENT, chest diseases and surgical services. But they were still continuing Paediatric, Gynic, Cardiology, Urology and Nephrology in the hospital based on emergencies, the hospital superintendent said.

The hospital doesn't have any oxygen supply issues since it has 750

beds with oxygen supply directly from oxygen units in the hospital and the transporter filling it regularly. There are two tankers with a total capacity of 21.5 kilo litres (one unit has 10,000 litres capacity and second unit has 11,500 litres) on the hospital premises.

In addition, a new oxygen generating unit is ready to function with capacity of 3,000 litres per minute.

District collector G. Veera Pandian on Tuesday evening visited the Kurnool GGH and interacted with doctors and told them to provide all facilities for Covid-19 patients without returning them. Make a special focus on quality of medications and food provisions. He then observed functioning of Oxygen plants and supply to the patients in the hospital. He also directed the hospital officials to recruit needed staff and doctors based on increasing admissions. He visited few private hospitals in the city.

Demand to start Corona Care
Centres in every municipalityDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

Andhra Pradesh Urban Citizens Forum demanded starting of Covid-19 care centres in every municipality to offer treatment to Covid-19 infected people free of cost.

The APUCF leaders lamented that Coronavirus patients were facing severe difficulties due to the shortage of oxygen, medicines and beds but the government failing to improve the needed facilities in the government hospitals.

APUCF convener Ch. Babu Rao alleged that Covid-19 cases in the state are 10 times higher than the data shown by the officials. He said they have discussed various issues pertaining to the present Covid-19 situation during a meeting here on Tuesday. He alleged that the required number of Covid tests is not being carried by the government and the delay in giving the test report was paving way for further spread of the Coronavirus. He said that there is no truth in the state government's claim that there is no shortage in oxygen supply, beds, medicines and injections.

Babu Rao said the Prime

Experts: Patients should
opt for Covid Care centresK.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 27

Health experts are suggesting people to opt for Covid Care Centres rather than rushing to the hospitals out of panic. After reports of people waiting in the queue at Covid-19 notified hospitals, health officials in Visakhapatnam said the patients having mild symptoms seem to be rushing to the hospitals due to panic. "They can as well get admitted to the two Covid Centres which were opened in Visakhapatnam last year. The patients will get medical supervision, medicines and food. In case of emergency, an ambulance will shift them to hospital," said medical officer in-charge for Covid Care Centres Dr Malladi S. Sharma.

Visakhapatnam has two centres — one at

Mudasarlova and another at Bakkannapalem — which can accommodate over 1,600 patients. Mudasarlova opened on Sunday with all the facilities and as on date 35 patients are being treated for mild symptoms.

He said the Centres would give them confidence that they are under medical supervision and will be shifted to a hospital in case of emergency.

"Under the present conditions, Covid Care Centre can find a bed for the patient which he cannot get on his own," said another medical official.

Citing an instance, the official said a 33-year-old patient from neighbouring state and living all alone in Vizag got admitted to a Covid Care Centre with mild symptoms. Hours later, his oxygen levels started falling.

Minister has totally failed to support the state and left everything to the state's fate. He alleged that the BJP and the PM are interested in conducting elections and

to be in power but not showing interest to save the lives of the people during the pandemic. He demanded to conduct council meetings in all Municipalities.

11,434 Covid
cases, 64 deathsDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 27

Andhra Pradesh registered 11,434 fresh Coronavirus infections and 64 deaths in the last 24 hours.

State health authorities reported here on Tuesday that 11,434 out of 74,435 samples tested were found infected with Coronavirus.

Out of a total number of 1,61,43,083 samples tested in the state so far, 10,54,875 persons were found infected; of them, 9,47,629 have recovered while 99,446 are still under treatment.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus infections, all 13 districts registered more than 250 infections each, with Guntur recording the highest at 2,028.

This was followed by 1,982 infections in Chittoor, 1,322 in

Srikakulam, 1,237 in Nellore, 1,067 in Visakhapatnam, 702 in Anantapur, 633 in Vizianagaram, 544 in Krishna, 497 in Prakasam, 474 in Kurnool, 424 in West Godavari, 271 in Kadapa and 253 in East Godavari district.

Chittoor district continues to be the worst-affected with the highest number of Coronavirus cumulative active cases at 13,716, followed by 12,883 in Srikakulam, 10,024 in Nellore, 9,827 in East Godavari, 9,484 in Guntur, 8,249 in Visakhapatnam, 7,544 in Kurnool, 7,382 in Krishna, 6,366 in Anantapur, 5,172 in Prakasam, 4,295 in Vizianagaram, 2,378 in Kadapa and 2,126 in West Godavari. Vizianagaram district reported the highest tally of daily Covid deaths at eight.

TOMATO PRICES
TO CRASH THIS
SEASONAVINASH P.
SUBRAMANYAM | DC
TIRUPATI, APRIL 27

Owing to higher production, compression of demand and market disruption amid Covid-19 second wave crisis, the prices of tomato have plummeted to their lowest in the current season.

Earlier this week, the price of tomato was ₹2-₹3 per kg in the wholesale markets in Chittoor district, which is the largest supplier of this perishable additive to markets in the neighbouring states and north India.

Due to high moisture-laden short shelf life, coupled with high arrivals and impact of lack of demand from bulk users, the farmers and traders at the "whole-sale mandis" were selling their tomato crop in a hurry.

He stressed the need to build confidence among medical professionals involved in the treatment of Coronavirus patients by providing them an attractive insurance package to also take full care of their families in case any of them succumb to the deadly virus-hit.

The ₹50 lakh insurance package announced by the Centre last year is not adequate considering the high risk being taken by the medical and paramedical personnel, Dr Ramanaiah felt.

An important functionary of Jana Vignan Vedika, Dr Ramanaiah lamented the sacking of the medical personnel hired last year for hospital duty and the delay in recruiting such staff again as the virus is playing havoc with lives.

"Lockdown can only slow down the pandemic. This is not a solution to contain the virus," the physician asserted while advising the government to declare a health emergency and make better use of the services of doctors in the private sector.

have been effectively handled if the lull between the first and second waves was utilised for developing the infrastructure and recruiting more of medical and paramedical staff.

SAVING | LIVES

Each unit will cost ₹40,000 to ₹60,000 depending on brand

Call for buying oxygen concentrators

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR |
DC
NELLORE APRIL 27

A medical professional has advised the state government to buy portable oxygen concentrators on a war footing to save the lives of the people. The oxygen concentrators are designed to convert air into oxygen and they can be fixed to the hospital beds.

Senior physician at People's Poly Clinic popularly known as Ramachandra Reddy hospital, Dr M.V.

Ramanaiah, suggested that the government buy 100 oxygen concentrators for oxygen beds at the GGH, which is full to its brim with patients in Nellore.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, he said each unit will cost ₹40,000 to ₹60,000 depending on the brand. This is small pie for the government.

Dr Ramanaiah said medical experts in the government were well aware of the second wave of Coronavirus looming large over the country. The present crisis could

● The ₹50 lakh insurance package announced by the Centre last year is not adequate considering the high risk being taken by the medical and paramedical personnel, Dr Ramanaiah felt.

A.P.POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD
REGIONAL OFFICE : Plot No.15, BLT Villas, Tapovanam, Ananthapuram

POSTPONEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEARING

Due to Covid-19 situation and as per the Orders of the Collector & District Magistrate, Ananthapuram, the Environmental Public Hearing of M/s. Sri Ramakrishna Ferro Alloys (I) Pvt Limited, Plot No. 5 & 6, APIC Industrial Park, Gollapuram (V), Hindupuram (M), Ananthapuram District, Andhra Pradesh for expansion project scheduled to be held on 28-04-2021 at 11.00 AM (as notified in Deccan Chronicle dt. 27-03-2021) at vacant APIC land opposite M/s. Sri Ramakrishna Ferro Alloys (I) Pvt Limited, Plot No. 5 & 6, Gollapuram, Industrial Park, Hindupuram (M), Ananthapuram District, is postponed indefinitely.

Sd/- Environmental Engineer
A.P. Pollution Control Board,
Regional Office, Ananthapuram

Ananthapuram
Date : 27-04-2021

A.P.POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD
REGIONAL OFFICE : Plot No.15, BLT Villas, Tapovanam, Ananthapuram

POSTPONEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEARING

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Sd/- Environmental Engineer
A.P. Pollution Control Board,
Regional Office, Ananthapuram

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SHORT TAKES

VAJAPYEE'S NIECE KARUNA DIES OF COVID-19

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC RAIPUR, APRIL 27

Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's niece Karuna Shukla who played a key role in dethroning Raman Singh government in the 2018 Assembly elections, died of Covid-19 in a private hospital here early on Tuesday morning. She was 70 and is survived by her husband, daughter and son. The senior Congress leader was admitted to the Ramakrishna Hospital in Raipur last week when she tested positive and succumbed to the virus early on Tuesday morning, her family members said. Her last rites were performed in Baloda Bazar in Chhattisgarh.

Late Shukla had begun her political career in BJP and was elected to the Madhya Pradesh Assembly 1993 and to the Lok Sabha from Janjgir in Chhattisgarh in 2004 as BJP candidate. She, however, had fallen out with former chief minister and BJP national vice-president Raman Singh and snapped her 32-year-long ties with BJP in 2014. She later joined Congress.

She was fielded against Singh in Rajnandgaon Assembly seat in Chhattisgarh by Congress in 2018 polls. She, however, had lost the polls.

Late Shukla, a firebrand leader, had played a key role in the return of Congress to power in Chhattisgarh in 2018 Assembly polls after a gap of 15 years.

She had vowed to defeat BJP in Chhattisgarh in the 2018 Assembly poll in Chhattisgarh and campaigned against BJP extensively in Chhattisgarh in the 2018 Assembly elections. She was appointed president of Chhattisgarh state social welfare board when Bhupesh Baghel government came to power in the state.

MAHA MIN: NOT ENOUGH SUPPLY TO GIVE SHOT TO ALL

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, APRIL 27

Citing shortage of Covid vaccines, Maharashtra has raised a question mark over the implementation of vaccination drive for people above 18 years of age. Maharashtra home minister Rajesh Tope has expressed inability to start the vaccination from May 1 if sufficient doses are not provided.

Amid a massive Covid surge in the country, the Centre has allowed vaccination for all 18-plus citizens from May 1. Earlier the inoculation was restricted only for people above 45 years and frontline workers.

According to Tope, Maharashtra has 5.71 crore people in the age group of 18-44 years and, for their two-dose vaccine and taking wastage into account, 12 crore doses will be needed.

"But if we don't get vaccines, how will we start vaccination from May 1? This is not just our situation, this is a situation every state in India is facing," he said on Tuesday.

The Serum Institute of India (SII) has informed the State government that it can supply the 'Covishield' vaccine only after May 20. They have told us that till May 20 their stock is blocked by the central government. Maharashtra needs a week's quota delivered at one time in order to vaccinate a maximum number of people, the health minister said.

The state government has sent letters to the SII and Bharat Biotech two days ago, asking about the schedule of vaccine supplies in such large quantities, and is awaiting their reply, Tope added.

Bodies of 22 victims stuffed in one ambulance

Medical college's Dean cites lack of ambulances, managing transportation of patients as reason

Aurangabad, April 27: The bodies of 22 Covid-19 victims were stuffed in one ambulance while being taken to a crematorium at Beed in Maharashtra, with the district administration citing lack of medical transport vehicles as the reason for it.

The incident took place on Sunday when the bodies, kept in the mortuary of the Swami Ramanand Teerth Rural Government Medical College at Ambajogai in Beed, were being transported for the last rites.

"This happened because the hospital administration does not have enough ambulances," said the medical college's Dean, Dr Shivaji Sukre.

He said they had five ambulances during the first wave of Covid-19 last year. Out of them, three

were later withdrawn and the hospital was now managing the transportation of Covid-19 patients in two ambulances.

"Sometimes, it takes time to trace the relatives of a dead patient. The bodies from the Covid-19 centre at Lokhandi Sawargaon village are also sent to our facility as they don't have a cold storage," the official said. He said they wrote to the district administration on March 17 to provide them three more ambulances.

"To avoid the chaos, we have also written to the Ambajogai Municipal Council to conduct the last rites of the victims between 8 am and 10 pm and the bodies will be sent to the crematoriums from the hospital ward itself," he said.

Meanwhile, BJP MLC

Suresh Dhas alleged that the hospital and the local civic body were passing the blame on each other.

Talking to a TV channel, the legislator from Ashti in Beed said, "There is no control left and the government is not acting swiftly. The state administration has permitted ambulances to be provided from the MLA fund, but the technical sanction for it is given from Mumbai."

Ambajogai Municipal Council's chief officer Ashok Sabale said it was the responsibility of the medical college to transport the bodies to the crematorium on Mandwa road (designated for the last rites of Covid-19 victims).

"Our teams are there at the crematorium for conducting the last rites. A meeting was held on Mo-

nday over the issue during which the medical college dean said they do not have enough ambulances. If it is the case, didn't they have any review mechanism? Why didn't they act on it?" Sabale asked.

Municipal council president Rajkishor alias Papa Modi also expressed concern over the incident and said the same day, eight more bodies were transported in another ambulance for cremation.

"We are going to provide one ambulance to the medical college and another two will be made available from the district administration," he said.

The official said the local medical infrastructure is "stressed" as critical patients from nearby districts are also brought to Ambajogai.

—PTI

Pune: Social group ensures dignified farewell to victims

Pune, April 27: A social welfare group is working round-the-clock with the Pune civic body to give a dignified farewell to Covid-19 victims, irrespective of their religion, for the last 14 to 15 months. So far, we have buried or cremated over 1,200 victims in Pune city and adjoining villages in Maharashtra district," said Ummat Foundation member Javed Khan.

"Many a times, family members or relatives are unable to come, but we ensure that the last rites are conducted with all respect and as per their

increased during the current second wave of Covid-19. "We have been helping conduct the last rites of victims, irrespective of their religion, for the last 14 to 15 months. So far, we have buried or cremated over 1,200 victims in Pune city and adjoining villages in Maharashtra district," said Ummat Foundation member Javed Khan.

"Many a times, family members or relatives are unable to come, but we ensure that the last rites are conducted with all respect and as per their

tradition," Khan said. He said the number of deaths has increased in the second wave, and their group members are now working 24x7.

Two days ago, they got a call about the death of an elderly member of a Brahmin family, which was in isolation after contracting the viral infection, he said.

"Our volunteers in PPE kits reached there with a body bag, brought the mortal remains to a crematorium and conducted the last rites as per their rituals," he said. —PTI

Fighting spirit on



Family members of Covid-19 patients wait outside an oxygen-filling centre to refill their empty cylinders, as demand for the gas rises due to spike in Coronavirus cases, at Naraina in New Delhi on Tuesday.

—PTI



(Top) Health worker move Covid-19 positive patient inside a Coronavirus OPD at a Covid-19 hospital, amid the ongoing surge in Coronavirus cases, in Ahmedabad on Tuesday.

—PTI

(Left) Senior citizens wait on wheelchairs to receive a dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at a Vaccination Centre in Mumbai on Tuesday.

—PTI

RELIGIOUS AFFAIR

Nearly 2,000 seers of 13 'akhadas' had taken a dip in the Ganga at Har Ki Pairi ghat

Kumbh: Seers keep last Shahi Snan symbolic

Dehradun/Rishikesh, April 27: The last 'shahi snan' at the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar on Tuesday was a subdued affair with seers keeping the ritual symbolic in view of a nationwide surge in Covid-19 cases.

Till the conclusion of the royal bath, nearly 2,000 seers of 13 'akhadas' (sects) had taken a dip in the Ganga at Har Ki Pairi ghat which was reserved exclusively for them, officials said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 17 had appealed to sadhus to observe the remaining duration of the Kumbh only in a "symbolic" manner.

Following this different 'akhadas' had agreed to keep their participation symbolic.

Crowds at the ghats of the Ganga started thinning down drastically since last week after the key 'akhadas' of seers began pulling out of the Maha Kumbh, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, citing the spike in the number of Coronavirus cases.

Many spots were a deserted look on Tuesday at the Kumbh which will formally close only on April 30.

With 3,23,144 people testing positive for Coronavirus infection in a day, India's



Devotees gather for last Shahi Snan of Kumbh 2021 on the day of Purnima, or full moon, in Haridwar on Tuesday. —PTI

total tally of Covid-19 cases has climbed to 1,76,36,307, while the national recovery rate has further dropped to

● **CROWDS AT** the ghats of the Ganga started thinning down drastically since last week after the key 'akhadas' of seers began pulling out of the Maha Kumbh.

82.54 per cent, according to the Union health ministry data updated on Tuesday.

Uttarakhand reported 5,058 Covid-19 cases on Monday with Dehradun registering 2,034 cases and Haridwar 1,002 cases.

Around 2,000 seers of the Joona, Agni, Avahan, Kinnar, Udasin, Bada and Naya Udasin, Nirmal and

Niranjani akhadas and three Bairagi akhadas kept the 'snan' symbolic on Chaitra Purnima, Zonal Officer of LIU, Haridwar, Sunita Verma said.

Kumbh Mela officer Deepak Rawat, Inspector General (Kumbh Mela) Sanjay Gunjyal and Senior Superintendent of Police, Kumbh Mela, Janmejy Khanduri reviewed the arrangements at Har ki Pairi before commencement of the bath on Tuesday.

Talking to reporters, Rawat thanked the seers for scaling down the shahi snan in response to the Prime minister's appeal. —PTI

Guj: Night curfew in 9 more cities

Ahmedabad, April 27: The Gujarat government on Tuesday decided to impose night curfew in nine more cities of the state in a bid to stem the spread of Coronavirus. With this, the night curfew is now being enforced in 29 cities of Gujarat.

The state government also announced new restrictions in these 29 cities, including closure of restaurants, swimming pools, cinema halls, shopping complexes and water parks in these 29 cities till May 5.

Other establishments like beauty parlours, gardens, salons, gyms, auditoriums and malls would also remain shut in these cities, it said. Besides all the APMCs (agriculture produce market committees) across the state will also remain closed, and only market yards trading in vegetables and fruits will be allowed to function.

All religious places in the state will also remain shut for the public, and only 20 people will be allowed at a funeral, the release said, adding that the upper limit for marriage gatherings is 50.

Public transport buses across the state would function with 50 per cent capacity, it added.

Gujarat's Covid-19 tally crossed the 5 lakh-mark on Monday to reach 5,10,373 with the addition of 14,340 new cases, the highest rise in a single day so far. With a record 158 fatalities in a day, the Covid-19 toll rose to 6,486, as per the state health department. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

TANKER SPILLS OIL
OFF CHINESE PORT
AFTER COLLISION

Beijing, April 27: A tanker spilled oil into the sea off one of China's busiest ports Tuesday after a collision with another vessel, the government and a ship tracking company reported.

The A Symphony collided early Tuesday with a cargo vessel, the Sea Justice, while approaching Qingdao, according to MarineTraffic.com. It was anchored outside Qingdao, southeast of Beijing, the Maritime Safety Administration said. Other ships were told to stay at least 10 nautical miles (18.5 kilometers) away, but the agency gave no details of damage or how much oil leaked.

KABUL BUS CRASH
KILLS 7, INJURES
70: OFFICIAL

Kabul, April 27: Two buses crashed head-on near Kabul, killing at least seven people and injuring more than 70, an Afghan official said Tuesday.

The traffic accident took place on Monday night, on a highway linking the Afghan capital and southern Kandahar province, according to Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian. The buses were going in opposite directions but the cause of the accident was not immediately known, Arian added. He said the injured were transferred to nearest hospitals for treatment. In a similar accident last week on the same highway, 14 people were killed and 12 were injured. Traffic accidents are common in Afghanistan, mainly due to poor road conditions and carelessness of drivers on highways.

17 MIGRANTS
FOUND DEAD OFF
SPANISH ISLANDS

Madrid, April 26: Seventeen people were found dead Monday on a boat drifting off El Hierro in Spain's Canary Islands, the country's maritime service said, as migrant arrivals to the archipelago surge despite the deadly dangers of the crossing.

A Spanish military helicopter airlifted three survivors to a hospital on El Hierro, one of the smallest of the Canary Islands, a spokeswoman for the service said.

"The three had hypothermia but were otherwise in good shape," she said.

A Spanish air force plane first spotted the boat some 265 nautical miles southeast of the island of El Hierro on Monday morning and a search and rescue vessel was deployed to the area.

The migrants on the boat were all sub-Saharan Africans, the spokeswoman said. It was not immediately clear where the boat had embarked from.

Earlier this month four people were found dead in a makeshift boat that was found south of El Hierro, with 23 migrants on board.

PAK LAWMAKER
ARRESTED IN
TREASON CASE

Lahore, April 27: A Pakistani lawmaker was arrested here on Tuesday on charges of treason.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's close aide Javed Latif was arrested by the Crime Investigation Agency (CIA) of Lahore Police after a sessions court rejected his pre-bail petition in the treason case.

According to the FIR, Latif defamed state institutions and passed hateful remarks against them.

He is also accused of talking about dismemberment of Pakistan in case anything happens to Sharif's daughter Maryam Nawaz.

"If anything happens to PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz, the PML-N will not say Pakistan Khappay (stay united). PPP had made this slogan of Pakistan Khappay after assassination of Benazir Bhutto but the PMLN will not say this if anything happens to Maryam Nawaz," Latif had said in a TV talk show. He was talking in the backdrop of alleged "life threats" being given to Maryam for taking on the military establishment.

On March 20, Latif was booked on charges of treason and a case was registered against the Member of National Assembly (MNA) on the complaint of a private citizen, Jameel Saleem.

Biden hails stunning progress in virus battle

A lot of work needs to do in May and June to get us to July 4 celebrations, says US President

Washington, April 27: President Joe Biden hailed the "stunning" progress that the United States has made in the fight against the Coronavirus pandemic, as he addressed the nation from the White House on Tuesday.

"While we still have a long way to go in this fight, a lot of work to do in May and June to get us to July 4, we've made stunning progress because of all of you, the American people," Biden said, referencing Independence Day as a milestone goal in the fight against the virus.

"Cases and deaths are down — down dramatically from where they were when I took office," Biden spoke out as the country's premier health agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, issued new guidance notifying Americans vaccinated against the coronavirus that they no longer need to wear masks outdoors.

Fully vaccinated people can eat, walk or attend small gatherings outside without a mask — as long as they are not at crowded events.

"If you are fully vaccinated, you can start doing many things that you had stopped doing because of the pandemic," the government body said in a statement.

Masks are still considered necessary for vaccinated people if they are at concerts, parades or large

China: South Asian FMs meet
on Covid-19 'open' for India

Beijing, April 27: China, which is hosting a meeting of Foreign Ministers of some South Asian countries to deal with the Covid-19 situation, said on Tuesday that the virtual conference is open to all countries in the region, including India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are invited to the virtual Foreign Ministerial level meeting being hosted on Tuesday by Chinese

RUSSIA CLAIMS BRAZIL REFUSAL TO
IMPORT SPUTNIK V JAB 'POLITICAL'

Moscow, April 27: The developers of Russia's Sputnik V Coronavirus vaccine on Tuesday criticised Brazil's refusal to import the jab as politically motivated.

Brazilian health regulator Anvisa on Monday denied requests from several states to receive batches of Sputnik V, saying it did not have the data needed to verify the jab's safety and efficacy.

"Anvisa's delays in approving Sputnik V are unfortunately of a political

● **THE MEETING** is part of China's cooperation with South Asian countries to fight the Covid pandemic.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi, India, Maldives and Bhutan are conspicuously absent from the meeting. Asked why India has not been invited to the meeting, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing that "China follows the spirit of openness and inclusive-

nance". "This meeting is open to South Asian countries, including India. We welcome the participation of all countries," he said.

This meeting is part of China's cooperation with South Asian countries and regional and international cooperation to fight the Coronavirus pandemic, he said. "We follow an open attitude and we are open for the participation of other South Asian countries," Wang said. — PTI

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"Anvisa's delays in approving Sputnik V are unfortunately of a political

nature and have nothing to do with access to information or science," the official Sputnik V Twitter account said.

It pointed to a recent US government report that said Washington had tried to persuade Brazil not to use Sputnik. "The US Department of Health, in its 2020 annual report several months ago, publicly stated that the US health attaché 'persuaded' Brazil to reject the Russian vaccine against Covid-19," the account added. — AFP

EU set to give approval to
post-Brexit trade deal

Brussels, April 27: European Union lawmakers are set to formally ratify the post-Brexit deal between the EU and the United Kingdom amid ongoing tensions between London and Brussels over Northern Ireland trade rules.

The deal, which was finalised on Christmas Eve, already has been ratified by the UK Parliament and conditionally came into force pending the European Parliament's approval. Because of disagreement on how to apply trade rules in Northern Ireland, some EU legislators previously threatened to hold back the ratification vote, but a large majority of lawmakers are in favor of the deal. Results of the vote are set to be announced on Wednesday, almost five years after UK voters decided to withdraw from the bloc.

"This deal is not good because Brexit is not good. The situation is also complicated because we cannot be sure how trustworthy the UK government really is," said Terry Reintke, the vice-president of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament. "Still, this agreement can be a starting point reconstructing what we lost due to Brexit."

Top European Union officials and their British counterparts have so far failed to find common ground on implementing the so-called Northern Ireland protocol, which were designed to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland, and to guarantee the integrity of the bloc's single market. In March, the UK government unilaterally

France warns over
Brexit fishing deal

Paris, April 27: France on Tuesday threatened "reprisals" against Britain unless a post-Brexit deal on fishing rights is implemented, the latest sign of cross-Channel tensions over the highly sensitive sector.

French fishermen say they are being prevented from operating in British waters because of difficulties in obtaining licenses. They began a protest movement last week by blockading trucks bringing fish from Britain to France, saying that only 22 boats out of 120 from the Boulogne-sur-Mer port had obtained a licence for British waters.

"We are asking for the whole deal, nothing but the deal, and for as long as it has not been implemented... we will carry out reprisals in other sectors if it is necessary," French Europe Minister Clement Beaune told the BFM Business channel on Tuesday. British authorities have contested the French industry's claims, saying last Friday that 87 French boats had received licences for fishing within six to 12 nautical miles from the UK coast.

extended until October a grace period for not conducting checks on goods moving between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, a decision that led the EU to start legal action against its former member nation.

In an address to EU law-

Fishing rights were one of the most complicated questions to negotiate in the Brexit deal agreed between Britain and the European Union for the UK's full departure from the bloc on January 1.

Britain made fishing rights a key issue in the negotiations, with control over access to its waters seen as a sign of British sovereignty.

Beaune said that French reprisals could be in the form of holding up approvals for British financial service operators to work in the EU.

"The United Kingdom is expecting quite a few authorisations from us for financial services. We won't give any for as long as we don't have guarantees on fishing and other issues," he added.

"It's give-give. Everyone needs to respect their commitments, if not we will be as brutal and difficult as is necessary as a partner," he said.

The British fishing sector has also complained about red tape preventing the export of catches to the European continent.

— AFP

EU lifts immunity
of Greek lawmaker

Brussels, April 27: European Union lawmakers voted on Tuesday to lift the immunity of a Greek far-right member of the EU parliament who has been sentenced to 13 years in prison in Greece for being a leading member of a criminal organisation.

The European Parliament voted 658-24, with 10 abstentions, to remove Ioannis Lagos's parliamentary protection, paving the way for Belgian authorities to extradite him to Greece. Lagos has been living in the Belgian capital, Brussels, since a

Greek court in October convicted him and 17 other former Greek parliament members from the extreme-right Golden Dawn party of leading a criminal organisation, or being members in it.

The other convicted Golden Dawn members are already in jail, except for one who escaped. Golden Dawn was founded as a Neo-Nazi group in the 1980s. It saw a surge in popularity during the 2010-2018 financial crisis, gaining parliamentary representation between 2012 and 2019. — AP

LUNAR ODYSSEY

Blue Origin slams Nasa's SpaceX pick

Washington, April 27: Blue Origin, the US space company founded by billionaire Jeff Bezos, on Monday filed a protest against Nasa's choice of rival SpaceX to build the module that will land the next US astronauts on the Moon.

"NASA has executed a flawed acquisition for the Human Landing System programme and moved the goalposts at the last minute," Blue Origin said in a statement. The decision "eliminates opportunities for competition, significantly narrows the

supply base, and not only delays, but also endangers America's return to the Moon" by 2024 as the US space agency plans, the private space company said.

"Because of that, we've filed a protest with the GAO," or Government Accountability Office, which audits services for Congress.

NASA announced just over a week ago that it had chosen Tesla founder Elon Musk's company to take its astronauts back to the Moon, awarding SpaceX a \$2.9 billion contract to

AUSTRALIA

Oz suspends direct
flights from India

Melbourne, April 27: Australia on Tuesday suspended all direct passenger flights from India with immediate effect until May 15 due to the "very significant" spike in Covid-19 cases, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced.

Morrison, announcing the temporary border closure with India, also launched an immediate support package for the country in its fight against the ongoing Coronavirus crisis. Addressing a press briefing after convening a Cabinet's national security committee meeting, he said that the ban on arrivals from India would be reviewed before May 15.

"Today we agreed, in addition to the measures that I announced after the last National Cabinet meeting, to pause direct passenger flights between India and Australia until the 15th of May," he said. "We recognise that this has been a very significant outbreak in India," Morrison said.

The latest move would affect direct flights into

Sydney and two repatriation flights scheduled to arrive in Darwin. The move could also affect thousands of people, including Australian cricketers currently playing in the Indian Premier League in India.

All indirect flights coming from India via Singapore, Doha, Dubai and Kuala Lumpur have also been paused by their respective governments. Giving details of the relief package, Prime Minister Morrison said that Australia will send a range of goods to India to help as it struggles with a critical shortage of medical supplies.

Australia will send 500 ventilators, as well as 1 million surgical masks, 500,000 protective and surgical masks, goggles and face shields. "We're standing with those Australians in India and recognising those serious difficulties they face. I stress this is an initial package, there'll be more to follow," Morrison said.

— PTI

BELGIUM

BELGIUM BANS
ARRIVALS FROM
INDIA, BRAZIL,
SOUTH AFRICA

Brussels, April 27 : Belgium on Tuesday became the latest territory to ban travel from India, Brazil and South Africa, major countries hit by fast-spreading Coronavirus variants.

"Passenger travel by air, train, boat, and bus, including transit traffic, from India, Brazil and South Africa to Belgium will be banned," Prime Minister Alexander de Croo announced in a statement.

"People with Belgian nationality and people who have their main residence in Belgium can return from India, Brazil, and South Africa to Belgium. They are strongly advised not to travel to these countries."

There will be some exceptions to the ban for essential travel by some transport workers and diplomats, but otherwise the ban will be strictly enforced.

— AFP

Covid recovery discussion



Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi addresses the Italian Senate to present the governments EU-funded pandemic recovery plan, just days before the deadline to submit it to Brussels, in Rome on Tuesday. — AFP

N-deal talks resume in Vienna

Berlin, April 27: World powers were set to resume high level talks in Vienna on Tuesday focused on bringing the United States back into the nuclear deal with Iran, in their first session since comments surfaced from the Iranian foreign minister alleging that Russia once tried to scupper the pact.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has thus far refused to comment on the remarks from Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, made in a seven-hour interview with a think tank associated with the Iranian presidency that leaked over the

weekend. Russia's top representative at the Vienna talks, Mikhail Ulyanov, who has outwardly been one of the most optimistic about the possibility of getting Tehran and Washington to agree to terms for the US to rejoin the 2015 deal, also made no mention of the allegations before the meetings, saying in a tweet only that "the participants will continue negotiations on restoration of the nuclear deal."

Ulyanov is joining representatives from China, Germany, France, and Britain — the other parties to the deal, known as

the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA — for the talks chaired by the European Union. "Participants will continue their discussions in view of a possible return of the United States to the JCPOA and on how to ensure the full and effective implementation of the JCPOA," the EU delegation said before the talks.

The US is not at the table because it unilaterally pulled out of the deal in 2018 under then President Donald Trump, who restored and augmented American sanctions in a campaign of "maximum

pressure" to try and force Iran into renegotiating the pact with more concessions. President Joe Biden wants to rejoin the deal, however, and there is a US delegation in Vienna taking part in indirect talks with Iran, with diplomats from the other world powers acting as go-betweens.

The deal promises Iran economic incentives in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. The reimposition of American sanctions has left the country's economy reeling, and Tehran has reacted by steadily increasing its violations of the restrictions of the deal. — AP

Decision eliminates opportunities for competition, says Bezos' firm

● **Blue Origin** argued that Nasa had misjudged the risks involved in choosing SpaceX.

develop the Starship rocket.

But Blue Origin argued that NASA had misjudged the risks involved in choosing SpaceX's "entirely new launch vehicle." "Starship has no flight heritage or validation of performance, and launch vehicle development is notoriously difficult and takes much longer than anticipated," the com-

plaint said. Prototypes of the rocket are currently being tested in Texas, but recent tests have ended in spectacular explosions. In addition, Blue Origin said, the space agency's decision to award only one winner rather than two, as had been originally set out in the sub-missions process, would leave the project at "high risk" because it lacks a back-up plan.

The decision also "creates a potential monopoly for all future NASA exploration missions because there would not be contin-

uing programs for lunar access other than the SpaceX solution," the protest said.

Blue Origin, which had partnered with three big names in the aerospace industry — Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and Draper — to respond to NASA's call for tenders, asked the GAO to press NASA to rescind its decision and "resolicit offers against a revised statement of available funds, and conduct discussions with all eligible offerors under the revised requirements." — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

28 APRIL 2021

EC failed in duty, sharp rebuke by HC welcome

The decision of the Election Commission of India to ban victory processions once the results in the elections to the legislative assemblies of four states and a Union territory are announced justifies the sharp criticism of the Madras high court on the role of the constitutional body in triggering a second wave of pandemic Covid-19 in India. The commission's decision to allow only two persons to accompany the winning candidate to receive the certificate of election from the returning officer also goes with the spirit of the observations and the order of the court which had asked the commission to draw up a programme without which it would be inclined to stop the counting scheduled for May 2.

A bench of the court, comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy, while hearing a petition seeking a direction for adherence to a strict protocol on the day of counting, singularly held the commission responsible for the second wave and went to the extent of suggesting that its officials be booked for murder. The court's rebuke of the panel, which stood as a mute spectator of the mammoth rallies which lakhs of people attended in utter disregard of Covid-appropriate protocols, will be welcomed by the people who in their lakhs fall sick every day. The court did not mince its words when it asked the commission whether its members were on a different planet when these rallies were taking place. It also reminded the poll panel of the fact that the fruits of democracy could be enjoyed by citizens only if they are alive. Or, in other words, elections are not for elections' sake, but for the people's sake. The Calcutta high court had also made similar remarks last week, after observing that the commission had failed to implement its own guidelines while conducting elections during the pandemic.

The judges were reflecting the minds of all right-thinking people in this country, or even in the world, who have been petrified by the dance of death the pandemic has let loose in India. It did not demand superior wisdom to understand that the convergence of lakhs of people at a place to listen to leaders would eventually end up as a superspreader event. The commission had the power to stop them but it looked the other way when leaders, including the country's Prime Minister, took pride in and announced that they have addressed the largest rallies of their lives during these elections. The explanation that it followed up on the procedure it had deployed in Bihar elections hardly wash. That a mishap did not happen is no reason why one should go easy on the rules especially while negotiating the fatal curves an extremely dangerous pandemic leaves behind.

The election process is not over yet but the commission has already entered the dock for failing the people on many occasions in recent times; the vaccinations on pandemic rules are just one instance. Its overenthusiasm while taking on the Opposition while going easy on the ruling party is another. It will do well not to invite non-complimentary comments from other constitutional bodies such as courts in future.

Opinions still matter

Newspapers are in the news these days, including a couple who have forsworn reporting of IPL cricket in the time of the pandemic. *New York Times*, a newspaper of record from the Big Apple, is in focus at the moment for deciding to do away with the term "Op-Ed", or "Opposite Editorial" page, because there seem to be more viewers of newspapers online in America than are consuming the old-fashioned printed version, which still come crackling paper form in the morning with a smell of fresh ink. But the definition of the spatial has changed in the digital age, the old geography skewed by there being no flipping of pages, only scrolling from one page to another.

The "Op-Ed" was much more than a defining physical term at the top of the page. It symbolises a space for the expression of opinions that were often at odds with those of the newspaper editors, who however are free to express themselves, even if anonymously, in editorials on the "Edit" page. A diversity of thought was always considered good for society, however opinionated the reader or viewer himself may be regarding the great societal issues of the day. The more blunt 'Opinion' will probably mark the section that carries a variety and range of opinion that newspapers still invite from thinkers, activists, intellectuals and politicians too, for who can have stronger opinions one way or the other than politicians.

It might appear that the day and age is somewhat perilous for those stating opinions in public space, be it in the Edit and Op-Ed sections of newspapers or in online news and opinion websites or in the more equitable space of social media. As the free and the fair cringe in the face of official India and trolls for opinions expressed without fear or favour, the stating of opinion is far too important to be sacrificed, however tilted the world may seem against honest opinions. The term "Op-Ed" may seem outdated but opinion still matters. But, as the Bard said, what is in a name?

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Subhani



Caring governance vital to save lives & India's future



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

Reflections

When the newspapers recorded that over 20 Covid-19 patients had died in a leading New Delhi hospital for lack of oxygen, they also reported that India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, had paid \$57 million (\$592 crores) for the Stoke Park estate in England. Another tycoon, Adar Poonawalla, CEO of Serum Institute of India, had rented a mansion in London's Mayfair for £50,000 a week.

India has always been a land of cruel contrasts. But seldom has the self-seeking cynicism of its ruling class been so grotesquely flaunted. Humanity cannot avert what lawyers call "acts of God", but the devastating second wave might not have struck so ferociously had it not been for the government's triumphalism.

"With made-in-India solutions, we controlled the spread of the virus and improved our health infrastructure", Prime Minister Narendra Modi had boasted. "Our vaccine research and production capacity have given a shield not just to India but to many other countries in the world." The complacency and vanity ignored India's decrepit medical infrastructure.

Monday's official figures of 16,960,172 infections and 192,311 deaths may be a gross understatement. Even without deliberate fudging, there are few means of accurate assessment in India's remote villages, for whose innocent inhabitants all illnesses are just "bemaari", or fever.

Reflecting official Indian priorities, the system virtually ignores both the countryside, where 70 per cent of 1.3 billion Indians live, and the poor who numbered 364 million (28 per cent of the population) in 2019, according to the

United Nations. As studies elsewhere have shown, hypertension, diabetes, respiratory disorders and nutritional deficiency are the highest in lower income groups.

Wallowing in India's cricket victory over England may have been counter-productive. Cricket crowds, religious jamborees like the Kumbh Mela, packed cinema halls and the BJP's resolve to extend its control through elections in five states/UTs contributed to today's crisis. The Covid-19 protocols were completely abandoned and the virus was able to mutate into new vaccine-resistant forms. West Bengal's ten-fold rise in infections is being squarely blamed on political rallies.

The BJP's smug pundits should rue the February day when, swept away on the tide of servile sycophancy that is the hallmark of our political culture, they hailed Prime Minister Modi as a visionary who had "defeated" Covid-19. This has become routine adulation. Even in 2018 the party's national executive had passed a resolution applauding his his "visionary and disruptive leadership" (echoing Joseph Schumpeter's theory of "creative destruction") and claiming that his "new confident India" would reach "new heights in each and every field" by 2022. Another eight months to go before that Elysium dawns!

Meanwhile, pictures of the dead and dying, of coronavirus patients gasping for breath on pavements outside hospitals and of cremation fires smouldering night and day have gone viral on the world's television screens. "I weep for your nation" — messaged Doug Jackson, a journalist from the North of England with whom I had worked 63 years ago and who is now

Their private jets may fly the Ambanis and the Poonawallas to Geneva or New York for a toothache, but the system by and large gives reasonably good service to the next rank of the wealthy and the politically influential. It neglects all the others.

an authority on Tiffany glass, the author of *Mosaic: The Story of Joseph Briggs, the English 'Tiffany'*.

"It sounds ghastly", commented Colin Smith, the author of *England's Last War Against France and Singapore Burning*, and once star writer for London's *Observer* newspaper. In that capacity he had trekked to Dhaka from what was then Calcutta during the 1971 Bangladesh war, encountering hordes of fleeing East Bengal refugees who thought him mad for walking in the opposite direction. "Wish London would at least make a gesture and send a squadron of RAF transports heavy with oxygen" Colin Smith added.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has responded since.

But tiny Singapore made the unpublicised first gesture with four cryogenic oxygen containers. "We stand with India in its fight against Covid-19", said Singapore's high commission in New Delhi. But whatever Britain — or for that matter any other country — does, the answer lies in Indian hands. Neither another Marshall Plan or PL-480 wheat (or its equivalent) can resolve India's trauma now.

India alone can save its own future through more responsible and caring governance.

As the virus shifts to smaller towns and villages or moves down the age scale in a land where 65 per cent of the population is under 35, as vast swathes of people are

felled because only 1.3 per cent of the population has been fully vaccinated, the BJP's religion-obsessed caste-ridden bigots must face up to the stark facts. Death and disease do not spare the rich because they are Hindu. Nor is there a quick fix to compensate for the neglect of decades. The situation might well deteriorate before it improves.

Everything in India now is geared for the rich. Their private jets may fly the Ambanis and the Poonawallas to Geneva or New York for a toothache, but the system by and large gives reasonably good service to the next rank of the wealthy and the politically influential. It neglects all the others.

Mandatory online registration for vaccinations is the latest instance of discrimination since it at once creates difficulties for large numbers of the underprivileged. The differential pricing for vaccines, with no cap, to which West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee rightly objects, is equally objectionable for potentially facilitating profiteering.

In fact, in reviewing the system, the government cannot overlook the choice between hospitals that exist only to make a profit for the owner and institutions whose main purpose is to serve the public.

Private hospitals, including many old established nursing homes, have the resources and quality. But being now in the hands of businessmen with no vision, many have deteriorated into money-making operations.

Government hospitals, on the other hand, are often ill-equipped with poorly trained staff, no public accountability and subject to bureaucratic and political controls.

Choosing between the devil and the deep blue sea cannot be easy. But the vast majority of Indians will remain bereft of adequate medical care without a caring version of John Kenneth Galbraith's "post office socialism".

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS

POLL INTROSPECTION

There must be an introspection by all those who were instrumental in flagrant violations of Covid-appropriate behaviour during the election campaigns (*Madras HC: EC must be charged with murder, DC, April 27*). Now that the HC indicted the EC for the lapses and even went on to suggest murder charges against the officials for abetment, the onus falls on NHRC and those who lost their loved ones to file FIRs suitably.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

It's shocking that the Madras HC remained silent during elections rallies and is now coming down heavily on the Election Commission after hundreds of deaths. Even other state governments were aware about dangers of hosting election rallies but the judiciary remained silent.

Maresh Kumar Kachhawah
Anantapur

SECOND WAVE

The second wave is spreading like wildfire and those afflicted are facing a crippling shortage of medical care (*Govt must wake up to reality, do a course correction swiftly, DC, April 27*). The crisis has opened a can of worms. The situation demands synergetic emergency and control and the government has to meet the crisis on a war footing.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

33 held in City for defying ban order

HYDERABAD, April. 27
Thirty-three persons were taken into custody by the police for defying prohibitory order in force in City on the 16th day of the indefinite strike by the State Government employees today.

The strikers were arrested, when they picketed before the Secretariat. Later, they were produced in the court and the case was posted for hearing on May 7. All of them released on personal bonds. Mr. I.B. Ramakrishna Rao, Convenor, Joint Council of Employees' Unions and Associations in a statement claimed the strike was total in all departments throughout the State.

Freddy Gray



Joe's rodeo: US President's first 100 days have been a wild ride

Joe Biden, 46th President of the United States, has never been able to keep his mouth shut. Throughout his absurdly long career in politics, he has always said too much, made stuff up, gone too far. His friends and fans just shrug it off: "That's our Joe".

The trouble is: Mr Biden is now America's commander-in-chief, leader of the not-so-free-anymore world, and his loquaciousness is a problem.

Take, for instance, his decision this week to intervene before the jury reached its verdict on the trial of Derek Chauvin, the white police officer found guilty of the murder last year of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. "I'm praying the verdict is the right verdict. I think it's overwhelming in my view," Mr Biden said. "I wouldn't say that unless the jury was sequestered," he quickly added — as if there were nothing untoward in a President weighing in pre-emptively on the most racially charged legal trial in America since the O.J. Simpson case in 1995.

As things turned out, the jury agreed with Mr Biden and found Chauvin guilty on all three counts. Yet what ought to have been a calm vindication

of American justice was treated as a grubby political show trial. Angry right-wingers will regard the verdict as a sop to left-wing mobs who would have set fire to cities across America had Chauvin not gone down.

So far, the new President's aides have done an impressive job of keeping his promiscuous verbosity under wraps. His public appearances are carefully managed, his speeches tightly scripted. In the coming week, he will mark his first 100 days in the White House, and yet has only given one real press conference.

After the political earthquake of Donald Trump's presidency, everybody in Washington is eager to make out that sanity is back in charge. Under Mr Biden, the headlines have certainly been a lot less sensational. Pay attention to what he's been saying, though — and you realise America's executive branch is as mad as ever.

Mr Biden has brought back civility to politics and international affairs, we are told. Yet he's already called Xi Jinping a "thug" and Vladimir Putin a "killer". His presidency would restore America's clout in the world, we were told. From Bush to Obama to Trump

and now to Biden, America's great power continues to wane.

But who cares when the money keeps flowing? Mr Biden is carrying out the biggest government spending splurge of all time. His Covid relief package alone came to \$1.9 trillion: to be poured on top of what looks set to be the world's strongest economic recovery. For now, polls suggest people like the free cash. Those who worry about the deficit or inflation are told they don't understand modern economics.

Next comes the \$2.5 trillion infrastructure bill, to which Democrats are tackling all sorts of spending commitments for pet causes.

Mr Biden is canny enough to have realised at some level that he won the Democratic nomination and the presidency precisely because the public didn't think he was rabidly left-wing. He's also sufficiently sharp to recognise that he must keep appeasing the radicals who increasingly dominate the airwaves and his party.

At some stage, probably next year as the mid-term elections approach, Mr Biden will try to drag the Democratic donkey back towards the middle ground. For now, he seems happy to let the woke warriors take him for a

wild progressive ride. On Tuesday, after the Chauvin verdict, Mr Biden did do the presidential thing of calling on the nation to come together.

"Not enough" might be the leitmotif of Mr Biden's presidency so far. It sometimes feels as if the President is in an abusive relationship with the radical Democratic fringe. He promises ever more urgent and expensive solutions to global climate change, and his party just demands more. He talks about the nobility of the American ideal, yet his UN ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, claims: "White supremacy is weaved into our founding documents and principles."

"Words have consequences", Mr Biden used to say over and over when campaigning against the loudmouth Donald Trump. But that does not appear to be a lesson he has learned. As a candidate, for instance, Mr Biden was desperate to emphasise his enthusiasm for all immigration. In a televised debate, he said: "I would in fact make sure that we immediately surge to the border all those people seeking asylum."

Inevitably, as soon as he became President, migrants did as he asked. The result has been a catastrophe. In

March, US Customs and Border Protection stopped nearly 200,000 people who were trying to enter the country, including tens of thousands of unaccompanied children. Mr Biden's White House recently admitted that the situation has reached "crisis" levels.

To his admirers, Mr Biden is finding a third way between the old centre and the new left. Because he campaigned as a moderate, they say, he can govern as a radical. His impressive vaccine rollout is drawing worldwide praise. Add to that his gargantuan spending packages, and patter about new deals and transforming the soul of America: he can still be hailed as a 21st-century answer to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

But many of the problems blamed on Mr Trump are only getting worse under Biden. His administration so far has been defined by a kind of geriatric weakness. "I want to change the paradigm," he said in that only presidential press conference. He has been using stock phrases for more than 50 years and so have most American politicians. The language of progress never changes.

By arrangement with the Spectator

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,944.14	1.15
Nifty 50	14,653.00	1.16
S&P 500*	4,188.44	0.02
Dollar (₹)	74.65	0.12
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.67	0.30
Euro (₹)	90.07	0.37
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,906.69	0.14
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.90	0.38
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.055	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.584	0.014

TVS Motor profit rises four-fold to ₹319 cr in Q4

TVS Motor Company posted nearly four-fold increase in its consolidated net profit to Rs 319.19 crore for the March quarter, on the back of robust sales in the domestic and international markets. The company had reported a net profit of Rs 81.84 crore a year ago. Revenue from operations rose to Rs 6,131.90 crore from Rs 4,104.71 crore. Total two- and three-wheeler sales stood at 9.28 lakh units in Q4, up 47 per cent.



■ Bid to avert IL&FS, PNB-like scams
Lenders require RBI nod to hire auditor

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 27

In a bid to improve the quality of financial reporting of lenders and to prevent IL&FS and Punjab National Bank-like scams, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday made it mandatory for lenders to take its prior approval for the appointment and re-appointment of statutory central auditors (SCAs) and statutory auditors. The apex bank also mandated that the statutory audit for entities with an asset size of at least Rs 15,000 crore at the end of the previous year should be conducted by a minimum of two audit firms. All other lenders of lesser size should appoint at least one audit firm to conduct the statutory audit, the apex bank said in its guidelines on appointment of statutory auditors of commercial banks (excluding regional rural banks), primary (urban) co-operative banks (UCBs) and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs). The guidelines will be applicable to commercial banks from financial year 2021-22. However, UCBs and NBFCs shall have the flexibility to adopt these guidelines from H2 of FY22 so that there is no disruption. The guidelines provide instructions for appointment of SCAs/ SAs, the number of auditors, their eligibility criteria, tenure and rotation, etc. while ensuring the independence of auditors. "The



revised Guidelines being issued will ensure that Statutory Auditors are appointed in a timely, transparent and effective manner," the RBI said. Makarand Joshi, founding partner, MMJC and Associates—a corporate compliance firm—said, "Rotation of auditors is heavily relied upon by regulators to ensure that any element of true and fair view cannot be kept under wraps for a fairly long period. The issues in large NBFCs like IL&FS and DHFL witnessed over the past few years has been a wake-up call for the regulator. This is an attempt to improve transparency and reliability. The new norm would mean that management will have to invest time to make a new auditor familiar with working of NBFC or financial institution more frequently." Public sector banks have to allot the top 20 branches (to be selected in order of the level of outstanding advances) to SCAs to cover a minimum of 15 per cent of the total gross advances

of the bank by SCAs. For other entities—excluding payment banks and core investment companies—SCAs/SAs shall visit and audit at least the top 20 branches/top 20 per cent of the branches of the entities (in case of entities having less than 100 branches), to be selected in order of the level of outstanding advances, to cover a minimum 15 per cent of their total gross advances. Commercial banks (excluding RRBs) and UCBs will be required to take prior approval of RBI (Department of Supervision) for appointment/reappointment of statutory central auditors and statutory auditors, on an annual basis, the banking regulator said. Currently, Lenskart has a team of 150 staff. In the next six months, it would reach 250, with a majority of them working from Hyderabad. The new recruitment, he said, would be in engineering, product and data science functions. Lenskart has posted a modest rise in sales during the last fiscal because of the Covid-induced restrictions and change of customer behavioural pattern. However, it has witnessed a 50 per cent increase in its online sales.

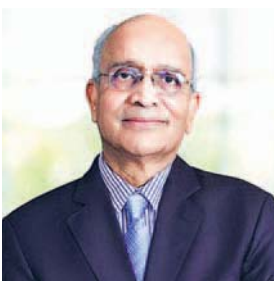
Lenskart to hire 100+ for tech centre

FC BUREAU
HYDERABAD, APRIL 27

Lenskart, India's omnichannel eyewear brand, on Tuesday said that it will hire 100 engineers and designers for its newly opened technology centre in Hyderabad. This would be the latest addition to technology and research centres that several companies have set up in Hyderabad. "To accelerate the on-goings, Lenskart is looking to hire 100+ people, across engineering, product & design in the coming six months," said Ramneek Khurana, co-founder, Lenskart. He also revealed that the company has acquired Hyderabad-based e-commerce start-up DailyJoy and would utilise the services of the target company's technicians to manage its Hyderabad technology centre. The cost of the acquisition, however, was not made public.

Maruti expects second wave to boost car sales

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, APRIL 27



R.C. Bhargava

Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest carmaker, on Tuesday said a fresh surge in coronavirus cases in the country would strengthen demand for personal mobility, and that lockdowns in some cities had not yet hurt the carmaker's sales or production. Following a steep fall in car sales last year when the pandemic first hit, Maruti's sales picked up in India over the past two quarters as people opted out of public transport and poured their lockdown-led savings into big-ticket items such as cars. Still, Maruti's fourth-quarter results took a hit due to rising commodity prices and supply chain disruptions. Maruti has passed on some of the

"If the current demand situation continues, April-June should be "decent," he said. The carmaker, which sells one out of two bought in the country, reported a 9.7 per cent year-on-year (YoY) decline in profit at Rs 1,166 crore for the March 2021 quarter, on the back of weak demand and higher commodity costs but revenue was strong. The New Delhi-based company reported a profit of Rs 1,291.7 crore in the year-ago period. Revenue from operations in Q4 FY21 stood at Rs 24,023.7 crore, up 32 per cent from Rs 18,198.7 crore in the year-ago period backed by strong double-digit growth in sales. Maruti Suzuki sold 4,92,235 vehicles in the March quarter, up 28 per cent YoY.

MARKET SENTIMENTS LOOK UP

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 27

The Sensex gained over 500 points for the second day in a row, after the Covid scare seemed to come down due to a drop in fresh daily cases. The Sensex closed 558 points, or 1.15 per cent, up at 48,944 while Nifty-50 rose to 14,653, up 168 points. The BSE Mid-cap and Small-cap indices up 1.04 per cent and 1.49 per cent. The daily Covid cases on Monday were lower at 3.23 lakh compared to around 3.5 lakh on Sunday and Maharashtra also reported lower daily infections at 48,700. The market sentiment also got a boost as help started pouring in from many countries. "Investors' expectations from earnings outcome by heavyweights, the progress of the vaccination drive and a dip in the Covid cases further boosted sentiments," said Ajit Mishra, VP-research, Religare Broking. On Tuesday, FPIs were net sellers by Rs 1,454.75 crore.

RETAIL TRADE COUNTS LOSSES

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 27

Lock-down and restrictions in a few states has caused a business loss of Rs 5 lakh crore to unorganised traders, while the organised retail too estimates around 40 per cent loss in states affected by the second wave. The Confederation of Indian Traders says curfew and other restrictions has caused a business loss of about Rs 5 lakh crore in the past 25 days nationally. Out of Rs 5 lakh crore, the loss of retail traders is estimated to be about Rs 3.5 lakh crore and wholesale business of Rs 1.5 lakh crore. Delhi alone recorded a business loss of more than Rs 25,000 crore. The calculations are based on the trader feedback from 14 states, excluding West Bengal, NE, Punjab, Haryana, J&K and Goa. Interstate trade and loading and unloading activities also are getting affected due to night curfews.

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Boxer injured in Worlds bout dies

Lausanne, Switzerland: An 18-year-old boxer from Jordan has died after being seriously injured in a bout at the World Youth Championships, the International Boxing Association said on Tuesday. Rashed Al-Swaisat was treated in the ring and then hospitalised after being knocked out in his preliminary-round lightweight fight against Estonian boxer Anton Vinogradov on April 16 in Kielce, Poland. "It is with deep sadness that we learned of the passing of Rashed Al-Swaisat of Jordan, who had been admitted to hospital on April 16 further to his fight during the AIBA Youth World Championships," AIBA said. — AP

FC Goa play out yet another draw

Margao: FC Goa conceded an 89th minute goal to squander the chance to become the first Indian club to win a match in the prestigious AFC Champions League as they played out a 1-1 draw with Al Rayyan of Qatar here Monday. Jorge Ortiz gave FC Goa the lead in the third minute of the Group 'E' match but Ali Ferydoon equalised with just a minute left in regulation time. The Indian Super League side went out of reckoning for a knockout berth after Al Wahda of UAE beat Persepolis FC 1-0 in another Group 'E' match. — PTI

Repsol Honda gear up for Spanish GP

Spain: After an emotional return to MotoGP in Portimao, Marc Marquez's rehabilitation continues in Jerez as Pol Espargaro aims to make amends for the previous round. Heading to the iconic Jerez de la Frontera for the Gran Premio Red Bull de España, the MotoGP World Championship is primed for another exciting weekend. The Repsol Honda Team will again be operating at full capacity as Marquez and Espargaro line up together aboard the RC213V. This weekend there will be a fifth Honda on the grid as Stefan Bradl returns to the World Championship as a wildcard. Marc put in a hero's effort to race to seventh in Portugal.

Correa keeps Lazio in CL hunt
Joaquin scores brace to beat AC Milan, Napoli blank Torino to go third

Rome, April 27: Joaquin Correa ensured Lazio kept their hopes of Champions League qualification alive on Monday with a double in a 3-0 win over AC Milan while Napoli jumped up to third thanks to a 2-0 triumph at Torino. Correa opened the scoring for Lazio with only a minute on the clock at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome and added the second five minutes after the break. Ciro Immobile struck the third with three minutes left as Lazio moved five points off the Champions League spots with a game in hand on their rivals. "This was like a final for us, the last chance to stay in with a shout for the top four... It was a clear and dominant victory," Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi told Sky Sport Italia. Inzaghi's side sit sixth, behind AC Milan who are level on 66 points with Napoli and Juventus — third and fourth respectively — but have dropped down to fifth after their second straight league defeat. They are 13 points behind leaders Inter Milan, who can win their first league title since 2010



Lazio's Joaquin Correa (left) vies for the ball with Ante Rebic of AC Milan in their Italian league match at Rome's Olympic Stadium on Monday.

on Saturday if they beat Crotone and second-placed Atalanta fail to win at Sassuolo on Sunday. Stefano Pioli's Milan, who started the weekend in second place, could have been beaten by a larger margin as Manuel Lazzari

was denied a goal just before the break by the tightest of VAR offside calls and Italy forward Immobile struck the post seven minutes before he scored his 18th league goal of the campaign. Pioli was however left

frustrated by Correa's second, which was given after a lengthy VAR check following what he felt was a foul from Lucas Leiva on Hakan Calhanoglu. "I don't understand how it wasn't given as a foul on Calhanoglu, said Pioli.

THE RESULTS

Torino	0
Napoli	2
(Bakayoko 11, Osimhen 13)	
Lazio	3
(Correa 2, 51, Immobile 87)	
AC Milan	0

"He looked at it again and from the replay you cannot say Leiva doesn't catch Calhanoglu and completely miss the ball." Napoli moved into third thanks to first-half goals from Tiemoue Bakayoko and Victor Osimhen earlier on Monday. They could have been further ahead at the break following a dominant opening period in which Piotr Zielinski hit the post and Matteo Politano was unlucky to see his deflected shot slide wide. Lorenzo Insigne, playing his 300th Serie A match for Napoli, also hit the upright with a curling shot just before the hour mark. They failed to add to their tally but ran out winners to put pressure on their rivals. — AFP

SOCIEDAD EDGE PAST EIBAR TO KEEP HOLD ON EUROPA SPOT

Madrid, April 27: Alexander Isak scored a first-half winner as Real Sociedad defeated Basque Country rivals Eibar 1-0 to strengthen their hold on fifth place in the Spanish league. The win left Sociedad three points ahead of sixth-placed Real Betis and four points in front of seventh-placed Villarreal with five rounds remaining. The teams finishing in fifth and sixth places secure a Europa League berth next season. It was only the second win for Sociedad in their last seven league matches. It was the fifth consecutive loss for last-placed Eibar, which is winless in 16 straight league games.

● The win left Sociedad three points ahead of sixth-placed Real Betis and four points in front of seventh-placed Villarreal with five rounds remaining.

It stayed seven points from escaping the relegation zone. Isak scored at Eibar's Ipurua Stadium with a shot from close range in the 26th minute. Sociedad next visit Huesca, while Eibar host Alavés, another relegation-threatened team. — AP

Iheanacho leads Foxes fightback to sink Palace

Leicester (United Kingdom), April 27: Leicester strengthened their grip on third place in the Premier League as Kelechi Iheanacho's superb strike capped a spirited fightback in Monday's 2-1 win against Crystal Palace. Brendan Rodgers' side trailed to Wilfried Zaha's first half goal. But Timothy Castagne equalised soon after the interval with his first goal since September. And Nigeria striker Iheanacho sealed Leicester's second successive victory when he scored with a thunder-

ous finish 10 minutes from full-time. Leicester are four points clear of fourth placed Chelsea and seven ahead of fifth placed West Ham as they bid to qualify for next season's Champions League. "It was a very important win for us. It was the third game in nine days so a tough schedule," Rodgers said. "Going one behind against Palace, they're super organised and tough to break down. I thought the players were outstanding. They kept the calmness and control

and scored two very good goals." With five games left, the FA Cup finalists have already matched their total of 62 points from last season. A late collapse cost the Foxes a place in the Champions League in 2020, but Rodgers' men are firmly on course to make amends thanks to the sparkling form of Iheanacho. "We spoke about it at the start of the season and put it to bed them. Our performance levels this season have shown that is in the past," Rodgers said. — AFP

TOKYO | OLYMPICS

Host towns pull out over corona

Tokyo, April 27: Hundreds of Japanese towns and cities have been forced to rethink plans to host Olympic teams because the coronavirus will prevent public appearances and require costly safety measures. The western town of Okuizumo spent more than \$5 million preparing to welcome India's hockey team for a pre-Games training camp, only to scrap the visit because of Covid-19. After sinking money into upgrading sports facilities, Okuizumo balked when it became clear it would have to provide bubble-like biosecurity measures with regular virus tests and medical care. "We wanted to have one of the world's top tier teams visit our town and show their skills to local children," town official Katsumi Nagase said. "But that seems impossible now." More than 500 municipalities signed up to host athletes and officials in a scheme aimed at broadening the Olympics' benefits beyond Tokyo. Some, like Okuizumo, have already scrapped plans to host overseas athletes, while others are devising careful programmes they hope will

● The western town of Okuizumo spent more than \$5 million preparing to welcome India's hockey team for a pre-Games training camp, only to scrap the visit because of Covid-19. keep everyone safe. Instead of giving residents the chance to meet elite athletes and try out new sports, towns will have to ditch any physical contact, school visits and public training sessions. Kurihara city in northern Miyagi prefecture was planning to host South Africa's hockey team, but decided the expense was no longer worth it given the limitations imposed by virus measures. "It's a project that will use our tax resources," Hidenori Sasaki, an official with the local board of education, said. "If it becomes just athletes holding a training camp without any exchanges with local residents, local citizens won't enjoy the benefits." In some cases, Olympic teams have cancelled, worried about the risk of infection before the Games. — AFP

HOCKEY UMPIRE'S MANAGER VIRENDRA DIES OF COVID-19

New Delhi, April 27: Indian hockey umpire's manager Virendra Singh has died of Covid-19 related complications and his demise was mourned by the game's governing body. Singh was 47. He died in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, on Monday. Virendra had officiated in a number of All India tournaments and National Championships. Mourners his demise, Hockey India president Gyanendra Ningombam said, "We at Hockey India are deeply saddened to learn about the untimely demise of Virendra Singh." 'SHOOTER DADI' CORONA POSITIVE, IN HOSPITAL Octogenarian shooter Chandro Tomar, nicknamed 'Shooter Dadi', has tested positive for Covid-19 and admitted to a hospital due to difficulty in breathing. The Twitter page of the 89-year-old legendary shooter, hailing from the Baghat village in Uttar Pradesh, posted the development. — PTI

