

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VIJAYAWADA | THURSDAY | 1 APRIL 2021

WEATHER

Max: 43.0°C
Min: 26.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
43/26 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Bahula Chavithi
till 11.02 am
Star: Visakha till 7.22 am;
Anuradha till 5.18 am (Friday)
Varjyam: 11.01 am to 12.29 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.18 am to
11.06 am; 3.10 pm to 3.59 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Sha'ban 18,1441 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.50 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.15 pm
Maghrib: 6.25 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.02 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.20 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 10.11 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 9.43 PM

COUNTER POINT



Believe me, the elections are not over... still six more phases are there!

SHORT TAKES

Cops raid houses of 'Virasam leaders'

Hyderabad/Vijayawada: Officials from the National Investigation Agency (NIA) along with police teams from Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh searched several houses of people associated with Virasam and alleged links with Maoists in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday. The searches were going on till late in the night.

■ Report on Page 3

Ishrat encounter: Cops discharged

Ahmedabad: A special CBI court on Wednesday discharged police officers G.L. Singhal, Tarun Barot and Anaju Chaudhary in the 2004 Ishrat Jahan alleged fake encounter case. Special CBI judge V.R. Raval allowed the discharge applications. The CBI said the state declined prosecution sanction.

■ Report on Page 5

PAN-Aadhaar link deadline June 30

New Delhi: The government extended the deadline for linking PAN with biometric Aadhaar by three months till June 30. The I-T department said it has received representations from taxpayers that the last date for intimating the Aadhaar number may further be extended in the wake of the on-going Covid-19 pandemic.

NADU | NEDU

Women from self-help groups to inspect works

Govt schools affiliated to CBSE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has released a training hand book for educational institutions' development committees and officials on the activities to be taken up in the second phase of Manabadi — Nadu Nedu.

During a review on Nadu Nedu works in schools, Jagananna Vidya Kanuka and CBSE affiliation in schools here on Wednesday, the Chief Minister launched two

more books, one with SOPs on preparation of quality mid-day meals under Jagananna Gorumudha and other with SOPs on toilet maintenance in schools. Comparing the infrastructure facilities in Jawahar Navodaya and Kendriya Vidyalayas, the officials explained the differences in infrastructure facilities developed in schools under Nadu Nedu.

The Chief Minister said that self-help group women should inspect the works completed in schools under the first phase of Nadu

Nedu and directed officials to prepare a simple questionnaire for them to get feedback. He said schools renovated in the first phase of Nadu Nedu would be dedicated to the people on April 30.

Regarding Jagananna Gorumudha, he said complaints received on Jagananna Gorumudha should be solved immediately and mistakes should not recur.

He said there should be no compromise on the quality of food and added that they should come up with SOP

for preparing food items.

The Chief Minister said feedback should be taken from schools regarding the implementation of Gorumudha scheme and maintenance of toilets.

Reviewing Jagananna Vidyanuka, Jagan Mohan Reddy said that students should be provided with Jagananna Vidya kanuka kits and include a dictionary, textbooks, notebooks and bags.

■ Page 2: Textbooks in Telugu, English, says Jagan

WORLD | 6

Biden's dog bites WH staffer again

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Jagan allows 711 TS staff to shift

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

After a gap of nearly two years, the Centre has convened a meeting between Telangana State and Andhra Pradesh to resolve state bifurcation-related disputes between both states and review the status of implementing assurances given to both states under AP Reorganisation Act, 2014. Official delegations led by chief secretaries of both states will take part in the meeting through video conference on April 6. Though the meeting was scheduled on March 31, it has been postponed on the request of Telangana.

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) convened last such meeting in August 2019. Sources said all major contentious issues, including distribution of assets and liabilities, remain unresolved even seven years after bifurcation. Only two service matters — repatriation of TS Class IV employees working in AP and cadre allotment to Additional SPs and DSPs in police department — have been addressed by both the states. While the first one was out of mutual understanding, the other could

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has accorded permission to relieve 711 employees who hail from Telangana state and are presently working in AP government to return to Telangana.

A delegation of the AP Government Telangana Native Employees Association has called on the Chief Minister at the

camp office here on Thursday and requested the latter to relieve them from services in Andhra Pradesh so that they can join duty in their native state.

The Chief Minister agreed to their request and extended best wishes. The employees thanked the Chief Minister for his "humanitarian gesture", which gives them chance to return to their native state.

● THE UNION Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) convened the last meeting in August 2019. All major contentious issues, including distribution of assets and liabilities, remain unresolved

be completed on directions of Telangana High Court.

"The MHA is playing more of a spectator role. It is high time both states make serious efforts to resolve issues," sources

say. As these disputes are not linked to the timeframe of 10 years, they will drag for years if the two states are not sincere about finding a solution, they added.

Official sources said TS chief secretary Somesh Kumar, who received the note from MHA, briefed Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao on Wednesday on the meeting.

■ Page 2: CM seeks reports on pending issues

AP SET TO HOLD ZILLA, MANDAL POLLS IN APRIL

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Preparations are on to hold Zilla and Mandal Parishad polls in the state around April 10.

With Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy keen on completing the local body polls to shift focus to other pressing issues including the vaccination drive, the government will urge the State Election Commission to fasten the conduct of ZP and mandal polls.

The state government will launch the vaccination drive for people in the age group of above 45 years from April 1.

The drive as of now will be limited to the urban areas and will be intensified in rural areas once the polls for the ZP and mandal are over.

Nilam Sawhney, who was appointed as State Election Commissioner, will take charge from the incumbent N. Ramesh Kumar on Thursday.

Though Ramesh Kumar conducted polls for gram panchayats and urban local bodies, he chose to not issue notification for the mandal and ZP polls.

SPORTS | 8

All eyes on Pant ahead of IPL

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TD merges with BJP, Naidu finalises deal

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

In a development that marks a tectonic power shift in Andhra Pradesh politics, Telugu Desam (TD) chief and former three-term chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has decided to merge his floundering party with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), bringing to an end the saga of a regional entity that had seen a meteoric rise in the country.

TD leaders reportedly felt the party has lost its verve and there is little hope of reinvigorating the party within the next three years and wrest power from the YSRC in the next Assembly polls.

Losing people's support and being deserted by leaders and cadre across all districts and regions of the state, Naidu decided it was time to change the game itself.

Taking a leaf out of the book of Tollywood megastar K. Chiranjeevi, who merged his Praja Rajyam with the Congress, after being routed in the 2009 elections, a besieged and heart-broken Naidu sent feelers to the BJP top brass.

It could not be independently confirmed if any of the former TD Rajya Sabha MPs who joined the BJP acted as facilitators.

After some deliberations, the saffron party decidedly



made a tough offer, given the misapprehensions about Naidu's flip-flops among many BJP leaders.

As per the agreement, sources close to the development said Naidu will merge his party with the BJP unconditionally and move to Central politics soon. Though the TD's precondition of rewarding Naidu with a key post in the Union Cabinet was turned down, he may soon

be made a Cabinet-rank minister.

The BJP also did not make any promises regarding the political future of Nara Lokesh, who is currently an MLC and the TD party's national general secretary.

Despite the lukewarm response he got from the BJP top brass, Naidu decided it was time to go ahead and surrender the party, founded by the Telugu cine-

ma and cultural idol and father-in-law N.T. Rama Rao, to the saffron behemoth. The merger will take effect within a month.

The BJP hopes to utilise Naidu's strategic acumen and understanding of Telugu politics to strengthen itself in both the states — Andhra Pradesh and neighbouring Telangana.

■ Page 2: YSRC, BJP bonhomie to end

APERC SCRAPS MINIMUM POWER CHARGES IN STATE

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Andhra Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission (APERC) has on Wednesday announced electricity tariff for 2021-22. The average unit price has been reduced to ₹6.37 from present ₹7.17.

Domestic consumers will no more have to pay minimum user charges. However, ₹10 will be collected per kilowatt of power consumed. The new tariff will come into effect from Thursday, April 1.

Disclosing elements of the new power tariff to media, APERC chairman Justice C. V. Nagarajuna Reddy disclosed that the state government has agreed to bear the burden of ₹7,297 crore on free electricity supplied to non-corporate farmers, sugarcane crushing units, rural horticulture nurseries and to dhobi ghats during 2021-22.

The government will also pay ₹1,657 crore for supplying electricity free of cost to consumers involved in caste occupations, apart from ₹136.72 crore on concessional tariff extended to the domestic consumers of APEPDC.

In addition, the state government will bear the subsidy of ₹1,657.56 crore arising due to the concessional tariff/free power extended to various class of consumers, namely; SC and ST colonies / tandas, BPL Rajaka community, BPL MBC community, BPL professional goldsmiths, BPL Nayee Brahmin community, handloom weavers and aquaculture consumers.

The APERC chairman said the proposal of DISCOMs to bill apartment consumers under a single point HT connection has been rejected. This is to avoid burdening middle-class apartment dwellers.

■ Page 3: Tariffs continue on electric vehicles



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launches YSR Bima scheme from the camp office on Wednesday.

CM releases ₹254cr under YSR Bima to 12K families

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Wednesday released ₹254.72 crore under YSR Bima to families of 12,039 deceased persons eligible for the scheme but did not enrol themselves with banks.

Speaking at an event organised on the occasion, the Chief Minister asserted that the state government will not back out from providing financial assistance to families who have lost their sole breadwinner.

That is the reason why the government has come forward to also pay premium for those sole breadwinners who failed to enrol under YSR Bima but passed away. The CM pointed out that the government came forward to pay premiums for all 12,039 claims.

Jagan Mohan Reddy explained that there are 1.4 crore ration card holders across the state. The government started YSR Bima in October 2020 by paying a premium of ₹510 crore to banks and continued it, despite central government, which was paying 50 per cent of the premium, withdrawing from the scheme.

The Chief Minister underlined that now, the entire premium is being paid by the state government on humanitarian grounds to provide security for fami-

JAGAN LAYS STONE FOR 1.5 KM FLOOD RETAINING WALL ON KRISHNA BANK

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

The decades old problem of inundation due to Krishna River floods will be a thing of the past following the decision to construct flood retaining wall.

Towards this, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy laid the foundation stone for the construction of the retaining wall on the left bank of Krishna River

between 51-70 years. Similarly, in case of natural death, those between 18-50 years are paid ₹2 lakh and for partial, permanent disability in an accident case (18-70 years), an assistance of ₹1.5 is provided.

Deputy Chief Minister Dharmanna Krishnadas, labour minister Gummanur Jayaram, special chief secretary (Housing) Ajay Jain, principal secretary (Labour) B. Udaya Lakshmi, panchayat raj commissioner M. Girija Shankar, AP Dairy Development Cooperative Federation managing director Babu A., APSHCL MD Narayana Bharat Gupta, SERP CEO P. Rajababu, MMPMA MD V. Vijayalakshmi and other senior officials attended the meeting.

■ Page 2: Locals happy by the move

IN BRIEF

KCR SEEKS
REPORTS ON
PENDING ISSUES

FROM PAGE 1

The TS CM directed officials to prepare reports pertaining to pending bifurcation issues and present TS government arguments effectively before the MHA in the meeting.

In its latest report (2018-19) tabled in Legislative Assembly on March 26, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) had pointed out that ₹1,51,349 crore under capital heads, ₹28,099 crore under loans and advances, ₹4,474 crore under deposits and advances, ₹238 crore under suspense and miscellaneous, and Rs. 310 crore under remittances are yet to be apportioned between AP and TS ever after bifurcation of state in 2014.

Both states continue to lodge complaints against each other with the Centre, besides knocking doors of High Court and Supreme Court for control over common institutions listed under Schedule IX, and X, mostly located in Hyderabad.

The two states are also engaged in disputes over sharing of Krishna and Godavari river waters, accusing each other of flouting the AP Reorganisation Act and taking up new projects without seeking required approvals from the centre or other regulatory bodies. The state government is planning to depute senior officials from industries, irrigation, general administration and other departments for the meeting. The CS directed officials concerned to come prepared with relevant documents and files in support of arguments made by the state government in the past.

Some of the major issues that are expected to figure in the meeting include division of assets and liabilities of Schedule IX and X institutions, AP Bhavan in New Delhi, Singareni Collieries Company Limited, AP Heavy Machinery and Equipment Ltd., AP State Finance Corporation, apart from claims and counterclaims on payment of power dues by distribution companies of the two states.

TD WILL PAY BACK
WITH INTEREST TO
YSRC: LOKESHDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Telugu Desam national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh warned about paying back to YSR Congress for its all misdeeds with interest by TD in the future and commented that 'Psycho Reddy' prevailed in AP State. He visited Lakkaraju Garlapadu in Sattenapalli of Guntur district on Wednesday and consoled the family of Garikapati Krishna Rao who allegedly died in the attack of YSRC activists. He alleged that CM Jagan Reddy was enjoying attacks on TD cadres and as many as 25 TD activists were murdered in the past two years in the Psycho Reddy government. Mr. Nara Lokesh held out a very serious warning that the TD would pay back with interest and 'peel off skin' if the YSRC dared to continue its attacks on any TD activist.

YSRC MISLEADING
COURTS IN NREGS
FUNDS DIVERSIONDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Former minister and Telugu Desam leader Alapati Rajendra Prasad on Wednesday slammed the Jagan Mohan Reddy Government of misleading both the courts and Central Government in order to misuse and divert over ₹6,400 Cr funds under the NREGS programme. He accused the AP Government of adopting a politically vengeful attitude even towards those who carried out the NREGS works during the previous TD regime.

Addressing a press conference here, Mr Rajendra Prasad said that the AP Government was telling lies to the Centre that irregularities took place in the NREGS works which was part of the ulterior plan to default the payments. He stated that the court has ordered for payment of the NREGS dues along with interest for 2018-19 and 2019-2020 but the State Government was turning a blind eye. He alleged that no fresh reports should be submitted once a social audit was completed but the Jagan regime was ignoring this.

BJP-JS only hope in fight
against YSRC: Deodhar

BJP national secretary for one chance to BJP-Jana Sena combine

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 31

BJP national secretary and state co-in-charge Sunil Deodhar said the BJP-Janaseena combine is the only hope for AP in the fight against the YSRC's "rowdy" rule.

He said the combine is in a position to checkmate the rising clout of mafias engaged in illegal sand mining, red sanders smuggling and religious conversions in the state.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, the BJP leader alleged that the ruling YSRC acted in a high-handed manner against candidates of the Opposition parties in the recently held Panchayat Raj and municipal elections in AP.

"The BJP-Jana Sena backed candidates were not allowed to file nominations in the panchayat elections and this happened also in the recently held municipal elections", he alleged and asked why there was no political force to fight against this "rowdy" party?

"The opposition Telugu Desam has no guts to question or launch a protest against this undemocratic rule. They preferred to stay back at their houses when the ruling party resorted to highhandedness against Opposition contestants and their supporters," he said.

Alleging that a state-sponsored rowdiness is prevailing in AP in addition to the sway of liquor and sand mafias, the BJP leader said the state is witnessing a political conversion mafia, which has been taking a giant shape but will soon meet with its death at the hands of the BJP.

Asking the voters to think about the YSRC's highhandedness and react, Deodhar requested the people of Tirupati parliamentary constituency to give one chance to the BJP-Jana Sena combine. This, he said, is only political force to face the YSRC and check the corruption in the state.

Meanwhile, BJP AP state chief Somu Veerraju said, "It is really unfortunate that CM Jaganmohan Reddy is following the style of terror set by Chandrababu Naidu, in the Nandalay by-election in the past. "Jaganmohan Reddy's rule in the state is a replication of the old Emergency rule of the Congress. With the help of volunteers, they have prevented people from exercising their franchise in the local elections," he alleged.

The prestigious Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election has turned more interesting with political leaders using social media as a tool to target their opponents, who are in the fray. The AP BJP leaders appear to be ahead of their rivals in using the social media as a weapon to target and counter the ruling and the opposition parties in the state.

For instance, after targeting the YSR Congress, AP BJP Chief Somu Veerraju has turned his focus on Telugu Desam, cornering Panabaka Lakshmi,



YSRC's Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election contestant Dr M. Gurumurthy campaigns in Tirupati city on Wednesday.

Postal ballot facility for
disabled, Covid-hit, 80 +DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 31

Officials have been making arrangements to provide postal ballot facility for the first time to the disabled in addition to the service voters, officials on polling duty, people above 80 years old and Covid-19 patients during the ensuing by-election to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat.

There are 947 service voters (persons working in army and navy etc.) and 10,000 employees on polling duty. The other notified electors should apply for a postal ballot through form 12D.

The Returning Officer for the by-poll and Collector of SPSR Nellore district K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu has disclosed this while speaking to this newspaper.

He said he had obtained special permission from the Election Commission of India to apply ink mark to the righthand forefinger of the voters since ink mark was applied already to the left hand during the recent elections to Panchayats and Civic bodies.

He informed that the Election Commission of India has added some new features to the election

TD WILL HIGHLIGHT FAILURES OF YSRC
DURING CAMPAIGN: ATCHANNAIDUDC CORRESPONDENT
Nellore, March 31:

Telugu Desam AP president K. Atchannaidu said they are going to launch a door-to-door campaign at Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency to highlight the failures of the YSRC government in the next 15 days in Tirupati Lok Sabha segment as part of the campaign for their nominee for the election, Panbaka Lakshmi.

Addressing the media at Venkatagiri town after

deliberations on the election strategy with party senior leaders at Venkatagiri on Wednesday, he said Panabaka Lakshmi was elected to Lok Sabha four times and also served as Union minister for two terms during her three decades in public service.

Alleging that the YSRC has been betraying the people of the state, Atchannaidu said the ruling party has won seats in civic and gram panchayat polls using its power.

Responding to Somu Veerraju's post, Ms. Lakshmi refuted the BJP's propaganda and alleged that the AP BJP President has shared a morphed video of her. "I have respect for Somu Veerraju. But I'm wondering how he made such allegations against me. In my entire political career, I never criticised the opposition leaders. I never criticised Chandrababu Naidu also," she said.

Ms. Lakshmi also said that the people of Tirupati parliamentary constituency are aware of the truth and know her well. She also claimed to have the TD's high command about

the TD's contestant for the forthcoming by-poll, by sharing a purported old video of her.

Sharing a video on his official twitter handle, Somu Veerraju stated; "Here, I'm presenting the scene to Telugu Desam, in which Tirupati MP candidate Ms. Panabaka Lakshmi described the former chief minister and TD president Chandrababu Naidu". The video carried According to that video, Lakshmi said "How did he enter politics? Didn't he know about Anacondas when he was in the Congress party? He backstabbed his father-in-law to become Chief Minister and now he is

process for the benefit of people exercising their franchise.

The new initiatives include display of the candidate's photo beside his name in English and Telugu apart from his party symbol on the ballot unit.

The ECI relaxed the norm that polling agents should be from polling station limits by extending the boundaries to the assembly constituency.

Incidentally, as many as 251 polling stations are being added in Nellore district and 250 in Chittoor district for Tirupati Lok Sabha segment compared to 2019 election to fulfil ECI instructions to setup one polling station for every 1000 voters.

There used to be one polling station for every 1200 voters in the rural areas and 1500 voters in urban areas in the past.

Chakradhar Babu attributed the 1,000 voters limit to the summer and to maintain 6 feet distance between each voter in the queue as per Covid-19 safety precautions. The timings of voting also extended from 7 am to 7 pm for the same reasons, he added.

Referring to the scrutiny of the nominations process completed on Wednesday, they added that the complaint of Ramana is deemed to be invalid as he failed to submit the evidence on time.

Speaking to media persons, Ramana pointed out that Ratna Prabha has been working as chairperson of Karnataka Skill Development Corporation and was also drawing pension as the retired bureaucrat, which was wrong as per the rules.

FROM PAGE 1

He said reforms in the education sector will lead to revolutionary changes in the future and augur well for students as they prepare for their respective careers.

Officials said a special office of CBSE will be opened soon and all government schools will be affiliated to CBSE Board in 2021-22 and the students will write tenth class board exams in 2024-25.

The Chief Minister said there should be enough training for teachers on CBSE syllabus. He said inspection and monitoring mechanisms should be strong and directed the officials to come up with a

plan for it. He said the education monitoring commission should work efficiently.

He said the textbooks in both Telugu and English are being given to students and the problems with English would be improved with time and practice. He said English will be introduced as a medium of instruction in PP-1 schools and Anganwadi centres.

Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh, School Education Secretary Buditi Rajashekar, School Education Commissioner Chinaveerabhadru, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan State Project Director Vetri Selvi and other officials were present.

REJECT NOMINATION
OF BJP CANDIDATE,
DEMANDS JANATA
DAL NOMINEEDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 31

Janata Dal (United) nominee for the by-election to Tirupati Lok Sabha seat A.V. Ramana filed a petition before the Returning Officer for the poll and Collector of SPSR Nellore district K.V. Chakradhar Babu demanding to reject the nomination of BJP candidate K. Rathna Prabha citing various lapses in her affidavit.

In the petition, he alleged that Rathna Prabha, who was Chief Secretary of Karnataka, has failed to mention cases booked against her and not submitted genuine records related to her caste and hometown. He alleged that there are cases registered against her in the past at Banjara Hills, Saifabad police stations in Telangana state, and Hanumanthunipadu police station in Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh.

Ramana charged that the supporting documents, related her caste as Madiga, submitted with the affidavit are also fake while appealing the Returning Officer to reject her nomination for failing to provide mandatory information to the Election Commission.

When contacted, officials concerned said that Returning Officer should not conduct inquiry during scrutiny of nomination, which took place on Wednesday. "It is a quasi-judicial process and the burden of proof lies on the complainant. Any benefit of doubt should be given to the candidate and RO shouldn't reject any nomination on mere suspicion and in the absence of any substantial evidence placed before him during scrutiny (not after)" officials said.

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Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh, School Education Secretary Buditi Rajashekar, School Education Commissioner Chinaveerabhadru, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan State Project Director Vetri Selvi and other officials were present.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at the foundation-stone laying ceremony for Retaining Wall to Krishna River at Krishnalanka in Vijayawada on Wednesday. Minister Botsa Satyanarayana (second from right) and principal secretary Y. Srilakshmi (right) are also seen.

— DC

Nimmagadda worked for
TD, alleges Perni NaniDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Information minister Perni Venkataramaiah, alias Nani, criticised SEC Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar for writing a letter to the Governor on the measures to be taken to enhance transparency in elections and cornering YSRC.

Speaking to the media here on Wednesday, the minister said that Ramesh Kumar has no moral right to speak on transparent and unbiased elections, as he was the one who worked under the directions of Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu, during his stint. He said that it was strange for Ramesh Kumar to suggest that the State Election Commissioner has to stay away from politicians and political parties, while he himself went overboard and held secret talks with Sujana Chaudhary and Kamini Srinivas at a hotel.

Reiterating that Ramesh Kumar always worked for the interests of Naidu, Nani said that it was funny for him to come with such a letter, as he had overruled every recommendation he listed. He said that people are not going to believe his words, as the entire state had already witnessed the bias towards Naidu. Recalling past instances, the minister said that it was

RAMESH LAUDS GOVT FOR EXTENDING SUPPORT
IN CONDUCT OF POLLS SUCCESSFULLY IN STATEDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar Ramesh Kumar lauded the state government for extending all requisite support in terms of manpower and also funds to help him conduct polls for gram panchayats and urban local bodies successfully.

The election commissioner told media persons while demitting office on superannuation that without the support from the chief secretary, director general of police, state election commission secretary, joint secretary and collectors and SPs in the districts and also the judiciary, it could be highly impossible to conduct polls. Referring to the criticism of a series of decisions taken by the election commissioner pertaining to conduct of polls from ministers and others, he described it as a storm in a tea cup.

Ramesh Kumar who wrote the letter to the Centre that was drafted in the TD office, postponed elections citing Covid-19, when only a few cases were registered, held polls

The state election commissioner thanked both the Supreme Court and the High Court for enabling it to fulfill its constitutional mandate to conduct the polls by reminding the State Election Commission of its extensive constitutional powers.

However, the election commissioner vowed to wage a legal battle if needed to get his right to vote as his registration as a voter in the electoral rolls at his native village Duggirala in Guntur district, was pending for some reasons.

He came up with draft recommendations to affect some changes in election law to improve electoral practices in order to make them more accountable and transparent and sought suggestions from intellectuals for further improvement.

He welcomed the new election commissioner Nilam Sawhney and said she would do a good job.

when Covid was at its peak and even went to the court demanding to vote although he was not qualified as per Form 6 of Central Election Commission.

LOCALS HAPPY
BY THE MOVE ON
RETAINING WALL

From Page 1

About 12 lakh cusecs of water flow into the river when there is heavy flooding. The retaining wall is designed to withstand the flood currents.

The concrete wall at a height of 8.9 m is being constructed on pile and raft foundations 18 m deep with a diameter of three feet.

It may be recalled that during the 2009 flood, the then Chief Minister Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy sanctioned the flood retaining wall. This wall was built at that time from Yanamalakuduru to Kotinagar. The latest is a continuation of this.

The Chief Minister interacted with Mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi and corporators while the locals expressed happiness over the move. They recalled that whenever floodwater was released from Prakasam Barrage, their houses would be inundated.

Ministers Velampalli Srinivasa Rao, Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao (Nani), Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani), P. Anil Kumar Yadav and Botsa Satyanarayana, government whip Samineni Udaybhanu, Brahmin Corporation Chairman Malladi Vishnu, MLC Karimunnisa, MLAs KYLE Anilkumar, Mondithoka Jaganmohan Rao, Kothuru Parthasarathy, Kothari Abbaraya Chowdary, Jogi Ramesh, Gudivada Amarnath, and Simhadri Ramesh, MPs Balashowry Vallabhaneni and others were also present on the occasion.

● The concrete wall at a height of 8.9 m is being constructed on pile and raft foundations 18 m deep with a diameter of three feet.

COMPENSATION | FOR LAND Six-member committee is expected to finalise its report today

NGT continues hearing on dump yard at Polavaram

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN |
DC
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

National Green Tribunal members, led by retired justice B. Seshasayana Reddy, continued their public hearing on the second day over compensation provided to oustees of dump yard at Polavaram village, where garbage from the Polavaram project is being dumped.

Villagers who arrived at the government high school in the village on Wednesday too complained to NGT panel that many of them had either been given partial or no payment at all, though they gave up their land for the dump yard at Moola Lanka.

The villagers said the dust particles from dump is also affecting their health.

● Villagers who arrived at the government high school in the village on Wednesday too complained to NGT panel that many of them had either been given partial or no payment at all, though they gave up their land for the dump yard at Moola Lanka. The villagers said the dust particles from dump is also affecting their health.

● A section of villagers complained that the amount provide as relief is disproportionate to the land acquired from them.

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complainings about problems pertaining to resettlement and rehabilitation of the project, apart from poor amenities at the rehab centres, panel members advised them to confine themselves to issues related to the dump yard.

Some of them informed the panel that their fields were getting submerged with flood water especially during the rainy season as

the muck was blocking flow of water in the rivulet.

The panel members noted down the complaints raised by the villagers and later held a review meeting with the officials from the irrigation and revenue departments.

The six-member NGT panel is expected to finalise its report on Thursday.

SHORT TAKES

50% REDUCTION
IN VACANT LAND
TAX SOUGHTDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Representatives of CREDAI-AP met urban development minister Botsa Satyanarayana on Wednesday and sought 50 per cent reduction in vacant land tax for providing relief to the construction sector.

VSP protests



Employees and representatives from various trade unions take out a rally in protest against the central government move to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant near the district collector office in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— DC

AP TO WITNESS
SEVERE HEAT
WAVE CONDITIONSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Heat wave conditions are likely to prevail in Andhra Pradesh, with day temperatures ranging from 40 to 43 degrees Celsius at isolated pockets over south coastal AP and Rayalaseema regions in the next two days.

Weather office here said the dry weather would prevail with heat wave conditions in parts of both coastal AP and Rayalaseema regions on April 1 and 2. The IMD issued a weather warning to AP by saying that thunderstorm along with lightning likely to occur at isolated places over north coastal AP and Yanam on April 3 and 4.

“The synoptic features of weather interference in AP indicate that low pressure area over southeast Bay of Bengal and adjoining south Andaman sea and the associated cyclonic circulation extending 5.8km above mean sea level, will persist. It is likely to become more marked over central parts of Andaman Sea and its neighbourhood during the next 24 hours and is likely to form into a depression over the same region in the subsequent 24 hours.

A north-south trough also runs from Jharkhand to north coastal AP and extends up to 1.5km above mean sea level. Meanwhile, on Wednesday, heat wave conditions prevailed at isolated pockets in parts of East Godavari, West Godavari districts of north coastal AP and also in parts of south coastal AP and Rayalaseema regions.

S.No. 04 e-Tender No.: 44_N_SC_21_OT **Name of the work:** SW 1) Repairs to colony roads at RDM, RGPM, PDPL, KOLR, KYOP, PTPK, JMKT & OPL Stations and Approach roads to station and cabin at RDM, KOLR, KYOP Station under ADEN/RDM Sub-Division. SW 2) Repairs to road surfaces at LC gates under ADEN/RDM Sub-Division. **Approx. Tender Value in (₹):** 1,12,05,977/- **Completion period in Months :** 09 **Maintenance period in Months :** 06

S.No. 05 e-Tender No.: 45_Co_SC_21_OT **Name of the work:** Regular maintenance of Sewerage system which includes preventive as well as trouble shooting under SSE/Works/SC & SSE/Works/HYB sections (for 2 Years). **Approx. Tender Value in (₹):** 48,93,091/- **Completion period in Months :** 24 **Maintenance period in Months :** Nil

1. Tenderers should participate through e-tendering only and no manual offers may be considered.
2. All the prospective tenderers are requested to remit Cost of EMD (If applicable) through online payments only.
3. The Railway reserves the right to cancel the tender without assigning any reason thereto.
4. All the prospective tenderers are advised to get GSTIN identification Nos. and submit along with their offer.

Sr.DEN/Co-ordination/
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For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at <https://www.iemps.gov.in> or www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in

AP records 1,184
new Covid cases

Guntur registers highest no. of +ve cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Andhra Pradesh registered 1,184 fresh cases of Coronavirus and four deaths in the last 24 hours. The state health authorities reported here on Wednesday that out of 30,964 samples tested, 1,184 persons were found infected with the confirmed Covid-19.

Out of a total number of 1,50,83,179 samples tested so far, 9,01,989 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,87,434 recovered while 7,338 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus, Guntur registered the highest at 352 followed by 186 in Visakhapatnam, 115 in Chittoor, 113 in Krishna, 78 in Nellore, 66 in Anantapur, 64 in Kurnool, 62 in Kadapa, 47 in Srikakulam, 45 in Prakasam, 26 in East Godavari, 19 in Vizianagaram and 11 in West Godavari.

Chittoor district found to be the worst hit with 1,333 Coronavirus cumulative active cases followed by 1,091 in Visakhapatnam, 1,058 in Krishna, 884 in Guntur, 678 in East Godavari, 470 in Nellore, 353 in Kurnool, 333 in Prakasam, 329 in Srikakulam, 325 in Anantapur, 219 in Kadapa, 142 in West Godavari and 123 in Vizianagaram.

Among daily cases of death of Coronavirus infected patients, out of a total number of four, Chittoor alone recorded three while one in Nellore, rising the death toll to 7,217.

Christians seek steps to end attacks

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

The Andhra Pradesh Christian Leaders Forum has alleged that some fanatic Hindu organisations are threatening pastors and seeking to obtain information via RTI about the Church, priests and pastors. The forum leaders submitted a memorandum to RTI commissioner P. Ramesh Kumar here seeking

ing protection of Christians from such designs. They alleged that these fanatic organisations have carried out attacks on pastors in several places.

Oliver Roy, chairman of the forum, said the religious fanatics were creating fear among Christians in the name of the Right to Information Act.

Addressing the media here on Wednesday, he said these fanatics were

conspiring to unlawfully dig out the details and personal information of a few Christians and Pastors through the RTI Act. As a result, Christians are subjected to fear and insecurity.

Roy alleged that the religious fanatics are pressurising the MROs in a few mandals and obtaining information on Christians as to which Church they attend.

BLACK | MONEY

Houses of people associated with Virasam searched

NIA raids houses in AP, TS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD/VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

Officials from the National Investigation Agency (NIA) along with police teams from Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh searched several houses of people associated with Virasam and alleged links with Maoists in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday. The searches were going on till late in the night.

Sources said that the NIA officials were carrying out investigations pertaining to the Bhima

Koregaon case. In Telangana, the houses of V. Raghunath, High Court Advocate and Vice-president of Civil Liberties Committee (CLC) in Dilsukhnagar were raided.

Raids were also conducted at the residence of Dappu Ramesh, a leader of several public associations.

NIA officials are alleged to be conducting searches to ascertain their links with the Maoists. Earlier, NIA officials have arrested several people, including Professor Kashim and Nalamasa

Krishna, on the same charges.

In East Godavari at Rajamahendravaram, the NIA officials searched the residence of APCLC state president Chitti Babu.

In Visakhapatnam, they searched the residence of lawyer K. Padmain Pithapuram Colony and also at the residence of another lawyer K.S. Chalam at China Waltair.

In Proddatur of Anantapur district, they searched the house of Virasam leader Varalakshmi.

In Kurnool, they conducted searches at the res-

National Flag designer hailed
through photo exhibitionDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

The Andhra Pradesh Photography Akademi (APPA) held a Mana Trivarnapathaakam-Mana Atma-gouravam (our tricolour-our self-respect) photo exhibition in memory of National Flag designer Pingali Venkayya here on Wednesday.

Inaugurating the photo exhibition, AP state council of higher education chairman Prof. K. Hemachandra

Reddy stressed the need to protect the nation's rich heritage and culture. The photo exhibition was held in Victoria Jubilee Bapu Museum marking the completion of 100 years of the National Flag.

He felt this photo exhibition would help the younger generation know the history of National Flag.

Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu noted that former chief minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy had released a stamp on Pingali

Venkayya and present CM Jagan Mohan Reddy felicitated Venkayya's daughter Seetamahalakshmi.

He praised the efforts of APPA for holding the photo exhibition on the National Flag.

Former deputy speaker Mandalai Buddha Prasad recalled that in year 1921, Venkayya presented the Tricolour to Mahatma Gandhi at this place where a photo exhibition is conducted in the same premises. “This is a great tribute to Venkayya,” Prasad said.

TARIFFS
CONTINUE
ON ELECTRIC
VEHICLES

From page 1

Also accepted are proposals to merge aqua hatcheries and aqua feed mixing plants and poultry hatcheries and poultry feed mixing plants under industry general category. LT captive feed mixing plants of poultry farms, pisciculture, prawn culture and dairy farms having independent connections and exempted from GST will be allowed to pay a tariff of ₹5.25 / unit and demand charges ₹75 per kW.

To promote usage of environmental friendly electric vehicles for transport, the commission has continued to keep the tariff for electric vehicles at ₹6.70 per unit.

Justice C. V. Nagarajuna Reddy said the request of private power plants, which do not have binding agreement, to include them in power procurement plan for FY 2021-22 has been rejected. This will enable DISCOMs to take advantage of real-time market opportunities towards saving power purchase costs.

DISCOMs have been directed to establish a round-the-clock dedicated cell to monitor real-time market prices. This will help replace costlier sources with cheaper sources of power and help optimise overall power purchase cost.

Meanwhile, representatives of CREDAI-AP met urban development minister Botsa Satyanarayana on Wednesday and sought 50 per cent reduction in vacant land tax for providing relief to the construction sector.

CREDAI president P. Srinivas and secretary K. Subhash Chandrabose pointed out that due to Corona pandemic, construction sector has been facing many problems and has almost come to a halt. They appealed that the government increase period of approval by one year and relax set-back for multi-storied buildings.

Responding to the CREDAI representatives, Satyanarayana said he will take up the issue with Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy.

● **DISCOMS HAVE** been directed to establish a round-the-clock dedicated cell to monitor real-time market prices.

TTD releases papers
on human hair seizureDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 31

Releasing the documents related to seizure of human hair made by the Assam Rifles, Customs and the Mizoram police, TTD additional executive officer A.V. Dharma Reddy refuted the propaganda on human hair smuggling issue and said that some vested interests hatched a conspiracy to damage the reputation of the TTD — the premiere Hindu religious institution, with malicious campaign.

Addressing a media conference in Tirumala on Wednesday the additional EO said, in spite of all disclosures, the vested interests were targeting the TTD and the AP government through various media platforms and hurting the sentiments of the devotees.

“The baseless charge was that the TTD officials and Customs officials were clandestinely transporting the tonsured hair. There was no reference or link to the TTD in the ₹18,17,089 worth rotten human hair seized on February 8. The reports of police and customs categorically stated that the seized hair were not linked to the TTD at all and were also useless for processing. However, a section of the media is making all-out efforts to damage the reputation of the TTD and thereby hurting the sentiments of Hindu devotees across the globe”, he said.

He said the TTD has established a transparent and state-of-art technology to process treatment-cum-storage of tonsured hair. “Not a single glade of hair is offered in e-auction without its processing”, he added.

TTD DEMANDS
APOLOGY FROM
SATYANARAYANADC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 31

The TTD has strongly condemned the allegations on TTD trust board EO and additional EO in social media by ex-MLA Bandaru Satyanarayana Murthy over the issue of seizure of hair by Assam rifles without ascertaining the facts.

In a release on Wednesday, the TTD expressed objections for attributing motives to AP Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy though he has no links to the hair issue. The temple body stated that it had categorically ruled out any role in the spoiled hair caught by Mizoram police.

“The additional EO A.V. Dharma Reddy had clarified issues at a media conference last evening and also on Wednesday morning released documents presented by Customs, Mizoram police and Assam Rifles, proving that the TTD had nowhere figured in those reports,” added in the statement.

He said the malafide campaigners had painted the officials of Kalyanakatta, the TTD Vigilance and 1,200 barbers as thieves and marked them guilty. “It had hurt the TTD employees mentally, who are working in the division in spite of health hazards. It was also not good to malign a few officials and employees for the sake of cheap popularity”, he added.

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DECCAN Chronicle

1 APRIL 2021

Not all gloom, but clearly complacency will be fatal

A recent surge in coronavirus cases across India has triggered concerns over the growth trajectory of the economy. A free hand given by the Union home ministry to state governments to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and threats to impose lockdown by states like Maharashtra have given rise to concerns about the fragile economic recovery.

Nevertheless, Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das believes that the economy will move only upwards from now on. Though the benchmark market indices Sensex and the Nifty were in jitters over the rising viral infections, Mr Das does not see a need for a revision in the central bank's growth estimate, which was pegged at 10.5 per cent for the financial year 2021-22.

The downside of the people's confidence in the government's ability to deal with the pandemic would be complacency, as could be seen across India

The RBI's assessment of the economy appears to be based on three factors — first, an unlikely prospect of a complete lockdown as India had witnessed between April and May 2020; second, Covid is not as unknown to Indians as it was in 2020; third, an improved ability of the Indian healthcare system to handle the Covid-19 disease, though the vaccination programme is going on at a rather slow pace.

Compared to 2020, the Indian industry, too, has adapted itself to working in a new normal

created by the Covid-19 pandemic. People are not as unsure about their future as they were in April 2020, which will not force them to sit tight on their spending. As a result, there won't be any drastic fall in demand and, therefore, the production.

Some economists, however, expressed concerns about the Maharashtra government's threat to impose localised lockdown in the state, which has been contributing around half of the total cases in the country. The western state contributes 14.5 per cent of the Indian GDP and is one of the powerhouses of the country in manufacturing. If the lockdown was imposed in the state, they argue that it would disrupt the supply chain and cause great harm to the economic recovery. After witnessing the economic and social consequences of the 2020 lockdown, no government would ever repeat it again.

The downside of the people's confidence in the government's ability to deal with the pandemic would be complacency, as could be seen across India. People stopped following Covid-appropriate behaviour because of a lower number of cases in January. Politicians should also be blamed for complacency as many of them began to write off Covid by moving around without masks, which inspired people to dodge social distance norms.

After the second wave of cases, governments and people have woken up to reality and have begun to take quick steps to slow down the spread of infection. The reports of healthcare infrastructure being overwhelmed in bigger cities like Delhi and Mumbai would trigger a course-correction in people's behaviour. As a result, an SBI research report claims that the second wave could peak in mid-April and ebb in May. It means the second wave would last for 100 days, which is not a period long enough to push the Indian economic growth into negative territory once again.

Wrong signal in Valley

Former J&K chief minister and PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti was recently informed that her application for passport extension has been rejected. The state CID has given an "adverse" report. If this should cause surprise, no less surprising is the ground for rejection given by the CID. It appears issuing a passport to the former CM — who is a key mainstream politician of Kashmir — will be detrimental to national security.

This is Kafkaesque. Until not long ago, Ms Mufti's party ran a coalition government in J&K with the BJP, the party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Wholly unlike one another in ideology, these parties had come together on account of the unusual Assembly election result of 2014. Many thought that if a Valley-based party got together with a national entity which had a pronounced Hindu community tilt and was well-grounded in the Hindu-majority Jammu region, many of the (then) state's woes will be over.

These were lofty reasons intended to serve the national interest in a troubled part of the country. But BJP and PDP have since split. Ms Mufti was thrown into prison along with hundreds of other Kashmir politicians, not excluding all the leading lights. And Ms Mufti has suddenly become a threat to national security, no less.

Even if the Government of India, to which the state CID reports since J&K is no longer a state but a UT, is being petty since Ms Mufti is an ally-turned political adversary of the ruling party BJP, what about the former CM's old mother, Gulshan Nazir, widow of the PDP founder Mufti Mohammed Sayeed who had brought his party and BJP together? It appears the old lady, too, has been denied a passport for the same reason as her politician-daughter.

This is beyond petty and smells of vendetta. Perhaps all senior mainline Kashmir politicians, not just the separatists, will share the Mufti family's fate if they applied for a passport. Naturally this makes India laughing stock in the world and in the region. It also makes the ordinary people of Kashmir wonder about the Centre's intention about them. For the Modi government, an anxious and dissatisfied populace in the border regions when fresh talks with Pakistan are envisaged cannot be a good sign.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

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Subhani



Being politically correct in times of Covid & polls



Devi Kar

Through most of 2020, as the fearsome Covid-19 pandemic engulfed the whole world, the stormy American presidential elections took up much of our attention. No matter where you are, you simply can't get away from the tumult of politics. Perhaps I feel this all the more because West Bengal, where I live, is in the midst of the eight-phase Assembly elections while we teachers are struggling to run our schools with full Covid-19 protocols in place. The spectre of the board exams is looming before us; they have to be administered after the election results are out.

Meanwhile, politics began interfering with the distribution of vaccines, and sadly with children's books as well.

At the beginning of this month, it was announced that six of Dr Seuss' titles would be recalled because of the "racist tropes" that people had been talking about. It is well known that banned or unattainable objects are always the most attractive. Therefore, I promptly ordered a copy of the delightful Dr Seuss book *And to Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street* before it became unavailable. Maybe it is a good thing that the United States is finally becoming sensitive to the feelings of non-whites. But removing stereotypical line drawings from books does not really get to the heart of racism. I don't know about others, but if an Indian woman was depicted as a brown sariclad figure eating out of a thali with her fingers, I would not mind at all. It is only if we believe that white is the only acceptable complexion, or that eating with one's hands is unacceptable, that we would feel upset by such illustrations. Come to think of it, there are no "racist tropes" around white people — and it is

not difficult to fathom the reason. Dr Seuss himself explained how he went about changing his original yellow-skinned, pig-tailed "Chinaman" whom he had drawn wearing a conical hat and eating out of a bowl with sticks. He changed "a Chinaman" to "a Chinese man", but after deleting his conical hat and pig-tail and removing the yellow from his skin, Dr Seuss thought that his Chinese man looked more like an Irishman!

Politics dominates society so powerfully that everywhere and at all times we are required to be "politically correct". This has reached such ridiculous lengths that very often the replaced "correct" expression can't be comprehended. These "correct" terms have been especially coined to protect people from feeling hurt. In this context, it has to be mentioned that people seem to have very thin skins these days and get hurt far too easily. So, we have to look out for racist innuendos, references to skin colour, remarks on religion which may be deemed hurtful or even sacrilegious by some group or the other. We must remember not to call short people "short" though it is fine to call tall people "tall". You had better not refer to a person who is hard of hearing "deaf" or for that matter a visually impaired person "blind". You will be called all kinds of names if you use an "incorrect" term — racist, sexist,

Maybe it is a good thing that the US is becoming sensitive to the feelings of non-whites. But removing stereotypical line drawings from books does not really get to the heart of racism.

An ad for 'reliable and hardworking applicants' was seen as offensive! The current euphemism for 'old people' is 'senior citizens', but I suspect that this too will in time offend people of an advanced age.

insensitive to alternative sexual orientation (in some places the term "homosexual" is taboo, you must say "same gender loving"), intolerant of other religions, and so on. A few decades ago, Americans became so self-conscious about being Christian-centric that to be perceived as inclusive, they began to call the Christmas season "the holiday season" and wishing each other "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas". But surely, calling a Christmas tree a "holiday tree" seems a bit too much.

This sort of political correctness without bringing about a radical change in attitudes is quite meaningless. It is true that certain words genuinely acquire connotations which are insulting to groups. For instance, the word "Negro" — although if it merely referred to the Negroid "type", it would be taken as just a scientific fact. Today the term cannot be dissociated with the history of slavery. Unfortunately, "black" has also taken on a similar meaning. But then if you truly believe that "black is beautiful", you wouldn't mind being described as a black-skinned or dark-skinned person. The trouble is that ethnicity is a loaded concept, and simple words have become complex. In India, where colour matters a great deal, people use the word "*maila*", or dirty, to describe someone's dark complexion.

I hope it was a joke, but I have read that an advertisement for "reliable and hardworking applicants" was rejected as it could offend unreliable and lazy people. The current euphemism for "old people" is "senior citizens", but I suspect that this too will in time offend people of an advanced age.

Recently, I named a virtual classroom "Brainstorming Room", and soon after that I read that the term "brainstorming" could threaten epileptic people. The suggested alternative term was "Thought Showers". It is nerve-racking to even speak these days.

Going back to children's books, it is not only the allegations of racism or "hurtful" religious references that have generated trouble but also certain references to political ideology. "I know up on top you are seeing great sights, but down here on the bottom we too should have rights" — in Dr Seuss' *Cat in the Hat* was found to be "too political" for children. In West Bengal, the withdrawal from the primary curriculum of Tagore's *Sahaj Path* by the former Left Front government had caused a furore. One of the reasons for withdrawing these beloved books, some alleged, were a couple of lines that showed a *zamindar* to be benevolent. This was certainly not in alignment with the CPI(M)'s principles. I know that the now condemned Enid Blyton books were read innocently and with great enjoyment by generations of children without a thought about racism or classism. However, I do believe today that stereotyping the stepmother as evil in children's stories could have a detrimental effect on children's minds. Such stereotypes must be avoided.

In conclusion, it can be stated that a balance must be sought between a genuine need to change terminology and the rush to appease thin-skinned groups.

The writer is a veteran school educator based in Kolkata

However, I do believe today that stereotyping the stepmother as evil in children's stories could have a detrimental effect on children's minds. Such stereotypes must be avoided.

LETTERS

COVID WAVE

The Covid resurgence indicates that lessons have not been learnt and people are not willing to learn. Let all those in the 20-60 age group who go out to work be inoculated to contain the second Covid wave. Further, strict compliance of protocols and huge fines for violators will be the key.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

SUEZ CRISIS

With the ship stuck in Suez Canal being freed, a big tension has been eased for the world. It is a good lesson for humankind that nature is more powerful than them despite advancement in science and technology. We must take care that the March 21 incident does not repeat in future.

Pratapa Reddy Yaramala
Tiruvuru, Krishna district

INDIA'S GROWTH

It's interesting to know that according to World Bank, India is likely to register around 10 per cent GDP growth for financial year 2021. It is a hopeful estimate based on increase in public spending and ongoing massive vaccination programme. It will be great to see such a fast recovery. The second wave of Covid may upset the apple cart. The focus of administration should now be on containing the pandemic.

Dr D.V.G.Sankararao
Vizianagaram

VEHICLE SCRAPPING

As per the vehicle scrapping guidelines, the maximum run period allowed for a vehicle is 20 years. Gone are the days when a car could be kept for life. Resale of vehicles may come down as there will be more sellers than buyers. Consumers and vehicle manufacturers may have to change their mindset.

P. Ramakrishna
Rajahmundry

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

W. Pak troops ejected from large areas

AGARTALA, March. 31

The liberation forces of Bangla Desh, which have ejected the West Pakistani troops from large areas, and the army, still entrenched in major centres, were today busy consolidating their positions, according to UNI correspondents who travelled into the war-torn land.

Scattered fighting continued in several places, mainly outskirts of cities, and the army continued to use tanks and aircraft.

The Goa government's move to place a serving IAS officer in the State Election Commission has backfired badly for not just chief minister Pramod Sawant but also the state chief secretary Parimal Rai. The Supreme Court has cancelled the appointment of state law secretary Chokha Ram Garg in the post.

er, within babu circles in Panjim, it is chief secretary Rai who has become the most visible face to take the blame for this harsh indictment by the court.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.



Dilip Cheria

Dilli Ka Babu

High court pulls up Punjab govt for tainted cops in IPS positions

The Amarinder Singh-led Congress government in Punjab is getting flak from the Punjab and Haryana high court and the issue has had ramifications across the country. The court has directed the state government to explain how and why it has chosen to appoint Punjab Police Service (PPS) officers to IPS-cadre posts of SSPs in the state. The court has held that these appointments are in violation of the IPS cadre rules and has also impleaded the Centre as a party to look into these "apparent violations".

The court noted the instance of PPS officer Rajinder Singh Sohal who was convicted in a criminal case but has been posted as the SSP of Gurdaspur, a post meant for the IPS cadre.

Further, the court has issued a show-cause notice to additional chief secretary (home) Anurag

Aggarwal for "filing of false affidavit" in the matter. Mr Aggarwal may face perjury proceedings if the court is not satisfied with his response. The court has directed the state government to remove tainted or convicted police officers from duty until a policy is framed on action to be taken against these officers. Future proceedings in the court will be watched with great interest. Watch this space for updates.

BIHAR STRUGGLES TO FILL IAS VACANCIES

The Nitish Kumar-led NDA government in Bihar is increasingly re-employing retired officers. Its latest appointment is of retired IAS officer Deepak Kumar as the principal secretary to the chief minister. Mr Kumar, a 1984-batch officer, retired in February and was promptly rehired.

Sources say the government has

little choice when it comes to appointments due to the acute paucity of IAS officers in Bihar. Bihar apparently has only 202 IAS officers against a sanctioned strength of 359 officers. Not surprisingly, the deficit has impacted the quality of administration. It is not unusual for senior officers to be burdened with three or four departments each, apart from their principal task.

It is learnt that Nitish Kumar has requested the Centre to allot 54 IAS officers based on the civil service exam last year. It is reportedly also facilitating appointments to 22 posts from the 2018 batch, 15 posts from the 2019 batch and 16 posts from the 2020 batch under the promotion quota.

GOA CHIEF SECY IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

The Goa government's move to place a serving IAS officer in the

State Election Commission (SEC) has backfired badly for not just chief minister Pramod Sawant but also the state chief secretary Parimal Rai. The Supreme Court has cancelled the recent appointment of state law secretary Chokha Ram Garg as the state election commissioner. In its stinging order, the apex court noted that the move was "a mockery" of constitutional mandate.

The court has further issued directions to all states and Union territories to cancel similar appointments and to appoint only "independent persons to this high constitutional office", nipping in the bud any similar approaches that other states may have been contemplating. Mr Sawant's "innovative" approach is now unlikely to "inspire" other states to attempt something along similar lines.

While political reactions to the decision have been muted, howev-

SHORT TAKES

ARE YOU ABOVE LAW?: HC ASKS PARAM BIR SINGH

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MARCH 31

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday reprimanded Param Bir Singh the former Commissioner of Police, Mumbai for approaching the court without registering an FIR against state home minister Anil Deshmukh. Singh has approached the HC seeking CBI probe against Deshmukh for his alleged criminal malpractices.

The court asked Singh if he thought himself above the law. The court also directed the police to bring a station diary to verify what action they took on a complaint filed by one Jayshree Patil. The chief justice praised Patil for showing the courage to file a police complaint against the home minister and police commissioner.

Interestingly, another HC bench had dismissed Patil's petition on Tuesday calling it a "publicity stunt". There are three PILs and two writ petitions before the HC.

Chief Justice Dipankar Datta reserved order on the maintainability of the PIL filed by Singh and other petitions after hearing senior lawyer Vikram Nankani for Param Bir Singh, Advocate General (AG) Ashutosh Kumbhakoni on behalf of the State and Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Anil Singh for CBI.

During the hearing, the petitioner's lawyer Nankani pressed for an investigation by an independent agency like CBI. However, Chief Justice (CJ) repeatedly asked him how the court could issue directions for a probe when there is no FIR.

DELHI TO HIKE TESTING TO 80,000 PER DAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Amid the recent spike in Coronavirus cases, Delhi health minister Satyendra Jain on Wednesday informed that Covid-19 testing will be increased to 80,000 per day in the national capital, adding that the Delhi government has ordered an increase of 220 ICU beds and 838 non-invasive beds in the wards of 33 private hospitals.

Delhi has been witnessing a surge in cases in the past few days, reporting 992 new infections on Tuesday. "Delhi recorded 992 positive cases on Tuesday. The positivity rate was 2.7. The testing has been increased. The testing rate had dropped for the last two days, from today onwards 80,000 tests will be done...30 contacts each of every Covid-19 positive patients are being traced," Jain said.

"An ample number of beds is available in government hospitals. The overall occupancy in private and government hospitals in Delhi is 25 per cent. A shortage of ICU beds has been reported at three to four private hospitals, so we have ordered an increase in ICU beds," he added.

INDIA SEES A SLIGHT DIP IN COVID +VE CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

India recorded 53,480 new Coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, 4.8 per cent lower than the day before, taking the total tally to 1,21,49,335 on Wednesday. On Tuesday, the country had recorded 56,211 cases, while on Monday; it logged 68,020 cases, the highest single-day spike in daily new cases since October 11 last year. Maharashtra has witnessed a dip in daily cases count as the state reported over 27,000 infections in the last 24 hours as against over 31,000 cases recorded on March 29. With 27,918 Covid-19 cases on Tuesday, the state tally has now reached 2,77,346.

According to the ICMR, 24,36,72,940 samples have been tested up to March 30 with 10,22,915 samples being tested on Tuesday. On Monday, only 7,85,864 samples were tested, while on Sunday, 9.13 lakh samples were tested, compared to over 10 lakh samples the previous days, according to the data by the apex research body.

Prior to March 30, India registered a steady increase for 19 days in a row. The active cases have now increased to 5,52,566 comprising 4.55 per cent of the total infections, while the recovery rate has further dropped to 94.11 per cent.

RAHUL GANDHI ATTACKS PM MODI, ACCUSES HIM OF LYING

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, MARCH 31

Launching a frontal attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday accused him of lying and said that if you want to listen to lies — about Assam, farmers, about anything — then switch on your TV, look at Narendra Modi's face and listen to him as much as you want.

Gandhi on Wednesday started his two-days visit to the poll-bound Assam by visiting Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati where he interacted with devotees around the temple and also addressed three public rallies.

Addressing a public rally in Kamrup district he said, "I have not come here to lie to you. My name isn't Narendra Modi. If you want to listen to lies — about Assam, farmers, about anything — then switch on your TV, look at Narendra Modi's face and listen to him as much as you want. He lies to India 24 hours."

Pointing out that Congress has given five guarantees to voters of Assam that will be fulfilled, Gandhi said, "I want to give you sixth guarantee that the government of grand alliance will not be run on dictates from Nagpur or New Delhi. Our government will be receiving orders from the people of Assam."

"We are not BJP, we fulfill our promises. Tea garden workers must remember our guarantee of ₹365 per day as minimum wage," Gandhi said.

The Congress has promised in its 'guarantees' that it will not allow the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to be implemented in Assam, provide employment to five lakh youths, provide 200 units of free electricity per month to every household, give monthly assistance of ₹2,000 to every housewife, besides raising the minimum daily wages of tea garden workers.

Ishrat Jahan case: CBI court discharges 3 cops

Ahmedabad, March 31: A special CBI court here on Wednesday discharged police officers G.L. Singhal, Tarun Barot and Anaju Chaudhary in the 2004 Ishrat Jahan alleged fake encounter case.

Special CBI judge V.R. Raval allowed the discharge applications of Singhal, Barot (now retired) and Chaudhary.

"The CBI has not mentioned anything specific against the sanction order (in which the Gujarat government declined sanction to prosecute the three accused) which also leads to believe the act of applicants/accused was in discharge of official duties," the court observed.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on March 20 conveyed to the court that the state government had declined sanction for prosecution of the three accused.

The court in its October 2020 order observed that they had "acted in their official duties," so the probe agency was required to obtain sanction for prosecution.

Under section 197 of the Criminal Procedure Code, sanction is required for prosecuting government servants for anything done in the discharge of official duty.

Ishrat Jahan, a 19-year-old woman from Mumbai near Mumbai, was killed along with Javed Shaikh alias Pranesh Pillai, Amjad Ali Akbarali Rana and Zeeshan Johar by Gujarat police in an 'encounter' near Ahmedabad on June 15, 2004.

The police claimed the four were terrorists who



Poll officials leave for their poll duties, ahead of the second phase of Assembly elections, in Haldia, on Wednesday.

— PTI

Didi slams EC as Nandigram comes under aerial vigilance

Already 22 companies of Central paramilitary forces deployed in N'gram alone

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MARCH 31

Labelling the Election Commission as a "spokesperson" and "broker" of the BJP for meeting the demands of the saffron party, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday wondered if the President's Rule has been imposed in the state for the ongoing Assembly election.

The Trinamul Congress supremo spewed venom against the EC after the central poll panel, anticipating violence, enforced prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, also a demand of the BJP, and switched on aerial surveillance from choppers across Nandigram, where the two-time CM is contesting from this time against her nemesis Shuvendu Adhikari of the BJP, a day before the hot seat and 29 others go to the polls in the second phase.

Raja denies violating Model Code in reply to EC's notice

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

DMK deputy general secretary and MP A. Raja, denied having spoken anything that violated the Model Code of Conduct or any other provision of the law with regard to the allegation by the AIADMK that he insulted Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami.

In his interim reply to the notice issued by the Election Commission of India, Raja said on Wednesday that he did not make any derogatory or defamatory speeches against the Chief Minister and did not demean or defame women or motherhood.

"As a student of Ambedkar, Periyar and Anna, as a person who was guided by Dr Kalaignar Karunanithi and as a member of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, I had or have or will never indulge in such activities which will disrepute women," he said.

When the AIADMK and BJP started propagating

witnessed growth in the BJP votebank in the last Lok Sabha election. In a virulent speech, Banerjee told a TMC rally at Uleberia East in Howrah, "The EC scheduled the poll dates going by the Mandals of the BJP. I discovered it. It is true. I was surprised. In the EC each looks like Mandal committee president. I respect the EC as much as it needs. With humble regards, I request the EC, Be impartial. Is it a must to pay heed to whatever the BJP says? Even yesterday BJP workers attacked me and pushed my car in Nandigram. But the EC did not take any action. My personal security personnel tried their best. But the way the EC is giving its instructions, people see it as for the BJP only."

She alleged, "All TMC flags and hoardings have been removed because Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address a rally. This is the main job of the BJP. It only acts as a broker of BJP. Listen, this is Bengal. If I ask some boys and girls just once, they will throw them out by slapping in a second. But I do not indulge in it. I am a peace loving individual."

Midnapore and West Midnapore, eight from Bankura and four from South 24 Parganas where 171 candidates are in the fray. The seats in West Midnapore and Bankura

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Over 12 die in Bihar under mysterious circumstances

NAYEAR AZAD | DC
PATNA, MARCH 31

Over a dozen people across the state have lost their lives under mysterious circumstances in the last 24 hours.

While the administration has not yet confirmed the reason, a section in the Bihar political circle doesn't rule out consumption of illicit liquor as a reason behind these deaths.

Deaths have been reported from Nawada, Begusarai and Rohtas districts. Reports suggest that the incident took place after some of these people consumed spurious liquor during Holi on Monday evening. The incident has exposed administrative failure in controlling the illegal liquor trade in dry Bihar.

Sources from Nawada and Begusarai said that victims were cremated by the families fearing police

● **A SECTION** in the Bihar political circle doesn't rule out consumption of illicit liquor as a reason behind these deaths.

investigation into the case after they died after consuming adulterated liquor.

After the incident, people have expressed anger and blamed the local police for allowing the rampant illegal liquor trade in villages. According to local political leaders in Nawada, "officials are trying to hide facts. Senior administrative officials have not said anything about these deaths. People have been raising the issue of liquor trade but the police didn't take any action".

Talking about the incident ADG headquarter Jitendra Kumar said that "The police were informed that four people have lost their lives under mysterious circumstances in Nawada. A probe has been

ordered and anything regarding the issue can only be said after the police receive medical reports of the deceased persons".

Liquor prohibition was the first major announcement by Nitish Kumar after he was sworn in as Chief Minister in 2015 following an emphatic election victory.

The complete ban was imposed on April 5, 2016, but the stringent excise law was brought into force in October 2016. Prohibition, consumption and dealing and conniving to sell liquor was made a criminal offence under Bihar's prohibition law which provides for imprisonment up to 10 years and fine of more than ₹1 lakh.

According to RJD leaders, "liquor is easily available despite stringent prohibition law in the state. The state government has failed to check and control illegal liquor trade in Bihar".

Pawar recovering after surgery: Tope

SONU
SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, MARCH 31

NCP president Sharad Pawar is doing well after undergoing a surgery for removal of a gallbladder stone at a private hospital in Mumbai on Tuesday night, Maharashtra health minister Tope informed. The minister said that Pawar will get relief from abdominal pain as the stone has been removed successfully. "The decision for gallbladder surgery would be taken by the doctors after a few days. Pawar is stable and there is no reason to worry," Tope said.

The NCP chief was supposed to be admitted on Wednesday, but since he had experienced pain in his abdomen, he was admitted on Tuesday afternoon itself.

Tope said that after conducting all diagnosis, the doctors concluded that the main reason behind

SHAH: WILL NOT ALLOW ASSAM TO BECOME HUB OF INFILTRATORS

DC CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI, MARCH 31

Union home minister Amit Shah here on Wednesday said that the BJP will not allow Assam to become a hub for infiltrators once again while claiming that his party had successfully freed the land encroached by them during the last five years.

Intensifying attack against AIUDDF chief Badruddin Ajmal, Shah in chaste Hindi said, "Kaan khol kar sunlo Ajmal, Assam ko ghuspetiyo ke adda phir se nahin banne denge. (Ajmal listen carefully we will not allow Assam to become a hub for infiltrators again)".

Referring to Ajmal at length in his speech in three public rallies that Shah addressed on Wednesday said, "Do you know? Ajmal is claiming that the key of forming the next government is in his hands and he will be deciding who will form the next government in Assam but he doesn't know that the key of forming the next government is into the hands of people."

Shah also accused Congress of failing to stop infiltration. "Hame aur paanch saal de dijiye, aadmi toh kya parinde bhi ghus nahi sake" (give us another five years, and we will ensure that no one not even birds enter illegally)," said Shah.

Reminding as to how late Congress chief minister Tarun Gogoi rejected Ajmal by saying — "Who is Ajmal?" Shah regretted that Rahul Gandhi is saying that Ajmal is Assam's identity.

Asserting that BJP will not allow this to happen, Shah said, "Assam's identity is Vaishnav saint Srimanta Sankardeva, Bharat Ratnas Gopinath Bordoloi and Bhupen Hazarika who represent Assam's identity and the Congress and Ajmal will not be allowed to change it at any cost." He reiterated that it is the BJP's double-engine government at the Centre and the state which successfully ended violence and agitation in the state.



Sharad Pawar

the abdominal pain was the stone developed in gallbladder.

"The stone was removed through endoscopy. He is now feeling relief from night and pain has also been reduced. Doctors have planned to remove the gallbladder, which contains more stones, after eight to 10 days once all the parameters would be stabilised," he added.

"A surgery was necessitated on him following some complications. We will decide on surgery on the gallbladder later. Currently, Pawar is under observation. He is doing well," Dr Amit Maydeo said.

FESTIVE | FIRE

Officials suspect Holi festival revellers may have caused fire

Fire breaks out in MP tiger reserve

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, MARCH 31

A massive wildfire has broken out in Bandhavgarh tiger reserve (BTR) in Madhya Pradesh, causing huge damages to flora in some forest ranges under the national park.

However, wildlife animals including tigers have remained unaffected by the forest fire, BTR field director Wincnet Rahim told this newspaper on Wednesday. "No animals including the tigers and

avian species have been affected by the fire", he added.

"The fire broke out on Tuesday. It spread to the 'fire points' in three core ranges and three buffer areas of the BTR. The fire has now been extinguished", he said.

He said that bamboo clumps and grasslands in these areas were destroyed in the fire.

However, locals said the wildfire broke out on Monday and spread very fast in the jungle. The fire could be brought under

control on Wednesday afternoon with the help of ground level forest staff, police and local villagers.

"Dry leaves and dry tree branches had helped the wildfire spread fast in the forest", the local villagers said.

Panic button was pressed among the forest officers when the fire started engulfing the Mahaman and Bhadrasila forest patches under the Magadhi range, the core area of tigers in BTR, prompting the forest staff to intensify firefight measures, sources said.

The wildfire had spread to the forest ranges of Tala, Magadhi, Khitauli, Jagajhar, Panpatha and Pataur, a senior forest officer said.

"We are yet to make assessment of damages caused by the wildfire. Our priority was to extinguish the fire", Rahim said.

Forest officials suspect the Holi festival revellers may have caused the fire.

Sources said lack of forest staff has hampered protection of forest particularly in BTR. "The post of deputy field director of

BTR has been lying vacant since last four months. Out of 3 posts of Sub-Divisional Officer (forest) sanctioned for BTR, only one SDO has been appointed. Similarly, a number of posts of forest rangers in BTR were yet to be filled", a senior forest officer told this newspaper requesting anonymity.

"Local villagers are invariably behind all the fire incidents. It is a difficult task for forest officers to protect the forest if adequate staff are not available", he added.

SHORT TAKES

ATTEMPT TO
HARM QUEEN: 5
THAIS INDICTED

Bangkok, March 31: Prosecutors in Thailand indicted five pro-democracy activists on Wednesday for attempting to harm the queen during a street demonstration last October. Queen Suthida, the wife of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, was not in any evident danger in the incident, which occurred when a limousine carrying the queen and the king's son, Prince Dipangkorn Rasmijoti, passed through a small crowd of protesters mixed with supporters of the royal family.

'99 MASSACRE:
ACCUSED SERB
ARRESTED

Pristina (Kosovo), March 31: Kosovo's police on Wednesday arrested a Serb, identified only as M.A., suspected of taking part in the massacre at Izbice on March 28, 1999, when Serb police, military and paramilitary forces found thousands of ethnic Albanian refugees in a meadow outside a village. They stole money and other valuables before separating the men from the women and children. The 130 men were then shot dead.

SECOND BITING
INCIDENT BY
BIDEN DOG

Washington, March 31: US President Joe Biden's dog, Major, has been involved in another biting incident at the White House, his second in less than a month, according to a media report.

Major, one of President Biden's two German shepherds, attacked on Monday just days after returning from training in Delaware. The incident involved a National Park Service employee on the South Lawn on Monday afternoon, according to CNN.

The employee was working at the time and needed to stop in order to receive treatment from the White House medical unit, the report said.

Major, a three-year-old German Shepherd is the younger of the Bidens' two dogs and the White House's first ever rescue dog.

BBC SCRIBE
LEAVES CHINA
AMID SAFETY

Beijing, March 31: A veteran BBC correspondent whose coverage angered China has left the country amid concerns for his safety, the BBC and a journalist organisation said.

The BBC said John Sudworth had relocated to Taiwan and would continue to be the British public broadcaster's China correspondent. The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China said that Sudworth had left last week "amid concerns for his safety and that of his family."

The organisation said that Sudworth's wife, Yvonne Murray, a correspondent for Irish broadcaster RTE, had left with him. "John's work has exposed truths the Chinese authorities did not want the world to know," the BBC said.

SPYING: ITALY
EXPELS TWO
RUSSIANS

Rome, March 31: Italy on Wednesday ordered two Russian Embassy officials expelled and arrested an Italian Navy captain on spying charges after police caught the Italian allegedly giving classified documents to one of the Russians in exchange for money.

Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio told a joint session of the Italian Parliament's foreign relations committees that the alleged incident was a "hostile act of extreme gravity". The Italian Foreign Ministry said it summoned Russian Ambassador Sergey Razov to protest the "grave incident" after a sting operation on the outskirts of Rome allegedly caught the Italian and one of the Russians in a "clandestine operation" to exchange the documents late Tuesday.

Italy's Carabinieri paramilitary police said in a statement that the Italian naval officer, who is a frigate captain, had been arrested. The Russian observed with him, a member of the Russian armed forces stationed at the Russian Embassy in Italy, was initially detained but not immediately placed under arrest given his diplomatic status. He was ordered expelled along with another Russian Embassy official allegedly involved

Biden to unveil
massive \$2 tn
infra plan

Washington, March 31: President Joe Biden will on Wednesday unveil a \$2 trillion infrastructure plan aimed at modernizing the United States' crumbling transport network, creating millions of jobs and enabling the country to "out-compete" China. The first phase of Biden's "Build Back Better" programme, which he will unveil in a speech in Pittsburgh, will detail massive investment spread over eight years.

It is designed to inject \$620 billion into transport, including upgrading 20,000 miles (32,000 kilometres) of roads and highways, repairing thousands of bridges and doubling funding for public transit. The president, whom Donald Trump tried to caricature as "Sleepy Joe" and a man without strong ideas or motivation, intends to make infrastructure investment one of his flagship policies. "He views his role as laying out... a broad vision, a

bold vision for how we can invest in America, American workers, our communities," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said.

The cost would be partly paid for by raising corporate tax from 21 percent to 28 percent. "The president is proposing to fundamentally reform the corporate tax code so that it... ensures that large corporations are paying their fair share," a senior administration official said ahead of the speech. The new spending offensive comes soon after the United States passed a nearly \$2 trillion Covid-19 economic stimulus plan.

And Biden's speech is set to open a bitter battle in Congress, where the Democrats hold only a narrow majority and will face strong opposition from the Republicans.

The first criticisms came before Biden even gave his speech, some of it from the progressive wing of his party.

— AFP

Pfizer says its Coronavirus
vax protects younger teens

Vaccinating children will help schools look normal after months of disruption

Washington, March 31: Pfizer announced Wednesday that its Covid-19 vaccine is safe and strongly protective in kids as young as 12, a step toward possibly beginning shots in this age group before they head back to school in the fall. Most Covid-19 vaccines being rolled out worldwide are for adults, who are at higher risk from the coronavirus. Pfizer's vaccine is authorised for ages 16 and older. But vaccinating children of all ages will be critical to stopping the pandemic — and helping schools, at least the upper grades, start to look a little more normal after months of disruption.

In a study of 2,260 US volunteers ages 12 to 15, preliminary data showed there were no cases of Covid-19 among fully vaccinated adolescents compared to 18 among those given dummy shots, Pfizer reported. It's a small study, that hasn't yet been published, so another important piece of evidence is how well the shots revved up the kids' immune systems.

Researchers reported



People receive a dose of the BioNTech/Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine at a vaccination clinic set up inside the Derby Arena at Pride Park in Derby, Derbyshire on Wednesday.

— AFP

high levels of virus-fighting antibodies, somewhat higher than were seen in studies of young adults. Kids had side effects similar to young adults, the company said. The main side effects are pain, fever, chills and fatigue, particularly after the second dose.

The study will continue to track participants for two years for more information about long-term protection and safety. Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech in the coming weeks plan to ask the US Food and Drug Administration and European regulators to

allow emergency use of the shots starting at age 12.

"We share the urgency to expand the use of our vaccine," Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said in a statement. He expressed "the hope of starting to vaccinate this age group before the start of the next school year" in

the United States. Pfizer isn't the only company seeking to lower the age limit for its vaccine.

Results also are expected soon from a US study of Moderna's vaccine in 12- to 17-year-olds. But in a sign that the findings were promising, the FDA already allowed both companies to begin US studies in children 11 and younger, working their way to as young as 6-month-old.

AstraZeneca last month began a study of its vaccine among 6- to 17-year-olds in Britain. Johnson & Johnson is planning its own pediatric studies. And in China, Sinovac recently announced it has submitted preliminary data to Chinese regulators showing its vaccine is safe in children as young as 3. While most Covid-19 vaccines being used globally were first tested in tens of thousands of adults, pediatric studies won't need to be nearly as large.

Scientists have safety information from those studies and from subsequent vaccinations in millions more adults.

— AP

Experts examine ship bottom
Egypt leader says Nile
water is 'untouchable'

Cairo, March 31: Experts dived under a colossal container ship that had been stuck for nearly a week in the Suez Canal before it was freed, to examine the vessel's underside, officials said Wednesday. The dives were part of a continuing investigation into what caused the grounding of the Ever Given, now anchored in the Great Bitter Lake, a wide stretch of water halfway between the north and south ends of the canal.

Salvage teams succeeded in finally freeing the skyscraper-size vessel on Monday afternoon. The ship got stuck sideways in a narrow stretch of the canal, shaking the global shipping industry when it halted billions of dollars a day in maritime commerce for around a week. Two senior canal officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to talk to reporters, said "slight to

Ismailia, March 31: Egypt's president has said his country's share of the Nile River's waters are "untouchable" in a stark warning to Ethiopia, which is building a giant dam on the Nile's main tributary.

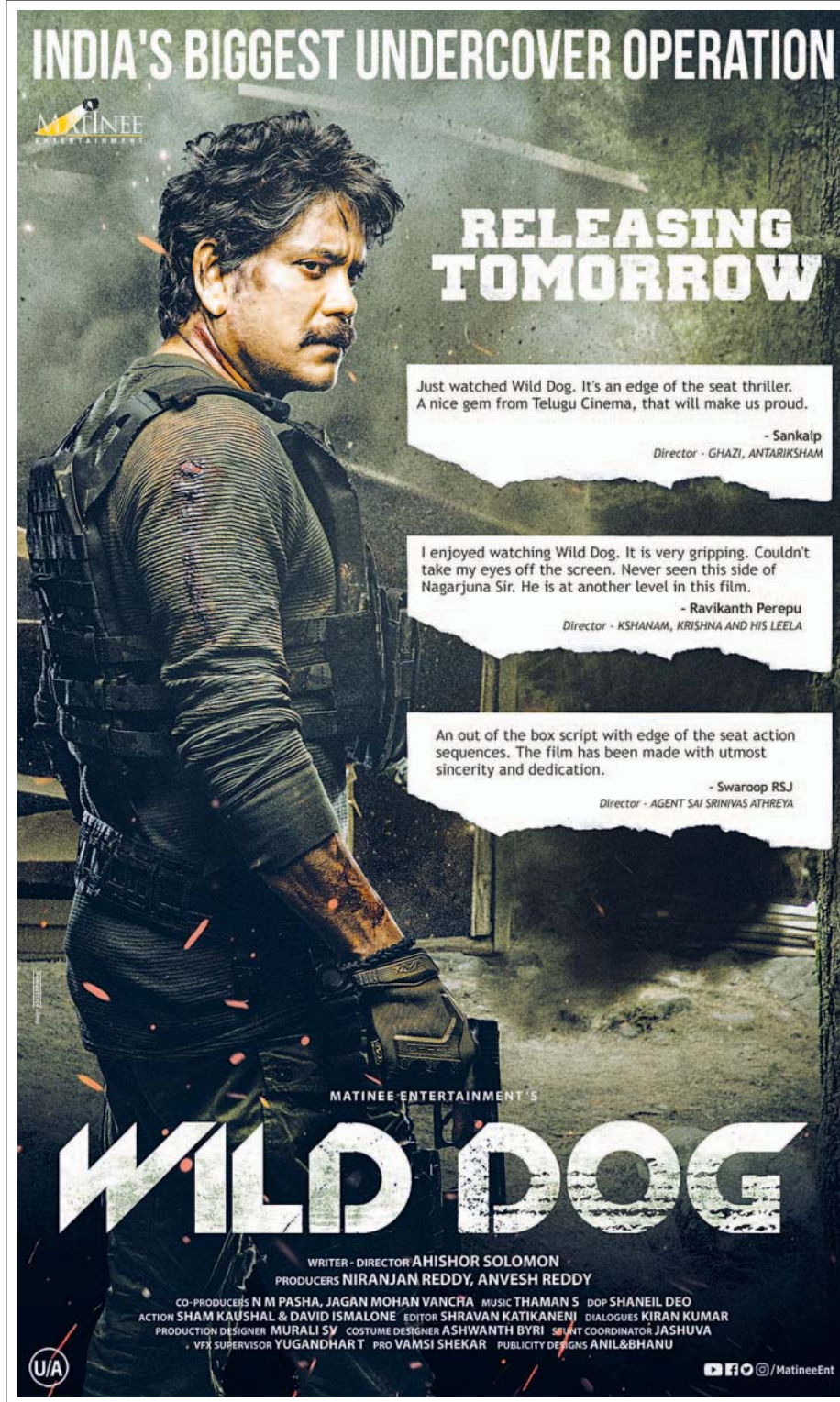
The comment from President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi comes amid a deadlock in the years-long talks over the dam between the Nile Basin countries, which also includes

medium" damage was found at the vessel's bulbous bow. One of the officials, who is a canal pilot, said experts were studying the exact extent of damage, but he said it unlikely would impede the Panama-flagged, Japanese-owned ship's navigation. He said the navigation of the ship would depend on "several legal and procedural" measures that the canal authority would discuss with the Ever Given's operator.

Sudan. In a news conference on Tuesday, el-Sissi warned of "instability that no one can imagine" in the region if the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is filled and operated without a legally binding agreement. "No one can take a single drop of water from Egypt, and whoever wants to try it, let him try," he said. "No one imagines that it will be far from our capabilities."

A media officer at the Ethiopian Embassy in Cairo declined to comment on el-Sissi's remarks. El-Sissi was firm while discussing the dam dispute at a news conference in the Suez Canal city of Ismailia. He visited the crucial, east-west waterway following its reopening on Monday. "I repeat that the waters of Egypt are untouchable, and touching them is a red line," he said.

Investigations were ongoing to determine what caused the ship to become wedged across the canal. When blame gets assigned, it will likely lead to years of litigation to recoup the costs of repairing the ship.

H-1B electronic
registration
selection done

Washington, March 31: The US has received enough electronic applications during the initial registration period to reach the 2022 fiscal year cap for the H-1B foreign workers visa, the most sought-after work visa among Indian professionals.

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services, the federal agency which screens and allocates H-1B applications, said it was randomly selected from among the registrations properly submitted to reach the cap.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows the US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. The USCIS has notified all prospective petitioners with selected registrations that they are eligible to file an H-1B cap-subject petition for the beneficiary named in the applicable selected registration.

The federal agency said that H-1B cap-subject petitions for fiscal 2022, including those petitions eligible for the advanced degree exemption, may be filed with the USCIS beginning April 1, if

● **WITH THIS**, China has achieved the UN goal of poverty eradication 10 years ahead of the 2030 deadline, he said. Over the past eight years, the final 98.99 million impoverished rural residents living under the current poverty line have all been lifted out of poverty.

based on a valid, selected registration.

Last month, the USCIS said it received a sufficient number of petitions needed to reach the Congressionally mandated 65,000 H-1B visa regular cap and the 20,000 H-1B visa US advanced degree exemption, known as the master's cap, for fiscal year (FY) 2021.

The Biden administration in Feb. announced that it was delaying the H-1B policy of the previous Trump administration on the allocation of the popular foreign work visas by continuing with the lottery system until Dec. 31, 2021, to give the immigration agency more time to develop, test and implement the modifications to the registration system.

On January 7, the USCIS announced to do away with the traditional lottery system in deciding the successful applicants for the H-1B visas.

— PTI

New air strikes
in Myanmar

Mae Sam Lae (Thailand), March 31: The military launched more airstrikes Tuesday in eastern Myanmar after earlier attacks forced thousands of ethnic Karen to flee into Thailand and further escalating violence two months after the junta seized power.

Thailand's prime minister said the villagers who fled the weekend airstrikes returned home of

their own accord, denying that his country's security forces had forced them back. But the situation in eastern Myanmar appeared to be getting more, not less, dangerous.

The Karen National Union, the main political body representing the Karen minority, said the airstrikes were the latest case of Myanmar's military breaking a cease-fire agreement.

— AP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49509.15	-1.25
Nifty 50	14690.70	-1.04
S&P 500*	3,986.92	0.72
Dollar (₹)	73.11	0.38
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.76	0.22
Euro (₹)	85.77	0.42
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	43,925*49	0.11
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	63.89	-0.39
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.177	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.723	-0.003

* As of 8:30 PM IST

RBI asked to ensure retail inflation at 4%

The government 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, economic affairs secretary Tarun Bajaj said. To control the price rise, the government in 2016 gave a mandate to the RBI to keep the retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side for a five-year period ending March 31, 2021.

Pakistan set to import sugar, cotton from India




Pakistan will import sugar and cotton from India, newly appointed finance minister Hammad Azhar announced, lifting a nearly two-year old ban on the commodities' import from the neighbour. The economic coordination committee allowed the private sector to import five lakh tonnes of white sugar from India, Azhar said. He also said that Pakistan will import cotton from India starting June this year.

Govt pegs H1 mkt borrowing at ₹7.24 lakh cr

The government will borrow Rs 7.24 lakh crore in the first half of 2021-22 fiscal to meet resources to perk up the economy. According to the Budget for 2021-22, the government's gross borrowing was estimated at Rs 12.05 lakh crore in the financial year beginning April 1. "In the first half of 2021-22, we would be borrowing Rs 7.24 lakh crore, which is 60.06 per cent of the gross issuances," secretary Tarun Bajaj said.

₹32,835 cr raised via disinvestment in fiscal 2020-21

The government has mopped up Rs 32,835 crore from CPSE share sale and buybacks, thus, exceeding the disinvestment target set in the revised estimates (RE) for current fiscal. The realisation is, however, lower than the record Rs 2.10 lakh crore originally budgeted. In the RE, the target was scaled down to Rs 32,000 crore as the pandemic delayed planned big ticket disinvestments.



■Purchase assurance also part of package Govt to offer \$1 bn each to chip units

SANKALP PHARTIYAL & ADITI SHAH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

India is offering more than \$1 billion in cash to each semiconductor company that sets up manufacturing units in the country as it seeks to build on its smartphone assembly industry and strengthen its electronics supply chain, two officials said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' drive has helped to turn India into the world's second-biggest mobile manufacturer after China. New Delhi believes it is time for chip companies to set up in the country.

"The government will give cash incentives of more than \$1 billion to each company which will set up chip fabrication units," a senior government official told Reuters, declining to be named as he was not authorised to speak with the media.

"We're assuring them that the government will be a buyer and there will also be mandates in the private market (for companies to buy locally made chips)."

How to disburse the cash incentives has yet to be decided and the government has asked the industry for feedback, said a second government source.

Governments across the world are subsidising the construction of semiconductor plants as chip shortages hobble the auto and electronics industries and highlight the world's dependence on Taiwan for supplies.

India also wants to establish reliable suppliers for its electronics and telecom industry to cut dependence on China.

Chips made locally will be designated as "trusted sources" and can be used in electronic equipment, the first source said.

But the sources did not say whether particular semiconductor companies have shown interest in setting up units in India.

India has previously tried to woo semiconductor players but the firms were deterred by Indias wobbly infrastructure, unstable power supply, bureaucracy and poor planning.

The renewed government push to lure chip-makers is more likely to succeed, after the success of the smartphone industry, industry insiders say.

Moreover, Indian con-

glomerates, such as the Tata Group, have also expressed interest in moving into electronics and high-tech manufacturing.

India in December invited an "expression of interest" from chipmakers for setting up fabrication units in the country or for the acquisition of such manufacturing units overseas by an Indian company or consortium.

The government estimates it would cost roughly \$5-\$7 billion to set up a chip fabrication unit in India and take two-three years after all the approvals are in place, one of the auto industry sources said.

The source added that New Delhi is willing to offer companies concessions, including waivers on customs duty, R&D expenses and interest free loans.

—Reuters

Small savings rates cut by 50-110 basis points

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Fixed income investors have a reason to worry as the Ministry of Finance on Wednesday announced a cut in small savings deposit rates from 4 per cent to 3.5 per cent for the first quarter of the financial year, starting April 1, 2021. This is the second time the Centre has cut interest rates on small savings schemes in the past one year. In the April-June quarter of 2020-21, the government had slashed rates of small savings schemes by 70-140 bps.

According to the circular, the rates of small savings schemes have been reduced by 50-100 basis points for the April-June quarter of financial year 2021-22. However, the interest on one-year term deposit, has been reduced to 4.4 per cent from 5.5 per cent, a cut of 1.1 per cent.

"From 1 April, Public Provident Fund (PPF) will get an interest rate of 6.4 per cent. The interest for National Savings

Steep cut		
Instruments	Interest (%) 2021	
	Jan to Mar	Apr to Jun
Savings deposit	4.0	3.5
1-year time deposit	5.5	4.4
2-year time deposit	5.5	5.0
3-year time deposit	5.5	5.1
5-year time deposit	6.7	5.8
5-year recurring deposit	5.8	5.3
Sr Citizen Savings Scheme	7.4	6.5
Monthly Income Account	6.6	5.7
National Savings Certificate	6.8	5.9
PPF Scheme	7.1	6.4
Kisan Vikas Patra	6.9*	6.2**
Sukanya Samridhhi Yojana	7.6	6.9
* Will mature in 124 months		
** Will mature in 138 months		
Source: Ministry of Finance.		

Certificate (NSC) have been reduced to 5.9 per cent. Among other small savings scheme, the Sukanya Samridhhi Yojana will fetch the interest rate of 6.9 per cent as well," said the circular.

"Similarly, the interest rate for the five-year Senior Citizens Savings Scheme has been lowered

PLI scheme for food processing cleared

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

The Union Cabinet has approved the Rs 10,900 crore production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for the food processing sector, which is expected to increase output of the industry by around Rs 33,500 crore and create employment for 2.5 lakh persons by 2026-27.

The scheme will support food manufacturing entities which have stipulated minimum sales and willingness to make stipulated investment for expansion of processing capacity and branding abroad.

The scheme will provide incentives for six years from 2021-22 till 2026-27. As per the segment-wise incentive data provided by the government, ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat brands will receive a total incentive of Rs 4,181 crore in these six years and processed fruit and vegetables will get a total of Rs 3,582 crore.

Marine products will get Rs 993 crore and mozzarella cheese Rs 283 crore, which adds up to a total of Rs 9,039 crore. Innovative and organic products of SMEs, including free range eggs, poultry meat, egg products, also are covered under the scheme.

Further, Rs 9,040 crore will be provided as an incentive for sales and Rs 1,500 crore for branding and marketing.

Implementation of labour codes deferred

New Delhi, March 31: The four labour codes will not come into effect from April 1 as states are yet to finalise the relevant rules, which means that there will be no change in take home pay of employees and provident fund liability of companies for now.

Once the wages code comes into force, there will be significant changes in the way basic pay and provident fund of employees are calculated.

The labour ministry had envisaged implementing the four codes on industrial relations, wages, social security and occupational health safety & working conditions from April 1, 2021. The ministry had even finalised the rules under the four codes.

"Since the states have not finalised the rules under four codes, the implementation of these laws are deferred for the time being," an official source told PTI.

According to the source, only a few states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Uttarakhand had circulated the draft rules.

Since labour is a concurrent subject under the Constitution of India, both the Centre and the states would have to notify rules under the codes to bring those into force in their respective jurisdictions.

Under the new wages code, allowances are capped at 50 per cent. This means half of the gross pay of an employee would be basic wages.

PF contribution is calculated as a percentage of basic wage, which includes basic pay and dearness allowance.

—PTI

EMERGENCY CREDIT LINE TILL JUNE 30

New Delhi, March 31: The government on Wednesday extended the Rs 3-lakh-crore emergency credit line guarantee scheme by another three months till June 30 and also widened its scope to new sectors, including hospitality, travel and tourism. ECLGS 3.0 would involve extending credit of up to 40 per cent of total credit outstanding across all lending institutions as on February 29, 2020, the finance ministry said. The tenor of loans granted under ECLGS 3.0 would be six years, including a moratorium period of two years.

—PTI

QR CODE ON B2C INVOICE MUST ONLY FROM JULY

New Delhi, March 31: The government has deferred by three months till July 1 the requirement of printing dynamic QR code on B2C invoices generated by businesses. In a notification, the CBIC waived the amount of penalty payable by a registered person for non-compliance of provisions of dynamic QR code in B2C invoices till June 30.

—PTI

6-DIGIT HSN CODE MUST FOR ₹5 CR TURNOVER

New Delhi, March 31: Businesses with turnover of more than Rs 5 crore will have to furnish six-digit HSN or tariff code on the invoices issued for supplies of taxable goods and services with turnover of up to Rs 5 crore in the preceding financial year would be required to furnish four-digit HSN code on B2B invoices.

—PTI

FTP to run till Sept. end

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

The government has further extended the Foreign Trade Policy by six months till September 30, 2021. The basic customs duty and IGST exemption for export units also have been extended for one year.

The foreign trade policy for 2015-20, which was due to expire on March 31, 2020 was earlier extended by one year till March 31, 2021 in the event of the

pandemic. Now the policy has been further extended till September 30, 2021, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade said on Wednesday, without providing any reason.

The government has also extended the basic customs duty and IGST exemption benefit for Export Oriented Units till March 31, 2022.

The government said in Parliament that it is in the process of preparing For-eign Trade Policy 2021-26.

Auto debit extended till Sept. 30

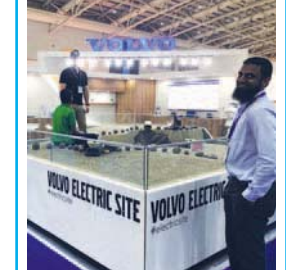
FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MARCH 31

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday extended the timeline for lenders, financial institutions and payment gateways to comply with its guidelines related to recurring online transactions with Additional Factor of Authentication (AFA) by six months till September 30. This is the second time that regulator has extended the deadline, as several players have failed to implement the framework.

This could have impacted customers' recurring payments such as of utility bills, recharge of phone, DTH among others, from April and led to large-scale defaults.

To make digital payments in India "safe and secure", the banking regulator introduced AFA and directed all banks, including regional rural banks, non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) and payment gateways to comply with AFA for automatic recurring payment by March 31, 2021. However,

VOLVO INDIA ANNOUNCES 24 WEEKS PAID PATERNAL LEAVE



Mumbai, March 31: Swedish car maker Volvo on Wednesday announced a gender-neutral policy, 'Family Bond', that allows the male employees in India to avail up to 24 weeks (120 working days) of parental leave at 80 per cent of total salary.

Women employees will continue to avail 26 weeks of fully paid maternity leave as per the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, Volvo Car India said in a statement.

The policy which is line with Volvo Car global directives, applies to all regular salaried (on-roll, full-time) employees in India, including all mothers and fathers, same sex parents, parents to adopted and foster children or through surrogacy, the statement said. There are no limitations on age or marital status, it added.

"Volvo, being an employee-friendly company, believes that both partners should share the joys of parenthood and be available to each other while bringing up children."

—PTI

₹14,500 cr to be infused in 4 PSBs

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MARCH 31

The government on Wednesday announced a capital infusion of Rs 14,500 crore in four state-owned banks, namely Central Bank of India (CBI), Indian Overseas Bank (IOB), Bank of India (BOI), and UCO Bank by issuing zero coupon bonds.

According to experts the capital infusion will help CBI, IOB and UCO Bank that are under the RBI's prompt corrective action

framework to come out of the PCA restrictions in the new financial year.

The government will infuse Rs 4,800 crore in CBI, Rs 4,100 crore in IOB, Rs 3,000 crore in BoI and Rs 2,600 crore in UCO Bank.

Anil Gupta, vice president-financial sector ratings, Icra, said, "With GoI deciding to infuse substantial capital in all the three public banks which were in PCA framework, we expect these banks to come out of PCA in FY2022."

"However, given the capi-

tal infusion is through zero coupon recapitalisation bonds, the earning profile of these banks may not improve on account of this transaction as their capital position improves."

Recapitalisation bonds will be issued with six different maturities and the special securities would be "at par" for the amount applied for.

With this infusion, the government has completed capital infusion of Rs 20,000 crore in public sector banks in FY21.

ROLLERCOASTER | RUN Sensex gains over 68% in last one-year

Market gives decade high return in FY21

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 31

The stock market's FY20-21 return turned out to be one of the best in the last decade, with the Sensex giving a return of 68 per cent and Nifty-50 77.4 per cent while IT, pharmaceutical and bank stocks were the top sectoral performers.

The Sensex closed the financial year at 49,509.15 points compared to the March 31, 2020 closing at 29,468.49, gaining 20,040.66 points or 68 per cent over the last one-year period.

The Nifty-50 closed at 14,690.70, gaining 77.4 per cent compared to last fiscal close at 8,281.

"The markets have rallied by close to 80 per cent,

INVESTORS' WEALTH UP BY ₹90.82 L CR

New Delhi, March 31: Investors' wealth grew massively by Rs 90,82,057.95 crore in 2020-21 driven by an extraordinary rally in the equity market.

Market analysts termed 2020-21 a roller coaster ride for not only Indian markets but also for equity indices globally due to the pandemic.

Thanks to the improved investor sentiment, the market capitalisa-

tion of BSE-listed companies zoomed Rs 90,82,057.95 crore to reach Rs 2,04,30,814.54 crore in 2020-21.

On March 3 this year, the market cap of BSE-listed companies had reached its lifetime high of Rs 2,10,22,227.15 crore.

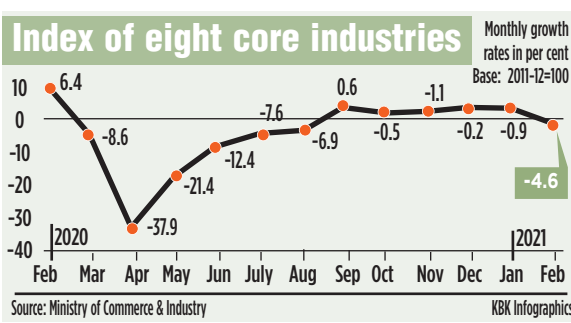
From witnessing massive losses to record-breaking gains, investors witnessed a wide array of emotions in 2020-21.

—PTI

both Nifty-50 and Sensex, in FY21, the best financial performance in a decade. The key thing to note is

returns to the tune of 30 per cent. This is quite similar to the base that was created in FY09 when markets corrected by 40 per cent due to the global financial crisis. But that was swiftly followed by close to 80 per cent returns for FY10," said Joseph Thomas, head of research, Emkay Wealth Management.

"The fall in market due to severe economic distress proved to be the best investment opportunities. The star performers among individual sectors were IT, Pharma and Banking," Thomas said. The Nifty IT index gave a return of 109.88 per cent, followed by Pharma (77.96 per cent) and Banks (77.31 per cent).



Mobikwik faces forensic audit

Mumbai, March 31: The Reserve Bank has asked troubled digital wallet firm Mobikwik, which is facing data breach allegations, to get a forensic audit done without any delay.

Though the Gurugram-based firm has been claiming that its systems are secure and that there is no basis to the allegations of data breach, after a group of hackers on Tuesday

said that they accessed personal and financial data of nearly 10 crore Mobikwik customers.

On Wednesday, sources told PTI that the RBI has ordered an immediate forensic audit of the company's systems by a certified auditor.

When contacted, an RBI spokesperson refused to comment.

Mobikwik refused to give a direct answer to a query

on whether the RBI has ordered a forensic audit.

"We take privacy and security of our user data seriously and are working with authorities to conduct an independent forensic audit," it said.

However, the sources said the RBI has asked Mobikwik to get the forensic audit done without delay to ascertain whether there was a data breach or not.

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

Virat retains No.1 ranking in ODIs

Dubai: India captain Virat Kohli retained his top spot in the ICC rankings for ODI batsmen, while pacer Jasprit Bumrah slipped a place to fourth position in the bowler's list released on Wednesday. Kohli, who had scores of 56 and 66 in the first and second ODIs against England, has 870 points in his kitty. Bumrah, who was rested from white-ball series against England, slipped a place to fourth among bowlers and has 690 points. India limited overs vice-captain Rohit Sharma is ranked third, behind Pakistan's Babar Azam, while KL Rahul has moved up from 31st to 27th spot. All-rounder Hardik Pandya has achieved a career-best 42nd position among batsmen after scores of 35 and 64, and Rishabh Pant has entered the top 100. Seam bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who took three for 42 in the final match, has gained nine slots to reach the 11th position, which is his best since being 10th in September 2017. Shardul Thakur's haul of four for 67 in the same match has enabled him to move up to 80th spot from 93rd. For England, all-rounder Ben Stokes has advanced four places. — PTI

Junior hockey nationals put off

New Delhi: The upcoming 11th junior women's hockey nationals has been postponed until further notice due to a surge in Covid-19 cases, the sport's governing body said on Wednesday. The tournament was scheduled to be held from April 3 to 12 in Simdega, Jharkhand. Following instructions and protocols from the district commissioner, Simdega and state authorities, the decision to postpone the championship was taken by Hockey India. "In light of the rising number of Covid-19 cases and after advice from the local state authorities, Hockey India in consultation with the host Hockey Jharkhand arrived at the decision to postpone the 11th Hockey India Junior Women National Championship 2021..." Hi president Gyanendra Ningombam said in a statement. "Hockey Jharkhand received tremendous support from the state government to host the recently concluded Sub Junior Women National Championship 2021..." — PTI

Karate champ 'bullied' by coach

Tokyo: A Japanese karate champion who will compete at the Tokyo Olympics testified before an ethics commission on Wednesday, alleging that a federation official hit her in the face with a bamboo sword. Ayumi Uekusa, who will compete in the women's over 61kg kumite category as karate makes its Olympic debut this summer, said she was the victim of a bullying campaign by Masao Kagawa, the technical director of the Japan Karatedo Federation. It is the latest "power harassment" scandal to hit Japanese sport, with the country's wrestling federation apologising to four-time Olympic champion Kaori Icho in 2018 over bullying claims. Uekusa, a world champion in 2016, claimed in a blog post on Sunday that Kagawa began using a bamboo sword as part of her training, with the aim of forcing her to dodge his swings and thrusts. But Uekusa says she and other athletes suffered bruised eyes after Kagawa hit them in the face with the sword while training without protective headgear. Kagawa has denied the allegations. — AFP

Nuggets too hot for sluggish 76ers

Los Angeles: Jamal Murray scored 30 points as the Denver Nuggets put on a show for returning fans on Tuesday with a 104-95 defeat of the Eastern Conference-leading Philadelphia 76ers. Murray's haul included five-of-11 three-pointers in a one-sided victory for the Nuggets, who roared into a 44-22 first quarter lead at Denver's Ball Arena and never looked back. Murray added six rebounds, four assists and three steals while Nikola Jokic delivered a towering all-round display, with 21 points, 10 rebounds and five assists. — AFP

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PUNTER'S POINT

Ponting says captaincy will make Pant a better player

Mumbai, March 31: Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting is convinced that leading the side in the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League will make swash-buckling wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant an even better player. Pant was named the captain of Delhi Capitals for the upcoming IPL after regular skipper Shreyas Iyer was ruled out of the tournament after he injured his left shoulder during the recently-concluded England's tour of India.

"Unfortunately that Shreyas will miss the tournament, but looking forward to seeing @RishabhPant17 grab his opportunity. It's well deserved for his recent performances and he's coming in with a lot of confidence. I'm convinced captaincy will make him an even better player," Ponting tweeted.

The highly-rated Pant has been in sensational form across formats this year. He played match-winning knocks of 97 and unbeaten 89 in the third and the fourth Test against Australia to help India clinch the Border Gavaskar Trophy Down Under.

This season will mark the wicketkeeper-batsman's debut as IPL captain. Pant has led Delhi's state team in the past.

MISHRA WORKS ON HIS BATTING

Delhi Capitals' seasoned leg-spinner Amit Mishra on Wednesday said he is working on improving his batting ahead of the upcoming IPL, preparing himself for situations where he might be required to use the willow to good effect.

The 38-year-old said that apart from honing his bowling prowess, he is focussing on improving his batting as well.

"I am working on my batting. The coaches have also told me to keep practicing my batting as there might be situations in matches when I will have to string partnerships of 25-30 runs." — PTI



A file photo of Delhi Capitals coach Ricky Ponting (right) with Rishabh Pant.

Moeen in awe of MS captaincy

Chennai, March 31: Chennai Super Kings all-rounder Moeen Ali on Wednesday vouched for Mahendra Singh Dhoni's captaincy and said most cricketers look forward to play under him as he helps them improve their game.

Dhoni is gearing up to lead the CSK franchise in the upcoming edition of the IPL starting April 9.

"I've spoken to players who have played under MS and they tell me how he improves their game. I believe a great captain does that," the England

I've spoken to players who have played under MS and they tell me how he improves their game. I believe a great captain does that.

— MOEEN ALI
CSK allrounder

all-rounder was quoted as saying by the CSK website.

"I think it's something on every player's wish list to play under MS. I think it's the confidence and the clarity he gives people. It's exciting," he added.

Moeen, who said he was looking forward to playing under Dhoni, said it is

very important to have strong leadership and coaches who stay calm.

"It's very important to have strong leadership and coaches who stay calm, who take the pressure off the players as much as they can and are consistent. We are very lucky we have that," he added.

HAVE NOTHING TO PROVE, SAYS HARBHAJAN

New Delhi, March 31: Harbhajan Singh is still playing because he "wants to" and he "will", asserts the veteran off-spinner, as combative at 40 as he was in his hey-days and least bothered by the people questioning his willingness to carry on.

He is back in IPL this year with the Kolkata Knight Riders after skipping the last season for CSK in the UAE and wants to now "enjoy every moment of whatever cricket is left" in him.

"Lot of people think 'Bhai yeh kyun khel raha hai?' Arrey bhai yeh unki soch hai, meri naahi. Meri soch hai ki main abhi khel sakta hoon, toh main khelunga (People think 'why is he playing' but that's your opinion. From where I see myself, I want to play and I will play)," Harbhajan explained.

"I have got nothing to prove to anyone. My intention is to play well, enjoy my stint out there in the middle and playing cricket still gives me that satisfaction." — PTI

"At CSK I feel the reality is there for us to win the competition. I'm excited about playing with the players we have here," the 33-year-old left-hand batsman cum off-spinner, who was picked up at the IPL auction in February, further said.

Moeen, who previously turned out for Royal Challengers Bangalore, said, "I think what differentiates CSK from other teams is actually how they structure everything, from the squad they have to the way they do things." — PTI

JASON REPLACES MITCHELL TO JOIN SUNRISERS IN IPL

London, March 31: England opening batsman Jason Roy has joined Indian Premier League side Sunrisers Hyderabad as a replacement for Australia's Mitchell Marsh, his county side Surrey announced on Wednesday.

The 30-year-old looked likely to miss out on the tournament after no bids were made for him during the mini-auction in February.

At the time, Roy tweeted that it was a "massive shame" he was not going to be involved, but he will now team up again with compatriot Jonny Bairstow after the pair shone in the recent Twenty20 and one-day international series in India.

Roy will also work under coach Trevor Bayliss, who left the England and Wales Cricket Board two years ago after helping England win the 50-over World Cup. David Warner is captain of Sunrisers Hyderabad. — AFP

Brief scores (Day 2, stumps):

West Indies 354 (Brathwaite 126, Cornwall 73, Mayers 49, Lakmal 4-94, Chameera 3-69) vs Sri Lanka 136/3 (Thirimanne 55, Chandimal 34*)

Earlier, Brathwaite extended his occupation of the crease to eight-and-a-half hours which brought him 126 off 311 deliveries with 13 fours, a ninth Test century. — AFP

North Sound, March 31: Captain Kraigg Brathwaite was last out in the West Indies' first innings of 354 before the visitors rallied behind Lahiru Thirimanne's third consecutive half-century to reach 136 for three at stumps on the second day of the second and final Test in Antigua on Tuesday.

After scores of 70 and 76 in the drawn first Test, Thirimanne's run of good

scores — going back to the series in South Africa last December — continued with another composed innings of 55.

However, his dismissal to Kemar Roach in the day's final session necessitated consolidation which the unbroken fourth-wicket pair of Dinesh Chandimal (34 not out) and Dhananjaya de Silva (23 not out) provided on an increasingly placid surface with an unbroken

stand of 59.

Earlier, Brathwaite extended his occupation of the crease to eight-and-a-half hours which brought him 126 off 311 deliveries with 13 fours, a ninth Test century. — AFP

Barty, Medvedev cruise into semis

Miami, March 31: World number one Ashleigh Barty advanced to the semi-finals of the Miami Open on Tuesday as Russian top seed Daniil Medvedev booked his place in the quarter-finals of the men's tournament.

Barty battled through her third three-setter of the fortnight to oust seventh seeded Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus in 2hr 16min on the Grandstand Court.

The Australian will face Elina Svitolina of Ukraine in the semifinals following her gruelling 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 win. Svitolina advanced to the last four after defeating Latvia's Anastasija Sevastova 6-3, 6-2 last Tuesday.

After taking a close first set, Barty appeared to be on the brink of victory after grabbing a 3-1 lead in the second set tie-break. Sabalenka staged a superb recovery however to snatch the tie-break 7-5, forcing a decisive third set.

Barty regrouped in the third though and with Sabalenka clearly in pain clutching her stomach, rammed home her advantage to complete a deserved win.

The victory leaves Barty one semifinal win away

from retaining her world number one ranking, though the Australian insisted she was not preoccupied with holding on to top spot.

"It's an amazing thing to be No. 1 in the world at the moment, but I promise you that's not what makes me happy. It's a focus of course. I want to try to do the best that I can, but it's not a distraction or a pressure in any way," Barty said afterwards.

Medvedev, meanwhile, had an easier ride in the men's tournament, easing past Frances Tiafoe of the United States in straight sets, 6-4, 6-3.

Medvedev hammered down 11 aces in the win, breaking Tiafoe three times en route to victory. Medvedev will face Roberto Bautista Agut in the last eight after the Spaniard eliminated John Isner in three sets to avenge his 2019 quarter-final loss in Miami.

Bautista Agut saved a match point at 5-6 down in the third set tie-break to claim a 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7) win. "I think I played a brilliant set the first set, and then with John you feel always under pressure," Agut said. — AFP

30 SPORTSPERSONS TEST COVID-19 POSITIVE AT NIS

New Delhi, March 31: Thirty sportspersons and support staff across disciplines were found to be Covid-19 positive after 741 precautionary tests were conducted at the National Centres of Excellence in Patiala and Bengaluru, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said on Wednesday.

However, the positive results in both the centres do not include any Tokyo Olympic-bound athlete. India's men's boxing chief coach CA Kuttappa and shot put coach Mohinder Singh Dhillon are among those who have tested positive for the virus in the recent drive at the National Institute of Sports (NIS), a SAI source confirmed. Later, SAI also issued a statement which said that 313 and 428 tests were conducted in Patiala and Bengaluru respectively. While 26 were found to be positive in Patiala, the Bengaluru count stood at four.

"Keeping the safety of Olympic-bound athletes, coaches and support staff in mind, the SAI conducted precautionary RT-PCR tests at National Centre of Excellence in Patiala and Bengaluru. The reports received today indicate that all Olympic-bound athletes at both centres are Covid negative," the SAI statement read. — PTI



Portugal striker Cristiano Ronaldo (right) is challenged by Luxembourg's Lars Gerson during the World Cup 2022 Group 'A' qualifying match at the Josy Barthel Stadium in Luxembourg on Tuesday. — AP

Ronaldo rocks in Portugal victory

Paris, March 31: Cristiano Ronaldo helped Portugal to a hard-fought 3-1 win over Luxembourg on Tuesday with his first goal of the 2022 World Cup qualifying campaign, while Belgium became the latest team to join the protests over human rights in Qatar before hitting eight past Belarus.

Juventus forward Ronaldo bagged his 103rd international goal five minutes after the break to stop his side falling foul of a Luxembourg team whose recent performances have defied their small status and tiny population.

Ronaldo had been controversially denied what looked to have been an added-time winner in Saturday's draw against Serbia in Belgrade, but he was not to be denied when he tapped home Joao Cancelo's cross.

BELGIUM JOIN QATAR PROTESTS

Belgium's players donned t-shirts in support of migrant workers building the stadiums for next year's finals in the Gulf state and then smashed Belarus 8-0 to move top of Group E despite coach

Roberto Martinez playing a second-string side.

Germany, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands have recently staged similar protests, and the Belgian gesture mirrors the one made by their Dutch neighbours with t-shirts emblazoned with the message 'Football supports change'.

Human rights groups have been critical of the treatment of migrant workers, claims Qatar disputes.

On the field in Leuven Belgium made easy work of their opponents, Michy Batshuayi starting a deluge of goals in the 14th minute.

DUTCH CLOSE IN ON TURKEY

The Netherlands closed the gap on Group G leaders Turkey to one point after they won 7-0 in Gibraltar.

Frank de Boer's team were far from their best but got maximum points after taking a long time to break down their minnow opponents, who were playing in front of a home crowd thanks to Gibraltar's successful coronavirus vaccine programme. — AFP