

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | MONDAY 19 | APRIL 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 35°C  
**Min:** 26°C  
**Rainfall:** Nil

## ASTROGUIDE

**Pilava:** Chithirai 6  
**Tithi:** Sapthami  
**Star:** Punarpusam  
**Rahukalam:** 7.30 am to 9 am  
**Yamagandam:** 10.30 am to 3 Noon

### PRAYERS

**Fajar:** 4.45 am  
**Luhar:** 12.14 pm  
**Asar:** 3.19 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.22 pm  
**Isha:** 7.34 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY** 6.22 PM  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW** 5.54 AM  
**MOONRISE TODAY** 11.11AM  
**MOONSET TOMORROW** 1.17 AM

## CORONA COUNT

| CASES       | DEATHS   |
|-------------|----------|
| (+2,58,095) | (+1,570) |
| 1,50,54,027 | 1,78,743 |

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+10,723)  
**TN:** 9,91,451 13,113

### WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

14,18,34,251s

### DEATHS

30,29,273

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES  
219

worldometers.info

## No lockdown on May 2, says chief electoral officer

The Tamil Nadu chief electoral officer has clarified that there will be no lockdown on Sunday, May 2, the day on which votes polled in the elections to five state assemblies, including in Tamil Nadu, will be counted.

## UK Oppn asks Johnson to cancel India visit

**London:** Britain's Opposition Labour Party on Sunday joined calls for Prime Minister Boris Johnson to cancel his visit to India, starting next Sunday, amid growing concerns of a new variant of COVID-19 detected in the country.

Public Health England has said that 77 cases of the so-called double mutant Indian variant have been detected in the UK since last month and that it has now been classed as a Variant Under Investigation. Downing Street had earlier confirmed a much shorter schedule for the UK prime minister's visit, with the bulk of the programme including talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi set for a day-long agenda on Monday, April 26.

## COUNTER

## POINT



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

# Navalny could die at any moment: Doc

**Moscow, April 18** A doctor for imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who is in the third week of a hunger strike, says his health is deteriorating rapidly and the 44-year-old Kremlin critic could be on the verge of death.

Physician Yaroslav Ashikhmin said test results he received from Mr Navalny's family show him with sharply elevated levels



**NAVALNY'S potassium levels are high: report**

of potassium, which can bring on cardiac arrest, and heightened creatinine levels that indicate impaired kidneys. "Our patient could die at any moment," he said in a Facebook post. Anastasia

Vasilyeva, head of the Navalny-backed Alliance of Doctors union, said on Twitter that "action must be taken immediately."

Mr Navalny is Russian President Vladimir Putin's most visible and adamant opponent.

His personal physicians have not been allowed to see him in prison. He went on hunger strike to protest the refusal to let them visit

when he began experiencing severe back pain and a loss of feeling in his legs. Russia's state penitentiary service has said he is receiving all the medical help he needs. He was arrested on January 17 when he returned to Russia from Germany, where had spent five months recovering from Soviet nerve-agent poisoning that he blames on the Kremlin. — PTI



**NATION | 4**  
**Yediyurappa in hospital, stable**



**WORLD | 5**  
**Nasa Mars copter flight 'today'**

**SPORT | 8**  
**Muttiah Muralitharan admitted to hospital in Chennai**



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

Vol. 17 No. 23 Established 1938 | 8 PAGES | ₹3.00

# Night curfew from tomorrow

■ TN declares lockdown on Sundays ■ Puts off plus 2 exam

**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 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

## RAILWAYS TO RUN 'OXYGEN EXPRESS' TRAINS

**New Delhi, April 18:** The Railways will run 'Oxygen Express' trains over the next few days to transport liquid medical oxygen and oxygen cylinders across the country as the demand for medical oxygen in the country has gone through the roof.

Empty tankers will begin their journey from Kalamboli and Boisar railway stations in and near Mumbai on Monday to load liquid medical oxygen from Vizag, Jamshedpur, Rourkela and Bokaro, railway officials said. — PTI

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. ■ P2

# Singh roots for compulsory licensing to produce vaccine

**New Delhi, April 18:** Former prime minister Manmohan Singh on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the Covid-19 crisis, stressing that ramping up vaccination was the key to battling the pandemic, and mooted steps to boost supply including invoking compulsory licensing provisions as in case of HIV/AIDS drugs.

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. "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 of the population vaccinated," he said in his letter.

Noting that India currently has vaccinated only a small fraction of its population, Dr Singh said he is certain that with the right policy design, "we



can do much better and very quickly".

"There are many things we must do to fight the epidemic but a big part of this effort must be ramping up the vaccination programme," he said while making several suggestions.

The former prime minister suggested that states should be given some flexibility to define categories of frontline workers who can be vaccinated even if they are below 45 years.

Currently, people above 45 years of age are eligible for vaccination. He said some states may want to designate school teachers, bus, three-wheel-

## RAHUL GANDHI SUSPENDS ALL PUBLIC RALLIES

**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. "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. — PTI

er and taxi drivers, municipal and panchayat staff, and possibly lawyers who have to attend courts as frontline workers, and they can then be vaccinated even if they are below 45 years.

The suggestions come a day after the Congress Working Committee met and discussed the efforts required to fight the Covid pandemic. ■ P4

# Acute shortage of vaccines, send more doses, Stalin writes to Modi

**Chennai, April 18:** DMK president MK 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. Now, there was a "huge shortage of vaccines" across the state and there are news reports to suggest that the people who visit government hospitals for vaccination were returning for want of vaccine availability, Stalin, claimed. The

Centre should allow states to independently procure drugs, vaccines and medical equipment as the pandemic affected states could not wait every time for Centre's nod for "each and everything," he said.

Tamil Nadu had on Saturday reported 9,344 new COVID-19 cases pushing the caseload to 9,80,728. Till date, "only 46.70 lakh people" have been vaccinated out of which, 40.64 lakh were administered the first dose and 6.05 lakh the second dose, he said. — PTI

## ABD-Maxwell masterclass



Glenn Maxwell (78 off 49 balls) and AB de Villiers (76 not out off 34 balls) powered Royal Challengers Bangalore to an emphatic 38-run win over Kolkata Knight Riders at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Sunday. It was RCB's third win in as many matches. — IPL

## Sexagenarian, two grandsons charred to death in blaze

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VELLORE, APRIL 18

A sexagenarian and his two minor grandsons were charred to death in a fire accident that damaged their cracker shop in Latheri in Vellore district on Sunday, plunging the entire area into deep sorrow.

Police identified the deceased as Mohan Reddy (60), and grandsons Tejas (6) and Tanuj (8). Reddy lighted some new types of crackers outside the shop for a demo after asking his grandchildren to remain inside. A spark flew from the exploding crackers and fell into the shop.

■ P3

amazon  
**smbhav**  
SUMMIT

**Unlocking infinite possibilities for a digital India**

# THANK YOU!

We thank the **60,000+** small businesses & entrepreneurs for attending Amazon Smbhav Summit 2021 and partnering with us in helping unlock infinite possibilities for a digital India.



**2.5 MILLION**

**SMBs digitized**

of the **10 million** pledged by 2025



**3 LAKH**

**jobs created**

of the **1 million** incremental jobs pledged by 2025



**\$3 BILLION**

**worth global exports enabled**

of the **\$10 billion** pledged by 2025



**Presenting three new initiatives as part of our commitment to building a brighter digital India**

### Amazon Smbhav Venture Fund

**\$250 million towards digitization of small businesses, agri-tech innovations and health tech**



### Spotlight North East

**To boost the local economy, create jobs, accelerate financial inclusion, empower women and tribal communities**



### Enabling local shops

**1 million offline retailers and neighbourhood stores to be digitally enabled by 2025 through Local Shops programme**



Visit **www.amazon.in/smbhav** to know more

Pledges represent Amazon's intent and do not constitute legal obligations. Any use of or reliance on the above information by you is at your own risk, and Amazon will not be liable for any claims (including estoppel claims) or demands in respect of such use or reliance.



## OTHER STORIES

## Fire service week observed

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUCHY, APRIL 18

The fire and rescue department personnel led by District Fire Officer, G. Anusuya, and her deputy, Karunakaran, and Station Fire officer, Melghio Raja, gave a rousing reception to a team comprising 45 fire and rescue personnel, who culminated their cycle rally at the fire station here, on Sunday.

The team including Robin Castro, Mano Prakasham, Loganathan and Vadivelu, station fire officers of Villupuram, Thanjavur, Cuddalore and Tiruvallur respectively, commenced the rally at Villupuram on Saturday, as part of the 'fire service week' celebrations from April 14 to 20, culminated their cycle rally at Tiruchy on Sunday.

The team paid homage to all firemen who had lost their lives during their service in all fire stations across the state, besides creating awareness among the people on the services rendered by the department, and maintenance of fire-fighting equipment.

## Erumbeeswarar temple closed

**Tiruchy:** In view of the second Covid-19 wave, the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) has ordered closure of Sri Erumbeeswarar temple popularly known as 'Malai Kovil' at suburb Tiruverumbur near here, on Saturday. The place 'Tiruverumbur' derives its name from this temple dedicated to Shri Erumbeeswarar. ASI sources said, as per instructions from the Centre and state government, they ordered closure of all temples under their control till May 15. The temple was closed after completion of daily rituals on Saturday.

## Leyland delivers light bullet proof vehicles to IAF

**Chennai:** Ashok Leyland, the largest supplier of logistics vehicles to the Indian Army, has strengthened its Armoured vehicle platform by delivering first of its kind 'Light Bullet proof Vehicles' (LBPV) to the IAF. The first lot of these modern vehicles was delivered on April 13. The vehicle offers Superior protection and combat capability. The crew is well protected from both ballistic and blast threats and can launch attacks.

LBPV is an adopted version of Lockheed Martin's (LM) CVNG (Common Vehicle Next Gen) and has been developed under TOT from LM to Ashok Leyland. It is completely indigenous and developed in India. Mr. Vipin Sondhi, MD & CEO, Ashok Leyland, said,

"This LBPV is another example of our team's capability combined with a strong sense of understanding of what is required in arduous conditions."



Fire and rescue service personnel take out corona awareness cycle rally at Ashok Nagar. — DC

## Sunday lockdowns to be severe with essential shops too closed

From P1

Journalists, petrol bunks, continuous process industries and industries producing essentials will be allowed to work during the curfew, besides persons on night duty who must produce their ID cards to be out during the curfew hours.

The Sunday lockdowns are going to be severe with vegetable, meat and fish shops, besides commercial establishments and cinema theatres to be closed. Entry to public parks is also banned on all days, which means people may have to confine themselves to their homes if they are not out at work during daytime. Beaches, parks and archaeological sites will also remain closed to the public. Hill stations like Ooty and Kodaikanal and a few monuments have been closed to tourism.

Restaurants and platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, etc., will restrict their working hours to between 6 am and 10 am, 12 pm and 3 pm and 6 pm and 9 pm on Sundays and lockdown days. Delivery services will be allowed on Sundays when service providers can function but other e-commerce platforms are not permitted to function during Sundays.

The attendance cannot exceed 100 guests at weddings and 50 at funerals. There will be a limit of 50% customers at a time in malls and shops while 50% of IT staffers working for an office are expected to work from home. In short, it is back to the 'worst of Covid times like it was under the first wave of the coronavirus. Only the numbers of people affected may get far worse now in the second wave.

## GCC reopens Covid-19 tele-counselling centre

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, APRIL 18

Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) on Sunday brought back the 24x7 Tele-Counselling Centre that can provide Covid19-related services for at least 100 persons at a time. G. Prakash, Commissioner, GCC inaugurated the centre. According to officials, the general public can contact 044-4612 2300, 044-25384520 to get medical counselling.

Queries relating to Covid19 including vaccination, medication, hospital bed situation, volun-

teer services, screening and testing will be addressed by the counsellors at the centre. Apart from Covid-19, other epidemic related queries will also be answered.

The Corporation has decided to bring back the service of the centre after it played a crucial role in disseminating information and helping the general public during the first wave in the city. "As many as 4 lakh phone queries have been addressed by the centre so far since its inception in March last year", said the officials.

## Karur all set to tackle Covid-19

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KARUR, APRIL 18

The district administration here is taking all possible preventive measures on a war-footing, against the second Covid-19 wave, which is spreading fast.

A collectorate release said here on Sunday that from March last year till date, they conducted 14,457 fever camps across the district, in which 12,35,455 persons were subjected to medical tests, and swab tests done on 2,39,502 persons.

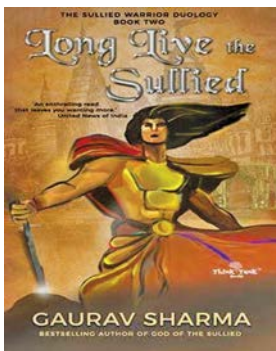
From March this year till date, the district administration has organised 1,411 medical camps across the district and 48,000 swab tests were taken. As on date, there are 47 persons including 20 women are undergoing Covid-19 treatment at the government medical college hospital (GMCH) and from April 15 last year till today, there were 3,393 covid-19 positive cases treated at the GMCH. They were discharged after they fully recovered, the release added.

The district administration has readied three special treatment centres at the old government hospital premises with 300 beds, another 300 bedded special treatment centre located in the government arts college premises here, and a 200 bedded special treatment centre also located at a private engineering college at suburb Puliyur, the release said, adding that efforts were on to establish another special treatment centre with 200 beds near Karur in a couple of days.

PRIYANKA MINJ | DC  
CHENNAI, APRIL 18

The book is the second part of the sullied warrior duology, written by Gaurav Sharma. In this, the point of view, changes and the story are seen from different perspectives.

"I was there when nothing was, I am here when nothing is, and I will be present in all years to come." The narrator of this mythological series is time, which tells the story



of Eklavya. By the end of the first book, Eklavya is crowned as the king of

## State hits new peak past 10k mark in daily Covid-19 cases

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, APRIL 18

Hitting a new peak on Sunday in Covid-19 cases in a single day, the State crossed 10,000-mark in the state with 42 deaths. The data provided by the State Health department shows the state adding 10,724 cases, which is a sharp jump from 9,344 on Saturday. This takes the total Covid-19 infections in the state to 9,91,451 with death toll 13113 including 4,400 in Chennai.

Chennai registered 3,304 cases and 16 deaths. New cases surged from 2,884 on Saturday, with which the district records a total of 2,83,436 cases so far. Chengalpattu district, which has a total of 66,440 positive cases, reported 954 cases and 6 deaths, also a spike from Saturday's figures of 807 new cases and 3 deaths.

The number of daily cases in Coimbatore jumped from around the 600-mark to 700, adding 727 new cases on Sunday. While Chennai, Coimbatore, and Chengalpattu continue to add over 500 cases every day, Thiruvallur district joined the 500-plus club on Sunday contributing 503 cases.

Kancheepuram, Tirunelveli, Thirupur, and Trichy recorded 300-plus cases on Sunday. Erode, Krishnagiri, Madurai, Nagapattinam, Selam, Thoothukudi, and Vellore districts crossed 200mark. Apart from this, at least 12 other districts in the state registered 100 plus cases.

Active cases in the state

## Puducherry adds 663 fresh virus cases, overall tally goes up to 47,771

**Puducherry, April 18:** Puducherry registered 663 new coronavirus cases in 24 hours taking the overall tally to 47,771, a senior official of the Department of Health and Family Welfare Services said on Sunday. Three more people succumbed to the virus, pushing the death toll to 708, Director of the Health and Family Welfare Department S Mohan Kumar said in a release.

The number of active cases in the union territory stood at 4,468 while the recoveries was 42,595 so far, he added. The 663 new cases were identified at the end of the examination of 5,070 samples and were spread over Puducherry (497), Karaikal (80), Yanam (35) and Mahe (51).

The fatality and recovery rates were 1.48 per cent and 89.16 per cent respectively. The Health department Director said that 7.28 lakh samples have been tested so far and it was found that 6.62 lakh out of them to be negative.

Kumar said 30,171 health

**The fatality and recovery rates were 1.48 per cent and 89.16 per cent respectively. The Health department Director said that 7.28 lakh samples have been tested so far and it was found that 6.62 lakh out of them to be negative**

workers and 17,931 frontline workers have been vaccinated so far. As many as 1,05,642 people coming either under the category of senior citizens (those above 60 years) or those above 45 years with comorbidities have been vaccinated under the second phase of vaccination launched on March 1, he said.

Lt Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan visited the Edouard Goubert Big Market in the city on Sunday to see for herself the progress of vaccination at a special camp in the market to cover the shopping public. She told reporters later that the

vaccination festival which began on April 11 ended Sunday and there was overwhelming response from the people above 45 years for inoculation. She said that there would be no side-effects following vaccination.

The Lt Governor said Covid care centres were being opened to help people in home quarantine. Areas that reported large number of new cases of infection would become containment zones, she added. A close watch would be kept on people in such zones and their requirements would be taken care of, she said.

Tamilisai Soundararajan said the Mahatma Gandhi Government Dental College, the Rajiv Gandhi Women and Child hospital and the ESI hospital were being used to admit patients with complaints of infection.

She appealed to the people to make use of the facilities as the government was running testing centres and also centres for vaccination of people above 45 years.

— PTI

## Hyundai becomes India's top car exporter again

A. ARUL PALANI | DC  
CHENNAI, APRIL 18

Hyundai exported 1,04,342 cars between April 2020 and March 2021, continuing its journey as the No.1 automobile brand exported from India. Hyundai has also become the leading exporter of SUVs with over 2 lakh Creta and Veune cars exported to overseas markets including Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Nepal and Chile.

Further, the all-new i20 that has been well accepted in India and in global markets and is being exported to all key markets across Africa and Latin America region. Commenting on the

**The all-new i20 that has been well accepted in India and in global markets and is being exported to all key markets across Africa and Latin America region**

achievement, Mr S S Kim, MD and CEO, Hyundai Motor India Ltd. said, "Despite numerous challenges emerging out of the global pandemic, uncertainty in various markets, restriction on imports and disruption in supply chain, HML has continued to drive operational excellence to ensure customer satisfaction. And,

an export of 1,04,342 cars in 2020-2021 stands testament to our spirit. It is a moment of great pride for Hyundai as we step forward in the journey of making world class quality cars from India.

Our Smart Manufacturing Processes have led us to maintain our leadership position in passenger vehicle exports and strengthened our commitment to 'Make in India' for the World," he added.

Hyundai also commenced exports of cars to Nepal through rail from the Walajabad railway hub near Irungattukottai, Chennai. As the country's largest exporter of automobiles,

Hyundai also surpassed the 3 million vehicle export milestone earlier in 2020, exporting to 88 countries.

Hyundai has recorded multiple export milestones over the years. During the successful export journey, Hyundai Motor India has won prestigious awards including - 7 EEPIC National and 5 South Region Awards as Top Exporter of Year for Large Enterprise category. The automobile major is presently exporting 10 models to 88 countries across five continents, About 32 countries in South America, North America (Mexico) and 28 countries in Africa and one in Europe.

## Gold worth ₹65.87 lakh seized by Air Customs

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, APRIL 18

Based on intelligence that gold was likely to be smuggled from Dubai by concealing in aircraft, an Indigo Flight from Dubai was searched when an unusually heavy white circular disk was found concealed below a wash basin in the aircraft toilet.

On removing the white paint, gold weighing 1 kg valued at ₹48.77 lakhs was recovered and was seized.

On removing the white paint, gold weighing 1 kg valued at ₹48.77 lakhs was recovered and was seized

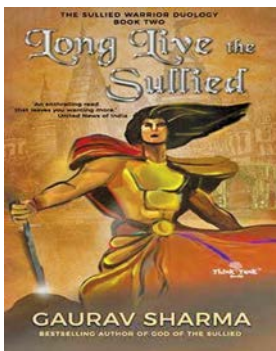
During surveillance in the airport transit area two heavy packets wrapped with white adhesive tape were found in one of the toilets. Gold paste weighing 503 grams was recovered which on extraction yielded 356 grams of gold valued at ₹17.1 lakhs and same was and seized as unclaimed under Customs Act.

## Earthly feelings collide with spiritual knowledge

PRIYANKA MINJ | DC  
CHENNAI, APRIL 18

The book is the second part of the sullied warrior duology, written by Gaurav Sharma. In this, the point of view, changes and the story are seen from different perspectives.

"I was there when nothing was, I am here when nothing is, and I will be present in all years to come." The narrator of this mythological series is time, which tells the story



of Eklavya. By the end of the first book, Eklavya is crowned as the king of

Long Live the Sullied: The Sullied Warrior Duology (Book 2) By Gaurav Sharma

Rudraputra. He rules with fairness and justice. There is peace, justice and harmony in his kingdom and Kaliyuga, it seems, is defeated by a benevolent and just king.

Chaos descends on Rudraputra when Eklavya advocates everything, becomes a yogi and leaves the kingdom in search of truth and wisdom. A sinister

silence grips Rudraputra. In the opening scene, Acharya Virbhadrar arrives at the gate of the palace to meet Eklavya. The stage is set for the characters to play out their parts.

The main protagonist in the second part is Pundir, Eklavya's classmate in the mountain gurukul and his best friend. The conflict is internal and the story is a reflection of the mental, spiritual and physical turmoil of the characters. This is especially true for Pundir. He was regarded

as an excellent student of theology in gurukul, but, unlike Eklavya, he finds it difficult to imbibe the sacred teachings and philosophies in his life. He knows 'Moksha' is the ultimate liberation from Maya. But his earthly feelings, which made him human, always collide with his spiritual knowledge. It is this tussle which forms the backdrop of the story.

The mystery which unravels is enthralling though it becomes predictable in the later part of

the story as the story never really develops; it is just the continuation of the first part with minor character development of the major characters and cameos are mundane. Despite this, the story is not repetitive; it is engaging and flows smoothly.

The language is simple and easy to understand. The plot is engaging with lots of philosophical questions and answers. In the end it's all about the choices we make and from those choices results or repercussions follow.

## When Pandora's Box opened out came B.1.617



R. Mohan

## Namma Chennai Diary

"The vaccines protect you, so go get vaccinated — that's the message," says Dr. Fauci, the most visible face in America's battle against the virus. "If you're around other vaccinated people, you shouldn't worry about it at all. Zero."

The Pandora's Box is open

and the double mutant B.1.617 carrying two specific mutations of concern - E484Q and L452R - is wreaking havoc across the country.

All of us are to blame. The politicians are primarily to blame because they still crave for votes while India is crippled by another and

more deadly wave than that of 2020.

The politicians are again to blame for not asking the religious leaders straightaway to clamp down on the Kumbh Mela in the time of the pandemic. A majority of 1.4 billion-plus Indians are also to blame for letting their guard down and behaving as if the coronavirus had spared somehow the country and gone away after just one wave.

Official India is to blame for letting the country descend into chaos in the wake of the second wave.

Current government behaviour betrays the fact that it has left everyone to his own

devices allowing the virus take the hindmost in the foolish hope that the much touted herd immunity will kick in soon. But science is still showing the way, its analysis of the post-vaccination phase after just the first jabs revealing that infections and deaths among the most vulnerable sections of the population who were inoculated first had come down considerably. This disproves many politicians' assertion that the lockdown had more to do with declining cases than the vaccines.

In UK, studies have shown that the rate of Covid-related hospital admissions fell

by 75 per cent in vaccinated 80 to 83-year-olds within 35 to 41 days of their first dose of the jab. The rate of people getting Covid dropped by 70 per cent, with the number of positive tests falling from 15.3 per one lakh people to 4.6. The figures suggest the link between infections and admissions has been broken by the vaccine programme. The lockdown of 2020 may have helped the initial fight but it seems to make little sense against the second wave. Lockdowns are decisively pro-rich and extremely anti-poor. We see distressing proof of this in the exodus that has begun again of

migrant workers crowding the railway stations of Mumbai.

Science points to the vaccine being the passport out of the pandemic. Vaccinations began in mid January in India but many years have to elapse before a sizeable section of the population is covered. They have been proven to do a good job of protecting us from the virus. The problem is the variants are triggering fear by sending out confusing signals. Medical advice has it that the vaccines on hand are providing a cushion and even if any one vaccine is less effective against a variant it still appears to be pro-

tecting people against the illness. At least it seems to affect people only in a milder way.

It may have taken a bit of courage on my part to go to the Omandurar Medical College to take a jab at the very place where the irrepressibly witty comedian and environmentalist Vivek took his shot just two days before and then died tragically from a cardiac arrest. It did seem his death was not caused by the vaccine and there is no need to fear the minuscule statistical chance of death by vaccine. The odds of allowing the vaccine to protect you are far better than those

that invest people with, say, the fear of flying.

All we are getting from the government now is more obfuscation in terms of hiding the true extent of the deaths even as hospitals are overflowing and crematoriums and burial grounds are bursting at the seams. The data being put out are obviously buttressing very weak arguments over the second wave. As someone said - "There are lies, damned lies, and statistics".

(R. Mohan is the Resident Editor of Chennai and Coimbatore editions of Deccan Chronicle)







## 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

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.

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

on Saturday halted its inoculation drive in over 1,000 session sites including in the hotspot Nuapada district, a senior health department official said. The states vaccine stocks will be exhausted in two days, family welfare director Bijay Panigrahi said.

Only 56,472 people were given jabs at 465 session sites on Saturday against 91,195 who had been vaccinated in 781 centres on Friday, he said. The state has so far vaccinated 49,58,447 people, the health department official said.

Panigrahi said that the vaccination drive could not be taken up in rural Odisha due to the scarcity of Covishield vaccines. Covaxin is being administered in Bhubaneswar; while it is Covishield in the rest of the state.

More than 6,000 people have been vaccinated against Covid-19 at 'mandis' in Punjab during the ongoing procurement of crops, according to an official statement on Sunday.

In addition to putting in place adequate protocols at the 154 mandis (wholesale markets), the state government has started special camps to inoculate all stakeholders and has so far vaccinated more than 6,000 eligible persons.

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

Singh roots for compulsory  
licensing to produce vaccine

FROM PG 1

Dr 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 prime minister 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 rollout.

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 quickly by providing funds and other concessions.

"I believe this is the time to invoke the compulsory licensing provisions in the law so that a number of companies are able to produce the vaccines under a licence. This, I recall, had happened earlier in the case of medicines to deal with the HIV/AIDS disease," he said.

Citing Israel's example, which has already invoked the compulsory licensing provision, he said there is an overwhelming case for India to do so as well quickly.

With domestic supplies being limited, Dr Singh said any vaccine that has

been cleared for use by credible authorities such as the European Medical Agency or the USFDA should be allowed to be imported without insisting on domestic bridging trials.

"We are facing an unprecedented emergency and, I understand, experts are of the view that this relaxation is justified in an emergency."

The relaxation could be for a limited period during which the bridging trials could be completed in India, he said.

Dr Singh said he is forwarding his suggestions for consideration in a spirit of constructive cooperation in which he has always believed and acted upon.

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 Niranjana 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.

"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

SEVERE | SHORTAGE

Gujarat reported 10,340 new Covid-19 cases and 110 deaths on Sunday

## Guj Dy CM admits shortage of beds, health infra

**Ahmedabad, April 18:** Gujarat deputy chief minister Nitin Patel on Sunday admitted that the present requirement of beds and other healthcare facilities in the wake of the spike in Coronavirus cases is more than the state administrations' capacity.

Patel, who handles health portfolio, said though the state government is adding more facilities and beds at regular intervals to accommodate

more patients, it fell short of demand.

"Over 9,000 new Coronavirus cases are emerging in Gujarat everyday. Though we are adding new facilities and beds at regular intervals, it falls short against the demand as the inflow of Coronavirus patients is much higher," Patel told reporters at civil hospital campus here.

"Requirement for beds and other healthcare facilities in the present situation is higher than the

health department and administration's capacity. In view of the spike in cases, we are adding more beds to accommodate the patients," he said.

Commenting on the long queue of ambulances carrying Coronavirus patients outside the civil hospital, Patel said it is the government's obligation to save each and every patient turned away by other hospitals.

"Long queues happen because other hospitals

refuse to admit patients. Such patients then come to us for treatment. Such queues are not a pleasant sight, but it is our obligation to save each and every patient. Till they are admitted in the hospital, till they are in ambulance, we try to keep them alive by giving oxygen," he added.

Gujarat reported 10,340 cases and 110 deaths on Sunday, the highest one-day case count and death toll for the state since the pandemic began. — 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 Zaiulhaq 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 the 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 Tukur 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 Damasak 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

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

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".

— 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

## HIGHEST DAILY SPIKE OF 6,000 CASES IN PAK

**Islamabad, April 18:** Pakistan on Sunday reported its highest single-day Coronavirus spike this year with over 6,000 new cases and about 149 deaths, as the country struggled to speed up its vaccination programme.

The previous highest surge was recorded last year on June 20 when the country reported 6,825 infections and 153 deaths.

The country on Sunday reported 6,127 new cases, pushing the country's infection tally to 756,285. The death toll rose to 16,243 with 149 more fatalities. The government announced that it will start vaccinating people in the 50-59 age group from April 21.

— PTI

## POPE BACK TO IN-PERSON SUNDAY BLESSING

**Vatican City, April 18:** Pope Francis says he is happy to be back greeting the faithful in St Peter's Square for his traditional Sunday noon blessing after weeks of lockdown measures. Italy later this month will start gradually lifting some anti-pandemic restrictions, allowing, for example, outdoor dining at cafes and restaurants in areas of the country where the Covid-19 outbreak has been showing signs of improvement.

A couple of hundred people, including nuns and families, standing a safe distance apart in the vast square, turned out to see the pope speak from a window of the Apostolic Palace.

— 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



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 dissident's treatment in a phone call to Putin last week or being more forthright in his public comments.

— AFP

## 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

## 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

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

**The government must invest in health infrastructure, ban gatherings and work with every institution, state or otherwise, to enforce Covid-appropriate behaviour**

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 counter-balance 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 adapt 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.

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

**Chennai:** SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254747, 22254748

**Coinbatore:** 77 Vivekananda Road, Rammagar. Coinbatore 641009. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256

**Hyderabad:** 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256.

**Bengaluru:** 5th Floor, BMTC Commercial Complex, 80 Ft. Road, Koramangala, Bangalore-560095. Ph: 08043604500; Fax: 080-22960551/52/55

**Visakhapatnam:** Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Roadway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax: (0891) 2755285

**Vijayawada:** No. C 3 & 4, Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 2555284/ 2555287, Fax: (0866) 2555234

**Rajahmundry:** Vemagiri, Dhawleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 531125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618

**Anantapur:** Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904

**Nellore:** Survey No. 527/2, Burrampur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348581/ 82, Telefax (0861) 2348580

**Karimnagar:** Survey No. 1341, Vavilalappally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar 505 001. Phone: (0878) 2228088; Telefax (0878) 2220433

**Kochi:** No. 3-B, 3rd Floor, DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloor-Kadavanthara Road, Ernakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408

**Kozhikode:** No 6/1002 E, First Floor City Mall, Opp. YMCA Kannur Road, Kozhikode - 673 001 Fax: 0495 4019018

**Thiruvananthapuram:** St Joseph Press Thycaud post, Cotton Hills, Thiruvananthapuram-14, Ph: 0471-2735105/67, Fax: 0471-4016112 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08ss

KAUSHIK MITTER  
Editor

R. MOHAN  
Resident Editor

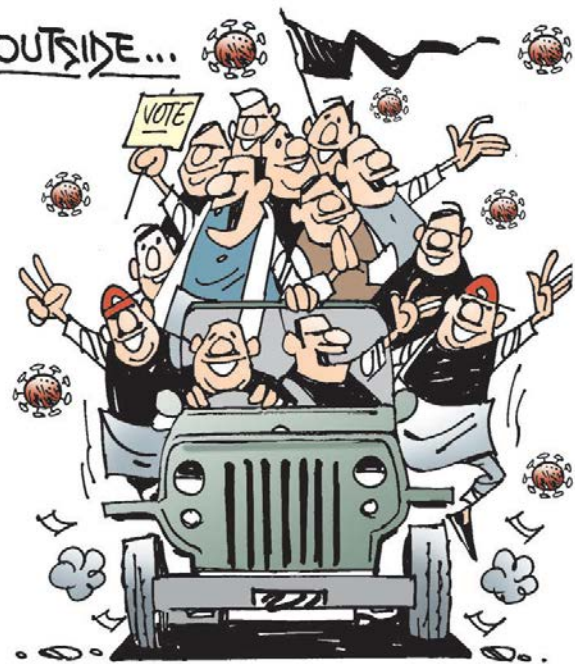
K. SUDHAKAR  
Printer & Publisher

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 failsafe 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 nangey 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

BEASTLY HUMANS

It was shocking to learn that a pet dog was tied to a two-wheeler and dragged along some distance on a road in Malappuram district (Kerala). But for the timely intervention of some kind-hearted people, the canine would have met a horrible end. Last year, too, the same place had hit the headlines for the gruesome plight of a pregnant elephant who died due to an explosion in her mouth after she ate a fruit stuffed with fire-crackers. A few months ago, a pet dog was tied to a car and dragged along the road in Kochi. The frequent instances of cruelty to animals indicate that the existing laws do not have the teeth to create a sense of fear. Pity, some humans behave like wild animals!

P.G. Menon,  
Chennai

SONIA GANDHI'S CALL

Appropos the report Vaccinate25-plus, scrap GST on medicines, Sonia tells PM. Sonia Gandhi's call which is applicable to the current Covid conditions is wholly welcome. Did any politician think on those two vital issues that affect and threaten every individual day-in and day-out? In the U.S., vaccines are tested to suit people of 16 and above. Field tests are now being conducted now to include all children aged 12 and above. With the onslaught of the second wave of corona and in the context of threatening and lightning surge, it is logical and necessitous to make all people aged 25 and above eligible for vaccination as suggested by Sonia. There is no justification to deny vaccination to those below 45 as of now. It is a timely and invaluable appeal made by Sonia to the PM. The Modi government shall consider this issue and pursue immediate action without allowing any grass to grow under its feet. Further, GST at 18% each is being charged on medicines in the name of CGST and SGST. Totally 36% GST is collected on medicines for the Centre and the other for the State as shown in the bill itself. It is justifiable to scrap GST on all life-saving medicines.

Manoharan Muthuswamy,  
Chennai

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.



## 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.

Printed & Published by K Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed & Published at Deccan Chronicle Presses situated at SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai. Editor: T Venkatram Reddy, RNI Reg. No. TNENG/2008/25473 Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

## 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 Ayog 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.

## 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 slow-downs 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, eastern region, 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

#### Quartararo wins, Marquez seventh

**Portimao, Portugal:** Fabio Quartararo won his second consecutive race when he took the Portuguese MotoGP at Portimao on Sunday, with six-time champion Marc Marquez seventh in his first race back after nine months out.

Repsol Honda Team rider Marquez's seventh-placed finish came on his return after three bouts of surgery on the right arm he broke in the 2020 opener at Jerez. He qualified in the second row and admitted on Saturday that he was "going to suffer" after such long time away from racing. — 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. — AFP

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

## 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 credit, 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.

## Messi wins Copa crown for Barca

● 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.

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

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



