

Forecast: Sunny. **Temp:** Max.40°C. Min.20°C. **Humidity:** 5% **Sunrise:** 06:17 **Sunset:** 06:36

the Telangana native employees called on the Chief Minister at his camp office and urged him to relieve them from the services of Andhra Pradesh and the Chief Minister agreed to their request. He also extended his best wishes to them. The jubilant employees wished that Jagan should take more and more pro-employee decisions and win over the employees.

Womenia

TWEET PATROL



NIVETHA THOMAS
@I_NIVETHATHOMAS

Looking ahead

#VakeelSaab

#VakeelSaabOnApril9th



Boost immunity with Vitamin D

As the summer approaches, I can't help but look back on those days I spent with all my cousins at my grandmother's house. Our days would be full of laughter, delicious food and unexpected adventures. Although there was no fixed routine during our vacation, my grandmother would ensure that we play outdoors to get our dose of morning sunshine aka Vitamin D. Most of us are not that lucky anymore. With work-from-home, co-ordinating zoom meetings and social distancing we tend to skip out on much needed sun exposure.

What is frightening is that even babies are being born with Vitamin D deficiencies. This seems to be a pandemic in itself and must be addressed immediately.

In my two decades as a practising nutritionist I have overserved that clients are often reluctant to test their vitamin D levels. After much resistance they oblige and take the test. They are disappointed to see low levels and are left perplexed when I explain to them that a lot of their ailments are linked to low Vitamin D levels.

Unlike other vitamins, Vitamin D is actually a hormone which interacts with various systems in our body allowing it to play an integral role in Insulin production and parathyroid hormone secretion. Hence it is not surprising that low vitamin D levels are linked to mood swings, PCOS, Thyroid malfunction, Diabetes, Obesity and even Cancer.

Vitamin D supports bone formation and maintenance as well Calcium which is required for strong bones, is only absorbed in the presence of Vitamin D. This means that you could have a ton of calcium in your body but without Vitamin D it cannot be used to form bones.

I can vouch for the immune-protective nature of Vitamin D, playing a crucial role in synthesis of the various soldier cells that hold up a strong fight against encroaching immune-suppressants.

Vitamin D is a fat soluble vitamin and to ensure you are getting a sufficient amount of it, eat enough good quality fat like nuts, seeds, coconut and desi cow's ghee.

Wondering where to get your Vitamin D from if you have limited sun exposure? Worry not! Here are a few Vitamin D foods that you can easily incorporate in your diet. Organically produced Cow's milk and its products are a good vegetarian source. Egg yolks and Indian fish such as Black Pomfret, Hilsa, Bommeralu and Shrimp have plenty of Vitamin D in them. Vegans can benefit from vitamin D found in mushrooms but it may not be enough for sustenance. In that case, consult your physician and inquire about supplements you can take. So Fear not the Sun, Include these Vitamin D rich foods and follow my tips to stay on the sunny side of Health.



NEWS ROUNDUP

I'd be upset if someone got a part over me due to social media following: Parul Gulati

Actress Parul Gulati, who is playing a pivotal role in the web series "Hey Prabhu! 2", says even though social media is a great space for visibility, she would be upset if she is rejected for a role only based on social media following.

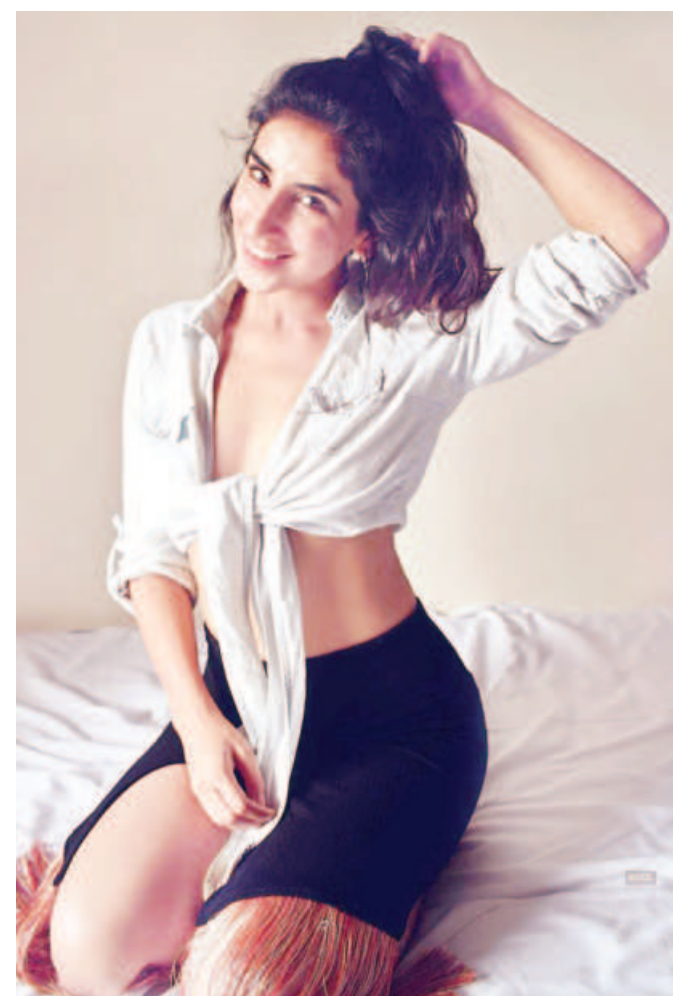
"I would be very upset if I am pulled back and someone else is selected for a part in a web series only because she has more followers on social media, instead of her acting skills, because that is unfair," Parul told.

She added, "Five years ago even I was doing so much on social media and people would say I should focus on acting. I love both, and that is why I am putting out content on social media, especially on Instagram. I also have a business of hair extension for which I use social media as one of the platforms. But I think visibility on social media should not be the reason why you take an actor for a project."

"Having said that, this business of entertainment is a gamble and everyone wants to win. So, it is a risk that everyone takes when signing an actor," she added.

In "Hey Prabhu! 2", Parul plays a journalist and a friend to the protagonist Prabhu played by Rajat Barmecha.

The show features Achint Kaur, Jasmeet Singh Bhatia, Sonyaa Ayodhya, Pryanca Talukdar, Rituraj Singh, Dev Dutt, Raj Bhansali, and Neha Panda, and streams on MX Player.



Awareness on menstrual health

Pure spokesperson Sandhya Gollamudi said that the organisation would conduct awareness programs on monthly changes in women.

Upasana Kaminey Konidela will launch Pure Femme Song and Film, Pure Guru at Pure Human Awards on April 4. She spoke at an event organised at Somajiguda Press Club in Hyderabad on Wednesday Pure Femur Hygiene Awareness Campaign.

She focused on managing menstruation adequately and with respect for adolescent girls. The goal of the Pure Femme program is not to influence the girl's education but for easy access of hygiene products, demonstrating their use, and interactive sessions that help them understand adolescence ensure a supportive environment, including teachers and boys in conversation, to create a general state around this culturally taboo



Pure Femme spokesperson Sandhya Gollamudi spoke on 'A Menstrual Health Awareness Campaign' programme for women in Hyderabad

topic. The programme also aims to provide education on menstrual hygiene for girls, so that they have the confidence and authority to make informed decisions on how to manage menstruation.

It promotes menstrual education for teachers, boys, and parents. Thereby helping them to break down negative social norms, allow girls to stay in school by giving them access to hygienic menstrual products, toi-

lets, water, and disposal options. This is going to help children around the world.

Pure Youth, a leadership program, aims to discuss and raise awareness about the impact of education on society through a number of projects and fundraising. With a strong foundation of dedicated elementary, middle, and high school ambassadors spread across the United States, Pure Youth serves to better understand public school standards, provides assistance to schools in developing countries around the world.

Pure Youth supports projects from all program areas. It gives them an opportunity to understand the impact on lives that can help change. It is not a for-profit organisation, founded in 2016 to bring educational and livelihood opportunities closer to economically disadvantaged children, disadvantaged youth and the general population.

SOURDOUGH BREAD DAY

If there's one thing any sandwich connoisseur knows, it's that most sandwiches are made better by the addition of sourdough bread.

Bacon Lettuce Tomato sandwiches? They're always better with the bite and tang of sourdough. Burgers? Oh, yes, replacing a humdrum old hamburger bun with a butter-grilled sourdough bread pushes them to the next level. Tuna salad sandwiches? If there is anything that can make this already delicious sandwich better, it's putting it on a couple of slices of toasted sourdough bread.

So is it any wonder that Sourdough Bread has its own day of celebration dedicated to it? It shouldn't be a surprise.

Sourdough bread is made from dough that has a mixture of the normal yeasts in symbiosis with a Lactobacillus culture. This is a really big word for the culture that gives the bread a slightly sour tang. And that is what makes it far superior to all other breads. Plus, this culture also provides the bread with a longer shelf-life.

What is surprising isn't that sourdough bread isn't a standard in everyone's pantry, but that it was actually one of (if not the first) forms for leavening bread in human history!

In fact, in some forms of bread, it is necessary to use sourdough cultures for the bread to even work at all. Rye bread has a remarkably low gluten count, making the typical baker's yeast simply impractical for helping it to rise. Sourdough, on the other hand, happens to work perfectly in this type of bread.

In America, one of the most famous places where Sourdough is made is San Francisco, California. This is because French bakers brought the leavening

to northern California to feed those hunting down that precious gold during the Gold Rush of the 1850's.

So how did Sourdough go from being the favorite leavening agent for bread in so many places? Well, wheat-based breads don't need the special properties of sourdough leavening, and it was gradually replaced by barn, a result of beer making. Eventually, when purpose grown yeasts came into play, they were easier to use and they began to take over the industry. Sourdough Bread Day reminds us of the origins of one of the most important staples of our diet, and to remember that it still makes one of the most delicious breads available out there!



Summer essentials you need in your wardrobe

While we all love trends, no wardrobe is complete without the essentials. They're the items that you turn to in order to create almost every outfit. From the simple white t-shirt to the classic maxi dress, they are the pieces that every summer closet requires. So, if you want to up your style game this sunny season, you need to know what they are. With an abundance of trends emerging from both the runways and your ever-shifting social media grid, we have created a list to guide you through all the must-have summer staples so that you can have your most chic season ever.

White T-shirt

The white T-shirt may not be the most exciting piece of clothing, but it is one of the most versatile. The simple summer style can partner with nearly everything and look great. So, whether you're rocking black pants, a patterned skirt, maxi dress or jeans, you can never go wrong with this staple piece.

Ankle strap heels

Ankle-strap heels are classic summer footwear for a reason. From heeled sandals to two-strap heels, these shoe styles offer a great way to dress up for summer celebrations without having to wear uncomfortable pumps. Grab a pair of neutral wedges for the day and check out block heel sandals for a night out with friends.

White shirt

A white button-up shirt is another versatile summer essential. It can be

worn with jeans, shorts, skirts, and under dresses. As well as adding a touch of polish to casual outfits, the style is also perfect for enhancing the appearance of your glowing summer tan.

Cami

On those super hot days, camis are an essential wardrobe piece worth putting on. Loose and fitted camisoles can look trendy with jeans or skirts and can be paired with heels or sneakers. Not only can you grab a cami top in all your favorite colors, but they are easy to layer under white shirts or denim jackets when the weather starts to cool down at night. Showcase your summer style with colorful hues and tones.

Carryall tote

A carryall tote is a comfortable and easy way to bring your gear for the pool, beach, or wherever else your summer day may take you. These bags come in several different shapes and sizes so find your favorite and stock up on sunscreen.

Sunglasses

Sunglasses are the ultimate summer accessory, adding just the right final touch to your look. From sleek and affordable to designer and upscale, the most popular sunglasses brands make quality shades that protect your eyes with class. Check out different shapes and styles to find the best sunglasses for your look and invest in a high-quality pair that offers protection from the summer sun.

Denim shorts

If you've been working out and want to show off your legs, denim shorts are the ideal

choice. Great for staying fresh on those hot summer days, these shorts can be worn in many different ways. You can dress them up with a loose-fit blouse and heeled sandals or choose a button-up shirt with booties. Keep it casual with a white tee and sneakers or crop top and sandals.

Maxi dress

The maxi dress is the ultimate combination of comfort and style. It's traditionally long and flowy, which allows for a cool, comfortable look that can be worn at work, school, or family events. Find them in floral, patterns, and solids and match them with your shoes.



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Poll-bound Kerala’s political din signifies nothing

DOWN south in God’s own country, election campaigns are going on in full swing, with every political party leaving no stone unturned to drum up support of the electorate for a possible victory as usual in the politically-volatile State. With the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) having its eyes on the prospects of increasing its number in the Assembly from the existing one to as many as possible, party heavyweights, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and a host of other leaders are on pins and needles, busy addressing public meetings and playing every trick to make the saffron party’s presence felt in the State after the hustings. Modi, the jack of all trades, is heavily banking on the religious sentiments of majority Hindus and Christians by crying foul over the

Left Democratic Front (LDF) government failing to protect the faith of millions following. They also blame the United Democratic Front (UDF) for not doing anything to keep the faithful protected, while the Left parties hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindus. Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Vadra are in the forefront of election campaigns for Congress-led UDF. A notch higher in oratory skills and body language than brother Rahul, Priyanka was the cynosure of all eyes on Wednesday, giving her best political performance in the socially and politically enlightened Kerala. The CPI(M)-led LDF is hollering on top of its voice that ‘this time, LDF for sure’. The Left leaders are trying their best to project Rahul Gandhi in poor light and highlight the achievements the Pinarayi Vijayan’s government has made. While

the political firmament in the coastal State is abuzz with allegations and counter-allegations, claims and appeals, the political history of Kerala says something else. Kerala, being a society with high literacy rate and deep understanding of socio-political development, has always remained unpredictable in matters relating to elections. Barring only a very few occasions, ever since the first Assembly elections were held in 1957, Kerala has never elected the same party or alliance for a second time. This time too, there are enough allegations of corruption, crime, nepotism and a whole lot of skullduggery against the ruling LDF, and people in general are tad sensitive to such issues. The recent issue of a dangerously attractive woman smuggling gold in a diplomatic bag using her clout with Chief Minister’s Principal

Secretary A Shivshankar has stirred up a hornet’s nest, diminishing the chances of the ruling party of clinging to power. Communal forces have always been outrightly rejected by the people of Kerala who are overtly secularistic in their outlook and lifestyles. The entry of veteran and well-known engineer E Sreedharan into the BJP was not welcomed by people of the State, instead made the party a laughing stock. Film actors like Suresh Gopi and Krishna Kumar have been hitting the headlines oftentimes for all wrong reasons. That means the BJP leaders’ rhetoric and inconsistent promises and claims limit its chances to make a ripple. A few new local apolitical sprouts are also fast gaining electorate’s attention as was visible in the last elections to the local bodies. Given the mindset of Kerala electorate, and going by the history, chances of winning is distant for the ruling LDF. The rest is anybody’s guess!

‘Protect SEC against scurrilous attacks’

N RAMESH KUMAR



AS per the AP High Court observations in its judgement on March 16, the outgoing State Election Commissioner prepared draft recommendations of certain changes to election law and measures to improve electoral practices. He said that the suggestions are classified under two heads including changes to Acts/ Rules and procedural changes.

The SEC opined that The State Election Commission should be vested with the complete responsibility as well as determination of all related matters pertaining to elections to improve the election environment by centralizing all the related decision making processes. He said enabling citation and provision has to be made in both AP Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 and Municipal Acts.

As uncertainty and delays have been the bane of local body elections which are to be held with unfailing regularity, the elections to local bodies should also be done with the same sanctity as in case of legislatures.

In extraordinary and compelling circumstances like natural calamities and health emergency, the Election Commission shall be consulted and concurrence in writing be obtained mandatorily for such situations. However, such interim arrangements should not exceed maximum of six months. The determination of reservations shall be vested with the Commission exclusively instead of Government. Many states have already adopted this practice.

The preparation of electoral rolls is exclusively to be vested with the State Election Commission as well as delimitation of wards instead of with Govt. Delimitation of wards shall be done by the Commission through consultative process. Merger of Gram Panchayats with urban local body shall be completed well before notification i.e. six months before notification schedule. The State Election Commission shall have full financial and functional autonomy and full empowered. The Commission’s mandate should be recognised by the govt which shall provide it with all necessary facilities.

The State administrative machinery will be completely accountable to the state election commission. Provision has to be built into AP Panchayat Raj Act and Municipal Act.

Regarding appointment of State Election Commissioner, a three-member collegium system is to be put in place with a representative of High Court in the search committee along with Chief Secretary and retired SEC as other members. The tenure and service conditions shall be the same as sitting High Court judge. The SEC needs to be protected against scurrilous attacks and its stature and standing shall be protected especially in the social media.

The electoral law is to be amended to enable the Commission to restore the rights unduly deprived of any contesting candidates on enquiry and to its satisfaction during the course of election process with a view to safeguard against the pernicious practices of forced withdrawals and prevention from filing nominations.

The present abridged practice of 15-day election schedule is found to be lacking in transparency and well lacking in level playing field. The old and tested 21- day schedule is recommended to be brought back.

To promote transparency, the elected representatives shall submit their option before the notification date to the commission.

To prevent horse trading post-elections, it is recommended to hold the elections of Mayor/Chairperson in case of ULBs the day after counting at 11 am instead of present practice of three days.

Amendments to be PR and Municipal Acts will have to brought to facilitate e-filing of nominations as being done by several states.

Measures to improve electoral practices

- Analogous to the measures adopted by Election Commission of India, long standing personnel of the Panchayat Raj, Revenue and police department should be transferred in consultation with the election commission.
- A complaint receiving and redressal system which is technology based will be adopted both at State and district level.
- In view of several complaints receiving during counting process, EVMs is the preferred mode in case of elections to the Urban local bodies.
- The filing and withdrawal process shall be completely sanitised under electronic surveillance. Counting process will be done with complete transparency under electronic watch. The police personnel are expressly forbidden to enter counting area.
- The general guidance imparted by Commission shall be adhered to in case of counting to promote transparency by collectors and returning officers.
- The code of conduct shall be in vogue without exception and any violation will be taken criminal cognisance by police authorities suo moto or on complaint made.
- Any category of Govt servants including contractual appointees under various nomenclatures such as helpers or volunteers found to be involved in partisan conduct shall be summarily discharged. The above measures are only indicative, but not exhaustive. However, implementing them through statutory changes and amendments is the need of the hour.

(Draft recommendations were made by outgoing SEC N Ramesh Kumar on changes to election law and measures to improve electoral practices. The outgoing SEC is to submit the draft recommendations to Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan and various political parties)

Adversity as a great opportunity



Dr Mohan Kanda

NOT many of us will probably be familiar with it, but the song “always look on the bright side of life”, by Monty Python, (from the film ‘Monty Python’s life of Brian’), very popular in Britain, as a common singalong in public events. Reminiscent, in a way, of the all too familiar adage about a pessimist and an optimist looking differently at a half-filled glass – half empty, or full, respectively – it conveys a simple, but powerful, message. And that is, to make the best out of every situation one faces in life.

I remember how, as an officer trainee in the late 1960s, I was taken in by the techniques of modern management, which were just beginning to make their presence felt by then, thanks to Gurus such as Peter Drucker. Several varieties of management, such as Management by Objectives, OKRA (Objectives, Key Results and Actions), and the like, were increasingly in the news, as instruments of improving efficiency and focus in the corporate as well as the public sectors.

Another method, brought in by the winds of change in the late 1960s and 70s, was what has become commonplace now as the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, developed originally by Alfred Humphrey at the Stanford Research Institute. While analysing a given situation or assessing the health of an organisation (or, for that matter, a new way of doing things), one learns to look, not merely at the weaknesses and threats, but also at the strengths and opportunities.

Returning to the subject in the

discussion, many things changed over the last one year, thanks to the compulsions and imperatives occasioned by the unprecedented spread of the Covid – 19 virus. For instance, four out of five people (according to a study), changed their eating habits. They adopted healthier eating habits, and started focusing on food safety, avoiding restaurants and other ready food sources, they also did more shopping, cooking, eating healthier and even thinking, differently, as a result.

Many of them, probably as a result of the impact advertisements in the print and electronic media had on them, began to depend on home remedies to improve their immunity and to consume more fruits and vegetables. Again, probably on account of the same influence, there was a marked fall in the consumption of sugar, fried foods and salt on their part with the focus shifting to plant proteins.

Meanwhile, the social media, not to be left behind, through their cooking tutorials on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, made cooks out of people who had hardly even seen the insides of a kitchen before!

On a completely different plane, the situation also offered a rare opportunity for contemplation. One was able to sit back and look at the big picture, and reflect upon options and priorities, things which had received little attention before, in the hustle and bustle of day to day life.

Thanks to the constraints imposed by the environment, organisations were also able to take a fresh look at the rigidity of their systems, and the consequently tardy results. They realised that procedures could be skipped, or accelerated, and rules winked at – to create an environment that enabled quicker decision-making. Realisation dawned upon them that, earlier, people spent as much as 23 hours per week in meetings, half of which were considered a waste of time.

Rethinking the issue led to the laying down of new restrictions on meetings, which were either unnecessary, or longer than required. What is more, the by now well accepted form of “work from



It is really up to us all, now to preserve, protect and defend the unexpected benefits, that came as a fallout of the perceived adversity of an unprecedented, an unforeseen, situation. And use the opportunity to reconsider our lives and reorganise them in a manner that is people-friendly and compatible with the imperatives of environmental protection and economic growth

home” gained wide acceptance.

Service providers were also quick to grab the opportunity offered by the prevailing conditions and shifted to the delivery mode. Schoolteachers taking classes online became a common place occurrence, as did home delivery, on telephonic orders, of fresh vegetables and fruits, food items and medicines. The situation also proved a boon to services such as Flipkart and Amazon as people took more and more to ordering things online. Similarly, as visiting doctors became difficult, more and more virtual diagnoses and prescriptions began to happen. Courts of law also took to holding virtual hearings.

Among the other blessings that came in disguise during that time were great opportunities, for social bonding, and other ways of connecting with people and helping them. The not so unnatural feeling, of isolation and loneliness, which some people were bound to feel, was fortunately counteracted by the feeling of “we are in this together”, infused in them by well-meaning friends and relatives. The times also saw heartwarming incidents such as Italians singing together from their

windows and balconies.

Apart from attempts at improving the mood of the public in general that were worldwide in nature, many small but local initiatives also helped improve morale. Social coherence, in other words, became the buzzword.

On the other hand, it was not as if generosity, goodwill and empathy along were in evidence. Hoarding, of things like food, medicines, toilet paper, as well as self-serving and ego centric behaviour were, unfortunately, also in evidence, although, fortunately, on a very small scale.

Not surprisingly the Covid – 19 situation also resulted in a dramatic decrease of industrial activity resulting in many not unwelcome consequences such as a decrease in road, railway and a traffic leading to reduced pollution. Quite obviously, many of the outcomes of the situation we have witnessed over the last one year were not only good as responses to the situation, but also such as to provide mankind with sustainable and lasting benefits, even in the future, in the post Covid – 19 situation.

It is really up to us all, now to preserve, protect and defend the

unexpected benefits, that came as a fallout of the perceived adversity of an unprecedented, an unforeseen, situation. And use the opportunity to reconsider our lives and reorganise them in a manner that is people-friendly and compatible with the imperatives of environmental protection and economic growth.

In conclusion, we need to realise that the role we play on this planet needs to be moderated, following an acceptance that things cannot always be what we want them to be. No matter how well – planned and organised we are, and no matter how much we live in the Anthropocene – the era characterised by significant human impact – we are, in the ultimate analysis, not in control.

Clearly, the period we have all been through had its dark side, and positive side, as well as opportunities for realising the fundamental changes we need to adopt in approaching the world. These changes should include looking at the brighter side of life, and realising that challenges can be opportunities.

One now begins to wonder whether one should really wish the crisis to come to an end soon. Because the longer it lasts the greater the opportunities will be, for making changes, and altering deeply rooted habits and convictions.

Adversity, in other words, can be a great opportunity. It has been said, that a war not only destroys but also creates opportunities, for those who are resilient, and care to rebuild. And, today, our war, against Covid– 19, has brought us similar challenges and opportunities. It is for us to decide whether we can measure up to the opportunity.

As the poet Iqbal said, “Khudi ko kar buland itna ki har taqdeer se pehle khuda bande se khud pooche bata teri raza kya hai”. Opportunity, like beauty, is, apparently, in the beholder’s eye. To end on a lighter note, a senior colleague recently asked me why it was called a lock ‘down’ when, as a matter of fact, we were all locked ‘up’!

(The writer is former Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

LETTERS

Make state govt employees more accountable

NOWADAYS our Telangana ministers are busy in the election meetings. When one election process is over the next one is announced. So this is a continuing process and the question does arise when they would focus on their ministries and concerned offices. There is a need to surprise check all offices situated in Hyderabad and district offices by the ministers. With the surprise check the staff will be vigilant and give their 100 per cent duty.

Even there is a need that our Chief Minister should make a surprise visit to the various state departments and check their service record whether they come with punctuality and keep the record intact. There is a need to check the corruption angle in the state departments.

The state government has increased the monthly salaries of government employees, so there is a need that staff should be regular and complete the work without pending. Hope our Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao will take cognisance and to start the regular surprise check of all state departments and give directions to all Ministers to visit the concerned department offices for surprise check. Even in the surprise check there is a need to look whether the staff keep the office clean and follow the Covid guidelines properly or not.

Syed Nisar Mehdi, Hyderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com

Modi’s street-smart politics

IT was quite a strange spectacle to see Prime Minister Modi campaigning for one of the respected technocrats turned BJP leader in Palakkad in Kerala. What is more intriguing is the 88-year-old on becoming a politician needs a Gujarati-speaking 70-year-old Prime Minister seeking votes for him from Malayalam-speaking voters which can happen only in India. One wonders what would be going into the minds of those senior BJP leaders who have been placed in Margdarshak Mandal for crossing the 75 years age restriction imposed by the party. Selective exemption on age restriction would help Modi to continue beyond BJP’s superannuation age. Modi seems to be an astute politician gathering supporters for his own future to thwart attempts to send him to Margdarshak Mandal.

NS Rajan, Hyderabad

No governance, only politics

THE two visuals of Manjul on cover page of today’s THI are worth trillions of words. Very appropriately shown on prevailing administration of government. All political parties more so ruling party is busy and pre-occupied with focus on elections to win as one election or other is held, every year, in some State or other; by election to MP seat or MLA; Municipality or Panchayat. Central ministers queued to campaign in Hyderabad municipal elections. The government is coming to a standstill, not concerned about Good Governance.

G Sivaramkrishna, Hyderabad

Needed a new narrative on caste system

IT was distressing to read the news item that parties are using the caste card to win elections in Tirupati. It is extremely unfortunate that we went so wrong in understanding and correcting a terrible discourse after independence. The only reality of the Indian social systems are the castes (jatis); thousands of them which have vibrantly and dynamically evolved or dissolved across centuries. These castes are based on many things and Indian experience has been that political, social, and economic power lay with different castes at different times. Varnas have been always four in number and these have been categories. The one-to-one correlation between the jatis and varnas has been one of the most dubious and difficult exercises across all times. One cannot give a hierarchical ordering to Varnas but extreme cherry picking and selective readings of the colonials (especially the reading of the Purusasukta) created a hierarchy of varnas. There have been equally valid and important texts which calls for equality of all the varnas or even reverses them. The colonials and our scholars have conveniently ignored them. The colonials did not ‘create’ the caste system but this was an ‘experiential unity’ for them of the hundreds of jatis and the social system they saw in India.

The country is dividing deeply as new castes come into existence and the existing discourse solidifies further. The political pundits complicated the issue by introducing further classifications like ‘forward’, ‘backward’ (with sub-categories), ‘sched-

uled’ and so on. These have only created frictions and angers in our society when we should be moving forward in harmony and unity. The Varna Vyavastha and the jatis have been the bedrock of our civilisation and the reason we could survive so many physical and intellectual onslaughts to obliterate us. But we need new narratives- based solely on our past traditional understanding ironically. The people who should remain far away from creating fresher narratives to the agitated country where everyone is fighting for rights based on ‘caste’ are the politicians. Ironically, they are the most significant people in charge. Meanwhile, we learn that caste system is bad and ugly, while at the same time mentioning our caste in every application form.

Dr Pingali Gopal, Warangal

Enhance awareness drives

IT is a matter of grave concern that the cases of coronavirus pandemic increase day by day in AP. In the wake of this harsh reality, the police take stringent action against the people who avoid wearing face masks in public places. Violators of Covid protocol are penalised differently in different districts according to the whims and fancies of the SP’s. During the previous lockdown, the frontline warriors of different departments strained every nerve to contain the disease. Yet, there are victims of it. Focus on mask wearing is not enough. All public places are the scenes of no social distancing. There is no proper social and personal sanitisation. Awareness drives should be enhanced instead of emptying the pockets of the public in the name of fines for not wearing masks.

Tulluri Venkateswarlu, Bapatla

Tremendous opportunities exist in shipping and logistics industry

NITISH GUPTA

LOGISTICS has always been the backbone of our economy, playing an ancillary role in running the country. This became even more evident in the year 2020. With the country and the world going into lockdown the demand for efficient and uninterrupted logistic supply became paramount.

The testing ground

The logistic and shipping industry like any other sector is heavily dependent on manpower. An after-effect of the pandemic has resulted in a supply and demand deficit. There is a huge shortfall of skilled resources which are necessary to increase the first mile and last mile shipping efficiency. The boom in the e-commerce industry came at a time when the flights were not operational and all the movement was happening via surface. This along with staggered warehouse operational timings and less staff caused capacity issues all across the country.

The opportunity

The industry has seen exponential growth due to the surge in e-commerce. More and more people are purchasing and selling online. The barrier to entry has completely been razed as these days it only takes half a day to set up an online store and start selling. This requires a plug and play solution for logistics powered by seamless technology. This is where most logistic companies are lacking. This would make not only make the processes more transparent but would also encourage more businesses to venture into the e-commerce sector. Cash on delivery is still the preferred payment mode while ordering from any e-commerce store. While there have been strides made towards contactless delivery, the end-user is still not sold on paying in advance. The way logistic companies can capitalise on the opportunity is by becoming more efficient when it comes to COD order delivery. There have been numerous instances where the delivery agents give false remarks or there are delays in transit which doesn’t mature into a pleasing experience for the buyers. (The author is co-founder, Shippigo, a logistics automation company)

AP CM releases ₹254 cr for YSR Bima

12k families who lost their breadwinners will get the insurance amount

These people are eligible for the insurance but could not benefit as they have not enrolled with the banks

CM says the State govt is implementing the scheme despite the withdrawal of Centre, which was earlier paying 50% premium

AMARAVATI

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

Speaking at the event, the Chief Minister said that the state government has not backed out in providing financial assistance to those families who lost their sole breadwinner. Even though the government pays premium to banks, due to non-enrolment under YSR Bima, the government came forward to pay for the 12,039 claims.

The Chief Minister explained that there are about 1.4 crore ration card holders across the state, and the government



Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy releasing Rs 254 crore under YSR Bima scheme at his camp office on Wednesday

started YSR Bima in October 2020 by paying a premium of Rs 510 crore to the banks, despite Central government withdrawing from the scheme, which was earlier paying 50 per cent of premium.

After the Centre dropped out, the entire premium was paid by the state on humanitarian grounds to provide security for those families in need. However, the Centre has put more clauses, closing the existing group insurance system and made a mandatory bank account for every person in the family. The Centre had put another clause of a 45-day cool-off period from the day of account opening, where if someone dies within 45 days, the insurance will not be paid.

The Chief Minister said that

62 lakh accounts were opened so far and the remaining 70 lakh accounts are yet to be opened. He directed the officials to come up with a practical solution to sort out the issues and for the better implementation of YSR Bima.

He assured that the government shall pay the premium just like the previous years and told the authorities to find a practical solution to support families in need. Further, the Chief Minister said that any eligible person who was left out from YSR Bima can call toll-free number 155214 for getting registered and assured that the government will take steps to ensure that they get benefitted.

Under the scheme, insurance amount for accidental death and total permanent disability

for people aged between 18-50 years is Rs 5 lakh and for those between 51-70 years Rs 3 lakh. Similarly, for natural death cases (18-50 years) Rs 2 lakh and for partial, permanent disability in an accident case (18-70 years) Rs 1.5 lakh assistance will be provided.

Deputy Chief Minister (revenue) Dharmana Krishna Das, minister for labour Gummanur Jayaram, housing special chief secretary Ajay Jain, principal secretary B Udaya Lakshmi, panchayati raj, rural development commissioner M Girija Shankar, AP Dairy Development Co-operative Federation MD Babu A, APSHCL MD Narayana Bharat Gupta, SERP CEO P Rajababu, MMPMA MD V Vijayalakshmi and other senior officials were present.

Nimmagadda thanks CM, officials for cooperation

- Possible to conduct panchayat and municipal polls without the support of govt and staff
- States that he will fight for his right to vote in his native place as a citizen
- Stressing the need for changes in existing electoral rules, he will be submitting recommendations based on the best practices in other States to the Governor

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

STATE Election Commissioner N Ramesh Kumar thanked Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, chief secretary Aditya Nath Das and officials for their cooperation to complete the panchayat and municipal elections successfully. He said that without the cooperation of the government, it would not have been possible for SEC to conduct the elections efficiently. He said that he was happy for conducting elections successfully without any repolling.

Addressing the media on the occasion of end of his tenure as



SEC, Ramesh Kumar said there were some misunderstandings due to some persons at first and as a result majority of the staff of SEC had applied for leave. Later, the issue was settled and every one cooperated with the SEC.

Referring to pending of his application for vote in his native village Duggirala in Guntur district, the SEC said that such small issues should not reflect on constitutional systems. After his retirement on Wednesday, as a citizen he is going to approach High Court to get his voting right in his village.

Stating that the SEC never crossed its limits, he said that everyone should respect other constitutional systems too.

Citing High Court observations for changes in Election Commission rules, the SEC stressed the need for changes

in the existing system. He said that best practices from other states should be adopted. As per the High Court observation, he prepared draft recommendations for changes in election law and electoral practices and going to submit the proposals to Governor Biswa Busan Harichandan.

Welcoming the appointment of former chief secretary Nilam Sawhney as State Election Commissioner, the SEC said that the officials of SEC should not compromise on its jurisdiction and act independently. He said there should be self-control and at the same time the powers entrusted with the organisation should be utilised.

Later, to a question from reporters, he said he would not 'commit a mistake' of joining politics after the retirement.

Naidu suggests Bharata Ratna to Pingali Venkayya

Says it is a matter of pride for all Telugus that Venkayya gave design for Tricolour which symbolises country's essential values

AMARAVATI

TDP national president and former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday appealed to the Central government to confer 'Bharata Ratna' on Pingali Venkayya for his services as a freedom fighter and designer of the National Flag.

Naidu termed it as a matter of pride for all Telugus that Venkayya gave the design for the National Flag which remained a symbol of the country's equality, fraternity and unity in diversity. The Tricolour symbolised and reflected the overall Indian culture and tradition.

In a statement here, the TDP chief recalled how Pingali Venkayya actively took part in the Vandemataram and Home Rule agitations during the struggle for independence. His services in the freedom movement would be remembered forever. The Tricolour would always stand out for the three basic tenets of sacrifice, peace and progress. The Asoka Chakra in the middle would stand for dharma.

Naidu said that Pingali Venkayya had also rendered his research services in agriculture and geology.

He worked as an advisor in the mineral research department after independence.

‘Address Gorumuddha immediately’

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

CHIEF Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy released training handbook for educational institutions' development committees and officials on the activities to be taken up in second phase of Manabadi-Nadu Nedu.

During a review on Nadu Nedu works in schools, Jagananna Vidya Kanuka and CBSE affiliation in schools held at camp office here on Wednesday, the Chief Minister unveiled 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 with the infrastructure facilities in Jawahar Navodaya and Kendriya Vidyalaya schools, the officials explained the differences in infrastructure facilities developed in shoos under Nadu Nedu.

The Chief Minister said self-help group women should inspect the works completed in schools under first phase of Nadu Nedu and directed the officials to prepare a

simple questionnaire for them to get the feedback. He said to focus on maintenance of the schools and added that the schools renovated in the first phase of Nadu Nedu will be dedicated to people on April 30. He directed the officials to inspect the maintenance of schools and toilets during their visits.

The Chief Minister said the complaints received on Gorumudha should be solved immediately and the mistakes should not recur. He said there should be no compromise on quality of food and added

that they should come up with SOP for preparing food items.

He said the students should be provided with Jagananna Vidya Kanuka kits with dictionary, textbooks, notebooks and bags.

The officials said a special office of CBSE will be opened in the state. All the 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 to provide training and create awareness among teachers on CBSE and to maintain teacher-student ratio. He said inspection and monitoring mechanisms should be strong and directed the officials to come up with a plan for it.

Perni faults outgoing SEC over recommendations



Minister for I&PR Perni Venkatramaiah (Nani) addressing the press conference at YSRCP Central Office in Tadepalli on Wednesday

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

MINISTER for information and public relations, Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) criticised State Election Commissioner (SEC) Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar for writing a letter to the Governor recommending measures to be taken up to enhance transparency in elections, cornering YSRCP.

Speaking to the media here on Wednesday, the Minister said that Ramsh Kumar has no moral right to speak on transparent, unbiased elections, as he was the one who worked under the directions of TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu all his term. He said that it was strange for him to suggest that the SEC to stay away from politicians and political parties, while he himself went overboard and held secret talks with Sujana Chaudhary and Kamineni Srinivas at a hotel.

Reiterating that Ramesh Kumar always worked for the interests of Chandrababu Naidu, the minister said that it was funny for him to

- Says Ramesh Kumar has no moral right to speak of unbiased, transparent elections as he has worked under the directions of TDP chief
- Observes that as SEC, he has overruled every recommendation he listed in his letter to the Governor

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 SEC's bias towards Naidu.

Recalling the past instances, the minister said that it was Ramesh Kumar who wrote the letter to the Centre that was drafted in the TDP office, postponed elections citing Covid-19, when only a few cases were registered, held polls when Covid was in peak and vaccination was taking place and even went to the court demanding to vote although he was not qualified as per Form 6 of Central Election Commission.

Perni Nani hailed Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy for laying a foundation for constructing a 1.5-km retaining wall along Krishna river. He said that the previous government had completely neglected the residents of Krishna Lanka, who used to take refuge in shelter homes during floods and always lived in fear. In addition to the retaining wall, he said that the Chief Minister had also instructed the authorities to start the works on the right side of the river from Varadhi to Pushkar Ghats to be on the safe side.

SC-appointed panel on farm laws submits report

Continued from P1

The fourth member, Bhartiya Kisan Union President Bhupinder Singh Mann, had, however, recused himself from the committee before the work began. Separately, while briefing Cabinet decisions, Food Minister Piyush Goyal said that while the new farm laws have been brought in the interest of farmers, it is a different issue "some people have misled farmers and tried to create a negative atmosphere". However, farmers across the country now understand that the new farm laws do not take away the existing system of mandis, and provide more marketing options, he said. Goyal also explained that the government's main concern when the new farm laws were passed in Parliament was how to increase farmers' income and what steps should be taken to open more avenues to ensure their income rises.

Biden names PIO as Washington judge

Continued from P1

Unlike federal judges, they are not nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate and, therefore, do not issue judgments or hear cases. Quraishi is a former US Army captain who ad served in Iraq and has also worked as an assistant chief counsel in the Department of Homeland Security and as an assistant federal prosecutor. The South Asian Bar Association welcomed their nominations, tweeting, "We are proud to see Judges Rupa Ranga Puttagunta and Zahid Quraishi on the list" of Biden's judicial nominees.

Vaccination for all above 45

Continued from P1

The Centre asked states to archive incorrect or duplicate entries on Co-WIN platform, to identify low vaccine coverage areas and finally ensure that vaccination of these two priority groups can be wrapped up.

Following is a list of advisories the Centre issued to the States and UTs:

- Maintain vaccine wastage at less than 1% (present National Wastage Percentage being 6%).
- Regularly review vaccine wastage across all levels to minimise the same.
- Ensure timely utilisation of available stocks to avoid expiry of vaccines without usage.
- Timely updating of data of vaccine consumption to be ensured on CoWIN & eVIN portals.

Our Covid vax 100% effective on 12-15-year olds: BioNTech-Pfizer

Continued from P1

The BioNTech/Pfizer shot is based on novel mRNA technology and was the first Covid-19 vaccine to be approved in the West late last year. Both the United States and the European Union have approved its use for people aged 16 and above. Since then, it has been used in millions of adults in more than 65 countries. A real-world study involving 1.2 million people in Israel found it to be 94 per cent

effective. With the world scrambling to inoculate, BioNTech said on Tuesday that it was on track to manufacture 2.5 billion doses of its vaccine this year. The higher output was driven by the recent launch of a new production site in the German city of Marburg, which is now one of the world's largest mRNA vaccine manufacturing plants, it said. The vaccine is also being produced at a Pfizer plant in Belgium and at three sites

in the United States.

BioNTech said improved efficiency and new cooperation agreements with outside partners had also helped lift its vaccine target, as had the regulatory nod allowing vaccinators to extract six instead of just five doses from a single BioNTech/Pfizer vial.

BioNTech and Pfizer last week began studies of the jab on children, with the first group of 5-to-11-year olds getting the vaccine.

Farmers to intensify protest with ‘Parliament March’

Continued from P1

The SKM also said that the protesting farmers will block Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) Expressway for 24 hours on April 10.

The Centre has held several rounds of formal talks with the representatives of farmers in the past few months to resolve the issue but failed to achieve any concrete solution with the unions sticking to their main demand for the repeal of the legislations.

Last month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that the government and Parliament have great respect for farmers who are voicing their views on the three farm laws, and made it clear that those who want to continue with the old agriculture marketing system can continue doing so.

Only 2 guests will be allowed in TTD rooms

HANS NEWS SERVICE
TIRUMALA

TTD additional EO A V Dharma Reddy on Wednesday directed officials to take extra precautions on devotees' health security in view of Covid spike in the country, including the pilgrim city.

Addressing a review at Anna-maiah Bhavan in Tirumala, the additional EO urged them to make foolproof arrangements for Srivari Darshan as per new Covid guidelines.

He said thermal scanners were installed at Anna Prasadam centres and room allotment sub-centres while only two persons were allowed per room which will be allotted only after sanitisation after each vacation.

Devotees visiting Tirumala were urged to bring their own masks and sanitisers and they should compulsorily wear masks at all crowded locations of Tirumala like Vaikuntam queue complex, Srivari temple, Anna Prasadam Complex,

Kalyanakatta and sanitise the region once in 2 hours he said seeking the devotees strictly follow physical social distancing in Tirumala.

In order to minimise the crowd on the hills, TTD decided to allow the devotees with time slot tokens who are coming on vehicles at Alipiri checkpoint by 1 pm of previous day and for the devotees (with time slot tokens) who walk to Tirumala to be allowed at Alipiri and Srivari Mettu at 9 am of the previous day. While in Vaikuntam queue complex devotees will be allowed 30 minutes before the allotted time slot for darshan.

All vehicles to be sanitised at Alipiri and devotees to undergo thermal scanning, additional EO said urging those suffering with cold, cough and fever should postpone their Tirumala visit.

Heads of each department should see all employees are vaccinated and TTD will publicise precautionary measures of Covid through radio broadcasting in five languages.

ELECTIONS TO WB, ASSAM ASSEMBLIES

Arrangements in place, EC all set for 2nd phase polls

NEW DELHI

AS the second phase of polling is all set to take place on Thursday covering 69 Assembly seats both in West Bengal and Assam, the Election Commission along with state administration was ensuring all arrangements in place to conduct a peaceful election.

Dispatching of polling parties has begun as polling will take place in 30 Assembly constituencies in West Bengal and 39 in Assam with several polling teams moving ahead braving difficult terrains, blocked roads and rivers to reach specific booths.

The Election Commission said that it has completed all preparations for voting, and that its all-polling parties will reach polling stations by this evening.

“Not even difficult terrain, heavy rain and blocked roads can stop our dedicated officials, who are involved in election duties...for Phase II Polls tomorrow,” the EC said as its poll parties headed polling booths through difficult terrains on way in Assam and West Bengal.

All the booths where polling will be held in the second phase will be put under proper security radar as most of the areas are very sensitive, and the borders of the state adjoining other states are being closely monitored, an EC official said.

Vehicles entering the borders of the district and cities are being



Poll officials carry EVMs ahead of the 2nd phase of Assembly elections, in Haldia on Wednesday

checked by security personnel in the presence of magistrates.

Nearly 700 Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) companies have been almost deployed in West Bengal's Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, South 24 Parganas and Bankura districts. However, over 500 CAPFs are also being deployed in Assam to ensure a completely peaceful and fearless environment for polling.

The high-profile Nandigram constituency, where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is pitted against her one-time loyalist-turned-rival Suwendu Adhikari of BJP, will vote in the second phase.

Banerjee is seeking a third term in office from Nandigram Assembly constituency of Purbo Midnipur district. For her, and

the BJP, the battle for Nandigram is a prestige fight because it was the 2007 agitation against land acquisition in the region which catapulted the West Bengal Chief Minister to the centre stage of politics in the state, paving the way for the Trinamool's victory in the 2011 Assembly polls that ended 34 years of Left Front rule.

A total of 171 candidates are in the fray for the second phase polls in West Bengal's 30 seats where 75,94,549 voters will exercise their franchise.

In Assam, the second phase of state elections will decide the fate

of 345 candidates in 39 seats with over 73 lakh voters set to cast their ballots.

Most of the seats in the second phase in Assam are likely to see a straight fight between the NDA and Congress-led Mahajoth. The BJP has fielded 34 candidates, Congress has 28, Assam Jatiya Parishad 19, AIUDF seven, AGP six and the BPF has four candidates in the fray.

For the ruling BJP, ministers Parimal Suklabaidya, Bhambesh Kalita, Pijush Hazarika and sitting MLA Numa Momin would seek re-election. Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, Sum Ronghang, Siddique Ahmed from the Congress would try their political luck. Senior BPF leader and minister Rihon Daimary is also in the fray from the Udalguri seat.

Suzam Uddin Lashkar, Siraj Uddin Ajmal are in the contest from the AIUDF. However, this election would not witness participation of former Chief Minister and Asom Gana Parishad leader Prafulla Kumar Mahanta who represented the Bahrampur seat for the last 35 years. (IANS)

Ishrat Jahan case: Guj cops discharged

GANDHINAGAR

THE Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Special Court on Wednesday discharged three accused Gujarat police officials in the 2004 Ishrat Jahan encounter case, and also dropped the proceedings against them -- G.L. Singhal, Tarun Barot and Anaju Chaudhary.

Special CBI judge Vipul Rawal on Wednesday allowed the discharge application by the three Gujarat police officials and discharged them from the offences under the IPC 341, 342, 343, 365, 368, 302 and 201 and under section 25 (1)(e) and 27 of Indian Arms Act. They were released on personal bond of Rs 15,000 each. The CBI special court dropped the proceedings against and discharged them from the case after the Gujarat government refused to sanction to prosecute the three accused police officials -- IPS officer G.L. Singhal, retired DySP Tarun Barot and an assistant sub-inspector Anaju Chaudhary.

These are the last three policemen, who were facing prosecution for charges of murder, criminal conspiracy, abduction and illegal detention of the 19-year-old girl from Mumbai. (IANS)

‘Results of Kerala polls, beginning of Cong’s return to Delhi in 2024’



Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra waves at the crowd during a public meeting for Kerala Assembly polls, at Irinjalakuda, Thrissur on Wednesday

ASIM KAMAL

NEW DELHI (PTI) The Kerala poll results along with those of other states will mark the beginning of the Congress' comeback nationally and its return to Delhi in 2024, former Kerala chief minister Oommen Chandy said on Wednesday. Chandy, who is among the top contenders to be the chief minister if the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) gets a majority in the Kerala polls, said there would be “no problem” in the selection of the CM after the polls if voted to power and the high command's decision in the matter would be acceptable to all the leaders.

In a telephonic interview with PTI, the former Kerala chief minister also asserted that the BJP would remain a marginal player in the polls like last time when it had won just one seat. Expressing confidence that the UDF would come to power, Chandy said the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in the last assembly elections made so many promises but could not fulfil any of them and asserted that the people can see the difference between

the LDF and the UDF. “The slogan of UDF is development and care, development of state and care stands for special attention to the weaker sections. We fulfilled our promises (when in government),” said Chandy, who was the chief minister from August 2004 to May 2006 and then from May 2011 to May 2016. The LDF made so many allegations against the previous UDF government, claiming that there was a lot of corruption, but in the last five years they could not do anything or proceed in a single case, he asserted.

Chandy said the UDF was not afraid of the BJP and was fighting it with full might. Pointing to an alleged Left-BJP collusion, he said they are fighting each other in front of the public but their fight is with the common aim of defeating the Congress. “There is a strong rumour that they have a secret arrangement to defeat the Congress,” said Chandy. On the entry of ‘Metroman’ E Sreedharan on the side of the BJP, he said Sreedharan is a “good person and a very good technocrat”, but his decision to enter the political fray was “not correct”.

Indian Army shuts down military farms after 132 years of service

NEW DELHI

THE Indian Army shut down military farms -- which were functional for the last 132 years -- across the country on Wednesday.

“After 132 years of glorious service to the nation, curtains were drawn on this organisation,” said the Indian Army.

The force said that all the officers and workers employed in the military farms have been redeployed and would continue to serve the organisation.

During the closing ceremony of the farms in Delhi, Lieutenant General Shashank Mishra said: “The military farm is ending its services. The first farm was established on February 1, 1889 in Allahabad and by the time we got Independence in 1947, India had 130 such farms. At that time it was highly beneficial for us as the White Revolution had not begun. Verghese Kurien had started the Operation Flood in 1970.”

The farms were set up with the sole requirement of supplying hygienic cow milk to the troops billeted in various garrisons across British India. After Independence, military farms flourished with 30,000 heads of cattle in 130 military farms set up all over India under varied agro-climatic conditions.

Military farms were even established in Leh and Kargil in late 1990s, with an aim to supply fresh milk to the troops in those areas on a daily basis.

Another major task was management of large tracts of defence land, and production and supply of baled hay to the animal holding units.

For more than a century, military farms with their dedication and commitment supplied 3.5 crore litres of milk and 25,000 MT of hay yearly. The farms are credited with pioneering the technique of artificial insemination of cattle and introduction of organised dairying in India, providing yeoman service during the 1971 war, supplying milk at the Western and Eastern war fronts as well as during the Kargil operations to the Northern Command.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, they established “Project Freiswal”, credited to be the world's largest cattle cross-breeding programme.

They also teamed up with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for producing bio-duel. There were over a 1,000 employees who were maintaining 39 farms spread across 20,000 acres. Till two years ago, the Army maintained over 25,000 cows. (IANS)

Will field 70-80% fresh faces in ‘22 Assembly polls: Goa Cong

PANAJI: THE Congress will field 70 to 80 per cent new faces in the 2022 Assembly elections in Goa, state party President Girish Chodankar said on Wednesday. “We will field 70 to 80 per cent new faces in the upcoming elections,” Chodankar said. Elections to the 40-member state assembly are scheduled to be held in early 2022. The Congress in Goa has been plagued by desertion over the last few years, with 13 MLAs quitting the party since 2017, leaving it with just five legislators in the state Assembly. When asked to respond to a recent demand made by South Goa Congress MP Francisco Sardinha for his resignation owing to poor performance by the party in the recently concluded zilla panchayat and municipal polls, Chodankar said: “We have to show respect to the elders in the family and listen to them.” (IANS)

VISUAL IMPACT



A woman wearing a face mask, walks past a coronavirus theme-based mural in Mumbai on Wednesday

ED files charge sheet against 124 in Adarsh Co-op money laundering case

NEW DELHI

THE Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday filed a charge sheet against 124 people, companies and firms in connection with its probe into the Adarsh Credit Cooperative Society Ltd (ACCSL) case.

The ED, in a statement, said that it filed a charge sheet against 124 individuals, companies and firms including ACCSL, Mukesh Modi and directors or partners or persons responsible for Adarsh Group of Companies or firms or LLPs, the Riddhi Siddhi Group of Companies or firms or AOPs, the Virendra Modi Group of Compa-

nies or individuals and others.

The charge sheet comes months after it attached movable and immovable properties, worth Rs 1,489 crore, spread across Rajasthan, Haryana, New Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

The financial probe agency has registered a case on the basis of the FIR registered by Rajasthan Police against Mukesh Modi, Rahul Modi and others of Adarsh Group, officials of ACCSL and other private persons on the offences of cheating, criminal breach of trust, forgery of valuable security, and criminal conspiracy.

“Money laundering probe revealed that ACCSL lured common people by offering high interest rates on their deposits. The funds so collected were siphoned off to Mukesh Modi's companies or firms and his relatives and associates in garb of loans illicitly availed and integrated with their real estate businesses,” it said.

The funds were diverted or siphoned off by Mukesh Modi and others, it added.

“Mukesh Modi, in collusion with his relatives Virendra Modi, Bharat Modi, Rahul Modi, Rohit Modi, Priyanka Modi, etc and associates including society's officials, siphoned off depositors’

funds from ACCSL by way of inter-linked fraudulent transactions,” it said.

Mukesh Modi, his relatives and associates incorporated several companies or firms or LLPs for sole purpose of diverting funds from ACCSL to their real estate business by way of availing fraudulent loans.

The ED alleged that Mukesh Modi also infused huge amount in these companies as share capital from ACCSL. “And huge amounts were diverted and siphoned off by means of exaggerated salaries, incentives and commissions to its own kin and companies or firms,” it added. (IANS)

FROM NAXAL-HIT REGIONS TO ANDAMAN

‘Rain centres’ to conserve water

NEW DELHI

FROM Maoist-hit Dantewada district in Chhattisgarh to Changlang in Arunachal Pradesh, and Ballia in Uttar Pradesh to South Andaman, maximum number of districts in the country are now under the Centre's mammoth drive to build ‘rain centres’ to guide people in constructing Rainwater Harvesting Structures (RWHS).

Almost 623 districts covering 31,150 villages across the country have been targeted to set up these ‘rain centres’, which will act as technical guidance centres for all the districts, teaching them how to ‘catch the rain, as it falls, where it falls’ under the ‘Catch the Rain’ initiative.

The target is to set up these rain centres at every district, collectorate, municipality and gram panchayat headquarters in order to meet the present challenges facing the water sector, said a project report released by the Ministry of Jal Shakti.

Every rain centre will have a dedicated mobile phone number and will be manned by an engineer or a person well trained in RWHS. The rain centres are aimed at taking forward the National Water Mission's (NWM) ‘Catch the Rain’ campaign that was launched in February.

These centres will assist all the stakeholders in creating appropriate RWHS suitable to the climatic conditions and sub-

soil strata before the onset of monsoon.

Under the NWM campaign, drives will be carried out to make water harvesting pits, rooftop RWHS, check dams; remove encroachments and de-silting of tanks to increase their storage capacity; remove obstructions in the channels which bring water to them from the catchment areas; and repair the stepwells and use defunct bore-wells to put the water back to the aquifers.

“The NWM has requested the states and the district magistrates to establish rain centres in every district headquarters. In the future, these centres can be developed into ‘Jal Shakti Kendras’, which will act as knowledge centres on water-

linked topics like RWHS, restoration, desilting of water bodies, ground water recharging, water saving practices in agriculture, industry, drinking water ect.,” the Ministry of Jal Shakti project report mentioned.

The state governments have started to set up rain centres in their respective districts, it said. “A number of districts in the country, including Dantewada, Changlang, Balia and South Andaman, have responded to our request and have already started setting up rain centres in their districts,” the report said.

The NWM had requested the state governments, Central ministries, Airport Authority of India (AAI), Railway Board,

Army, IAF, Navy, universities, IITs, IIMs, Central Armed Police Forces, Ordnance Factory Board, Sports Authority of India, Military Engineering Services, Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), and the Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) to create rainwater harvesting and artificial recharge structures and to support the NWM in its Catch the Rain initiative.

The AAI has affirmed that it has already implemented various measures to store and recharge rainwater to the aquifers at most of the airports, thus contributing to the Catch the Rain campaign of the NWM.

In addition, RWHS is also being implemented at all the ma-



ajor airport projects of AAI, the ministry said. “Many organisations have also responded to our request for supporting the Catch the Rain campaign and informed us about the details of the activities undertaken by them. The campaign is also en-

dorsed by dignitaries like the Vice President of India; Vice Chairman, NITI Ayog; CEO, NITI Ayog; senior government officials; and water experts Sonam Wangchuck and Anil Joshi, among others,” the ministry added. (IANS)

TODAY'S QUOTE

Trade can strengthen Indo-Tajik ties

“ There is potential for further bolstering India-Tajikistan economic cooperation, particularly in respect of investments from Indian companies in Tajikistan. We would encourage the business community, the Chambers and trade bodies on both sides to engage more intensively with each other while the governments will continue to play a facilitating role

– S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister



UNFAZED BY COVID IMPACT

HAL logs revenue of over ₹22,700 cr

In spite of the Covid-19 pandemic that affected the company's operations and disrupted the supply chain (both within and outside the country), Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) has recorded a revenue in excess of Rs 22,700 crore (provisional and unaudited) for the financial year ended on March 31, 2021. The corresponding figure for the previous year stood at Rs 21,438 crore

FOREX (buy rates in ₹)			
US Dollar	73.85	South	
Euro	86.64	African Rand	5.67
UAE Dirham	20.5	Hong Kong Dollar	10.82
Thai Baht	2.57	Japanese Yen	0.76
British Pound	101.8	New Zealand Dollar	51.69
Australian Dollar	56.27	Saudi Riyal	21.44
Canadian Dollar	58.61	Swedish Krona	9.64
Swiss Franc	78.35	Singapore Dollar	55.45

DELHI THURSDAY 1 APRIL 2021

BIZ BRIEFS

SpiceJet's new offer

SpiceJet has introduced an offer - zero change fee, which helps customer make changes in travel at least seven days prior to the date of departure. Passengers booking direct domestic flight tickets during March 27, 2021, and April 4, 2021, can enjoy a one-time waiver on the change fee for the travel period between March 27, 2021 and June 30, 2021. Fare difference will be applicable for flight changes. The offer is valid on bookings made via all channels including SpiceJet's website, mobile site reservations, airport ticketing counter, online travel agents etc. Passengers will be able to avail the waiver of change fee one time only. In case the flight is changed by customer for the second time, change fee as per standard terms shall be charged.

Vivo's X60 record sale

Vivo has announced that the newly launched X60 flagship series has received an overwhelming response from customers breaking all previous records. Till March 30, 2021, the X60 series which includes X60, X60Pro and X60Pro+, have received more than 200 per cent pre-bookings when compared to the last year's X50 series. The first vivo smartphone to be co-engineered with the iconic brand, the X60 series 5G integrates the user-oriented innovation of Vivo and the outstanding expertise in mobile imaging of ZEISS to culminate outstanding software and hardware capabilities.

BCG-Zoom releases report

Zoom along with Boston Consulting Group (BCG) conducted a survey to evaluate the economic impact of remote work and video communications solutions during the pandemic and also on what industries were able to pivot their business processes using video conferencing. The resulting report, prepared by Zoom and findings made by BCG, spans key industries and six countries such as India, US, UK, Japan, France and Germany. The report identifies 2.5-3.0x increase in remote working at businesses surveyed, which was supported by a 2.4-2.7x increase in employees using video conferencing solutions. The total time spent on video conferencing solutions increased 3-5x. BCG's Covid-19 employee sentiment survey from 2020 showed that 70 per cent of managers are more open to flexible remote working models than they were before the pandemic.

Immunisation summit concludes

Abu Dhabi's HOPE Consortium and world-leading experts marked the end of The World Immunisation and Logistics Summit on Wednesday by pledging to close the global immunisation gap. Through a series of key discussions with global healthcare professionals, philanthropists, decision makers etc., the consensus was formed that innovation, ingenuity and inclusiveness are key to finding a global solution to the Covid-19 pandemic and ensuring equitable access to vaccines for all. H.E. Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Hamed, Chairman, Department of Health, Abu Dhabi, said: "We strongly believe no one can do this alone. Together, we have a capacity to handle over six billion doses of the vaccine this year, and we are already increasing this to deliver over 18 billion vaccine doses by the end of 2021."

IT COs' MARGINS SWELL ON GREENBACK FEVER

Planned wage hikes, rising utility costs may eat into revenues

DEBASIS MOHAPATRA
BENGALURU

STRENGTHENING of US dollar against the rupee from the beginning of this year is likely to benefit the operating margins of domestic IT services firms in the coming quarters. However, scheduled wage hikes, more travel cost and higher utility cost due to gradual opening of offices may eat into the benefits arising out of margin improvement.

Indian IT firms have seen improvement in their margins for the third quarter ended December 2020 owing to less travel and utility costs apart from deferring expenses on account of salary hike, bonuses, and other staff-related costs.

These cost benefits continue in the fourth quarter as most IT firms continue to operate with minimal staff capacity. Moreover, the weakening of rupee against dollar in the January-March quarter is expected to supplement the margin profile further.

Due to rising US bond yields, dollar has strengthened against all emerging currencies including rupee this month. On Tuesday, the Indian unit fell 1.2 per cent to close at 73.38 against the US dollar. The fall was the



steepest one-day drop since February 26, making it the weakest in a month.

Analysts said that if the US bond yield rises further, rupee is expected to depreciate from these levels. In such a scenario, IT firms will gain from higher USD/Rs conversion rate.

"In the fourth quarter, rupee has not moved much against US dollar. In Q3, the conversion rate was around 73.5 level which has not

Analysts say that if the US bond yield rises further, rupee is expected to depreciate. In such a scenario, IT firms will gain from higher USD/Rs conversion rate

changed much in January-March quarter. However, if US bond yield continues to rise, the Indian rupee will depreciate from these levels, which should support the margins," said a Mumbai-based analyst.

"However, all IT companies are now planning wage hikes. Also, travel and utility costs will rise as the situation normalises. So, the gain in op-

erating margins will be utilised to meet these rising expenses," he added. In Q3 of ongoing fiscal, most IT firms have seen improvement in their margins. Infosys posted an operating margin of 25.4 per cent, which were 350 basis points higher than the corresponding period of last fiscal. It has also revised its margin guidance for FY21 to 24-24.5 percent from 23-24 per cent. Similarly, market leader Tata Consultancy Services witnessed its operating margins growing by 160 basis points year-on-year basis to 26.6 per cent in Q3. Third largest IT services firm HCL Technologies improved its operating margin by 265 basis points to 22.9 percent on YoY basis in the December quarter. It also raised its margin guidance for FY21 to 21-21.5 percent from 20-21 percent as predicted earlier. Analysts say that the margin guidance for FY22 is not likely to see any drastic change from this fiscal despite a likelihood of weaker rupee.

"In the next financial year, things are expected to come back to normal level. This will push up cost in terms of wage hike, utility and travel costs among others. So, guidance is likely to be at par with this fiscal level," said the analyst.

8 core industries' outputs shrink in February

NEW DELHI

INDIA'S eight major industries' output plummeted during February 2021, according to official data showed on Wednesday. The Index of Eight Core Industries' reading for last month showed a decline of 4.6 per cent in output from an expansion of 6.4 per cent in the same month last year.

On a sequential basis, the output of eight major industries had expanded by 0.9 per cent in January 2021. ECI index comprises 40.27 per cent of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). These industries comprise coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement, and electricity.

On a sector specific basis, the output of coal, which has a weight of 10.33 per cent in the index, showed a decline of (-) 4.4 per cent in February 2021 over the same month of the previous year.

Similarly, the output of refinery products, which has the highest weightage of 28.04, declined 10.9 per cent compared to the corresponding month of the last fiscal.

Sensex closes below 50k amid spike in Covid cases

BSE index ended lower by 627 pts, Nifty slips 154 pts; HDFC twins crash about 4%

MUMBAI:

EQUITY benchmark Sensex tanked 627 points to close below the 50,000 level on Wednesday due to heavy profit booking in HDFC twins, Reliance Industries and Infosys amid concerns over resurging coronavirus cases.

The 30-share BSE index ended lower by 627.43 points or 1.25 per cent at 49,509.15 with 19 of its constituents ending in the red. The broader NSE Nifty slumped 154.40 points or 1.04 per cent to close at 14,690.70.

HDFC Bank and HDFC were top losers among Sensex stocks, a day after the private banking major admitted to some glitches in its online banking services. The bank, which has already faced the RBI penalty for disruption in online services, promised to resolve the issue and restore services. HDFC tanked 4 per cent while HDFC Bank declined 3.86 per cent on BSE.

Among other major losers, PowerGrid fell 2.71 per cent, Tech Mahindra by 2.5 per cent, ICICI Bank by 1.71

per cent, ONGC by 1.59 per cent, Kotak Bank by 1.5 per cent, Infosys by 1.28 per cent and Reliance Industries by 1.25 per cent.

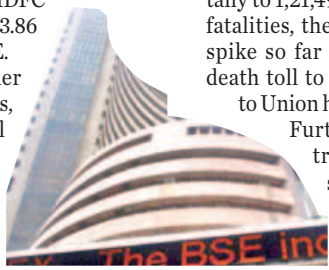
On the other hand, ITC, Bajaj Finserv, HUL, SBI and TCS were among the gainers.

Among sectoral indices, BSE finance, bankex, power, telecom, energy and teckfell up to 1.73 per cent, while realty, FMCG, consumer durables, basic materials and metals indices rose up to 1.89 per cent. Broader midcap and smallcap indices outperformed benchmarks, rising up to 0.52 per cent.

"Domestic equities traded lower as concerns pertaining to spike in Covid-19 cases and resultant restrictions continued to weigh on investors' sentiments," said Binod Modi, Head - Strategy at Reliance Securities.

As many as 53,480 fresh infections pushed India's Covid-19 tally to 1,21,49,335 while 354 new fatalities, the highest single-day spike so far this year, took the death toll to 1,62,468, according to Union health ministry data.

Further, a rise in US treasury yields and strengthening dollar index aggravated concerns, Modi added.



India records 0.2% CAD in Dec quarter

MUMBAI

INDIA'S current account deficit narrowed to \$1.7 billion or 0.2 per cent of the GDP in the December quarter as against \$2.6 billion or 0.4 per cent of GDP in the year-ago period, according to data released by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday.

In the current fiscal, the current account had been in surplus in the previous two quarters, at \$15.1 billion and \$19 billion, respectively, as per the data. The critical metric of the country's external strength now

stands at a surplus of 1.7 per cent of GDP for the first nine months of the fiscal year as against a deficit of 1.2 per cent in the year-ago period. In the December quarter, there was a rise in the merchandise trade deficit to \$34.5 billion from \$14.8 billion in the preceding quarter, and an increase in net investment income payments, RBI said.

Centre's fiscal deficit at 76% of RE during Apr-Feb: CGA

The central government's fiscal deficit at the end of February worked out to be 76 per cent of the revised estimate, indicating

that it is likely to remain within the projections made by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

The minister had revised the fiscal deficit projections for 2020-21 to Rs 18.48 lakh crore or 9.5 per cent of the GDP from the original budget estimate of Rs 7.96 lakh crore or 3.5 per cent of the GDP, mainly on account of additional outgo to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

As per the data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA), the fiscal deficit at the end of February stood at Rs 14.05 lakh crore or 76 per cent of the revised estimates.

State level bankers' quarterly meet held



HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

STATE Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC), Telangana convened its 28th quarterly review meeting today for the quarter ended December 2020. The meeting was conducted through video conference on account of Covid-19 pandemic.

Somesh Kumar, Chief Secretary, Govt of Telangana, Om Prakash Mishra, CGM, SBI and President, SLBC, Lalit Kumar Chandel, Economic Advisor, Department of Financial Services, Govt of India, B Janardhan Reddy, Secretary, APC and Commissioner, Agriculture, Ronald Rose, Secretary to Govt, Finance Department, N Satyanarayana, IAS, Commissioner (MA&UD) and MD, MEPMA, Y Krishna Rao, CGM, NABARD, all State heads of public and private sector banks, RRBs, TSCAB, and other Govt department officials were present.

Krishan Sharma, General Manager, SBI & Convenor SLBC presented the vote of

thanks. According to the quarterly report on the performance of the banks in Telangana up to December 2020 presented by Om Prakash Mishra, Chief General Manager, SBI and President of SLBC, the following are the details.

Deposits of the banks grew by Rs 62,570 crore (12.92 per cent growth over March 2020). Total deposits as on 31st December, 2020 at Rs 5,47,010 crore. Advances of the banks grew by Rs 39,227 crore (6.88 per cent growth over March, 2020). Total advances of all banks as on 31st December 2020 are at Rs 6,09,645 crore. CD ratio stood at 111.45 per cent as on December 31, as against 117.75 per cent as on March 31, 2020 due to higher growth in deposits compared to advances.

During the current financial year upto December 2020, banks have lent Rs 29,235 crore under crop loans and achieved 55 per cent of targeted amount of Rs 53,222 crore. Banks have disbursed Rs 14,348 crore as Agriculture term loans.



Tata Sky opens 'Jingalala store'

HYDERABAD

TATA SKY, content distribution and pay TV platform, on Wednesday announced the opening of its first exclusive 'Jingalala Store' as a direct point of access to its range of products and services under one roof for existing and new customers.

"Jingalala is an exclusive store in Hyderabad. It serves as our first direct point of sale with customers, giving them a chance to experience the myriad entertainment possibilities that come with a Tata Sky connection. It will give Tata Sky an increased visibility in the market and offer the 'touch & feel' option that continues to be an important factor in the buying process of Indian customers, thereby elevating Tata Sky in the consideration set of prospective customers," said Neil Soares, chief sales officer, Tata Sky.

The new store will bring alive the promise of offering excellent entertainment and lifestyle upgrade options for the customers. The store offers the complete array of services from Tata Sky including Tata Sky DTH, Tata Sky Binge and Bingee+ (OTT). The store is equipped with trained staff to cater to customers' personalised requirements including product demo, priority installations, query resolution and other after sales services.

The store will also act as a direct touch point for existing subscribers to avail after sales services including box upgrades, changing packs and channels, getting a spare remote or to resolve any other customer complaints.

Tomar overcomes growth spurt to win WC gold; coach happy

NEW DELHI

WORLD Cup gold-medallist shooter Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar overcame a growth spurt during lockdown which forced him to change his jacket and adjust his rifle. Tomar edged past world No. 1 Istvan Peni in the final of the New Delhi Shooting World Cup to win gold in the 50m rifle 3 position event. It was his first individual gold medal at a senior World Cup and he was the youngest Indian in history to win an individual 3 positions gold at a World Cup.

"Since coming out of the lockdown, he was shooting better with every competition," high performance Specialist coach of the Junior Indian rifle shooting team Suma Shirur told the Olympic Channel.

Suma, a 2002 Busan Asian Games silver-medallist, was glad to see her ward Tomar overcome a particular challenge after lockdown.

"Post-lockdown, he suddenly looked bigger. I left him looking like a kid and he came out looking like an adult. Aishwary had a growth spurt during the lockdown," said Suma.

"His old jacket wouldn't fit him anymore. So we had to actually have a new jacket, adjust the rifle



according to size. He came to Mumbai and got a new kit done. It's always a challenge with boys at this age because their bodies are growing. To be able to deal with that aspect of their life and coming on top despite that, I'm very happy to see that," she said.

Having turned 20 in February, Tomar is also the youngest Indian to win a shooting World Cup gold in the 3 positions event. He was the only one from India to win an individual gold in a rifle event at the New Delhi World Cup.

"He shot 1182 in the trials and

then 1185 in the all-India university championships. In the World Cup, his score was not very high but scores overall were low at the (50m) 3 Position events. That's because of the very tough outdoor conditions. It was extremely windy on that day. But hanging in there and performing the way he did showed maturity beyond his years. Coming out and winning the finals was phenomenal," said Suma.

Indian shooters raked in a record haul of medals at the New Delhi World Cup. A total of 30

medals, including 15 gold, was their best performance at a World Cup.

Apart from being Tomar's personal coach, Suma, a former Commonwealth Games gold-medallist, also guides the junior Indian rifle shooting team. She has shaped the careers of Divyansh Singh Panwar and Tomar, as both of them progressed through the juniors and have gone on to clinch Olympic quota places for India.

Panwar won a bronze in the 10m air rifle individual event while he and Elavenil Valarivan also claimed gold in the 10m Air Rifle mixed team event. Panwar, Tomar and Deepak Kumar won the silver medal in the air rifle men's team event. Tomar also combined with Sunidhi Chauhan to win bronze in the 50m 3P mixed team event.

"I am extremely happy for Aishwary and Divyansh, because they are the only ones who won individual medals," said Suma.

"That is what we need, and that is what is important when you think of the Olympics. You have mixed team events but not team events at the Olympics, in the air weapon. But presently we don't have a quota in the mixed team. Winning individual medals was very important," she said. (IANS)



Bhuvneshwar Kumar achieves best ODI ranking since Sep 2017

NEW DELHI

INDIA fast bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar moved up to 11th from 20th in the International Cricket Council's (ICC) ODI rankings for bowlers. This is Kumar's best position since being 10th in September 2017.

Kumar played an integral role in India's 2-1 win over England in the recent three-match series, picking 3/42 in the final match.

Meanwhile, K.L. Rahul moved up from 31st to 27th, 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.

Shardul Thakur's haul of four for 67 in the same match sees him force his way up to 80th from 93rd.

England all-rounder Ben Stokes has advanced four places to 24th in the batsmen's rankings after scoring 99 off 52 balls in the second ODI. Stokes is also up to second among all-rounders, while Jonny Bairstow has retained seventh place in the batting rankings after touching a career-high 796 rating points with his player of the match effort of 124 in the same match. Moeen Ali is up nine places to 46th among bowlers.

Meanwhile, India captain Virat Kohli slipped back to fifth place with the in-form New Zealand batsman Devon Conway leapfrogging him to fourth in the T20I rankings.

Pujara changes stance for IPL, smashes sixes in training

MUMBAI: Cheteshwar Pujara will be making a



comeback to the Indian Premier League (IPL) this year with Chennai Super Kings after being unsold in auctions for seven years and the Test batting stalwart seems to be making adjustments to his game. In a video tweeted by a fan, Pujara can be seen standing with a higher backlift and practicing his

big hitting. Pujara can be seen smashing sixes off Deepak Chahar, Karn Sharma and throw-down specialists.

Pujara, who has never played a T20 International for India, last played an IPL match for Kings XI Punjab, now known as Punjab Kings, in 2014. He has played a total of 30 matches, scoring 390 runs at an average of 20.52 with a highest score of 51.

Chennai Super Kings are currently training in Mumbai, where they play their first five matches. They had earlier trained in Chennai with players who were available from March 8 before the others joined in after undergoing a seven-day quarantine in Mumbai. They play Delhi Capitals in their first match of the season on April 10. (IANS)

Captaincy will make Pant a better player: Ponting

MUMBAI: Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting is convinced that leading the side in the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League will make swashbuckling 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.

He followed that up with a brilliant century against England in the fourth Test in Ahmedabad, forcing the selectors to include him in the white-ball squads. Making a comeback into the Indian white-ball side, Pant was promoted to No. 4 in the series against England, and the 23-year-old did not disappoint. He scored half centuries in the two ODIs he featured in.

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



Girls outnumber boys in EME Sailing Association's YAI Coaching Camp

SECUNDERABAD

EME Sailing Association (EME SA) of Military College of Electronics and Mechanical Engineering (MCEME) conducted a ten-day Yachting Association of India (YAI) Certification Coaching Camp at Hussain Sagar Lake, Hyderabad from March 21 to 30.

The camp was enthusiastically attended by more than 80 young sailors of potential of age groups varying from 6 to 21 years. Interestingly, girls outnumbered boys with as many as 52 of them being



girls. The camp, conducted by professional and expert sailors of EME SA, provided a unique opportunity to acquire basic and advanced level of sailing techniques. The partici-

pants also practiced the associated skills required for sailing, like boat rigging, launching and recovery of capsized boats. The young sailors were excited and remained moti-

ivated towards learning the sport. EME Sailing Association in conjunction with YAI facilitated providing training to 13 children of BASS Orphanage free of cost, as part of social responsibility.

The conduct of camp proved challenging with regards to ensuring safety of participants on and off water, while at the same time observing COVID precautions. However, the EME Sailing Association team successfully conducted the camp besides adding few more young sailors into the sailing fraternity.

Barty retains grip on number one ranking

MIAMI

ASH Barty's grip on the world number one ranking remains for now after winning in three sets against seventh seed Aryna Sabalenka in the Miami Open quarter-finals on Tuesday.

The 2019 Miami Open champion defeated Sabalenka 6-4, 6-7 (5-7), 6-3 in humid conditions in South Florida to reach the last four, where the Australian will face fifth seed Elina Svitolina.

Svitolina won in the later match on Tuesday over Latvia's Anastasija Sevastova 6-3 6-2.

Barty, the 2019 French Open champion, did not drop her serve once against the Belarusian, saving seven break points throughout the match as she bids to retain her top ranking.

Barty is under threat from 2021 Australian Open winner Naomi Osaka for the number one ranking, with the Japanese also into the quarters.

The Australian will retain the top ranking by reaching the decider, regardless of second seed Osaka's results. "It was a brilliant match today," Barty said in her on-court interview. "It was certainly the best level I've played for a long time and especially over a sustained period. "Aryna really made me bring out my best stuff today. She's an exceptional competitor."

Barty has now won 10 consecutive matches in Miami, dating back to her 2019 title with 2020's event cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ukraine's Svitolina, ranked fifth in the world, reached the Miami Open semi-finals for the first time with her win over the unseeded Sevastova.

26 athletes test positive for Covid, but none Tokyo-bound

NEW DELHI

TWENTY six sportspersons and support staff across disciplines were found to be COVID-19 positive after around 380 campers were subjected to tests for the dreaded infection at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala, a Sports Authority of India source told PTI on Wednesday.

However, the 26 positive results 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, the SAI source confirmed.

"Around 380 athletes at the NIS Patiala were tested for COVID recently. The tests were conducted across the board and were not random," the SAI source told PTI.

It is learnt that 10 of the 26 positive cases are from the track and field group training at the institute.

"Out of 380, 26 athletes have tested positive for the virus but the good thing is that they are not Olympic-bound athletes. The positive athletes have been isolated and the entire campus has been sanitised."

However, all weightlifters housed at the premier sports institute have returned negative for the virus.

The NIS Patiala is primarily the base of Olympic-bound boxers, track and field athletes and weightlifters along with sportspersons from some other disciplines.

The boxers who have tested positive include Asian silver-medallist Deepak Kumar and India Open gold-medallist Sanjit. "Some more test results are awaited at this point. The cases in boxing are seven as of now," another source stated.

EUROPEAN UNDER-21 Spain, Italy join Netherlands and Germany in last eight

BUDAPEST

SPAIN and Italy have joined fellow heavyweights Netherlands and Germany in the European Under-21 Championship quarter-finals. All four sides picked up the results they required in Tuesday's final round of fixtures in Groups A and B to advance through to the knockout stages later this year. Germany were pushed all the way by Romania in one of the early kick-offs, a goalless draw in Budapest enough to send the 2019 runners-up through on goal difference at Romania's expense.

Romania, now unbeaten in their last seven group matches in the competition, hit the post through Alexandru Matan in the first half and had a shot blocked on the line. But a point apiece was just about the right outcome in the end as Amos Pieper was also denied by the frame of the goal in the second half and Lukas Nmecha missed a penalty. The Netherlands had far less



trouble seeing off tournament joint-hosts Hungary as they ran out 6-1 winners at MOL Arena Sosto to pip Germany to top spot in Group A by virtue of a superior head-to-head record.

Dani de Wit opened the scoring three minutes before half-time and Cody Gakpo, who set up that goal, scored two of the Netherlands' five second-half goals.

Myron Boadu was also on target from the penalty spot for the Netherlands, before Sven Botman and substitute Brian Brobbey got in on the act late on, rendering Bendeguz Bolla's own spot-kick little more than a consolation.

Hockey skipper Manpreet hopeful of another unbeaten tour of Argentina

NEW DELHI

ITS morale high after an unbeaten tour of Europe, the Indian men's hockey team left for a competition trip to Argentina on Wednesday with captain Manpreet Singh optimistic of a strong show against the reigning Olympic champions.

A 22-member Indian team left for Buenos Aires from here this morning for its second outing in 2021 after an unbeaten tour of Europe last month where it took on Germany and Great Britain.

Returning to the Indian team after a year, Manpreet shared his excitement about playing against a top-quality side.

"Not playing competitive hockey for over a year has been a big setback but this is something every team in the world is facing due to the pandemic," Manpreet said in a press release issuing by Hockey India.

The six-match tour against hosts Argentina includes four games matches apart from the back-to-back FIH Hockey Pro League matches on April 11 and 12.

"Though I missed out the Europe tour due to personal reasons, I was closely following the matches and it was very encouraging to see how the team performed against Germany and Great Britain. We are looking forward to yet another unbeaten tour," stated the optimistic captain.

The tour is largely being viewed as an exposure for the team as it prepares for the Tokyo Olympic Games. Manpreet believes it will be a great opportunity for the youngsters to prove themselves in the lead up to the Games.

"Quite a few youngsters have been selected in the squad for this tour and I believe this will be a great opportunity for them to show their mettle against a top-quality team."

"Every opportunity we are getting in these challenging times is like a blessing and we need to make the most of it," he said.

Speaking about his personal goals, Manpreet said, "It has been a tough year for all of us. I think personally for me, overcoming COVID last year was more of a mental battle than anything else."

"I was off hockey for nearly six weeks, but I was very fortunate to receive the best care, thanks to the efforts of Hockey India and SAI. Over these past few months, I have put in a lot of hardwork to return to my earlier form."

"This tour will not only be a good occasion for the team to assess our performance but also personally for me to understand the areas I need to improve individually too."

