

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VISAKHAPATNAM | TUESDAY | 27 APRIL 2021

WEATHER

Max: 38.6°C
Min: 26.4°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: Nill

Forecast: Mist.
Max/Min temp.
38/26 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Shuddha Pournami
till 9 am; Chaitra Bahula Padyami
till 5.14 am (Wednesday)
Star: Swati till 8.07 pm
Varjyam: 1.03 am to 2.27 am
(Wednesday)
Durmuhurtam: 8.27 am to
9.17 am; 11.05 pm to 11.50 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm

HIJRI CALENDAR
Ramzan 14,1442 AH
PRAYERS
(ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.05 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.00 pm
Maghrib: 6.19 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.16 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.33 AM

MOONSET TODAY 5.37 AM

MOONRISE TOMORROW 6.38 PM

RAMZAN TIMINGS

IFTAR: 6.20 PM (TODAY)

SEHR: 4.15 AM (TOMORROW)

COUNTER POINT



Shh! Don't say no oxygen.

You might be booked

under the Gangster Act!

SHORT TAKES

IMD predicts wet spell till April 30

New Delhi: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicted a wet spell over several parts of India, including central, south and northeast India, from April 26 to 30. Thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds (speed reaching 30-40 km per hour) are very likely at over Telangana, Kerala and Mahe from April 26. Lightning at isolated places likely over coastal AP, Rayalaseema, south interior Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

SC advances summer vacation

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday decided to advance its summer vacation, which will now commence from May 8 in view of sudden surge in Covid cases. Chief Justice N.V. Ramana on his first working day held an "emergent meeting" with bar bodies to take stalk of rising pandemic situation.

Wear masks at home too: Centre

New Delhi: The Centre said it is time people start wearing masks at homes as well, and refrain from inviting guests. NITI Aayog member Dr V.K. Paul said if there is a Covid-positive person at home, he or she must wear a mask to prevent others from getting infected.

Nomadland wins Oscar glory

Los Angeles: Meditative road drama *Nomadland* got the Oscar for best picture as well as best director for Chloe Zhao, the first woman of colour to get the coveted trophy, at the 93rd Academy Awards. Anthony Hopkins won best actor award for *The Father*.

Report on Page 4

Report on tabloid

WORLD | 5

Boris in soup for taking deaths lightly



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SPORTS | 8

Ashwin withdraws, Covid scare in IPL



TABLOID

No more Maldives vacation



Vol. 36 No. 333 Established 1938 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

Run for life



A man tries to escape the heat at a mass cremation of Covid-19 victims and others at Gazipur Crematorium in New Delhi on Monday.

— PTI

Jagan sets 2-yr deadline for rural Internet linkage

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 26

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Monday directed officials to ensure that all villages in the state have internet connectivity in the next two years.

Speaking at a review meeting on the rural internet connectivity and laptop scheme for students, the Chief Minister laid stress on providing internet connectivity with unlimited capacity or at least 20 GB capacity in villages to help the people adapt to the new 'Work From Home' model. He also called for provid-

ing internet connectivity in the upcoming YSR Jagananna Colonies and instructed the authorities to come up with an action plan accordingly, keeping in mind the addition of 31 lakh houses. He directed the officials to lay underground cables in 108 cyclone-affected villages to ensure uninterrupted internet connectivity even during the storms.

He called for setting up YSR Village Digital Libraries at village secretariats and asked the officials to arrange six computers at each library by the time the construction of libraries was completed. With regard to the

Amma Vodi scheme, the CM said laptops must be provided to the students who opted for it on January 9. Earlier, the state government provided an option to the students pursuing Classes from IX to XII to either receive a laptop or money.

He said the laptops that are being provided to the students should come with a proper guarantee and warranty cards, along with 'service' support. If a laptop wasn't functioning well, the Chief Minister said the student should be able to hand it over to the concerned village secretariat, which will get it repaired.

Covid cases in AP slightly slowed down on April 26

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 26

Andhra Pradesh registered a slight dip in fresh Coronavirus infections at 9,881 with 51 deaths on Monday against 12,634 infections with 69 deaths on Sunday.

State health authorities reported here on Monday that out of 74,041 samples tested, only 9,881 persons were found infected with the Coronavirus indicating that despite more samples tested, caseload had come down.

The health authorities tested 62,885 samples and found 12,634 persons infected with the virus on April 25. Out of a total number of 1,60,68,648 samples tested so far in the state, 10,43,441 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 9,40,574 were recovered while 95,131 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus virus infections, Nellore district found to be the worst hit

14 STUDENTS TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, APRIL 26

Fourteen girls studying in Balayogi Gurukulam at Adoorpalli village in Chejerla mandal have tested positive for Covid-19 on Monday. School authorities organised Covid tests for 73 students after noticing Covid symptoms on April 20.

The officials have allotted vacant classrooms at the school to the infected students.

with 1,592 followed by 1,302 in East Godavari, 1,048 in Guntur, 1,030 in Visakhapatnam, 906 in Srikakulam, 860 in Chittoor, 629 in Kurnool, 616 in Vizianagaram, 522 in Prakasam, 483 in Kadapa, 395 in Anantapur,

GOVT STAFF SEEK WORK FROM HOME MODEL

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 26

Government employees have urged the state government to allow either 50 per cent of them to attend to offices or permit them to work from home, in the wake of several of them getting infected with Coronavirus.

They hoped the government would consider their request positively.

■ Full report on Page 2

EC should be charged for murder: Madras HC

Slams poll panel for allowing rallies, spreading Covid-19

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 26

The Madras High Court came down heavily on the Election Commission (EC) on Monday with scathing comments on how it was the "only institution" responsible for the second wave of the deadly coronavirus that is sweeping the country as it did not stop political parties from holding election rallies.

A bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy, hearing a petition on whether there were adequate Covid safety procedures in place during vote counting at the Karur constituency, went so far as to say, "Election Commission officers should be booked on murder charges probably."

"Despite repeated orders of this court going on like a broken record at the foot of at least every election petition entertained that Covid protocol ought to be maintained during the campaign time the significance of adhering to such protocol may have been lost on the Election Commission going by the puerile silence on the part of the Commission as cam-

Bengaluru, April 26:

The Karnataka government on Monday announced more restrictions in what it termed as a 'close down' across the state for 14 days from Tuesday night in a bid to control the huge spike in Covid-19 cases in the state.

The state cabinet led by Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa also decided to provide Covid vaccinations free of cost at government hospitals for those between 18-44 years of age. "Strict measures to control Covid will be taken. From tomorrow night till the next 14 days, there will be a close down for the

whole state," Yediyurappa said.

Speaking to reporters after a three-hour long Cabinet meeting here, he said shops selling essential commodities will be allowed to remain open only from 6 am to 10 am.

"The agriculture sector, manufacturing sector, construction sector and medical and essential sectors will continue to operate," he said.

Night curfew, which is in place now between 9 pm to 6 am, would continue, the Chief Minister said. Transport services would not ply during the close down period.

— PTI

paings and rallies were conducted without distancing norms being maintained and in wanton disregard of the other items of the protocol," the Bench said. "Were you on another planet when political rallies were being held?"

the chief justice asked EC's standing counsel when he told the court that measures had been put in place to ensure Covid protocol during vote counting. The court has asked for a suitable blueprint from EC on how Covid

TN LETS STERLITE TO OPEN UNIT TO MAKE OXYGEN

G BABU JAYAKUMAR AND D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, APRIL 26

The Tamil Nadu government decided to allow Sterlite Industries to produce Oxygen at its Copper Smelter plant in Thoothukudi on Monday even as Advocate General Vijay Narayan told the Madras High Court that most of the oxygen manufactured there was of industrial quality and not fit for medical use.

Though the nod to open the oxygen manufacturing plant alone was given for four months, on a temporary basis, at an all-party meeting, attended by representatives of 'recognised political parties', leaders of a few other political parties came down heavily on the decision.

Among the conditions laid out for Sterlite were that none of the other units in the Thoothukudi plant can be opened or operated and the the oxygen produced in the next four months, which may be extended in view of the continuing pandemic, should be primarily supplied to hospitals in Tamil Nadu.

Serum, Bharat Biotech told to cut vaccine prices

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

Reacting to criticism from several states and political parties over profiteering during a major health crisis, and many asking that there be uniform pricing of vaccines for the Central and state governments, the BJP-led government on Monday asked Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech to the lower prices of their Covid-19 vaccines - Covishield and Covaxin, respectively.

It is learnt that the issue of vaccine pricing was discussed at a meeting chaired by Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba on Monday after the two companies announced their vaccine prices. It is expected the two companies will now come up with revised, reduced pricing for their vaccines.

The price for Covaxin was fixed at ₹600 per dose for state governments and at ₹1,200 per dose for private hospitals, while Covishield was priced at ₹400 per dose for state governments and ₹600 per dose for private hospitals. Both vaccines are avail-

Modi, Biden discuss Covid on telephone

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to the US President Joe Biden who assured him of America's "shoulder-to-shoulder steadfast support and solidarity" by deploying resources such as oxygen-related supplies, therapeutics, ventilators.

In a phone conversation late Monday evening, Modi highlighted the importance of smooth and efficient supply chains of vaccine raw materials

and medicines and Mr Biden assured him that the US would identify sources of raw materials to be made available for the manufacture of Covishield vaccines.

Prime Minister Modi also conveyed to the American President India's commitment to contain the Covid pandemic globally through vaccine "Maitri" (India's vaccine exports), and its participation in Covax and the Quad Vaccine Initiatives.

■ Page 4: PM, Suga firm on India-Japan bilateral ties

able to the Central government at a rate of ₹150 per dose. Several states including Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Delhi, Maharashtra and Rajasthan have announced that they will administer these vaccines free of cost to their 18-plus population from May 1.

A huge rush for vaccines is expected as India continues to report a very high number of daily Covid-19 cases. On Monday, the country registered nearly 3.53 lakh fresh cases and 2,812 deaths, putting a huge load on an already fragile healthcare system.

RIPPLE | EFFECT

Migrant workers return home in AP; spark fears of Covid spread

Karnataka lockdown triggers exodus

DC CORRESPONDENT ANANTAPUR, APRIL 26

With the Karnataka government announcing a 14-day lockdown from April 27 night across the state and the closure of its borders, people from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana state are returning to native places. Both states will stop running buses towards Bengaluru and also other districts like Bellary, Raichur, Bidar and Tumkur in Karnataka from Tuesday.

District administrations along the border in AP were alerted over the possible rise of positive cases

● Though Karnataka CM B.S. Yediyurappa announced the construction, manufacturing, and agriculture sectors will be allowed to continue, the migrant farmers and settlers returning to their villages suspecting that the crisis would continue.

● District administrations along the border in AP were alerted over the possible rise of positive cases labourers from Karnataka.

in villages following the return of migrant labourers from Karnataka.

Though Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa announced the construction, manufacturing, and agriculture sectors will be allowed to continue, the migrant farmers and set-

tlers returning to their villages suspecting that the crisis would continue. A similar situation was witnessed last year when the lockdown was imposed across the country.

Border areas like Madakasira, Kalyanadurgam, and Rayadurgam in Anant-

apur districts, Adoni, Emiganur, and Mantralayam in Kurnool, Madanapalle in Chittoor district have close access with Karnataka.

For instance, all five mandals of the Madakasira Assembly segment covered by Karnataka from all four sides, except an R&B Road from Hindupur, and the area had connectivity with Bengaluru and Tumkur. The Mantralayam temple town is located in Andhra Pradesh closer to the Karnataka border and KSRTC operates a huge number of buses on normal days.

The sudden decision,

however, caused confusion for many who had to visit Karnataka to attend marriage and other important occasions. A man from Hyderabad had to travel to Hospet in Vijayanagar district of Karnataka on April 29 to get married. With no clear instructions about passes, the family was plunged into confusion and approached Karnataka officials.

"We got permission for marriage at a function hall one week ago by following Covid-19 norms, but the sudden lockdown put things out of gear," the family members of the bridegroom said.

TD's Ravi Kumar dies, Sabbam Hari serious

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 26

Telugu Desam leader and GVMC 31st ward corporator Vanapalli Ravi Kumar on Monday succumbed to Covid-19 at a hospital in Visakhapatnam in the early hours of Monday.

He was in home isolation for some time and when the situation became serious, he was rushed to the hospital located at Seethammadhara here.

Earlier, he was elected for the first time to council in 2009 and was most vocal in the proceedings.

Ravi Kumar was known for charitable and social work and served many people under SaiPuja Voluntary organisation.

Meanwhile, the condition of former mayor and Telugu Desam leader Sabbam Hari remained critical.

The Telugu Desam leader has been on ventilator and was undergoing treatment in a corporate hospital for the last one week. Telugu Desam national president Nara Chandrababu Naidu and many other leaders called his family members and wished him a speedy recovery.

IN BRIEF

**TIRUPATI CITY NOW
CONTAINMENT ZONE;
SHOPS 7 AM TO 2 PM****DC CORRESPONDENT**
TIRUPATI, APRIL 26

The entire city of Tirupati has been declared a containment zone until further notice, after a continuous spike in the number of Covid-19 cases. All commercial establishments in the city will remain open from 7 am to 2 pm, until the situation is under control.

On Monday, city MLA B. Karunakar Reddy, municipal commissioner P.S. Girisha, and Tirupati SP Venkata Appala Naidu chaired a meeting with the representatives of the Tirupati Chamber of Commerce and trade unions, and discussed the measures to be taken to control the spread of Covid-19 in the city.

"All shops and commercial establishments will have to be shut by 2 pm every day, from April 27, whereas all restaurants and food outlets will only provide take-away service. Pharmacies can function round the clock," Reddy said, while addressing the media.

He also warned that the state will initiate strict action against private hospitals who overcharge Covid-19 patients. Cautioning private hospitals and medical stores, he added that a task force committee, headed by an IPS officer, has been formed to keep a tab on them. Stating that the entire city has been declared as a containment zone, Girisha said, "Almost all divisions under the civic body have active cases, and that too in high numbers, because of which they have decided to impose a curfew from 7 pm to 5 am every day."

"The government has issued orders to impose curfew from 10 pm to 5 am. However, the civic body, in coordination with the police department, has decided to implement the curfew from 7 pm daily, owing to the continuous surge in Covid-19 positive cases," he added.

The authorities, after thorough deliberation, have also decided to direct the Thathaiya Guntta Gangamma temple authorities to observe the 'Ganga Jatara' in solitude, given the Covid-19 situation in the country for the second consecutive year.

A decision was also taken to reduce congestion at the city vegetable market, by decentralising it across nearly six locations.

**COLLECTOR DECLARES
SRIKAKULAM TOWN
A CONTAINMENT ZONE****DC CORRESPONDENT**
SRIKAKULAM, APRIL 26

The district collector late on Monday evening announced that the entire Srikakulam town has been declared as a containment zone effective from Tuesday due to the spurt in the cases.

He said 30 per cent of the population has been infected with Covid-19. The town has a population around 2 lakh. All the shops would be closed after 2 pm for a period of 14 days. The district reported 906 positive cases during the last 24 hours and the total active cases have gone up to 12,229.

**CHINTA SUSPICIOUS
OF EVMs USED IN
TIRUPATI BYPOLL****DC CORRESPONDENT**
TIRUPATI, APRIL 26

Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll Congress candidate and former union minister Chinta Mohan here on Monday expressed suspicion over electronic voting machines (EVMs) used in the polling held in the Tirupati parliamentary constituency on April 17.

Addressing the media, the Congress Working Committee (CWC) member came down heavily on the Election Commission, alleging that it has failed to act against the ruling dispositions at the Centre and AP, though they have indulged in election malpractices.

"BJP and YSRC have come to power in the 2019 general elections by indulging in electoral frauds. Modi and Shah were involved in this high-level fraud. The Central Election Commission (CEC) and CRPF have helped them in indulging such electoral frauds, while the Bengaluru-based company - BHEL, extended a major help to them by making tampered EVM machines that gained artificial votes for the BJP and YSRC," he alleged.

He alleged that the EC and official machinery extended help to the YSRC for casting nearly 3.50 lakh bogus votes in the recently concluded Tirupati LS bypoll.

Govt to audit remdesivir, oxygen for optimal usage

Misuse of the two by any means won't be tolerated: Singhal**DC CORRESPONDENT**
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 26

The Andhra Pradesh government will audit the supply and use of medical oxygen and remdesivir to avoid their misuse in the state.

Health principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal told media persons here on Monday that given the precarious nature of their availability, the state government had to come up with a series of measures to ensure that the medical oxygen and remdesivir vials to be given only to the needy Covid-19 patients and to avoid issues related to their short supply.

The audit will also check mismanagement especially with remdesivir vials by hoarding and diversion to black market and also their sale at exorbitant cost.

The senior official stated that they had got allotment of 340 tonnes of medical oxygen on Monday and added that their daily requirement was ranging from 320 to 330 tonnes at present when the demand for it peaked to 260 tonnes per day during the prevalence of the first wave of the pandemic.

With regard to the management of medical oxygen at the hospitals, he said that they had asked for deputing a technical person at the district level so that in case of any trouble in handling the oxygen, he would rush to the hospital and attend to any technical issues to avoid mishaps.

On remdesivir vials he said that some private hospitals were procuring them directly from the manufacturers while some hospitals are placing an indent with the state



A health worker carries out a Covid-19 test to a sick woman sitting in an autorickshaw at a stadium in Vijayawada on Monday.

— C. NARAYNA RAO

JCs to take care of Covid management in districts

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 26

Joint collectors dealing with village/ward secretariats and development to other JCs within the district.

With this, the Joint collectors will exclusively focus their attention of the functioning of government and AarogyaSri empanelled hospitals treating Covid patients and also on the functioning of district control rooms attending to 104 calls and other issues.

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At the district level, the district collector will divide all private hospitals permitted to treat Covid-19 patients into clusters and appoint a district-level officer as in-charge to inspect these hospitals and receive complaints and take appropriate action.

A district-level flying squad with representatives from drugs control administration, vigilance and enforcement and medical and health to be constituted to keep tab and initiate strict action on hospital flouting the guidelines.

aged between 18 and 45 years as the Centre would provide the doses periodically.

He also announced curbs in public places by restricting only 50 persons to attend any functions and temporary closure of stadia, gyms and swimming pools while public transport and film theatres to have only 50 per cent of their capacity.

government for supply and added that the state government would supply if asked and cautioned that its misuse by any means would not be tolerated.

He said that when the indent was placed for 8,352 vials, they had supplied 1,820.

Singhal said that the government would take up vaccination of people

Government employees have urged the state government to allow either 50 per cent of them to attend to offices or permit them to work from home, in the wake of several of them getting infected with Covid-19.

Even though the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has been affecting thousands of people and causing the death of several people every day, no exception was given to the employees working in both the government and private sectors from attending the offices.

At Andhra Pradesh Infrastructure Corporation's office, several employees have been infected and nearly 50 per cent of them have been on leave to take treatment. In the directorate of Animal Husbandry, nearly 15 employees have been infected while one died of the virus. In APSRTC's office, several employees, including some senior officials, have been infected.

"We are optimistic that the state government will take a decision positively

Govt staff seeks to WFH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 26

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AP SETS UP 3-TIER STRUCTURE FOR COVID MANAGEMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 26

The state government has set up a three-tier structure by setting up a state-level task force with special chief secretary, higher education, Satish Chandra as the chairperson and state Covid-19 Command and Control Centre chairman Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy as a member.

The state government issued an order on Monday by setting up a state-level task force with special chief secretary, higher education, Satish Chandra as the chairperson and state Covid-19 Command and Control Centre chairman Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy as a member.

Vigilance and enforcement director K.V. Rajendranath Reddy, health principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal, health and family welfare commissioner K. Bhaskar and drugs control administration director general Ravi Shankar will be the other members.

At the district level, the district collector will divide all private hospitals permitted to treat Covid-19 patients into clusters and appoint a district-level officer as in-charge to inspect these hospitals and receive complaints and take appropriate action.

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PPE kits and medical waste dumped in open garbage bin and left exposed to the visitors inside the King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Guidelines issued to Covid hospitals to ensure safety

**SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN |
DC**
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 26

Andhra Pradesh fire service authorities have come up with a set of guidelines for hospitals treating Coronavirus patients to avoid chances of fire mishaps in the state.

The managements of the hospitals have been asked to ensure proper functioning of the fire-fighting equipment installed in their units and divide the floors as fire compartments to avoid spread of the fire.

No obstruction should be found on the ramps and staircases and a ban is imposed against locking of the fire exit doors.

Hospitals have to display the 'evacuation plan' at places where fire-fighting equipment is located and also at exit ways.

The authorities have asked the managements to accord top priority to the immediate shifting of patients to safety in case of a fire mishap and suggested posting a fire warden on each floor.

The need to ensure proper functioning of electric appliances and air-conditioners has also been

There was also a call to avoid storage of cots, mattresses and furniture in the basements and rule out any chance for setting up any medical store in the basement.

Kitchen and canteen may be set up in a separate building, it was advised, and the need for providing proper training to doctors, nurses and the staff on how to shift the patients to safety in case of any fire mishap.

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The fire authorities have been advised for use of BIS standard electrical equipment in hospitals and arranging for repair

works only with certified electricians. There is the need to fix fuses with proper rating to provide protection from power fluctuations. Use of miniature circuit breakers has been advised.

Hospitals should not allow people to charge laptops and mobile phones near the beds. Call 1912 for information pertaining to power related issues, it was advised.

In a separate development, deputy chief minister and minister for health Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas said the state government is taking all necessary steps to avoid shortage of medical oxygen and Remdesivir injections in the hospitals.

State Covid special officer T. Krishna Babu inspected the Covid Care Centres at Gudavalli in Krishna district and Tenali in Guntur district on Monday.

At Gudavalli, he said that 112 out of the space set apart for 500 patients on admission were taking treatment at present and facility for 25 more patients will be added shortly. At Tenali, he said there was the need to enhance the number of doctors.

NAIDU SAYS GOVT FAILED TO SUPPLY MEDICAL OXYGEN TO CORONA-HIT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 26

Telugu Desam national president and former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu said that the state government had failed to ensure proper supply of medical oxygen in hospitals treating Coronavirus-infected patients in the state.

In a statement issued here on Monday, Naidu turned critical on Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for not taking responsibility to extend necessary help to the patients and blamed the ministers for remaining mute spectators.

Referring to Maharaja hospital in Vizianagaram, Naidu alleged that several Covid-19 affected patients died for want of timely supply of medical oxygen and expressed shock and grief over their death.

He also castigated the state government alleging that it was unable to provide correct information on facilities available at Covid hospitals.

2 Covid-hit die as oxygen pipe leaks

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 26

Two Covid patients died when oxygen supply was cut off due to technical snag developed in the supply system in Maharaja District Headquarters Hospital in Vizianagaram in the early hours of Monday. The officials detected the snag and shifted other patients to various hospitals and saved their lives. The supply was restored an hour later.

Reports from various sources said the officials detected oxygen supply interruption when an alarm was raised following the death of two patients due to lack of oxygen supply.

They immediately arranged ambulances drawn from different sources and shifted them to nearby Covid hospitals. The officials said 290 patients were undergoing treatment in the hospital and of them 25 were on the oxygen support.

"The whole process of shifting was completed in one hour," said a senior medical officer.

District collector Dr M. Jawaharal denied that the two patients died due to interruption in oxygen supply. He clarified that the two died due to Covid-related complications.

He said the leakage to the oxygen supplying pipe was detected and rectified immediately. The hospital has a storage capacity of 2kl and to compensate the loss, a tanker with 1kl capacity was sourced from Visakhapatnam Steel Plant with the help sought from the district minister Botsa Satyanarayana.

The collector said the hospital has a capacity for 200 patients only but on humanitarian grounds, 90 more patients were taken in.

Superintendent of Maharaja Hospital Dr Gowri Shankar said there was no shortage of oxygen in the district and adding 200 more beds shortly to meet the present demand.

A request was made to Visakhapatnam district collector V. Vinay Chand to reserve some beds in NRI Hospital, Visakhapatnam.

GRAM | SWARAJ

The two ensured well-maintained roads, 100% collection of property taxes, improved sanitation

Kakinada Rural Mandal, G.Ragampet role model for other villages

VADREVV SRINIVAS | DC
KAKINADA, APRIL 26

In a boost for grassroots-level governance, Kakinada Rural Mandal and G. Ragampet in Peddapuram Mandal have been recognised as role models for other villages in achieving 'Gram Swaraj'.

These villages, with well-maintained roads and improved sanitation, also ensure hundred per cent collection of property taxes.

Further, planned planta-

tion drives have also been initiated in the villages to maintain ecological balance along with earning money through garbage.

In these villages, the gram panchayat functions in a systematic manner, and local governance has also been impressive. In 2021, Kakinada rural Mandal bagged the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Shashaktikaran Puraskar, while G. Ragampeta village secured the Gram Panchayat Development

Plan Award.

The Mandal and the villages have been maintaining records, which are updated online from time to time. Further, the Mandal is maintaining e-governance on an everyday basis, without causing any delays.

In order to solve water scarcity problems, the Mandal set up a central water protection scheme in Panduru village, and a separate water system was established at Turangi.

"We found other sources

of revenue, such as selling coconuts from coconut trees in government sites, we established solid waste management centre sheds to make vermicompost, which is being sold to the farmers. The MPDO meeting hall is being given on rent for various functions. We have earned nearly ₹10 lakh as additional income. Besides, the routine revenue from property taxes was between ₹10 to ₹12 lakh," said P. Narayan Murthy, the development officer for Kakinada rural

Mandal parishad.

Further, he said that several other issues such as modification of the electrical systems in Primary Health Care centres, development of school buildings, and other grievances are being sorted out in a time-bound manner.

Adding that the Mandal falls under agriculture minister Kurasala Kannababu's Kakinada rural constituency, Murthy said that the minister paid more attention towards the development

of this Mandal.

G. Ragampet village has also become a role model for other villages, with its green cover and cleanliness.

A. Ramana Reddy, the development officer for Peddapuram Mandal Parishad, said, "The villagers have given full support to implement government schemes in the village.

Neethipudi Selat Raju, the grade-I secretary of the village, said that wet and dry garbage is separated, and manure is made with vermicompost, which is sold at ₹5 per kg to the farmers.

A park has also been developed using the vermicompost. Additionally, cent percent property tax has been collected, amounting to nearly ₹25 to ₹35 lakh. Open defecation has also been completely prohibited, with every house having its own toilet.

"These activities will also continue in the future," he added.

IN BRIEF

Special trains for summer

Visakhapatnam: The railways has launched special trains to clear the summer rush. The trains include Agartala-Bengaluru Cant. special, Villupuram and Kahargpur and Howrah-Yesvantpur Special express. Visakhapatnam-Raipur special train is cancelled on April 27 due to safety related works being taken up in the Sambalpur division of East Coast Railway.

OVER 4,000 PATIENTS GET DISCHARGED

FROM PAGE 1

Officials have reported 10,169 Covid cases in East Godavari, 9,129 in Guntur, 9,077 in Nellore, 8,017 in Kurnool, 7,692 in Visakhapatnam, 6,921 in Krishna, 5,822 in Anantapur, 4,869 in Prakasam, 4,302 in Vizianagaram, 2,404 in Kadapa and 1,710 in West Godavari.

The state health authorities discharged 4,431 Coronavirus infected patients after recovery in the last 24 hours in the state.

Among daily cases of deaths of Coronavirus infected patients, Chittoor recorded six followed by five each in Kurnool and Vizianagaram, four each in Anantapur, East Godavari, and West Godavari three each in Guntur, Kadapa, Krishna, Srikakulam, and Visakhapatnam and two in Prakasam. With this, the death toll rose to 7,736.

BELGIAN NATIONAL FOUND DEAD IN VIZAG

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 26

A Belgian national was found dead in his hotel room in Visakhapatnam city on Sunday. He was identified as Verneulen Geert, 58, who has been living in an upscale hotel near NAD Kotha Road in the city since February 24.

According to Airport Police Station Inspector K. Umakanth, the Belgian national was here to work on some erection of machinery at a plywood factory in Atchutapuram Special Economic Zone.

He has been sick for quite some time and also underwent some treatment at a corporate hospital.

CHANGE OF NAME AND DATE OF BIRTH

I, KIMIDI ARAN JYOTHI spouse of Ex. No. 14401613W, Naik/DMT, V.Venkata Ramana residing at Bhasur - Village & Post, Palakonda - Mandalam, Srikakulam - Dist (A.P.), PIN - 532440 have changed my Name from KIMIDI ARAN JYOTHI to VARADA ARAN JYOTHI and date of birth from 28/02/1977 to 28/02/1978 vide Affidavit dated 31/3/2021 before Notary, Srikakulam - 532001(A.P.)

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Huge numbers of people gather around the Sanjeevini Bus after they get registered themselves for the swab test for Covid-19 at Government ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

Wait for hosp beds goes up

People booking beds in advance; politicians recommend patients

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 26

The waiting list at the government hospitals notified for Covid-19 treatment is getting longer with each day passing in Visakhapatnam.

Patients with their attendants were seen mostly at the 500 bed CSR block of King George Hospital, premier hospital in the government sector with round the clock attendance by experts and uninterrupted oxygen supply. The patients were seen waiting under a tree with despair while their attendants making frequent visits to the reception counter. Many blamed the authorities for not maintaining the queue and taking patients recommended by politicians and senior officials.

"All the beds are full as on date and we are ensuring that the queue is followed strictly. Vacancies can be filled only after discharges and this we have been telling the people. Some social media posts are misleading the people," said KGH superintendent Dr P. Mythili.

The other government

Action against doctors absent without permit

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, APRIL 26

Visibly angry with the absence of some duty doctors at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Prakasam collector Pola Bhaskar said that they would take stringent action against doctors ignoring their duties.

During a surprise visit to the RIMS Hospital in Ongole, he said they would initiate action against the doctors who went on leave without

permission when their services are required for Covid-19 patients. He said that they have arranged 200 ICU beds at RIMS based on the number of doctors and technicians and adding additional beds with oxygen facility. Referring to the pressure for beds at RIMS in view of the steep increase in Covid-19 cases, he said priority is given based on the intensity of the disease and care is being taken to avoid any inconvenience to the infected.

hospital in demand is the Visakha Institute for Medical Sciences (VIMS) which has 200 beds with few ICU units. This hospital is also witnessing long waiting.

The administration also notified 40 private hospitals and of them GITAM, Gayatri and Prathama put under A grade is entirely dedicated to patients under

Aarogyasri. GITAM became fully operational with 200 beds from Monday onwards.

The remaining hospitals made mandatory to reserve 50 per cent for the government sponsored patients.

The private hospitals are shooing away patients and refusing to tell when the next bed would be available, said a

He said they made the adjacent Girijan Bhavan as part of RIMS Hospital and beds are arranged at the quarters of senior residents as well as at the Social Empowerment Centre.

"We have asked the management of Bhashyam School located opposite RIMS to give the building to add 100 more beds in the premises. There are also proposals to secure other buildings around RIMS to enhance bed capacity," Pola Bhaskar informed.

COPS INITIATIVE HELPS TIMELY ARRIVAL OF O2

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, APRIL 26

The initiative of Siddharth Kaushal, Superintendent of Police, Prakasam district helped for the timely arrival of an oxygen tanker to save the lives of patients undergoing treatment at the RIMS Hospital in Ongole on Monday.

The tanker carrying 20,000 litres of oxygen from Visakhapatnam to RIMS in Ongole was stranded on the national highway near Bollapalli toll plaza in Narnavariapalem because of mechanical problems including brake failure around 4 am on Monday.

On noticing the stationary tanker, the police officials of J. Pangalore Highway Mobile spoke to the driver Rajesh Kumar Ram. They alerted the Police Control Room after learning that the engine had failed due to mechanical and electrical brakes. Police rushed to spot along with three mechanics and repaired.

O2 TANKER ARRANGED FOR NELLORE

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, APRIL 26

Minister P. Anil Kumar Yadav said they have arranged a tanker to bring oxygen to Nellore by Monday evening to address the needs of the hospitals in the city.

During a review with the managements of private hospitals in the city along with collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu and joint collector N. Prabhakar Reddy on Monday, the minister claimed that remdesivir injections have been made available to the private hospitals.

He said that oxygen being sent to Nellore following the intervention of the Chief Minister Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy. Anil Kumar said officials are constantly monitoring the Covid-19.

labs will be set up in Kadapa, Proddatur, Pulivendula, Rayachoti, Badvel and Jammalamadugu towns in the district this week," he said.

Railway Koduru, Rajampet and Mydukur towns are also being considered for setting up of labs. He said steps were being taken to identify primary and secondary contacts immediately and prevent the spread of the virus.

The health status of the positive person is being monitored immediately by the health workers, he said. Out of the total six Covid-19 Care Centers in the district, 350 beds are available in Kadapa Haj Bhavan, 150 in Rayachoti Government Minority Polytechnic Hostel.

Implement Covid-19 preventive measures

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, APRIL 26

State Deputy Chief Minister S.B. Amjad Bhasha and district in-charge minister Adimulapu Suresh have directed the authorities to strictly implement control and preventive measures against the second wave of Covid-19 in the district. They attended a high-level review meeting chaired by district collector Chevuru Hariikiran on Covid-19 in the Spandana hall of the collectorate.

The review meeting first outlined through a powerpoint presentation on the measures taken to prevent and control the rapidly growing Covid-19 outbreak in the district.

The district has so far conducted 8,43,936 tests,

of which a total of 61,822 positive cases have been registered. The overall positivity rate was 7.32 per cent.

Hariikiran explained that so far 552 people have died of Covid-19 in the district. So far this month, 80,349 tests have been done and 4,542 positive cases have been received, with a positivity rate of 6 per cent. In the last one week, 13 deaths have been reported. "We are currently conducting 3,500 tests per day in the district. The average positivity rate last week was 8.4. Plans are afoot to increase these tests to 6,000 per day. Testing

labs will be set up in Kadapa, Proddatur, Pulivendula, Rayachoti, Badvel and Jammalamadugu towns in the district this week," he said.

Railway Koduru, Rajampet and Mydukur towns are also being considered for setting up of labs. He said steps were being taken to identify primary and secondary contacts immediately and prevent the spread of the virus.

The health status of the positive person is being monitored immediately by the health workers, he said. Out of the total six Covid-19 Care Centers in the district, 350 beds are available in Kadapa Haj Bhavan, 150 in Rayachoti Government Minority Polytechnic Hostel.

1,592 fresh cases in Nellore

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, APRIL 26

Even as Covid-19 patients are running from pillar to post for admission in the hospitals, 1,592 fresh Covid-19 positive cases, highest in the state, have been detected and six people succumbed to the virus in SPSR Nellore district on

Monday.

With the new cases, the total number of positive cases detected in the district reached 75,889 and active cases to 9,077 as of Monday.

According to medical and health wing data, the 1,592 fresh cases have been detected from 7,113 samples tested on Monday.

Among them, as many as 607 cases have been detected in Nellore City alone.

The Intensive Care Units and oxygen beds in all the major hospitals in Nellore are full to their brim and the patients suffering from shortness of breath are finding it very difficult to secure oxygen beds in popular hospitals.

Sri Kodandarama Kalyanam held at Vontimitta temple

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, APRIL 26

It was a grand spectacle of Rama and Sita wedding at Sri Kodandaramaswami temple of Vontimitta in the YSR Kadapa district on Monday night. The divine fete organised by the TTD as part of the ongoing annual Rama Navami Brahmotsavams was conducted in ekantham (solitude) as per the Pancha Ratna Agama traditions from 8 pm to 10 pm.

The event commenced at 8 pm under the stewardship of Kankana Bhattar (head priest) Rakesh Bhattar with rituals Bhagavat Vignapana, Punya Havachanam and Sankalpam for global well-being. Thereafter, Raksha Bandhanam, Yajnopavita dharana, Kanya varanam and Madhu parkarchanam were performed.

After Maha Sankalpam and Kanyadanam, the paravas of both Sita and Rama

were recited and family pedigree of both were chanted. It was followed by programmes of Mangalasutra puja, Mangalasutra Dharana and Akshataropana. The kalyana episode concluded with Swami Nivedana, Veda Swasti and Mahadashirvachanam. To facilitate the devotees to witness the spiritual programme from their homes during Covid-19 situation, the TTD had organised the live telecast of the Rama Sita Kalyana episode by the SVBC channel.

AP endowment minister Velampalli Srinivasa Rao on Monday presented pattu vastrams and pearls to Sri Kodandaramaswami temple on behalf of the AP government. Srinivasa Rao, Kadapa district incharge minister Adimulapu suresh, Rajampet MLA and TTD board member Meda Mallikarjun Reddy and spouse were present.



Priests perform Rama and Sita wedding at Sri Kodandaramaswami temple of Vontimitta on Monday.

Date extended for Sri Kalyanamastu

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, APRIL 26

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has extended the last date for unwed young couples to apply for the Sri Kalyanamastu (common wedding for poor) programme up to April 30.

The TTD has finalised three auspicious dates in 2021 including May 28 between 12.34 pm and 12.40 pm, October 30 between 11.04 am and 11.08 am and November 17, between 9.56 am and 10.02 am. In this regard, TTD has invited applications from interested unmarried youth wanting to participate in the Kalyanamastu programme

during the first phase which is scheduled on May 28.

Devotees were asked to submit applications with all details on or before April 25. As the Covid-19 cast a shadow on several programs and developments, the TTD has extended the application date up to April 30.

Now, devotees can submit the applications at the offices of District Kalyana Mandapams on or before April 30.

Interested youth and parents could gather the details of the programme including the procedures and applications from the program assistants of the nodal agency, HDP, in all district headquarters.

VASANTHOTSAVAM CONCLUDES AT TIRUMALA

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, APRIL 26

The three-day annual festival of Vasanthotsavam was concluded at the Srivari temple in Tirumala on Monday.

On the final day, Lord Malayappa Swamy along with his consorts Sridevi and Bhudevi, Lord Sri Rama with Goddess Sita Devi, Lakshmana Swamy and Anjaneya Swamy and Lord Sri Krishna with Rukmini Devi were rendered celestial bath at the Kalyanotsava Mandapam inside the temple.

The snapana Tirumanjanam to all the nine Utsavarlu took place

between 2 and 4 pm.

In view of the Covid-19 restrictions, the TTD has performed the event in the Kalyanotsava Mandapam this year instead of Vasanthotsava Mandapam, located backside of the Tirumala temple.

In the evening Asthanam was held and at night the utsava idols of Lord Malayappa and his consorts were paraded on the Mada streets.

Tirumala pontiffs Pedda Jeeyar Swamy and Chinna Jeeyar Swamy, TTD EO Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy couple, CVSO Gopinath Jatti, Srivari temple DyEO P. Harindranath and other officials were present.

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1	'a' Procurement Tender Notice No.07/2021-22(EE-V(B)/DB Dt:26-04-2021	13 Nos	Rs. 65.54 Lakhs	27-04-2021 @ 02.00 PM	11-05-2021 @ 03.00 PM	11-05-2021 @ 03.30 PM	11-05-2021 @ 04.00 PM	0891 2746302	
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DAILY 1 SHOW,
Timing: 11-00 AM

SHORT TAKES

PM, SUGA FIRM ON INDIA-JAPAN BILATERAL TIES

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

In a “summit telephone talk” with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday that lasted 25 minutes, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga “expressed serious concerns about China’s continued and strengthened unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East and South China Seas, including the Coast Guard Law.”

The reference to China was made in a statement on the telephone talk released by Japan but there was no reference to it in a separate statement on the conversation that was released by New Delhi. The Japanese statement reflects increasing alarm in Japan over Chinese strategic intent, with a reiteration of the concerns first raised by PM Suga when he earlier spoke to PM Modi last month.

“The two leaders confirmed the importance of Japan-India bilateral cooperation and multilateral cooperation, including Japan-Australia-India-U.S. quadrilateral cooperation, towards realising a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. They also shared the view to continue their effort on building a rules-based free and open international order,” Japan said.

Japanese Foreign Ministry further said, “PM Suga stated that he hopes to further develop the cooperation.”

PM, CDS REVIEW COVID OPERATIONS BY ARMED FORCES

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday reviewed with Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat the preparations and operations undertaken by the Armed forces to assist in Covid-19 situation in the country.

CDS briefed the PM that all medical personnel from armed forces who have retired or taken pre-mature retirement in the last 2 years are being recalled to work in Covid facilities within proximity of their present place of residence. Other medical officers who retired earlier have also been requested to make their services available for consultation through medical emergency help lines.

Prime Minister was also informed that all medical officers on staff appointments at Command Headquarters (HQ), Corps HQ, Division HQ and similar HQ of Navy and Air Force will be employed at hospitals.

The CDS informed the Prime Minister that nursing personnel are being employed in large numbers to complement the doctors at the hospitals. CDS said that oxygen cylinders available with armed forces in various establishments will be released for hospitals.

The CDS also said that they are creating medical facilities in large numbers and where possible military medical infrastructure will be made available to civilians.

COVID REPORT NOT REQUIRED: HC TO HOSPITALS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 26

The Delhi High Court on Monday directed hospitals in the national capital to “scrupulously follow” the AAP government’s circular on not to insist on Covid positive test reports before admitting patients showing symptoms of Coronavirus.

A bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jasmeet Singh also directed the Delhi government to “widely publicise” its April 23 circular on the matter.

The order came while disposing of a PIL seeking directions to the Delhi government to order hospitals not to insist on Covid positive reports to hospitalise patients who show symptoms of Coronavirus.

The petitioner, Jaideep Ahuja, told the bench that the Uttar Pradesh government has passed such a direction on not insisting on RT-PCR positive test reports for admitting patients.

The Delhi government told the court that its Health department has issued a circular on April 23 directing hospitals in the city not to insist on Covid positive test reports to admit patients who are showing symptoms of Coronavirus infection.

Assam rules out full lockdown

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, APRIL 26

Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma here on Monday said that there will be no shortage of oxygen, ICU and isolation beds in the state for next 10 days and in between state has started augmenting its resources to build up its capacity to face any eventuality due to pandemic.

Pointing out that the state government has made arrangements to import oxygen from neighbouring Bhutan, Sarma told reporters that the oxygen production capacity of the state has reached to 61 MT per day while storage capacity has already been expanded to 468 MT.

Informing that they are going to operationalise three more oxygen plants soon, he said that there will be no shortage of Remdesivir too as he requested drug manufacturer Sun Pharma to expedite the production at its Palasbari plant to 80,000 vials per week.

Sarma said that he visited Sun Pharma’s Palasbari plant near Guwahati on Sunday and requested them to scale up production to ensure that there is no shortage in the state. “The Sun Pharma’s production unit in Guwahati can produce 80,000 Remdesivirs every week,” he added.

He said, “There is a new oxygen plant being set up in Bhutan. We have made arrangements to procure oxygen from there if required.”

Sarma said that the Assam government was not aware of an oxygen plant in Dimapur in Nagaland, and now it will sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the neighbouring state for procurement.

“The oxygen level that we are able to manage, I think there will not be any problem until several thousand patients arrive at the hospitals,” he added.

“ICU beds have also been ramped up. I believe we will be able to manage the Covid-19 crisis very fast like last year,” Sarma who also expressed surprise over the Congress memorandum to the Election Commission accusing him of violating election code of conduct for his initiative to face the Covid situation, said.

About the possibility of lockdown in Assam, he said that there is no necessity for any such drastic step at this moment. “When do we announce a lockdown? It is done when there is no oxygen, injection, medicine, kit in hospitals, then we get temporary relief by implementing lockdown,” said the minister adding that Assam is fully geared up to face the Covid crisis.

“We have already placed the order for the vaccine also. In a day or two we will come to know the delivery process and accordingly the state will plan out its vaccination drive for 18 plus citizens,” said the minister.



1) Mass cremation of Covid-19 victims and others takes place at Gazipur Crematorium, in New Delhi on Monday.

2) Relatives of Covid-19 patients wait to refill cylinders with medical oxygen, during the second wave of Coronavirus pandemic, in Gurugram on Monday.

3) People wait in a queue to receive a dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at NESCO Jumbo Covid-19 Vaccination Centre at Goregaon in Mumbai on Monday.

— PTI



Covid-19 crisis to worsen in Punjab, lockdown not an option: Amarinder

Chandigarh, April 26:

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh here on Monday said he is against the imposition of a Coronavirus lockdown even as he predicted that the pandemic situation is expected to get worse in the state.

The Chief Minister made the comment at a meeting, a day after the daily infection count in the state crossed the 7,000 mark, the highest single-day rise since the outbreak of the pandemic last year.

The Chief Minister said the situation is expected to worsen, especially in south Punjab. He said Ludhiana district alone reported 1,300-plus cases on Sunday.

According to a statement, the Chief Minister said while stringent measures are being taken to tackle the surge in cases, he is not “proposing” a lockdown in the state as it

● **CHIEF MINISTER** said while stringent measures are being taken to tackle the surge in cases, he is not ‘proposing’ a lockdown in the state as it leads to economic woes and the exodus of migrant workers.

● **HE DIRECTED** health department to follow up with Centre for vaccine supplies as the state presently has only 1.76 lakh Covishield and 22,000 Covaxin doses left.

leads to economic woes and the exodus of migrant workers.

The Chief Minister said at another meeting that the state government is making all efforts to secure medical oxygen to supplement its depleting stocks.

Of the 105 tonnes of medical oxygen quota, the state is getting only 85 tonnes as the rest is being diverted to the PGIMER, Chandigarh, he said.

The Chief Minister also directed the health department to follow up with the Centre for vaccine supplies as the state presently has only 1.76 lakh Covishield and 22,000 Covaxin doses left.

Reacting to reports of threats of a strike by health workers, the Chief Minister said such actions will be met with dismissal “as we cannot tolerate this kind of nonsense in a war-like situation.”

Meanwhile, the Army Western Command assure to revive the state’s defunct oxygen plants.

Lt Gen R.P. Singh, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Command, at a virtual meeting with the Chief Minister offered to provide staff to run a 100-bed Covid facility proposed to be set up at the building loaned to the state government by the Council of Scientific and

Industrial Research for the purpose.

15 trained nurses have already been sent to Patiala to support the civic staff, he said.

Army officials said though their resources were stressed on account of requirements from other states, they will extend all possible help to Punjab to tackle the situation.

The Chief Minister later said the government will also approach the Union home ministry to provide manpower and ICU beds through the Border Security Force (BSF).

Health secretary Hussan Lal told the Chief Minister at a meeting that 2,000 beds will be added at government and private hospitals. While 900 beds will be added at government medical colleges in Patiala, Amritsar and Faridkot, 542 will be added at private colleges, he said.

— PTI

7th phase by and large peaceful, over 75% vote

RAJIB CHOWDHURI & PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI | DC
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE, APRIL 26

The seventh phase of the Assembly elections in 34 seats spread over five districts in West Bengal recorded 75.06 per cent polling that went off peacefully except some stray incidents of violence in Murshidabad on Monday.

While nine seats in Murshidabad saw voter turnout of 80.30 per cent, six constituencies in South Dinajpur of North Bengal saw 80.21 per cent polling with 78.76 per cent and 70.34 per cent voting in six seats of Malda and nine in Burdwan West respectively from 7 am to 5 pm.

However four hot seats - Bhowanipore, Rasbehari, Ballygunge and Kolkata Port - in South Kolkata clocked only 59.91 per cent polling during which chief minister Mamata Banerjee and her MP nephew cast their votes. A revised figure of polling is expected from the Election Commission on Tuesday.

Unlike other districts, Murshidabad remained tense since morning.

At Senapara, Raninagar Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate Mashwara Khatun’s car was attacked and her polling agent was beaten up by armed Trinamul Congress workers. The police had to rescue her.

Allegations again surfaced against the Central paramilitary forces of ransacking Raninagar block TMC president Mizanur Rahman’s residence and destroying food. When district TMC president and MP Abu Taher Khan went there, angry workers of his

party shouted “Go Back” slogans at him.

He was soon seen leaving in his car in face of the protest. At Gurapasa High School in Nabagram, the Central forces allegedly beat an elderly TMC worker so much that he had to be admitted at Nabagram Hospital.

Later the CM, while lashing out at the Central forces over its excessive use of force, said, “We will lodge an FIR against the CRPF in these incidents.”

In Farakka, an aged TMC worker, Janmejy Mondal, was injured in an attack by the Bharatiya Janata Party workers armed with sharp-cutting weapons. He was admitted at the Farakka Hospital.

Murshidabad Congress candidate Niyazuddin Sheikh was caught by the TMC workers distributing money hidden in masks at a booth in Gudhia High School. But Mr Ahmed claimed that he distributed only masks to the voters for their protection from Covid-19. The Election Commission has sought a report of the incident.

Also, Jalangi Sanjukta Morcha candidate Saiful Islam Mollah from the CPI(M) and his three associates were attacked by the TMC workers with bamboo poles and sticks at Choanpara.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission transferred a few police officers as West Bengal voted in the seventh phase of assembly polls on Monday, officials said.

Shantanu Sinha Biswas, an inspector at the Directorate of Economic Offences, was transferred to the office of the DIG Jalpaiguri Range as a crime inspector, they said.

SAFETY | FIRST Government urges people to avoid stepping out unnecessarily

Mask up even indoors: Centre

New Delhi, April 26:

As a second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic rips through the country, the government on Monday said it is time people start wearing masks inside their homes as well, and refrain from inviting guests.

Addressing a press conference here, NITI Aayog member (Health) Dr V.K. Paul said if there is a Covid-positive person inside the house, he or she must wear the mask so as to prevent other family members from getting infected.

“Rather, I’ll say that the time has come that we start wearing masks even otherwise inside our homes. We used to talk

about wearing it outside homes, but the way the infection has spread, it will be better if we wear mask inside our homes if we are sitting with someone,” he said.

“But, definitely, if there is a Covid-19 positive person, that person must wear the mask and others inside the house also must wear a mask and the positive person should be kept in a different room,” Paul underlined.

His statement came days after a new assessment published in *The Lancet journal* said there is consistent, strong evidence to prove that the SARS-CoV-2 virus, behind the pandemic, is predominantly trans-

mitted through the air.

Paul added that people should also avoid stepping out of their houses unnecessarily and not invite guests at home.

He also suggested if the house lacks such facilities for isolation, then people may go to isolation centres, known as corona care centres. Getting admitted to a hospital is not the only option, Paul said. “Hospital beds are used for the needy people.”

Highlighting the importance of vaccination, Paul said, “We cannot let the pace of Covid-19 vaccination decline or slacken in the face of the emerging situation. In fact, it should be escalated and with that

intent the government of India brought a revised (vaccination) policy. We believe and are confident that will bring in more acceleration,” he said.

AIIMS Director Dr Randeep Guleria, who also addressed the press conference, sought greater community participation to ensure optimal utilisation of hospital facilities.

“We see now there is unnecessary panic among people which is causing more harm than good. Those who test positive even if their oxygen saturation levels are normal and have mild symptoms, they also want to get admitted.

“It is causing a lot of rush outside hospitals and

suffering to genuine patients as they do not get proper treatment. Also, hoarding of drugs at homes is causing unnecessary shortage of essential drugs in markets and also leads to misuse of drugs,” he said.

Underlining the importance of oxygen in the treatment strategy for Covid-19 patients, Dr Guleria said its misuse must be avoided.

There should be judicious use of oxygen therapy, he said, adding, hospital authorities should make sure there is no leakage of oxygen at their facilities, and also advised prising to increase oxygen levels in the body.

— PTI

IN BRIEF

Russia expels Italian diplomat

Moscow, April 26: Moscow said Monday it was expelling an Italian diplomat in response to the “unfriendly” removal of two Russian officials from Rome in March over an espionage scandal.

The foreign ministry said it had summoned Italy’s ambassador and informed him that Russia was declaring “persona non grata” Rome’s naval attaché in Moscow, who would have 24 hours to leave the country.

Rome announced late last month it was expelling the two Russian officials after an Italian navy captain was caught by police selling confidential military documents to a Russian embassy official.

Romania to expel Russian diplomat

Bucharest, April 26: Romania said Monday it will expel a Russian diplomat, the latest European country to do so in solidarity with the Czech Republic, which is involved in a spat with Moscow.

The deputy military attaché at the Russian embassy in Bucharest, Alexei Grichayev, would be declared “persona non grata... in view of his activities and actions contrary to the Convention of Vienna on diplomatic relations,” the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Romania’s foreign minister Bogdan Aurescu summoned Russian ambassador Valery Kuzmin to his offices on Monday, according to the statement.

Jihadists kill 31 Nigerian soldiers

Kano, Nigeria, April 26: At least 31 Nigerian soldiers were killed when IS-aligned jihadists ambushed a military convoy escorting weapons and overran a base in northeast Nigeria’s Borno state, military sources said on Monday.

Fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) attacked the convoy with rocket-propelled grenades on Sunday in the town of Mainok outside the regional capital Maiduguri before storming the nearby base.

The attack was the deadliest this year against Nigeria’s army which has been battling a decade-long jihadist insurgency in the region that has killed 36,000 people.

‘14 protests: 108 on trial in Turkey

Ankara, April 26: Turkey on Monday put 108 Kurdish politicians on trial for their alleged roles in deadly 2014 protests that erupted as jihadists from the Islamic State group overran the Syrian town of Kobane.

The case against current and former members of the pro-Kurdish HDP party — including its two former co-leaders — stems from one of the darkest episodes of the decade-long Syria war. Thirty-seven people died in violent demonstrations against the Turkish army’s inaction in the face of an IS offensive against the largely Kurdish northern Syrian town.

The jihadists were driven out of Kobane in January 2015 by US-backed Syrian Kurdish fighters that Turkey officially views as terrorists.

AFGHANISTAN ATTACKS KILL 12 POLICEMEN

Kabul, April 26: At least 12 Afghan policemen were killed on Sunday, including seven who were ambushed by the Taliban south of the capital, officials said, as fighting continued in the violence-wracked country.

The two separate attacks in the provinces of Logar and Kandahar came as the top US military commander in Afghanistan, General Scott Miller, said work had begun to withdraw the remaining American forces as ordered by President Joe Biden this month.

“Seven policemen were killed and three wounded when the Taliban ambushed their vehicles in Mohammad Agha district of Logar province,” Dedar Lawang, spokesman for the provincial governor, said.

The policemen were part of a security force guarding copper mines in Logar, south of the capital Kabul.

Police from Logar province confirmed the attack.

Afghanistan, whose economy has been severely impacted by decades of conflict and endemic corruption, has reserves of copper, iron, cobalt and lithium. In a separate attack on Sunday, a suicide bomber ran an explosives-laden car into a police vehicle in the southern Taliban bastion of Kandahar, killing five policemen.

EU mounts legal action on AstraZeneca for vax delay

Charges vaccine maker for failing to respect terms of contract

Brussels, April 26: The European Commission on Monday said it has launched a legal action against vaccine maker AstraZeneca for failing to respect the terms of its contract with the EU.

Spokesman Stefan De Keersmaecker said, “The Commission has started last Friday legal action against the company AstraZeneca on the basis of breaches of the advance purchase agreement.” He said that the reason for the legal action was that “some terms of the contract have not been respected” and that “the company has not been in a position to come up with a reliable strategy to ensure a timely delivery of doses”. Contract with EU foresaw an initial 300 million doses for distribution among the 27 countries, with option for a further 100 million. But only 30 million doses were delivered.

— AP



A lone woman walks past stalls in an almost-empty shopping alley in Bangkok on Monday, amid an expansion of lockdown restrictions to halt a surge in Covid-19 cases.

— AFP

Burj Khalifa lit up with Tricolour

Dubai, April 26: Prominent iconic buildings, including the Burj Khalifa, in the UAE were lit up with the Tricolour to show solidarity with India as it grapples with its best wish-

UAE

ing Covid-19 crisis. The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) headquarters and the world’s tallest building, Burj Khalifa, in Dubai were lit up with the colours of the Indian flag in solidarity with India as it responds to a

second Covid-19 wave, the official WAM news agency reported.

“As #India battles the gruesome war against #COVID19, its friend #UAE sends its best wishes. Glowing star @BurjKhalifa in #Dubai lits up in Flag of India to showcase its support,” Indian Embassy in the UAE tweeted on Sunday. The embassy also tweeted a video of the Burj Khalifa displaying the Indian flag and #staystrongIndia. — PTI

Google, MS Indo-American CEOs pledge aid to India

Houston/Washington, April 26: Google CEO Sundar Pichai and his Microsoft counterpart Satya Nadella have assured help to India. “Devastated to see the worsening Covid crisis in India. Google & Googlers are providing ₹135 crore in funding to @GiveIndia, @UNICEF for medical supplies, orgs supporting high-risk communities, and grants to help spread critical information,” Google CEO Pichai said in a tweet.

Nadella said that his

company will continue to use its resources and technology for relief efforts and support for buying oxygen devices. Nadella said he was “heartbroken” by the current Coronavirus situation in India. “I am heartbroken by the current situation in India. I’m grateful the US government is mobilising to help. Microsoft will continue to use its voice, resources, and technology to aid relief efforts, and support the purchase of critical oxygen concentration

devices,” he said.

US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have assured India and its people of providing all assistance, including urgently sending necessary medical lifesaving supplies and equipment, to help the country combat the deadly crisis. “Just as India sent assistance to the United States as our hospitals were strained early in the pandemic, we are determined to help India in its time of need,” Biden said. — PTI

Boris in soup for ‘dying’ talk

London, April 26: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced a call to resign on Monday after claims he dismissed the prospect of thousands dying from Covid-19, as a row over government “sleaze” escalated.

In a front-page headline, the *Daily Mail* newspaper reported Johnson had said he would rather see “bodies pile high in their thousands” than impose a third Coronavirus lockdown. Ultimately, Johnson did order a new round of restrictions in January. But he is now locked in a

damaging war of words with his former top aide Dominic Cummings over his Coronavirus policies last year and financial dealings.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said the *Daily Mail* report, based on unnamed sources, was “not true” and had been “categorically denied by practically everyone”. “None of this is serious. The prime minister has been utterly focused on delivering, alongside Cabinet colleagues, the response to Covid,” he told *Sky News*. — AFP

UK VAX FOR ALL AGED 44, ABOVE

London, April 26: Everyone aged 44 and above in Britain will now be able to book their Covid-19 jab starting on Monday as the UK’s National Health Service (NHS) vaccine programme expands further to more younger age groups. Around half a million 44-year-olds will receive a text message inviting them to get their jab. — PTI

THAILAND FINE OF UP TO \$640 FOR NOT WEARING MASK

Bangkok, April 26: Authorities in Thailand are imposing fines of up to 20,000 baht (\$640) for people who fail to wear face masks in public in 48 provinces, as the government struggles to cope with a new wave of coronavirus cases that is straining the medical system.

The capital, Bangkok, which has the largest number of cases, is also closing more than 30 types of businesses and services, including cinemas, parks, zoos, bars, pools and massage parlours. Gatherings of more than 20 people are banned. — AP

Oz ventilators, PPE, oxygen for India

Melbourne, April 26: Australia will send oxygen, ventilators and personal protective equipment to India as part of an immediate support package to the country which is battling with the latest surge of the Covid-19 cases, Health Minister Greg Hunt said on Monday.

The federal government was in the process of considering what it could send to help, the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* news channel quoted Hunt as saying.

“India is literally gasping for oxygen,” the federal health minister said.

And while we can assist with the national medical stockpile, their particular request is for assistance

with regards to the physical supply of oxygen. That will be one of the things we are looking at, in particular with the states, the minister said.

The federal government also confirmed to send oxygen, ventilators and personal protective equipment to India as part of an immediate support package to be announced on Tuesday, according to the report.

However, Australia would not send vaccines.

Hunt further said: “We are in a strong position on that front because we don’t need them at this point in time. We will still keep a reserve, but if they can be of assistance (they will be donated).” — PTI

World military spending grows

Stockholm, April 26: Military expenditure worldwide rose to nearly \$2 trillion in 2020, defying the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, researchers said Monday. Global military spending increased by 2.6 percent to \$1,981 billion in 2020, when global GDP shrank 4.4 percent, according to a report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Diego Lopes da Silva, one of report’s authors, said the development was unexpected. “Because of the pandemic, one would

think military spending would decrease,” he said.

“But it’s possible to conclude with some certainty that Covid-19 did not have a significant impact on global military spending, in 2020 at least,” Lopes da Silva said. He cautioned however that due to the nature of military spending, it could take time for countries “to adapt to the shock”. The fact that military spending continued to increase in a year with an economic downturn meant the share of military spending out of total GDP had risen. — AFP

MISINFORMATION OF VIRUS: FB BLOCKS OZ MP

Sydney, April 26: Facebook removed Australian member of parliament Craig Kelly’s page for repeatedly peddling pandemic misinformation, the social media giant said Monday.

Kelly previously had posts blocked on the platform and was forced to quit the governing Liberal Party, amid controversial statements on vaccine safety, lockdowns and unproven Covid treatments.

Facebook said it removed his popular page permanently after “repeated violations” of its policies. — AFP

CHINA CARGO FLIGHTS TO INDIA SUSPENDED

Beijing, April 26: China’s state-run Sichuan Airlines has suspended all its cargo flights to India for 15 days, causing major disruption to private traders’ efforts to procure the much-needed oxygen concentrators and other medical supplies from the country despite Beijing reiterating its readiness to help India. “China has been following the situation in India and expressed readiness to help curb the latest surge,” FM spokesman Wang Wenbin said. — PTI a

Zarif’s leaked recording offers blunt comments

Dubai, April 26: A recording of Iran’s foreign minister offering a blunt appraisal of diplomacy and the limits of power within the Islamic Republic has leaked out publicly, providing a rare look inside the country’s theocracy.

The release of the comments by Mohammad Javad Zarif set off a firestorm within Iran, where officials carefully mind their words amid a cut-throat political environment that includes the powerful paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, ultimately overseen by the country’s supreme leader. Zarif has been suggested as a possible candidate for Iran’s June 18 presidential election as well.

Outside of Iran, Zarif’s comments could also affect talks in Vienna aimed at finding a way for Tehran and the US to both come into compliance with Ira-

n’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Already, sabotage targeted Iran’s nuclear facility at Natanz during the talks as Tehran has begun enriching a small amount of uranium up to 60% purity, which edges the country closer to weapons-grade levels. After the leak became public, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh did not dispute the tape’s authenticity. He told journalists on Monday that the recording represented just a portion of a seven-hour interview Zarif gave to a well-known economist that was to be held for posterity by a think tank associated with the Iranian presidency.

Khatibzadeh called the release of the recording “illegal” and described it as “selectively” edited.

— AP

Germany flays Navalny curbs

Berlin, April 26: Germany condemned an order by Russian prosecutors Monday to suspend all activities by jailed opposition figure Alexei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) and its regional network.

Chancellor Angela Merkel’s spokesman Steffen Seibert said “using the instruments of fighting terror against politically undesirable opinions is in no way compatible with the principles of the rule of law”.

A Moscow court had begun a preliminary hearing into designating FBK and its regional offices as “extremist” after prosecutors requested they be added to a list of “terrorist and extremist” organisations run by Russia’s Anti-Terrorism Committee.

The Moscow City Court confirmed that the activities of the group’s regional network were suspended, but clarified that prosecutors had the power to make the decision and

said a final court ruling on designating the group as extremist was still due.

Russia’s list of extremist organisations currently consists of 33 including the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda and the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The groups are banned from operating in Russia and participating in their activities can result in lengthy prison terms.

Navalny, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s most prominent opponent, was arrested in January on returning to Russia from Berlin after recovering from a near-fatal poisoning attack he says was orchestrated by the Kremlin.

Moscow denies the allegation.

He is serving two-and-a-half years on old fraud charges — which he says are politically motivated — in a penal colony in the town of Pokrov east of Moscow.

— AFP

Suu Kyi court date postponed

Yangon, April 26: Myanmar’s junta again postponed court proceedings against deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Monday her lawyers said, as they fight for permission to visit her 12 weeks after she was detained.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military ousted the Nobel laureate in a February 1 coup, shutting the country back into junta rule after a brief experiment with democracy. Large swathes of the population have taken to the streets in protest, with security forces unleashing a brutal campaign to quell the massive uprising.

Meanwhile Suu Kyi has been under house arrest, with the junta charging her under six cases — including for sedition and having unlicensed walkie-talkies. But movement on her case was once again delayed until May 10, her lawyer Min Min Soe said Monday after a hearing.

Twelve weeks since Suu Kyi was detained, Min Min Soe said they still have not received permis-

sion to meet their client face-to-face — one of many hurdles the team has faced.

“When the judge asked (police) which stage they have reached, they replied they couldn’t tell specifically,” she said, adding that Suu Kyi was frustrated by the slow pace.

“I think she is not getting access to watch news and TV. I do not think she knows the current situation happening in the country,” she said.

Besides not being able to meet with Suu Kyi, junta-imposed mobile data shutdowns have also prevented video-conferencing in previous hearings.

The most serious charge Suu Kyi faces falls under Myanmar’s official secrets law, with a hearing due in Yangon on May 6.

Nationwide protests continued Monday, with demonstrators holding signs that said “Free our leaders” and waving red flags emblazoned with a golden peacock — the symbol of Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy Party. — AFP

NUCLEAR | DISASTER Dozens gather in ghost town of Pripyat, hold candle vigil

Ukraine marks 35 years since Chernobyl

Kiev, April 26: President Volodymyr Zelensky was due Monday to visit the Chernobyl exclusion zone and address Ukrainians to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the world’s worst nuclear disaster.

The exclusion zone is a 30-kilometre (20-mile) radius around the nuclear power plant that was evacuated in the aftermath of an explosion and was deemed unsafe for humans to

live for thousands of years. Ahead of his arrival, dozens of people gathered in the nearby ghost town of Pripyat and held an overnight vigil with candles in memory of the those who lost their lives in the accident.

The deaths of some 30 people were directly linked to the explosion in the fourth reactor at Chernobyl during a safety test on April 26, 1986.

But thousands more are feared to have died in the years that followed from radiation poisoning across Ukraine as well as its northern neighbour Belarus and Russia to the east.

The exact number of victims remains a subject of intense debate because the Soviet authorities kept most of the information about the disaster hidden.

Hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated

from the area around the disaster site, and the exclusion zone has now become a ghostly uninhabited region. About 600,000 emergency workers and state employees who became known as “liquidators” were dispatched with little or no protective gear to help clean up the aftermath of the disaster.

A 2005 United Nations report estimated that up to 4,000 people could eventu-

ally perish from the invisible poison in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus.

The Greenpeace environmental group issued its own study the following year estimating that 100,000 people had already lost their lives as a result of the accident.

In November 2016, a massive metal dome was erected over the remains of the reactor.

— AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

27 APRIL 2021

Govt must wake up to reality, do a course correction swiftly

The world is waking up to the tragedy that India has found itself in, with scores of people dying for want of oxygen and critical drug shortages in several parts of the country. The United States, which had only last week insisted that its job was to vaccinate Americans first and held back critical raw materials for vaccine production in India, has now promised to speed up the delivery of such goods; and it is now “pursuing options to generate oxygen on an urgent basis” in India. Going by reports, these will include oxygen aggregators and concentrators. The European Union, France, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have also started sending vital medical supplies. Even Pakistan has offered to send help to India.

The world media is awash with the details on how the NDA government’s lackadaisical approach during the interregnum between the first and second waves of the pandemic have landed India in the mess. And they cannot be faulted. Reports of the parliamentary committee on health in February warning about “an unprecedented increase in the demand for non-invasive oxygen cylinders and instances of lack of oxygen cylinders” have already appeared. It had also recommended that the government “encourage adequate production

Reports of the parliamentary committee on health in February warning about “an unprecedented increase in the demand for non-invasive oxygen cylinders and instances of lack of oxygen cylinders” have already appeared.

of oxygen for ensuring its supply as per demand in the hospitals”. It’s not that the government had done nothing; it had initiated steps but not with the urgency with which a nation prepares for a second wave which experts had warned was coming. The Prime Minister’s Office had on January 5 announced the PM-Cares Fund had allocated ₹201.58 crore for installing 162 dedicated pressure swing adsorption (PSA) oxygen generation plants in public health facilities. However, only 33 had been built by April 18. The procurement of the plant was to be done by the Central Medical Supply Store, an autonomous body under the Union Health ministry. It may be hoped that the 551 new PSAs the PM Cares Fund has newly

sanctioned will not meet with a similar fate. From the responses, one cannot be faulted if one thought that the Government of India was the last to get a grip of the crisis.

Augmenting healthcare infrastructure is a long-term programme even in the face of a pandemic. The immediate, effective and assured tool to fight it is universal vaccinations, but the government has been displaying a lack of urgency about that too. The mandarins deciding vaccine policy are yet to wake up from their slumber and see the unfolding events. Parliament has passed a budget with a sum that will be sufficient to inoculate every eligible Indian free of cost if it bought the doses at the price the manufacturers decided in the first phase. The government has several legal and administrative options, including the compulsory licensing route, to enhance production. However, it seems to be in no hurry and, worse, it has passed the responsibility for inoculation first to the state governments and then to citizens. The government may, at least now, make a course correction in order to obviate a similar global initiative to vaccinate Indians.

Oscars in pandemic times

A sanitised Oscars ceremony was befitting in the dark times the world is going through. Even then, it didn’t have to end the way it did with the oldest actor to win the coveted prize, Anthony Hopkins, not tuning in even by video from his home in Wales. Hollywood, well-known for its love of a cinematic climax to all stories big and small, also didn’t quite time it right. An empty stage with a golden Oscar statuette and then just the titles was a strange but, perhaps, symbolic climax to a ceremony which, clubbed with a narcissistic red carpet and extravagant parties, used to represent the glitz and glamour of the movies.

“It has been quite a year, and we are still smack dab in the middle of it,” Regina King said in reference to the pandemic as well as the verdict on the

This year’s awards were a “wake” Hollywood’s ode to diversity, with Chloe Zhao, of Chinese origin, becoming the first woman of colour to win the best director statuette.

colour to win the best director statuette. Predictably too, China rubbed her out because she is not in sync with its nationalistic ideals. Empathy was at the very heart of the prize that went to Frances McDormand who starred in *Nomadland*, with real-life actor-nomads from marginalised, itinerant communities in a post-recession United States reflecting an American dream gone awry. The greatest disappointment may have been in black actor Chadwick Boseman not winning best actor posthumously while Hopkins won it for portraying an older man with dementia in *The Father*. It was, however, a historic day for women and people of colour, and no one can complain about that.

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Subhani



Covid mess to cost govt dear at home & abroad



K.C. Singh

On March 12, US President Joe Biden convened the inaugural summit of the “Quad” countries, comprising Australia, India, Japan and the United States, held in a virtual format. Their joint statement headlined “The Spirit of the Quad” emphasised the combating of Covid-19. In the last paragraph, they committed to combining medical, financing, manufacturing and delivery as well as development capabilities to address the “historic crisis”. India was seen as the hub of vaccine manufacture and the vanguard in this battle.

Covid-19’s second wave hit India soon afterwards, with India’s leadership preoccupied with crucial state elections, the Kumbh Mela and cricket. The mutant virus had begun wreaking havoc in Britain. Unmindful of this, India was exporting AstraZeneca (Covishield) vaccines to friends and fulfilling its Covax commitments. The cases began spiking, first in Maharashtra and Punjab, and finally in the nation’s capital, Delhi. Two virus variants, the British B.1.1.7 and a local double mutant B.1.617, may have accelerated the spread. The Quad spirit of cooperation ran into vaccine nationalism when India’s pleas to the US for assistance were rudely rejected. The public discourse started getting toxic, especially in the social media, with escalating criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his deputy, home minister Amit Shah, for campaigning without masks and amidst mammoth crowds. The Election Commission too irresponsibly conceded the BJP’s desire for the eight-phase, month-long polls in West Bengal.

Alongside, the lackadaisical vaccination programme started, with frontline workers and

then the older, more vulnerable population. But as the vaccination was stepped up, the demand began outpacing the supply. Instead of being the “Vishwa Guru” and global factory for vaccines, India now blocked exports. The Serum Institute of India, producing the AstraZeneca vaccine Covishield, and Bharat Biotech, producing Covaxin, fell behind their production targets. The European Union sued SII for breach of commitments. In turn, it complained its production was being hampered by US restrictions on raw material exports.

India-US relations came under strain as public opinion in India soured. Both sides failed to communicate their respective concerns properly. In America, newly elected President Joe Biden assumed office, promising to undo the harm done by the unscientific and populist approach of his predecessor Donald Trump. He invoked the old Defence Production Act (DPA), within two weeks of assuming office, to marshal all resources. His target of 200 million shots in the first 100 days was achieved before time. The US also started building up a strategic reserve of vaccines, now amounting to over 300 million surplus shots. But the DPA constrains the export of vaccines. Consequently, the four million doses given to Mexico and Canada were called a loan.

The US had other considerations for not sharing its vaccines. Both Pfizer and Moderna have obtained liability protection from the US government for civil or criminal liability for any untoward health episode post-vaccination. If exported, they would seek similar protection from the importing nations. Only about one-third of the US population has been fully vaccinated so far and thus a fresh surge of cases was troubling. The new spike is driven by mutated ver-

sions, the efficacy of vaccines against which is still unclear. The British mutant B.1.1.7 is believed to be 60 per cent more contagious and 67 per cent deadlier. As per the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) data, adults in their 20s to 50s are getting hospitalised in the Midwest, South and Northwest. *The New York Times* said: “From Minnesota to New Jersey to North Carolina, younger people are making up a growing share of hospitalisations”. Currently, 45,000 persons are hospitalised in the US.

Thus, an India unprepared for the second surge ignored US concerns when publicly seeking relaxations of DPA restrictions on the export of vaccine production raw material and a possible loan of unused AstraZeneca vaccines, so far unapproved for emergency use. The initial rejection was taken as a snub and allowed to play in public. China’s glee was palpable as its English mouthpiece *Global Times* chided India for depending on the US and not seeking Beijing’s help. Russia also rushed to supply oxygen, etc.

When India’s mishandling and the fresh surge became lead news in the US media, and after mass cremation pictures appeared on the front pages of its major newspapers, the Democrats and the Biden administration finally woke up. The liberal wing of the Democratic Party, which the Indian government and especially external affairs minister S. Jaishankar chided over their criticism of India’s Kashmir policy, now came to India’s rescue. US national security adviser Jake Sullivan tweeted on April 25 that after he talked to India’s NSA Ajit Doval the US agreed to “deploying more supplies and resources” to aid India as both nations had the greatest number of cases globally. Among this

When India’s mishandling and the fresh surge became lead news in the US, the Democrats and the US administration finally woke up.

would be raw materials, protection kits, therapeutics, rapid diagnostic kits, ventilators, etc.

The US Development Finance Corporation will aid the expansion of vaccine manufacture by Hyderabad-based Biological E Ltd, which has finished its Phases 1 and 2 trials. Baylor Medical College has provided the proven and simpler yeast-based expression technology. The company is to produce one billion doses by the end of 2022 at an affordable price. This is the magic bullet for the developing and underdeveloped world, now without access to a vaccine. Africa doesn’t have even a vaccine producer now. Globally, the developed nations, with 16 per cent of the world population, have cornered 52 per cent of vaccines. But the US has still not cleared the export of unused AstraZeneca vaccines. President Joe Biden said the US was helping India in its hour of need as India it them in the past, but the focus is on capacity building.

How does India return to being seen as the world’s vaccine hub rather than a troubled victim? Political mismanagement, electoral partisanship, religious pandering and the lack of foresight have damaged India’s image. It has left China smirking, though on the positive side Pakistan’s political comments and public opinion have been empathetic. The current electoral cycle ends on April 29 in West Bengal, but immediately another begins as the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election is due in February 2022. Has the government learnt the lesson that public health and safety must remain above politics? Also, US help will come laced with unsaid conditions. For one, majoritarianism and the democracy deficit may invite more forceful US intervention. India’s Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan policies will also see closer US monitoring. The mismanaged pandemic at home will diminish the government’s political space both at home and abroad.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh

LETTERS

HEIGHT OF SLAVERY

There is so much bootlicking, obsequies and servile behaviour from juniors to appease the seniors (*Covid-hit cop blames seniors, DC, April 26*). This incident is just a chip of the bark. Nobody is courageous enough to speak against this in the department. Except for a few, all are living like slaves and are tongue tied because of corruption. If these policemen want to be free from this slavery, they ought be honest.

Dr Syed Sarmad
Kurnool

AAROGYASRI COVER

AP government’s Aarogyasri scheme is the best plan for needy citizens. This is virtually a life saver for the downtrodden. Hope this programme will continue.

Maresh Kumar Kachhawah
Anantpur

WAKE UP TIME

Better late than never (*Modi orders installation of Oxygen plants swiftly, DC, April 26*). Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government had enough time to ponder over the problem and plan a course of action for the second wave. Now, it is a fire-fighting situation and May might go down in Indian history as the darkest ever thanks to the poor foresight of our rulers and people who neglected safety.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Curbs imposed on diplomats, others

NEW DELHI, APRIL. 26 Relations between India and Pakistan headed for a diplomatic show-down today with India ordering retaliatory measures on the movement of Pakistani diplomatic and other personnel in India.

Under the new measures, effective from 1800 hours today, all diplomatic officers of Pakistani missions in India, their wives, children and domestic servants of Pakistani nationality will be required to obtain prior permission of the Government of India for their exit from India.

In a note handed over today to Mr. Sajjad Haider, Pakistan’s High Commissioner here, India outlined the measures it has imposed following those already enforced by Pakistan.

Aakar Patel



India’s health calamity has exposed flaws in Guj Model

Just before the 2014 election, two of India’s most famous economists had a public quarrel. Because they were academics the language was mostly polite, but the disagreement was not minor. It was about the so-called “Gujarat Model”. Jagdish Bhagwati took the side of Narendra Modi, and Amartya Sen took the opposite side. In brief, the Bhagwati-Modi view was to prioritise economic growth over social spending. Sen’s view was that economic growth was not possible without social spending.

Sen did not oppose a liberalised business environment: his concern was primarily what the government did. Bhagwati did not oppose social spending: his concern was what the government should not do.

Both sides had rational arguments, but Sen had one unanswerable question: Could anyone name a nation that had become developed without a healthy and well-educated population? The answer to that was no. There is no nation on the world that has ignored investing in the health and education of its population and become developed. It is social spend-

ing that leads to growth and not the other way around. You cannot have a population that is not very literate and not very healthy and expect that industrialists will do all the work necessary to make a nation developed. The state and the government have the primary responsibility and function in this area.

The “Gujarat Model believes that if the government supports industrialists by offering them subsidies, ease of doing business, freedom from workers’ unions and holding vibrant Gujarat melas — if it does this for a sufficiently long period, then the benefits will accrue to the general population because it is business that makes the economy strong.

The Sen model believes that a healthy and educated population is both an end in itself and a means to achieving economic prosperity. It was in fact possible for the government to create a healthy and educated population even when it had no real economic strength, and Cuba is an example of this. There is no example of a developed nation that had a Third World education and healthcare system. For this reason, the

State must focus on building a strong education system and a strong healthcare system and prioritise its spending in these areas. Sen supports schemes like MNREGA and the right to food, Narendra Modi opposed MNREGA and called it a monument to failure. The Congress Party said this week that in 25 years under the BJP, including 12 years under Mr Modi, Gujarat did not build a single new government hospital. The BJP has not denied the claim, meaning that it is correct. Of course, many Vibrant Gujarat summits were held. What did they produce ultimately? The answer is not development, whatever definition we can use for it. Yes, it is true that some Gujaratis have become very wealthy, a few even managing to triple their wealth in 2020 a year, when many of us lost work. But for the majority there was no benefit. The large industries that came up in Gujarat did not employ a lot of people. This is why the most dominant political community of the state, the Patidars, took to the streets demanding reservations in jobs.

The sacrifice that was made by the population for the Gujarat Model was

very great. Gujarat was low on the Human Development Index and in 2012 Mr Modi told the *Wall Street Journal* that malnutrition in his state was high because its girls were “fashion conscious” and didn’t want to drink milk.

This sort of contempt and ignorance of fundamental issues has come at a cost to India. The Sen model is not only about expenditure, it is also about the focus of the State. A government which believes that it is the well-being of its citizenry as measured through their health and education will be geared and organised in a particular way. It will not be caught scrambling one year after a global pandemic because it does not have enough oxygen or medicines or beds. The Gujarat Model expected that the private sector would take care of health because it was a business and there would be consumers. That is not how the rest of the world has achieved it.

It is not necessary to say today that Bhagwati was totally wrong because he was, and we can see that all around us. As India suffers and the ruling party is on the defensive, the

truth is that the only way that this wave will pass is if exponential growth of the virus stops on its own. The intervention of the government is so poor and so weak that it cannot by itself do anything significant to save us. In the short term we have to suffer the consequences and there is no option.

This is the reason why Prime Minister Modi has been missing from the public eye after stopping his rallies in West Bengal abruptly. The reason why Mr Modi was furious that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal showed their interaction to the rest of us was not because it was a breach of protocol but because the truth was exposed and it was embarrassing. At a moment of crisis, we are choosing to run away from the fact that core beliefs about what the government should do have been proven wrong. We should have an honest discussion once again about the Bhagwati and Sen debate and what we should do in the medium and long term.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	48386.51	1.06
Nifty 50	14485.00	1.00
S&P 500*	4,189.51	0.22
Dollar (₹)	74.73	0.39
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.99	0.11
Euro (₹)	90.41	0.04
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,976.81	0.17
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.57	-0.82
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.038	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.568	0.001

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Mankind Pharma to give ₹100 cr to families of dead

Mankind Pharma will donate Rs 100 crore to the families of deceased doctors, police officers, pharmacists, and other healthcare workers who have lost their lives fighting the pandemic. The firm plans to start releasing the money with immediate effect and hopes to complete it within three months, Mankind said in a statement. The firm said it is standing alongside the families of the heroes who lost their lives.



Age ceiling for top tier set at 70 years Bank chief's tenure capped at 15 years

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 26

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday fixed the tenure of managing directors and chief executive officers (MD & CEO) and whole-time directors (WTD) in private sector banks at 15 years and prescribed the maximum age of 70 years for such functionaries.

The central bank also said a CEO, MD or WTD, who is a promoter or major shareholder of a bank as well, will not be eligible to hold these posts for more than 12 years, with an extension of up to 15 years permitted at its sole discretion. Bank chiefs and WTDs who are not promoters will be eligible for a second-term even after the 15-year period after a three-year break. During this three-year gap, the individual shall not be associated with the bank or its group entities in any capacity.

The RBI also said the chairman of the board



must be an independent director. It also listed other guidelines on the pay of non-executive directors, age limits and setting up of audits, remuneration and risk-management committees.

The RBI has given banks until October 1 to comply with the rules.

Analysts pointed that promoter Uday Kotak, who has been at the helm of Kotak Mahindra Bank for over 12 years, had been re-appointed for a term of three years starting January 2021, may not be immediately impacted.

Similarly, the RBI approved the reappointment of N. Kamakodi, MD & CEO of City Union Bank,

for three years effective May 1, 2020 will continue. Kamakodi has been heading the bank since 2011.

"However, one will have to wait and see as to what view the RBI takes on Bandhan Bank. Does the limit include the MD and CEO's tenure when he was heading Bandhan as an NBFC? Similarly, the MDs of Federal Bank, DCB Bank and RBL Bank have been there for long but the upper limit of 15 years may not have an immediate impact on these banks," said an analyst.

J.N. Gupta, former executive director of Sebi, said, "I am unable to understand as to why the RBI feels that independent directors and non-executive directors should be paid a fixed sum which is in total contradiction with the provisions of the Companies Act. Secondly, how can a promoter who owns substantial equity in the bank be asked to sit on the fence and watch non-interested parties manage the bank."

AUTO INDUSTRY VETERAN JAGDISH KHATTAR PASSES AWAY

New Delhi, April 26: Former managing director of Maruti Suzuki India, Jagdish Khattar, passed away Monday morning following a cardiac arrest, according to people close to him.

Khattar (79), a former bureaucrat, was considered as one of the most high profile leaders of the Indian automotive indus-



try, laying the foundation for Maruti's future growth after the government began its disinvestment in 2002 and gradually exited from its joint venture with Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC).

He had joined the then Maruti Udyog Ltd in July 1993 as director (marketing).

Maruti Suzuki chairman R. C. Bhargava, who persuaded Khattar to leave IAS and join Maruti, termed him as a "first class person" and his demise as a "big loss" both personally as well as for the automotive industry. — PTI

MPHASIS OWNERSHIP CHANGE TO SET OFF OPEN OFFER

New Delhi, April 26: Shares of Mphasis Ltd closed with a gain of over 1.6 per cent on Monday after Blackstone said funds managed it will acquire a majority stake in the mid-sized IT firm.

This, the private equity firm said, will trigger an open offer for acquisition of up to 26 per cent stake for about Rs 8,262 crore.

A wholly owned subsidiary of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, UC Investments (Office of the Chief Investment Officer of The Regents, University of California) and others will co-invest with Blackstone PE fund in the company, a statement said.

A different fund managed by Blackstone had acquired a controlling stake in Mphasis from Hewlett Packard Enterprise in September 2016.

Based on the open offer subscription, the blended purchase price will vary between Rs 1,452 and Rs 1,497 per share and the purchase consideration will vary between Rs 15,200 crore and Rs 21,000 crore (about \$2 bn-2.8 bn), the statement said.

At the end of March 2021 quarter, Marble II Pte Ltd, a fund managed by Blackstone, held 56.03 per cent stake in Mphasis.

Mphasis in a regulatory filing said Marble II will sell up to 55.31 per cent stake as part of a share purchase pact signed on Monday. — PTI

Price gap of ready and under construction houses narrows

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 26

Sluggish demand has narrowed down the price difference between ready-to-move-in and under-construction residential units to as low as 3 per cent.

The price gap between ready and or under-construction housing, which has been narrowing since 2017, has come down to 3 to 5 per cent, indicating the sluggishness in demand in the market, finds Anarock Property Consultants.

In 2017, the price gap stood at 9 to 12 per cent and it had narrowed to 5-8 per cent in 2018.

In Mumbai, the price difference shrunk from 12



per cent in 2017 to 3 per cent in Q1 2021. In the case of Bengaluru, it was 12 per cent and 4 per cent and Pune, the gap narrowed from 12 per cent to 5 per cent.

According to Anarock, average prices of ready-to-occupy homes in Delhi NCR were Rs 4,650 per sq.

ft. and for under-construction ones Rs 4,500 per sq. ft. In Mumbai it stood at Rs 10,700 per sq ft and Rs 10,350 per sq ft respectively.

Apart from sluggish demand, unsold stock too held back the price rise of ready-to-occupy homes in these years. Construction delays and stalled projects also made customers averse to investing in under-construction units.

Further, ready-to-occupy homes do not attract GST and this has been an added attraction. "The shrunk price gap works well for end-users as well as investors," said Anuj Puri, chairman, Anarock Property Consultants.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

TECH MAHINDRA Q4 NET UP 34.6% TO ₹1,080 CR

Mumbai, April 26: Tech Mahindra reported a 34.6 per cent jump in net profit to Rs 1,081 crore for the March 2020 quarter and guided towards targeting for a double-digit revenue growth in FY22. Its post-tax net profit grew 9.8 per cent to Rs 4,428 crore in 2020-21, on the back of a 2.7 per cent growth in overall revenues to Rs 37,855 crore. CEO and MD C. P. Gurnani said 2020-21 was the "repair" year when the company faced the pandemic impact, and promised 2021-22 to be a "growth year". — PTI

TATA MOTORS TO CUT PRODUCTION

Pune, April 26: Tata Motors said it has decided to "calibrate" production of its vehicles with actual demand to prevent oversupply and a pile up of inventory at the company and dealers. It did not give any details about the likely quantum of

reduction in production. "The lockdown enforced in various parts of the country is expected to impact vehicle demand temporarily," the auto major said, adding, Hence, the firm has set in motion a comprehensive 'Business Agility Plan' to protect and serve the interests of its customers, dealers and suppliers. — Michael Gonsalves

POWERGRID INVIT'S IPO THIS WK



Mumbai, April 26: Powergrid InvIT will come out with India's first PSU infrastructure investment trust IPO on Thursday, April 29. The IPO seeks to raise Rs 7,734.92 crore from units sold at a price band of Rs 99 to Rs 100 apiece. IRB InvIT and Indi Grid InvIT are already listed on the stock exchanges. An InvIT is a collective investment scheme similar to a mutual fund that invests in infrastructure projects. The Powergrid InvIT IPO comprises fresh issue of units for up to Rs 4,993.48 crore and the selling unitholder is offering units aggregating up to Rs 2,741.50 crore. — Ravi Ranjan Prasad

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Hockey captain Rani, 6 others +ve

New Delhi: Seven members of the Indian women's hockey team, including captain Rani Rampal, and two support staff members on Monday tested positive for Covid-19 ahead of a training camp at the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) Centre in Bengaluru.

All the players and support staff are asymptomatic and have been placed under observation at the SAI centre.

"They were tested on April 24, post quarantine after their return from their respective home towns to their training base at SAI Bengaluru, as per the laid down protocol," the SAI said in a statement. — PTI

Nadal bags 12th Barcelona crown

Barcelona: Rafael Nadal saved a championship point to beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-4, 6-7 (6/8), 7-5 on Sunday and claim a 12th Barcelona Open title in the ATP's longest match of 2021. He secured his first title of the year and 87th of his career, denying Tsitsipas back-to-back triumphs following his maiden Masters 1000 title at Monte Carlo last week. Nadal avenged his Australian Open quarter-final loss to Tsitsipas and will return to second in the ATP rankings on Monday by climbing back above Daniil Medvedev after his marathon 3-hour 38-minute win. — AFP

Cirstea wins WTA title after 13 years

Istanbul: Romania's Sorana Cirstea said she "didn't expect" to win the Istanbul claycourt tournament on Sunday, her second career title coming 13 years after her first. The 31-year-old Romanian defeated top-seeded Elise Mertens of Belgium 6-1, 7-6 (7/3) in the final having not dropped a set all week. Cirstea, ranked at 67 in the world, captured her maiden title at Tashkent in 2008. Sunday was her fifth final, having made her maiden championship match as a 17-year-old qualifier at Budapest 2007. "I'm very, very happy for this trophy," Cirstea said at the winner's ceremony. — AFP

FOUR IN A ROW FOR CITY

Guardiola's men outclass Tottenham to retain League Cup in front of fans

London, April 26: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said winning felt much better with fans in attendance after beating Tottenham 1-0 at Wembley to lift the League Cup for the fourth consecutive year in front of 8,000 supporters on Sunday.

Aymeric Laporte's header eight minutes from time finally rewarded a dominant performance from City as they extended Spurs' 13-year wait to win a trophy.

For the first time in 13 months, a football match in England had designated fans from both teams inside the stadium in one of a series of test events at the 90,000 capacity Wembley as coronavirus restrictions are eased.

"It's not full, but it is much better," said Guardiola. "To celebrate with them is much better. "We played really well. We are incredibly happy to win the first title, four in a row in this competition, but especially because in the last 33 games, we won 30."

Defeat by Chelsea in the FA Cup semi-finals last weekend means City can not claim an unprecedented



Manchester City players celebrate with the trophy after winning the League Cup final against Tottenham Hotspur 1-0 at the Wembley Stadium in London on Sunday. — AP

ed quadruple of trophies this season.

However, they remain on course for a treble with the first leg of their Champions League semifinal against Paris Saint-Germain to come on Wednesday before possibly

sealing the Premier League title next weekend.

Victory takes Guardiola's personal tally of major trophies to 25 across his spells in charge of Barcelona, Bayern Munich and City, seven of which have come in England.

end of a chaotic week that saw them sack Jose Mourinho on Monday and, along with City and four other English clubs, pull out of a proposed European Super League amid fan fury.

Son Heung-min was reduced to tears after full-time, but in caretaker boss Ryan Mason's second game in charge, Spurs were completely outclassed by a far superior side.

"It's difficult to take for everyone associated with the football club," said former Tottenham midfielder Mason.

"It hurts. I know that feeling and it is normal that they are hurting. This group of players care deeply about this football club. We tried, it wasn't enough today and it's tough to take."

After a slight dip in form in recent weeks, City were back to their best as they pinned Tottenham back from the first whistle and should have won by a far more comfortable scoreline.

Hugo Lloris's goal lived a charmed life, particularly during the first half.

— AFP

ATLETICO DEFEAT BY BILBAO HANDS INITIATIVE TO BARCA

Madrid, April 26: Atletico Madrid's title hopes suffered a setback on Sunday as a shock 2-1 defeat at Athletic Bilbao handed Barcelona the upper hand in a thrilling race at the top of La Liga.

Real Madrid's draw with Real Betis on Saturday gave Atletico the chance to pull further clear but instead they ended the weekend with their lead reduced, a loss at San Mames the latest twist in Europe's most unpredictable domestic chase.

Barcelona had earlier beaten Villarreal by the same scoreline, with Antoine Griezmann's quick-fire double becoming all the more valuable

after another Atletico slip. Sevilla have largely been overlooked as possible champions in Spain but they are right in the mix as well now after a 2-1 win over Granada puts them just three points off the top and one behind Real Madrid.

Yet Barcelona were the biggest winners, with Ronald Koeman's team able to go top of the table if they win their game in hand at home to Granada on Thursday, even if Atletico might have a way back given they are still to play at Camp Nou on May 8.

Real Madrid host Sevilla a day later. — AFP

Italian clubs in rebel league to be banned from Serie 'A'

Rome, April 26: The Italian football federation (FIGC) said on Monday that clubs who join a breakaway league would be banned from all domestic competitions including Serie 'A'.

Three Serie 'A' clubs — Juventus, Inter Milan and AC Milan — were among 12 major European sides who were involved in the plans to launch a European Super League last week.

"(Clubs) who plan to play in competitions outside of FIFA or UEFA will lose their affiliation to our championship," FIGC president Gabriele Gravina said after a meet-

ing on Monday. Inter Milan announced their withdrawal from the proposed Super League last Wednesday after the departure of the 'big six' English clubs.

But Juventus and AC Milan were less clear, acknowledging the failure of the plans without specifying whether or not they were leaving the project.

"It is obvious that if, on June 21, the closing date for applications for registration, some wanted to participate in competitions of a private nature, they would not take part in our championship," said Gravina in a statement.

"At the moment, we have no information on who stayed and who left the Super League." The new rule will be added to the licenses of the clubs and into the regulatory texts of the FIGC. — AFP

Deepika, Atanu trap triple gold

Guatemala City, April 26: Indian archery's star couple Deepika Kumari and Atanu Das led the show with two individual gold medals as the country capped its best ever performance in a World Cup, claiming three golds and a bronze in the tournament's first stage here.

Former world number one Deepika claimed her career's third individual World Cup gold to add to the team's triumph, while her husband Das grabbed his first ever World Cup individual medal in style winning the men's recurve individual final.

The two are now automatically qualified for this season's most-coveted Archery World Cup Final.

"We travel together, train together, compete together and win together," Das, who got married to Deepika in June last year after a two-year courtship, said after claiming the gold medal on Sunday.

"She knows what I like, and I know what she likes."

This was the best ever World Cup finish by India's recurve archers with two individual and one team gold medals in their return to the top International calendar year event after almost two years.

Also, this was India's best ever individual recurve men's result since

● This was the best ever World Cup finish by India's recurve archers with two individual and one team gold medals in their return to the top International calendar year event after almost two years.

Jayanta Talukdar triumphed in Croatia way back in 2009.

India started with the women's trio of Deepika, Ankita Bhakat and Komalika Bari winning the first team gold after seven years. They scripted a stunning turnaround to down fancied Mexico 5-4 (27-26) in an intriguing shoot-off.

The performance rubbed off on the mixed pair of Das and Bhakat as they bagged a bronze, upsetting top seeds USA 6-2 with yet another tightback at the Sports Complex Los Arcos here.

But the icing on the cake came in the individual events later in the day when Deepika and Das bagged two individual golds in their respective events.

This was Deepika's third career stage win and first since Salt Lake City 2018. — PTI

TOKYO TO DECIDE ON FAN LIMIT BY END OF MONTH

Tokyo, April 26: Tokyo 2020 President Seiko Hashimoto said on Monday that she will decide the upper limit of spectators for the Olympics and Paralympics by the end of April.

"As for the upper limit of spectators, we will make a decision on that regard by the end of April. In order to flexibly address the virus situation including the state of emergency, we will work closely with the IOC, IPC, the central government and the Tokyo metropolitan government in order to gain consensus," said Hashimoto during Tokyo 2020 executive board meeting held in the capital.

Hashimoto noted that she was highly aware of concern about the virus resurgence as the state of emergency has been issued in Tokyo and three other prefectures but will have anti-virus measures that address all the possible issues that may be caused by holding the games amid the pandemic. — AP

