

U-TURN CORNER

STATUS QUO ON SMALL SAVINGS INTEREST RATE

FC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

Old small savings deposit rates for fixed income investors will stay as the Centre on Thursday withdrew its decision to cut interest rates saying that the “orders were issued by oversight and shall be withdrawn”.

The decision to roll-back was taken hours after the government announced the steepest cut in the rate on small savings schemes on Wednesday. The government, however, said the rate cuts are in line with overall interest rate movement in the financial system.

Sources said that the government’s surprise rollback decision on small savings schemes is an attempt by the BJP to contain the fallout of the decision hitting the common man in the ongoing elections in West Bengal, Assam and other states.

PAKISTAN GETS COLD FEET ON INDIA TRADE

Islamabad, April 1: In a volte-face, Pakistan’s Cabinet on Thursday rejected a proposal of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) to import cotton and sugar from India, according to a media report.

The decision comes a day after Pakistan’s new finance minister Hamad Azhar on Wednesday announced to lift a nearly-two year old ban on the import of cotton and sugar from India after a meeting of the ECC chaired by him.

However, a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday rejected the ECC proposal to import cotton yarn and sugar from India, Geo TV reported, citing sources. There was no official word on the decision of the Cabinet.

Ahead of the Cabinet meeting, Khan’s close aide and minister for human rights Shireen Mazari said that all ECC decisions have to be approved by Cabinet and only then they can be seen as “approved” by the government. “All ECC decisions have to be approved by Cabinet & only then they can be seen as “approved by govt”! So today in Cabinet there will be discussion on ECC decisions & then govt decision will be taken!” Mazari tweeted. — PTI

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC  
KOLKATA, APRIL 1

Even as polling was underway in Nandigram on Thursday, the BJP’s star campaigner, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Thursday said at a poll rally in West Bengal that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had made a “big mistake” by contesting from Nandigram and asked whether she is contemplating fighting from another constituency.

“Didi, is there any truth in the rumour that you are going to file nomination from another constituency? First, you went there (Nandigram), and the people gave you an answer. If you go somewhere else, the people of Bengal are ready,” PM Modi said while addressing a rally in Uluberia, which will vote in the third phase on April 6.

Reacting to his potshots, the TMC tweeted, “Didi is winning Nandigram. The question of her fighting from another seat doesn’t arise. @narendramodiji, retract from your efforts to mislead people before they see your lies with the end of nomination in WB. Look for a safer seat in 2024, as you will be challenged in Varanasi.”

Referring to the ongoing polls in the state, Mr Modi claimed the huge turnout of voters would help the BJP surpass its target of 200 seats out of 294 to come to power for the first time in the state.

Addressing a BJP rally at Joynagar in South 24 Parganas, Mr Modi attacked Ms Banerjee’s latest Bengali poll slogan: “Thanda thanda, Cool cool, Ebar Trinamul”.

Calling the ruling Trinamul Congress a “shool” (thorn) and causing pain to the people of West Bengal, Mr Modi said, “I now find Didi, who often threatens and abuses, saying ‘Cool, Cool’ even after TMC unleashed atrocities on women,” and added, “Trinamul cool nahi, Bangal ke logon ke liye shool hai, shool. Bangal ko asahaniya pira denevala shool hai Trinamul. Bangal ko rak-taranjit karnevala shool hai Trinamul. Bangal ke saath anyay karnevala shool hai Trinamul (Trinamul is not cool. It is nothing but a thorn for the people of Bengal. It is a thorn which inflicts unbearable pain to Bengal, leaves Bengal bleeding and metes out injustice to Bengal). You have to give accounts of killings of brothers and sisters of Bengal. Bloodbath will not happen further.”

BJP will win 200+ in WB: Modi

Calls TMC shool (thorn) for West Bengal, asks if Mamata will contest from another seat

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at a polling station during the second phase of West Bengal Assembly Polls, at Boyal in Nandigram on Thursday.

80% VOTING IN W. BENGAL, 77% IN ASSAM IN PHASE 2

Kolkata/Guwahati, April 1: Sporadic violence took place in West Bengal while Assam witnessed peaceful polling, barring a firing incident, as people in large numbers exercised their franchise in both states in the second phase of the assembly elections on Thursday.

Officials said that over 80.43 per cent voter turnout was reported from 30 constituencies in West Bengal up to 5 pm, while Assam registered 77.21 per cent voting in 39 seats till 6 pm. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee accused central forces deployed in Nandigram constituency, where she is locked in a fight with her former aide Suwendu Adhikari, of helping the saffron party under instructions from Union home minister Amit Shah.

Allegations of booth capturing and partisan behaviour prompted the EC to seek a report on an incident in Boyal village where the TMC boss was seized by BJP supporters.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at a polling station during the second phase of West Bengal Assembly Polls, at Boyal in Nandigram on Thursday.

Nandigram turns violent

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC  
with agency inputs  
KOLKATA, APRIL 1

Despite prohibitory orders issued under Section 144 of the CrPC, massive presence of Centre-ordered paramilitary forces and aerial surveillance by the Election Commission, Nandigram — the hot seat in West Bengal Assembly elections where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is taking on her protégé-turned-adversary Suwendu Adhikari — reeled under violence on Thursday, leaving Ms Banerjee stranded at a polling booth for over two hours.

Ms Banerjee had to be rescued by Central paramilitary forces stationed in the state after she was confined at a polling booth in Nandigram amid an extremely tense face-off between the BJP and Trinamool Congress supporters.

Page 2: Mamata dials Governor for rescue

More reports on Page 5

GST collections cross ₹1.23 L cr

New Delhi: GST collections in March touched a record high of over ₹1.23 lakh crore, a 27 per cent growth over the year-ago period, the finance ministry said. “GST revenues crossed above ₹1 lakh crore mark at a stretch for the last six months and a steep increasing trend over this period are clear indicators of rapid economic recovery post pandemic,” the ministry said.

Report on Page 7

Prez recovers after surgery

New Delhi: President Ram Nath Kovind on Thursday said he is recovering well after his bypass surgery and thanked doctors and caregivers. The president said he was touched by messages from citizens and leaders from across the country and abroad wishing him speedy recovery. “It’s difficult to express in words my gratitude to you all,” Kovind said. Kovind, 75, had on Tuesday underwent a cardiac bypass surgery at the AIIMS here.

THURSDAY | SENTIMENT

Award for superstar on his favourite day

Rajini wins Dadasaheb Phalke

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN | DC  
with agency inputs  
CHENNAI, APRIL 1

It looks like the Dadasaheb Phalke jury had done their homework on Rajinikanth’s “Thursday” sentiments and timed its award accordingly. Superstar Rajinikanth was conferred with the 51st Dadasaheb Phalke award on a Thursday, a day he considers special and when he schedules important events.

Prakash Javadekar, Union minister of information and broadcasting, took to social media to share the news. He wrote, “Happy to announce #Dadasaheb Phalke award for 2020 to one of the greatest actors in history of Indian cinema Rajinikanthji. His contribution as actor, producer and

Rajinikanth

screenwriter has been iconic.”

The jury for this year for the prestigious award included ace playback singer Asha Bhosle, director-producer Subhash Ghai, Malayalam superstar Mohanlal, music composer and singer Shankar Mahadevan and actor-politician Biswajeet Chatterjee.

Presented annually at the National Film Award ceremony, the Dadasaheb Phalke Award recognises ‘outstanding contribution to the growth and development of Indian cinema.’ Instituted in 1969, Amitabh Bachchan was awarded with the honor in 2019.

Rajinikanth is the 12th south Indian to be conferred with this award. Legends like Dr Rajkumar, Sivaji Ganesan, Akkineni Nageshwar Rao, K. Balachander and K. Vishwanath have been awarded before.

The legendary actor has been honoured with the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan in the past.

Rajinikanth dedicated the award to those who made him what he is now: “I dedicate this award to my friend and bus driver Raj Bahadur, who discovered my acting talent and encouraged me, my elder

brother Sathyanarayana Rao Gaekwad, who sacrificed a lot to make me an actor while struggling with poverty, my guru K. Balachander, who created this Rajinikanth,” he said.

In a statement he also dedicated the award to producers, directors, technicians, distributors, theatre owners, media, the Tamil people, “who have given me my life, and my fans across the world.”

Rajinikanth said he thanked the government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for conferring him the “Indian cinema’s highest honour.”

His long-time co-actor and friend Kamal Haasan said on Twitter: “...The award is 100 per cent appropriate for Rajini, who has proven that he can win over fans by appearing on screen.”

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## SHORT TAKES

## ARMY GIVES AI SYSTEM TO STOP ACCIDENTS TO TS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

Telangana on Thursday received an artificial intelligence (AI)-based accident prevention system which the Road Transport Authority will put to test on heavy vehicles.

The system, developed by the Military College of Electronics and Mechanical Engineering (MCEME), was handed over to the state government by Lieutenant General T.S.A. Narayanan, Commandant, MCEME and Colonel Commandant Corps of EME, to Jayesh Ranjan, principal secretary, information technology.

The MCEME had in the recent past carried out AI-based projects, which are being further developed as deployable systems.

## HC REJECTS CASH-FOR-VOTE SCAM APPEAL

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

The Telangana High Court on Thursday rejected the appeal of R. Uday Sinha, one of the accused, seeking discharge in the cash-for-vote scam of May 2015. Justice Shamim Akthar rejected the appeal, stating that when the case was in the trial stage, it would not be proper to discharge the accused. Uday Sinha was arrested along with A. Revanth Reddy, then a Telugu Desam leader and now with the Congress, while giving ₹50 lakh to Elvis Stephenson, a nominated MLA, to vote in favour of a Telugu Desam Candidate in the Legislative Council elections.

Earlier, the ACB court had also rejected the discharge petition of Uday Sinha following which he moved the High Court with an appeal petition.

In another development on Thursday regarding the cash-for-vote scam case, the ACB court recorded the statements of Stephenson.

## MGM HOSPITAL STAFF, DEMANDS SALARY, PF

DC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, APRIL 1

Tension prevailed in Warangal MGM Hospital on Thursday after police removed the protest camp of the employees who were protesting since a week in the hospital campus.

Over 600 outsourcing staff have boycotted their duties demanding regularisation of their jobs and receive pay on par with their work.

Following an altercation with the police, several workers were arrested and shifted to various police stations in the city. As a result, some workers climbed the hospital building and threatened to commit suicide.

“The Agile Security Force Pvt Ltd agency through whom we were hired has not paid salary, bonus, or Provident Fund (PF) on time. Despite making several pleas to the concerned authorities, our lives continue to be miserable,” said a worker Y. Srinivas.

Another outsourced hospital worker R. Rajesh, alleged that the contract period of the Agile Security Force agency is completed, but the MGM Hospital authorities extended it for two more months.

“Our issues were taken to the notice of health minister Etela Rajender and concerned officials, but there is no response. The state government promised to pay extra to those workers who render services in the covid-19 ward, but till date, we did not receive it,” he said.

As a result of the strike, the emergency and inpatient wards are overflowing with medical waste. The health department has sought help from the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) for disposal of the medical waste. In retaliation, the contract staff of the hospital raised slogans against GWMC sanitation staff.

● **OVER 600 outsourcing staff have boycotted their duties demanding regularisation of their jobs and receive pay on par with their work. Following an altercation with the police, several workers were arrested and shifted to various police stations in the city. As a result, some workers climbed the hospital building and threatened to commit suicide.**

## Tweak vaccine drive: Expert

Wants India to remove age barriers, capitalise on its Pulse Polio programme experience

BALU PULIPAKA | DC  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

India could have done better with its Covid-19 vaccination strategy and relying on the possibility of developing herd immunity may not serve the purpose of containing a resurgent Coronavirus, according to an infectious diseases specialist.

According to Dr Ranga Reddy Burri, president of the Infection Control Academy and honorary professor at University of Hyderabad, India could have designed a vaccination strategy appropriate to its needs and population instead of following the Western model of starting the vaccination drive for senior citizens.

Instead, India, should, at least now, remove all age limits for vaccination and accelerate the drive to enable the young and economically active population to come out and be part of the economic activities that need to pick up further, he said. Incidentally, this is also the strategy the Telangana state government has been urging the Centre to follow. Considering that a large percentage of senior citizens are not active and surplus availability of vaccine unlike in other countries is just not available in India, certainly not on an equitable basis, the Centre may tweak its vaccination strategy to avoid further deterioration of situation and to safely restart all engines of economy, Dr Ranga Reddy told *Deccan Chronicle*.

India, he said, should capitalise its experience from the Pulse Polio programme, and redesign the Covid-19 vaccination system to provide the vaccines at home to people, and that the authorities should increase the number of vaccination centres from the current 10,000 government and 20,000 private centres.

These measures will help India gain some much-needed traction against Covid-19 which is witnessing a resurgence in the disease. Several states are already ringing alarm bells, fast-filling ICUs and increasing pressure on their healthcare systems. With the situation going from bad to worse, a new lockdown, though currently being talked about as a remote possibility for now, could be an option to stop the further escalation of the spread of Covid-19.

Getting the vaccination strategy right with the right kind of tweaks, will help stop the many mistakes in virus control that India is still allowing to happen, he said.

“Everyone knows by now vaccination is the best possible way to get out of this mess.



People wait for Covid-19 vaccine at a government hospital in Hyderabad on Thursday. It was open for those belonging to 45 years and above. — DEEPAK DESHPANDE

## Mask must in GHMC limits, ₹1,000 penalty for spitting

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

Offices, malls, commercial complexes and transport systems here have been ordered to strictly follow the ‘No Masks, No Entry’ rule in view of the rising Covid-19 cases in the GHMC limits.

“It is important that mask is worn properly and it covers the nose and mouth. This must be compulsorily done in public places, offices and while travelling,” stated the GHMC in a note to all departments. Common areas, door knobs, handles and staircase rods must be sanitized regularly.

Crowding is banned outside offices and shops and strict physical distancing of six feet must be maintained by all in public places. “Do not spit in

public places. Those who do so will be fined ₹1,000. In offices and commercial complexes, escalators must be avoided and staircase used.”

It is also advised that offices opt for fans and avoid using the central air-conditioning systems and air coolers. Proper ventilation by keeping windows open is advised.

In government and private offices, people must opt for e-system for files except for emergency use. Offices have been asked to call their staff on alternate days and ensure not more than a 50 per cent attendance.

Metro Rail has also issued an advisory to passengers, saying there will be no entry for the maskless. Thermal screening

has been arranged and this is mandatory for all passengers. Hand sanitizers are available at entry points of metro stations.

Inside the trains, there are markers for maintaining social distance and this regulation must be followed. Metro Rail has deployed extra security personnel to oversee the procedure. Awareness on safety and Covid-19 protocols are being announced at all stations in three languages — Metro Rail said all its 55 trains are sanitized after every ride. Travel without physical contact is being encouraged wherein passengers can buy Mobile QR tickets prior to their journey using apps like Phone Pe, MakeMy trip, Paytm and T-Savaari. This is to avoid queues at ticket counters.

## Etala: Ensure death rate comes down

KANIZA GARARI | DC  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

Health minister Etala Rajendar urged hospital superintendents and health officials to take steps to ensure that the Covid-19 death rate comes down.

Participating in an emergency teleconference meeting on Thursday, Rajender asked doctors to provide quality services and ensure that people do not succumb to the disease.

According to government doctors, who briefed the minister, it was noted that people were coming late to hospital and the crucial ‘incubation time’ was lost in serious cases.

A senior government

● **ETALA RAJENDAR stressed that those above 45 years of age must take the free vaccine from govt hospitals.**

doctor on condition of anonymity said, “The serious cases are coming to government hospitals after the patients have visited private hospitals. Earlier, they all used to come to the government hospitals, which saved precious time. Only serious cases are being admitted in government hospitals. For mild cases kits are being provided for home treatment.”

Another government doctor explained, “We are admitting more people in

serious condition from the 30-45 years age-group. This vulnerable population is coming with high viral load. Most of them are asymptomatic and it is only CT scans that provide a clear picture.”

Rajendar took stock of the medical equipment like personal protection kits, remdesivir injections, N 95 masks, liquid oxygen tanks, bulk cylinders and tablets in different hospitals.

He also asked doctors to instill confidence among the people about the availability of medicines. Remdesivir must not be procured in black as it is abundantly available with the government, he urged.

All healthcare workers have been asked to work

## TS RECORDS 887 FRESH COVID-19 CASES, 4 DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

The number of Covid cases in the state surged to 887 on Wednesday, a rise of over 200 cases in a day and an increase of more than 400 cases in two days. On Monday, the state had recorded 483 cases and on Tuesday, 684. The caseload stood at 3,08,776 on Wednesday, the state health department bulletin said.

There were four more deaths due to the disease on Wednesday, taking the toll to 1,701.

The number of cases in the GHMC area crossed the 200-mark and stood at 201, against 184 on Tuesday and 145 on Monday. The number of active cases has increased to 5,511 with 2,166 persons in home and institutional isolation.

The districts on the city outskirts also witnessed a huge rise in numbers, with Medchal Malkajgiri reporting 79 cases and Ranga Reddy 76. Medchal Malkajgiri has recorded 364 cases from March 25 to March 31.

Nirmal district saw 78 registered on Wednesday — March 25, there were only eight cases there. On March 30 the district saw 30 cases and on March 31, 78. Jagtial district recorded 56 cases, taking the caseload since March 25 to 147. Other districts which are seeing a surge in cases are Nizamabad 45, Sangareddy 36, Mahbubnagar 22, Kamareddy 27 and Karimnagar 23 cases.

The government tested 59,297 samples, 46.8 per cent of them primary contacts and 12.1 per cent secondary contacts.

round-the-clock and additional staff would be hired on a temporary basis. In the villages, ground-level medical staff plays a major role in preventing spread of the virus. People must be counselled about staying within their zone and avoiding unnecessary travel.

Travel to different states must be avoided as the situation in all states is getting grim. Medical and health officials from districts neighbouring Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh must be on high alert, he said.

They have been asked to carry out robust surveillance by testing, tracking and treating cases.

## Mamata dials Gov. for rescue

From Page 1

From the spot, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee dialled Governor Jagdeep Dhankar, telling him the situation was a failure of the Election Commission.

“Anything might happen at any moment... There is total breakdown of law and order,” wheelchair-bound Ms Banerjee said, adding that she feared for her life. She was escorted out by the security forces, who managed to bring the situation under control after long-drawn negotiations with the villagers.

Soon after, the Governor tweeted, “Issues flagged @MamataOfficial a while ago on phone have been imparted (sic) to the concerned”.

Despite this Nandigram recorded voter turnout of over 81 per cent till 5 pm. Though sporadic incidents of violence and allegations of vote fraud marked the second phase of West Bengal Assembly polls, a large voter turnout of more than 80 per cent was recorded. Bankura recorded the highest turnout at 82.92 per cent, followed by Purba Medinipur at 81.23, South 24 Parganas at 79.65 per cent, Paschim Medinipur at 78 per cent.

The Election Commission has sought a report from the East Midnapore district administration on Ms Banerjee’s presence at the booth for a long time and her allegations of electoral malpractices.

Violence erupted across the high-profile constituency as the polling

got underway in the morning. At Satengabari, TMC activists pelted stones on the convoy of Ms Banerjee’s nemesis, Suwendu Adhikari of the BJP, and shouted “Go Back”. Bombs were hurled at Sonachura and Kalicharanpur.

In Bhetukiya a BJP worker, Uday Dube (48), was found hanging in his residence. His party accused the TMC of driving him to commit suicide.

Allegations also surfaced against the BJP of not allowing TMC agents at voting booths, rigging and booth capturing at many polling centres. Ms Banerjee, who was keeping a tab on the polling from her temporary address at Reyapara in Nandigram, came out in the afternoon. She visited booth (No. 7) at Boyal Moktab Primary School at around 1.15 pm after getting complaints from her party of booth capturing and rampant rigging by the BJP in the absence of Central paramilitary forces.

The TMC chief was taunted by BJP workers with “Jai Shree Ram” slogan and her party workers, shouting “Khela Hobe”, clashed with them. Sitting in her wheelchair inside the booth, a helpless CM was seen calling up Governor Jagdeep Dhankar to complain as the fight between BJP and TMC workers escalated despite prohibitory orders. Stones were hurled and abuses traded, prompting the administration to rush a police contingent to the spot.

## TRS’ annual plenary likely to be delayed

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

The annual plenary of the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS), its 20th this year, is most likely to be postponed yet again due to the increasing number of Coronavirus cases and the government’s restrictions on public gatherings and rallies until April 30.

The TRS conducts the plenary every year on April 27 to mark the formation of the party on that day in 2001, followed by a huge public meeting. This year’s plenary assumed significance as it marked two decades of the party’s founding.

Last year, the event was cancelled in view of the Coronavirus-related lockdown. In April 2019, the party did not hold the plenary due to the Lok Sabha elections in April-May.

As per the party constitution, organisational elections should be held every two years to elect the party president.

The last organisational

elections were held during the 2018 plenary in which TRS president K. Chandrashekar Rao was re-elected.

On February 7 this year, addressing the TRS state executive committee meeting at Telangana Bhavan, Chandrashekar Rao had said that the party will hold the plenary in a grand manner on April 27 to mark the 20th anniversary of the party’s formation, followed by a public meeting with one lakh people.

He launched the party membership drive on February 12 and set a target of enrolling not less than 50,000 members in each of the 119 Assembly segments. He said that the election of new committees from the ward to the state level would commence on March 1.

All these dates were missed as the Legislative Council elections in March and the upcoming Nagara juna sagar Assembly bypoll on April 17 kept the party leadership engaged.

## Don’t need cadre who fear police cases: Bandi

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar stated that the party was able to rise to high levels because many activists had sacrificed their lives for it.

He urged the cadre to work hard to achieve their goals in Telangana state and reiterated that BJP would not have any electoral alliance.

Addressing a Yuva Morcha executive meeting here on Thursday, Sanjay Kumar asked the cadre to continue the hard work and ensure that the party comes to power in the state in 2023. He cautioned that the party will have no need of activists who fear police cases and arrests.

Sanjay said that they would hoist the party flag at Golconda Fort and alleged that Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao was enjoying power that came to him following sacrifices of countless martyrs during the statehood struggle. Rao was running a corrupt administration like the Razakars,

● **SANJAY SAID that they would hoist the party flag at Golconda Fort and alleged that CM was enjoying power that came to him following sacrifices of countless martyrs during the statehood struggle.**

he alleged. Sanjay, the Karimnagar MP, condemned TRS leaders for spreading false news that they will an alliance in the next election. He said the job notification before the Nagarajunasagar byelection was aimed at influencing the voters.

The government was encouraging corporate education institutions to loot people. Sanjay expressed unhappiness at the decision of the intellectuals in the MLC graduates elections.

He slammed the IPS officer, who claimed that during Bhainsa incident, Hindu Vahini activists had attacked journalists. Yuva Morcha president Bhanu Prakash presided over the meeting.

## NO HIDING

Officials warn of increased likelihood of illness among people

## Mercury inches past 44°C in TS

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

In a warning issued for the next 24 hours, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has warned of high temperatures in a few districts, even as the mercury inched past the 44°C mark. On Thursday the hottest place in the state was Garimellapadu which recorded 44.1°C, followed by Mulakalapally and Burgampahad (44°C), and Julurpad (43.8°C).

In the city, the warmest place was Viratnagar DMRL at 39.9°C, which was followed by Macha-



People cover their heads with cloth to save themselves from scorching heat. The traffic during noon has dropped drastically due to heat. — P. SURENDRA

bolaram (39.7°C), Patigad-da and Narayanguda (35.5°C).

The IMD in its warning said: “Heat wave condi-

tions very likely to occur at isolated pockets in the districts of Bhadradi Kothagudem, Khammam, Suryapet, Nalgonda,

Mahbubnagar and Nagarkurnool.”

Officials said there is increased likelihood of heat illness symptoms in people who are either exposed to sun for a prolonged period or are doing heavy work. There will be high health concern for vulnerable people — infants, elderly, people with chronic diseases.

“Due to Increase of heat conditions and maximum temperatures rise during 12 noon to 3 pm, the public is advised not to go outside during the period,” it said and recommended intake of liquids like oral rehydration salts

(ORS) and water. It advised people to stay in cool and shaded areas, avoid heat exposure and dehydration.

However, there could be good news ahead. According to a seasonal outlook released by the IMD for April, May and June, the maximum temperature in the state would be slightly less than the normal values.

“Over Telangana maximum temperatures are likely to be slightly less to the normal value (-0.17) during April to June with a probability of 40 to 50 per cent,” said IMD director Dr K. Nagaratna.



OTHER STORIES

MISCREANTS TRY TO LOOT ATM, FAIL TO OPEN IT

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

Unidentified thieves failed to break open an ATM of a private bank at Kattedan in Mailardevpally early on Thursday. The security guard had left the kiosk, which is on the main road, after midnight. "They tried to damage the machine and steal the cash. But repeated attempts failed and they left empty-handed," a police release said. Customers who came to the ATM in the morning found the machine damaged and informed the Mailardevpally police. The police are examining footage from surveillance cameras to identify the miscreants.

KTR, VEMULA, AJAY TO VISIT KHAMMAM TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT KHAMMAM, APRIL 1

Khammam and Sattupalli to witness different programmes led by ministers on April 2. Minister for Municipal Administration and Information Technology K.T. Rama Rao, minister for roads and buildings Vemula Prasanth Reddy and minister for transport Puvvada Ajay Kumar will inaugurate and laying foundation stones to different projects. In Khammam, RTC new bus station and Vaikuntadhamam will be inaugurated by KTR and lay foundation stone to the IT-Hub second phase building. Later, the road and building minister will lay foundation stone to the road expansion project at Sri Sri Circle. The 4.4 kilometer road will be expanded as four lanes with the cost of ₹35 crore. Ministers will inaugurate 1000 DBR complex at Tekulapalli and drinking water scheme to supply water every day to the 1.30 lakh households. Later, a new building for Sattupalli Nagar Panchayat will be inaugurated.



Stolen Idols seized by police

POLICE ARRESTS HANUMAN TEMPLE BURGLAR

DC CORRESPONDENT KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 1

The Sircilla police officials on Thursday nabbed a temple burglar who broke into the Hanuman temple situated at Gandhinagar in Sircilla town and seized six idols from the accused possession. Disclosing the facts to the media, the police inspector, V. Anil Kumar said that the accused was identified as a Shakeel Singh alias Haribhajan Singh, resident of Gajwel district broke into the Hanuman temple at Gandhinagar in midnight on March 29 and rob the idols present in the temple. Based on a complaint lodged by the temple priest Venkatesham, the police registered a case under Crime number 137/2021 under sections IPC 457 and 380 and started investigation. Using modern technology along with observing the footage recorded in the CCTV cameras which were installed at various locations, police apprehended Shakeel Singh along with the buyer Sarroju Balaiah of Gandhinagar who purchased the stolen idols from him. Police seized six idols of Lord Sri Rama, Sita Devi, Lakshmana, Anjaneya Swamy, Panduranga Swamy and Rukmini Devi from his possession. The District police officials appreciated inspector Anil Kumar and his team, Sub-inspector Sudhakar, crime party team Pulkam Srinivas and Neelam Jagadishwar for nabbing the temple thief. ● POLICE APPREHENDED Shakeel Singh along with the buyer Sarroju Balaiah of Gandhinagar who purchased the stolen idols from him.

Errabelli criticises Centre for cut in fund allocation

CM is borrowing ₹20,000 cr to buy paddy from farmers

DC CORRESPONDENT WARANGAL, APRIL 1

The minister for Panchayat Raj and Rural Development, Errabelli Dayakar Rao, criticised the Centre for giving awards but not funds for the development of the state. Speaking at a review meeting on paddy procurement at Jangaon on Thursday, he said the Central government did not set the minimum support price (MSP) for paddy but the Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao is borrowing ₹20,000 crore and buying paddy from farmers. It may be noted that Telangana received 12 awards as part of the Deendayal Upadhyay



Errabelli Dayakar Rao

Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar 2021 awards. "The state's annual funding of ₹1800 crore has been slashed to ₹1300 crore this time. The Centre, which has reduced ₹500 crore of funding, is giving awards, but how can we take up development activities without sufficient funds?" he asked. "Despite fund cuts and

central discrimination against the state on other hand, KCR is allocating ₹308 crore to gram Panchayats every month. Today the villages are thriving due to the rural development programmes and continuous sanitation," he said. Urging the police and other officials to work in tandem as part of the

paddy procurement drive, he said an estimated yield of 3 lakh 67 thousand metric tonnes is expected in the Jangaon district. "We have made 191 purchasing centres available, 28 lakh gunny bags, 4592 tarpaulins, 203 weighing machines, five warehouses and 35 rice mills this season. Appoint an officer in charge of each village. Make sure that farmers do not face any problems in purchasing grain. Educate people, especially farmers, on social and physical distance and the use of masks in the wake of Coronavirus outbreak," he told officials asking the district collector to oversee all these arrangements.

CPI-ML CONDEMNS RAIDS ON ACTIVISTS HOUSES

DC CORRESPONDENT KHAMMAM, APRIL 1

CPI (ML) New Democracy Potu Ranga Rao said that the BJP government showed its fascist ideology by ordering NIA to search the houses of 21 intellectuals in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh that were voicing for the rights of the people. He said that the BJP government is using the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to suppress the intellectuals and right activists. "The NDA government jailed famous intellectuals in the name of Bhima-Coregaon case. They are being denied bail and harassed in the jails. The intellectuals like Stanley Stone (90) years and Varavara Rao (80), are being tortured for the last two years", he said. Ranga Rao said that all the raids are being done as part of implementing the agenda of RSS against intellectuals and minorities. The government wants to suppress every voice that questioned them. Each citizen of India should condemn the raids to check the RSS plans to implement its agenda, he said. The silence of people is a loss to the stirs of farmers, workers and women in India he added.

Devotional spirit



Jangam family member offer prayers at Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy Devasthanam on the eve of Shivakalyanam in Vemulawada, Rajanna Siricilla district on Thursday.

—DC

No promises made to set up Rly coach factory in TS: BJP

DC CORRESPONDENT WARANGAL, APRIL 1

The AP Reorganisation act - 2014 had only asked the railways for a report on whether there was feasibility for establishing a coach factory in Telangana, but made no promise of setting up the factory at Kazipet, BJP Warangal Urban District president Rao Padma said. Addressing a press conference on Thursday she criticised the TRS and Congress for misrepresenting the facts for their political gains. "Just because the

Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) elections were round the corner, and unable to fight the BJP, this is a stunt adopted by the TRS," she said. Padma noted that Boinapally Vinod Kumar and Pasunoori Dayakar from TRS and Siricilla Rajaiah from Congress have represented Warangal in the parliament but none has fought for the coach factory. She alleged that both the Congress and TRS are running fake agitations, demanding the coach factory. "The Congress which denied

coach factory for Kazipet to establish it in Punjab in 1985 has no right to question BJP," she added. It is now clear that the TRS and Congress are scared of BJP's recent electoral success and resorting to such acts, Padma said. She reminded that the BJP government at the Centre has been developing roadways in Telangana besides laying a third railway line between Kazipet and Balharsha, KZP and Vijayawada. The Warangal and Kazipet railway stations have been modernised.

DCCB ex-chief slams allegations, says it was for political benefit

DC CORRESPONDENT KHAMMAM, APRIL 1

DCCB former chairman Muvva Vijay Babu challenged the bank officials to hang him in Mayuri Centre in Khammam if the allegations on him of swindling bank funds made are proved. He said that the case filed by the officials is prompted to get political benefits and not a single rupee of bank and the farmers is misused. He

● THE DCCB turnover was ₹800 crore in 2013 and it went up to ₹2300 crore, during my tenure.

said that he is ready to face any investigation or enquiry and informed that the officials had all the balance sheets in with them. The Rythu Samkhema Nidhi was constituted with the donation given by the farmers. A hospital was built with the funds

under a trust and there is no link to the trust and the DCCB", he said. No notice was issued to him by the Sumitra Committee or the officials. "The Khammam DCCBs turnover was ₹800 crore in 2013 and it went up to ₹2300 crore, DCCB branches were opened even in remote villages during my tenure. Do not underestimate my silence and I will fight against the allegations in any forum", he

said. Pertaining to the cooperative act-1964, he said that some rules of the act became a barrier to give more loans to the farmers. He asked the government to change the rules for the sake of the farmers. He said that cooperative banks will not be sustained if the digitisation take place in cooperative banks. He said that the norms should be designed to give more loans to the farmers.

TRSMA urges govt to re-open schools, colleges, save pvt. teachers from crisis

DC CORRESPONDENT KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 1

Representatives from Telangana Residential Schools Management Association (TRSMA) on Thursday met district collector, K. Shashanka and submitted a memorandum asking him to petition the government for reopening all educational institutions immediately. Speaking on the occasion, state president of the association, Shekar Rao wanted to know how the government had taken the unilateral decision and had ignored TRSMA, which represents more than 10,000

● SHEKAR SOUGHT sanction of ₹7,000 per month for the lockdown period to private teachers, providing internet connection and distribution of tabs to students.

recognized private schools and is providing educational services to about 30 lakh students across the state. He condemned the decision of shutting down educational institutions citing the spread of Coronavirus in certain schools when the fact is that even Indian Medical Association (IMA) has made it clear that there was no life threat to chil-

dren. If any student is diagnosed with Covid-19 symptoms in any school, then by adopting the 'test, trace and treat' method, the government must take necessary steps to prevent the spread. Instead it closed all schools and is playing with the lives of thousands of private teachers, he said. Online classes started seven months back, but there are no proper guidelines about the calendar, assignment and examination schedules. This could prove to be a major blunder, he said. By understanding the problems of private insti-

tutions, teachers and in the interests of the future of students, the government must roll back its decision of open schools and colleges immediately. He also sought sanction of Rs.7,000 per month for the lockdown period to private teachers, providing internet connection and distribution of tabs to students from schools-budget. TRSMA members E. Prasad Rao, Lakshma Reddy, Srinu, K. Sanjeev Reddy, D. Sripral Reddy, G. Tirupati, Ch. Srinivas Rao, Naresh Kumar, Musthaq, Thirupathi Reddy and Sampath Rao were part of the delegation.

Finish Narayanapur canal works, demands Congress

DC CORRESPONDENT KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 1

The official spokesperson of Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) Medipally Satyam on Thursday demanded the government to complete the construction of right and left Narayanpur canal as they have been pending for the past seven years. After inspecting the dry fields in Madhura Nagar of Gandhar mandal and Narayanpur right canal, Satyam recalled that during the Rajiv palle bata programme, former chief minister, Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy, who visited Choppadandi constituency on a plea by farmers, launched the construction works of Narayanpur reservoir at Jalayagnam to make the lands fertile in the entire region and allocated funds in the 2008 budget. But, the TRS government has failed to make any headway. Former legislator Bodiga Shoba looted the constituency and the present M.L.A. Sunke Ravi Shankar is not interested in taking any steps though many fields in his own mandal are drying up, he said. Satyam alleged that the TRS leaders are boasting that they are supplying water to all regions through Lakshmiur Gayatri pump



Official spokesperson of TPCC and Choppadandi assembly segment incharge, Medipally Satyam, inspects pending works of Narayanpur canal works in Choppadandi Town of Karimnagar district on Thursday.

—BY ARRANGEMENT

● BY TAKING water from Choppadandi to Ranganyak Sagar, Mallanna Sagar and Kondapochamma reservoirs, the TRS government is doing injustice to the people of Choppadandi.

house present in Ramadagu mandal of Choppadandi constituency, then why single out Choppadandi, he wondered. By taking water from Choppadandi to Ranganyak Sagar, Mallanna Sagar and Kondapochamma reservoirs, the TRS government

is doing injustice to the people of Choppadandi constituency. If works are not taken up immediately, the Congress party along with farmers will launch a padayatra and 'chalo collectorate', he cautioned. Congress leaders P. Manohar, D. Buchhaiah, V. Ramana Reddy, B. Ganganna, K. Swamy, B. Maheshwar Reddy, Ch. Chakrapani, K. Prabhakar, B. Mahesh, Srinivas Goud, Lachalaiah, Yellash, Shekar, Rajesham, Karunakar, Shravan Rao, Ajay, Lingaiah and Sridhar were present along with others.

AAI SENDS TEAM TO EXAMINE LAND FOR AIRPORT IN KOTHAGUDEM

DC CORRESPONDENT KOTHAGUDEM, APRIL 1

Bhadradi-Kothagudem district collector M.V. Reddy said that the Airport Authority of India will be sending a three-member team to study the land to set up an airport in Kothagudem. The team will stay in the coal town for four days

MIM LEADER HACKED TO DEATH IN HYD

Hyderabad: An MIM leader from Hyderabad was hacked to death in broad daylight on the busy Mailardevpally road on Thursday afternoon. According to the police, the victim, Asad Khan, 40, was ambushed by a group of men near Indian Function Hall when he was heading towards Shastripuram on his bike. The Hyderabad police had invoked the Preventive Detention Act on Asad Khan in 2018. Police said, "The perpetrators, who are yet to be identified, fled the place in an autorickshaw after the murder. We suspect that previous enmity related to the Amjad Khan murder case is the reason behind the attack."

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## DECCAN Chronicle

2 APRIL 2021

### Small savings U-turn: Bad economics, bizarre optics

It is a bizarre moment for policy. Since Assembly elections are on in many states, evidently the fear of electoral backlash has forced an about turn by the Centre in something like 12 hours flat. On Wednesday night, the government announced substantial cuts in interest rates for small savings, meaning instruments such as PPF, post office savings, bank fixed deposits, Kisan Vikas Patras, and Senior Citizen Savings Scheme which ordinary people use to save their lifelong earnings. On Friday morning, the announcement was reversed in a tweet by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Small savings, or common people's savings, are critical. They constitute as much as 60 per cent of all savings in the economy. The savings rate in the country was already touching a 15-year low, with household savings (small savings) declining steadily on account of shrinking interest rates, especially since early 2020. If the savings rate is low, investments will be inadequate. As a result of low investment funds available within the country, India has had to take recourse to external borrowings. So, that's how important small savings are.

**The ordinary people, rather than the better off citizens, were being asked to shoulder the burden of government borrowings which for the financial year 2021-22 is slated to be ₹12.06 trillion**

The core inflation rate in India was six per cent in January. The proposed cuts in interest rate for small savings would have brought the real value of most of these savings into negative territory. So, why was the finance minister unmindful of the daily needs of ordinary Indians when it is well known that millions of people depend on the interest earnings from their savings to meet their everyday needs?

This is not just bad poll-time optics, hurting the lower end of society is deplorable political economy. During the year-long pandemic, and for three years before that (as a consequence of demonetisation), it is the poor, the middle classes, and small and medium businesses that really suffered in terms of job losses and output losses. They have struggled to survive. In contrast, the richest Indians — especially big industry — have made handsome gains. And yet, the government's policy on interest rates, which is done quarterly, singled out small savings for punishment.

A probable reason is that the government may have calculated that if the interest rates are pushed down, it can borrow on better terms to meet its needs. Which means the ordinary people, rather than the better off citizens, were being asked to shoulder the burden of government borrowings which for the financial year 2021-22 is slated to be 12.06 trillion rupees. In effect, the section of the population which is already teetering on the brink was expected to surrender more to finance the government's plans, as compared to the big boys.

The plan was jettisoned overnight, but even at the prevailing rates of interest for small savings, the ordinary householder is eking out a hard living. Is the present finance minister responsible for the poor woman's misery, or is it that the policy set responsible for accelerating poverty pre-dates her assuming charge of finance?

Policymaking is highly centralised in the present set-up. Whether it is finance or foreign affairs or defence, or matters concerning home, agriculture or industry, it is widely thought that decisions are made on high. That is where answers ought to be sought for the goof-up. On account of elections, the panic button was pressed at the last minute. But what happens in the next quarter will be keenly watched.

### K'taka: 'Lotus' probe welcome

The Karnataka high court has allowed an inquiry into the "Operation Lotus" controversy that surfaced before the Janata Dal-Congress government of H.D. Kumaraswamy was brought down in July 2019 through defections. This is a setback for the BJP as well as its Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa who was charged with engineering the collapse of the government through various inducements, including an offer of money reportedly made in a telephone call with the son of a JD(S) legislator.

The judge John Michael D'Cunha, known to take a tough stand on corruption in politics as evidenced in his sensational 2014 ruling to convict J. Jayalalithaa of graft and fine her ₹100 crore, has based his judgment on the allegations and the contents of the complaint being so serious as to not allow a court to empower itself to quash the complaint and FIR. It is a different matter that the agencies that will be tasked with running the probe would be controlled by the powers that be. The highest degree of morality would be sustained only if Mr Yediyurappa were to step down for the pendency of the probe but such ideals have been thrown by the way-side long ago in Indian politics.

In a sensational audio clip that became public at the time, a conversation between Mr Yediyurappa and Sharanagouda Patil, son of JD(S) MLA Naganagouda Patil, had revealed an offer of ₹10 crore as well as a ministerial berth if he could get his father to switch sides. Mr Yediyurappa had, of course, dismissed it as a conspiracy hatched by the then chief minister to entrap him.

Facile explanations should cut no ice with probe agencies provided they run a thorough investigation to get to the bottom of the affair and establish that compelling offers had indeed been made for legislators to switch loyalties. The fact that a probe has been ordered itself brings into focus the widely held view that the ruling party at the Centre had been playing toppling games through which non-BJP governments were targeted and brought down, as in Madhya Pradesh and Puducherry, but proved unsuccessful in Rajasthan.

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Subhani



## BJP has a different take... On history, science, cows!



Karan Thapar

As I See It

My office keeps a track of some of the outlandish things said by leaders of the BJP. I am not sure how it started, and I doubt if we follow other parties equally assiduously. But the BJP collection, if I can use that term, is quite a hoard. It includes the offensive and the ludicrous, it ranges from the Prime Minister to the least known MLA, and it covers subjects as varied as religion, mythology, history, couture, cuisine, practically everything to do with cows and, of course, sex. On a slow day it can be quite fun to browse.

Well, that's what I did over the recent holidays and I noticed a few intriguing patterns. Perhaps the most striking is that the BJP has a very poor grasp of history. For instance, Tirath Singh Rawat, the new chief minister of Uttarakhand, believes "America enslaved India for 200 years". His counterpart in Tripura, Biplab Kumar Deb, is convinced that Rabindranath Tagore returned his Nobel Prize to protest against the British. But what really surprised me is the number of times the Prime Minister is confused by the past.

Alexander's army, he once said, conquered the entire world but was defeated by the Biharis. On another occasion he relocated Taxila to somewhere not far from Patna. On a third, he said when he thinks of the Gupta dynasty, he remembers Chandragupta. Of course, at the time he was wooing the voters of Bihar so perhaps this was intended as flattery.

But what do you make of this? In 2018 he claimed Kabir, Guru Nanak and Baba Gorakhnath "sat

together and discussed spirituality". It's an interesting idea but as impossible as the claim Jesus and Muhammad had a fireside chat or as inaccurate as the belief Buddha and Zarathustra were buddies.

However, my favourite is a bloomer about the man many consider the Prime Minister's party's revered founder. This is what Mr Modi told a gathering in Gujarat in 2013: "Syama Prasad Mookerjee was a revolutionary. He died in 1930 in London." I would call that a three-in-one. Mookerjee was not a revolutionary. He was a member of Jawaharlal Nehru's first Cabinet. Before that he was president of the Hindu Mahasabha. Earlier, he was a lawyer and academic. He didn't die in 1930 but 1953. It wasn't in London but in a jail in Jammu and Kashmir. And, of course, he founded the Bharatiya Jan Sangh.

A second theme in the file is the BJP's questioning of science alongside its conviction that most modern achievements actually occurred centuries or even millennia earlier. When he was junior minister for human resources development — which, incidentally, includes education — Satyapal Singh said Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution was "scientifically wrong". Since no one had seen "an ape turning into a man", he said, that was proof dear Charles had got things mixed up. Our textbooks, he concluded, need to be changed.

And not surprisingly, long is the list of BJP leaders who believe some of the greatest modern achievements actually existed in the times of the Mahabharata. Tripura's Biplab Deb claims the Internet and satellite communications were known to the Kauravas

and Pandavas. Bengal's Jagdeep Dhankhar insists that Arjun's arrows had nuclear power. UP's Dinesh Sharma maintains journalism started to cover the battle at Kurukshetra. Not just that, there were live telecasts too. And he adds: "Your Google has started now but our Google started long time back".

Much the same sort of claim is made about genetic science, plastic surgery and test-tube babies. In 2014, in a speech at the inauguration of the Reliance Hospital in Mumbai, the Prime Minister said the fact Karan was born from Kunti's ear is proof that genetic science was known at the time. He added the fact Ganesh has an elephant head is proof there were plastic surgeons in those days. No doubt inspired by his leader, Dinesh Sharma has more recently proclaimed Sita was a test-tube baby!

Less surprising but also far more frequent is evidence of the BJP's incredible faith in the Indian cow and its many products. Suman Haripriya, a member of the Assam Assembly, believes "gaumutra" and "gobar" can cure Coronavirus. Sadhvi Pragma believes it's already cured her cancer. Meanwhile, for those who have blood pressure problems, she strongly recommends a good rub of a cow's back.

If, however, wealth rather than health is your concern Dilip Ghosh, the BJP's Bengal chief, insists that cow's milk contains gold. "There's a *nari* (blood vessel) that helps pro-

duce gold with the help of sunlight", he has declared. So rather than drink a glass of the stuff, you ought to sift it.

Michael Lobo, a BJP minister in Goa, says that cows in Calangute have recently changed their character and now "only eat non-vegetarian food". I wonder if earlier they were fond of beef? Uttarakhand's former chief minister Trivedi Singh Rawat had once proclaimed that cows exhale oxygen. So what do they breathe?

Our file reflects these days BJP leaders have become specialists in haute couture. They've taken to advising women what to wear. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat has firmly ruled out ripped jeans. He doesn't approve of bare knees. "If this kind of woman goes out in society to meet people and solve their problems, what kind of message are we giving to society and to our kids?", he asks. So clearly, he's not in favour of a plunging décolletage.

Dilip Ghosh, his colleague in Bengal, who perhaps hopes to replace Mamata Banerjee as chief minister, is more avant-garde. He's suggested Ms Banerjee should wear Bermudas. "If she has to keep her leg out then why wear a sari", he asks. "She could wear a pair of Bermudas instead. So that it can be seen clearly".

Of course, the thickest part of the file is what BJP leaders have to say about Muslims, their religion Islam and the fact that they would be better off in Pakistan. Termites feature in this part fairly substantially. So does the size of their families. But there's nothing imaginative or fanciful about this portion. Just offensive and horribly wrong.

Now I don't know how other parties compare with the BJP. My office hasn't kept a track of their statements. My producer, Arvind Kumar, tells me this is something he intends to do. But will it be as much fun? Or is this one respect in which the BJP is truly special?

*The writer is a television commentator*

#### LETTERS

##### FREE WATER PLAN

Registering for free water is a Herculean task. Once details of flatowners are uploaded, the website either shows a mismatch or invalid Aadhaar. Even after repeated attempts, only a few can register. Non-resident owners find it hard to get OTP. The procedure is impractical. Government should make it easy if they are sincere about giving free water.

Y.C. Reddy  
Hyderabad

##### CHURCHES CONFUSED

The TS government took a decision to close Good Friday and Easter Sunday services without a proper survey. After lockdown, all churches are strictly following Covid restrictions. There are various ways the virus is spreading. Labourers from other states are working with the GHMC and other government organisations. There is little control over beggars at signals without being vaccinated or using a mask.

K.P. Mohan Mathews  
Secunderabad

##### TD-BJP MERGER

Though the news of TD's merger with the BJP on April 1 maybe a prank, regional parties like the YSRC, TRS should be prepared. The BJP could make them fall in line (*TD merges with BJP, Naidu finalise deal, DC, April 1*).

N. Nagarajan  
Hyderabad

##### NIGHT CURFEW

Night curfew may not be the solution to control Covid. It is better to impose curfew for 24 hours and relax it for two hours in the morning and evening for one month.

P. Samuel Suresh  
Hyderabad

## 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

### E. Pak towns in flames: bitter fighting on

CALCUTTA, April. 1

Several East Pakistani towns were burning after heavy bombardment by Pakistani Air Forces planes as part of what appeared to be an all-out armed forces offensive against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's forces today. The Pakistani Army and Air Force launched a fresh offensive against Bangla Desh Liberation Forces over wide areas.



Vincenzo de Luca

## Linking Italian, Indian cultures, past & present, in Covid times

This year marks a very special one as we celebrate the Festival of Italian Culture in India which is held in parallel with the Indian Cultural Festival in Italy. The initiative was promoted at the last bilateral digital summit held on November 6, 2020 between the two Prime Ministers and it was also acknowledged by the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, as one of the pillars of the bilateral cooperation between Italy and India. In his message to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the occasion of Republic Day, Mr Mattarella said: "The Festival of Italian Culture in India and Indian Culture in Italy will take place in 2021. These events will facilitate the reciprocal comprehension and the closeness among our people."

We inaugurated the festival in January and had the honour to host the minister of external affairs, S. Jaishankar, for the first in-person event since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The festival is a unique opportunity to further strengthen the historical cultural relations between the two countries

and to share the new dynamics of exchanges between the protagonists of the Italian and Indian culture and creative industries.

The cultural exchanges between the two countries date back to ancient history. Not only can ties between European and Indian cultures be traced back to 700 BC, there are also testimonies of linguistic influences in the sixteenth century. In the last century, Giuseppe Tucci and Luigi Tassinari contributed to the knowledge of Indian culture and artistic tradition in Italy by collecting scientific studies and artistic testimonies still preserved in Italy. Thanks to these experiences, Italy boasts the most important tradition of Indology studies in the world outside India. In the last 50 years, exchanges in the cinematic field have flourished with the production of docu-films by Pierpaolo Pasolini and Roberto Rossellini and awards at the Venice Film Festival to Satyajit Ray and Mira Nair. We recently hosted the screening of Rossellini's and Pasolini's masterpieces during a three-night open-air "Notti Stellate, Italian Cinema under the Sky",

where unedited images from their travels throughout India in the late 1950s and 1960s are a testament of life in those days.

Cultural ties between Italy and India are not only rooted in the past, but they are very much driven by innovation, creativity and contemporary cultural contamination.

To celebrate the Festival of Italian Culture in India, together with the Embassy of India in Rome, we crafted a rich agenda of events in various fields — cinema, music, literature, visual arts, fashion and design. This year Italy celebrates the 700th anniversary of the death of the most important figure of the Italian culture — the father of Italian language and its most famous poet, Dante Alighieri. We are commemorating him in many of our cultural activities — from theatre to literature, exhibitions and musical performances. In February, I moderated a panel with two eminent professors from Rome and Trento University in which we analysed the figure of Dante Alighieri and how contemporary its masterpiece *The Divine Comedy* is today.

We are also working on a very special project on Italian Indology and Sanskrit studies. Together with the University of Rome La Sapienza, we are putting together a collection of publications by the most prominent Italian Indologists. The project is composed of four volumes — the first one will be a collection on Italian studies on Indian History, Economy, Society; the second volume focuses on culture and literature; the third is the English translation of the biography of Giuseppe Tucci; the fourth will be entirely dedicated to Indian contemporary art.

Our events are a constant dialogue between innovation and tradition. We are focusing on our traditions but also on our dynamic and contemporary cultural drive. We are also attaching great importance in forging partnerships with our Indian counterparts and are thus working on strengthening cooperation among museums, developing projects on the protection of our cultural heritage, enhancing collaboration among artists, musicians and our creative industries.

Promoting culture in the midst of a

pandemic is not easy. As with all the cultural institutions around the world, we also had to reinvent ourselves taking full advantage of the digital tools we familiarised with, without giving up on the possibility of nurturing our Indian friends with limited outdoor events carried out in full observation of health safety protocols. It is thanks to the digital tools that we have been able to connect Italy and India even more. The availability of digital performances through the channels of the Embassy of Italy in New Delhi, the consulates in Mumbai and Kolkata and the Italian Cultural Institutes of New Delhi and Mumbai, along with the innovative platforms launched by the Italian foreign ministry have been quite successful. The promotion of arts, music, culture knows no limits.

Numerous more events still lie ahead, and I am sure the "Festival of Italian Culture in India" will further consolidate the relations between Italy and India, two culture superpowers.

*The writer is the Italian ambassador to India*



SHORT TAKES

JAWAN BEGINS KASHMIR TO KANYAKUMARI RUN

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 1

An Army corporal on Thursday began a walk from Kashmir to Kanyakumari with a resolve to set a Guinness World Record.

Naik N.A. Velu P. of the Army's 60 Para Field Hospital who was sent off from the headquarters of the Chinार or 15 Corps headquarters here by his colleagues on the journey covering a distance of approximately 4,300 kilometres within 50 days is an "ultra-marathoner who is attempting a Guinness book of world record, defence spokesman Lt. Colonel Emron Musavi said.

He was flagged off from 92 Base Hospital at Srinagar with a heart-warming gathering of enthusiasts.

ODISHA SIZZLES UNDER SEVERE HEAT WAVE

DC CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 1

Bhubaneswar which on Wednesday recorded the country's maximum temperature of 44.2 degrees Celsius, continued to sizzle under intense heat wave on Thursday. The city, according to local meteorological office sources, recorded 39.8 degrees Celsius temperature.

While Angul and Talcher recorded the highest 42.7 degrees Celsius temperature, mercury hovered over 40 degrees Celsius in at least 13 other cities.

Stating that the heat wave conditions would continue till next 24 hours, the weather department cautioned people not to venture out under the scorching sun.

Like Wednesday, normal life was severely affected on Thursday after mercury began to shoot up after 8 am.

Soon after, the local Met office posted a tweet warning people to avoid direct heat exposure till 4 pm. The Regional Meteorological Centre forecasted that there would be a fall in temperature in the state from Friday.

TIGRESS FOUND DEAD IN MP RESERVE FOREST

DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, APRIL 1

A female tiger died in Bandhavgarh reserve forest core zone which was struck by a wildfire a couple of days ago, forest officers said on Thursday. Carcass of the 13-year-old tigress was found in Rahania forest beat area under Magadhi range in the reserve late on Tuesday night, field director of Bandhavgarh tiger reserve Wincent Rahim said.

Post-mortem of the body was done on Wednesday by the veterinary doctor of the range Nitin Gupta in the presence of representatives of National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and senior officers of the state forest department including Rahim.

The post-mortem report, made public late on Wednesday night, suggested that the big cat may have succumbed to injuries caused by a fierce fight with another tiger, a senior forest officer told this newspaper.

"Prima facie it appears the tigress had suffered grievous wounds due to a tussle with a male tiger during their mating. The big cat had injury marks on her shoulder and neck. She may have succumbed to her injuries", Rahim said.

Odisha infant dies as doc gives injection after 'Google search'

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 1

A couple hailing from Odisha's Nabarangpur on Thursday alleged that their six-month-old infant son suffering from pneumonia died after he was administered an injection which was prescribed by the doctor after a 'Google search' at Dabugam Health Centre.

The local medical officer, however, denied the allegation and said proper injection was given to the infant. According to the reports, Prasant Bisoyee of Badaolama village in Nabarangpur district on



People queue up to vote on Thursday during the second phase of Assembly elections in East Medinipur district of West Bengal. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Cong, AIUDF aim to make big gains in Assam 2nd phase

Assam records 73% polling in 39 Assembly constituencies in phase-II

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, APRIL 1

In the second phase of polling, Assam on Thursday recorded more than 73 per cent polling in 39 Assembly seats spread across six different regions of the state. The Nowgong seat recorded the highest turnout of 83.10 per cent.

The six regions which went to polls on Thursday included Southern Assam's Barak Valley with 15 seats, Central Assam's 12 seats, Hill districts' five seats, Bodoland Territorial Council's four seats, Kamrup rural's two seats and one seat of lower Assam.

The political battles are also different in each of these regions. The biggest chunk of seats in the second phase are in the Barak Valley in southern Assam. Bengali speaking voters are in a majority in this region, which has a sizable number of migrants, both — Hindus and Muslims. The BJP has traditionally been stronger among Bengali Hindus.

This region also has a sizable number of Muslim population — 60 per cent in Hailakandi district, 56 per cent in Karimganj district and 37 per cent in Cachar district. The Barak Valley Muslims are also Bengali speaking. In the 2016 Assembly polls, the BJP had won eight out of 15 seats, the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) four and the Congress three.

This time, however, the equations have changed with the Congress and AIUDF joining hands. In 2016, out of the eight seats BJP won, four were due to a vote split between the Congress and AIUDF. This time the two parties have come together therefore, the alliance is hoping its chances of inflicting heavy losses on the BJP in this region.

Three seats each in Darrang, Morigaon, Nagaon and Hojai districts also voted in the second phase of polling on Thursday. Five seats in Nagaon have already voted along with Upper Assam in the first phase of polling.

Thursday took his critically ill son to the Dabugam Health Centre after his condition deteriorated. The doctor who attended the infant wrote the prescription after searching the medicine on Google, he said.

"The doctor advised that my son needed a life-saving injection. He prescribed the injection not from his memory but after doing a Google search. Soon after the baby was administered the injection, he closed eyes and died," Bisoyee added.

"The doctor didn't bother to refer us to the Umerkote hospital in time where we could have availed better treatment," he alleged.

Assam polls battle between 'jhooth' & 'vikas', says Modi

DC CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI, APRIL 1

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday came down heavily on Opposition Congress and said that the ongoing Assam Assembly election has become a "battle" between the Congress-AIUDF grand alliance of "maha jhooth" (great lie) and National Democratic Alliance of "maha vikas" (great development).

Addressing a public rally in Kokrajhar which is scheduled to go for polling in the third and final phase of polling on April 6, Modi said, "Football is very popular among youth here. In terms of football

Like Barak Valley, Central Assam too has a sizable Muslim population, though it is a mix of Assamese and Bengali speakers.

Muslims account for 56 per cent of the population in central Assam's Nagaon district, 52 per cent in Morigaon, 53 per cent in Hojai and 64 per cent in Darrang. This region, too, is likely to witness a major impact of the Congress-led grand alliance with AIUDF.

In 2016, NDA had won 9 out of 12 seats, but four of these were due to a split in votes between the Congress and AIUDF. The political observers are of view that the NDA may have to struggle to hold on to its seats in this area too.

The battle for one seat — Barhampur in Nagaon district has also become interesting as the BJP has taken over the seat of its ally AGP, denying a ticket to former chief minister and AGP stalwart Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

The polling in Assam was almost peaceful with a significant number of voters turning up since morning hours to exercise their franchise on Thursday.

people have yet again shown a Red Card to Congress and its Mahajot. People of Assam have trust in the NDA for the development, peace, security of the state. This is an election between the 'maha jhooth' of Mahajot (Congress-AIUDF grand alliance) and 'maha vikas' of the double engine government." Asserting that the BJP is set for a grand victory in Phase-I polls, Modi said the NDA government is working for welfare of Assam with the mantra of 'sabka saath sabka vikas sabka vishwas'. "People of Assam have given blessings to NDA in 1st phase of polling. In the 1st phase, Assam has put a stamp on

grand victory of NDA," he said

Referring to BJP government's developmental initiatives in the state, Modi said, "Medical college is being set up in Kokrajhar at a rapid pace. A package of ₹1,500 crore has also been provided for development. Bodoland University, Central Institute of Technology, Bodoland Bhaman and several other institutions are becoming the identity of this region."

He said, "From providing land pattas to over 3.25 lakh families, increasing rates of workers to making the life of women working in tea gardens, the NDA has tried to bring all-round development."

EC issues notice to BJP minister

DC CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI, APRIL 1

Amidst the charges of intimidating Opposition by ruling BJP minister in the name of NIA probe, a candidate from Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF), a partner of the Opposition Congress-led grand alliance, switched sides and joined the ruling BJP late on Wednesday night.

With less than a week to go for the third and final phase of Assembly polls, Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in a mid-night social media post announced, "Official candidate of BPF and so called Congress-led alliance from Tamulpur LAC (legislative Assembly constituency) Ram Das Basumatary met me a short while ago. He has expressed his desire to join BJP and retire from the election."

Earlier on Thursday Congress claimed that its Mahajot candidate from Tamulpur constituency is missing and it asked the ruling BJP to answer about his whereabouts.

Congress leader Manish Tiwari who is camping in Guwahati told reporters, "Congress-led Mahajot candidate from Tamulpur constituency, Rangia Basumatary of BPF was made to disappear. It's the Assam government and BJP's responsibility to answer where he is. We demand from the Election Commission that a probe should be done in this matter."

However, soon after Rangia Khungur Basumatary, who is also known as Ram Das Basumatary appeared before the media to announce his retirement from the contest.

Meanwhile in a related development, the EC on Thursday issued a notice to Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for his alleged remark of misusing NIA against Congress candidate. The EC asked Sarma for submitting an explanation by April 2.

Uttrakhand's borders with Uttar Pradesh at Narsan in Roorkee and Kashipur in Udham Singh Nagar district has been intensified to ensure that only people with a negative RT-PCR test report proceed for the Kumbh Mela.

"Besides registering on our portal, it is compulsory for devotees to bring a negative RT-PCR test report with them," Mela Officer Deepak Rawat said.

A negative RT-PCR test report not older than 72 hours before arrival has been made mandatory for devotees gathering for the



RAJA BANNED FROM CAMPAIGN FOR TWO DAYS

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 1

Former union minister and DMK deputy general secretary, A. Raja, has been debarred from campaigning for '48 hours with immediate effect' by the Election Commission of India, which was not satisfied with his reply to a notice sent to him on a complaint by the AIADMK.

The ECI order on Thursday reprimanded Raja for violating the Model Code of Conduct and delisted him as DMK's star campaigner, besides advising him 'to be watchful and not to make intemperate, indecent, derogatory, obscene remarks and lower the dignity of women in future during election campaign.'

The AIADMK's complaint dated March 27, alleging that Raja had made a derogatory and scandalous speech during a campaign on March 26 at the Thousand Lights constituency, was forwarded by the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Tamil Nadu to the ECI.

Raja was asked to give his explanation after the ECI obtained a factual report from the CEO and on the basis of preliminary reports and transcripts of his speeches made at Keelapalur and Meensuruti.

The order said that Raja had described Stalin as a child of good relationship and good birth and Edappadi K. Palaniswami as a child of a bad relationship and a premature-born child at Keelapalur.

Troops sent to stop Myanmar refugees' entry

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

Additional battalions of ITBP, SSB and Assam Rifle are being rushed to the India-Myanmar border as some refugees from Myanmar have been trying to enter India in wake of Army action against protestors there. Though so far Myanmar residents are not being allowed, Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) will discuss the issue in its meeting next week, sources said.

Security and intelligence agencies are closely monitoring the situation all along the India-Myanmar border as there is considerable tension in Myanmar as Army has launched a massive offensive against protestors in their country. This has forced people to flee from Myanmar and a lot of them have been trying to enter India.

But so far border guards have managed to stop any illegal entry into India and have contained the situation along the border. India shares almost a 1,500-km long border with Myanmar.

Following the tense situation in Myanmar it has been decided that additional central paramilitary forces like ITBP, SSB and Assam Rifle have

been rushed to the Myanmar border.

Sources said so far it has been decided that illegal migrants will not be allowed into India. However, as a humanitarian gesture, Indian security forces have been providing food, medicine and water to some residents of villages in Myanmar which are close to the border. However, they are not being permitted to cross over into India.

Top security sources said that the Cabinet Committee on Security, which is likely to meet sometime next week, will discuss the Myanmar situation in detail.

A decision could also be taken on the crucial issue on whether some refugees from Myanmar should be allowed inside India purely on a temporary basis till the time the situation normalises in Myanmar.

"So far government policy is clear that no illegal migration would be allowed from Myanmar. But maybe some relaxation could be given only on temporary and humanitarian basis to give shelter to some refugees. But the decision will have to be taken by the Cabinet Committee on Security," a senior home ministry official added.

COVID UPDATE

NEW VARIANT FOUND IN CHHATTISGARH

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, APRIL 1

New variant of Coronavirus, named N-440, has been found in Chhattisgarh indicating mutation of virus in the state. Chhattisgarh health minister T.S. Singhdeo said on Thursday.

According to him, the Centre has sent a report to the Chhattisgarh government recently confirming that the new variant of Coronavirus was found in five samples from the state.

However, doctors say a study was yet to be done as to how the new variant of the virus would exactly affect our immune system.

But, it has been found that the mutant was capable of weakening the immune system.

Singhdeo said no Coronavirus variants of Britain, South Africa and Brazil were so far detected in Chhattisgarh.

All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), Raipur, gathers samples in Chhattisgarh and sends them to the National Centre for Disease Control for tests.

The first positive case in Chhattisgarh was reported in Raipur on March 18, 2020.

Meanwhile, India on Thursday recorded 79,275 new cases and 461 deaths in the last 24 hours taking the nationwide tally of cases to 1,22,99,987.

FOUR MORE DIE IN J&K, 461 NEW CASES REPORTED

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, APRIL 1

The number of Coronavirus cases are increasing with each passing day in Jammu and Kashmir.

On Thursday, as many as 461 fresh cases of the virus were reported including 361 from the Valley and 100 from Jammu region of the Union Territory which is the highest daily rise this year.

Also, four more people died of the infection, raising the toll to 1,998. "The total number of Covid-19 positive cases in J&K has risen to 1,31,421. However, only 2,874 are active positive whereas 1,26,549 patients have recovered and 1,998 have died," an official spokesman said in Jammu.

Several areas in the Valley have been declared contaminated zones following residents in fairly large numbers contracted the virus.

Also, eight schools have been shut for three to seven days after the swab samples of more than 60 students and half a dozen teachers collected during a recent drive by the J&K Health Department turned positive for the virus.

The Jammu & Kashmir government had on Tuesday announced a slew of measures to contain Coronavirus in view of fresh surge in positive cases.

It is for the 1st time in history that the event is held for just a month

Kumbh Mela begins in Haridwar

HOLY | GATHERING

Haridwar, April 1: The Kumbh Mela formally began in Haridwar on Thursday with several restrictions imposed on devotees coming to attend the event amid rising cases of Covid-19 in various states including Uttarakhand.

Officials associated with organising the event, including Mela Officer Deepak Rawat, Mela IG Sanjay Gunjyal and Haridwar SSP Janmejay Khanduri, worshipped in temples along the banks of the Ganga to pray for a safe and unhindered Kumbh fair.

Checking on

Uttrakhand's borders with Uttar Pradesh at Narsan in Roorkee and Kashipur in Udham Singh Nagar district has been intensified to ensure that only people with a negative RT-PCR test report proceed for the Kumbh Mela.

"Besides registering on our portal, it is compulsory for devotees to bring a negative RT-PCR test report with them," Mela Officer Deepak Rawat said.

A negative RT-PCR test report not older than 72 hours before arrival has been made mandatory for devotees gathering for the

Kumbh by the Uttarakhand High Court.

In an order on Wednesday, the high court said a negative RT-PCR certification will be compulsory even in the case of devotees who have received the first dose of the Corona vaccine.

Devotees who have taken the anti-Covid vaccination will have to show their certificates and follow the anti-Covid guidelines like wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and frequently undertaking hand sanitisation in the Kumbh Kshetra.

The high court has also asked the health authori-

ties in Haridwar to ramp up testing from 5,000 per day to 50,000. Uttarakhand reported 293 positive Covid-19 cases on Wednesday with Dehradun and Haridwar districts accounting for a majority of them.

Dehradun reported 171 cases followed by Haridwar which reported 70, the Covid Control room in Dehradun said.

It is for the first time in the history of the grand religious congregation held on the banks of the Ganga in Haridwar once in 12 years that its duration has been curtailed to just one month due to the

pandemic. In normal circumstances, Kumbh is held for nearly four months. Its last edition was held in Haridwar from January 14 to April 28 in 2010.

Between April 1 and 30, there will be three major bathing dates (shahi snan or royal baths) on April 12, 14 and 27.

Besides the shahi snan dates when people descend in droves on the banks of the Ganga in Haridwar for a holy bath, a heavy turnout of devotees is also expected on the occasion of Chaitra Pratipada on April 13 and Ram Navami on April 21.

— PTI



SHORT TAKES

PAK COURT  
LIFTS BAN  
ON TIKTOK

**Peshawar, April 1:** A Pakistani court on Thursday lifted its ban on popular Chinese video-sharing app TikTok and ordered the country's telecommunication authority to make sure that "immoral content" is not uploaded on it.

The Peshawar High Court on March 11 had ordered a ban on the TikTok over alleged "obscene content", the second time in less than six months. The court on Thursday lifted the ban.

**LONDON COP IN NEO-NAZI GROUP CONVICTED**

**London, April 1:** A London jury has found a rookie police officer guilty of belonging to a banned neo-Nazi organisation, the first time a British police officer has been convicted of membership of an outlawed far-right group.

After 32 hours of deliberation, the jury at the city's Old Bailey court found Benjamin Hannam, 22, guilty Thursday of being a member of the extremist group National Action.

**US SAYS ISRAEL 'OCCUPIES' WEST BANK**

**Washington, April 1:** US President Joe Biden's administration said Wednesday that Israel's control of the West Bank is indeed "occupation," clarifying its stance after the release of a report that seemed to downplay the term, adopting language used by the former President Donald Trump's government.

The State Department's annual report on human rights "does use the term 'occupation' in the context of the current status of the West Bank," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

"This has been the longstanding position of previous administrations of both parties over the course of many decades," he said. But under the staunchly pro-Israel Trump, the annual human rights report renamed the section on "Israel and the Occupied Territories" as "Israel, West Bank and Gaza."

# US court lets Rana file reply

Hearing of Tahawwur, declared fugitive by India, is scheduled April 12

**Washington, April 1:** A US court has acceded to the request of Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, who is sought for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, to file an additional reply against his extradition to India.

The in-person extradition hearing of 59-year-old Rana, who has been declared a fugitive by India, is scheduled for April 12.

The United States has supported India's request for his extradition to India. US District Court Judge in Los Angeles Jacqueline Chooljian, in his brief order on Wednesday, said: Rana shall file a sur-reply of no more than 20 pages by not later than April 5.

The government may, but is not required to file any surrebuttal to the sur-reply, which may not exceed 20 pages, by not later than April 12, the judge said. In a separate order, the judge asked both Rana and the government representatives to confer and submit a status report within a week regarding the scheduling of the in-person extradition hearing, which is currently set for April 22.

Under the existing law, hearings in cases of extradition under treaty stipulation or convention shall be held on land, publicly, and in a room or office easily accessible to the public, the judge said.

However, an in-person hearing is not currently authorised due to the pandemic, the federal judge said. Nor is it clear to the Court on the current record, that Mr. Rana may waive an in-person extradition hearing and consent to proceed by video/telepho-

nic conference, even if he wished to do so, the judge said. As such, the judge ordered the two parties to confer and file a status report within a week.

Last week Rana, who is being sought in connection with his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, approached the court that it wanted to file an additional reply in opposition to the motion of the US government that supported his extradition to India. The US government quickly reached out to the court arguing that there was no need for Rana to file an additional motion.

On Wednesday, the court ruled in favour of Rana.

Rana, a childhood friend of David Coleman Headley, was re-arrested on June 10 in Los Angeles on an extradition request by India for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which 166 people, including six Americans, were killed.

Pakistani-American Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist Headley was involved in plotting the 2008 Mumbai terror attack. He was made an approver in the case.

—PTI

# Race review: Johnson's PoC adviser resigns

**London, April 1:** UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's senior-most PoC adviser, Samuel Kasumu, has stepped down from his post as Special Adviser for Civil Society and Communities, it emerged on Thursday, a day after the release of a controversial government-appointed race review.

Kasumu's resignation will come in effect from May 1 and Downing Street has dismissed as completely inaccurate reports that it is linked to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) report, which had concluded that Britain was not a structurally racist nation even though overt racism remained a reality in the country. It has been claimed that Kasumu's exit was on the cards for some time due to tensions within Downing Street and is not directly linked to the much-criticised report.

"Mr Kasumu has played an incredibly valuable role during his time at No 10," a Downing Street spokesperson said. As he previously set out, he will be leaving government in May. Any suggestion that this decision has been made this week or that this is linked to the CRED report is completely inaccurate," he said.

Kasumu had previously handed in his resignation in February but went on to retract it. At the time, he had said he wanted to continue work he had been doing fighting misinformation on Covid-19 vaccines with Britain's PoC community, with "the view to leaving at the end of May". However, according to *The Politico*, Kasumu confirmed his decision to leave Downing Street on Tuesday morning, just as the findings of the CRED report were released. It comes as racial equality campaigners criticised the findings, and the Opposition Labour Party accused the government of downplaying institutional racism.

Labour's shadow equalities secretary Marsha de Cordova called the report "divisive", adding it was "no wonder" the government was "losing the expertise from their team".

—PTI

# WHO blasts Europe's vax rollout

France latest to impose curbs to combat rising infections

**Copenhagen, April 1:** The WHO on Thursday slammed Europe's "unacceptably slow" vaccine rollout and warned of a "worrying" surge in cases, as France became the latest country to impose new restrictions to combat soaring Coronavirus infections. In a sign of the devastation the virus is still causing while the world races to roll out vaccines, Brazil reported the country's death toll had spiralled last month. Officials said more than 66,000 people had died of Covid-19 in Brazil in March — more than twice as many fatalities as the country's second-deadliest month of the pandemic, July 2020.

"Never in Brazilian history have we seen a single event kill so many people" in one month, said doctor Miguel Nicolelis, former pandemic response coordinator for Brazil's impoverished northeast.

With the southern hemisphere winter approaching and the virus spreading fast, Brazil is facing "a perfect storm", he said.

The surge in Brazil has overwhelmed hospitals and forced doctors to make agonising decisions over whom to give life-saving care — prioritising those most likely



A closed street cafe is seen in Eisenstadt, Austria, on Thursday, amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The Austrian capital Vienna and two neighbouring regions entered a temporary lockdown over the Easter holiday, to ease pressure on intensive care units as Coronavirus cases surge.

—AFP

to survive.

The virus has killed more than 2.8 million people worldwide since it emerged in Wuhan in late 2019. And though the world is looking to vaccines to end the upheaval the virus has brought, rollouts are off to a sputtering start in many countries, notably in Europe. "Vaccines present our best way out of this pandemic... however, the rollout of these vaccines is unacceptably slow," the World Health

Organisation's director for Europe Hans Kluge said. "We must speed up the process by ramping up manufacturing, reducing barriers to administering vaccines, and using every single vial we have in stock," he added. The organisation said Europe's virus situation was "more worrying than we have seen in several months" and that slow rollouts were "prolonging the pandemic".

Five weeks ago, the number of weekly new

cases in the region had dipped to under one million. But last week there were 1.6 million new cases in Europe, the WHO said.

In France alone, daily cases have doubled to around 40,000 and hospitals are overflowing in flashpoints such as Paris.

The surge forced President Emmanuel Macron to relent and reimpose nationwide restrictions he rejected in January.

—AFP

# Myanmar civil war likely, warns UN ambassador

**United Nations, April 1:** The UN envoy on Myanmar implored the Security Council to take action in the Asian nation's escalating crisis, warning of the risk of civil war and an imminent "bloodbath" as the junta violently represses pro-democracy protests. More than 520 people have died in daily demonstrations since the military overthrew elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, halting Myanmar's decade-old experiment in democracy.

"I appeal to this Council to consider all available tools to take collective action and do what is right, what the people of Myanmar deserve and prevent a multi-dimensional catastrophe," special envoy Christine Schraner

Burgener told the closed-door session, according to remarks obtained by AFP.

She said she remained open for dialogue with the junta but added: "If we wait only for when they are ready to talk, the ground situation will only worsen. A bloodbath is imminent." Barbara Woodward, the UN envoy from Britain, which requested the meeting, told reporters the Security Council was "united in its condemnation" and was discussing "a range of measures at our disposal."

"One-sided pressure and calling for sanctions or other coercive measures will only aggravate tension and confrontation and fur-

ther complicate the situation, which is by no means constructive," China's ambassador, Zhang Jun, said.

The session came after Suu Kyi's legal team earlier Wednesday said the ousted leader appeared to be in good health despite two months of detention.

Suu Kyi, 75, has not been seen in public since she was deposed but a member of her legal team, Min Min Soe, was summoned to a police station in the capital Naypyidaw for a video meeting with her.

Suu Kyi is facing a raft of criminal charges, and conviction could see her barred from office for life.

The coup and the junta's subsequent actions have triggered international condemnation.

—AFP

# Navalny health raises concern

**Moscow, April 1:** Supporters of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny are raising deep concerns about his decision to launch a hunger strike, saying they fear more damage to his already-fragile health.

Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent opponent, announced the hunger strike on Wednesday to demand proper medical treatment in prison. The 44-year-old is serving two-and-a-half years on old fraud charges in a penal colony east of Moscow. He was arrested when he returned to Russia in January from Germany, where he had spent months recovering

from poisoning he blames on the Kremlin.

Navalny says he is suffering in prison from severe back pain and numbness in his legs and has only been given painkillers.

His allies said his announcement of a hunger strike is no idle threat and they do not expect he will back down.

"Navalny has always taken such a step as a hunger strike extremely seriously," Ruslan Shaveddinov, a spokesman for him, said. "We are very concerned about his condition and that's why we are demanding immediate access to doctors."

—AFP

# Biden allows Trump era H1-B rules to expire

**United Nations, April 1:** The UN envoy on Myanmar implored the Security Council to take action in the Asian nation's escalating crisis, warning of the risk of civil war and an imminent "bloodbath" as the junta violently represses pro-democracy protests. More than 520 people have died in daily demonstrations since the military overthrew elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, halting Myanmar's decade-old experiment in democracy.

"I appeal to this Council to consider all available tools to take collective action and do what is right, what the people of Myanmar deserve and prevent a multi-dimensional catastrophe," special envoy Christine Schraner Burgener told the closed-door session, according to

remarks obtained by AFP.

She said she remained open for dialogue with the junta but added: "If we wait only for when they are ready to talk, the ground situation will only worsen. A bloodbath is imminent." Barbara Woodward, the UN envoy from Britain, which requested the meeting, told reporters the Security Council was "united in its condemnation" and was discussing "a range of measures at our disposal."

"One-sided pressure and calling for sanctions or other coercive measures will only aggravate tension and confrontation and further complicate the situation, which is by no means constructive," China's ambassador, Zhang Jun,

said. The session came after Suu Kyi's legal team earlier Wednesday said the ousted leader appeared to be in good health despite two months of detention.

Suu Kyi, 75, has not been seen in public since she was deposed but a member of her legal team, Min Min Soe, was summoned to a police station in Naypyidaw for a video meeting with her. Suu Kyi is facing a raft of criminal charges, and conviction could see her barred from office for life.

The coup and the junta's subsequent actions have triggered international condemnation. Britain called for the emergency meeting after the military dramatically ramped up its use of lethal force against protesters. Myanmar's military Saturday launched the first air strikes.

—AFP

INDIA'S BIGGEST UNDERCOVER OPERATION

MATINEE ENTERTAINMENT

MATINEE ENTERTAINMENT'S

WILD DOG

WRITER - DIRECTOR AHISHOR SOLOMON

PRODUCERS NIRANJAN REDDY, ANVESH REDDY

CO-PRODUCERS N M PASHA, JAGAN MOHAN VANCHI MUSIC THAMAN S

DOP SHANEIL DEO ACTION SHAM KAUSHAL & DAVID ISMALONE

EDITOR SHIRAVAN KATIKANENI CHALLENGER KIRAN KUMAR

PRODUCTION DESIGNER MURALI SV COSTUME DESIGNER ASHWANTH BYRI

STUNT COORDINATOR JASHUVA VFX SUPERVISOR YUGANDBHAR T

PHO VAMSI SHEKAR PUBLICITY DESIGNS ANIL BBAHANU

RELEASING TODAY

Just watched Wild Dog. It's an edge of the seat thriller. A nice gem from Telugu Cinema, that will make us proud.

- Sankalp

Director - GHAZI, ANTARIKHAM

I enjoyed watching Wild Dog. It is very gripping. Couldn't take my eyes off the screen. Never seen this side of Nagarjuna Sir. He is at another level in this film.

- Ravikanth Perepu

Director - KSHANAM, KRISHNA AND HIS LEELA

An out of the box script with edge of the seat action sequences. The film has been made with utmost sincerity and dedication.

- Swaroop RSJ

Director - AGENT SAI SRINIVAS ATHREYA

DREAM WARRIOR PICTURES PRESENTS

FROM THE MAKERS OF

అపరీత & శైలి

KARTHI

అపరీత

WRITER DIRECTOR BAKKIYARAJ KANNAN

PRODUCED BY SR PRAKASH BABU - SR PRABHU

WARANGAL SRINU RELEASE



quick  
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,029.83	1.05
Nifty 50	14,867.40	1.20
S&P 500*	4,009.89	0.93
Dollar (₹)	73.11	0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.03	-0.26
Euro (₹)	85.99	-0.25
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,701.881	1.97
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.00	2.01
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.177	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.679	-0.067

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

No issues with  
bulk messages,  
asserts Trai

**New Delhi:** As bulk messages came into force, Trai asserted that no major disruptions were noticed for commercial messages and OTP generation in sectors such as banking, health-care and government services, and that issues were limited to "few" cases. Trai said reports from telcos indicated that "no major issues came to notice" and that "messages which are in accordance with regulations are getting delivered successfully".

Wipro to acquire  
Oz's Ampion  
for \$117 million

Wipro said it will acquire Ampion, an Australia-based provider of cyber security, DevOps and quality engineering services for \$117 million (about Rs 857 crore). The acquisition of Ampion is an important step for Wipro in this direction, and strengthens the commitment towards clients and stakeholders in Australia and New Zealand, Wipro said. The acquisition is expected to close in the June quarter.

Mastercard to put  
\$100mn in Airtel  
Africa's money biz

Airtel Africa on Thursday announced that Mastercard would invest \$100 million (about Rs 733 crore) in its wholly owned subsidiary Airtel Mobile Commerce BV (AMC). Mastercard would hold a minority stake in AMC on completion of the deal, with Airtel Africa continuing to hold the majority stake, an Airtel statement said. Sources said Mastercard would get about 3.75 per cent stake in the firm.

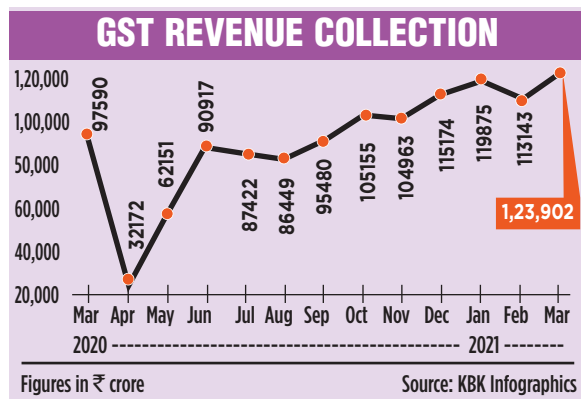
NSE reduces mkt  
lot size for Nifty  
50 derivatives

The NSE has slashed the market lot size for derivative contracts on Nifty 50, a move that will reduce the burden of excessive upfront margins for retail traders. The lot size has been reduced to 50 from the existing 75. The cut will reduce the margin requirements for futures trading by one-third, stockbroking firm Fyers CEO Tejas Khoday said. Currently, traders need about Rs 1,73,000 to trade one lot, he said.

Collection tops ₹1 L cr for 6th month in a row  
GST mop-up hits record  
₹1.23 lakh crore in MarchFC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

In line with the trend of constant recovery in GST revenues over the past five months, the gross goods and services tax (GST) revenue collected in March 2021 stood at a record high of over Rs 1.23 lakh crore. The total revenues earned for the month are 27 per cent higher than the GST collected in the same month last year, according to finance ministry data released on Thursday.

"The gross GST revenue collected in the month of March 2021 is at a record of Rs 1,23,902 crore, of which CGST is Rs 22,973 crore, SGST is Rs 29,329 crore, IGST is Rs 62,842 crore



(including Rs 31,097 crore collected on import of goods) and Cess is Rs 8,757 crore (including Rs 935 crore collected on import of goods)," the ministry said.

The GST collections for March this year is the six consecutive month of revenue crossing Rs 1-lakh crore mark. The finance ministry said that a steep increasing trend over this

period is a clear indicator of a rapid economic recovery post-pandemic.

"The revenues from import of goods was at 70 per cent higher and the revenues from domestic transaction (including import of services) are 17 per cent higher than the revenues from these sources during the same month last year. The GST revenue witnessed growth rate of (-) 41 per cent, (-) 8 per cent, 8 per cent and 14 per cent in the first, second, third and fourth quarters of this financial year, respectively, as compared to the same period last year," it said.

The Centre has settled Rs 21,879 crore to CGST and Rs 17,230 crore to SGST.

## Car sales rebound in March

MICHAEL GONSALVES  
PUNE, APRIL 1

Most carmakers in the country—such as Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Tata Motors, Kia Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Toyota Kirloskar Motors, Renault, Ford Motor, Honda Cars, MG Motor and Nissan Motor—on Thursday reported substantial year-on-year sales growth in March 2021 in comparison to the unusually low sales in March 2020 because of the lockdown.

These 11 of the 14 carmakers in India who control 99 per cent of India's domestic car market

clocked a 126 per cent jump in March sales to 3,15,946 units, up from 1,39,761 cars sold in March 2020 when the lockdown had begun to hit production.

Car sales have been improving in the last few months and March showed a substantial year-on-year growth.

Maruti Suzuki, which sells one car out of two bought in India, reported 91.76 per cent sales growth to 1,46,203 units last month compared to 76,240 units sold in March 2020.

Hyundai, the South Korean carmaker, clocked a 100 per cent rise in domestic sales during

March to 52,600 units as against 26,300 units sold in the same month last year.

Tata Motors, India's third biggest carmaker, recorded a 422 per cent increase at 29,654 units as compared to 5,676 units sold in March last year. This is the highest-ever sales in a month for the company in nine years. A total of 705 Nexon EVs were sold in March.

Korean brand Kia Motors logged a 123 per cent growth in volumes to 19,100 units against 8,583 units.

Sales at Mahindra & Mahindra, the SUV specialist, climbed 394 per cent to 16,700 units during the month against 3,383 units

sold in March last year.

Similarly, Toyota Kirloskar Motors posted a 114 per cent sales increase to 15,001 units as against 7,023 units, clocking the best monthly sales for it since 2013.

Sales at French car brand Renault also jumped 278 per cent at 12,356 units last month against 3,269 units sold in February last year.

Ford Motor India clocked 7,746 units sales in March, a growth of 120 per cent from 3,519 units.

Sales at Honda Cars India was up 92 per cent at 7,103 units versus 3,697 units. Its production in March was impacted due to a shortage of semiconductors.

Cathay, EFL Global  
deliver vaccines  
to South AmericaFC BUREAU  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

The recent shipment of 1,00,000 Covid-19 vaccine doses that India delivered to Paraguay were sent from Hyderabad, aboard a Cathay Pacific cargo flight which carried the 10,000 vials of the vaccine. The shipment left from Hyderabad on March 26 on a cargo only passenger plane of Cathay Pacific.

The vaccines were stored between 2 and 8 degrees Celsius as mandated from the time of acceptance of the shipment to its delivery. According to the airlines, the shipment was first taken to Hong Kong, where it was transferred to a cargo freighter plane and then flown to Miami, USA, before the final leg of the journey to Paraguay in South America.

In a release, the airlines' regional general manager for South Asia, Middle East and Africa, Mark Sutch, said Cathay Pacific Cargo was happy to be able to support vaccine delivery during this crucial time. Our "Vaccine Task Force" is well equipped to handle the shipments with utmost care."

## Exports jump 58% to \$34 bn

FC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

Exports increased by 58.23 per cent to \$34 billion in March on the back of healthy growth in key sectors like engineering, gems and jewellery and pharmaceuticals, provisional data from the commerce ministry showed.

Exports during April-March 2020-21, however, decreased by 7.4 per cent to



\$290.18 billion compared with \$313.36 billion in 2019-20. Imports during 2020-21 contracted by 18 per cent to \$388.92 billion compared with \$474.71 billion during 2019-20.

In March 2020, the

exports stood at \$21.49 billion, which was a decline of about 34 per cent over March 2019 due to the global slowdown.

"India's merchandise exports in March 2021 were \$34.0 billion as compared to \$21.49 billion in March 2020, an increase of 58.23 per cent," the ministry said in a statement.

It said that the "first time ever in a month", the exports crossed \$34 billion.

Salary income of Gulf  
workers tax exempt: FM

**New Delhi, April 1:** Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said salary income earned by non-resident Indians in the Gulf countries would continue to be exempt from tax in India.

Quoting a tweet of TMC MP Mahua Moitra, Sitharaman clarified that the Finance Act 2021 has not brought in any new or additional tax on Indian workers in Saudi/UAE/Oman/Qatar.

Earlier in the day, Moitra had tweeted a picture of an amendment in Finance Bill, 2021, saying the complicated words in the amendment is in reality a Special Gulf workers tax.

"FM going back on her words. Hardworking Indian workers in Saudi/UAE/Oman/Qatar to be taxed EXTRA," Moitra tweeted.

Sitharman said the said amendment in the Finance Act, 2021, has

merely incorporated general definition of the term "liable to tax" in the Income Tax Act to provide clarity.

This amendment has not altered the taxability of salary income earned by non-resident Indian citizens in the Gulf countries. Their salary income earned in the Gulf countries would continue to be exempt in India, the Office of Finance Minister tweeted.

—PTI

S&P 500 BREAKS ABOVE 4000-MARK  
AS BULL MARKET BARRELS ONKATIE GREIFELD &  
VILDANA HAJRIC  
APRIL 1

A revival in technology shares alongside budding optimism about the global recovery pushed the world's most important stock index past 4000 points for the first time.

The S&P 500 rallied as much as 0.7 per cent to a record as investors weighed President Joe Biden's newly unveiled \$2.25 trillion stimulus plan ahead of Friday's US employment report, which is expected to show the quickest pace of hiring in five months. While it took almost five years for the index to rise from the 2000 milestone to 3000 in July 2019, the latest

1000-point trip took about 21 months.

The S&P 500's recent climb has largely been built on a surge in energy and financial shares as the vaccine rollout picks up speed. That's pressured Treasury yields higher and boosted inflation expectations, sending cyclical stocks upward. However, a moderation in the bond sell-off's breakneck pace has breathed life back into tech stocks, the benchmark's biggest sector.

"The market at 4000 now is a much broader and better S&P 500 than it was at the peak of February 2020," said Arthur Hogan, chief market strategist at National Securities Corp.

—Bloomberg

NIIF INVESTS ₹2,100 CR  
IN MANIPAL HOSPITALSFC BUREAU  
CHENNAI, APRIL 1

The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund, an investment platform anchored by the Government of India, has invested Rs 2,100 crore in Bengaluru-based Manipal Hospitals. The investment through the NIIF Strategic Opportunities Fund is NIIF's first funding in the Indian healthcare sector.

Manipal operates 15 hospitals and the key focus is on tertiary and quaternary care. Last year, Manipal had acquired 100 per cent stake in Columbia Asia Hospitals for Rs 1,800 crore.

Demand for healthcare has been growing and this has been further accentuated in the backdrop of the pandemic.

Suez Canal crisis: Egypt may  
seek \$1 bn in compensationTAREK EL-TABLAUWY &  
MIRETTE MAGDY  
APRIL 1

Egypt said it may seek around \$1 billion in compensation after a giant container vessel blocked the Suez Canal for almost a week and roiled shipping markets.

The figure is a rough estimate of losses linked to transit fees, damages incurred during the dredging and salvage efforts, the cost of the equipment, and labour, Suez Canal Authority chief executive Osama Rabie said late Wednesday to local television channel Sada Elbalad.

He did not specify who the Canal Authority would

TAFE'S MALLIKA  
SRINIVASAN TO  
SELECT PUBLIC  
SECTOR HONCHOS

Mallika Srinivasan

**New Delhi, April 1:** Mallika Srinivasan, chairman and managing director of Tractors and Farm Equipment (Tafe) Limited has been appointed as the chairperson of the Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB), an order issued by the personnel ministry on Thursday said.

This is the first time a private sector specialist has been appointed as the head of the PESB, responsible for appointment of top management posts in the Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), officials said.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Srinivasan as the chairperson of PESB for a period of three years from the date of assumption of charge, or until the attainment of the age of 65 years, it said.

Sailesh, a 1985-batch IAS officer, has been appointed as member, PESB. He is at present secretary, Department of Public Enterprises.

The PESB shall consist of one chairperson and three full-time members.

M. K. Gupta and Rear Admiral Shekhar Mital (ret'd) are its two serving members.

—PTI

PE/VC funding  
soars 85% in Q4SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, APRIL 1

Private equity (PE) and venture capital (VC) investments in the March quarter was up 85 per cent against the pre-lock-down quarter of last year.

PE and VC firms invested over \$11.86 billion across 188 deals in the first three months of 2021—an increase of about 85 per cent compared to the same period in 2020, as per the data of Venture Intelligence. The pre-pandemic quarter of January-March 2020 had recorded PE/VC investments of \$6.5 billion across 238 deals.

The value of investments in the March quarter was also 58 per cent higher compared to the previous December quarter, which saw \$7.5 billion being invested across 231 deals. However, deal volumes were down by 21 per cent against the March quarter of last year and 19 per cent compared to the December quarter.

In the past few quarters, investments into Reliance Group entities have been pushing the aggregate funding to new

highs. In the June quarter, total investments had touched \$13.95 billion and in the September quarter it stood at \$11.87 billion. However in the March quarter, there were no investments into the group.

Piramal Enterprises winning the bankruptcy bid for Dewan Housing Finance for \$5.2 billion was the largest deal in the quarter. Some of the tech unicorns like Zomato and Byjus attracted \$500 million and \$460 million, respectively, in the quarter.

"The high level of fund flows during the latest quarter, coming as they did without any investments into Reliance Industries Group companies, is very encouraging. It would be interesting to see how the investment figures in the coming quarters match up against the high bar set by RIL Group deals which had dominated the last three quarters of 2020," said Arun Natarajan, founder of Venture Intelligence.

Exits too were active in the March quarter, as there were eight successful domestic IPOs of PE-VC backed companies.

US MFG SECTOR  
INDEX RACES  
TO 37-YEAR  
HIGH IN MARCHLUCIA MUTIKANI  
APRIL 1

A measure of US manufacturing activity soared to its highest level in more than 37 years in March, driven by strong growth in new orders, the clearest sign yet that a much anticipated economic boom was probably underway.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) said on Thursday its index of national factory activity jumped to a reading of 64.7 last month from 60.8 in February. That was the highest level since December 1983.

A reading above 50 indicates expansion in manufacturing, which accounts for 11.9 per cent of the US economy. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the index rising to 61.3 in March. The year-long pandemic has boosted demand for goods.

Economic growth is expected take off this year, juiced up by the White House's massive \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package and the reopening of nonessential businesses as more Americans are vaccinated against the coronavirus.

The relief package passed last month is sending additional \$1,400 checks to qualified households and extending the government safety net for the unemployed through September 6. Households have also accumulated about \$19 trillion in excess savings, which are expected to fuel pent-up demand.

President Joe Biden on Wednesday unveiled a plan to spend roughly \$2 trillion on infrastructure like roads and bridges over 10 years.

—Reuters



## SHORT TAKES

Female lifter fails  
dope test, axed

**New Delhi:** A woman weightlifter, who was part of the ongoing national camp at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala, has been provisionally suspended after testing positive for banned substance.

The weightlifter, a national record holder and who has participated in several international tournaments including the Commonwealth Championship where she won gold, was set to be a part of the Indian team for the Asian Championship to be held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan from April 16 to 25. "Yes, she has failed a dope test. The report came about 10-15 days back," a source in the Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWLFF) confirmed. Taking a break from the national camp, the weightlifter went home in October last year when national coach Vijay Sharma and star lifter Mirabai Chanu had travelled to the United States.

After she returned to the camp, her sample was collected by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) in November last. The weightlifter had allegedly consumed a supplement that contained the prohibited substance. — PTI

Ex-Olympian guilty  
of drug smuggling

**Brisbane:** Former two-time Olympic silver medalist canoeist Nathan Baggeley and his younger brother have been found guilty of plotting to smuggle 200 million Australian dollars (\$150 million) worth of cocaine into Australia. The 45-year-old Baggeley and his 39-year-old brother Dru were charged with attempting to import 650 kilograms of cocaine in 2018. After about eight hours of deliberating, a Brisbane Supreme Court jury found both men guilty on Thursday. Nathan Baggeley won two canoeing silver medals at the 2004 Athens Olympics and also was a three-time world champion. But his career was tarnished with drug scandals testing positive for banned steroids in 2005 and also being jailed with Dru Baggeley 10 years later for his role in a drug manufacturing syndicate. The Baggeley brothers will be sentenced on a date yet to be decided by the court. — AP

Telangana draw  
a blank in cycling

**Hyderabad:** Telangana failed to win even a single medal at the 72nd Senior, 49th Junior & 35th Sub-Junior National Track Cycling Championship that concluded at SATS Velodrome in Osmania University, Hyderabad, on Wednesday. It was a major embarrassment for the hosts, who had fielded 42 athletes, none of whom could make the podium in the 44 events that were part of the championships in which 552 players from 24 states participated. Officials presenting medals was the closest locals could get to the podiums. However, the meet saw 14 records being broken. Records fell in the Men's Elite Team Sprint (Manipur), Men's Elite Sprint ESOW (Andaman and Nicobar), Team Pursuit (SSCB), Individual Pursuit (Anil Manglawar from RSPB) and 1 km Time Trial (Amarjeet Singh, Punjab). Women's Elite Individual Pursuit (Swasti Singh), Team Pursuit (RSPB). The Junior Men broke four records while the Junior Women and Sub-Juniors Boys beat one record each.

20 players in lead  
at Senior chess

**Hyderabad:** International Master Rahul Srivatsav is sharing the lead with 19 others after Round Three of the Telangana State Senior Fide Rated Chess Championship being organised by the Telangana State Chess Association at the Lal Bahadur Stadium here. Top seeds Bharat Kumar Reddy Poluri, Kheerthi Ganta, Krishna Karthik N, Sushanth Kamabathula, Karyasheel P, Rajsekhar B, Shaati Majumder, and Md Bashiq Imrose are among leaders who have three points each. **Third round (selected results):** Gudla Shanth Kumar (2) lost to Rahul Srivatsav (3), Bharat Kumar Reddy Poluri (3) bt Mahendar (2), Teerthala Abhinav (2.5) drew with Raghav Srivatsav (2.5), Aditya Varun Gampa (3) bt Surya Alakanti (2).

**Live on TV**

CRICKET

South Africa vs Pakistan: First ODI from 1.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

## LIONS ON PROWL

After last year's low, there is lot to gain for CSK

**Chennai, April 1:** The return of Suresh Raina could boost the batting department but spin-reliant Chennai Super Kings will have to adapt to conditions which may assist pacers as they seek to improve upon their nightmarish show of last season.

Three-time champions CSK had a flop show last season, avoiding the wooden spoon thanks to a few victories at the back-end of the league phase as they failed to make the play-offs for the first time in the tournament's history. CSK have oodles of experience, which will stand them in good stead in crucial situations. The inspirational leadership of Dhoni is another advantage for the team. The return of Raina will strengthen the batting unit which faltered far too often in last year's IPL in the UAE.

A batting line-up of Raina, along with Faf du Plessis, Dhoni, Ambati Rayudu, Ravindra Jadeja, Sam Curran, new recruit Moeen Ali and fast improving Ruturaj Gaikwad could prove a handful for rival bowling attacks and big scores could set the platform for the bowlers to do their job.

With the likes of Lungi Ngidi, Shardul Thakur, Curran, Deepak Chahar in the line-up, CSK have a decent bowling unit. A team comprising ageing stars proved CSK's undoing last season and they have stuck pretty much to the core squad. In the fast-paced world of T20s, senior stars could prove to be a handicap. — PTI



CSK skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Suresh Raina (left) share light moment in this photo.

— Twitter

## Hazlewood pulls out of IPL

**Melbourne, April 1:** Australia and Chennai Super Kings fast bowler Josh Hazlewood has pulled out of the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League to take a small break from cricket and keep himself fresh for the Ashes and the T20 World Cup later this year.

Hazlewood was to depart with other Australia's IPL-bound players and join CSK but decided to skip the cash-rich league,

which will start on April 9 and go on till May 30, and spend time at home for the next two months.

"It's been a long 10 months in bubbles and quarantine at different times, so I decided to have a rest from cricket and spend some time at home and in Australia in the next two months," Hazlewood was quoted as saying by *cricket.com.au*.

"We've got a big winter ahead. The West Indies is

going to be a long tour, with Bangladesh (T20 tour) potentially thrown on the end of that. Then potentially the T20 World Cup leading into the Ashes, so it's a big 12 months.

"As it always is with Australia, and I want to give myself the best chance to be mentally and physically ready for that," he added.

He follows Josh Philippe (RCB) and Mitchell Marsh

(SRH) in withdrawing from the IPL, while some other Australians may consider opting out also, according to the report.

Hazlewood has been under restrictions from July last year before leaving for England with Australia's limited-overs team where he was in strict bio-secure lockdown before heading to the UAE for the IPL where again safety protocols were tight. — PTI

IPL WILL BE A  
HUGE BENEFIT  
TO US: STOKES

**Mumbai, April 1:** The increased participation of English players in the IPL, where there is constant pressure to perform, will benefit them during the T20 World Cup to be held in India later this year, reckons star all-rounder Ben Stokes.

This year, there are 14 England cricketers contracted to play IPL, Eoin Morgan, Jos Buttler, Stokes, Johnny Bairstow, Moeen Ali, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Sam Billings, Liam Livingstone and Dawid Malan.

"Yes — the percentage of English players in the IPL has probably grown in the last five or so years," Stokes told *Sky Sports*.

"Not only is that great for the individual but it is also great for the players involved in the England set-up; it gives them experience in the most high-profile competition in the world but not only that — you are under constant pressure to perform," he added.

"You've got billions of people watching you and you've got the pressure of the franchise on you."

"Being constantly exposed to that is a huge benefit to us as a team, especially with the T20 World Cup coming up at the end of the year in India; it's a great chance for the English guys to get more experience in these conditions," Stokes said. — PTI

Germans beaten  
in Cup qualifier

**Paris, April 1:** Germany suffered a stunning 2-1 home loss to North Macedonia in World Cup qualifying on Wednesday, while defending champions France edged Bosnia and Herzegovina 1-0 and England beat a Poland side missing the injured Robert Lewandowski.

Napoli midfielder Elif Elmas secured a famous victory for North Macedonia in Duisburg, scoring five minutes from time to give his country a second win from three Group 'J' matches.

Veteran striker Goran Pandev, 37, put the visitors in front just before half-time but Ilkay Gundogan levelled from the spot after Leroy Sane was fouled in the area. Timo Werner missed a glorious chance after coming off the bench, and Elmas condemned the four-time world champions to a first defeat in qualifying for the global showpiece since 2001 when he steered in a cut-back from Arijan Ademi.

**GRIEZMANN STARS  
FOR FRANCE**

Antoine Griezmann scored the only goal of the game in Sarajevo as France recorded a second away win in four days over Bosnia following their 2-0

● **North Macedonia stunned four-time World Cup winners Germany 2-1, their first defeat in a World Cup qualifying match for 20 years.**

success in Kazakhstan at the weekend. After being held 1-1 at home by Ukraine in their opening game on the road to the 2022 finals in Qatar, France are now in a strong position at the top of Group 'D'.

Harry Maguire struck a late winner for England as the 2018 World Cup semi-finalists overcame Poland 2-1 at Wembley. Harry Kane put England ahead with a first-half penalty after a foul on Raheem Sterling, but a mistake by John Stones allowed Poland to level through Jakub Moder.

**WINS FOR SPAIN  
AND ITALY**

Goals from Dani Olmo, Ferran Torres and second-half substitute Gerard Moreno lifted Spain to a 3-1 victory over Kosovo and top of Group 'B'.

Italy defeated Lithuania 2-0 in Vilnius with Ciro Immobile adding a stoppage-time penalty for the Azzurri. — AP



North Macedonia's Goran Pandev (right) is congratulated by his teammates after scoring his side's first goal against Germany during their World Cup 2022 qualifying match in Duisburg, Germany, on Wednesday. — AP

## THE RESULTS

<b>North Macedonia</b> (Pandev 45+2, Elmas 85)	<b>2</b>	<b>Italy</b> (Stefano Sensi 48, Ciro Immobile 90+4-pen)	<b>2</b>
<b>Germany</b> (Gundogan 63-pen)	<b>1</b>	<b>Lithuania</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>England</b> (Kane 19-pen, Maguire 85)	<b>2</b>	<b>France</b> (Griezmann 60)	<b>1</b>
<b>Poland</b> (Modest 58)	<b>1</b>	<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Spain</b> (Olmo 34, Torres 36, Moreno 75)	<b>3</b>	<b>Georgia</b> (Khvicha Kvaratskhelia 78)	<b>1</b>
<b>Kosovo</b> (Halimi 70)	<b>1</b>	<b>Greece</b> (Kakabadze 76-og)	<b>1</b>

NAOMI SURRENDERS TO SAKKARI,  
MEDVEDEV ALSO IS OUT OF MIAMI

**Miami, April 1:** Top-seeded Daniil Medvedev crashed out of the Miami Open Wednesday on a day of upsets that also saw Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka ousted from the quarterfinals.

Seventh-seeded Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut beat Medvedev 6-4, 6-2, for his third win in as many meetings with the Russian who was runner-up to Novak Djokovic at the Australian

Open and ascended to No. 2 in the world with his victory at Marseille in March.

Women's world No. 2 Naomi Osaka — seeded second behind Ashleigh Barty in the prestigious ATP Masters and WTA hardcourt tournament — had bowed out hours earlier, the Japanese star's 23-match winning streak coming to a crashing halt with a 0-6, 4-6 loss to Greece's Maria Sakkari. — AP



Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Virat Kohli (left) and star batsman AB de Villiers join the RCB squad in Chennai on Thursday ahead of upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League.

— Twitter

## Virat, AB arrive in Chennai

**Chennai, April 1:** India and Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Virat Kohli reached here on Thursday to join his IPL squad before which he will undergo a seven-day quarantine.

The team has already started its training camp on Tuesday for the upcoming season which begins on April 9.

"Captain Virat Kohli has arrived in Chennai," RCB said, announcing Kohli's arrival in a tweet, along with a picture of their captain wearing a mask.

RCB face defending champions Mumbai Indians in the tournament opener on April 9 here.

Kohli, who has been with the RCB since the inception of the IPL in 2008, quit the bio-bubble in Pune on Monday after India's ODI series win against England.

He has been part of bio-secure bubbles since the end of January, ahead of the England series, and was part of each of the four Tests, five T20 Internationals and three ODIs.

Another key RCB player and South African star batsman A B de Villiers also joined the RCB bio-bubble on Thursday.

"The spaceship has landed! AB de Villiers has joined the RCB bubble in Chennai," the RCB tweeted.

The 37-year-old batting great has been a key player for the team since he joined the franchise in 2011.

Head coach Simon Katich also came out of quarantine, along with pacer Navdeep Saini as the RCB team underwent another practice session.

**UMESH READY TO HIT  
THE DECK FOR DC**

Out of mandatory seven-day quarantine, India and Delhi Capitals fast bowler Umesh Yadav is ready to hit the deck as he returns to be with the familiar faces at his old franchise in the Indian Premier League, beginning on April 9.

The 33-year-old Yadav,

who started his IPL career with the Delhi franchise, returned to the side after being acquired for his base price of ₹1 crore in the auction in February.

"After being in quarantine for one week, it was great to step onto the ground and spend some time with the boys," Yadav said.

"I just want to do well whenever I have the ball in my hand. I will definitely give my best for my team and keep getting better everyday," he said in a DC release.

Yadav, who has picked up 119 wickets in 121 IPL matches, said he felt at home in the Delhi Capitals camp. — PTI



G. Sai Karteek Reddy (left) of Telangana and Arnab Pathange of Karnataka pose with their trophies after winning the doubles title at the All India National Ranking tennis tournament being held at Lakeview Tennis Academy in Hyderabad.

Karteek & Arnab  
doubles champs

**DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1**

G. Sai Karteek Reddy of Telangana partnered Arnab Pathange of Karnataka to win the doubles title, beating the top two seeds along the way, at the All India National Ranking tennis tournament being held at Lakeview Tennis Academy in Hyderabad.

In the finals, Karteek and Arnab dished out their best game to topple top seeds Ishan Hussain and Irfan Hussain of Tamil Nadu in straight sets at 7-5, 6-3.

Both teams went toe-to-toe in the first set and slugged it out for points before Karteek & Arnab clinched it at 7-5. Buoyed by the lead, they turned up heat in the second to go full throttle before sealing it at 6-3 and with it, the title.

Earlier in the semifinals, Karteek & Arnab sailed past Kavay Masilamani & Hitesh of Tamil Nadu 6-2, 6-3.

In the quarterfinals, the winners saw off second seeds K. S. Dheeraj & Ribhav Kiran of Karnataka in straight sets, 6-2, 6-4.

Laxmi-Rithika best pair;  
Hrishik-Dhiraj also win

**DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1**

Laxmi Siri Dandu & Rithika Kakarlamudi and Hrishik Vavilapally & Dhiraj Reddy emerged winners of the girls and boys doubles events respectively at the AITA Championship Series Under 16 tournament at Sania Mirza Tennis Academy in Murtuzaguda, Hyderabad, on Thursday.

In the girls final, Laxmi &

Rithika defeated Yashasri & Sreemanya in straight sets 6-0, 6-1. Hrishik & Dhiraj were stretched by Nikhil D'Souza & P. Sandilya before clinching the boys title round with a 6-4, 3-6, 11-9 scoreline.

## THE RESULTS

■ **Girls U-16 doubles final:** Laxmi Siri Dandu/ Rithika Kakarlamudi bt Yashasri P/ Sreemanya A 6-0, 6-1.

■ **Boys U-16 doubles final:** Hrishik Vavilapally/ Dhiraj

Reddy bt Nikhil D'Souza/ P. Sandilya 6-4, 3-6, 11-9. **Semifinals:** Harshik Vavilapally/ Dhiraj Reddy bt G. Yashwanth/ Trishant Reddy 6-2, 3-6, 10-5; Nikhil D'Souza/ P. Sandilya bt T. Sri Pranav/ Rohan Sriram 3-6, 6-1, 10-6.

■ **Boys U-16 singles semifinals:** Chris Hamilton bt Harsha Perla 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7-3); T. Sri Pranav bt P. Sandilya 6-4, 6-4.

■ **Girls U-16 semifinals:** Rithika Kakarlamudi bt G. Hansika 7-5, 6-2; M. Manogyna bt Pushti Laddha 6-4, 6-4.