

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | FRIDAY 9 | APRIL 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 39°C  
**Min:** 22°C  
**Rainfall:** Nil

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Panguni 27  
**Tithi:** Thryodasi  
**Star:** Sadhayam-Poorattadhi  
**Rahukalam:**  
10.30 am to 12 noon  
**Yamagandam:**  
3 pm to 4.30 pm  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 4.50 am  
**Lunar:** 12.16 pm  
**Asar:** 3.25 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.21 pm  
**Isha:** 7.33 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.33 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.14 AM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 4.30 AM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 5.22 PM**

## CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+1,31,787)	(+802)
1,30,57,863	1,67,694

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+3,276)  
**TN: 9,15,386** 12,840

### WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

13,41,07,159

**DEATHS**  
29,07,148

COUNTRIES  
AREAS WITH  
CASES **219**

uorlometers.info

### Justice Ramana attends SC collegium meeting

**New Delhi, April 8:** The Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde on Thursday held its scheduled meeting to discuss possible candidates for appointment of judges in higher judiciary, but it remained inconclusive, sources said. The brief collegium meeting was attended by all the five senior-most judges including Justice N.V. Ramana who has been appointed the next CJI by President Ram Nath Kovind on April 6, they said. No decision could be taken, they said. As per the apex court's website, Justice Ramana did not hold the court on Thursday. The top court has a sanctioned strength of 34 judges and there are five vacancies now. The matter of elevation of Chief Justice of Tripura High Court Akil Kureshi and also Karnataka senior woman judge Justice B.V. Nagarathna to the Supreme Court have been discussed in meeting in past as well, sources said.

## COUNTER POINT



**Reply to all these EC notices? No hurry! Let them issue some more!**

# Sheenless IPL starts in Chennai today

**C. SANTHOSH KUMAR | DC**  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

The fanfare and festivities will be sorely missed for the second consecutive season when the 14th edition of the Indian Premier League begins at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Friday with a high-profile clash between champions Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers.

Growing concern over a second wave of Covid-19 infections has resulted in a cloud of uncertainty over the cash-rich league, keeping BCCI officials on their toes, but the TV ratings are



expected to go through the roof.

The entire season will be held behind closed doors as players, franchise officials and broadcast crew hop from one bio-bubble to another much like the previous edition conducted in

the UAE.

Living in a bubble and playing in an empty stadium have become familiar experiences for cricketers, but it can be exhausting, as revealed by some big names.

Mumbai Indians skipper

Rohit Sharma who is eyeing a hat-trick of IPL trophies feels lucky to be playing cricket during the pandemic. "A lot of people are going through hard times, a lot of people are not able to work, not able to do what they like to. At least we are lucky that we are getting to do what we like," Rohit said.

The growing number of cases has proved that even a bubble is vulnerable. This edition will be a litmus test of BCCI's organisational ability. The successful conduct of IPL will pave the way for the World T20, scheduled to be held in the country later this year.



### CITY | 2

**Wear masks, take vaccine: Governor**



### WORLD | 5

**Sri Lanka arrests 'Mrs World' over assault**

### SPORT | 8

**TN sailors book Olympics berth**



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# TN bans all religious festivals

## Govt reintroduces restrictions as Covid-19 infections spike

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

A total ban on religious festivals (thiruvizhas) and congregations and closure of fruit and vegetable retail outlets in the Koyambedu market and other wholesale markets in the state are among the new restrictions brought in to the lockdown that is in force with relaxations till April 30 with a view to combating the spread of Coronavirus. The new set of restrictions will come into force on Saturday, a government order (GO) said on Thursday.

As per the GO, marriage-related gatherings should not exceed 100 guests and funerals and last rites should limit the number of mourners to 50. All religious places and places of worship should be closed by 8 pm and strictly adhere to the standard operating procedures (SOPs), put out on August 31, 2020.

Public transport buses in the city, within the state and to neighbouring states of Puducherry, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh will be allowed to carry sitting passengers alone and not permit anyone to stand during the journey.

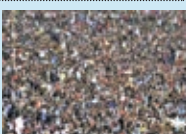
All commercial establishments, including malls, restaurants, food courts and tea shops can be kept open only till 11 pm and allow customers in

## Restrictions are back (From Saturday)

**CLOSURE:** Fruit and vegetable retail outlets in Koyambedu, other wholesale centres.

**NUMBER RESTRICTIONS:** 50 for funerals and last rites, 100 for marriages, 200 for social/political events.

**TOTAL BAN:** religious festivals (thiruvizhas), congregations



### TIME RESTRICTIONS:

Religious places: **8 pm**  
Commercial establishments: **11 pm**



► E-registration mandatory for those coming from abroad and other states apart from Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

only to 50 per cent of the capacity.

Recreational clubs, cinemas, entertainment and amusement parks, auditoriums, assembly halls, zoological parks, museums and such places should restrict entry of people to 50 per cent of the capacity and follow SOPs.

Social, political, academic, entertainment, sports, cultural and other functions in closed spaces should not have a gathering exceeding 200 persons and stadia and playgrounds are prohibited from permitting specta-

tors. Exhibition halls can only organise business to business events and film and television production companies should ensure that all artistes and workers taking part in shooting undergo RT-PCR test and also vaccination.

Taxis are allowed to play with only three passengers and auto rickshaws with two passengers, according to the new restrictions that also make e-registration mandatory for those coming from abroad and other states apart from Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. ■ P2

## NAXALS RELEASE COMMANDO WITH EMISSARY TEAM

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC**  
RAIPUR, APRIL 8

The CoBRA commando of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Rakeshwar Singh Manhas walked free on Thursday evening after spending five days in Maoists' custody.

The jawan of 210 CoBRA battalion who was abducted by Maoists after the April 3 Naxal ambush on security forces in Terram on Sukma-Bijapur border in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar region was handed over to a four-member emissary team, constituted by the Chhattisgarh government to negotiate his release, at an undisclosed location.

The jawan, with his hands tied, was produced before a "jan adalat" or kangaroo court of Maoists in the presence of scores of armed rebels, local villagers and mediapersons before being set free at 4 pm. "The jawan has been released by Maoists. He has reached Basaguda camp (of CRPF)," Bijapur district superintendent of police Kamal Lochan Kashyap said.

He was scheduled to be flown to Raipur after his medical checkup, police said. "As soon as we learnt that the jawan was held hostage by Maoists, we contacted eminent people in the region, social activists and media persons to secure his release from Maoist custody," Mr Kashyap said.

**1,26,789** The number of new infections confirmed on Thursday, the highest ever

**9,10,319** The number of active cases

**1,29,28,574** the total no of cases till now

**1,66,862** total deaths

**The TN Scene:** The daily caseload of Covid19 in Tamil Nadu crossed the 4000 mark on Thursday, when it added 4,276 cases, up from 3,986 on Wednesday.

PM Narendra Modi talks to chief ministers, press for increased pace of vaccinations  
Several states complain of shortage of vaccines  
Non-BJP govts allege discrimination: Centre refutes it  
Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan contracts Covid-19

# Centre, states fight over vaccine supply

**VINEETA PANDEY | DC**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

Amid the raging controversy and war of words over a shortage of Covid-19 vaccines, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday took the second dose of Covaxin. "Got my second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at AIIMS today. Vaccination is among the few ways we have to defeat the virus. If you are eligible for the vaccine, get your shot soon," Mr Modi said in a tweet. However, several states have complained to the Centre that they do not have enough vaccines to inoculate their population and will have

to shut some centres soon.

Reports from Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Haryana and Chhattisgarh say they are facing an acute vaccine shortage. Some states also face a shortage of oxygen and Remdesivir injections. Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said his state has vaccine supply only till Friday, while several vaccine centres in Maharashtra had to be closed for the want of vaccines. However, Union health minister Harsh Vardhan dismissed these allegations, saying enough vaccines had been given to the states. ■ P4

# Leaders claim win on ground reports

**G. BABU JAYAKUMAR, D. SEKAR | DC**  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

Irrespective of exit polls and other surveys suggesting varying results, leaders of both the AIADMK and DMK are hopeful of emerging victorious when the votes polled for the state Assembly on Tuesday are taken up for counting on May 2.

Chief Minister and AIADMK co-coordinator Edappadi K. Palaniswami met up with this loyalists in the party at his house in Siluvampalayam in Salem district on Wednesday night and exuded confidence in winning the elections, sources said.

When his acolytes pointed out that many survey results had predicted a win by the DMK-led alliance, Mr Palaniswami is said to have told the party honchos that he had information on the AIADMK clinching at least 140 of the 234 seats in the Assembly.

He had told those who had called on him that the Kongu belt remained a stronghold of the AIADMK and the party would fare well in the nine districts of Coimbatore, Nilgiris, Tiruppur, Erode, Karur, Namakkal, Salem, Dharmapuri and



Krishnagiri.

Ministers Sengottaiyan, Thangamani, Velumani, Karuppanan, Vellamandi Nataraj and C. Vijaya Baskar were among those who met the Chief Minister, who told them that the AIADMK had the support of women, farmers, students and first time voters in the just concluded elections.

He reported to have told the ministers that they would have to weed out many unwanted persons from the party and also the state bureaucracy once they formed the government again. ■ P3

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## OTHER STORIES

## Toll fee high, compared to facilities: HC

Chennai, April 8: Observing that the fee collected by the National Highways Authority of India at its toll plazas in Tamil Nadu were high, compared to the facilities provided, the Madras High Court on Thursday advised NHAI to improve the infrastructural facilities there.

The introduction of Fastag, a computerised toll collection system, has not eased the congestion along the toll plazas, noted the first bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy. The bench made the observation when a PIL from Tiruchirappalli-based advocate A Joseph Sahayaraj came up for further hearing on Thursday.

The petition sought to restrain NHAI from collecting toll fees from vehicles plying through Paranur toll plaza on the Tambaram-Tindivanam stretch, as the concession agreement had already expired. Petitioner's counsel told the judges that the NHAI was entitled to collect only 40 per cent as per Rule 6 (6)(b) of NH Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008. Only a provisional completion certificate had been issued for the plaza. But it was allowed to collect the full toll. It glaringly exposed very many deficiencies in service, he added. "There has to be some amount of infrastructural setup prior to introducing Fastag," the bench said, adding that it resulted in the plazas remaining inaccessible to many and congestion at the plazas. The matter stands adjourned by two more weeks.

— PTI

## Foreign currency seized by Chennai air customs

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

Chennai Air customs seized foreign currency worth ₹51.28 lakh.

According to the official statement, based on intelligence, Sathakathullah (37) of Tiruchirappalli, who was destined for Dubai by Air Arabia flight G9-472 was intercepted in the departure terminal on suspicion of carrying foreign currency.

On search of his hand bag, 15000 Saudi Riyals were found concealed in the inner fitting of his handbag and four bundles wrapped with black adhesive tape were found inside the bag. On cut opening 26,000 Saudi Riyals and 2400 US Dollars were found recovered.

Total currency valued at ₹10.06 lakh was recovered and seized under Customs Act read with FEMA (Export and Import of currency) Regulation, 2015.

In another case, Mohamed Ali Akbar (61) of Tiruchirappalli, Mohammed Abdullah, (37) of Theni, Abu Javith (29) of Chennai and Shahjahan (57) of Sivaganga, who were bound for Dubai by Fly Dubai flight FZ 8518, were intercepted after they had cleared Immigration and were proceeding towards security hold area.

On their personal search, 34700 Saudi Riyal, 1140 Kuwait Dinar was recovered from pant pockets and 126000 Saudi Riyals, 2300 US Dollars, 440 Kuwait Dinar and 1050 Oman Riyal were recovered from the hollow pipes of their stroller bags. Total foreign currency worth ₹41.22 lakhs was recovered and seized under Customs Act read with Foreign Exchange Management (Export and Import of Currency).

**Total currency valued at ₹10.06 lakh was recovered and seized under Customs Act read with FEMA (Export and Import of currency) Regulation, 2015**

## Koyambedu shutdown a bolt from blue for traders, workers

T. SUDHEESH | DC  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

The order issued by the chief secretary on Thursday prohibiting fruits and vegetable retail shops at the Koyambedu market, for containing the spread of Covid-19 in the state, has not gone down well with the shopowners and employees at the market.

For traders, the new prohibition comes as a bolt from blue as they are struggling to cope with the pandemic blues. This is the second time, since the pandemic broke out in March last year, traders of Koyambedu, Asia's largest Market, are put under prohibition as part of containment measures. The market complex, which includes around 1,500 vegetable and 700 fruit retail shops, is the sole source of livelihood for over 15,000 direct employees.

The market complex was reopened in March after a five-month-long total shutdown and is still unable to cope with the post-lockdown situation.

G.D. Rajasekaran, president, Federation of Koyambedu Wholesale Vegetables Merchants' Association, said the new order was arbitrary and



Koyambedu market management committee puts up a banner 'No Mask No Sales' at the market entrance on Thursday.

deplorable as the Koyambedu market is no longer a Corona hotspot.

"The prohibition is going to affect not only families of 15,000 employees at the market but also the general public as the vegetable and fruits prices will shoot up as a result. The authorities have no concern about the life of poor people because they are getting salaries on time. The service sector and industrial sector have been allowed to function

with standard operating procedures (SOPs). When it comes to the Koyambedu market, it is a complete shutdown. They have no concern about the life of our family members," he added.

A.M. Vikramaraja, president, Tamil Nadu Vanigar Sangankalin Peramaippu, threatened to protest against the unilateral decision by the authorities. Issuing a statement, he pointed out that the traders cannot afford a

new prohibition as business came down to 40 per cent after the first lockdown.

"It's unacceptable to target the Koyambedu market alone for the spread of the virus in the city. They allowed all other activities with SOPs while we have been left to suffer. The government has provided no financial support to the Koyambedu market employees who are still struggling to come to terms with the impact of

the first lockdown. So the authorities should rethink about the prohibition and allow traders to run business with stringent SOPs," he said.

S. Sreenivasan, member, Koyambedu Wholesale Fruit Vendors Association, demanded rollback of the prohibition order as over 40 per cent of employees and shop owners have already been vaccinated. The authorities issued no prohibition order for Tasmac and other big companies. The Koyambedu shops should be allowed to function either with 50 per cent capacity or on alternate days instead of prohibition. How will the employees in these shops manage their family matters without wages, he asked.

The market complex, according to the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority which runs the market, has around 3,154 shops that sell vegetables, fruits and flowers daily. In the pre-corona era, the market had at least 1 lakh daily visitors. The market, which was shut down after it became a super spreader of Covid-19 in April, had shifted to Madhavaram and Thirumazhisai in May last year.

## TN breaches 4K-mark in daily Covid-19 cases

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

The daily caseload of Covid-19 in Tamil Nadu crossed the 4,000-mark on Thursday. The state added 4,276 new cases, surging from 3,986 on Wednesday. This comes at a time when the state imposed restrictions from April 10 to contain the spread of virus. Maharashtra and Delhi have already announced curfew.

According to the data provided by the state health department, Chennai continues to top the table adding 1,520 cases on Thursday, a rise from 1,459 on Wednesday. The new cases in the city were only around 500 till last month.

Coimbatore has become the second major contributor with 427 cases while Chengalpattu recorded 398 cases. Both districts are showing steady increase in Covid-19 cases

■ **Three districts — Chennai, Coimbatore and Chengalpattu — continue to have major share of cases reported in the state.**

■ **Nine people who returned by road from West Bengal, 2 from Bihar, one each from Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh added to the total of new cases on Thursday**

since mid-march.

Three districts — Chennai, Coimbatore and Chengalpattu — which added a cumulative total of 2,345, continue to contribute the major share of cases reported in the state.

Active cases have touched 30,131, a jump from 27,743 on Wednesday that is a clear spike from 21,958 cases on last Sunday. Active cases started surging from mid-march with around 5,000 cases.

Chennai's contribution to this table has gone up to 11,633 from 10,685 on

Wednesday.

At least 19 deaths, including 14 with comorbidities, have been reported, a rise from 17 on Wednesday.

While six people died in Chennai, Chengalpattu, Thiruvallur and Thanjavur recorded three cases each.

Coimbatore reported two cases. Thiruvallur and Tiruchy reported one death each.

Meanwhile, the state was able to test 84,658 persons on Thursday. A total of 1,99,30,436 individuals undertook the RT-PCR test so far in the state.



Commissioner of Police Mahesh Kumar Agarwal takes his second dose of Covaxin in Chennai on Thursday.

— DC

## Wear masks, take vaccine: Governor

Chennai, April 8: Governor Banwarilal Purohit on Thursday appealed to the people to cooperate with the government and follow norms like wearing masks to help prevent the spread of Covid-19. Purohit appealed to eligible sections of people to get administered the vaccine, which provided safeguard against the virus, a Raj Bhavan release here said. "As India is currently facing a very serious health crisis due to the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic, Governor of Tamil Nadu, Banwarilal Purohit has made an appeal to the people of Tamil Nadu to take care



of the family, mainly the elders." Appreciating the state government's measures and people's response to prevent the spread of Covid, he appealed to everyone to co-operate and follow the instructions issued by government to overcome the situation and to fight against coronavirus.

— PTI



A corporation staffer checks the temperature of a resident during house-to-house inspections in Kolathur on Thursday.

— DC



&lt;&lt;&lt;&lt;

A health worker checks the hand temperature of a woman at Ullagaram, on Thursday.

— DC

## Rapid Covid spread reported in southern dts

ARULOLI M | DC  
TIRUNELVELI, APRIL 8

Tirunelveli district reported 79 Covid-19 cases in a day on Thursday, taking the total number of infected patients under treatment in the district to 523. The highest number of cases, 16 in one joint family, was reported from Senthamilnagar, Pettai in Tirunelveli city.

Six belonging to another family at Perumalpuram in Tirunelveli city also tested positive for corona, while a couple residing in an apartment at Tirunelveli junction area, and a father and his 14-year-old daughter at Tilak Nagar in the city, were also reported to have been infected.

According to health department sources, 53 cases were found on Thursday in urban areas of Tirunelveli, while 26 persons in the rest of the district tested positive the same day, raising the single day tally in Tirunelveli district to 79.

A total of 523 patients were under treatment till Thursday evening at the

## Special Covid duty on liquor withdrawn in Puducherry

Puducherry, April 8: The Puducherry administration has rescinded the 7.5 percent special Covid-19 duty on liquor here, enabling a cut in rates of alcoholic beverages in this tourism-dependent union territory.

An official release here on Thursday said Lt Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan approved the excise department's proposal to bring to close the validity of the special excise duty with effect from April 7. The move would make liquor products cheaper here. The special duty was imposed in May last year to bring the price on par with the rates in neighbouring states and to prevent influx of people into

Puducherry, especially from Tamil Nadu, during the pandemic situation. The then LG Kiran Bedi, who imposed the duty much to the chargin of the then Chief Minister V Narayanasamy, extended it periodically. Now the duty has been withdrawn presumably to make liquor cheaper to net revenue to the fund-starved exchequer. While according approval for withdrawing the special duty, the LG on Thursday directed that all bars and retail sellers of liquor and restaurants to follow safety norms. The lifting of special duty has been done after getting EC clearance, the release from the office of the Lt Governor said.

— PTI

Tirunelveli medical college hospital and at private hospitals in the district, said district health department officials. The neighbouring district of

**Six belonging to another family at Perumalpuram in Tirunelveli city also tested positive for corona, while a couple residing in an apartment at Tirunelveli junction area, and a father and his 14-year-old daughter at Tilak Nagar in the city, were also reported to have been infected**

198 and 290 respectively. Madurai district that reported 707 cases in the last one week, now has 18 of its streets closed as 'containment zones'.

The Andhra Bank on South Masi street, Madurai, was also closed on Thursday, because its manager tested corona positive. The bank branch will remain closed for four days and will resume operations on Monday, said bank authorities.

## Challenging days: Fighting Covid 2.0 with 50% rule



B. Vijayalakshmi

## Viewpoint

Thursday's state government order permitted 50 per cent occupancy in vegetable and provision shops, malls, jewellery and textile showrooms, hotels, tea shops, restaurants, recreation clubs, entertainment, amusement and zoological

parks, cinema theatres and museums. Only 50 persons will be allowed in funeral processions.

And only 100 guests can attend wedding functions. Field level teams in zones, monitoring teams in districts and teams comprising

**While the government is pulling out all stops to fight the second wave, it is the duty and social responsibility of every citizen to comply with Covid norms and avoid another lockdown**

representatives of police, local bodies and health departments have been formed to weaken the astronomical pace at which Covid cases have been rising during the last few weeks.

Affected cities in other

states face stringent retractions, similar to lockdown. Covid fatigue, complacency after vaccine rollout, unfettered political campaigning and non-compliance with Covid appropriate behavior have led to exponential rise in positive cases in the state. Fever camps and door-to-door surveys to detect people with flu-like symptoms and contact tracing are back. Volunteers to help people in containment zones are ready.

Nevertheless, the government must impose harsher penalties for not following Covid protocols, increase

testing and tracing of close contacts and intensify vaccination drive to rein in the second wave.

Employees in government and private offices can be allowed to work from home and people must be encouraged to avoid congregating in public places, especially in cinemas, restaurants and malls.

While the government is pulling out all stops to fight the second wave, it is the duty and social responsibility of every citizen to diligently follow Covid guidelines and avoid another lockdown.



With theatres set to operate with 50 per cent occupancy from April 10, seating arrangements being re-done on Thursday.

— DC



## SHORT TAKES

## AMMK man held for cash tokens

G. SRINIVASAN | DC  
THANJAVUR, APRIL 8

Kumbakonam east police have registered a case against Kanagaraj of Koranattukaruppur, Kumbakonam, belonging to AMMK party, for issuing tokens to voters with the name of a provision shop printed on it before the election, so that people may get ₹2,000 from the shop.

Those who got the tokens went to the provision shop at Kumbakonam and approached the owner of the shop, Sheikh Mohamed, for getting the cash, on Wednesday. Mohammed was shocked to see people crowding around his shop with tokens.

Taken by surprise, Sheikh Mohamed said he was in no way connected to the token issue. Though the name of my shop is printed in the token with ₹2,000 printed on it, I don't know who issued the token, he said. As the crowd swelled on Wednesday, Mohamed closed the shop and put a board on the door stating that he had no connection with the token.

Following this, officials started a probe and found that AMMK has distributed the tokens. A case has been registered against Kanagaraj.

## Not paid for working on poll day: Temporary staff

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUCHY, APRIL 8

A section of youths who were appointed as temporary polling staff by public health authorities to serve in polling booths of Tiruverumbur assembly segment, on Thursday staged a demonstration in front of the collectorate here, flashing their identity cards protesting against the officials denying payment of their salaries, as promised.

These temporary polling staff were enrolled for checking the temperature of voters, supplied them hand sanitiser, gloves and face masks, and were promised a payment of ₹1,000 each, which would be paid by the Election Commission of India (ECI). The protesting youth said they were working on polling day and officials did not even provide them food, tea or snacks of any kind to them, while all other polling booth staff were well taken care off.

When they approached the concerned authorities for the promised salary of ₹1,000, they were told that they would be paid only ₹250 as salary. In their petition to the personal assistant (General) Collector of Tiruchy, Jaya Preetha, they wanted their salary of ₹1,000 be disbursed as promised, and she has agreed to look into their petition.

## Murder accused held at airport on arrival from Dubai

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

A 50-year-old man, the main accused in a murder case, was arrested by the immigration officers at the Chennai airport on Thursday morning when he landed from Dubai.

A lookout circular (LOC), issued by the Ramanathapuram Superintendent of Police, was pending against him.

According to immigration sources, the accused has been identified as Raja (50), a native of Thondi in Ramanathapuram district. He was doing electrical work in the district.

Police sources said he was reportedly involved in a murder in the district in 2018, and he fled to Dubai.

Following this, the Ramanathapuram SP declared him as an absconding accused and a LOC was issued to all airports.

Meanwhile, he was caught at the Chennai airport when he arrived from Dubai on a FlyDubai flight. The immigration authorities, while verifying the passport of all passengers who arrived in the flight, found that a LOC was pending against Raja, who was also cited as an absconding accused in the case, arrested him and proceeded with the formalities to hand him over to the Ramanathapuram police. Airport police said the accused will be handed over to the police team soon.

● According to immigration sources, the accused has been identified as Raja (50), a native of Thondi in Ramanathapuram district. He was doing electrical work in the district.

## Puducherry: BJP's dream project may remain just that

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR | DC  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

The BJP's dream of getting a toe hold in South India by winning a few seats at least in the Puducherry Territorial Assembly might not become a reality, going by the indications emanating from the former French Colony.

Though it was an open secret that the BJP distributed huge amounts of cash and even gold coins to voters before the elections on Tuesday, the chances of the national party winning seats seem to be remote for obvious reasons.

In the 2016 elections, the BJP drew a blank and the Congress that won 15 of the 30 seats formed the government. But the manner in which the BJP pulled down the government by political sleight of hand had made the Congress more popular among the people, particularly the middle class in urban areas.

A region known for its liberal and secular values, the people of the Union Territory cherish their traditions drawn from the French who ruled them once and dread the thought of a Hindutva regime taking control over their lives.

Besides, the small population comprises more than 12 per cent minorities – over six per cent Christians

and over six per cent Muslims – and another 18 per cent Dalits. These two sections, who put together form over 30 per cent, will never vote for the BJP, apart from the urbanites.

However, the BJP, after appointing Kiran Bedi as the Lieutenant Governor, aspired to form the government by nominating three MLAs and then pulling down the Congress government led by V Narayanasamy, whose resignation in utter disgust touched the hearts of the people.

Though Narayanasamy was not in the race for Tuesdays' elections, his party contested in 15 seats, giving 13 to the DMK, one to the CPI and another to an independent in Yanam. In the NDA, AINRC, led by N. Rangasamy, contested in 16 seats with the BJP fielding candidates in nine constituencies and the AIADMK in five.

Most of the candidates of the BJP were earlier with other parties and their defections had not been taken well by the electorate. However, the BJP, out of desperation, concentrated on the Union Territory during the elections and also resorted to money distribution.

Many first time voters had cited money distribution as a bane of elections in Puducherry and have expressed their disap-

## CASH FOR VOTE

● Though the practice of paying voters was not new to the people of Puducherry, they were wowed by the amount that was given to them this time. As someone from the field said when candidates of other parties paid ₹500 to ₹1,000 per voter, BJP's largesse was upward of ₹2,500.

● In Thirunallar, gold coins were seized and no one is clear if the same kind of coins were given away in other constituencies too in addition to the cash. The blatant manner in which the money distribution was done among the poor voters had actually enraged the urban middle class, particularly the youth.

proval of the practice. But would not the beneficiaries of the bounty be grateful to the BJP and return the favour through votes?

Well, the people are so used to getting money from candidates for a long time, they normally collect whatever is given to them and cast their vote as per their wish. This has been the practice all along, say insiders, suggesting they might not have been enamoured by the huge amount that was paid to them before the election.

So with a marked antipathy against the party among the middle class that relishes the peaceful life that they lead in Puducherry, particularly the total absence of communal conflict and lack of restrictions on their culinary habits, and the poor not feeling actually grateful

to those who paid them, the BJP would not have polled votes enough to win seats.

Above all, Puducherry is a Congress bastion with even the DMK and AIADMK not that popular. If the AINRC manages to get votes it is because it came from the Congress stock. N Rangasamy is basically a Congressman. Even he is said to have joined hands with the BJP reluctantly, fearing a backlash from the minorities and the urban crowd.

So even if AINRC gets a few seats, the chances of the party's votes getting converted to the BJP might not have happened, feel local political observers. But then after watching the BJP play its games during the tenure of Kiran Bedi, they do not want to hazard a guess on the exact outcome of the elections.

## Police summon 4 men in Velachery EVM case

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

The city police on Thursday issued summons to the four men found carrying two electronic voting machines (EVMs) and a VVPAT machine on two-wheelers at Velachery after the poll on Tuesday.

According to reports, a food delivery agent noticed the machines being transported on two bikes and confronted the riders after a machine fell on the Taramani main road in Velachery. They were caught over suspicion of EVM theft and handed over to the police.

The incident sparked an outrage with the DMK and the Congress alleging a serious violation of protocol. They also demanded recounting in booth number 92 in Velachery constituency.

After a preliminary investigation, the police said the motorists were corporation employees and the EVMs they were carrying were not the ones used for polling.

Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo clarified that they were unpollled EVMs kept in reserve. He referred to the district election officer's verbal report and said the men were corporation staff deputed on election duty.

Velachery returning offi-

● The incident sparked an outrage with the DMK and the Congress alleging a serious violation of protocol.

cer V. R. Subbulakshmi said that three officials, including a corporation worker, have been suspended by the Election Commission and they are carrying out a detailed investigation into the incident.

Two ballot units, a control unit and a VVPAT machine were being carried by these officials. The machines were to be used in case of any technical snag in the designated machines. After the polling ended, the officials were instructed to hand over the polled EVMs in Anna University and the unpollled ones to the EC strong room set up at a school in Thiruvannamur under police protection in a lorry. Instead of following this process, the officials carried the unused ones in a two-wheeler which is against EC rules," she said.

Meanwhile, the Velachery police issued summons to the four individuals asking them to appear at the Velachery police station on April 12 for an inquiry.

## Fraud charges against cops

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC  
TIRUCHY, APRIL 8

The Manachanallur AIADMK unit has appealed to the district administration here to suspend the Inspector of Police and Special Branch police constable attached to the Samayapuram police station, falling under Manachanallur assembly constituency, for violating the poll code on April 6.

A group of AIADMK men led by party's Manachanallur union secretary, Jayakumar, and Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) state deputy general secretary, Prince, and AIADMK Samayapuram town secretary, Sampath Kumar, in their memorandum to the personal assistant of the district collector, submitted that on the polling day, at a polling booth located at a school at Inam Samayapuram, AIADMK functionaries Anguraj, Azaguraj and Siva functioning of the party's booth agent there, at that time Deivasigamani and Abdullah of DMK brought six persons no way connected with the particular booth, to cast votes, which was objected by the AIADMK agents.

Following this, a four member DMK gang including Marudhupandi and Velusamy attacked the AIADMK booth agents, and were handed over to police inspector Samayapuram Muthu and special branch police constable Saravanan, and registered a complaint against them. But the police did not take any action against the DMK men.

In the closing hours of polling, the police officials took one the AIADMK booth agent, Siva, in their police vehicle and attacked and abused him, they added and wanted that the district administration should suspend these two police officials for violating the election rules and acted as supporters of the DMK.

The personal assistant (General) to the Collector Jaya Piritha told them that she will look into their complaint.

## Two Dalit youth killed in gruesome clash near Arakkonam

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

In a gruesome incident, two Dalit youth were killed and three others injured in a clash between Dalits and Vanniyaars youth at Guruvarampettai near Arakkonam on Wednesday night.

Reacting to the murder, Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi leader Thol

Thirumalvalavan, in a tweet, stated: "Two young men murdered in Soganur, near Arakkonam. And 3 others are in the hospital in a critical state. The caste-fanatics committed these murders out of fear of losing in the election. VCK demands arrest of caste fanatics and sand mafia gangs. We'll hold demos on April 10 at all district headquarters."

According to sources, a group of Dalit youth were riding to Guruvarampettai when another group belonging to the Vanniyaar community overtook them in a vehicle. The Dalit youth reportedly made gestures at the other group, near a bus stand, who felt offended and picked up a quarrel.

As the news spread, supporters from both sides

gathered at the spot. When the Dalits tried to leave the place, they were rounded up and attacked with weapons. Two Dalits – Arjunan, 26, from Soghanur village, and Suriya, 26, from Sembudu village sustained serious injuries and died at the spot. Three of their friends – Madhan, Vallarasu, and Soundarajan, who sustained injuries, were

rushed to the hospital. On information, the Arakkonam taluk police rushed to the spot and sent the bodies to Tiruttani government hospital for post-mortem. Demanding arrest of the accused, the Dalits staged road blockade from Wednesday night until early on Thursday.

Ranipet Superintendent of Police R. Sivakumar

rushed to the spot and pacified the local residents. The cops arrested a few persons in connection with the murder and assault. Police officials claim that an ego issue was the cause of the incident.

However, a party leader said the issue is purely personal between the two groups. There is no political motive behind it.

## Dead woman's dad accuses her husband, mom-in-law of murder

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

The case of unnatural death of a 26-year-old woman in Madurantakam's Kondarancheri took a new twist after her father suspected foul play in her death and accused her husband and mother-in-law of murdering her.

The kin of the deceased refused to accept the body after autopsy, blocked the road and demanded action taken against the duo. According to the police, the deceased has been identified as Selvarani (26). She married one Chinnarasu (30), a resident of Kondarancheri in Madurantakam. They met while working together at a clothing manufacturing unit in

Tirupur. They have been married for four years and lived with their two-year-old daughter in Chengalpet, the police said.

Meanwhile, on April 6 morning, Selvarani was reportedly found hanging dead at their house by Chinnarasu. He alerted the Madurantakam police, who rushed to the spot, recovered the body and sent it for post-mortem. Initially, a case of unnatural death was registered by the police until Selvarani's father Govindaraj suspected foul play in her death.

He approached the Madurantakam police station and lodged a complaint against Chinnarasu and his mother Valli. He alleged that Chinnarasu had an

illicit affair with another woman and when Selvarani protested, Chinnarasu and his mother murdered Selvarani and staged a suicide drama.

Meanwhile, the relatives and neighbours of the deceased staged a protest outside the Madurantakam DSP office. They then blocked the Madurantakam-Sonambedu road, demanding the immediate arrest of Chinnarasu and his mother. They also refused to accept the body after autopsy. However, after senior police officers promised an investigation of the case and arrest of the responsible at the earliest, the protesters dispersed. An investigation is underway.

## Stalin talks to party leaders over low polling in Chennai

From P1

DMK president M.K. Stalin was reportedly told by I-PAC, the external agency engaged by the DMK to formulate strategies of the election, that they had a scope of sweeping in 160 to 180 of the 234 seats in the Assembly.

Mr Stalin visited the I-PAC office for the second time after conclusion of polling and was welcomed the staff there. He was told that many ministers of the AIADMK government might also lose the elections and that the BJP had no chance of winning anywhere.

A video of Mr Stalin's visit to the office went viral on social media and it showed the enthusiasm with which the staff at I-PAC received Mr Stalin, taking photographs with him and greeting him.

Concerned over the low polling, particularly in Chennai, Mr Stalin called the party top leaders and the candidates of various constituencies in the northern part of the state up to Trichy for discussions at Anna Arivalayam at noon.

Meeting them individually, he wanted to know the reasons behind the low rate of polling in most constituencies. He even asked those in charge of his Kolathur constituency for the possible reasons for the low turnout on poll day.

The candidates are said to have spoken their mind explaining the problems they faced during the elections. One of them reportedly was the lack of finances. Mr Stalin had expressed surprise over some candidates not being able to provide for the expenses when they assured of mobilising the funds during the interview for candidates.

It is also said that many bureaucrats had expressed the opinion that the DMK will form the next government.



Tiruvannamalai collector and returning officer Sandeep Nanduri, on Thursday inspecting the strong room located in the regulatory market premises, on the Tiruvannamalai - Tindivanam highway, Tiruvannamalai district, and other related security set up, where EVMs and VVPAT machines from Chengam, Tiruvannamalai, Kilpennathur and Kalasappakkam assembly constituencies have been brought and kept under tight security. District SP S. Aravind and other election officials accompanied him.

—K.Senthil Nathan

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## SHORT TAKES

## ARMY CHIEF ON 5-DAY TOUR OF BANGLADESH

PAWAN BALI | DC  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

Indian Army chief General M.M. Naravane on Thursday reached Bangladesh on a five days visit to continue with the tradition of strong bilateral and defence ties between the two countries.

General Naravane's visit comes in the midst of Swarnim Vijay Varsh celebrations which mark 50 years of the liberation of Bangladesh, in which Mukti Bahini fought shoulder to shoulder with Indian Armed Forces.

General Naravane paid tributes to the martyrs of the Liberation War of 1971 by laying a wreath at the Shikha Anirban. He also received a Guard of Honour at Senakunji.

Gen Naravane called on General Aziz Ahmed, chief of Bangladesh Army. Both discussed strengthening of bilateral defence cooperation and strategic ties between two countries were discussed.

Gen Naravane gifted a replica of T-55 Tank and a picture of 75/24 mm Howitzer. The original equipment are being gifted for museums of Bangladesh. Both T-55 Tank and 75/24 mm Howitzer played a stellar role in the 1971 War of Liberation.

Gen Naravane called on Admiral M. Shaheen Iqbal Chief of Naval Staff, Bangladesh Navy and discussed issues of mutual interest. He also met Air Vice Marshal M. Abul Bashar, Acting Chief of Air Staff of Bangladesh Air Force.

## SHIFT OFFICES TO ASSAM: ULFA (I) TO THE TEA COMPANY

MANOJ ANAND | DC  
GUWAHATI, APRIL 8

After releasing two abducted employees of an oil company, the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Independence) on Thursday served a warning to a leading tea company demanding immediate relocation of all its administrative offices to Assam and recruitment of indigenous people of the state, failing which the outfit will prevent them from doing business in Assam.

The Ulfa (I) has served this notice to Amalgamated Plantations Pvt Ltd. The Amalgamated Plantations Pvt. Ltd (APPL) was carved out of the erstwhile Tata Tea Ltd (now Tata Global Beverages Ltd, or TGBL) 10 years ago to run tea estates in West Bengal and Assam.

The notice signed by Ulfa(I) Publicity Department member self-style Capt. Rumel Asom stated, "The United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) has taken note of ... management of the tea estates in Assam under your ownership. We appreciate that you are in the business of making profit and to that end you must devise your corporate planning. However, you have heavy responsibilities to the land and her people. You have your head office outside Assam where no indigenous personnel from Assam is in employment. The liaison office is also not in Assam."

The APPL head office is in Kolkata and its corporate office in Guwahati. The Ulfa(I) notice said "We are aware you are recruiting your workers from outside Assam instead of employing local youth and warned that this was contrary to the spirit of win, win relationship between corporates and the state."

## Mufti's mother to be questioned by ED

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 8

Days after former J&K chief minister and People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti was grilled by Enforcement Directorate (ED) in an alleged money laundering case, her mother Gulshan Nazir has been asked to appear before its officials here next week for a similar cross-examine.

The sources close to the Muftis said that ED officials on Thursday visited their residence along Srinagar's Gupkar Road to serve a notice on Gulshan, asking her to appear before the probing agency at its office in city's Raj Bagh area on April 15.

The ED officials had on March 25 questioned Mufti for about five hours in connection with the alleged

money laundering case. On emerging from ED's regional office here, she had told reporters, "Whoever speaks up, ED, CBI and NIA are used against him/her. The nation is running not according to the Constitution of India but the agenda of a particular party".

Likening her questioning by ED with "criminalising of dissent by the government," Mufti had alleged that the BJP government at the Centre was working against the opposition and everyone else who does not agree with it through ED, CBI or NIA. She claimed that she was asked questions about selling of the ancestral property in Bijbehara (Anantnag district) and also about funds meant for engagement of youths and others spent during her tenure as CM.

## Centre playing politics over jabs: Min.

Several states complained to the centre about vaccine shortage, had to shut down centres

FROM PG 1

Mr Modi on Thursday held a virtual meeting with the chief ministers of several states to discuss the Covid-19 situation and vaccine strategy. He told the chief ministers to focus on vaccinations and testing and hold a special drive April 11-14 to cover all eligible beneficiaries over 45. He also asked the states to prevent vaccine wastage.

Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope attacked the Central government for playing politics during the pandemic by giving more vaccines to BJP-ruled states and fewer to non-BJP governed states. Mr Tope accused the Centre of giving Maharashtra only 7.5 lakh doses against its demand for 40 lakh vaccines, which is not enough for the hugely populated state that is reporting the highest number of Covid-19 cases in the country. The minister said the state was aiming to vaccinate five to six lakh people daily to break the chain of transmission. He said vaccination centres at Satara, Sangali, Panvel, Pune, Mumbai and Navi Mumbai had to shut down due to the unavailability of vaccines, while Buldhana has only one day stock left. He later said that the Centre has promised him more vaccines soon.

"I talked to Dr Harsh Vardhan, and even (NCP supremo) Sharad Pawar talked to him. I raised the issue of discrimination. We have the highest number of active patients, positivity rate and deaths, with a 12 crore population.



Guest workers wait for transport along the Nashik highway in Thane of Mumbai on Thursday to leave for their home states after surge in Coronavirus cases in Maharashtra.

— PTI

Why are we given so few vaccines? Harsh Vardhanji assured me that corrections will be done soon. We are still waiting. Why this step-motherly treatment to Maharashtra during this time of crisis?" he said. He further gave data of vaccine distribution, which said Maharashtra got 7.50 lakh doses, Uttar Pradesh 48 lakhs, Madhya Pradesh 40 lakhs, Gujarat 30 lakhs and Haryana 24 lakh doses. Mr Tope said Maharashtra's population was 12 crores, but less doses were given to it by the Centre. He added that the Central government had told states not to pro-

cure any vaccines directly from the manufacturers as the Centre will do it. "Now, they are not giving enough vaccines," he said. Mr Tope also held meetings with the manufacturers of Covid-19 drug Remdesivir and asked them to double the production for the state. In order to increase beds for patients, the Pune administration has tied up with the Army Hospital to provide 40 ICU beds.

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the state has decided to purchase Remdesivir injections as there was a shortage.

Union health minister

Harsh Vardhan said: "The hue and cry by certain states about partisanship by the Union government is just a farce, an attempt to hide their own incompetence. Maharashtra and Rajasthan are two of the top three states based on the allocation of Covid-19 vaccine doses. Both are non-BJP governed states. Let's put an end to the fear mongering now! Covid-19 vaccine doses: Total administered: 9 crore plus, in stock/nearing delivery to states: 4.3 crore plus. Where does the question of shortages arise? We're continuously monitoring and enhancing supply."

reports had further claimed that if the confidence-building measures (CBMs) hold and ties improve further, Prime Minister Narendra Modi may pay a visit to Islamabad for the Saarc summit there later this year. The developments come in the wake of a sudden perceptible improvement in India-Pakistan ties in the past six weeks following the implementation of the ceasefire at the Line of Control by the armies of the two countries. "Our respective high com-

missions exist and are functioning. So that's a very effective channel of communication", MEA spokesman Arindam Bagchi said on Thursday, in response to reporters' queries on the back-channel talks. When asked whether there could be any Saarc summit in Islamabad which could be attended by Prime Minister Modi, as claimed in Pakistani media reports, the MEA spokesman termed it as "speculation", adding that he did not have anything to share on this for now.

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 8

## India mum on back channel talks with Pak

## Star campaigners



Actor and BJP leader Mithun Chakraborty takes part in a roadshow in support of Union minister and party candidate from Tollygunge Babul Supriyo, ahead of the 4th phase of the West Bengal Assembly election, in Kolkata on Thursday.

— PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

## ABHISHEK: TAKE MONEY FROM BJP, VOTE FOR TMC

**Kumargram/Tufanganj (WB) April 8:** Alleging that the BJP was distributing cash to purchase votes, TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee on Thursday asked people to exercise their franchise in favour of his party, after having taken the money being offered by the saffron camp.

Insisting that people should bargain for more, he urged voters to ask for ₹5,000 if offered ₹500. "Take money from lotus (BJP symbol) and vote for the twin flowers (TMC symbol). If they can do cheat you, why won't you do the same?" Banerjee stated at a public meeting at Kumargram in Alipurduar district.

Speaking at another rally at Cooch Behar's Tufanganj, he said that people have to decide whether they want leaders from outside or their "daughter Mamata Banerjee".

— PTI

## Violence in parts of Kannur after death of youth worker

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 8

A day after Muslim League youth wing member died in post poll violence, parts of Kannur district particularly Koothuparamba and Panur areas witnessed widespread violence.

After the death of 22-year-old Mansoor, the area became tense. Widespread violence took place during the funeral procession of the youth league worker on Wednesday night.

Half a dozen offices of the CPM local and branch committees were set on fire and vandalised allegedly by youth league workers.

The police had to resort to lathicharge and hurl stun grenades to disperse

the violent mobs. The houses of some of the accused in the case were also attacked.

The remand report prepared by the police stated that the Manzoor's death was a planned murder. It said a 25-member gang was behind the brutal incident.

Soon after the voting ended in the state on Tuesday night, clashes broke out between CPM and IUML workers which resulted in the death of Mansoor.

His brother Muhsin who also sustained injuries in the attack is currently undergoing treatment at a hospital in Kozhikode. The clashes were sequel to the skirmishes, arguments and minor altercation in polling booths during the day.

According to Muhsin,

there was less vaccination at Centre's hospitals. This isn't an issue, the issue is that we have to vaccinate more and more people soon," he said.

Jain further said that out of the total vaccination done in Delhi, "only 30 per cent to 40 per cent was done in the central government's hospitals".

He also informed that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has written to the central government urging to open vaccination for all. "We have made two more requests that vaccination should be allowed at least for all adults. Secondly, it should be allowed even at camp settings and not only at healthcare facilities," he added.

In view of the rising Covid-19 cases, the Delhi government has imposed a night curfew in the national capital.

Delhi reported 5,506 new Coronavirus cases and 20 deaths on Wednesday.

The national capital has 19,455 active cases currently.

## Weekend lockdown in MP urban areas

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC  
BHOPAL, APRIL 8

Amid surge in Coronavirus cases in Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday announced to impose weekend lockdown in urban areas in the state.

The weekend total shutdown will be enforced from 6 pm on Friday to 6 am on Monday in all the towns in the state, Chouhan said.

He said the state government was in the process of

setting up containment zones in major cities which witnessed sudden spurt in coronavirus cases in the last few days.

Chouhan said the state government has initiated the move to increase beds in the government hospitals for the patients, besides establishing Covid-19 care Centres in each district.

The state on Thursday reported 4,324 fresh cases of Coronavirus taking the tally of cases to 3,22,338 and recorded 27 deaths taking the toll tally to 4,113.

## SC dismisses Deshmukh's petition

FROM PG 1

The court order came as senior lawyer Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Manu Singhvi, representing Mr Deshmukh and the Maharashtra government, respectively, told the bench the high court passed the order without hearing Mr Deshmukh. When Mr Singhvi noted that the high court didn't address the question of maintainability of the petitions before it, Justice Kaul said: "The allegations are extremely serious and it becomes curious and curious. In this scenario, is it not a CBI probe case?"

As Mr Singhvi noted that the Maharashtra government has withdrawn the "general consent" for CBI probes in the state long back, saying the agency can investigate cases in Maharashtra only with the consent of the state govern-



ment or on the orders of the high court or Supreme Court, Justice Kaul said: "He (Deshmukh) did not resign when the commission of inquiry was ordered... He was clinging to his office... You can't say it affects the federal structure. This does not happen every day. Both have been heads of institutions where something has gone wrong."

In Mumbai, meanwhile, the Shiv Sena, which is part

of the state's ruling coalition, claimed that the BJP was playing "dirty politics" to destabilise the Uddhav Thackeray government. A day after assistant police inspector Sachin Waze made serious allegations against the sitting Maha Vikas Aghadi ministers, the Shiv Sena came out in support of its ministers and defended the government, saying the Opposition was playing "dirty politics" to defame the Maharashtra

government. Shiv Sena's Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Raut said efforts were being made by some people to destabilise the MVA government.

Mr Waze had on Wednesday alleged in his four-page letter that senior Maharashtra Cabinet ministers, including transport minister Anil Parab, had asked him to extort money from businessmen and establishments. The suspended officer also alleged former home minister Anil Deshmukh had demanded Rs 2 crores to allow him to continue in police service.

"From Day 1, efforts are being made to destabilise the Maharashtra government. A few people are making efforts day in and out for it, but the government is stable. Those who are involved in destabilising the government are being exposed," he added.

## 3 militants killed, 3 soldiers hurt in J&amp;K

DC CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 8

Three suspected militants have been killed and an equal number of security personnel injured in a fierce gunfight raging in a congested locality of Jammu and Kashmir's southern Shopian town since Thursday morning.

The police and Army sources said that fighting broke out after a joint team of J&K police's counterinsurgency Special Operations Group (SOG), the Army's 44 Rashtriya Rifles and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) laid siege to Jan Mohalla of the Shopian town, about 50km from here, over night on learning about the presence of militants in a private house.

The officials said that the militants were offered to lay down their weapons and surrender before the security forces but they preferred to fight and their opening fire at the search party triggered the encounter.

They said that the identities of the slain militants are being ascertained. The injured Army jawans Ram Dev, Drug Singh and Raj Kumar have been hospitalised. The sources said that the condition of one of them is stated to be critical.

According to the officials, the fire fight continued till reports last came in. They said that the intelligence input suggests that a 'top' militant commander has been trapped in the besieged area.



Dr Sanduk Ruit checks a patient's eye sight after his eye patches are removed at an eye camp in Lumbini, Nepal.



# DECCAN Chronicle

9 APRIL 2021

## With Russia, be measured, and keep an open mind

A realistic appreciation of the state of India's relationship with Russia — which remained high in areas such as military sales and energy, nuclear and space cooperation, even after the collapse of Communism, and while New Delhi's convergences with Washington took on strategic dimensions — can be gained when President Vladimir Putin visits India later this year. The compatibility between Indian and Russian political positions in the region, or internationally, is likely to be better in view then.

But there are straws in the wind that can be picked up at this stage. These were available during the visit earlier this week of Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, who held detailed confabulations with external affairs minister S. Jaishankar on a range of bilateral and regional issues, before embarking for Pakistan, with which Moscow has expanded its relationship in recent years, particularly in the field of fighting terrorism, sale of defence equipment and energy.

Moscow-Islamabad views the peace process in Afghanistan, and the place of importance in it given to the Taliban on the question of future power-sharing, appear convergent at this stage. More, they are not different from that of Washington and Beijing, which is happy to go along with Islamabad. The Indian position, although not fully articulated except on first principles, may be seen as differently nuanced on the Taliban factor and in the context of the relationship with the government of President Ashraf Ghani.

And yet New Delhi-Moscow ties have historically had a broad sweep. To what degree this changes, if at all, in the context of India's favourable positioning with the US, Russia's close proximity with Beijing and America's contentious relationship with both China and Russia, can be better understood after Mr Putin meets Prime Minister Narendra Modi later in the year.

But the observations of Mr Jaishankar and Mr Lavrov suggest that there is a desire on both sides to keep the bilateral relationship well-oiled. Will India go ahead with the purchase of the S-400 anti-missile defence system from Russia in the face of serious US reservations on this? This is a serious question for later, the answer to which could have a bearing on India-Russia as well as India-US relations.

In his remarks, the external affairs minister called the relationship “energetic and forward-looking”. This is a speculative formulation, which leaves the door open for positivity. The Russian foreign minister said that the bilateral ties were “valuable, mutually respectful” and “not subjected to political fluctuations”. The two formulations are far from being at odds. Perhaps they are at the stage of probing. The reference to “mutually respectful” is suggestive of differences at the tactical level in a variety of arenas. These will need to be ironed out or taken out of contention in mutually acceptable ways even while cooperating significantly in a range of areas.

Mr Lavrov noted that Russia-China ties are “at the highest” level, historically, but it is not a “military alliance”. At the same time he expressed Moscow's unease with India being a part of the Quad, obliquely calling it the “Asian Nato”. These observations are not adversarial, as is being sought to be made out in some quarters, but a reflection of the current state of play in the world. India and Russia both need to move with their eyes open and remain carefully calibrated.

## Uphold media's right to report

The order of the Jammu and Kashmir police banning live coverage of encounters between the security forces and separatist militants and of “law and order situations”, and the subsequent direction to senior police officers to take legal action in such situations, call for clarification by the governments in the Union territory and at the Centre. This has become all the more important since the police officer who issued the directive has quoted the constitutional rights of freedom of speech and expression, and life. The J&K media, which has been walking on the razor's edge for the last several decades, has already registered their strong protest against the new fiat.

The police are stating the obvious when it says it cannot allow live coverage of encounters; nobody has even a case that it should be allowed undermining the very operation the security agencies undertake. The police are right when it invokes Article 21 and says the right to life of men in uniform has to be protected. But how far is it justified when it talks of a media ban in “law and order situations” by which it obviously refers to the protests of the ordinary citizens that erupt in the streets of the Union territory? The same Indian Constitution gives the people the right to speech and expression, which is enjoyed by every citizen, not just journalists. They put that right to use when they protest; the journalists use the same right when they report it. The police can, of course, impose reasonable restrictions, of which the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the media there have quite a clear idea. The protection of basic rights of the citizens is as much the job of the state as the protection of the rights of the security agencies. The state just cannot barter one for the other.

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Saeed Naqvi  
Wide Angle



## Syria is still in the eye of the storm even after 10 years

In 1952, like a bolt from the blue, came UP chief minister Govind Ballabh Pant's order abolishing zamindari. The abrupt drop in prestige and lifestyle caused a relative across the Ganga to hide his arsenal of a few rifles and 12-bore shotguns along with boxes of Eley cartridges.

Whenever courtiers in rags, with some previous pique, stoked his fragile ego with stories of rampant lawlessness in villages because “huzoor's” power had ended, “huzoor” would come out with his preferred shotgun. This sad, fake “dadagiri” lasted as long as the boxes of Eleys did.

This trans-Ganga tragic hero came to mind when my eye fell on a bold headline of a piece by Graham E. Fuller, formerly of the CIA, on the aggressive style of Joe Biden's and Anthony Blinken's early outings in *Foreign Affairs*: “Hell Hath No Fury Like A Superpower in Decline”.

The subsequent utterances are subdued and moderate but the initial knee-jerk reaction was revealing.

Fuller writes: “The US leadership must have set some kind of new record in managing to personally insult the powers of the world within 48 hours of each other in these early days of the Biden administration.

President Biden called Vladimir Putin a ‘killer’ and lacking ‘a soul’. Blinken was equally insulting on China.

“This country has some grounds for pride in its own-imperfect democratic order. Still, how much reflection does it take to acknowledge what the Chinese Communist Party has accomplished in the past 30 years? Is it more worthy to bring half a billion people out of poverty into middle class life in a mere generation? Or more worthy to maintain intact an American electoral system in which mediocre or bad leaders emerge as readily as good ones?”

Fuller's invective is focused on the Biden-Blinken opening salvos at Russia and China. I would have scoured anything Fuller wrote on the tenth anniversary of the Syrian crisis. Five Western powers observed the occasion with all the fire and brimstone of the past. Fuller knows the area backwards. A key policy document advising the Reagan administration in 1983 on military action against Syria for strategic reasons was his handiwork. I have had this document ever since it was released in 2008, having been in secret vaults for 25 years.

After visiting Damascus and almost all the trouble spots in Syria's neigh-

bourhood, I had written a paper “The Storm in the Arab Spring”, the eye of the storm being Syria. I feel qualified to take a critical look at the statement the foreign ministers of the US, France, Germany, Italy and UK issued on the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the tragedy.

One allegation the ministers repeat is straightforward: President Bashar al Assad started the ghoulish operation against his own people who were rebelling against misrule, corruption, economic distress. Not true. I was in Damascus at the outset.

There were reports fairly early in the Obama administration leading the global effort to deploy “shadow” Internet and mobile systems which “dissidents can use to undermine repressive governments that seek to silence them by shutting down communications network”. James Glanz and John Markoff of the New York Times described one operation in a fifth-floor shop at Washington's L Street, where “a group of young entrepreneurs, looking like a garage band, are assembling deceptively innocent-looking hardware into a prototype ‘Internet-in-a-suitcase’. It was all part of the big push for the Liberation Technology Movement, and how comprehensively it was applied against the Syrian regime”.

In Syria's case, the “moderate operation” the “free” world was busting its guts to help, in many cases, turned out to be cover for extreme Islamists like Jabhat al Nusra. One such instance defence secretary Lloyd Austin admitted before the Senate Armed Services Select Committee: A \$500 million project to train “moderates” to fight Assad turned into an embarrassment for Washington. Most trainees disappeared, along with the lethal equipment. Mr Austin mumbled “four or five” of the moderates trained were still with “us”.

Among the trick sentences in the foreign minister's statement was one on Daesh (Islamic State). “Preventing Daesh's resurgence remains a priority”, the statement says.

Hadn't Daesh, in the administration's words, been “destroyed”? So why is possible resurrection posed as a threat? Because the threat, when live, can justify airstrikes and other forms of intervention?

In America's “sole superpower” moment, countries were averse to calling the US names: how can it be accused of nurturing “terrorists” as possible assets in future contingencies?

The free run the US and regional allies like Saudi Arabia had to alter the ground realities in Syria ended

*The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.*

when the Russians arrived in 2015, boots on the ground.

A brief background to place Baghdadi in perspective. President Barack Obama was livid with Iraqi PM Nouri al Maliki for not signing the status of forces agreement before the US troops' departure. Washington wanted him out.

Just about this time, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi puts out a video from Mosul's main mosque on July 4, 2014, declaring the formation of an Islamic Caliphate. In August 2014, Mr Obama gave a significant interview to Thomas L. Friedman of the *New York Times*. Asked why he didn't order airstrikes against ISIS when it reared its head in June-July 2014, Mr Obama admitted that airstrikes on Baghdadi in July “would have taken the pressure off Nouri al Maliki”, Iraq's stubbornly anti-American Shia PM. In other words, the rapid march of ISIS from Mosul to Baghdad's outskirts was “facilitated” to keep the pressure on the PM. In September 2014, Mr Maliki was shown the door. Moral: Terrorists can be assets in certain circumstances!

*The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi*

Subhani



## ‘Force majeure’ can’t be fig leaf for naked greed



Mohan Guruswamy

The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic is here, across most of the country. Our daily infection peak has crossed that of 2020. It will once again stress the entire system, including our creaking public health infrastructure, and such times of stress are when the “force majeure” clauses in commercial agreements are waved about to renege on the promised word.

Last year, early in the first lockdown in April 2020, a major financial daily had reported that several large retail chains in India, such as Reliance, the Future Group, McDonald's, Domino's Pizza and others were trying to use the omnipresent “force majeure” clause in all agreements and contracts to back out of commercial obligations. Typically, these notices are served on the smaller associates deemed least able to challenge it. Some succeeded.

It will be interesting to know if the government has been told by Reliance or Airtel of their inability to pay the telecom spectrum dues? Or would Prince Mohammed bin Salman take kindly to any attempt to diddle his desert kingdom of payment for oil already processed?

It won't be long before the companies try these tactics again. Several automotive companies also operate their own showrooms, as do oil marketing companies and others. Some of our top business groups like the Tatas, with Croma and Westside, and the Goenkas, with Spencers, have a strong presence in the retail sector. The More retail chain was recently sold by the Birlas to a private investment group. Companies like Godrej, Samsung and LG have nationwide exclusive networks for

their products. These company showrooms are often the anchor stores in a mall or market that because of their perceived creditworthiness manage to get much lower rents.

These companies are citing a letter dated February 19, 2020, issued by the ministry of finance and is in relation to the definition of “force majeure” in the Manual for Procurement of Goods 2017. This manual is in relation to the procurement contracts of the Government of India for goods and services and is not applicable to the interpretation of separate “force majeure” clauses in private contracts.

Unlike with government procurement contracts, the performance of the obligation of contractual payments has not been prevented by any act, proclamation, regulation or ordinance of any government or government agency. The spread of Covid-19 is undoubtedly a public health crisis with multiple measures placed by the state and Central governments. However, the orders of the governments only cover educational institutions, theatres, function halls and cinema halls.

In any event, the Covid-19 virus can't be invoked as a reason to escape all contractual obligations

in general by universally invoking “force majeure” clauses. The spread of the Covid-19 virus or the government regulations around it have to directly make the performance of the obligation in a contract impossible in order to invoke the force majeure clause. The force majeure clause in agreements clearly specify the requirement of prevention or delay “by causes beyond the reasonable control of such party, including but not limited to any act, proclamation, regulation or ordinance

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of any government or government agency, having jurisdiction over the parties, provided that the affected party take(s) all reasonable action to eliminate the cause of the delay”.

Even if a company claims that it may have become onerous to pay the contracted amount as a result of the Covid-19 related government notifications, no government notification has rendered it impossible for the companies to pay for goods and services availed or being availed of. The ability of a company to generate a monthly profit is not linked to the obligation or ability of a profitable public corporation to pay the contracted amount.

Despite the lockdown notifications, these companies continued using the premises for storing commercial goods that were for present or future sale. For instance, most retail verticals continued to take orders and payments online for all postal codes. During the nationwide lockdown too, in the absence of being able to complete the delivery of sale, they still continued to receive payments for products that were being stored in their premises.

Nothing renders the payment of rent impossible. Any kind of temporary business interruption is covered in the risk insurance that these companies are obliged to have. The burden of the rent can't be wriggled out of because of reduced business opportunities in the light of measures taken around the prevention of Covid-19.

With respect to a similar pandemic, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in 2003, the courts did not permit tenants to wriggle out of

their obligations of payment in lease agreements even when the tenant was not permitted to enter the leased premises due to the temporary isolation orders of the government. In that context, the courts held that a two-week period was insigni?cant in view of the long duration of the lease, and that while SARS was arguably an unforeseeable event, it did not “signi?cantly change the nature of the outstanding contractual rights or obligations” of the parties in the case.

The law of the land with respect to lease agreements is that “where the property leased is not destroyed or substantially and permanently unfit, the lessee cannot avoid the lease because he does not or is unable to use the land for purposes for which it is let to him”. Additionally, the courts have held that even when the economic conditions are the product of a “force majeure” event, such financial hardship would not excuse performance if the party retained some level of control over its allocation of resources.

All our big companies report significant profits. Reliance Industries Ltd has reported a post-tax profit of over ₹35,000 crores for the year ended March 2019. Its annual report also highlighted that Reliance Retail became the first retailer in India to cross the ₹100,000 crore turnover milestone. Reliance Retail posted a profit of ₹2,727 crores just in Q3 of 2019. Incidentally, Mukesh Ambani's personal wealth went up by 60 per cent in the pandemic year.

It would be a travesty if these big groups should attempt to wrongfully wriggle out of their contractual obligations in such difficult times. Such attempts to renege on performance obligations particularly oppresses their smaller associates.

### LETTERS

#### LESSER TURNOUT

It was really surprising to note that the voter turnout in the Chennai district was less than 60% in the recent Assembly elections. It is imperative to find out the reasons for this lower turnout, as electorates in cities are expected to set an example to their rural counterparts. The indifference of voters to the election per se is a defeat for all the national and regional political parties in the state.

**S. Ramakrishnasayee,**  
Chennai

#### EC CREDIBILITY AT STAKE

Right from the EVMs being allowed to be transported in a BJP candidate's car in Assam and two Corporation employees transporting EVMs and VVPAT machines in motor cycles in Chennai, Lotus symbol and Two leaves symbols flashing when the voter pressed the rising sun symbol in the just concluded Tamil Nadu elections and the lame and unconvincing answers to such unpardonable acts, it is clear the EC has lost its credibility and the electorate its trust in their functioning. People are also much worried about the 28-day wait for the votes to be counted and fear that the EVMs could be tampered by the powers that be in collusion with the EC. Fortunately, all pre-polls conducted in Tamil Nadu by various agencies have predicted a landslide victory for the DMK alliance. As such, if the outcome of the results is against the DMK alliance would only bring in further disgrace to the EC that has already lost its credibility to a large extent with its pro-ruling party functioning.

**Tharcius S. Fernando,**  
Chennai

#### WAIT AND WATCH

As has been the case in the past, Kerala had witnessed brisk polling with close to 75 per cent casting their votes. The outcome of the Kerala assembly polls is being keenly watched for varied reasons. While the ruling LDF (Left Democratic Front) is pinning its hopes on the perceived popularity of its CM Pinarayi Vijayan and the slew of welfare measures it announced and implement with an alacrity during its reign to romp home and buck the long-existing trend of incumbent being voted out and power alternating between LDF and the Congress led UDF, Congress still being plagued by factionalism had pulled out all the stops to script a comeback in the saddle of power. BJP led NDA may not have much stakes in the poll, but its increasing vote share in the elections held over the decades, pointing to its gradual rise in the political landscape of Kerala cannot simply be overlooked. Pollsters have predicted a win for ruling LDF, but the choice of highly political conscious people of Kerala will be known only on May 2.

**M. Jeyaram,**  
Chennai







# Friday blockbuster

## Champions Mumbai take on Kohli's Challengers in opener

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

If the number of trophies won is a barometer for excellence in IPL, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Having won six IPL crowns — five as captain of Mumbai Indians and one with the Deccan Chargers, Rohit is arguably the most decorated player. On the other hand, the RCB skipper is still chasing his maiden success. Within just five months of lifting last season's trophy in the UAE, Rohit is out to secure an unprecedented hat-trick as the 14th edition of the cash-rich league begins with a marquee clash between Mumbai and RCB here on Friday.

With an array of exciting T20 players in their line-up, Mumbai Indians, once

again, are billed as the team to beat. And Rohit sure has a knack for getting the best out of his star-studded team. The current form of Ishan Kishan, Surya Kumar Yadav and Hardik Pandya who all had an impressive limited-overs series against England make Mumbai a formidable unit. Royal Challengers have bolstered their squad by signing on new players such as Glenn Maxwell, Kyle Jamieson and Dan Christian. But it remains to be seen if Maxwell who was bought for a whopping ₹14.5 crore lives up to the expectations. He didn't score a single six last season when he represented Punjab. However, Kohli doesn't seem desperate. "Personally, I feel relaxed with the resources we have, and strength of our team. Looking forward to being in



Rohit Sharma

the park and leading up to IPL is full of anticipation and nerves," Kohli said. For M.S. Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings, it's going to be

HEAD to HEAD	
Matches	29
MI	19
RCB	10
<b>Team news</b>	
● Quinton de Kock and Adam Milne are unlikely for the game as they have to serve the seven-day quarantine in their hotel rooms.	
● Devdutt Padikkal has rejoined the RCB squad after recovering from Covid-19.	
<b>FOR THE RECORD</b>	
● Mumbai have won eight of their last 10 meetings with RCB, and of the two games they lost, one was via the Super Over last season.	
● Of the six venues that will host this year's tournament, the MA Chidambaram Stadium has been Virat Kohli's slowest scoring (strike rate 111.49).	

redemption time. After failing to make the playoffs last season, for the first time in their franchise history, CSK have a lot to prove. It's also

likely the last season for veteran Dhoni. He is touted to take over as the team's player-cum-mentor next year, but a lot depends on this year's performance. Another swash-buckling wicket-keeper batsman, Rishabh Pant will be itching to emerge out of Dhoni's shadows and cement his place in the squad when he embarks on his new role as Delhi Capitals skipper. IPL provides an ideal platform for overseas players to prepare for the World T20 and some of them have already made their intentions clear. As a tournament with a reputation for spotlighting unknown talent every season, the Indian team management would be eager to see who will emulate the likes of T. Natarajan, Varun Chakravathy and Rahul Tewatia.

# TN sailors make history, qualify for Olympics

NEHA SURANA | DC  
CHENNAI, APRIL 8

Four sailors from TamilNadu — Nethra Kumanan, Vishnu Saravanan, K.C. Ganapathy and Varun Thakkar — have qualified for the Tokyo Olympics after sailing through the Asian Qualifier in Oman. It was a "dream come true" moment for the Chennai girl Nethra. "I am very happy and have no words to describe my joy. It's a huge deal, to be the first woman to qualify. And, I am proud of



K.C. Ganapathy, Varun Thakkar and Nethra Kumanan.

it," said Nethra. The 22-year-old has been stuck in Spain for over a year due to the pandemic. "I just want to come back to Chennai, it's been more than a year since I've been away from home. And then a

month later, I might go back to Spain, because I practised with some of the best sailors there and that has helped my game," said Nethra. Vellore-born Vishnu was gratified to see his hard work pay off. "I still can't believe we did it. We have been working hard for this since we were children. I am proud we did it as a team. I have been training in Malta for a while now and will be going back there soon to prepare for the Olympics," said Vishnu, who represents Army Yacht club, Mumbai.

The duo of Ganapathy and Varun qualified in the men's 49er class event for the Olympics. The childhood buddies had dreamt of this together and are nervous and excited at the same time to inch closer to their dream. "We need to improve and work harder to clinch a medal at the Olympics as the competition won't be a bed of roses. Varun and I, we are so close to it, we won't let it slip away," said Ganapathy. "It took years of hard work for us to reach here and it feels good."

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