









# Process of eliminating mafia has begun, says UP Min ahead of Ansari's return

LUCKNOW

UTTAR Pradesh minister Sidharth Nath Singh on Monday alleged that the Punjab Government made every effort to stall the handover of gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari to the UP police and asserted that stringent action will be taken against criminals, irrespective of their religion or caste, by the Yogi Adityanath dispensation.

He was speaking after an 80-member team of the UP police, accompanied by a unit of Provincial Armed Constabulary

(PAC), left from Banda for Punjab to bring bank Ansari, the jailed BSP MLA from Mau who is facing 52 cases in UP and other states.

"No criminal will be spared by the government of Yogi Adityanath. The process of eliminating the mafia has begun. Law and order will remain established in the state. Punjab Government made every effort so that Mukhtar Ansari is not handed over to UP Police. But, it had to bow before the commitment of the UP Government," Singh said.

The UP Government strongly pursued the



case in the Supreme Court. As a result, the court ordered the Punjab Government to hand over Mukhtar Ansari (to UP), said the

minister who holds several portfolios including Textiles, and Export Promotion. Asked about the ambulance used to ferry Ansari to a court in Punjab that was found mysteriously abandoned on a highway there, Singh said, "The Punjab Government is accountable on this." Hitting out at the opposition parties, he alleged they were seeing communalism in the action being taken against a criminal.

"Parties such as the SP, BSP and the Congress tried to project and sell the mafia in the name of (fighting) communalism. The thought process of the BJP is opposite to

this. Irrespective of the fact that the criminal is a big one, or he belongs to any particular religion or caste, strict action will be initiated," the minister said. Additional Director General of Police Prashant Kumar in a statement here said that there are 52 cases registered against Ansari in UP and other states. Of these, 15 are in the trial stage, the statement said, adding that prosecution work will be completed soon and the guilty will face punishment.

"Mukhtar (Ansari) had committed heinous crimes in eastern Uttar Pradesh including the murder of policemen. He had

formed a gang of criminals and shooters in the state. "He had also established contacts with the gang of Sahabuddin in Bihar to establish a strong crime network and empire," the statement said and added that Ansari established his hold over the coal market and contracts in eastern UP.

The UP Government has initiated strong action against Mukhtar Ansari and his aides by dismantling their empire under the Gangster Act. "The estimated worth of properties of Mukhtar Ansari and his aides seized/demolished/freed stands at over Rs 192 crore," the statement said.

# Copters begin firefighting operations in Uttarakhand

DEHRADUN

IAF helicopters on Monday began firefighting operations in Uttarakhand, conducting several sorties over the burning forests in Garhwal region of the state to spray water over the raging flames and extinguish them.

An Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter with a bucket carrying around 3,500 litres of water from Tehri lake was deployed to douse the forest fire in Gaja, Pokhri and Quili in the district, said Narendra Nagar DFO and the nodal officer of the campaign D S Meena.

The helicopter has made four sorties so far to extinguish the fires in these forests located in Narendra Nagar area of the district, he said. Similar sorties will also be conducted by the IAF helicopter on Tuesday to pour water over the burning forests of Thauldhar block of the district, Tehri DFO Koko Rose said. Boating activities in the Tehri lake



were kept suspended during the day so that the IAF helicopter can collect water from the lake in an uninterrupted way. Meanwhile, another IAF helicopter stationed in Kumaon for the purpose could not undertake sorties due to low

visibility caused by a thick cover of smoke emanating from the smouldering forests, Kumaon DFO Tejaswini Patil Dhakate said. There are 40 active fire spots in the forests of Garhwal and Kumaon regions with Naini-

tal, Almora, Tehri and Pauri districts being the worst-hit, forest officials said. Since January this year, there have been 983 incidents of forest fire in the state affecting 1,292 hectares of land, they said.

## 99 students, 23 staff of HP school test positive

SHIMLA

AT least 99 students and 23 staff members of an elite residential public school in Himachal Pradesh's Dalhousie resort in Chamba district have been tested positive for coronavirus, officials said. Deputy Commissioner D.C. Rana told the media that all patients of Dalhousie Public School were asymptomatic. "All of them have been kept in isolation and a medical team is monitoring their health," he said. The school was set up in 1970 and it has several students from non-resident Indian families and prominent personalities. The government has already closed all educational institutions in the state till April 15 owing to spike in coronavirus cases. However, the teaching and non-teaching staff will perform duty. The coaching centres and all medical, dental and nursing institutions will remain open in strict compliance of the SOPs issued by the Health Department, an official statement said.

The educational institutions having residential facility can remain open too.

## UP govt to transfer money into kids' account for uniform, bags

LUCKNOW

EACH student in a government school in Uttar Pradesh will now get a sum of Rs 1,100 in his or her bank account for buying school uniform, bag and shoes.

The decision has been taken to avoid delays in distribution of these items every year.

According to the government spokesman, "After a decision by the basic education department about depositing a certain amount into each beneficiary's account for the procurement of uniforms, school bags and shoes, the proposal has been sent to the cabinet."

While Rs 600 would be given to each child for uniforms, Rs 500 would be provided for school bags, sweaters, socks and shoes.

The money will be transferred to the students' accounts via the direct benefit

transfer scheme.

Notably, 1.6 crore students are given these facilities every year for free in Uttar Pradesh.

However, the procurement of items for children presently lies with the government and



the private players whose tenders are accepted.

There have been complaints about the delay that forced the authorities to take this step. The move to transfer the money to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries will not only prevent the delays but will also address the quality concerns.

## UP wedding guests capped at 100, panchayat campaign at 5

LUCKNOW

THE Yogi Adityanath government has said that not more than 100 persons will be allowed at a time in weddings and other functions in view of the spiraling Covid cases.

The chief minister gave these instructions at a meeting of Team 11 here on Monday morning. Guests will have to adhere to safety protocols that include wearing masks and maintaining social distancing.

The chief minister has also asked candidates in the upcoming panchayat elections to campaign only in groups of five and to wear masks.

The new order on Monday, is



bound to cause considerable inconvenience to those who are hosting weddings in the coming days and have already invited guests more than the prescribed numbers.

"My daughter's wedding is on April 23 and I have already sent out invites to about 200 persons, besides there will be guests coming with the 'baraat'. I do not know how to tell the guests now that I am withdrawing the invite. This is impossible," said Shirram Swarup, a local businessman.

## Doctors concerned over rising pollution in Punjab

CHANDIGARH

CONCERNED over the rising air pollution and its severe health impact on the people of Punjab, medical practitioners of the Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali tricity came together for a health convention held here on Monday.

The convention, which was organised keeping in mind the World Health Day on April 7, aimed at bringing medical practitioners together on a common platform to draw attention to the health cost of air pollution and the urgent need for mitigation.

The convention was organised by Clean Air Punjab -- a collective of individuals and organisations working on the issue of air pollution along with the Lung Care Foundation and Doctors for Clean Air.



Senior doctors comprising Zafar Ahmad of the Department of Pulmonology, Sleep and Critical Care Medicine in Fortis Hospital, Vanita Gupta, IMA President (Chandigarh), Preeti Arun Joint Director, GRIID, Reena Jain, clinic in charge, GRIID, Diljit Singh

Bedi, Consultant Paediatrics and Neonatology with Fortis, and Wasim Ahmad Assistant Professor (Intellectual Disability) with GRIID were part of the panel.

The engaging discussion highlighted the pressing need for action on air quality, both

in terms of awareness and education as well as to try and take active measures to reduce the risks of air pollution on health.

According to Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Survey 2019, air pollution was responsible for more than 40,000 deaths in Punjab in 2019.

There are nine non-attainment cities in Punjab and six of these have one real-time monitoring station each. During winter 2020, daily averages of PM2.5 concentrations were as high as 180 ug/m3 (three times the permissible limit) on some days.

Arvind Kumar, Chest Surgeon, Founder and Managing Trustee with Lung Care Foundation and doctors for Clean Air said that air pollution is a serious health hazard affecting the entire country.

## Upset over failing eyesight, farmer ends life

SHAHJAHANPUR

UNABLE to bear the cost of treatment for failing vision, a 42-year-old farmer in Uttar Pradesh's Faridabad village, committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree.

The deceased identified as Ram Singh, had lost the vision in one eye and doctors had advised him to get his both eyes operated as the disease was spreading to the other eye as well. Singh was worried that he would soon lose his eyesight and if he borrowed money for the surgery, he would not be able to repay since he was a small farmer. A relative said: "Singh had neither a medical card nor did have the money for his surgery. He used to sit under a fig tree outside the village for hours worrying about his future without eyesight. On Sunday, he left home in the morning and was found hanging from the same tree a few hours later."

Singh is survived by five minor children, four sons and a daughter, and his wife Madhuri. Ajay Nagar, a member of the autopsy team, told media: "The victim was suffering from a chronic eye disease and had lost vision in the left eye. His eyes were swollen. However, the reason for his death is hanging."

## Centre encroaching upon rights of States: Punjab CM

CHANDIGARH

Reiterating his full support for the farmers and the arhtiyas, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Monday flayed the BJP-led Central government for encroaching upon the rights of the states in its bid to dominate them.

While castigating it over its one-sided decision to forcibly impose the farm laws and the direct benefit transfer (DBT) on the state's farming community, he said the states never faced such problems earlier. Slamming the government of India for trying to destroy the existing relations and systems that



had worked well for more than 100 years, in the name of so-called reforms, the Chief Minister said the Centre is trying to impose the farm laws without taking the stakeholders into confidence.

Punjab's farmers and arhtiyas have age-old cordial ties, which the Centre is hell-bent on damaging, he said, terming the government

of India's tough posturing and ill-conceived decisions as being against the basic spirit of federalism. He said during his earlier tenure, he enjoyed the full confidence and support of former Prime Minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and subsequently that of Manmohan Singh, in all major policy decisions and development issues related to Punjab.

Virtually launching the two-day Kisan Mela organised by the Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Ludhiana, the Chief Minister expressed his solidarity with the farmers against the farm laws imposed by the Centre.

## MCD, DJB lock horns over borewell sealing in parks

NEW DELHI

DAYS after the National Green Tribunal (NGT) pointed to depleting groundwater levels in the national capital and directed the authorities to stop using groundwater for maintaining parks, the civic authorities and the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) are at loggerheads.

While the development and maintenance of parks in the city comes under the MCD which has over 15,000 parks across the city, the DJB, which comes under the Delhi Government, has sealed around 150 bore-wells located in municipal parks. The conflict



emerged also because civic authorities are ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) while the DJB comes under the AAP government.

As per the information, Delhi's three civic bodies have over 15,000 parks and are maintaining

around 4000 bore-wells to provide water for maintenance of parks. The DJB, following the NGT norms, started sealing bore-wells in parks which did not go down well with the BJP-ruled civic authorities.

The authorities have accused the DJB of failing to provide water for parks from its Sewerage Treatment Plants (STP). The South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC), which has around 6,872 parks and 1,398 tubewells, has asked the DJB to provide water for maintenance of parks else many parks will lose their greenery with the mercury soaring.

# Garbage bank opened in Varanasi, to fill people's pockets with money

VARANASI

A unique waste bank has been opened in Uttar Pradesh's Varanasi, which is also the parliamentary constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to keep the environment clean. This bank involves transactions through plastic waste. The plastic is collected by the people of the city, volunteers of the plastic waste bank as well as consumers and deposited here.

If the quantity of plastic is less, then an individual is given a cloth bag or face mask in lieu of that plastic waste. On bringing a larger quantity of plastic, money is given to the people according to the weight of the plastic waste. This bank is helping to fill the pockets of people

in exchange for plastic waste.

This bank located at Maldahiya in Varanasi is called the 'Plastic waste bank'.

According to Municipal Commissioner Gaurang Rathi, KGN and UNDP are working on the Public-Private Engagement (PPE) model. A ten metric ton capacity plant has been set up at Ashapur in Varanasi. There is a ban on polythene in the city. Tetra packs and water bottles are in circulation which are disposed by recycling them.

KGN Director Sabir Ali said the city collects nearly two tons of polythene waste every day. Apart from this used drinking water bottles are purchased for Rs 25 per kg. After processing this waste,



it sells for nearly Rs 32-Rs 38 per kg. He said plastic buckets, cans, mugs etc. are purchased at Rs 10 per kg which are

sold after saving Rs four to five. The bank also takes waste like cardboard etc for recycling. The plastic waste collected in

this bank is deposited at the sewage treatment plant at Ashapur. The plastic waste is pressured with the help of a pressure machine.

The plastic is separated in which the polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles are pressed with a hydraulic baling machine and collected in the form of a bundle which is sent for further processing. Other plastic wastes are also separated and are sent for recycling. This waste is then sent to Kanpur and other places, where with the help of a machine, the plastic waste is used to make plastic pipes, polyester threads, shoe laces and other material. In this initiative by the Municipal Corporation, this bank has been created for the disposal of plastic

waste.

V.D. Tripathi, Chairman of the Mahamana Malviya Ganga Research Centre, BHU, said the carbon molecules are smaller and lighter on burning polythene which penetrates inside the nose. This reduces a person's ability to breathe. The plastic can't be disposed off easily.

If the burnt plastic waste is swallowed by living organisms, then it results in swollen stomach which ultimately causes death. If this plastic is thrown on the roads and is eaten by cows and other animals, then it is harmful for them. It causes more physical harm than poisoning. There would be a lot of benefits from opening such a waste bank.





# 1 in 4 online users allow apps access to mic, webcam

ALMOST a quarter of online users always give apps and services permission to access their microphone or webcam, according to a global study of 15,000 people.

However, overall awareness of webcam security is promisingly high, with nearly six-in-ten worried that someone could be watching them through their webcam without them knowing, and 60 per cent concerned that this could be done via malicious software, said the study conducted by cybersecurity firm Kaspersky.

But the results come at a time when there is higher usage of video conferencing platforms amid the pandemic.

Understandably, with these technologies and apps helping people to navigate the events of the past year across work, social and entertainment needs, people have expressed a willingness to allow app access to their microphone and camera.

These tools have served as an enricher and facilitator of everyone's sudden digital transitions, leading to 27 per cent of people aged 25-34 always permitting access, according to Kaspersky research.

This is less common among older age demographics, however, with 38 per cent respondents aged 55 years and older revealing they never give apps and services such access.

"For sure, many people aren't instantly familiar with security protocols related to webcam usage and cybersecurity processes. However, what we are observing now is a strong positive trend of increased awareness around online safety and potential threats," Marina Titova, Head of Consumer Product Marketing at Kaspersky, said in a statement.

"This leads to more proactive consumer behaviour like taking preventive actions and checking permissions before allowing video and microphone access."

The best way to balance sufficient caution, while continuing to benefit from modern means of communication, would be to exercise mindful consideration around the apps and services people are using and what permissions they request.

For example, if a video calling app has camera permissions that would make sense. But if there is an app without any relevant functionality requesting access to a person's mic for no justifiable reason, it might be better to investigate and explore permissions.

Users can take various measures to feel safer while using webcams. Some of the measures recommended by Kaspersky include investing in a simple, dedicated webcam cover to provide peace of mind when the tool is not being used and using an effective security solution that offers advanced protection and covers multiple devices including PC, Mac, Android, and iOS devices. (IANS)



# Two trend-setting books set to clear the air on Indian data

TWO new books by Chennai-based data journalist Rukmini S, "Whole Numbers and Half-Truths: What Data Tells Us About Modern India" and "India in 100 Charts", to be published by Westland, are set to release in quick succession

The first is a sleek, ambitious book that sets out to answer 10 big questions about how India operates. Currently, most of the narrative is based on manifestly bad data, and it is to counter this that Rukmini takes a deep dive into the subject by drawing on extensive data sources and her own experiences from reporting across the length and breadth of the country.

Her second book captures fundamental changes in the country through surprising data points and engaging visuals to show us what we are really all about. A fascinating read and an essential addition to the bookshelf of every student, reporter, academician, policy-maker and just about any curious mind, this will be a collaboration with the artist and illustrator Satwik Gade.

Commenting on the acquisition, Rukmini S said: "I am thrilled at the opportunity to share what I've learnt from years of grappling not only with numbers, but with how they relate to lived reality. These are simply the stories of how India lives life, but with a wealth of data behind the insights. I look forward to surprising readers and for us to challenge our own dearly-held assumptions about the country."

Anish Chandy of Labyrinth Literary Agency said, "Rukmini's books were acquired by Westland in a keenly contested auction. Her unique approach where hard-to-source data meets accessible narrative will deeply enrich our understanding of India. Context has built a formidable portfolio in this genre."

Karthika V.K., Publisher, Westland Publications, said the two books are bound to change the way Indians - and the world - think about India. "Rukmini's writing is revelatory. It draws on painstakingly unearthed and carefully plotted data to provide a precise and often startling understanding of trends as well as truths that we would all be better off knowing," she added.

Rukmini S is the first Data Editor of an Indian newsroom. She is the recipient of several journalism awards, the most recent of which was the Emergent Ventures Covid-19 India Prize for her pandemic podcast, "The Moving Curve". Her work focuses on data-driven storytelling around gender, politics, crime, consumption, inequality and caste.

# The looming danger of reinfection

A team of scientists from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has identified a set of most plausible cases of reinfection of SARS-CoV2 virus in India. The scientists examined the cases of 1,300 individuals who had tested positive for the virus twice and had undergone tests even between the two positive results. The study found that the cases of 58 of the 1,300 individuals, or 4.5 per cent, could actually be classified as possible reinfections. In these 58, the two positive results had come at least 102 days apart, and they also had a negative test result in between.

The study is based on telephone interviews with people selected from ICMR's laboratory database of at least 80 million individuals tested between January 22 and October 7, 2020. The government has been working on a definition for 'reinfection' of cases since October. The 4.5 per cent who were found infected were people infected in the first wave. "This is an averaged out figure over a period of about eight months - January to October 2020 -, which will vary with

behaviour and intensity of epidemic," said Dr Balram Bhargava, director general, ICMR.

India has now breached one lakh cases limit and deaths have touched more than 700, as a month-long surge continued in the country. With this, the country's tally has risen to 12,485,509 and its death toll to 164,623, the health ministry's dashboard showed at 8 am of April 4. India, the third-worst country hit by the pandemic, on April 3 reported 89,129 Covid-19 cases in a day, the highest daily rise in around six-and-half-months. This was the highest daily figure since September 20 last year - 92,605 infections were recorded in 24 hours on that day.

The 714 fatalities in a day were also the highest since October 21. The number of daily Covid-19 cases peaked on September 17 last year with 97,894 infections recorded on that day. India began witnessing a gradual decline in cases of the coronavirus disease after that. India has again begun to record the highest number of daily infections in the world. Even in

terms of the seven-day rolling average of daily cases, a more reliable indicator of trends, India's tally of nearly 73,000 is the highest in the world, especially since Brazil's graph has been declining over the past few days.

It's not yet clear why the state of Maharashtra is reporting more than half of India's daily infections, while other populous states, such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, are yet to witness a steep rise. There is no shortage of potentially super-spreader gatherings in West Bengal, where large political gatherings are being organised every day. Maharashtra's Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, in his televised address on April 2, said his state is not "hiding" anything, which was a swipe at the low testing numbers of the other states.

What is of utmost interest here is not just the number of cases per day but the percentage of reinfection. This should come as a warning to all those who think they would never again be re-infected having gone through the agony of Covid-19. Indians have shown remarkable restraint during the last year's lockdown. It is time for a self-restraint again. The danger is not yet completely over.

## ₹100 crore bribe on Maharashtra Home Minister

# Is it possible for CBI to probe and prove?



IT is almost impossible to prove 'bribery' at the top level of governance, especially to punish a minister or a police officer or even a Chief Minister, because the criminal justice system demands evidence of very high standard, i.e. beyond reasonable doubt. The media gives a misleading headline whenever a charged public servant is acquitted in a corruption case that 'court gave a clean chit'. If some one could not be punished for want of evidence, it does not mean his innocence. Perhaps it is a testimonial for his capacity to prevent evidence reaching the court.

Justice is impossible in any country without evidence, and genuine evidence is impossible to be brought to the court of law in our country. Param Bir Singh, who was shunted out of the Mumbai Police Commissionerate and took charge as the Commandant General Home Guards, wrote an eight-page letter to CM Uddhav Thackeray on March 20, accusing Deshmukh of holding meetings with subordinate police officers, including suspended API Sachin Waze, and seeking a collection of Rs 100 crore from the 1750 bars and restaurants, in Mumbai. Home Minister Deshmukh has denied the allegations.

"It is said that none can see time, but many a time, time makes us see many things hitherto before unseen. So true. The proceedings of which we are seized lays bare incidents, allegations and approaches of a kind which, at least, the two of us have not experienced before. It is time that has made us realize that the realities of life would have to be examined to give shape to law, for, law would cease to serve its purpose if justice cannot be administered". These are the words of the division of Bench of Bombay High Court on 5th April 2021, while recognizing the need to investigate allegation of 100 crore bribe from 'police department'.

### Threat to justice

An accredited police officer, an advocate and a self-proclaimed criminologist, an advocate, and a chartered accountant-cum-teacher along with a social worker filed PILs seeking probe into this allegation. Before the High Court, advocates raised some technical issues and legal hitches in dealing with such allegations. Answering this the HC said: "We are thus of the view that since the law courts exist for the society, technicalities ought not to stand in the way".

The Court quoted Martin Luther King, Jr., who said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere", which has been accepted by the Supreme Court to be true in N. Kannadasan V/s. Ajay Khose, re-

ported in (2009) 7 SCC 1, while proceeding to hold that the people's faith in the judiciary cannot be afforded to be eroded. Bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Dutta and Justice GS Kulkarni concluded:

1. Allegations by former PC Parambir Singh against the Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh are of a "serious nature" that warrant a preliminary enquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

### Faith in police and credibility

2. Prima facie, the issues are such that the very faith of citizens in the functioning of the police department is at stake.
3. If there is any amount of truth in such allegations, certainly it has a direct effect on the citizens' confidence in the police machinery in the State. Such allegations, therefore, cannot remain unattended and are required to be looked into in the manner known to law when, prima facie, they indicate commission of a cognizable offence.
4. It is, hence, certainly an issue of credibility of the State machinery, which would stare at the face when confronted with the expectations of the law and when such complaints are received against high ranking public officials".

### Court cannot be a spectator

5. This Court cannot be a "mere spectator in these circumstances". The bench rejected the objections raised by the Advocate General of Maharashtra AG Kumbhakoni against the maintainability of the PILs. These objections are frivolous.
6. Dr. Patil, had lodged a complaint before the police seeking action on the allegations made by Singh against the Home Minister. However, no legal action followed on Dr. Patil's complaint. The CrWP of Dr. Patil raises an important issue of lack of enforcement of law by the police.

### Allegation unheard of

7. Since Dr. Patil has prayed for investigation into her complaint by the CBI, she could not have moved the Magistrate under Section 156(3), CrPC, the High Court noted. Only the High Court has the power to order CBI investigation. Dr. Patil had submitted her complaint to the Senior Police Inspector of the Malabar Hill Police Station on March 21, 2021; however, except for making an entry in the Inward Register, no action whatsoever, as the law would mandate, was initiated. The bench said that the serious nature of the allegations and the issue of public faith in police machinery in the State justified the demand for CBI investigation. "...it is indeed unheard of and unprecedented that a Minister could be so openly accused of wrongdoings and corrupt



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practices by none other than a senior police officer attracting wide attention from all and sundry.

### Legitimate expectation

8. There is certainly a legitimate public expectation of a free, fair, honest and impartial inquiry and investigation into such allegations which have surfaced in the public domain. The necessity to have a probe into such allegations by an independent agency, would also certainly be a requirement of the rule of law. To instil public confidence and safeguard the Fundamental Rights of the citizens, it is necessary that an inquiry and investigation is conducted by an independent agency and for such reasons, we consider it to be in the paramount public interest that an independent probe in the present circumstances would meet the ends of justice.
9. Here, Shri Deshmukh is the Home Minister. The police department is under his control and direction. There can be no fair, impartial, unbiased, and untainted probe, if the same were entrusted to the State Police Force. As of necessity, the probe has to be entrusted to an independent agency like the CBI.
10. Constitution envisages rule of law and not rule of goons. Rule of law, in terms

## LETTERS

### Heart-wrenching loss

THE ideology of Maoists can never be realized through their violent activities. Killing jawans and getting killed in encounters is witnessed as a continual phenomena since decades but neither state or central government could extinguish this massacre permanently. Is it a big job to encircle their pockets and nab them? Sukma encounter tragedy killing 22 jawans is heart wrenching.

Dr NSR Murthy, Secunderabad

### II

THE vexed Naxal menace could not be curbed by successive governments and it is a pity nation is losing precious lives of security personnel (Chhattisgarh encounter toll 22, April 5). How the centre failed to take responsibility to this burning "naxal" problem, when it takes pride for resolving issues like Ayodhya, Article 370, triple talaq? How long 7 year old Modi government blame it on foreign countries or Congress regime or act of God without introspecting itself for the failures? It's claim that naxal activities are controlled due to note ban is also proved to be fake.

Kshirasagara Balaji Rao, Hyderabad

### III

IT saddened us that many lives were lost in the encounter between the central paramilitary forces and the Maoists in the jungles of Sukma. We are diminished by the casualties on both the sides. Standing on the side of common humanity, we mourn for all those who died in the fierce gun-battles of which (and the events leading to them) there are different versions. Loss of life of both the security personnel tasked with protecting the interest of the state and the left-wing rebels who have taken to the path of armed resistance is tragic.

G David Milton, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

### Hasten vaccination, rein in complacency

MOST of the citizens have lost the initial fears of Covid-19. The arrival of the vaccine has perhaps emboldened them to break free & flout all Covid appropriate behaviour. The Govt on its part wasn't that strict in implementing these guidelines & loosened its grip. This was enough for the pandemic to raise its ugly head in the form of a 2nd wave.

Against this background, the Centre and all the affected States have to redou-

ble its efforts and expedite the vaccination drive. Insistence on rigid formalities like pre-registration has to be done away with forthwith. The biometric data produced through Aadhar, voter- ID, PAN card, driving licence can be sufficient enough to go ahead with the vaccination. Centre needs to issue necessary guidelines if it's really serious about expediting the inoculation exercise to end the pandemic on a war footing

N R Raghuram, Hyderabad

### II

INDIA recorded the highest single-day rise in coronavirus cases in six months with 89,019 new infections in a span of 24 hours, according to data released by the State Health Departments and ministries on Friday. This alarming surge in numbers came on the day when the Centre, following a high-level meeting, categorised 11 States/UTs as "States of grave concern" on account of their high and rising daily cases and deaths. Curbs on movement have been restricted and night curfew imposed in several of these states to curb the spread of this second wave of the virus.

The reasons for the sharp rise in cases

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could be mainly attributed to the severe decline in compliance of COVID-appropriate behaviour, especially in the use of masks and social distancing, pandemic fatigue and lack of effective implementation of containment measures at the field level. In the meanwhile, testing has been increased and it is time to speed up the vaccination drive with a 24x7 schedule in all the major cities.

C K R Nathan, Ghaziabad

### III

IT is quite sad and heartbreaking to know the news of the rapid rise in the COVID-19 positive cases. COVID-19 fatalities have been rising steadily and alarmingly for the last couple of weeks in India. Restrictions have been imposed by the government and the vaccination drive is in the full swing. Yet the cases have been rising rampantly. Massive political campaigns and public entertainments like cinema halls, bar and wedding receptions are being encouraged relentlessly. However, the authorities concerned of the areas who are responsible for looking after this, wash their hands of leaving all the responsibilities on the shoulders of the poor and hapless public. This is quite deplorable and condemnable.

Prabhakaran Vallath, Vatakara, Kerala



# COVID +VE CLAMOUR FOR KITS, MEDICINES

Coming out of home quarantine, many queue up along with others who have come for testing or vaccination to seek help

MOHAMMED HUSSAIN  
HYDERABAD

AMID the surging Covid-19 cases, the authorities are failing to provide basic facilities to the Covid positive patients in home quarantine as well as the asymptomatic who have imposed self-isolation upon themselves at home. As a result, the hapless, especially the poor, are rushing to Koranti Fever Hospital for medicines and home isolation kits.

More shocking is that they are using public transport to reach the hospital. They say they know they are putting others at risk, but they are helpless as they cannot afford private transport. A prior planning by officials before the second wave of Covid hit the city would have prevented such a sorry state of affairs.

These patients asked the government to provide them with home isolation kit which comprises medicine, masks, gloves, sanitizer and other necessities. Sushil Kumar, who stood sixth in the queue, said, "On getting a job opportunity abroad I had to undergo mandatory Covid test for visa process. Following which I was detected with asymptomatic infection and later three members from my also tested positive."

"Out of the five family mem-

With no medicines and kits being provided for those in home isolation, patients, who cannot afford, going in droves to govt hospitals. Poor as they are, they cannot afford private transport. When will such shocking facts matter to the government, ask concerned people



bers, four have tested positive. As we are under home quarantine, getting medicines and other necessities has become a great difficulty. In spite of knowing that I might cause infection to others, I had to leave my home for medicines and come to hospital by public transport, he added.

Like in the previous year the GHMC must provide home isolation kit to the Covid-19 patients, he urged.

Many such worried patients who have been asked to stay under quarantine say that the

health wing of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) is failing to meet its medical and other essential services.

"I tested positive almost a week ago and all these days I only took Paracetamol tablet. Only when my neighbor informed me that I should be taking other medicine I came to the hospital. I am standing in the queue for almost half an hour. Even Basti Dawakhana doctor didn't tell me which medicine to take," said Mohammad Saleem, 58 years-old

Out of the five family members, four have tested positive. As we are under home quarantine, getting medicines and other necessities has become a great difficulty. In spite of knowing that I might cause infection to others, I had to leave my home for medicines and come to hospital by public transport

— A Covid Positive Patient

auto driver. As many as 40 patients were seen standing in the queue.

Last year GHMC health department distributed as many as 20,000 'self-care kits' to mildly symptomatic and asymptomatic Covid-19 patients, who were under home quarantine.

However, according to the state health department media bulletin, as on Monday 302 new cases have been reported, whereas, in the past three days, the active cases were 283 and 253. And there are 79.2 per cent of asymptomatic cases in the State and 26.2 per cent of symptomatic cases.

## 4-fold rise in Covid cases in Telangana

Recovery rate drops further to 96.65%; fatality rate remains at 0.55%

HYDERABAD

WITH the continuing surge, the number of active Covid-19 cases in Telangana saw more than a four-fold increase over the last month. The official figures show that the active cases have jumped to 8,746 on April 4 from 1,948 on March 3. The state has been witnessing a spike in daily count over the last few weeks.

From 152 cases on March 3, the daily count climbed to 1,321 on April 3. During the last 24-hour period that ended at 8 p.m. on Sunday, the state reported 1,097 new infections. The drop was apparently due to fewer tests conducted over the weekend. The health authorities tested 43,070 samples against 62,973 the previous day.

With the fresh cases, the state's cumulative tally has gone up to 3,13,237. Six more people succumbed to the virus during the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 1,723.

According to the Director of Public Health and Family Welfare, the fatality rate remains at 0.55% against the national average of 1.33%. The admissions into hospitals treating Covid cases have also gone up. A total of 4,288 Covid patients were undergoing treatment in 61 government and 229 private hospitals. This number was 4,057 the previous day. The spike in cases continued in several districts. Hyderabad reported 302 cases, the highest



With the fresh cases, the state's cumulative tally has gone up to 3,13,237. Six more people succumbed to the virus during the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 1,723

in the state. Medchal Malkajgiri and Rangareddy districts bordering the state capital were the other worst-hit districts with 138 and 116 cases

respectively. Nizamabad recorded 77 cases followed by Sangareddy (52), Nirmal (42), Karimnagar (38), Jagtial (32), Warangal Urban (28), Kamareddy (28), Adilabad (24), and Mahaboobnagar (22). A total of 268 people recovered from the pandemic during the last 24 hours, taking the cumulative recoveries to 3,02,768. The recovery rate has slipped further to 96.65% but still above the national average of 92.8%. Of the total tests conducted during the last 24 hours, 37,338 samples were tested in government laboratories and 5,732 in private labs. With this, the number of tests conducted in the state so far climbed to 1,04,35,997. Samples tested per million population rose to 2,80,386.

## BJP confronts Jagan on temple attacks

TIRUPATI

IN the run-up to the Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll, BJP national secretary and Andhra Pradesh co-incharge, Sunil Deodhar, on Monday questioned Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy as to where the culprits involved in the alleged temple attacks were.

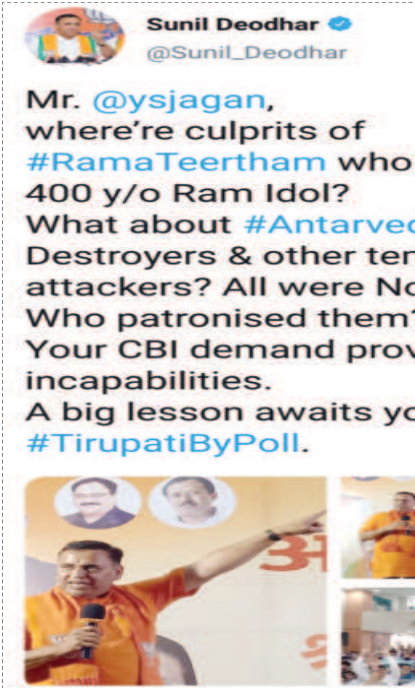
"Mr Reddy, where are the culprits of Ramateertham who beheaded (a) 400-year-old Ram idol? What about Antarvedi chariot destroyers and other temple attackers?" said Deodhar in a tweet.

Without furnishing any evidence, Deodhar claimed that all the people involved in those temple attacks were non-Hindus.

"All were non-Hindus. Who patronised them? Your CBI demand proved your incapability. A big lesson awaits you all in Tirupati bypoll," he claimed.

The BJP leader issued a warning to the ruling YSRCP to stop the alleged religious conversions.

"I warn (the) ruling YSRCP government to stop sponsoring religious conversions in AP. Otherwise, they will face dire consequences. This time, people will



Party national secretary, AP Co-Incharge Sunil Deodhar asks CM where are the culprits involved in Ramateertham and Antarveti incidents

Warns of 'direct consequences' if the YSRCP doesn't stop 'sponsoring' religious conversions

Claiming that perpetrators are non-Hindus, he wants to know who are patronising them

show their strong discontent by voting against them in Tirupati by-poll. BJP-JSP (Janasena) is the only alternative," he claimed.

Deodhar claimed that saffron surge in the southern state is inevitable.

Earlier, he met the local Rajasthani community in Tirupati and appealed to them to vote for the BJP in the Tirupati by-poll.

He also met leaders and supporters of the Kapu Sankshema Sena in Tirupati.

## TDP contestants refuse to call it quits

MPTC-ZPTC POLLS

- In many traditional strongholds of TDP, candidates are not in a mood to leave the poll battle since this will be their once-in-five-years opportunity
- They also can use the excuse of boycott decision in case they lose the polls

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
ANANTAPUR

WITH just three days to go for polling on April 8, TDP nominees for the Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency (ZPTC) and Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency (MPTC) are unable to digest the party decision to withdraw from electoral fray as the opportunity which comes only once in a five years will have to wait until 2026 if forfeited now.

The contestants who are in the middle of battle having spent considerable amount of money are unable to call it quits and continuing their campaigning though not a high profile one.

Most of the TDP contestants, especially those in TDP strongholds like Uravakonda constituency are engaged in a 'never say die' battle. Contestants are disinclined to quit especially in TDP pockets of influence where winning chances are based only on local factors and village politics.

However, TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu's decision to boycott the elections, the local TDP leaders feel, might serve as a face-saving move.

If they fared badly in the polls, they can say they withdrew from contest and did not actively campaign for their victory. In TDP pockets of influence, many of the contestants are likely to win despite no campaigning as the traditional voters would automatically press the TDP button.

There is also a discernible change in voters even in some of the TDP strongholds due to the



TDP leader and former Minister Bhuma Akhila Priya addressing media at Allagadda on Monday

## No question of boycotting polls, asserts Akhila

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
KURNOOL

TDP leader and former minister Bhuma Akhila Priya on Monday said that there was no question of party candidates boycotting MPTC and ZPTC elections under any circumstances.

Addressing the media at Allagadda on Monday, Akhila Priya came down heavily on the YSRCP government, saying that it was misusing its powers and trying to conduct elections in an unfair manner by exerting pres-

sure on the government officials and taking the support of police personnel. She alleged that they were pressurising the aspirants of opposition parties not to contest the elections.

She said that re-counting was not done during the gram panchayat election where the TDP aspirants had lost with a margin of 4 to 5 votes as the returning officers were strictly warned against to do so.

"The voters were also not allowed to exercise their franchise without fear. They were threat-

- The former Minister accuses the YSRCP govt of trying to conduct elections in an unfair manner by exerting pressure on officials
- Demands that the govt let the people freely elect the leaders of their choice

ened by the village volunteers that they would lose benefits of welfare schemes if they don't vote for the ruling party candidate," she said.

Akhila Priya demanded the government let the people elect leader of their choice and not to terrorise or mount pressure on them.

welfare benefits accrued to them through the ruling YSRCP government.

Some of them feel that Jagan Mohan Reddy's welfare agenda is on apolitical lines and he deserves to be supported unlike during the TDP rule when political lines were drawn clearly and benefits were distributed only on political lines based on political leanings and loyalties.

That is the reason for the increased vote share of YSRCP in Assembly and local body polls.

TDP local leadership feels that if panchayath elections were boycotted then there would have been justification as the battle was fought on non-political lines but to withdraw from a political battle fought on party symbols would be politically suicidal and would give credence to the YSRCP propaganda that the MPTC and ZPTC electorate also would formally vote for the party on the same lines as panchayath and municipal polls.

If the TDP wins, it can send a

## TS CM gives nod for releasing 1,850 cusecs from Vattem

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

CHIEF Minister K Chandrababu Naidu has agreed to a proposal to provide 1,850 cusecs from the Vattem reservoir in Ranga Reddy district to cover additional ayacut under the Kalwakurthy Lift Irrigation (KLI) scheme. This was stated by Agriculture Minister Singireddy Niranjan Reddy at a meeting held in his residence here on Sunday to review the works of KLI and Palamuru Ranga Reddy Lift Irrigation scheme.

Reddy directed officials to construct reservoirs to provide more water to the ayacut utilising less flood water. He asked them to expand the Ganapasamudram tank bund. The meeting decided to expand the Paspupula branch canal and to immediately complete the viaduct at Shapur in Khillaghanpur mandal to ensure provision of water in the ensuing monsoon season. It also decided to complete the pending work of the Budharam canal and call for tenders.

The meeting noted that since the Kalwakurthy ayacut has increased the present capacity of the canals would not be sufficient. It

Agriculture Minister Singireddy Niranjan Reddy says it will cover additional KLI ayacut



said although running of five pumps was possible, the previous governments had built canals of lesser capacity. Hence it was not possible to provide water for the present ayacut. The meeting noted that the earlier governments had proposed for 2.5 lakh ayacut under the KLI, but the current ayacut had increased to five lakh acres and that there was no possibility of taking water through canals, although there were pumps.

The officials told the meeting

that the Vattem reservoir water was being provided to meet the proposal to increase the KLI main canal capacity to 1.8 lakh acres.

The meeting was attended by MP Ramulu, MLAs G Balaraju, A Venkateshwar Reddy, Jaipal Yadav, B Harshvardhan Reddy, MLCs K Damodar Reddy, K Narayan Reddy, CE's Hameed Khan, Ramesh Raghunath Rao, SEs Satyaseela Reddy, A Satyanarayan Reddy, several DEs and EEs.

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
TADEPALLI

CHIEF Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy on Monday paid floral tributes to freedom fighter and social reformist Babu Jagjivan Ram on the occasion of his birth anniversary. The Chief Minister garlanded the portrait of Babu Jagjivan Ram and paid homage to him at the camp office here. Ministers Mekathoti Sucharitha, Pinepi Viswaroop,

Audimulapu Suresh, Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, CM events coordinator Talasila Raghuram, MP Nandigam Suresh, MLA Meruga Nagarjuna and others were present on the occasion.



Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy paying tributes to Babu Jagjivan Ram on his birth anniversary at his camp office in Tadepalli on Monday



# Chimpanzee poop is helping prevent coronavirus

Shirdi, Siddhivinayak Temples shut till further orders; 70 IIT-Jodhpur students test positive in one week

**NEW DELHI**

THE Oxford–AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine, a version of which is also being used in India, is made from an adenovirus isolated from chimpanzee poop, which has been genetically changed so that it is impossible for it to grow in humans. Now known as Covid-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca, it was formerly called AZD1222.

AZD1222 was co-invented by the University of Oxford and its spin-out company, Vaccitech. It uses a replication-deficient chimpanzee viral vector based on a weakened version of a common cold virus (adenovirus) that causes infections in chimpanzees and contains the genetic material of the SARS-CoV-2 virus spike protein.

After vaccination, the surface spike protein is produced, priming the immune system to attack the SARS-CoV-2 virus if it later infects the body.

The vaccine has been granted a conditional marketing authorisation or emergency use in more than 70 countries across six continents.

The Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine manufacturer by volume, is manufacturing a version of the Oxford–AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine named 'Covishield' in India.

Around 70 people including students and staff members at Rajasthan's IIT Jodhpur campus have tested positive for COVID-19 since last week, officials said. The students, most of them from Gujarat and Odisha, had returned to the institute to attend their mandatory laboratory



sessions after undergoing online classes in their home towns.

"Around March 11, some persons infected with COVID-19 had come here. They were from tribal villages Chandigarh, Gujarat and Jaipur. Then the cases started increasing," P Singh Deputy Chief Medical Health Officer (CMHO) said.

"Now almost 65-70 people have tested positive so far at Rajasthan's IIT Jodhpur. Of which 55-60 cases are active. There is no serious case. Block G3 on campus declared a micro-containment zone. Most of the positive students came from their houses in Chandigarh, Gujarat and Jaipur," he said.

The students have been quarantined in one of the hostels on the IIT campus, an IIT spokesper-

son said, adding all anti-Covid precautions are being taken.

Amid a surge in Covid-19 cases and the Maharashtra government's notification on restrictions, weekend lockdown and night curfew to contain it, officials of the renowned Saibaba temple in Shirdi decided to keep it shut from Monday night till further orders. Siddhivinayak temple has also been shut due to rising cases.

As per the Maharashtra government notification, religious places will remain closed due to the rise in COVID- 19 cases, and, therefore, the Saibaba temple will remain closed for devotees from Monday 8 pm till further orders, said Ravindra Thakre, the officiating chief executive officer, Shri Saibaba Sansthan Trust.

## WINDOWS



BJP MP and party leader Manoj Tiwari (R) during campaigning for West Bengal Assembly polls, in Kolkata, Monday

## March third warmest in 121 years: IMD

**NEW DELHI:** March was third warmest in 121 years in terms of monthly average maximum temperature. The IMD, in its review for the month, said the observed monthly average maximum, minimum and mean temperature for the country as a whole during March this year are 32.65 degrees Celsius, 19.95 degrees Celsius and 26.30 degrees Celsius, against the normal 31.24 degrees Celsius, 18.87 degrees Celsius and 25.06 degrees Celsius based on the climatology period 1981-2010. "The all India average monthly maximum temperature during March 2021 with 32.65 degrees Celsius is the warmest in the last 11 years with 2010 and 2004 as the ever warmest and second warmest month with 33.09 degrees Celsius and 32.82 degrees.

## 27 killed in ferry capsized

**DHAKA:** At least 27 people died after a small launch carrying over 100 passengers capsized after colliding with a cargo vessel in Bangladesh's Shitalakkhya river, officials said on Monday. The incident took place on Sunday evening at Narayanganj district, about 16 km southeast of Dhaka. While five bodies were recovered on Sunday, rescuers retrieved 22 bodies on Monday as a salvage vessel pulled out the launch with the help of a huge crane around midday, rescue officials said.

## Pak judge, kins shot dead

**ISLAMABAD:** A Pakistan anti-terrorism court judge, his wife and two children were killed after unidentified gunmen opened fire at his vehicle in Swabi district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police sources said. The judge was on his way to the national capital Islamabad when the militants ambushed him and killed him with his family members near an interchange at the motorway on Sunday, the sources told Xinhua news agency. Two policemen, including the judge's driver, were wounded in the attack, the sources added.

# Covid survivors rush for jab

Getting infected after vaccination cannot be ruled out: Raj Minister  
Modi government more concerned with image than saving lives: AAP

**NEW DELHI**

AS India witnesses a surge in Covid-19 caseloads, those who have survived the deadly disease and had antibodies for a certain period (up to six months) are now rushing to take the vital jab in order to avoid reinfections, health experts said on Monday.

Reinfection means a person once infected and recovered from the SARS-CoV2 virus -- the virus that causes Covid-19 -- gets infected again, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As is the case with other viruses, a case of reinfection cannot be ruled out, the agency had noted.

If a person gets infected and recovers, the "natural infection immune response" can last for nearly six months, says the World Health Organisation (WHO). However, the "protection may not be lifelong", hence, vaccination is important.

"Emergence of the second wave of Covid in the country also raises questions about longevity of sustained immunity post Covid infection. Hence, it is advisable to take vaccine for people who were earlier diagnosed with Covid," Dr Harshal R Salve, Associate Professor at the Centre for Community Medicine, AIIMS in New Delhi, told IANS.

Rajasthan Health Minister Raghu Sharma said that the possibility of getting infected with Covid-19 even after vaccination cannot be ruled out and those who got vaccinated should not give up wearing masks and maintaining social distancing.

The AAP questioned the Centre for sending vaccines across the world instead of further accelerat-



A health worker collects samples of a motorist for Covid-19 tests, as coronavirus cases spike across the country, in New Delhi on Monday

ing the inoculation drive within the country, claiming it will take at least 15 years to vaccinate the entire population of India at this rate.

AAP spokesperson Raghav Chadha questioned the reason for "exporting" vaccines and not supplying it to the people in India first. "Vaccination doses have been exported to 84 countries. The amount exported is higher than the number of vaccine doses given to the people in India. Should we care about people from our own country or from other countries?" Chadha said. "Where has the Centre's vaccine nationalism gone? The AAP demands an increase in the rate of vaccinations so that each and every Indian can get vaccinated," he

said. He further claimed that it will take 15 years to vaccinate the entire population of India if vaccination drive continues at the current pace. "Some scientists say that to contain the virus at least 70 per cent of the population has to be vaccinated. It will take 10 years to inoculate 70 per cent of the population of the country if the vaccination continues at the current pace.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking relaxed norms for opening vaccination centres, and asserted that all people here can be vaccinated against the coronavirus within three months if requisite permission is granted.



## Arch of world's highest Railway bridge on Chenab river complete

**KAURI**

THE construction of the arch of the world's highest railway bridge that soars 359 metres above the bed of the Chenab river in Jammu and Kashmir was completed on Monday, with the Northern Railways terming the achievement a milestone. The 1.3-kilometre-long bridge aims to boost connectivity to the Kashmir Valley and it is being constructed at a cost of Rs 1,486 crore as part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway Link (USBRL) project. The bridge, which is 35-metre higher than the Eiffel Tower in Paris, is expected to be completed within a year, officials said. "It is a historic day for the Northern Railways and a milestone in the completion of the USBRL project, connecting Kashmir with the rest of the country. The project will be completed within two and a half years," Northern Railway General Manager Ashutosh Gargal told reporters.

# No one succeeded by intimidating Bengalis: Jaya

**KOLKATA**

In an apparent dig at the BJP, Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan said on Monday that no one has ever succeeded by "intimidating" Bengalis. The veteran actor hailed Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, asserting that she was fighting a battle all alone for democracy in Bengal.

Bachchan said that she was in West Bengal to campaign for the TMC on the instruction of her party chief Akhilesh Yadav.

"Mamata is fighting all alone against the atrocities, and for democratic rights of the people of Bengal. Her leg is broken, but she is still fighting," Bachchan said.

"She is fighting for the rights and respect of the people of Bengal. This is the safest state for women. Those who are criticising her, I would only say shame, shame!" she said.

Union Minister Babul Supriyo said Jaya Bachchan might speak against BJP but will never say anything against him.

The final phase of polling for the assembly elections on Tuesday in 40 seats in western Assam is very crucial for both the ruling BJP led alliance and the opposition Congress led 'Mahajot' (grand alliance).

After weeks-long stormycampaign sessions, marathon rallies and mammoth road shows, Kerala is all set to go to polls on Tuesday with 2.74 crore voters exercising their franchise to decide the fate of 957 candidates including high-profile leaders and independents in 140 Assembly constituencies across the state.

The ruling AIADMK urged the Chief Electoral Officer to 'cancel' the candidature of DMK president M K Stalin and four others of his party for the April 6 Assembly polls, alleging 'distribution of cash' to voters.



Polling officials on a buffalo cart for the election duty in a remote area, on the eve of the final phase of Assembly polls, Kamrup (Rural) district in Assam on Monday

## Bengal now, Delhi next: Mamata

**CHUNCHURA :** West Bengal CMMamata Banerjee Monday asserted that she would win the ongoing state polls despite injury and eventually aim for power in Delhi. Training her guns at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, Banerjee who is seeking a third term in office said that Bengal will be ruled by its own people. Terming herself as a Royal Bengal Tiger, the TMC chief said, Bengal will not be ruled by anyone from Gujarat. "I will win Bengal with one leg and Delhi with two legs." The TMC leader said that she suffered injuries, which were allegedly inflicted on her by BJP supporters in Nandigram on March 10, to prevent her from campaigning for the West Bengal assembly polls.

## 59K cops, drones, for Kerala polls

**KOCHI:** Kerala Police chief Loknath Behra said that all security arrangements have been finalised for the smooth conduct of the assembly polls with a total of 59,292 police personnel and a drone system to detect crowds and obstruction of voters in the hinterlands on polling day. Behra had said that the entire state will be divided into special security zones and police will be deployed under the leadership of senior officers.

Kerala Chief Electoral Officer Teeka Ram Meena had earlier said that 140 companies of central forces have reached the state for the election, adding that the poll body is fully geared up to conduct free, fair, independent and credible election in the state.

## 171 votes cast in booth that had only 90 voters listed

**Dima Hasao:** Guwahati: Six polling officials have been suspended in Assam where the Election Commission found that 171 votes had been cast at a booth in Dima Hasao district that had only 90 registered voters.

The booth is in the Hafong constituency that voted in the second phase on April 1. Officially the constituency - won by the BJP's Bir Bhadra Hagjer in 2016 - recorded only 74 per cent polling. Sources said the poll body plans to issue a re-poll order for this booth, which was an auxiliary polling station for the main centre. An official order to this effect has yet to be issued. "The Presiding and 1st Polling officer, in their statements, have admitted that they allowed the voters registered against the main polling station to cast their votes in the auxiliary polling station," EC said.

According to news agency PTI, Seikhosiem Lhangum (Sector Officer), Prahlad Ch Roy (Presiding Officer), Parameswar Changarsa (1st Polling Officer), Swaraj Kanti Das (2nd Polling Officer) and Lalzamlu Thiek (3rd Polling Officer) have been suspended, with immediate effect. The poll body cited "dereliction of duty" in its suspension order.

This will be the second instance of re-polling ordered by the Election Commission in Assam this year, after it directed a new round of voting for the Ratabari seat.

That was after images of election officials transporting an EVM (electronic voting machine) in a BJP BJP candidate's car triggered controversy. The four officials involved were also suspended. As they sought to explain the incident, the Election Commission also said "the polled EVM comprising of BU, CU and VVPAT was found with its seal intact without any damage whatsoever".



## Tikait threatens tractor stir in Guj

**AHMEDABAD**

**BHARTIYA** Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait on Monday threatened to start a farmers' tractor agitation in Gujarat after Delhi, and said time has come to gherao the state capital Gandhinagar and also break barricades if needed. Talking to reporters outside the Sabarmati Ashram here, Tikait claimed farmers in Gujarat were unhappy and suffering. Hundreds of farmers have been camping at Delhi's borders since November last year against the Centre's three agriculture reform laws.

"Farmers will conduct an agitation in Gujarat using their tractors. Time has come to gherao Gandhinagar and block roads. If needed, we will have to break barricades too," Tikait said. The BKU leader is on a two-day tour of Gujarat since Sunday to campaign against the Centre's three farm laws. On the second day of his visit, Tikait, accompanied by former Gujarat chief minister Shantirsinh Vaghela, paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi at the Sabarmati Ashram.

# Missing jawan in Maoist captivity, wife appeals for safe return

**BIJAPUR**

AT least two local journalists said on Monday they received calls from a mystery person who claimed a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) commando was in the captivity of Maoists after a deadly firefight in Chhattisgarh last week, even as his wife appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah to ensure his safe return.

The caller informed that the commando, who went missing 48 hours ago during the encounter at the borders of Sukma and Bijapur districts, was safe and will not be harmed, according to the journalists.

A 400-member strong team of Maoists and their sympathisers ambushed a security team in the remote Tarrem area, killing 22 personnel in one of the

worst attacks linked to Left-wing extremism. The attack was suspected to have been led by notorious Maoist commander Madvi Hidma.

"The caller did not identify himself. He said Maoists will release the jawan in two-three days," Ganesh Mishra, one of the two journalists to receive the call, said. He is the president of the Bijapur Press Club.

Raja Singh Rathore, a journalist with Navbharat in Sukma, said he too received the call, but added that the caller identified himself as Hidma. "He told me that the missing jawan was in his custody. I asked about the well-being of the jawan, and was told that he was safe. The person, who claimed to be Hidma, added that more details and photographs will be shared soon," Rathore said.



According to latest reports on the encounter, a group of Maoists chopped off an inspector's hand before killing him and then fled the scene with bulletproof jackets, guns, ammunition, as well as his shoes.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday alleged that the operation against naxals in Chhattisgarh, in which 22 security personnel were killed, was "incompetently" executed and "poorly designed".


"Our jawans are not cannon fodder to be martyred at will," Gandhi said on Twitter and demanded that each Indian jawan be given body armour for protection. Out of the 22 fatalities in the Saturday naxal attack in the state, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) lost eight men, including seven CoBRA commandos, while one jawan is from the Bastariya bat-

talion, eight from the DRG and five from the Special Task Force. "No Indian jawan should face an enemy without body armour in the 21st century. It needs to be made available to every soldier," the Congress leader said. Citing a media report quoting CRPF Director General Kuldeep Singh as saying there was no intelligence failure in the operation and an equal number of ultras were killed, Gandhi said, "If there was no intelligence failure then a 1:1 death ratio means it was a poorly designed and incompetently executed operation." Officials on Sunday had said that 30 security personnel were also injured in the ambush by naxals. The security personnel were ambushed by naxals when they were out on a combing operation in a forest along the border of the Bijapur and Sukma districts of the state.



THE

HANS BUSINESS

FOREX (buy rates in ₹)				
US Dollar	74.02	South		
Euro	86.91	African Rand		5.75
UAE Dirham	20.55	Hong Kong Dollar		10.84
Thai Baht	2.57	Japanese Yen		0.76
British Pound	102.56	New Zealand Dollar		52.1
Australian Dollar	56.4	Saudi Riyal		21.49
Canadian Dollar	58.91	Swedish Krona		9.62
Swiss Franc	78.48	Singapore Dollar		55.58

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## BIZ BRIEFS

### APL enters South market

APL Apollo Pipes has expanded its wings to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana with wide range of pipes and will cater to the building and construction industry. The products range from 15mm to 400mm diameter. The company is into CPVC piping solution, plumbing piping solution. SWR and HDPE pipes are being manufactured according to national and international standards. Srinivas B Chattrnalli, South Head Marketing, APL Apollo, said: "We see South is the biggest market for the pipes. APL Apollo recognizes cost-efficient, quality and safety are key pillars for India's sustainable development with zero leaks and thus are considered high rated among consumer. Today we are introducing a range of specialized solutions of CPVC, UPVC, SWR pipes & fittings, HDPE pipes, sprinkler systems, water tanks & bathroom accessories to the market".

### Roya Green signs up Sonu Sood

Royal Green has announced its packaged drinking water's entry into the market. The company believes in reaching the consumers' mind with innovative technology after products are launched and also associated with Sonu Sood to narrate the philosophy behind the taste of success. ADS Group, as a company, believes in a sustainable development approach that guarantees long-term success. Sonu Sood said: "I am thrilled and proud to represent a brand such as Royal Green Packaged Drinking Water whose ethos and brand philosophy involves redefining success. The brand's communication truly reflects my belief that the path to success lies in choosing the untrodden course." Virat, founder, Royal Green, said: "Our association with Sonu Sood will reinforce what our brand Royal Green packaged drinking water stands for and believes in."

### Moj launches new campaign

Moj, short video app, has launched a new brand campaign #SwipeUpWithMoj to strengthen its brand recall as the ultimate entertainment destination. As part of the campaign, the app has teamed up with Tollywood hero Vijay Deverakonda and Bollywood diva Ananya Pandey as brand ambassadors. The commercials are set to launch on April 2, in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi keeping in view Moj's diverse audience across the country. The #SwipeUpWithMoj campaign is centred around a deeper understanding of the users' need for fun and engaging content. Vijay Deverakonda said: "Indians love entertainment in all its forms. I am glad to be associated with Moj. I love the fun, trendy, relatable and light content on the app."

### Hyundai sells 1mn SUVs

Hyundai Motor India Ltd. (HML) has announced the achievement of over one million 'made in India' SUVs sold cumulatively across domestic and export markets. From announcing new arrival Tucson to a green and eco-friendly SUV experience with Kona Electric, Hyundai offers benchmark SUVs that satiate the diverse needs of Smart Indian customers. To commemorate the achievement, the company has launched the No.1 SUV Maker national campaign. Tarun Garg, Director (Sales, Marketing & Service), Hyundai Motor India Ltd., said: "With over one million cumulative SUV sales in domestic and export markets, we have reiterated the promise of make-in-India over nearly two and a half decades of our presence in India."

## COVID-19 SECOND WAVE

# Mfg activity loses steam in March

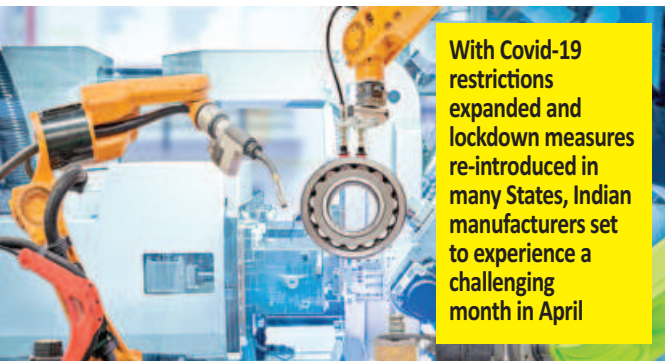
Manufacturing sector loses momentum in March, falls to 7-mth low

New Delhi

INDIA's manufacturing sector activities lost further growth momentum and fell to a seven-month low in March as demand was constrained by the escalation of the Covid-19 pandemic, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 57.5 in February to a seven-month low of 55.4 in March. However, the latest reading was indicative of a substantial improvement in the health of the sector that outpaced the long-run series average, it said. In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction. "Production, new orders and input buying expanded at softer rates," said Pollyanna De Lima, Economics Associate Director at IHS Markit. Lima further noted that "survey participants indicated that demand growth was constrained by the escalation of the Covid-19 pandemic, while the rise in input buying was curtailed by an intensification of cost pressures."

"With Covid-19 restrictions expanded and lockdown measures re-introduced in many States, Indian manufacturers look set to experience a challenging month in April," Lima said. India recorded an all-time high of 1,03,558 coronavirus infections in a day pushing the nationwide Covid-19 tally to 1,25,89,067,



With Covid-19 restrictions expanded and lockdown measures re-introduced in many States, Indian manufacturers set to experience a challenging month in April

## GDP recovery still resilient: FinMin

AS the country witnesses a rapid resurgence of coronavirus cases, a Finance Ministry report has exuded confidence in the Indian economy and termed the economic recovery as resilient citing improvement in high frequency indicators. The Monthly Economic Review for March 2021 released by the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) said that the agricultural sector remains the bright spot of Indian economy with foodgrains production touching 303.3 million tonnes in 2020-21 beating record production levels for the fifth consecutive year in a row. Further, MGNREGS has acted as a strong pillar to insulate the rural economy by generating all-time high employment of 383.8 crore person days during 2020-21. 44.7 per cent higher compared to previous year. "Despite the surge in cases, the recovery in economy is resilient with sustained improvement in the majority of high frequency indicators," it said. The report noted that India's PMI Manufacturing Index of 55.4 in March indicated some loss of momentum compared to February. However, manufacturing sector conditions continue to improve sharply, outpacing the long-run series average with firms scaling up production and witnessing upturn in sales.

according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday. The survey noted that employment declined in March, taking the current sequence of job shedding to a year. "Panellists indicated that the fall

stemmed from Covid-19 restrictions related to workforces. Despite the reduction in payroll numbers, outstanding business rose only marginally," Lima said. Business confidence waned in March.

## RBI's MPC starts deliberating on next monetary policy

MUMBAI

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das-headed rate-setting panel Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) started its three-day deliberation on the next monetary policy on Monday amid sudden surge in Covid-19 cases and the government's recent mandate asking the central bank to keep retail inflation around 4 per cent.

The Reserve Bank will announce the resolution of the MPC on April 7. Experts are of the view that the Reserve Bank will maintain status quo on policy rates at its first bi-monthly monetary policy review for the current fiscal. It is also likely to maintain an accommodative policy stance.

The policy repo rate or the short-term lending rate is currently at 4 per cent, and the reverse repo rate is 3.35 per cent. Last month, the government had asked the Reserve



Bank to maintain retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side for another five-year period ending March 2026. M Govinda Rao Chief Economic Advisor, Brickwork Ratings (BWR) said, given the rise in the spread of coronavirus infections and the imposition of fresh restrictions to contain the virus spread in the major parts of the country, RBI is likely to continue with its accommodative monetary policy stance in the upcoming MPC meeting.

"Considering the elevated inflation levels, BWR expects the RBI MPC to adopt a cautious approach and hold the repo rate at 4 per cent," Rao said. Rao noted that in the last MPC, RBI initiated measures towards the rationalisation of excess liquidity from the system by announcing a phased hike in the cash reserve ratio (CRR) for restoration to 4 per cent.

## Data loss hits Indian firms

Lack of proper cyber protection measures leads to unexpected downtime for many companies

MUMBAI

MORE than one in two organisations in India suffered unexpected downtime last year because of data loss, a report showed on Monday.

This was despite nearly 70 per cent of Indian companies investing in 10 cyber security solutions simultaneously. However, investing in more solutions does not necessarily lead to better cyber protection, according to the report by Singapore-based Acronis, a global leader in cyber protection. "These findings confirm our belief that the smarter approach is cyber protection, which unifies data protection, cybersecurity, and endpoint management in one," said Rustom Hirmanek, General Manager-South Asia at Acronis. A shocking 20 per cent of IT professionals in India don't know if their organisation is subject to data privacy regulations.

"If those responsible for ensuring data privacy don't know they are culpable, they cannot implement strategies or evaluate the solutions needed to address the re-



in India would not know if their data had been modified without their knowledge because their solution makes determining that kind of tampering difficult.

"Nearly 10 per cent of IT users in India don't know

requirements. That ignorance puts the business at tremendous risk of major fines for potential compliance violations in 2021," the report warned. The Acronis survey polled 4,400 IT users and professionals in 22 countries across six continents, including India.

The report found that there is a significant gap in awareness among users and IT professionals in India of what IT and cybersecurity capabilities are available to them, which can cause them to lose valuable time, money and security.

Nearly 35 per cent of IT users and 11 per cent of IT professionals

if their anti-malware stops zero-day threats, because their solution doesn't make that information easily available - but 58 per cent claim to have it," the findings showed.

The survey also revealed a staggeringly lax approach to data protection among IT users in India.

Nearly 98 per cent of IT users spent more time on their devices last year and 85 per cent of them took extra steps to protect those devices. About 35 per cent admit to not updating their devices until at least a week after being notified of a patch, or even longer, said the report.

## SoftBank mints unicorn in Meesho

SARITHA RAI

BANGALORE-BASED social commerce startup Meesho Inc. has raised \$300 million in new funding led by SoftBank Group Corp.'s Vision Fund-2, valuing the startup at \$2.1 billion.

Existing investors like Prosus Ventures and Facebook Inc. also participated in the fresh investment round, which adds a new member to a growing coterie of Indian unicorns, or startups valued at more than a billion dollars. Meesho, which operates an online sales platform for micro, small and medium businesses across India, will use the funds to "strengthen its talent pool" across all areas, including technology, product and business.

"SoftBank has always been excited to back founders that provide unique solutions for the local market," said Munish Varma, managing partner at SoftBank Investment Advisers. "By using the power of artificial intelligence and machine learning, Meesho has created a platform for many small business owners to sell to the next cohort of internet users."

## IN 1<sup>ST</sup> 10 MONTHS OF FY21

## India attracts over \$72 bn FDI

NEW DELHI

INDIA has attracted record total FDI inflow for the first ten months of a financial year in 2020-21. Accordingly, the inflow rose to \$72.12 billion during April to January, 2021, 15 per cent higher as compared to the first ten months of 2019-20, when it stood at \$62.72 billion. "The trends show that the FDI equity inflow grew by 28 per cent in the first ten months of FY 2020-21 (\$54.18 billion) compared to the year ago period (\$42.34 billion)," the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said.

"In terms of top investor countries, 'Singapore' is at the apex with 30.28 per cent of the total FDI equity inflow followed by USA (24.28 per cent) and UAE (7.31 per cent) for the first ten months of the current financial year 2020-21."

According to the ministry, Japan has been leading the list of investor countries to invest in India with



29.09 per cent of the total FDI equity inflows during January, 2021, followed by Singapore at 25.46 per cent and the US 12.06 per cent.

"The 'Computer Software & Hardware' has emerged as the top sector during the first ten months of FY. 2020-21 with 45.81 per cent of the total FDI equity inflow followed by 'Construction (Infrastructure) Activities' (13.37 per cent) and 'Services Sector' (7.80 per cent) respectively." As per the trends, the consultancy services emerged as the top sector with to receive 21.80 per cent of the total FDI equity inflow in January followed by 'Computer Software & Hardware' (15.96 per cent) and 'Service Sector' (13.64 per cent).



## MUSSANAH OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

## Kumanan bounces back to be in race for Oly berth

OMAN

INDIAN sailor Nethra Kumanan overcame the disappointment of a poor second race on Day 1, in which she had finished seventh, to get back into contention for a 2021 Tokyo Olympics quota on Day 2 of the Mussanah Open Championship on Sunday.

The first Indian woman to win a sailing World Cup medal, Kumanan, is currently leading the Laser Radial event of the Championship --- which is an Asian Olympic Qualifier --- having finished on top in Race 3 and second in Race 4 on Day 2.

The other Indians in the category, Ramya Sarvanan and Harshita Tomar, were placed third and fourth, respectively.

Kumanan had made history last year when she had become the first female Indian sailor to win bronze in the Hempel World Cup Series in Miami, USA.

In the Laser Standard class, Vishnu Saravanan, with nine points, was placed third on Day 2 after coming in second in Race 3 and fourth in Race 4.

The Mussanah Open provides two Asian spots each in the Laser Radial and Laser Standard classes, while all other classes have one Asian spot for Tokyo.

In the 49er class, the pair of KC Ganapathy (Helm) and Varun Thakkar (Crew) is third with a net total of 20. The duo finished fourth in Race 4, fifth in Race 5 and third in Race 6.

A total of 10 races are held in the Laser Standard and Laser Radial categories, while for all other events there are 12 races. The top 10 in each category then compete in the medal races. The aggregate of points then decides the winners.

## Indians' standings after Day 2

**Laser Radial class:** 1. Nethra Kumanan (5 points net total); 3. Ramya Saravanan (12 points net total); 4. Harshita Tomar (13 points net total); 12. Jayalak-



shmi Sundaravadivel (32 points net total)

**Laser Standard class:** 3. Vishnu Saravanan (9 points net total); 7. Upamanyu Dutta (22 points net total); 14. Mohit Saini (28 points net total); 15. Gitesh (30 points net total); 18. Ram Milan Yadav (48 points net total).

**49er class:** 3. KC Ganapathy and Varun Thakkar (20 points net total); 11. Prince

Noble and Manu Francis (39 points net total); 13. Sandip Jain and Munna Pandit (44 points net total).

**49er FX class:** 4. Ekta Yadav and Ritika Dangi (15 points net total).

**RS:X Men class:** 6. Ebad Ali (20 points net total); 7. Jerome Savarimuthu (23 points net total).

**RS:X Women class:** 3. Ishwariya Ganesh (12 points net total).

## Domestic badminton tourneys in April, May postponed

NEW DELHI: Domestic badminton tournaments that were scheduled to be held in April and May have been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) said in a statement on Monday.

"With the exponential rise in the number of COVID+ cases across the country, BAI President Himanta Biswa has decided to postpone all the upcoming domestic tournaments starting with B'lor (April 18-25) followed by junior & sub-junior in H'yd in May," the BAI said.

According to the calendar that the BAI released on March 26, the All Indian Senior Ranking tournament was scheduled to be held in Bengaluru from April 18 to 25.

"We have decided to postpone all senior, junior and sub-junior tournaments that were to be held in April and May," BAI general secretary Ajay Kumar Singhania told IANS.

Apart from the senior ranking tournament, qualifiers and main draws of the junior and sub-junior tournaments were scheduled to be held in Hyderabad, Mysuru and Bengaluru in May. The Indian Open is scheduled to be held from May 11 to 16 in New Delhi and the BAI has not yet indicated if the Super 500 tournament has been affected in any way due to the surge of Covid-19 cases in the country. (IANS)



## Sravan to lead Hyderabad in T20 cricket league-2021

HYDERABAD

BATSMAN G Sravan will be leading the 13-member squad selected to represent SSGF Hyderabad (Jr) team in the prestigious 'Bharat Ratna Dr. BR Ambedkar Junior National T20 Cricket League -2021' to be held from April 7 to 10 at Anantapur Sports Village, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh.

The T20 league is being or-

ganised by School Sports and Games Federation (SSGF).

The Squad: G Sravan (Captain), Rishi Kanishka (Vice-Captain), Ashwin Sooraj (Wicket Keeper), Abhiramanujan, Anirudh K, Rahul Macha,

Samridh S, Ramcharan, S Akash, Sumadhur M, Meeth Srivastava, Mirza Nomaan and Shaik Ameer. Mohammed Faiyaz uddin Ghazi (Manager).



## Gritty India women concede late goal, lose Uzbekistan friendly

TASHKENT: The India women's football team fought till the final moments of the game before conceding an 87th-minute goal to go down to Uzbekistan in the first friendly at the AGMK Stadium in Tashkent on Monday. While India also had a fair share of opportunities, Uzbekistan found the back of the net with a late free-kick from Maftuna Shoyimova. With freezing conditions to contend with, the Uzbeks definitely held an edge but India goalkeeper Aditi Chauhan was up to the task, thwarting a low cross from point-blank range early. India looked to hit back on the counter with defender Ranjana Chohan combining with midfielder Sangita Basfore to create an opportunity down the left, but the danger was averted by the Uzbek defence. The Indian defence too held firm with Sweetie Devi doing well to deal with aerial threats.

## Maha govt paves way for IPL; allows teams to practice post 8pm at Wankhede

MUMBAI

THE Maharashtra government on Monday cleared the decks for the IPL to take place in the COVID-ravaged Mumbai, allowing teams to practice after 8pm and travel to their respective hotels during the night curfew that has been imposed to contain the pandemic.

Due to the massive surge of Covid-19 cases in Mumbai and Maharashtra, the state government on Sunday announced

"Break the Chain", under which section 144 and night-curfew from 8pm to 7am on weekdays has been imposed on entire Maharashtra, including Mumbai.

The guidelines are to be implemented from this evening. However, the state government has allowed the IPL teams to practice beyond 8pm, provided there is "strict adherence to bio-bubble". The event starts in Chennai on April 9.

"Considering the match-timings, teams practicing at the CCI and MCA are

scheduled to practice in 2 sessions -- from 4pm to 6.30pm and 7.30pm to 10pm," wrote Srirang Gholap, Under Secretary of the Disaster Management, Relief and Rehabilitation department, in a letter issued to the BCCI.

Mumbai is scheduled to host 10 matches of the IPL at the Wankhede Stadium and nine of them are scheduled to start at 7.30pm. The first game at the Wankhede is due on April 10 between Chennai Super Kings and Delhi Capitals.

## Under new skipper Pant, DC look to go one step further in IPL 2021



NEW DELHI

DELHI Capitals lost their captain well before the 2021 Indian Premier League (IPL) started but it is this very factor that makes them arguably the most intriguing team going into the new season.

Shreyas Iyer's replacement as skipper of the team this year will be 23-year-old wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant, who couldn't make much of an impression last season, but has put up career-defining performances since then for India team.

Pant struggled to find consistency in IPL 2020, scoring 343 runs in 14 matches with just one half-century. He also missed a few matches due to injury.

Pant was dropped from the subsequent limited-overs tour of Australia but then turned it around in India's 2-1 Test series win. Impressive performances followed during the series against England and it has culminated in him becoming captain of the franchise.

Iyer's absence does leave a hole for DC in batting and puts more pressure on the top order to perform. This brings into focus Prithvi Shaw, who, unlike Pant, was dropped from the team after a

string of failures last season and lost his place in the Indian setup as well due to his struggles with the bat. The opener has since plundered a record 827 runs in the Vijay Hazare Trophy and DC would be hoping that he would carry forward his good form into the IPL.

He would be opening the batting with Shikhar Dhawan, who would be hungry to prove his worth in the shortest format of the game ahead of the T20 World Cup. DC have bought Steve Smith.

Smith may have to contend with a place on the bench considering that DC will be looking to field a foreign player in Shimron Hetmyer or Sam Billings in the lower middle-order in addition to all-rounder Marcus Stoinis and South African fast bowlers Kagiso Rabada and Anrich Nortje.

It is to be noted, however, that Rabada and Nortje will be available for selection only from the second game which means Smith could be playing in DC's season opener against Chennai Super Kings.

In the absence of Nortje and Rabada, England all-rounder Chris Woakes could also find a place in the squad that plays the first match.

## DC Squad

**Rishabh Pant (captain/wicketkeeper), Shikhar Dhawan, Prithvi Shaw, Ajinkya Rahane, Steve Smith, Sam Billings, Shimron Hetmyer, Ishant Sharma, Kagiso Rabada, Anrich Nortje, Umesh Yadav, Tom Curran, Avesh Khan, Lalit Yadav, Pravin Dubey, Rival Patel, Lukman Hussain Meriwala, M Siddharth, Marcus Stoinis, Axar Patel, Ravichandran Ashwin, Chris Woakes, Vishnu Vinod (wicketkeeper), Aditya Tare (wicketkeeper)**

**Coaching staff: Ricky Ponting (head coach), Mohammad Kaif and Ajay Ratna (assistant coaches), Pravin Amre (batting consultant), James Hopes (bowling coach)**



NEW DELHI

INDIA'S tennis ace Sumit Nagal overcame the challenge of Italy's Andrea Pelegrino 6-3, 6-4 to enter the second and final qualifying round of the \$408,800 ATP tennis tournament in Cagliari, Italy.

The No. 139-ranked Nagal, took one hour and twenty-eight minutes to get past his Italian rival, ranked No. 283 on the ATP, and set up a final-round clash on Monday against Maxime Janvier of France, who defeated Maxime

Cressy of the US in straight sets.

The Cagliari tournament --- also called ATP Cagliari --- has a qualification phase where lower-ranked players have to compete to participate in the main tournament. A total of 40 players compete in the tournament of which 24 get direct entries into the main tournament, while the others take the qualification route.

Exactly a month ago, the 23-year-old Nagal who hails from Jaitpur in Haryana, had registered the biggest win of his ATP career when he had

## Nagal one step away from Cagliari event main draw

stunned world No. 22 and second seed Cristian Garin of Chile 6-4, 6-3 to make it to the quarter-finals of the Argentina Open ATP 250 tournament in Buenos Aires.

Nagal's dream run in the tournament had ended when he had gone down fighting to Spain's world No. 46 Albert Ramos-Vinolas 6-4, 2-6, 5-7 in a two-and-a-half-hour slugfest.

The Indian, who had made it to the US Open second round in 2020, had started as a qualifier in Buenos Aires before making it to the main draw. (IANS)

## Russian Open, Indonesia Masters badminton tourneys called off

KUALA LUMPUR

THE Badminton World Federation (BWF) said on Monday that two Super 100 tournaments, the Russian Open and the Indonesia Masters, have been cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The Russian Open was scheduled to be held in Vladivostok from July 20 to 25. The Indonesia Masters, meanwhile, was scheduled to be held from October 5 to 10. "The ongoing COVID-19 restrictions and complications have left local organisers no choice but to cancel the tournaments," said the BWF in a statement.

"The respective decisions of the National Badminton Federation of Russia and Badminton Indonesia were made in consultation and agreement with the BWF," it further said. (IANS)

## Shuttler Bhagat bags two gold, India finish with 20 medals

DUBAI

DEFENDING world champion Pramod Bhagat came up with a dominant show to clinch two gold medals as India finished their campaign in the 3rd Sheikh Hamdan bin Al Maktoum Dubai Para Badminton International 2021 with 20 medals on Sunday.

Krishna Nagar and Prem Kumar Ale were also brilliant on the day, winning the other two gold medals for India in combined SH6 and the mixed doubles WH1-WH2 categories, respectively.

India topped the tally with 20 medals (4 gold, 6 silver and 10 bronze medals), ahead of France who finished with eight medals (4 gold, 2 silver and 2 bronze) and Malaysia with seven medals (3 gold, 1 silver and 3 bronze).

Bhagat started India's gold rush, clinching the yellow metal with a 21-17, 21-18 victory over compatriot Nitesh Kumar in 39 minutes. He then combined with Manoj Sarkar to beat the Nitesh Kumar-Sukant Kadam duo 21-18, 21-16 in the men's doubles SL3-SL4 final.

"It was a good tournament overall and I am very happy to start the year on such a strong note and hope to end it with a gold at Tokyo Paralympics. It feels great to get the rhythm back," said Bhagat.

Krishna Nagar took just 27 minutes to overcome 46-year-old Didin Taresoh of Malaysia 21-17, 21-18. The Indian then paired with Raja Magotra to crush Kenya's Jeremia Ngungi Maringa and Anthony Ojwang Otwal 21-9, 21-8 in the exhibition SH6 doubles final. The SH6 category was a combined category in this championship. (IANS)