

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | MONDAY | 19 APRIL 2021

## WEATHER

 **Max:** 39.0°C  
**Min:** 25.0°C  
**RH:** 73%  
**Rainfall:** Nil!

**Forecast:** Humid.  
Max/Min temp. 39/25 9C

## ASTROGUIDE

**Plava:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Chaitra Shuddha Saptami till 11.57 pm  
**Star:** Punarvasu full day  
**Varjyam:** 5.55 pm to 7.39 pm  
**Durmuhurtam:** 12.40 pm to 1.30 pm; 3.10 pm to 3.59 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 7.30 am to 9 am  
**HURI CALENDAR**  
**Ramzan** 6,1442 AH  
**PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)**  
**Fajar:** 5:25 am  
**Zohar:** 1:30 pm  
**Asar:** 5:00 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6:26 pm  
**Isha:** 8:30 pm  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW** 5.44 AM  
**SUNSET TODAY** 6.19 PM  
**MOONRISE TODAY** 10.04 AM  
**MOONSET TOMORROW** --

## RAMZAN TIMINGS

**IFTAR:** 6.28 pm (Today)  
**SEHRI:** 4.21 am (Tomorrow)

## COUNTER POINT



**You used to hoard pulses and onions? I am hoarding Covid vaccines and medicines!**

## SHORT TAKES

### India, Pak FMs crossover in UAE

**Dubai:** The foreign ministers of India and Pakistan made crossover visits to the United Arab Emirates this weekend, after it was revealed the Gulf nation has been mediating between the hostile neighbours. “Good to be in the #UAE,” Pakistan’s Shah Mahmood Qureshi tweeted late Saturday. His Indian counterpart Subrahmanyam Jaishankar visited Abu Dhabi on Sunday.

### APRIL EDITION OF JEE-MAINS POSTPONED

**New Delhi:** Engineering entrance exam JEE-Mains scheduled to be held from April 27-30 has been postponed in view of the Covid-19 situation, Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal ‘Nishank’ said on Sunday. According to an official order by the National Testing Agency (NTA), “looking at the present situation of COVID-19 pandemic and also taking into account the safety and well being of candidates and examination functionaries, it has been decided to postpone JEE-(Main) April session”. “The revised dates will be announced later on and at least 15 days before the examination,” the order said. — PTI

## CLEAN | CHIT

## Evidence on record ignored in Ashok Babu's favour AP tax staff helping TD MLC

**N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 18**

Senior officials of the AP commercial taxes department (CTD) have gone all out to safeguard the interests of Telugu Desam MLC P. Ashok Babu, a bitter critic of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. Ignoring all evidence available on record, the CTD gave a clean chit to Ashok Babu in a Lokayukta case. State GST commissioner Peeyush Kumar

even wrote to its registrar to drop further action on a complaint filed against the MLC.

Making things more embarrassing for the ruling dispensation, the CTD on Saturday illegally transferred the complainant in the case, B. Meher Kumar, GST officer and president of the AP Commercial Taxes NGOs Association. Meher approached the Lokayukta against the TD MLC after the YSR Congress took the reins of the government.

“Transfer of the complainant along with four others is a clear case of witch hunting because he questioned the previous inquiry conducted by senior officials into Ashok Babu’s case and approached the Lokayukta against them,” alleged K.R. Suryanarayana, president of the AP Government Employees Association. The transfer of Meher Kumar and others to any district other than Krishna is a clear violation of the Presidential Order,

he pointed out. Inquiries revealed that Ashok Babu had applied for voluntary retirement just before filing his nomination paper as MLC during the Naidu regime. There were allegations about his wrong claims of education qualification and pending criminal cases but the then inquiry officer looked the other way and a gave clean chit to Ashok Babu.

■ **Page 2: Clean chit facilitated retirement**

## WORLD | 5

### Israel relaxes rule to wear mask in public



deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle



## SPORTS | 8

### ABD, Maxwell fire RCB to third win

## TABLOID

### 'False Positive' costs archery team dearly



## Cops see ex-DGP ‘ploy’ on CM

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 18**

AP police have alleged that under suspension IPS officer A. B. Venkateswara Rao, once Director General of Police, had pressurised his subordinates into falsely implicating Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and his family in the Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy murder case.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, DIG (technical) Pala Raju charged that for 15 days after the murder of

● **PALA RAJU**, DIG (technical) charged that for 15 days after the murder of Vivekananda Reddy, former DGP Venkateswara Rao was monitoring the entire investigation.

● **HE DIDN'T** pass on to then Kadapa SP and others important information he had on the murder

Vivekananda Reddy. Venkateswara Rao was monitoring the entire investigation. During the period, he did not pass on to then

Kadapa SP and other officials important information he had on the murder, despite playing an important role in the investigation.

The DIG said the under suspension former DGP now writing a letter offering information on Vivekananda’s murder to CBI amounts to holding back information and not passing on the same to his succeeding officer, nor giving it to Special Investigation Team that investigated the case. This is in violation of All India

Service rules, Pala Raju told the assembled media. It may be recalled that Venkateswara Rao had recently levelled allegations against top brass of AP police as well as top government officials with regard to murder of Jagan Mohan Reddy’s uncle. The suspended officer further wrote a letter to CBI about reluctance of officials in receiving information regarding murder of Vivekananda Reddy.

■ **Page 2: Why 2 years to part with info, ask cops**

## 5 lakh frontline staff in AP to get jab

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 18**

State administration has geared up to vaccinate almost half a million healthcare and frontline workers against Coronavirus from Monday.

Andhra Pradesh Covid nodal officer Dr. Arja Srikanth pointed out that already five lakh workers have been vaccinated. Vaccination of all the remaining people in this category will start from Monday.

A user-friendly application has been developed to online monitor and capture individual vaccination data from every corner of the state.

### AP GETS SIH’S 2 LAKH VAX SHIPMENT

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 18**

AP government received two lakh Covishield vaccine doses from Serum Institute of India (SIH). The state has eight lakh vaccine doses and from Monday the doses will be administered across the state through PHCs, CHCs, area hospitals and

district Covid hospitals and a few designated private hospitals.

AP has kept the essential stocks handy following the surge in cases. The stocks include 4,75,331 VTMs, 8,07,562 PPE kits, 6,34,580 N95 masks, 23,89,050 triple-layer masks, 13,41,215 gloves, 4,26,096 home isolation kits and 46,565 remdesivir injections.

will use the latest application to enter details of individuals getting vaccinated.

■ **Page 3: Unvaccinated FLWs, HCWs to be listed**

### SURGE IN NORTH COASTAL AP, SRIKAKULAM TOP

**DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 18**

North coastal Andhra is witnessing a surge in Covid-19 cases, with Srikakulam district registering 912 cases, the second highest in AP after Chittoor with 1,171 cases in the last 24 hours. Visakhapatnam saw 551 cases and Vizianagaram 349.

■ **Page 3: Officials urge curbs to contain Covid**

## BJP enters Mum. row on remdesivir

**BHAGWAN PARAB and SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, APRIL 18**

The conflict between the Maharashtra government and the BJP over the supply of the Remdesivir drug reached a flashpoint after the Mumbai police, in a late Saturday night drama, detained a director of the Daman-based pharma company for allegedly storing a huge quantity of the drug. Furious BJP leaders have accused the state government of harassing the Remdesivir suppliers.

The Mumbai police detained and questioned the director, whose identity has not been revealed, of Daman-based Bruck Pharmaceuticals, after it got information that thousands of vials of Remdesivir used in Covid-19’s treatment were to be flown out of the country.

Denying allegations levelled by the BJP leaders, the police said it only “questioned” the pharma firm executive because of rampant black marketing of the drug. The director was questioned for about 45 minutes at the Vile Parle police station.

DCP Manjunath Shinge clarified in a statement: “We got information from our network that a huge quantity of Remdesivir made in Daman is being stored in Mumbai and will be transported out of

### CENTRE PLANS CRACKDOWN ON HOARDING

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 18**

The Union home ministry is coordinating with police departments of all states and Union Territories to crack down on those indulging in hoarding and over-pricing of essential medicines like remdesivir, Covid vaccines, and oxygen cylinders.

Source said a team of officials has been set up in the ministry, which is in constant touch with all state police forces. The ministry has also assured states that paramilitary forces can also be provided for their assistance to check misuse of medicines and vaccines.

■ **Page 3: Pandemic's scale is massive, say officials**

the country by air cargo.” He added: “There is a shortage of this medicine and its export was stopped. Hence, we acted and called the owner of the pharma firm to question him about where the medicine has been stored in the city. We acted in good faith for the larger interest of the public.”

### RAHUL CANCELS HIS RALLIES TO FIGHT COVID

**New Delhi, April 18:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday cancelled all his public rallies in poll-bound West Bengal following a rapid rise in Covid-19 cases in the country.

He also advised all other politicians to think about the consequences of holding large public rallies.

“In view of the Covid situation, I am suspending all my public rallies in West Bengal. I would advise all political leaders to think deeply about the consequences of holding large public rallies under the current circumstances,” he said on Twitter.

“One has seen such a crowd of the sick and the dead for the first time,” he said in another tweet in Hindi, apparently referring to the large crowds at Bengal rallies of BJP leaders.

The Congress has been critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah for holding rallies amid the rise in coronavirus cases in the country.

Senior Congress leader P. Chidambaram has accused the PM of shocking callousness for holding big rallies in poll-bound Bengal amid the rise in Covid-19 cases. — PTI

## Singh’s tips to PM on fighting Covid

### Invoke CL to let more firms make vaccine

**New Delhi, April 18:** Former prime minister Manmohan Singh on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggesting five measures to battle the Covid-19 crisis, including ramping up vaccination and boosting the supply of medicines.

In a letter to the prime minister, the veteran Congress leader said one must not look at absolute numbers but the total percentage of the population that has been vaccinated.

Invoking compulsory licensing provisions for drug manufacturers and giving some flexibility to states to define categories of frontline workers who can be vaccinated even if they are below 45 years are some of the steps mooted by him. “The key to our fight against Covid-19 must be ramping up the vaccination effort. We must resist the temptation to look at the absolute numbers being vaccinated, and focus instead on the percentage,” he said in his letter.

He said some states may want to designate school teachers, bus, three-wheeler and taxi drivers, municipal and panchayat staff,

## VSP liquid oxygen to reach Maha, MP

**K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 18**

The Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited will be sending 97 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) to Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, now facing severe shortage of the life-saving gas due to the abnormal increase in Covid-19 positive cases.

“We have received an indent for 97 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen, which will be sent

through road tankers placed on the flat wagons. Initially, we will be sending for 10 days and later the quantum will be decided based on our stock position,” said a senior RINL officer. The wagons would be arriving in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

He said the supply would not be stopped to AP government, a pre-condition before agreeing to supply to Maharashtra.

■ **Page 3: VSP biggest oxygen producer in AP**

and possibly lawyers who have to attend courts as frontline workers, and they can then be vaccinated even if they are below 45 years. “I believe this is the time to invoke the compulsory licensing (CL) provisions in the law so that more number of companies are able to produce the vaccines under a

licence. This, I recall, had happened earlier for medicines to deal with the AIDS disease,” he said.

Citing Israel’s example, which has invoked the compulsory licensing, he said there is a case for India to do so as well.

■ **Page 2: Be transparent on Covid orders, says Singh**



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## SHORT TAKES

SEER'S APPEAL  
TO AP, TS ON  
RAM NAVAMIDC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 18:

Seer of Sarada Peetham Swami Swoopandendra Swami has appealed to the governments of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana to stop public celebrations of Ram Navami in all the Ram temples in both states beginning from April 21 in view of the surge in the Covid cases across the two states.

He appealed to the chief ministers to regulate the village festivals celebrated in a big way after the Ugadi through the endowment departments.

BOGUS VOTES  
USED FOR BIG  
MARGIN: CONGDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 18

P. Naveen Kumar Reddy, Rayalaseema Porata Samiti convener and Congress senior leader, said that the YSRC had gained national attention, as the Chief Minister had wanted, by bringing thousands of outsiders to cast bogus votes during the Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency byelection in an effort to garner a record victory margin.

Speaking to mediapersons, Naveen Kumar said the whole country was shocked to see thousands of people flocking in buses to Tirupati with fake voter ID cards and casting bogus votes on Saturday.

KAKANI BLAMES  
TD, BJP FOR LOW  
VOTER TURNOUTDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 18

YSR Congress's Nellore district convener and Sarvepalli legislator Kakani Govardhan Reddy blamed the leaders of Telugu Desam (TD) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the steep decline in voter turnout in the Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election held on Saturday.

The YSRC MLA slammed the TD and BJP leaders for intimidating voters standing in the queue line at polling stations.

CLEAN CHIT  
FACILITATED  
RETIREMENT

FROM PAGE 1

The clean chit facilitated the retirement of P. Ashok Babu from service and contesting the Legislative Council elections.

Meher Kumar approached the Lokayukta stating that Ashok Babu had wrongly claimed that he was a graduate and had mentioned in his election affidavit his pending criminal cases while the department had concluded that there were no pending cases. Meher Kumar also produced evidence to establish that Ashok Babu was engaged in political activity including campaigning for the Congress against the BJP in the Karnataka Assembly elections.

BE TRANSPARENT  
ON COVID ORDERS,  
SAYS SINGH

FROM PAGE 1

Singh said the Centre should publicise vaccine dose orders placed and accepted for delivery over the next six months. He said the government should indicate how vaccine supplies are to be distributed to states.

"If we want to vaccinate a target number in this period, we should place enough orders in advance so that producers can adhere to an agreed schedule of supply," he noted.

The former PM said the government should indicate how this expected vaccine supply will be distributed across states based on a transparent formula.

He suggested that the central government could retain 10 per cent for distribution based on emergency needs, and states should have a clear signal of likely availability so that they can plan their roll-out. Noting that India has emerged as the largest vaccine producer in the world, he said at this time of a public health emergency, the government must proactively support vaccine producers to expand their manufacturing facilities.



Members of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant employees union and JAC members take part in a rally in protest against the privatisation move on Visakhapatnam Steel Plant and new farm laws by Central Government during Rythu Karmika Sankaravam on the beach road in Visakhapatnam on Sunday. — K. MURALIKRISHNA

BKU's Tikait backs protest  
against VSP privatisation

Modi govt is working for a few private industrial houses: Farmer leader

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 18

National president of All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) Ashok Dhawale and Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) spokesperson Rakesh Singh Tikait have pledged support to ongoing agitation against privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

Addressing a press conference in Visakhapatnam, both the leaders, who are here to address a public meeting at RK Beach, said it is time trade union leaders of Andhra Pradesh protected the

steel plant, failing which Modi government will gain courage to privatise major industries across the country.

Ashok Dhawale accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of being on a mission to privatise all public sector undertakings, including ports, airports, educational and health institutions. "Even during Covid pandemic period, the top 140 corporate houses made 596 billion dollars. People in all states are agitating against Modi's policies that enrich private players," Dhawale stated. Speaking on the occasion,

Ashok Dhawale accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of being on a mission to privatise all public sector undertakings, including ports, airports, educational and health institutions.

AIKS Punjab president Balkaran Singh charged that Narendra Modi is out to privatise even water, air and land.

BKU national spokesperson Rakesh Tikait said over one lakh farmers, while agitating

for minimum support price, have strongly opposed privatisation of VSP and other PSU industries in the country. He said Visakhapatnam Steel Plant belongs to people of Andhra Pradesh, as it came into existence on lands given by local farmers. "Modi government is working for a few private industrial houses and has no interest in the welfare of people," Tikait remarked.

AIKS Punjab president Balkaran Singh charged that Narendra Modi is out to privatise even water, air and land. "Modi is running

the government on lines of East India Company, which exploited the nation for centuries," Singh pointed out.

Former minister and farmers' leader Vadde Sobhanadeeswara Rao said the Prime Minister has sold 23 public sector undertakings for serving just Ambani and Adani families in the country. He asserted that privatisation of VSP will be stopped with firm determination of people. Trade union leaders Ch. Narsinga Rao, Mantri Rajasekhara and D. Adinarayana were present on the occasion.

## Fishing ban



Fishing harbor seen packed with huge numbers of mechanised fishing vessels as they were anchored in Visakhapatnam on Sunday. The two-month ban on fishing off the sea on mechanised boats was imposed by the state government a few days ago. — DC

FATE | SEALED

Central armed police forces would safeguard the strongrooms: Giridhar

EVMs shifted to strongrooms in Tirupati  
BJP demands repollingDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 18

The Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) and other units pertaining to Saturday's Tirupati Lok Sabha byelections received from Chittoor district polling stations were kept in the strongrooms at S.V. Arts College here on Sunday.

Although polling ended by 7 pm on Saturday, it was only by Sunday morning that some of EVMs and VVPATs reached Tirupati. The machines were kept in strongrooms in the presence of candidates and representatives of various political parties. They

were sealed in the presence of election observer Dinesh Kumar Giridhar Lal, district election officer and collector M. Harinarayanan and AROs. Giridhar Lal also reviewed the scrutiny of the polling process with the DEO, municipal commissioner P.S. Girisha, SPs S. Senthil Kumar and Ch. Venkata Appala Naidu and joint collector Veerabrahmam, polling officials and representatives of contestants.

Addressing officials, Giridhar Lal said that the central armed police forces would safeguard the strongrooms. He said the byelection process on Saturday went on smoothly and the arrangements

were good, as he himself had inspected 15 polling stations. He also said scrutiny with sectoral authorities was mandatory to secure EVMs in strongrooms.

He inquired into the complaints received in the last 48 hours. Assembly segment-wise AROs Chandramouliwar Reddy (Tirupati-), Srinivas (Srikalahasti) and Chandra Sekhar (Satyavedu) presented records from their respective sectoral authorities.

EVMs and VVPATs from Sullurpetta, Gudur, Venkatagiri and Sarvepalli segments were kept in strongrooms at D.K.W. Government college in Nellore. Returning officer

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 18

BJP demanded the cancellation of Tirupati MP by-election and conduct a re-poll due to the sheer violation of norms in various forms. BJP AP president Somu Veerajulu on Sunday said that YSR Congress pressed bogus voters into action in Tirupati by-election polling and ministers violated election code and the Election Commission

and Nellore collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu, assistant returning officer

State govt acts  
against former  
intel chief ABVDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 18

Andhra Pradesh government has on Sunday initiated disciplinary proceedings against suspended IPS officer A.B. Venkateswara Rao. Orders to this effect have been issued by Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das through GO RT: 767 under Rule 8 of All India Services (Discipline & Appeal) Rules, 1969.

The GO directed Venkateswara Rao to submit within 30 days a written statement of his defence and state whether he desires to be heard in person.

If no written statement is filed or he does not appear in person before competent authority or otherwise fails or refuses to comply with provisions of Rule 8, action will be taken against him based on the material available on record on ground that he has no explanation to offer. The order stated that the IPS officer violated norms by choosing to comment on the state of departmental proceedings against him, which are pending as of today,

stating that during the course of investigation, ACB threatened witnesses, reports have been submitted with false information, and forged e-file created to implicate him in the case with a mala fide intention.

The GO further said that under Rule 7 of AIS (Conduct) Rules, 1968, no member of the service shall anonymously, pseudonymously or in his own name or in name of any other person or in any communication to press or in any public utterance make any statement of fact or opinion, which has the effect of an adverse criticism of any current or recent policy or action of the central or a state government. The order said the act of Venkateswara Rao is totally unbecoming of a government servant and amounts to misconduct under Rule 3 of the All India Services (Disciplinary & Appeal) Rules, 1969, and is in violation of rule 7 of the AIS (Conduct) Rules, 1968. Hence disciplinary proceedings have been started against Venkateswara Rao.

‘Why 2 years to  
part with info?’

FROM PAGE 1

Pala Raju, former Kadapa SP Rahul Dev Sharma, superintendent of police when Vivekananda was murdered, and Ammireddy, a representative of IPS officers' association, have refuted these allegations of the former DIG.

The DIG (Technical) said for 15 days after the murder, Venkateswara Rao was running the entire investigation. "Why didn't he use important information that he had on the murder when he was an active part of the investigation? While leaving the investigation, it is mandatory for any officer to disclose every single detail to his successor. Why didn't he do that? For three months after the murder, the then government was in power. The case had been with us for nine months after the present government took over. Since the last one year, it has been with the CBI. What made Venkateswara Rao take more than two years to come out with this information," Pala Raju asked.

Questioning the manner in which the former DGP's letter has been made public and its tim-



G. Pala Raju

ing, the DIG alleged that when Venkateswara Rao was investigating the case, he pressurised then SP Rahul Dev Sharma and other officers to implicate the then Leader of Opposition and present CM and his family in Vivekananda murder case. "Even today, if he (Venkateswara Rao) actually wants to provide evidence, he could do so in a sealed cover to the CBI. Why has he approached media," Pala Raju asked indicating that the former DGP's intentions are suspect.

Pala Raju pointed out that Venkateswara Rao's allegations against IAS and IPS officials in an earlier case related to illegal purchase of protection equipment later turned out to be baseless.

LOKESH WRITES TO JAGAN SEEKING  
CANCELLATION OF SSC EXAMSDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 18

Telugu Desam sought cancellation of SSC and Intermediate exams in AP. TD national general secretary Nara Lokesh on Sunday wrote a letter to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan

Mohan Reddy to cancel the exams in view of spurt in Corona cases.

Mr Lokesh in his letter said that India and AP are well in the middle of a second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic with mortality rates on the rise, hospital beds filling up.

objected to the wandering of minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy in Tirupati during polling and further conducting of press meet terming it as violation of election code of conduct. Mr Veerajulu alleged that the police department showed bias towards ruling YSR Congress as they never responded to the polling violations in Tirupati. He said that BJP lodged a complaint with ECI.

Harendira Prasad were present when the strong rooms were being sealed.



## SHORT TAKES

VONTIMITTA  
BRAHMOTSAVAMS  
IN EKANTAMDC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, APRIL 18

The annual Brahmotsavams in Sri Kodanda Ramalayam at Vontimitta in YSR Kadapa district will be celebrated from April 21 to 29 in Ekantham in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. As the Covid-19 cases are on the rise, keeping in view the safety of the devotees, TTD has decided to conduct the Vontimitta Sri Kodandarama Swamy Brahmotsavams in Ekantham this year also.

UNVACCINATED  
FLWS, HCWS  
TO BE LISTED

FROM PAGE 1

The nodal officer pointed out that once each medical officer logs in with his or her user name and password, list of unvaccinated FLWs and HCWs will be available to them, along with their names and mobile numbers. SMS alerts will be sent to each such frontline and healthcare worker's phone to arrive for vaccination as per the date and time allotted.

Dr Srikanth said this is part of the state government's initiative to take care of its frontline workers, so that the second wave of Coronavirus pandemic can be dealt with effectively.

OFFICIALS URGE  
CURBS TO  
CONTAIN COVID

FROM PAGE 1

Senior medical officers and a few NGOs appealed to the government to impose restrictions to contain the spread of the virus in the region. They said fishing harbours, shopping malls, cinema halls and tourist spots were seeing huge gatherings with many not using masks and sanitisers nor maintaining social distance.

As a measure to contain the rush at the fishing harbour, the department of fisheries has offered ₹10,000 to country boat owners to stop fishing. This is on par with what is paid to motorised and mechanical boats during fishing holiday period.

"This would prevent crowding in the market as well as improve the breeding of fish in the sea," said joint director Phani Prakash. He said not many people were seen in the fishing harbour on Monday as most of the boats were anchored due to the two-month fishing holiday that came into effect from April 15.

Elected representatives also announced that they would not be meeting people physically. Anakapalle MP Dr K. Satyavathi and MLA Gudivada Amarath on Sunday appealed to the people not to visit their camp offices or homes due to the spread of Covid. Both the leaders announced that the petitioners could call them over phone for redressal of grievances or send mails.

Visakhapatnam West MLA and TD leader P.V.G.R. Naidu (Ganababu) also announced restrictions. He said a box has been kept at his main gate where people could drop their petitions and call him for urgent matters.

WOMAN DIES,  
HOME GUARD  
INJUREDDC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, APRIL 18

A woman Chikatla Ramalakshmi, 35, died and a home guard Koppa Nathi Gangadhar was injured when an RTC bus hit his bike near Turangi area under Karapa police station limits.

According to Karapa police, when Gangadhar was going to Rajamahendravaram on bike, Ramalakshmi asked a lift to go Ramachandrapuram. While both were going on bike, the RTC bus hit the bike from backside. Ramalakshmi died on the spot and home guard was admitted in Government General Hospital. Karapa Sub-Inspector D.Rama Rao registered a case.

Meanwhile Rajamahendravaram Urban District Superintendent of Police Shemushi Bajpayee said that all the sub-divisional police officers, Circle Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors should sanitize their offices in view of Covid-19 pandemic and every police personnel should wear masks without fail.



Traders shut their shops at One Town main bazaar following a call from the the Chamber of Commerce, to control Covid cases in Vijayawada on Sunday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Cloistered classrooms  
exposing kids to virus

Kurnool district reports 729 positive cases, three deaths

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC  
KURNOOL, APRIL 18

The sudden spike in Covid-19 cases in the district, particularly among schoolchildren, can only be addressed by the district administration if they devise newer and more workable containment strategies. On Sunday, 729 positive cases and three deaths have been reported.

Health minister Alla Nani directed district medical and health officer Ram Giddayya to monitor Corona cases in Kasturba school at Adoni where 53 students tested positive while a school in Kodumur reported six more cases. The school was closed for a week and students have been quarantined, said the DMHO.

The DMHO said most of the positive cases are reported from urban areas like Nandyal, Adoni and Kurnool and that too from educational institutions. The spread of the virus is very fast among students as schools are not maintaining physical distance norms due to cramped classrooms.

In private colleges run by Chaitanya and Narayana managements, it has been noticed that class sections have been canceled and all students of a particular class are accommodated in a single lecture hall. Lack of teaching staff and cost-reduction initiatives are mak-

Authorities identify 11 pvt  
hospitals for Covid-19 careDC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, APRIL 18

Health authorities of Kadapa have identified 11 private hospitals in the district for treating patients contracting Coronavirus.

These will be in addition to four government hospitals, apart from Fatima Medical College, Kadapa RIMS, Proddatur District Hospital and Pulivendula Area Hospital, which are already treating Covid-19 patients.

The 11 private hospitals identified had treated Corona patients last year too when instances of the virus had peaked. The private Covid hospitals include Madan Multi Specialty Hospital, Harsha, Shreyan Hospital, and Specialty Hospitals in Proddatur, Mohan Hospital, Komma Super Specialty Hospital, Rama Srikara Hospital, Thirumala, Palla Hospital, City Care, and Kadapa Hospital in Kadapa.

ing schoolchildren vulnerable, district education officials said. The DMHO who spent most of Sunday on video and phone conferences with medical and

● A total of 1,000 beds have been set apart for Coronavirus patients in all these hospitals

A total of 1,000 beds have been set apart for Coronavirus patients in all these hospitals. Further, five Covid Care Centres have been set up at Haj House in Kadapa, AP Carl in Pulivendula, Government Polytechnic College in Proddatur, Minority Polytechnic College in Rayachoti and Covid Care Centre in Horticulture University at Anantharajupeta near Railway Koduru.

District collector Chevuru Harikiran has put district authorities on high alert following a surge in cases during the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic.

Last year, persons diagnosed with Coronavirus exhibited symptoms of fever, cold, cough, loss of taste and odour, apart from respiratory issues.

There are cases wherein no symptoms are being exhibited in the second wave till the situation gets worse. The severity of corona disease is increasing day by day as compared to last year. Cases had increased by 2.3 per cent last week. But these have now risen to 6.2 per cent.

Harikiran advised people to remain vigilant and take all precautions. Relatively healthier persons who contract the virus can remain in home isolation while taking medications. The collector said chances of recovery in home isolation are more than 90 per cent. However, if the fever does not go down for 4-5 days, oxygen saturation is less than 94 per cent, and there is difficulty in breathing, such people should immediately go to the nearest Covid hospital. Doctors will immediately put them on the required Coronavirus regimen, the collector added.

some surgical measures to protect children."

A total of 39,500 doses of Covishield and 6,500 Covaxin have arrived, he said.

Covid-19 cases in Chittoor  
district cross 1-lakh markDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 18

The Chittoor district, which has been witnessing a steep spike in the number of Covid-19 positive cases for the past few days now, had crossed the 1-lakh mark with the addition of 1,171 fresh cases, reported in the last 24 hours as on Sunday.

According to the health bulletin released by the district administration, the tail-end district of AP had so far recorded 1,00,254 cases, out of which 7,856 are active after the discharge of

● 7,856 are active after the discharge of 91,480 patients and 918 deaths till date

● 33,000 cases added in August last year

91,480 patients and 918 deaths till date.

The virus spread in the district was rather slow initially, but it picked up pace in the mid of July and further skyrocketed in the month of August, last year. The district had recorded its first positive case on March 24, 2020 and it took nearly four months

to add 10,378 patients and breach the 10,000 mark on July 31 last year and later it took only 17 days to come near the 25,000-mark.

The district witnessed its worst-ever spike in cases in August last year, which added nearly 33,000 cases to the total. After a brief lull, now the case load reached the 1 lakh mark. The temple city of Tirupati has been continuously taking the top spot in the district and it has recorded 373 cases in its urban limits and 160 cases in rural limits in the last 24 hours as on Sunday.

## FRUITS OF LABOUR

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, APRIL 18

Oil palm farmers are a happy lot this season as a tonne of fruit is fetching ₹18,000. The price hike is being attributed to increase in prices of crude palm oil, which has touched ₹113 per kg. Price of palm fruit, which was ₹8,000 per tonne last year, went up to ₹9,000-₹10,000 in January this year. The same had shot up to ₹17,000 in the first week of April. Andhra Pradesh pro-

duces 15 lakh tonnes of palm fruit per year. Palmolin factories in the state purchase the fruit from farmers depending on international market prices of crude palm oil. Palm gardens in the state are spread over more than two lakh acres, majority of them being in East and West Godavari districts.

While palm farmers are a happy lot currently, they had faced great hardships from 2014 to 2019, as the Central government had lifted import duty on palm oil products. Prices of the

● The had lost ₹100 crore due to variation in prices of the fruit. However, after YSRC came to power, Chief Minister Jagan released ₹84 crore to palm farmers for recouping their loss to an extent

fruit had thus decreased drastically. However, the Central government has now imposed import duty on palm oil. This is helping farmers in getting a good price for their produce.

Fear of another  
lockdown loomsMD ILYAS | DC  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 18

People across the state are in the grip of fear about another lockdown due to the huge surge of Covid-19 positive cases. Business associations like the Chamber of Commerce have already imposed self-restrictions on trade timings by reducing business hours and closing shops by 6 pm with a complete closure on Sundays.

Government officials have started measures like closing parks, walking tracks, gymnasiums and swimming pools to contain the spread of a second wave.

However, these restrictions are worrying the public about a possible lockdown in the state.

There has been a steep hike in positive cases for the past 10 days. What earlier was around 200-300 new positive cases every day has now increased to a staggering 5,000 to 7,000 cases every day. As many as 6,582 new positive cases and 22 deaths were registered on Sunday reflecting the grim situation in all 13 districts.

As a precautionary measure, the Vijayawada Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Guntur Chamber of Commerce have decided to close all affiliated entities by 6 pm till April 30. Other associations and chambers in the state are likely to follow suit.

Presidents of the two chambers K. Vidyadhara Rao and A. Aanjaneyulu said that the Covid-19 situation is very alarming. They conducted meetings with business, commerce and trade organisations and decided to cut business timings.

Locals in several villages are imposing lock-

● Self-lockdown was imposed in villages of Kollipara mandal, Pedaravooru, Angalakuduru and Kathevaram and all shops, hotels and restaurants downed shutters.

down restrictions voluntarily. For instance, self-lockdown was imposed in villages of Kollipara mandal, Pedaravooru, Angalakuduru and Kathevaram and all shops, hotels and restaurants downed shutters. The task force committee meeting approved the appeal of locals and imposed lockdown restrictions till April 27 and shops would be allowed to open only from 6 am to 11 am.

Guntur Municipal Corporation commissioner, Ch. Anuradha said that parks, gymnasiums and swimming pools would be closed from Monday. She attributed the rise to people's neglect of Covid norms.

Private employees Purini Vijayabhaskar and Sk. Rahim said that many are in the grip of a lockdown fear. Several officials, requesting anonymity, opined that total lifting of restrictions and allowing cinema halls, malls, bars and liquor shops to stay open till night has worsened the situation. They opined that restricting business timings and closure of public gathering places could help avoid lockdown situations.

Officials said that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy during a review meeting on the Corona situation recalled the impact of lockdown on society and called for an increase in vaccinations, testing, tracing and containment measures.

Surge in Corona  
cases continuesDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 18

The huge surge in the Covid-19 new infections continues in AP State as 22 new deaths due to Covid-19, the highest daily toll since October; with 6,582 new infections registered on Sunday. Chittoor's cumulative infections tally has crossed the one-lakh mark and it was the second district after East Godavari to witness one-lakh Covid infections in the pandemic.

The total Covid-19 cases of the state increased to 9,62,037 and the toll reached 7,410. As many as 2,343 patients have recovered in the past day and the number of active Covid-19 cases were 44,686. The recovery rate further dropped to 94.58 per cent and the number of recoveries stands at 9,09,041.

As many as 35,922 samples were tested in the past day and their positivity rate was 18.32 per cent while the overall positivity rate of the 1.567 crore samples was 6.14 per cent.

The Chittoor district registered five new deaths, while Krishna and Nellore reported four deaths each. Kurnool district reported three, Anantapur and Guntur reported two each and Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram reported

one death each in the past 24 hours.

The Chittoor district reported the highest single-day tally of 1,171 new infections, followed by Srikakulam with 912, Guntur 804, Kurnool 729, Nellore 597, Visakhapatnam 551, Krishna 465, Vizianagaram 349, Prakasam 314, Anantapur 305, Kadapa 203, East Godavari 100 and least number of 82 new cases registered in West Godavari on Sunday.

The East Godavari district is on top with a total of 1,29,312 cases followed by Chittoor with 1,00,254, West Godavari 95,139, Guntur 86,570, Anantapur 71,453, Visakhapatnam 67,935, Nellore 67,600, Kurnool 66,125, Prakasam 65,985, Kadapa 55,313, Krishna 55,131, Srikakulam 51,788 and Vizianagaram is on the last place with a total of 43,537 Covid-19 cases.

encouraging. He hoped the same price trend will continue during the peak season too. He pointed out that in the past, Central government used to announce market intervention prices, but it is no more doing it.

A palm garden owner Bikkina Visweswara Rao recalled that white fly disease had infested palm fruit gardens during the past four years, which led to the yield falling to nearly one-fourth. This was the other reason palm farmers were getting low prices.



## SHORT TAKES

RAIPUR HOSPITAL  
FIRE: PROBE  
ORDERED

**Raipur, April 18:** Authorities have ordered an investigation after five Coronavirus patients died in a fire at the Covid-19 ward of a private hospital in Chhattisgarh's capital city Raipur, police said on Sunday.

Raipur collector Dr S. Bharathi Dasan has ordered an investigation into the incident. Officials have been directed to conduct safety check at Coronavirus hospitals in the city.

The fire broke out at Raipur's Rajdhani hospital on Saturday, police said. "Five Coronavirus patients died in the incident. One was charred to death and the others died due to suffocation," a police official said, adding a case of negligence will be registered against the owners of the hospital.

A supervisor saw smoke coming out of the ward and informed the hospital authorities, who alerted the police. The fire brigade and hospital staff rescued the other patients. "The fire broke out in the Covid-19 ward of Rajdhani Super Speciality Hospital located at Pachpedi Naka under Tikrapara police station at 4.30 pm and was brought under control by the firefighters in 20 minutes," tikrapara station house officer Sanjeev Mishra said.

When the fire broke out, there were around 30 patients in the ward, Mishra said. Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel expressed grief over the incident and announced a compensation of ₹4 lakh each to the families of the deceased.

CENTRE NOD TO  
BOOST MEDICAL  
OXYGEN SUPPLY

**New Delhi, April 18:** The Centre has sanctioned installation of 162 pressure swing adsorption (PSA) plants in public health facilities in all states, the health ministry said on Sunday, as demand of medical oxygen goes through the roof amid spiralling Coronavirus cases in the country.

The PSA plants manufacture oxygen and help hospitals become self-sufficient in their requirement for medical oxygen, while also reducing the burden on the national grid for its supply of medical oxygen.

A total of 162 PSA oxygen plants have been sanctioned by the government for installation in public health facilities in all states, the ministry tweeted. "These will augment medical oxygen capacity by 154.19 MT."

Thirty-three of the 162 PSA plants have been installed — five in Madhya Pradesh, four in Himachal Pradesh, three each in Chandigarh, Gujarat and Uttarakhand; two each in Bihar, Karnataka and Telangana; and one each in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Puducherry, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, it said.

Fifty-nine more PSA plants will be installed by April-end, while 80 more will be installed by May-end.

BSY IN HOSP FOR  
COVID, STABLE  
AND RECOVERING

**Bengaluru, April 18:** Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa who is undergoing treatment for Coronavirus at a private hospital is now stable and recovering, his office said on Sunday.

"The Chief Minister who was admitted in a hospital on Friday for Covid treatment is being monitored by a team of expert doctors. The health of the Chief Minister is stable and he is recovering," the office of the Chief Minister tweeted on Sunday.

Yediyurappa is spending his time in the hospital reading his favourite books and is in touch with officials to give them necessary directions, the tweet further said.

The Chief Minister had fever on Friday and when he got himself tested, the report came positive for Coronavirus. Accordingly, he got admitted to the hospital.

This is the second time Yediyurappa contracted Coronavirus.

This was despite the fact that the Chief Minister took the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine.

He was supposed to chair an all-party meeting on Sunday to take a stringent measure in view of rising Coronavirus cases in Bengaluru.

However, the meeting has been postponed to Monday and revenue minister R. Ashoka will now preside over the meeting.



City streets wear a deserted look during weekend lockdown to curb Covid-19 cases in Agra on Sunday.

— PTI

With 2.71 lakh new cases,  
India sees highest ever rise

States running out of beds, oxygen, drugs; govts scrambling to save lives

VINEETA PANDEY | DC  
with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

With 2,71,204 new cases, India saw the highest ever daily spike of Covid-19 on Sunday. The daily positivity rate in the last 12 days has doubled from 8 per cent to 16.69 per cent and the death in the last 24 hours due to the virus was 1,570. As states are running out of hospital beds, medical oxygen, and several life saving drugs, the union and state governments are scrambling to save lives.

Railways is gearing up to transport Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) and Oxygen Cylinders through "Oxygen Express" via green corridors to ensure fast movement of these trains. This came after Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra state governments approached the Ministry of Railways to explore whether Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) tankers could be moved through it.

In Delhi, the weekend curfew ends on Monday but traders in Chandni Chowk have decided to pull the shutters down till Sunday. Delhi government has filed FIR against four airlines under DDMA Act

BIHAR IMPOSES  
NIGHT CURFEW  
ALL OVER STATE

NAYYAR AZAD | DC  
PATNA, APRIL 18

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday imposed new restrictions including a statewide night curfew from 9 pm to 5 am to control the surge in Coronavirus.

According to the state government's directives, all educational institutions, religious places, malls, cinema houses and parks have been shut till May 15.

Offices and shops have also been asked to follow strict Covid-19 guidelines and close after 5 pm.

The decision to impose new restrictions was taken after a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Briefing reporters after his meetings with the health ministers and administrative officials, Kumar said "the decision has been taken to control the surge in Coronavirus cases.

Government and private offices will be open till 5 pm. Market places and mandis have also been asked to close after 5 pm. Bihar government has also decided to provide one month salary as a bonus to all health workers who have been working for the safety of people across the state."

Officials said that the steep rise in cases across the state has prompted the Bihar government to impose new restrictions in the state.

Delhi oxygen quota given  
to other states: Kejriwal

**New Delhi, April 18:** Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said Delhi is facing an "acute shortage" of oxygen for Covid-19 patients and alleged that the quota of the city has been diverted to other states.

The Chief Minister's remarks came hours after he wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his help in enhancing the number of hospital beds and immediate oxygen supply for patients in Delhi.

A central government

official has rejected Kejriwal's claims as "blatant lies" and said there was no panic situation in industries minister Piyush Goyal urging him to ensure "uninterrupted" supply of 700MT of oxygen on daily basis and restore supply of 140MT of oxygen by a supplier INOX.

The output of INOX, one of the major suppliers to Delhi hospitals, has been "diverted" to other states which has already started causing "critical shortages", he charged in the letter.

for not checking RT-PCR negative reports of incoming passengers. It is expected that the Delhi government may extend the weekend curfew for few more days as huge surges in daily cases continue. The decision in this regard is expected after a meeting between Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal on Monday.

Maharashtra minister Aditya Thackeray said the state is preparing for a third wave though it cannot be determined now if it will be as strong or weak. "We have come to the genuine belief that under-reporting is not going to help...Now we are preparing for the third wave. We have five lakh beds, 70 per cent of them oxygenated," said

A senior official in the Commerce Ministry said that the allegations made by the Delhi CM are "blatant lies".

According to official figures, Delhi hospitals received 254 MT of medical oxygen on April 16 and 612 MT on April 17. As of April 17, the daily demand of oxygen from Delhi was 197 MT. The total stock at INOX and Goyal Gas, Linde, Air Liquide for Delhi is 311 MT and the total stock position of oxygen in the capital is 700 MT. — PTI

Thackeray.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday held a review meeting to see Covid containment measures in his constituency Varanasi and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi announced to suspend all his election public rallies in view of rising cases.

Meanwhile, facing acute shortage of Covid-19 vaccines, Odisha government

TN imposes night curfew from  
April 20, full lockdown Sundays

R. MOHAN &  
D. SEKAR | DC  
CHENNAI, APRIL 18

It's back to basics again in the fight against Covid-19 in Tamil Nadu. Curfew at night (10 pm to 4 am) and a total Sunday lockdown have been ordered to kick in from Tuesday, April 20. The decision to try and clamp down was taken after a lengthy meeting at the Chief Minister's residence on Sunday.

In a statement released late evening, the government spelt out the measures it will be putting in place to try and stem the tide of the Coronavirus that has been infecting close to 8,000 people a day in its second wave before exploding past the 10,000-mark

STALIN URGES MODI TO SUPPLY 20L  
DOSES OF VACCINE FOR TAMIL NADU

**Chennai, April 18:** DMK president M.K. Stalin on Sunday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to direct officials to send 20 lakh Covid-19 vaccine doses "requisitioned" by the Tamil Nadu government immediately and ensure supplies commensurate with the state's population.

In view of rapid increase in the number of people getting infected by Covid-19, "universal vaccination" is the need of the hour to protect lives, the DMK chief said in a letter to the Prime Minister and appealed to him to "take a policy decision swiftly" over it.

Tamil Nadu would need more vaccine doses than allotted now to accomplish effective vaccinations, break the cycle of infection and flatten the curve, he said. — PTI

on Sunday when 10,723 new cases pushed the caseload to 9.91 lakh and total fatalities to 13,113.

The night curfew will be total with autos and taxis also banned. In normal times, autos and taxis are

expected to ply only for medical emergencies and to serve train and air travel passengers. There will be strict SoPs on public transport on working days. State Board exams for Class 12 have also been postponed and classes can be held only online and summer camps are banned.

Inter-district and inter-state transport will not be allowed either and only persons driving in an emergency will be allowed on the road. Of course, essential services like the carrying of milk and making newspaper deliveries and hospital emergency service vehicles will be allowed to ply. Transportation of petrol, diesel and LPG will also be exempted.

MP: Row over  
death of 10 in  
govt hospital

RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY | DC  
BHOPAL, APRIL 18

Ten Covid-19 patients died reportedly due to lack of oxygen in a government hospital in Madhya Pradesh, triggering an outcry.

The incident took place in the medical college hospital in Shahdol late on Saturday night.

While six patients died around midnight on Saturday, four others passed away in the early morning.

"Six people admitted in the ICU died last night. The deaths were not due to lack of oxygen. There were 62 patients in the ICU. Overall, there were 255 Covid-19 patients in the Covid hospital last night. Out of them, 155 were on oxygen", Milind Shiralkar, dean of the medical college hospital said on Sunday.

The hospital has its own oxygen plant.

He, however, said the oxygen pressure was going down in the system since Saturday evening. He has reported the matter to the local administration and sought liquid oxygen pillars to resume

● KIN OF the deceased, however, claimed some patients in the ICU were seen gasping for oxygen when the pressure in the oxygen supply system had gone down.

oxygen supply to the system.

However, no provision of liquid oxygen pillars was made till two in the morning.

Oxygen was supplied to the patients through oxygen cylinders, he added.

The dean said a probe was ordered into the incident.

Kin of the deceased, however, claimed some patients in the ICU were seen gasping for oxygen when the pressure in the oxygen supply system had gone down.

"I watched my brother dying due to lack of oxygen in the ICU", Ravi Kumar Jaiswal whose brother was admitted in the ICU told visiting reporters.

State medical education minister Vishwas Sarang denied that lack of oxygen had caused the death of ten Covid-19 patients in Shahdol medical college hospital.

14-day quarantine  
must for Kumbh  
mela returnees

AKSHAYA KUMAR  
SAHOO | DC  
with agency inputs  
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 18

Apparently worried over the sudden surge in Covid-19 cases across Odisha and Delhi, the state governments on Sunday made 14-day quarantine mandatory for Kumbh Mela returnees.

Several thousands of people, most of them from western Odisha, had visited Kumbh mela at Haridwar in Uttarakhand.

"The whole country is witnessing a surge in the number of Covid-19 cases. Spurt in the number of cases in the neighbouring states specially Chhattisgarh is affecting the border districts of Odisha," said director of public health Niranjan Mishra.

"As Kumbh mela has ended, it is expected that many participants will return to the state and it may worsen the situation. A list of the returnees has been prepared and it has been sent to all the district administrations. All the returnees have to stay in compulsory quarantine for 14 days. Even the quarantine period is mandatory for the returnees with Covid-19 negative certificates," said Mishra.

"If situation gets out of control in these states, the migratory Odias working there will be forced to return to the state. Odisha government is preparing a master plan to deal with any kind of eventualities," added Mishra.

Meanwhile, Delhi residents who have visited the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar or are planning to do so will have to undergo compulsory 14-day home quarantine on their return and upload their details on an official

website, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority said in an order.

The order issued on Saturday said those who visited Kumbh from 4 April onwards or those who plan to do so till end of the religious congregation at Haridwar on April 30 will have to upload their personal details, ID proof and dates of departure and arrival back to Delhi at the website [www.delhi.gov.in](http://www.delhi.gov.in).

"All residents of Delhi who have visited or are going to visit Kumbh 2021 at Haridwar, shall be required to compulsory home quarantine themselves for 14 days on arrival to Delhi," said the order issued by Vijay Dev, chief secretary and chairperson on executive committee of DDMA.

If a person returning from Haridwar Kumbh fails to upload his particulars on the Delhi government portal, he will be sent to institutional quarantine centre for 14 days by district magistrates concerned, the order said.

Violators of the DDMA order will be liable to be proceeded against under the Disaster Management Act 2005 and other legal provisions, it added.

A total of 1,701 people had tested positive for Covid-19 in the Haridwar Kumbh Mela area from April 10 to 14 confirming fears that one of the world's largest religious gatherings may contribute further to the rapid rise in Coronavirus cases.

A majority of the 48.51 lakh people who took part in the last two royal baths (shahi snan) held on the occasion of Somwati Amavasya on April 12 and Mesh Sankranti on April 14 were seen openly violating norms like wearing of face masks and social distancing.



A Covid patient receives primary treatment outside Kanpur LLR Hospital in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday. — PTI



## IN BRIEF

## Afghan mosque hit kills eight

**Jalalabad, Afghanistan, April 18:** Eight members of the same family were gunned down in an attack on a mosque in eastern Afghanistan, officials said Sunday. The shooting happened on Saturday night in the city of Jalalabad in Nangarhar province, and was believed to be over a land dispute, the province's governor Zailuqha Amarkhil said.

Five brothers and three of their male cousins were killed. "The incident is under investigation but initial information shows a land dispute has caused the incident," Amarkhil said. Fareed Khan, a spokesman for Nangarhar police, confirmed the attack.

## 4 cops sprayed, hospitalised

**Sacramento (US), April 18:** Four Sacramento police officers were hospitalised with injuries after they were sprayed with a liquid irritant during protests Saturday night, police told *KCRA TV*.

The demonstrators had gathered at the state Capitol downtown to protest the police shooting deaths of Daunte Wright in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, and Adam Toledo in Chicago. Protesters met at the Capitol Rose Garden after 8 p.m. and began marching around the downtown area later in the night, *KCRA* reported.

Demonstrators briefly sat in the streets in the Lavender Heights area before marching back toward the Capitol. The protest ended about 11 p.m.

## Syria prez poll on May 26

**Damascus, April 18:** (AP) Syria's parliament speaker announced Sunday that presidential elections in the war-ravaged country will be held on May 26.

Speaker Hammoud Sabbagh said the window for nominations will be open for 10 days starting Monday. Syrians abroad will vote May 20, he said. The election is widely expected to give President Bashar Assad a fourth seven-year term.

It is unclear whether any candidates will run against him but any such runs would be symbolic.

The United States last month warned Assad that the Biden administration will not recognise the result of its presidential election unless the voting is free, fair, supervised by the United Nations and represents all of Syrian society.

Syria has been in the throes of civil war since 2011.

## JIHADISTS KILL FIVE NIGERIAN SOLDIERS

**Kano, Nigeria, April 18:** Five Nigerian soldiers were killed, four injured and dozens missing when IS-aligned jihadists attacked a military base in northeast Nigeria's Borno state, two military officers told AFP Saturday.

Fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) on Friday dislodged troops from a base in Kamuya village, 35 kilometres (22 miles) from regional district Biu after a gunfight.

"The terrorists killed five soldiers and injured four others in the attack on the Kamuya base," a military officer told AFP. The insurgents sacked the base, forcing troops to withdraw in disarray, said a second military officer, who gave the same toll.

"So far 41 troops have returned while 58 are still missing and are presumed to have escaped the attack," said the second military officer.

Search and rescue operation was ongoing to "locate the missing soldiers", the officer added. Kamuya is the home village of Nigeria's former army chief Lieutenant-General Turuk Buratai which has been repeatedly targeted by jihadists, prompting the setting up of a base to end the attacks. ISWAP has focused on targeting military installations and troops since it split from mainstream Boko Haram in 2016 and rose to become a dominant group.

More than 20 people were killed following days of attacks on the town of Damask this week where the militants burnt offices of international aid agencies and several homes. The attacks have forced 65,000 residents to flee into neighbouring Niger, according to the UN.

The 12-year jihadist conflict has killed 36,000 people and displaced around two million from their homes in Nigeria's northeast. The violence has spread to neighbouring Niger, Chad and Cameroon.

## Masks off as Israel vaunts virus win

Marks key milestone as the country vaccinates its way out of a Coronavirus nightmare



A woman walks along a closed vaccination centre in the city of Nice, France, on Sunday, amid the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The centre closed due to a lack of candidates for the proposed vaccination.

— AFP

**Jerusalem, April 18:** Israelis stepped into the streets without masks on Sunday for the first time in a year, a key milestone as the country vaccinates its way out of a Coronavirus nightmare.

"It's very strange but it's very nice," said Eliana Gamulka, 26, after getting off a bus near the busy Jerusalem shopping boulevard of Jaffa Street and removing her face covering. "You can't pretend that you don't know anyone any more," she smiled.

With over half the population fully vaccinated in one of the world's fastest anti-Covid 19 inoculation campaigns, the health ministry announced on Thursday that masks would no longer be required in public outdoor spaces.

For Gamulka, a project manager, the good news came at the perfect time: just two weeks before her wedding. It will be "very nice to celebrate with everyone, now without masks," she said. "The pictures will be great! I'm very relieved. We can start living again."

The vaccination of close to five million people has sent Israel's Coronavirus caseload tumbling from some 10,000 new infections per day as recently as mid-Jan., to around 200 cases a day. That has allowed the re-opening of schools, bars, restaurants and other indoor gatherings — although masks are still required in indoor public spaces.

And even before Health Minister Yuli Edelstein's announcement came into effect, punters in the popular bars of Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market were mask-free and smiling on Thursday evening.

Yet on Sunday, office worker Ester Malka said she wasn't quite ready to let down her guard. "We're allowed, but I'm still afraid, I got used to (wearing a mask)," she said.

"I feel like it's part of my life. We'll see what happens when everyone has taken them off. If it goes well for a couple of months, then I'll remove mine."

Israel just months ago had the world's highest infection rate, a Coronavirus outbreak that left 6,300 people dead among 836,000 cases.

But the Jewish state sent its coronavirus caseload tumbling after striking a deal for a vast stock of Pfizer/BioNTech jabs.

In exchange, it agreed to pay above market price and share data it gathers on the recipients, using one of the world's most

sophisticated medical data systems.

Since Dec., some 53 percent of Israel's 9.3 million people have received both doses of the jab, including around four-fifths of the population aged over 20.

As recently as Jan. it was registering 10,000 cases per day. But as the effects of mass vaccination kicked in, by March it was able to implement a gradual re-opening.

"There's no better advertisement for Pfizer," said Shalom Yatzkan, a computer programmer who had been in quarantine after catching the virus.

"I was sick for three days, I had neck pains and felt weak," he said as he walked through central Jerusalem. "I just hope the new variants don't catch up with us."

Another Sunday landmark in Israel's exit from Coronavirus restrictions was the full resumption of the country's educational system, without restrictions on the numbers of pupils in classrooms.

Speaking at a Jerusalem high school, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailed the "festivity" of the day for the schools, while warning of complacency. "We're not done with the Coronavirus yet, since it can return," he said, stressing the need to obtain "millions more vaccinations".

"Sooner or later, we'll need another vaccination (dose)," he said. The situation in Israel is in stark contrast to the occupied West Bank.

— AFP

## Canada records second case of rare blood clot

**Toronto, April 18:** Canadian health authorities said Saturday the country has recorded a second case of rare but serious blood clotting linked to AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine, but still recommend the shot for use.

The patient, who lives in the western province of Alberta and received a version of the AstraZeneca vaccine supplied by the Serum Institute of India, "has received treatment and is recovering," Canadian health authorities wrote on Twitter.

Canada reported its first case of blood clotting associated with low platelets on Tuesday in a Quebec

● **BLOOD CLOT formations linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine "remain very rare" and Canada still believes that the vaccine's benefits "outweigh the potential risks".**

woman who received the same shot.

Blood clot formations linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine "remain very rare" and Canada still believes that the vaccine's benefits "outweigh the potential risks," Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada said. Canada's health authorities added that they

would "continue to monitor the use of all #COVID19 vaccines closely and examine and assess any new safety concerns."

At the end of March Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunisation (NACI) recommended suspending the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine in people under the age of 55 while it evaluated the risks. Health Canada said that limiting the use of the vaccine to certain populations was not necessary for the moment.

After a slow start, Canada's vaccine campaign is gaining momentum.

— AFP

## 80K Germans remembered

**Berlin, April 18:** Germany is paying tribute on Sunday to the nearly 80,000 people it has lost to the Coronavirus, even as the country struggles to get a grip on another rise in infections.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will lead a memorial event with other top officials at Berlin's Konzerthaus concert hall. His office says it is also dedicated to the

bereaved who could not accompany their relatives when they died and for whom important and comforting rituals of mourning were not possible.

Germany's confirmed death toll from Covid-19 stood at 79,914 on Sunday, an increase of 67 over the previous day. That is the fifth-highest total in Europe, after the UK, Italy, Russia and France.

Germany had a compar-

atively small number of deaths in the pandemic's first phase, but saw much higher infection levels in the fall and winter. In Jan., more than 1,000 deaths per day were reported at times in the country of 83 million people.

Infections have increased again over the past two months as a more contagious Coronavirus variant first detected in Britain took hold. Germany has

reported 3.14 million cases since the pandemic began.

Chancellor Angela Merkel is trying to get a bill through parliament that would mandate an emergency brake in areas where there are more than 100 weekly new cases per 100,000 inhabitants. The nationwide rate stood at 162 on Sunday. It would require the closure of stores, cultural and sports facilities.

— AP

## Sikhs seek probe into shooting

**Washington, April 18:** Influential American lawmakers and Sikh community leaders have sought a thorough investigation into the mass shooting at a FedEx facility in the US state of Indiana as a potential hate crime that killed eight people, including four Sikhs.

Indian-American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi on Saturday called for investigation of potential anti-Sikh motivations in the incident that took place late Thursday night.

While the Indianapolis and Sikh communities continue to mourn, and as the rest of our country mourns with them, investigators must also determine if this mass shooting was a hate-motivated attack.

— PTI

## Wisconsin shooting claims three lives

**Kenosha, April 18:** A shooting at a tavern in Wisconsin killed three people and seriously injured two others early Sunday, a sheriff's department official said.

The shooting happened at Somers House Tavern in the Village of Somers, Kenosha County Sgt. David Wright said. The suspected shooter was not immediately captured. Wright said the shooting appeared to be a "targeted and isolated incident," and authorities didn't believe the general public was in danger.

Officials were still working to determine the identities of the people who died. The two people who were wounded were taken to area hospitals, Wright said. The road leading up to the tavern remained closed early Sunday as officials investigated the latest in a string of recent shootings. Last month, four people were killed at an office shooting in California, eight people were fatally shot at massage businesses in the Atlanta area, and 10 died in gunfire at a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado.

— AP

## ONE KILLED IN OMAHA MALL SHOOTING

**Omaha (US), April 18:** A shooting at a Nebraska mall left one person dead and another wounded as terrified shoppers ran for cover. Authorities believe the shooting at Westroads Mall in Omaha was an isolated incident, and not a random attack. Police determined the suspects had fled the scene after searching the mall, according to Omaha police Lt. Neal Bonacci. Officers first gave the "all clear" around 1 p.m. — about an hour after multiple shots were fired.

— AP



Alexei Navalny

## ‘CONSEQUENCES’ IF NAVALNY DIES, WARNS U.S.

**Washington, April 18:** US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan warned Sunday that Russia will face "consequences" if hunger-striking Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny dies.

Jailed opposition leader Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent opponent, was arrested in Jan. upon returning to Russia after recovering from a near-fatal poisoning attack he says was orchestrated by Moscow.

"In terms of the specific measures we would undertake, we are looking at a variety of different costs that we would impose, and I'm not going to telegraph that publicly at this point," Sullivan told *CNN*.

"But we have communicated that there will be consequences if Mr. Navalny dies." The 44-year-old Russian began a hunger strike on March 31 to demand proper medical treatment for back pain and numbness in his legs and hands.

On Saturday, Navalny's doctors said his health had rapidly deteriorated and demanded prison officials grant them immediate access.

"Our patient can die any minute," cardiologist Yaroslav Ashikhmin said, pointing to Navalny's high potassium levels and saying he should be moved to intensive care. Both France and Germany on Sunday joined a growing international chorus of protest at Navalny's treatment.

Sullivan said the White House had told the Kremlin that Moscow would be "held accountable by the international community" for what happens to Navalny while in Russian custody. US President Joe Biden said that Navalny's situation was "totally unfair," but he is facing criticism for not bringing up the disident's treatment in a phone call to Putin last week or being more forthright in his public comments.

— AFP

## WEEK'S | DELAY

## Mission equal to Wright Brothers' 1903 flight

## Nasa Mars copter flight 'today'

**Washington, April 18:** Nasa's Ingenuity Mars Helicopter could make its first flight over the Red Planet as soon as Monday, the US space agency reported, following a delay of more than a week due to a possible technical issue.

The mini-helicopter's trip will mark the first-ever powered, controlled flight on another planet, and will help Nasa reap invaluable data about the conditions on Mars.

"Nasa is targeting no earlier than Monday, April

● **A PIECE of fabric from that plane has been tucked inside Ingenuity in honour of that feat.**

19, for the first flight of its Ingenuity Mars Helicopter," the space agency reported Saturday.

Data will return to Earth "a few hours following the autonomous flight," which would take off at approximately 3:30 am (0730 GMT), Nasa said. Ingenuity's first trip was

initially set for last Sunday, but was delayed after a potential issue emerged during a high-speed test of the four-pound (1.8 kilogram) helicopter's rotors.

Nasa calls the unprecedented helicopter operation highly risky: The flight is a challenge because the air on Mars is so thin — less than one percent of the pressure of Earth's atmosphere.

The helicopter arrived on Mars attached to the underside of the Perseverance rover, which

touched down on February 18. After the helicopter's flight, Ingenuity will send Perseverance technical data on what it has done, and that information will be transmitted back to Earth.

The helicopter mission is the equivalent on Mars of the first powered flight on Earth — by the Wright brothers in 1903 in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. A piece of fabric from that plane has been tucked inside Ingenuity in honour of that feat.

— AFP



DECCAN Chronicle

19 APRIL 2021

Vital shortages hit India amid Covid's 2nd wave

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to the people concerned to use the entire national capacity in the production of vaccines against Covid-19 comes at a time when poor anticipation and planning coupled with a lackadaisical approach of the government he heads have started having a telling impact on the pandemic situation in the country. For more than a year, the world has been under the grip of the fear the micro-organism has unleashed, but the nation which the government and the Prime Minister have been tom-tomming as the pharmaceutical hub of the world is now facing a shortage of everything that the healthcare workers need to fight the virus and save lives — hospital beds, antiviral life-saving drugs, vaccine, oxygen, intensive care units and ventilators. This, despite the fact that the government has set up a dedicated fund — PM-Cares — to promote initiatives to fight the virus.

The nation has no idea whether the government was, like most people in India, thinking if the pandemic had vanished, given the very little effort it was seen to be taking to face an exigency like the one we are facing now. There was little or no extra investment made to augment healthcare infrastructure in the country in the interregnum or to step up production capacities of the same materials, which we now face a shortage of. That the government has learnt little from the past is reflected from the fact that even the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, the national trade union belonging to the Sangh Parivar to which Mr Modi's BJP belongs, has cautioned about the reverse migration of guest workers from the towns and cities to the villages, in anticipation of another nationwide lockdown. It is stating the obvious that the government did not show as much alacrity as the guest workers did about planning for the future in the face of a pandemic attack.

It must not also go unsaid that the government had been busy plucking the low hanging fruits from the beginning of the corona fight. It started with the premature show of gratitude to the healthcare fraternity even before they started the real fight. Even the Indian Air force was dragged into the farce of showering flower petals on them from the skies when, on earth, they were fighting the virus with their back to the wall, with little availability of infrastructure and consumables. The government missed no chance to advertise the world's largest vaccination programme with little idea about the number of people it will have to vaccinate or the quantity of vaccine it would require or how to produce and distribute the same. Today, the vaccine manufacturers are running pillar to post seeking financial help to augment production capacity but the government does not seem to understand it at all; we heard no firm and immediate commitment from the government till now.

But it's not all lost as yet — the government must launch massive investment programmes in healthcare infrastructure, put its foot down firmly and ban all social, religious and political gatherings that can turn superspreaders, and work with every institution, state or otherwise, to enforce Covid-appropriate behaviour. Every rupee, every action and every moment count now.

Don't recoil from scrutiny

The Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, in a majority vote, has expressed concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in India. It has pointed out that "human rights defenders and journalists in the country lack a safe working environment" and commented on "concerns about the difficult situation faced by Indian women and minority groups, caste-based discrimination". This could not have come as sweet music to the ears of the rulers who seem convinced that vaccine diplomacy and a presence in Quad as a counterbalance to China in the difficult time of the pandemic proves that India enjoys a pride of place in the international community.

The EU stance on India's recent human rights record only adds to concerns already expressed by US freedom watchdogs and the UN. While an ostrich-like posture is easy enough to adopt on foreign perceptions of what ails Indian democracy now, a moment's reflection might show what the reality is. Dispassionate observers have signalled that India has been guilty of demonising its minorities, subverting institutions, intimidating journalists and social media executives, criminalising dissent and whimsically controlling the Internet. The incarceration of so many who opposed the CAA and the harsh treatment meted out to those supporting the months-long farmers' protest by lending their voices to global social media criticism are symptomatic of contempt for a dissenting opinion, be it from celebrities, academics and media-persons.

It is paradoxical that while we seem to crave international attention and pat ourselves on the back when we come in for praise, we recoil from any kind of scrutiny. Beyond reflection, there is a need to accept criticism, understand the reasons why and act on it to move away from an undemocratic path. Corrective action can begin even in a small way by looking first at why a few elderly academics and activists are in prison for interminable periods without even getting a trial, which in the Indian system inflicts inordinate delays and is the equivalent of extended imprisonment. It is no democracy which shows no inclination to support the right to dissent and, on the contrary, throttles it.

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Anand K. Sahay  
Far & Near



The idea behind capturing power in any kind of way: fair or foul

The BJP may or may not win the Assembly elections in Assam. In West Bengal, its chances may be considered to be less bright than in Assam on account of the structural makeup of the state, notwithstanding the pre-Partition communal politics rampant in undivided Bengal. But winning a poll fair and square is not the metric any longer. We have seen popular verdicts being overturned in state after state to the BJP's benefit.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his principal operative, Union home minister Amit Shah, the saffron party's new *subra* is to form a government in a state through any means. The capture of power is evidently crucial for erecting a scaffolding — a formal platform — for the systematic spread of ideas in the public realm through unrestrained heavy-duty propaganda, the rapid dissemination of communal politics through enabling instruments of State power (the police and the bureaucracy), and the unleashing of policy with a communal slant.

The last indubitably means going out of the way to disadvantage and

"other" those who are not the majority, leading to the making of such patently unjust policies — which defy the idea of equality before the law — the new normal in a sharp deviation from the political tradition whose roots were laid over 70 years ago.

The Westminster system of party politics, which is enshrined in our Constitution, has been stood on its head in the post-Atal Behari Vajpayee BJP. When the BJP fails to bag the numbers in an election, it simply sets up a trade mart in which MLAs become the commodity. The *gomash-tas*, or middlemen, and auctioneers are out in strength.

When elected legislators on party tickets other than BJP fail to take the bait (offered in the form of incentives), the punitive element kicks in and various agencies of the Central government raid and begin so-called investigations against the BJP's opponents. The law courts simply watch helplessly. The Election Commission has little to say. The governors of various states frequently don the garb of apparatchiks. The Speaker is happy to receive instructions remotely.

The RSS is the ideological mentor of

the BJP and several dozen allied organisations that are the repository of the notion of the "Hindu Rashtra" (the idea that the land mass of India — in its present political geography as well as in its mythological connotation — is the natural home of the Hindus of the world, where all others must resign themselves to the fate of being less equal).

The RSS lays claims to being exalted. Its propagandists and adherents have prided themselves on being seekers of a higher morality and ethical conduct in the family, society, and the "nation", the last being an expression which in its most recent manifestation in India has been so thoroughly weaponised as to cause unease among "citizens" — namely, those Indians who are not swayed by their religious identity alone in the running of public affairs and policymaking.

It was expected that the self-appointed custodians of the "culture" of the Hindus would object to such weaponisation in the interest of political hygiene and harmony in society. They have not done so.

When after an election, newly elected MLAs of non-BJP parties are pur-

sued with serious intent to switch sides so that the BJP may unfairly get to form the government and make a mockery of the people who voted for them and against the BJP, a small hint from the top levels of the RSS leadership may have done wonders. It would have worked as a discouraging factor. But the RSS top brass have little to say. The inference is that they approve of dishonourable conduct in the interest of making an ideological conquest.

Whether it is an election to a panchayat, a district board, a trade union, a social club, a professional association — and not just the state or national legislature — the BJP uses every trick in the book to "capture" the body. Only then can it pass rules, regulations, laws, to influence civil society as well as the government.

More, only then does it gain the formal legitimacy and the authority to direct the making of budgets and play the lead hand in the disbursement of funds to its favourite schemes and outfits. The stamp of approval is thus gained to promote unworthy communal agendas. The general media toms this, rather than interrogate the phenomenon.

Awestruck by the energy brought to bear by the BJP to win all elections, big or small, some commentators have urged other parties to emulate the saffron party's methods. This is misconceived advice. It leaves out of account the fundamental proposition — that the BJP is unlike any other party that we know.

It sanctions the use of majoritarian force (which may be unseen), rather than the commonly understood constitutional methods. Ordinary civil society sometimes transforms into uncivil society under its gaze. This is a phenomenon that is anathema to a democratic order.

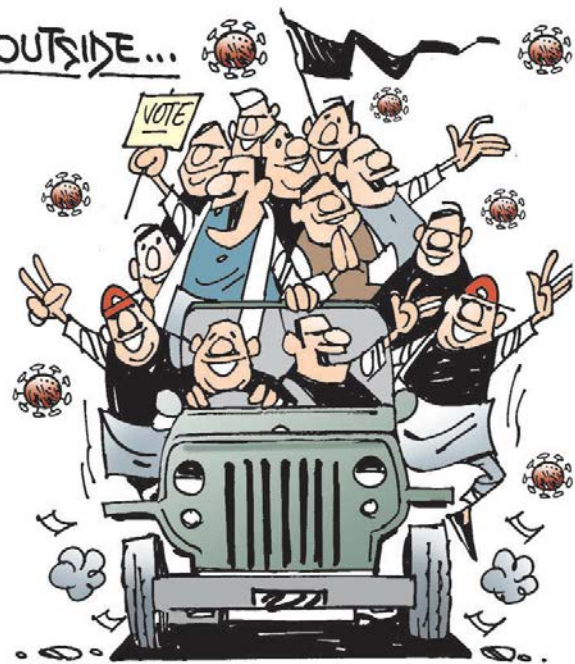
In both Assam and West Bengal, the political actors in the fray, as well as the general public, need to remain alert to the "capture" and "takeover" syndrome. A successful takeover bid may be expected to give rise to the unbridled spread of communal fires in (fragile) border states. The Congress and the Left parties have given little evidence of understanding the parallelogram of forces at work, especially in West Bengal. They may live to rue the day.

Subhani

INSIDE...



OUTSIDE...



Ideology or competence: What do the voters want?



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

There are many versions of Murphy's Law. The most popular one states that if something can go wrong, it will. Among the many versions the oldest one is attributed to a British merchant, engineer and owner of ships, Alfred Holt, who told his fellow engineers in 1877: "It is found that anything that can go wrong at sea generally does go wrong sooner or later." That proposition became popular as Murphy's Law when an American aerospace engineer, Edward Murphy, declared: "Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong." From the sea to space, engineers devised systems that could be as fail-safe as possible, forewarned by Murphy's Law.

As an analyst of Indian political, economic, social and governance systems I have long held the view that in India Murphy's Law works with a vengeance. Anything that can go wrong, invariably goes wrong. The unfortunate downside to that reality is that most Indians have come to accept a certain degree of incompetence in most systems. Given the generally high level of citizens' tolerance for incompetence, it rarely becomes an election issue.

Politicians are voted in and voted out for a variety of reasons, ranging from their charisma, caste, community, money power and so on, but rarely have they been voted out for incompetence. The Indian voter has come to live with power outages, limited access to drinking water, uncollected garbage in the neighbourhood, inadequate law and order, difficulty in securing access to education and healthcare, and so on. Rarely have any of these become issues that determine the outcome of elections. I

cannot recall the last time a politician went to the polls campaigning on a platform of competence, rather than loyalty or grievance based on caste, community or some other identity.

So, why should it surprise anyone that the voter has come to terms with the incompetent management of the Covid-19 pandemic and that this is not a defining issue in the ongoing elections to state legislatures? Caste and communal identity, allegations of corruption and nepotism seem to ignite political passions more during elections than the competence or incompetence of contending candidates in handling a pandemic.

India is no exception. Consider the fact that in the United States, Donald Trump secured more votes in the 2020 election compared to the 2016 election even though every medical professional in the United States will vouch for the fact that his administration's response to the Covid-19 pandemic was "incompetent". Mr Trump's incompetence did not defeat him. The unity of non-white voters finally did.

For all his continued popularity, at least as shown in the opinion polls, the fact is that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been at the head of an incompetent administrative response to the pandemic. One can argue about the relative responsibility of the Centre and the state governments and which of the states have responded more competently, one can differ on how one would define competence, but what is very clear is that the question of competence or incompetence in governmental response to the pandemic has not yet become a political issue.

In part this could be because, as the old adage

goes, *iss hamaam mein sab nangay hain*. In short, all political parties in government across different states have been equally guilty of an incompetent response. Many public health experts believe Kerala is an exception, but it is interesting that the Left Front's competence in dealing with the pandemic has not been an overt political issue in the recent elections.

As more and more evidence mounts up of administrative and political incompetence in dealing with the pandemic, it remains to be seen if Indian voters will just shrug their shoulders, throw up their hands, point to the gods above and quote Murphy's Law. Or, will they hold their elected representatives and governments accountable? In the last two years more doctors and nurses have died fighting the pandemic than soldiers in fighting the nation's enemies. While politicians become all patriotic when it comes to the death of soldiers and demand votes in the name of nationalism, why don't the deaths caused by incompetence stir voters' emotions?

There have been many examples of competent crisis management in the past and they stand in contrast to the present incompetence in dealing with the pandemic. As chief minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi took great pride, and rightly so, in his government's handling of the Kutch earthquake in 2001. Why has the same Gujarat state been so incompetent in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic? Will Gujarat's voters now punish their government for its incompetence?

**Covid-19 mismanagement reveals either administrative incompetence or the fear of professionals to speak their mind to politicians in power. Either way, the citizen pays the price.**

The Indian administrative system was built on the assumption that a meritocratic and technocratic bureaucracy would compensate for the lack of experience in governance of an elected political leadership. This assumption worked as long as the civil service was willing to speak its mind and politicians in power were willing to listen to them. When civil servants and professionals in government are either scared to speak their mind or have little to contribute and politicians imagine they know everything on anything, one ends up with incompetent response to administrative challenges.

For all its lack of democracy, the Chinese Communist Party has created an internal merit-based bureaucracy that allows political leaders to rise to the top only after proving their administrative and governance credentials at every step of the power ladder. The Chinese people have sacrificed democracy at the altar of meritocracy and the Communist Party of China has for long functioned like the Indian Administrative Service, creating a "mandarinate", so to speak. This has made China's response to Covid-19 crisis more professionally competent.

In India, the gap between political power and administrative competence has widened with an increasing number of elected politicians taking charge of day-to-day functioning of the government and an increasing number of civil servants either abdicating their responsibilities or doing the bidding of politicians in office without consideration for the merits of a policy or a decision. All this gets revealed in times of a crisis. Covid-19 mismanagement reveals either administrative incompetence or the fear of professionals to speak their mind to politicians in power. Either way, the citizen pays the price.

*The writer is an economist, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His latest book is India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution.*

LETTERS

TIRUPATI BYPOLL

The TD is bereft of ideas to defeat the YSRC. Hence, as is its wont, the leadership of TD has apparently concocted stories of poll irregularities. In fact, given an opportunity, the TD would have resorted to all those 'things' in any election. The voter turnout was too low because of Covid. The YSRC, having swept local body polls, is confident and need not resort to any irregularities.

Govardhana Myneedu  
Vijayawada

VACCINE DEATHS

There must be a proper investigation and research into all deaths after Covid vaccination, however negligible the number may be. They should not be declared 'mere coincidence' without it being ruled out beyond a reasonable doubt. No sooner than a death occurs after inoculation, the authorities deny the role of vaccine for the unfortunate event. To avoid fomenting any vaccine hesitance among masses, the authorities tend to hasten in declaring the vaccine as safe, which is unscientific. Actor Vivek's case is the perfect example. He was reported to have been vaccinated on Thursday and unfortunately got a massive heart attack the next day and succumbed. The thrombotic phenomena is one of the adverse effects of Covishield, though a rarity, for which some European countries are worried. When a heart attack is resultant effect of thrombosis, what is the rationale for authorities to rule it out as the cause in this case?

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao  
Vizianagaram

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Al's first Jumbo jet arrives in Bombay

BOMBAY, APRIL, 18  
Air India's first Boeing 747, Emperor Ashoka arrived here this morning on its delivery flight to the tumultuous welcome of thousands of citizens at Bombay airport led by the airline Chairman J.R.D. Tata and State Governor Ali Yavar Jung.

The quiet giant 346-seater piloted by Capt. D. Bose and escorted by two IAF MIGs in formation flight and another MIG in the lead, touched down on the Bombay airport at 8.26 a.m. today.



## quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	48,832.03 0.06
Nifty 50	14,617.90 0.25
S&P 500*	4,185.47 0.36
Dollar (₹)	74.35 0.76
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.46 0.85
Euro (₹)	89.06 0.77
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,431*9 0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.82 0.18
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.088 -0.02
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.578 0.048

\* As of Friday/Saturday

## Steel prices may take 2 yrs to cool down: JSPL MD

Steel prices might take at least two years to cool down as its demand is consistently increasing. In the current financial year, the demand for steel in India is also expected to exceed the production numbers, Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL) managing director V. R. Sharma told PTI. While the demand in FY22 will be in the range of 140-150 million tonnes, the country's production is expected to be somewhere around 125 mt, he said.



## Govt holds 93% stake in Pune-based bank, may sell 51% now BoM seen as first selloff pick

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 18

With the bank privatisation process gaining speed, state-owned lender Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) has emerged out to be the first strong candidate for the government's proposed disinvestment plan. Weighing in all options, both Niti Aayog and the finance ministry officials have already discussed the pros and cons of privatisation, a top finance ministry source said.

"The government is actively looking for ways to elicit strong interest from investors for state-run banks that are up for privatisation. Though we have shortlisted four public sector banks, initially we received huge response



from the prospective investors for Bank of Maharashtra," the source said.

There is a wide media speculation that the four PSBs shortlisted are Bank

of Maharashtra, Bank of India, Indian Overseas Bank and the Central Bank of India. It is also expected that the government is considering mid-sized or small banks for

the first round of privatisation, and may later go with large banks for divestment.

The Bank of Maharashtra stock moved up nearly 70 per cent from mid-February when an agency report named the lender among the privatisation candidates. Last Tuesday, the BoM stock moved up nearly 20 per cent with high volumes on renewed market buzz about its privatisation.

Attempts made by *Financial Chronicle* to reach out to the bank's MD & CEO A.S. Rajeev proved futile. He had earlier told the media that BoM would aim at growing at 10 per cent per annum and that only Rs 1,000 crore loan book now against Rs 15,000 crore in 2016 were required to be restruc-

tured. The government currently holds 93 per cent stake in the Pune-based BoM. Additionally, LIC holds 4 per cent. The remaining 3 per cent holding is with the public.

The government is likely to divest 51 per cent in the current round and reap the benefits of privatisation in the balance 42 per cent holding in later years.

As per a report by Denofwealth, Pune-based corporate giant Bajaj Group, which has a significant presence in the financial sector, could be a strong aspirant for the BoM buyout. Besides, two other corporates that are also reportedly throwing their hats into the ring are Tata Capital and Catholic Syrian Bank.

## Future's board approves debt recast plan

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, APRIL 18

Future Retail's board has approved a resolution plan to restructure the existing secured financial debt from the bankers. This has been permitted under a Resolution Framework for Covid-19 related stress announced by the Reserve Bank of India.

The resolution plan, already approved by the lenders, is subject to the approval of the expert committee under the chairmanship of K. V. Kamath.

The debt raised through the non-convertible debentures also will be restructured. The company has received the written consent of all the holders of the NCDs to amend the terms and conditions of the NCDs as per the resolution plan.

Debt from 28 banks and financial institutions, including working capital demand loans, term loans, cash credits, short term loans, NCDs, purchase bill discounting limits, other working capital loans and unpaid interest which became overdue will be restructured.

According to the company, the pandemic has deeply impacted the long-term business viability and led to significant financial stress across the industries. "The debt burden has become disproportionate relative to the cash flow generated by the company owing to the multiple lockdowns since the pandemic surfaced, posing sig-



nificant financial stability risks to the business. Hence, the restructuring of the debt is crucial and essential," it said in a stock exchange filing.

As per the plan, repayment of short term loans, term loans, NCDs, overdue working capital loans (converted into Working Capital Term Loans) will be extended up to a maximum of two years. Interest during the moratorium period between March 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021 shall be converted into Funded Interest Term Loan, which shall be payable by December 2021. Cash Credit will be continued at a reduced level based on bank assessment.

All securities created on the company's assets shall continue to operate in favour of the lenders in the ranks assigned originally, exception being extension of second charge on movable fixed assets being extended to working capital consortium lenders as a part of the restructuring. All penal interest and charges, default premiums, processing fees unpaid since March 2020 to implementation date will be waived off fully.

## Global jewellery brands fear inventory delay

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, APRIL 18

After a robust March quarter, international jewellery brands are now worried about "inventory delay" due to the surge in Covid-19 cases in India. They fear the delays could impact their full year sales.

US-based Signet Jewellers, in its quarterly update, said that it has evaluated the impact of inventory delays related to recent Covid-19 surges in India and other parts of the world.

"At this time, the company believes it has mitigat-

ed these short-term impacts; however, if the duration and magnitude of these inventory slowdowns intensify, there could be future negative impacts on the company's full year guidance," Signet cautioned.

Signet had posted stronger-than-expected conversion and average ticket values in the first quarter and also upped its full-year revenue guidance.

Similarly, French luxury goods Louis Vuitton's watches and jewellery division recorded revenue growth of 138 per cent in the March quarter com-



pared to the same quarter of 2020 and 80 per cent compared to that of 2019.

Russian diamond miner Alrosa too saw demand from end consumers for diamond jewellery showing robust growth across

key markets like the US and China owing to Valentine's Day and Chinese New Year and improved consumer sentiment.

This robust demand had reflected in the March exports of cut and polished diamonds, which grew 123.55 per cent compared to the same month in 2020.

However, chances of disruption in exports cannot be dismissed. Bharat Diamond Bourse was closed in the first week of April due to rising Covid cases in Mumbai. "BDB has been closed and if Mumbai port is also

closed, then it can affect the exports," said Prakash Pincha, chairman, Gems and Jewellery Export Promotion Council. Lower frequency of flights too can hit exports.

According to an industry insider, the diamond certification process is causing the current delay in shipments and the backlog is swelling owing to fewer staff.

Part of the labour force in Surat's polishing units also have gone to their hometown to leave their family back there, fearing a lock-down, said Dinesh Navdiya of the GJEPC.

## GAMES

### SHORT TAKES

### Srihari creates national record

**Tashkent:** Ace Indian swimmer Srihari Nataraj created a national record in 50m backstroke while winning his second gold of the Uzbekistan Open Championship here. The 20-year-old clocked 25.11 seconds to bag the top prize in the FINA-accredited Olympic qualifying event on Saturday night.

Indian swimmers enjoyed a rich haul of 29 medals — 18 gold, seven silver and four bronze — in the meet.

It was Srihari's third national record in two days as the Bengaluru swimmer had rewritten the national marks twice in 100m backstroke, his pet event, earlier this week. — PTI

### Krishna Poonia tests covid positive

**New Delhi:** Delhi Commonwealth Games gold medalist and sitting Rajasthan MLA Krishna Poonia on Sunday tested positive for Covid-19 and is undergoing treatment at a Jaipur hospital. The 43-year-old Krishna, who became the first Indian woman to bag an individual gold in the CWG by winning the discus throw event in 2010, is now admitted at the Rajasthan University of Health Sciences hospital. "She had cough and mild fever and she took a test on Saturday but the virus could not be detected. Today, we went to RHUS and doctors there took a CT scan from which it was diagnosed for Covid-19," her husband Virender Poonia said. — PTI

### Federer confirms French Open entry

**Paris:** Roger Federer confirmed Sunday that he will play the French Open at Roland Garros this year having skipped the 2020 edition to recover from knee surgery. "Hi everyone! Happy to let you know that I will play Geneva and Paris. Until then I will use the time to train. Can't wait to play in Switzerland again," the 39-year-old said on Twitter. Federer, a 20-time Grand Slam winner, captured Roland Garros for the only time in 2009. In March, Federer competed at the Qatar Open in Doha, marking his first tournament since the 2020 Australian Open. — AFP

## Nketiah saves Arsenal blushes Eddie scores last-gasp equaliser to earn a 1-1 draw against lowly Fulham

**London, April 18:** Eddie Nketiah delivered a hammer blow to Fulham's bid for Premier League survival as the Arsenal striker's last-gasp goal rescued a 1-1 draw at the Emirates Stadium on Sunday.

Mikel Arteta's side were seconds away from a first ever home defeat against Fulham as they laboured to find a response to Josh Maja's second half penalty. But Nketiah pushed Fulham closer to relegation deep into stoppage-time when he tapped in after the visitors failed to clear a corner.

It was a major setback for third bottom Fulham, who are six points behind fourth bottom Burnley and fifth bottom Brighton with just five games left.

After losing their previous four matches, Fulham were on course to mark Scott Parker's 100th match in charge with a memorable scalp.

Instead, they slipped closer to an immediate return to the Championship.

Next up for Fulham is a west London derby at Chelsea on Saturday before a decisive clash with Burnley on May 8.

Ninth placed Arsenal are nine points adrift of the top four and their best hope of reaching next season's Champions League is winning the Europa League.

Arteta's men face



Arsenal's Eddie Nketiah (right) scores against Fulham in an English Premier League match at the Emirates Stadium in London on Sunday.

Villarreal in the semi-finals after cruising to a 4-0 victory at Slavia Prague in the quarter-final second leg on Thursday.

### HEARTBREAK FOR FULHAM

The Spaniard made five changes to the side that thrashed Slavia, with Gabriel Martinelli among those to come in as Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang remained absent with

malaria. Martinelli should have given Arsenal the lead inside 40 seconds when he ran onto Alexandre Lacazette's pass and clipped his shot just wide.

Martinelli threatened again with a low shot on the turn from Emile Smith Rowe's cross, but Alphonse Areola sprawled to his left to make a good save.

Arsenal thought they had taken the lead when Dani

Ceballos looped his header past Areola from Hector Bellerin's cross.

But the Spaniard was denied his first Premier League goal after VAR ruled Bukayo Saka's toes were in an offside position in the build-up.

Saka hit the outside of the near post with a cross-shot before Fulham received another helping hand from VAR in the 59th minute. — AFP

### BLUES END CITY'S QUEST TO REACH FA CUP FINAL

**London, April 18:** Chelsea ended Manchester City's quest for a historic quadruple of trophies as Hakim Ziyech's goal earned a 1-0 win to take the Blues into the FA Cup final on Saturday.

A damaging day for City also saw them lose Kevin De Bruyne to an ankle injury just over a week away from the League Cup final, where they face Tottenham, and the first leg of their Champions League semi-final against Paris Saint-Germain.

Chelsea were good value for another impressive win under Thomas Tuchel and will be favourites for the German's first silverware in English football when they face Leicester or Southampton May 15.

Tuchel could land an even bigger prize in the Champions League just months after replacing the sacked Frank Lampard in January.

His side showed they can get the better of City in what could be a dress rehearsal for the Champions League final should the English clubs see off PSG and Real Madrid in the last four. — AFP

## Messi wins Copa crown for Barca

**Madrid, April 18:** Lionel Messi scored twice, including a stunning solo goal, as Barcelona blew away Athletic Bilbao to win the Copa del Rey on Saturday, consigning their opponents to a second final defeat in two weeks.

The cup was won and lost in a whirlwind 12 minutes in Seville, which saw Barca score four times to clinch an emphatic 4-0 victory, with Messi at his devastating best.

It remains to be seen if his seventh Copa del Rey triumph is the last trophy Messi lifts in Barcelona colours but if this was to be a final flourish, the 33-year-old crafted a fitting farewell. "It's very special to be captain of this team where I have spent my whole life and very special to be able to lift this cup," Messi said.

His first goal, and Barca's third, started with the Argentinian in his own half before a charging run down the right and a surge forward into the penalty area gave him the chance for a simple finish.

With the club's new president Joan Laporta in the crowd, Ronald Koeman's first title as Barcelona coach should also significantly boost his chances of remaining in charge

● It remains to be seen if his seventh Copa del Rey triumph is the last trophy Messi lifts in Barcelona colours but if this was to be a final flourish, the 33-year-old crafted a fitting farewell.

beyond the summer.

"To win a title is important for me," Koeman admitted afterwards.

Yet Laporta was noticeably evasive when asked about Koeman's future.

"He is doing well," he said.

Koeman took over a team at rock bottom, humiliated by an historic loss to Bayern Munich and wounded by the attempts of Messi to leave the club for free.

But this 31st Copa del Rey success for the club is a testament to progress made and Koeman will hope it not only helps convince Messi to stay but gives Barca momentum now in a neck-and-neck title race in La Liga.

"Despite the changes at the club and the young players, at Barca you have to always fight for trophies," Koeman said. — AFP

## VERSTAPPEN EMERGES ON TOP IN CHAOTIC IMOLA RACE

**Imola (Italy), April 18:** Max Verstappen kept his cool to claim a chaotic rain-hit Emilia Romagna Grand Prix on Sunday as seven-time Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton recovered from a rare mistake to sneak in second. Red Bull driver Verstappen muscled past pole sitter Hamilton on the first corner at Imola to set up his impressive first win of the season.

"I surprised myself. We worked really hard to make that better. In these tricky conditions we did a great job," Verstappen said.

Lando Norris in a McLaren took third for the Briton's second successive podium ahead of Charles Leclerc for Ferrari. The outcome of a compelling second leg of the Formula One season confirmed Verstappen's stature as a formidable obstacle to Hamilton's quest for an unprecedented eighth drivers' crown. After winning the season-opener in Bahrain and putting in the fastest lap on Sunday Hamilton leads Verstappen by one point ahead of the Portuguese Grand Prix next time out. — AFP



