



Pages 12 | ₹5 | LC

KOLKATA | NEW DELHI | SILIGURI | BHUBANESWAR



BYJU'S ACQUIRES
AAKASH FOR \$1 BILLION

P8



NETANYAHU BACK IN
COURT AS PARTIES
WEIGH IN ON HIS FATE

P9



RAPID COVID TESTS
TWICE WEEKLY FOR ALL
IN ENGLAND

P10

[@TheStatesmanLtd](https://twitter.com/TheStatesmanLtd)
facebook.com/thestatesman1875

WHY PANT MEANS
SO MUCH TO
DELHI CAPITALS

P12



WEATHER

Partly cloudy sky with possibility of thundery development. The maximum and minimum temperatures would be around 39 and 20 degrees Celsius respectively.

RAINFALL: Nil
RELATIVE HUMIDITY
Max: 64% Min: 20%
TEMPERATURE
Max: 38.8°C (+4) Min: 18.5°C (0)
SUN RISES SUN SETS
06:05 hrs 18:42 hrs
MOON RISES MOON SETS
03:34 hrs 13:27 hrs

THUMBNAILS



Dancers perform on the eve of Rongali Bihu, in Dibrugarh on Monday.

AGENCIES

Govt amends insolvency law: The government has amended the insolvency law to provide for a pre-packaged resolution process for micro, small and medium enterprises. An ordinance was promulgated to amend the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code on April. The latest move comes after the suspension of certain IBC provisions ended. The suspension, wherein fresh insolvency proceedings were not allowed for a year from 25 March, 2020, was implemented amid pandemic.

SC appoints 2 judges in trials of coal scam cases: The Supreme Court on Monday appointed two judicial officers, Arun Bhardwaj and Sanjay Bansal, as special judges to conduct trials in the sensational coal scam cases pending since 2014 here. Earlier special judge Bharat Parashar was conducting trials in around 40 coal scam cases.

5.4 magnitude quake near Sikkim-Nepal border: An earthquake of magnitude 5.4 on the Richter Scale occurred near the Sikkim-Nepal border at 8.49 p.m. on Monday, according to the National Center for Seismology.

Poll frenzy to grip Bengal, 4 other states

Voting in Bengal for phase three of eight-phases; single-phase polling in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry; last leg in Assam

SNS & AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The stage is set for the busiest day of the ongoing election season with all the five states/union territories-West Bengal, Kerala, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry going to polls on 6 April.

The polling will be held in a single-phase in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry while Assam will witness its third and final round of voting on Tuesday. In Bengal, this will be the third round in the eight-phase elections ending 29 April.

The counting for all Assembly elections will take place on 2 May.

A three-cornered battle is on the cards in 31 Assembly seats- 16 in South 24 Parganas (part II), seven in Howrah (part I) and eight in Hooghly (part I)- that are set to go to polls on Tuesday in the third phase.

The polling follows an angry showdown of the second phase on 1 April, which was dominated by the high-profile contest between chief minister Mamata Banerjee and BJP rival Suvidhu Adhikari in Nandigram.

On 6 April, the BJP will seek to storm TMC fortresses while the Left Front-IFC-Congress alliance would hope to make inroads in areas where identity politics has come to the fore.

More than 78.5 lakh voters are eligible to exercise their franchise and decide the fate of 205 candidates prominent among them being BJP leader Swapan Dasgupta, TMC minister Ashima Patra and CPM leader Kanti Ganguly- in three districts- Howrah, Hooghly and South 24 Parganas.

GAME ON IN BENGAL



TMC activists hold a 'Khela Hobey' (game on) poster during filing of nomination papers by a party candidate for the State Assembly polls in Kolkata, Monday. ■ AGENCIES

THREE-CORNERED BATTLE ON THE CARDS IN 31 ASSEMBLY SEGMENTS

» 16 in South 24 Parganas (part II), seven in Howrah (part I) and eight in Hooghly (part I)- that are set to go to polls today in the third phase

» More than 78.5 lakh voters are eligible to exercise their franchise and decide the fate of 205 candidates

KEY CONTESTANTS



SWAPAN DASGUPTA
BJP leader
Hooghly



Ashima Patra
TMC minister
Howrah



KANTI GANGULY
CPM leader
South 24 Parganas

SECURITY BEEFED UP AT "SENSITIVE" BOOTHS

Tight security arrangements have been made to ensure peaceful voting, with 618 companies of CAPF deployed to guard 10,871 "sensitive" booths. ECI imposed prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the CrPC, an official said.

2016 PERFORMANCE

The TMC had won all but one seat of the 31 segments in the 2016 Assembly elections. The Congress had managed to bag Amta constituency in Howrah district

BATTLING ANTI-INCUMBENCY?



The BJP is fielding its senior leader CK Padmanabhan to take on chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan in the latter's home turf Dharmadam



TAMIL NADU

» Palaniswami has won from Edappadi four times: 1989, 1991, 2011 and 2016. He is up against Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's pick, a youngster and 37-year-old TSampathkumar.

» MK Stalin-led DMK, which is out of power since 2011 in the state, is in a head-to-head battle with ruling party AIADMK led by chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswami in nearly 130 constituencies

» Assam will witness the final leg of its three-phased elections on Tuesday. This phase will decide the fate of 337 candidates across 40 constituencies of 12 districts in the state

» CM Sarbananda Sonowal to contest from Majuli and health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma seeks re-election from Jalukbari

party after the 2019 general election.

fielded sitting MLA and TMC turncoat Dipak Halder, who has considerable clout in the area.

Tamil Nadu: After an intense poll campaign that saw the two main political parties - the ruling AIADMK and the Opposition DMK taking each other head-on, all eyes are now on the voters as Tamil Nadu gears up for the single-phase polls on 10 April.

The Indian Secular Front (ISF), floated by Peerzada Abbas Siddiqui, has turned out to be a thorn in the flesh for TMC, as the outfit holds sway in several parts of South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts.

TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, having sensed the ISF's potential to eat into her party's minority vote base, had been hitting out at Siddiqui, alleging that he has been propped up by the BJP, a charge dismissed by the cleric, who is taking on the ruling party with vigour.

Adding to the ruling camp's woes, the BJP has

on April 6. Since the 1980s, the LDF and UDF have alternatively formed the government with neither able to gain back-to-back victories in Kerala.

If the ruling front can manage to buck the trend in the state this time, it will be history. If not, then the Left rule will become history as Kerala is the last Red bastion in the country.

Assam: Assam will witness the final leg of its three-phased elections on Tuesday.

This phase will decide the fate of 337 candidates across 40 constituencies of 12 districts in the state, including the senior minister and BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma in the Jalukbari constituency.

Puducherry: In Puducherry, the election in the 30-member Assembly will witness a keen contest between the Congress-led Secular Democratic alliance and the AIUR-led NDA.

See inside pages

New cases breach 1-lakh mark first time

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

PM to interact with CMs on 8 Apr

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold a meeting on 8 April with chief ministers of all the states and Union Territories to discuss the current status of the Covid-19 pandemic in the nation along with issues related to

vaccination via video conferencing, the Prime Minister's Office said.

This will be the second time in five days that the Prime Minister is going to chair a meeting to assess the current situation with connection to the surge in the number of Covid-19 cases.

number of Covid cases in India has now soared to 1.25 crore, of which, 1.16 crore are recoveries.

followed by Chhattisgarh with 5,250 while Karnataka reported 4,553 new cases.

Delhi adds 3,548 Covid cases, 15 deaths: The national capital today recorded 3,548 fresh coronavirus cases while 15 more people succumbed to the infection that took the city's death toll to 11,096, according to the Delhi government's latest health bulletin. (SEE P2)

FACT FILE

TOTAL CASES
1,25,89,067

ACTIVE CASES
7,41,830

NEW CASES
1,03,558

NEW RECOVERIES
52,847

TOTAL DEATHS
1,65,101

UNION HEALTH MINISTRY FIGURES AS OF 8:00 A.M.
MONDAY 05 APRIL 2021

Scamsters corner vaccines meant for frontline Covid-19 warriors

Gaurav Chandra
Bhopal, 5 April

Serious irregularities have possibly occurred across India in the Covid-19 vaccination drive for Health Care Workers (HCW) and Front Line Workers (FLW) compelling the Union Health Ministry to immediately stop any fresh registrations for the first doses of HCWs and FLWs, because the Ministry received inputs that imposters have fraudulently got vaccinated at many vaccination centres of the country.

The Health Ministry also

118-year-old gets Covid jab

A 118-year-old woman received her first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh, becoming the oldest person to be vaccinated in India, and possibly the oldest in the world too. Tulsa Bai, belongs to the Sadarpur village in Sagar district.

detected an unexplained sudden spike of 24 per cent in the national database of HCWs

since the vaccination drive began. This abrupt increase in the number of HCWs in the country raises the suspicion that some sort of Covid-19 vaccination scam has indeed taken place.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan shot a letter on 3 April to top health officials of all states and UTs directing them to not allow any new registrations of HCWs and FLWs for the first doses of vaccines.

The CoWIN portal has also stopped accepting any fresh registrations for the two categories since then.

"Various inputs have been received from different sources that in some of the CVC's (Covid-19 Vaccination Centres), some ineligible beneficiaries are being registered as HCWs and FLWs and are getting vaccinated in complete violation of the prescribed guidelines," Rajesh Bhushan's letter points out. "There has been 24% increase in HCW database in the past few days," the letter notes. The issue came to light at the meeting of the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration (NEG-VAC) for Covid-19 held on 3 April.

'Letter-bomb' blast: Post HC ruling, Deshmukh voluntarily quits as HM

SNS & AGENCIES
MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh has resigned from his post, hours after the Bombay High Court asked the CBI to probe the corruption allegations levelled against him by former Mumbai Commissioner of Police Param Bir Singh, a top Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader said here on Monday.

"Soon after the high court directives, Deshmukh met NCP president Sharad Pawar and offered to resign to ensure an impartial probe. After the

nod, Deshmukh has gone to meet chief minister Uddhav Thackeray to submit his resignation," NCP National Spokesperson and Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik told mediapersons.

In a terse resignation letter addressed to the CM, Deshmukh said: "In the wake of the HC ruling, I feel it would be improper for me to continue in the post on ethical grounds. Hence I have decided to voluntarily keep away from the post. Kindly relieve me from this responsibility."

Sharad-aide Wale Patil to take charge as HM: Veteran NCP leader Dilip Wale Patil is tipped to take over as Maharashtra's new Home Minister after the resignation

of Deshmukh. Patil, a seven-time MLA, began his political career as personal assistant to NCP chief Sharad Pawar.

Rafale deal report: Cong, BJP in ugly sparring match

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL



A French media report claimed ₹1.1m euros was paid to a "middleman" by the aircraft manufacturer

Chief Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala told a

TURN TO PAGE 4

The Congress on Monday sought a thorough probe in the Rafale defence deal and demanded answers from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, after a French media report claimed

that 1.1 million euros was paid to a "middleman" by the aircraft manufacturer.

French news portal's report has proved that Rahul Gandhi's oft-repeated allegations of corruption in the deal were correct.

While there was no immediate response from the BJP or

TURN TO PAGE 4

For water quality testing, visit <https://phedharyana.gov.in> and follow the five easy steps

1 Click on 'Submit Water Sample for Testing' in Citizen Corner



Workers should remain alert over EVM manipulation and examine them properly

ASOK BHATTACHARYA, CPI(M) LEADER AND POLL CANDIDATE FOR SILIGURI

ON HIS PARTY'S CONCERN THAT THE MACHINES COULD BE MANIPULATED DURING POLLS

Accelerate Covid inoculation drive in India before sending vaccines outside: AAP to Centre

PTI
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The AAP questioned the Centre for sending COVID-19 vaccines across the world instead of accelerating the inoculation drive within the country, claiming it will take at least 15 years to vaccinate the entire population of India at this rate.

The Delhi BJP, however, replied that the export of COVID-19 vaccine is in no way hindering the process of vaccination in India.

At a press conference here, AAP spokesperson Raghav Chada questioned the reason for "exporting" vaccines and not supplying them to the people in India first.

"Vaccination doses have been exported to 84 countries. The amount exported is higher than the number of vaccine doses given to the people in India. Should we care about people of our own country or of other nations?" he posed.

"Where has the Centre's vaccine nationalism gone? The AAP demands an increase in the rate of vaccinations against COVID-19 so that each

and every Indian can get inoculated," he said.

The AAP leader further claimed that it will take 15 years to vaccinate the entire population of India if the immunisation drive continues at the current pace.

"Some scientists say that to contain the virus, at least 70 per cent of the population has to be vaccinated. It will take 10 years to inoculate 70 per cent of the population and 15 years for the whole of the country if inoculation continues at the current pace," he said.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor has said the statement of Raghav Chada on the country's export of COVID-19 vaccine reflects the "petty political mindset" with which Aam Aadmi Party functions.

"They are now talking with the same dirty political mindset on a sensitive international issue they have played on internal issues," he said.

"Just as the government controlled COVID-19 spread by imposing lockdown followed by phased lifting of restrictions, it is now out to vaccinate fellow Indians in phases.

Relax norms for Corona vaccine centres, taking jabs: Kejriwal to PM

To speed up Covid vaccination, 1/3rd of Delhi govt hospitals' jab centres to operate 24/7 from today

SNS & PTI
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

With Delhi continuing to witness a surge in coronavirus infections, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal today wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to relax the norms for opening vaccination centres and to remove the age criterion for getting inoculated against Covid-19.

The CM iterated that the Delhi government can vaccinate all the residents of the city within three months if the necessary permissions are granted by the Centre.

Delhi had yesterday recorded over 4,000 fresh Covid cases and 21 deaths due to the virus.

"The increased transmission of Corona across the country has presented a new concern and challenge, we will have to move the vaccination

campaign more rapidly," CM Kejriwal wrote to PM Modi.

"If the rules for opening new centres are simplified and everyone is allowed to vaccinate, then the Delhi government will be able to vaccinate all Delhi residents in three months. Delhi government is fully prepared for it," he Kejriwal said.

The CM expressed faith in the PM and hoped that he will look into his concerns and respond affirmatively.

"The rapid spread of infection amid immunization campaigns suggest that we must move the vaccination campaign forward in a more swift manner," he said.

According to the central government's directives, vaccination centres could be set up only at hospitals or dispensaries.

The Covid vaccination drive in the last three months has shown that the vaccine is safe, Kejriwal said.



one by removing the age limit of 45 years and above.

"Except for those who cannot get vaccinated due to medical reasons, we should start vaccinating everyone. This will remove the hesitation among people and increase the number of those getting vaccinated," he said.

The Delhi CM also maintained that the vaccine should be made available to every-

one by removing the age limit of 45 years and above.

"Except for those who

cannot get vaccinated due to medical reasons, we should start vaccinating everyone. This will remove the hesitation among people and increase the number of those getting vaccinated," he said.

The Delhi CM, in his let-

added.

Meanwhile, seeking to accelerate the pace of vaccination against Covid, the Delhi government today ordered that one-third of inoculation sites at all its hospitals will run round-the-clock. The vaccination centres at present operate from 9 am to 9 pm.

"In order to accelerate the pace of COVID vaccination, it has been decided that the timings of functioning of the COVID vaccination centres should be increased," an order stated.

"It is hereby ordered that with effect from 06.04.2021, one-third of the vaccination sites in all Delhi Government hospitals will also function from 9.00 pm to 9.00 am," it said.

All the facilities will ensure deployment of adequate health personnel at these sites to ensure their smooth functioning, authorities said.

Delhi yesterday logged 4,033 coronavirus cases, highest in four months, which took its caseload to over 6.76 lakh, while its Covid toll then mounted to 11,081 with 21 new fatalities.

Classified

LEGAL NOTICES

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT

(Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

In the Court of

Sh. Rajneesh Kumar Gupta District Judge

(Commercial Court)-02

Central Room No. 120

Tis Hazari Courts,

Delhi

CS (Comm) No. 131/2018

ICICI Bank Limited

Versus

Neeraj Pandey

To:

Neeraj Pandey, s/o Sh. Balabhan Pandey, A 242, Gali No. 4, Shankar Marg Mandawali, NR Shiv Mandir Delhi-110092.

Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons it is hereby noticed that if you shall not defend the case on the 08-04-2021 the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex-parte.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Court on this 18-02-2021.

(Commercial Court)-02

Central Room No. 120

Tis Hazari Courts,

Delhi

Seal of the Court

FMG

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT

(Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

In the Court of

Sh. Rajneesh Kumar Gupta District Judge

(Commercial Court)-02

Central Room No. 120

Tis Hazari Courts,

Delhi

CS (Comm) No. 163/2019

ICICI Bank Limited

Versus

Harbhajan Singh

To:

Old Address. Harbhajan Singh, s/o Sh. Harbhans Singh, r/o 2021, Ground Floor, Saraswati Vihar, Rani Bagh, Shakur Basti, WZ Block, New Delhi-110034.

New Address.

Harbhajan Singh, C/o Modern Radio & Electricals Des

ignation-Prop. 1725, Laxmi Narain Street, Chuna Mandi Pahar Ganj, New Delhi-110055.

The Defendent above named

Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons it is hereby noticed that if you shall not defend the case on the 08-04-2021 the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex-parte.

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PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT

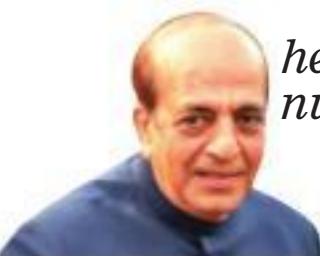
(Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

In the Court of

Sh. Rajneesh Kumar Gupta District Judge

(Commercial Court)-02

Central Room No. 120



here is scope to build a parallel Silicon Valley here given the number of software engineers the state trains every year.

FORMER UNION MINISTER DINESH TRIVEDI

CLAIMS BREAKING CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AND CORRUPTION KEY TO BENGAL'S ECONOMIC REVIVAL

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, TUESDAY 06 APRIL 2021

03

Centre encroaching upon states' rights to dominate them: PbCM

Capt Amarinder castigates the Centre over its 'one-sided decision' to impose the controversial farm laws and the direct bank transfer (DBT) scheme on Punjab's farming community

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 5 APRIL

Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh on Monday again flayed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Central government for allegedly encroaching upon the rights of the states in its bid to "dominate" them.

Keeping his guns trained on the Centre, Capt Amarinder castigated it over its "one-sided decision" to forcibly impose the controversial farm laws and the direct bank transfer (DBT) scheme on the state's farming community.

States never faced such problems earlier, the CM said, slamming the Narendra Modi government for trying to "destroy" the existing relations and systems that had worked well for more than 100 years, in the name of so-called reforms, which "they were trying to impose without taking the stakeholders



into confidence".

Punjab's farmers have aged old cordial ties with arthiyas (grain commission agents), which the Centre was hell bent on damaging, Capt Amarinder charged, terming the Centre's "tough posturing and ill-conceived decisions" as being against the basic spirit of federalism.

The CM said during his earlier tenure he enjoyed the full confidence and support of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari

Vajpayee, and subsequently of Dr Manmohan Singh, in all major policy decisions issues related to Punjab.

Virtually launching the two-day Kisan Mela organised by the Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Ludhiana, the CM expressed his total solidarity with the farmers against the "black farm laws" imposed by the Centre in alleged violation of the 7th Schedule of the Constitution, which clearly states that agriculture is a

State subject.

The Centre has deliberately impinged upon the state's powers, thus jeopardizing the basic structure of democracy, he alleged.

Capt Amarinder stressed that the Centre should have taken the farmers into confidence before enactment of these contentious legislations. "Had the Centre been sincere about finding a workable solution to this problem, it would have either con-

sulted the Punjab government or the state's farmers, as Punjab alone contributes over 40 per cent of food-grains to the national pool," he asserted.

The CM said Punjab, which was initially not even a part of the deliberations on the agricultural reforms, was included in the high-powered committee only after he wrote to the Centre. Consequently, Punjab finance minister Manpreet Singh Badal and the then secretary agriculture KS Pannu attended the two meetings held thereafter but there was no mention of these controversial farm laws at these meetings, he said.

Pointing out that 144 farmers have died so far during their agitation against farm laws, Capt Amarinder said his Congress government was giving Rs five lakh and a job to a kin of the deceased farmer, while the Centre continued to be insensitive to their pain and anguish.

HP to launch drive to vaccinate potential Covid spreaders

SANJEEV KUMAR
SHIMLA, 5 APRIL

The Jai Ram Thakur-led Himachal Pradesh government will soon start a special campaign to vaccinate those groups, which may prove as potential Covid spreaders, in order to curb the rise in Covid cases in the state.

HP Secretary, Health, Amitabh Awasthi said a target had been fixed to vaccinate those persons on priority who could prove potential Covid spreaders in the state.

"In a meeting with all the Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) and Block Medical Officers (BMOs) on Monday, they have been asked to set up new vaccination sites by 10 April.

The persons who commutes daily to neighbouring state of Punjab, which has been worst affected by Covid spread, the drivers and conductors of public transport will be vaccinated on priority under the campaign.

Besides, vaccination sites will also be set up near the educational institutions in the state by creating clusters," he told The Statesman.

Awasthi said the State Screening Committee had given approval for this special vaccination campaign and setting up of new vaccination sites for the vulnerable pop-



ulation. Apart from this, all the CMOs and BMOs had been asked to raise the target of vaccination to 30,000 to 35,000 persons per day under the ongoing drive, he said.

He further stated that the medical officials had also been asked to increase the testing for Covid to 8,000 persons per day by 8 April and they had been directed to raise RTPCR and Antigen testing to 55-45 ratio from existing 70-30 ratio.

Awasthi said the present trend of rise in Covid cases could be checked by following the basic principle of testing, tracking and treating and there was nothing to worry about the present situation in the state. "The state government will again start a door to door campaign to trace Covid patients and also monitor the health of patients who are in home isolation.

The state government will again start a door to door campaign to trace Covid patients and also monitor the health of patients who are in home isolation. There is the need for proper check on such patients

and emphasis will be given on providing them necessary care, besides informing the family members on Do's and Don'ts on curbing Covid spread," he added.

Awasthi added mapping of concerned areas of Medical Officers will be done and they have been instructed to call patients in home isolation everyday to check on their health and provide them with necessary and timely assistance.

"All the Covid case centres in the state which had been closed in the state had been reactivated to handle any emergency situation in the state and in addition, three makeshift hospitals at Dr RPGMC Tanda, IGMC Shimla and at Nalagarh have been made operational," he added.

The number of Covid cases had increased to 65,242 as on 4 April from 58,645 cases on 28 February while the number of active cases had also increased significantly to 3,577 as compared to 318 cases on 28 February.

75 deaths from Covid had been reported till 4 April with total death toll mounting to 1,057.

The worst affected districts with Covid surge in the state were Kangra with 712 active cases, followed by Solan (658), Una (611) and Shimla (352).

Himachal Pradesh gears up to control forest fires

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SHIMLA, 5 APRIL

The Himachal Pradesh government on Monday chalked out a strategy to control forest fires in the state in view of the ongoing summer season.

The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Dr Savita held a virtual review meeting with officials of all forest circles on preparedness for forest fires in the state.

The State Forest department is well prepared to fight the forest fires and rapid forest fire fighting force and rapid response teams have been set up at forest division and range levels.

Approximately 40,000 men-days of fire watchers would be engaged by the

department, in addition to existing frontline staff for preventing and combating forest fires.

Besides, the state disaster control room with toll free number 1077 at state level and 1070 at district level are made operational for reporting of the forest fire by the local community," she added.

Dr Savita said messages regarding forest fire had been shared with the members of the rapid forest fire fighting force, in which approximately 50,000 volunteers had already been registered.

In addition, awareness to the community was also conducted through Nukkar Nataks, songs, speeches and other activities at different locations in the state.

Suspicious object found near National Media Centre, bomb squad rules out explosives

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Besides, a massive state level awareness program was also conducted at 45 places from 10 to 17 March, 2021, she said.

She further stated that the Forest department had created forest fire lines and did control burning and also constructed water storage structures in the forest areas to combat forest fires.

Additional multi-utilitarian vehicles and water loaded tankers in 80 fire sensitive ranges had been engaged for three months.

The matter regarding Standard Operating Systems (SOPs) for requisition of helicopter services for dousing the forest fires have been sent to the state government for approval," she added.

The CISF reportedly found the toy-shaped object wrapped in polythene while looking around the area at around 10 am, police said.

The incident triggered tension among the security personnel. A dog squad was also rushed to the spot following the security scare.

The CISF's bomb disposal squad and its New Delhi District unit thoroughly searched the area for more suspicious objects, but nothing else was found, police said.

"CISF informed the local police about it. The Bomb Disposal Squad of CISF checked it thoroughly but found nothing suspicious. It is a plastic toy," Vikas Kumar, Additional DCP, Delhi Police said.

The National Media Centre is a key venue for Centre's press conferences and is managed by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It is situated on Raisina Road in central Delhi and is close to the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Parliament complex and the central secretariat, which houses various ministries.

The CISF, which reports to the Home Ministry, is tasked with providing security cover to government facilities and infrastructure projects, and key industrial units across the country.

DUTA organises outreach programme to create awareness about 12 Delhi govt-funded colleges

PTI
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) on Monday organised the second round of its outreach programme, "Jan Samvad", to create awareness in Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's New Delhi Assembly constituency about the alleged "crises" in 12 Delhi government-funded DU colleges.

According to a statement released by the DUTA, members of the teachers' association distributed leaflets to the public at Gole Market, R K Ashram Metro Station and Janpath Metro Station.

The teachers' association has been protesting since

earlier last month over a number of issues, including delay in issuing Grant-in-Aids, appointment of senior officers.

"People supported DUTA's demand that the draconian Pattern of Assistance document must be withdrawn by the Delhi government. The DUTA sees this Pattern of Assistance document as a part of the National Education Policy and a move towards dismembering these 12 Delhi University colleges from the Delhi University," it said.

The association also alleged that the Delhi government has "arbitrarily" assigned 12 senior AOs in the 12 colleges, even as DU has no provision of appointment of any such officers.

4 held with banned medicines in Haryana

CHANDIGARH, 5 APRIL

Haryana Police has seized 50,000 banned medicines and arrested four persons including a woman while they were carrying the contraband in a car in Sirsa district.

Giving this information on Monday, a Haryana Police spokesperson informed that a police team while patrolling stopped a car near Dinkar for checking. During the search, it had recovered 50,000 tablets, fallen under the category of prohibited medicines.

The arrested accused were identified as Ajay of village Khori Kalan in Mewat and Mukesh, Ravi and Radha, all residents of Rajasthan. They have been booked under relevant sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act and further investigation is underway. Accused would be taken on remand by producing in the Court to find out the involvement of others in this racket of drug peddling. SNS

Tax consultant held for killing friend over money dispute

PTI
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

the victim's belongings near the Yamuna river," the officer said.

Next day, the body was recovered from the area after a passerby informed police.

"The autopsy report stated the cause of death to be asphyxia as a result of strangulation. A case of murder under section 302 of the Indian Penal Code was registered at Anand Vihar police station," Shahdara Deputy Commissioner of Police R. Sathiyasundaram said.

During the course of investigation, statements of the deceased's elder brother were recorded and Deepak's friends were interrogated. Their call records and locations at the time of incident were also analysed.

"Many suspects, including his workers in the shop, were questioned since Deepak also reportedly took some loan from some of his friends and didn't return the money," the officer said.

With the help of technical surveillance and statements recorded, Jain was found to be involved in the murder and was subsequently arrested.

Jain confessed to his crime during interrogation and on his disclosure, his accomplice Singh was also arrested in connection with the case, the DCP said.

AAP alleges property-tax scam by North Corp

PTI
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The Aam Aadmi Party claimed on Monday that the BJP-ruled North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) had done a scam worth Rs 1,400 crore in the collection of property tax. AAP spokesperson Atishi said the NDMC collected tax from 5.75 lakh properties in 2017, while it was levied on only 4.25 lakh properties last year.

No immediate reaction was available from the BJP.

Addressing a press conference, Atishi said the civic bodies' primary source of revenue was the tax collected from both residential and commercial properties.

According to Atishi, the NDMC mayor had stated few days ago that the civic body saw an increase in property tax due to the rise in the number of properties.

However, she added, figures revealed the opposite.

"In the last couple of years, the number of taxed properties have decreased from 5.75 lakh in 2017 to 4.25 lakh in 2020," she said. "Therefore, claiming that there has been

an increase in tax through an increase in properties is an outright lie."

"The question is where have the balance properties gone in a matter of three years?" she asked. Atishi said that the NDMC hired an agency in 2017 to survey the number of properties and it was found there were over 12 lakh properties that had to pay property tax.

Addressing a press conference, Atishi said the civic bodies' primary source of revenue was the tax collected from both residential and commercial properties.

According to Atishi, the NDMC mayor had stated few days ago that the civic body saw an increase in property tax due to the rise in the number of properties.

However, she added, figures revealed the opposite.

"In the last couple of years, the number of taxed properties have decreased from 5.75 lakh in 2017 to 4.25 lakh in 2020," she said. "Therefore, claiming that there has been

conducted, then why has property tax been collected from roughly one-third of that number?" she asked.

Atishi said this "scam worth crores" had been running in the NDMC for years now. She added that property tax worth Rs 2,000 crore should have been collected if one goes by the 12-lakh-plus figure.

"Where is the balance of Rs 1,400 crore? Where is the property tax of the remainder roughly eight lakh properties? Who has pocketed this amount?" she asked, demanding answers from the NDMC.

Haryana to groom teachers for new education policy

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, 5 APRIL

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday cleared a sum of Rs. 21,658.73 crore towards Cash Credit Limit (CCL) upto end April-2021 for the procurement of Wheat in Punjab during the ensuing Rabi marketing season.

With this, the bulk of the CCL sought by the state government for the purchase of 105.60 lakh tonnes of wheat for this season has been released by the Central bank.

The release of the CCL



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

would facilitate the state government in making timely payments to farmers against purchases of food grains in

the current season, which would begin from 10 April and culminate on 31 May, according to an official spokesperson.

The Central government has fixed the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of wheat at Rs 1975 per quintal, hiking it by Rs 50 from last year's Rs 1925 per quintal.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh directed the food and civil supplies department to ensure that the farmers do not face any hassles in the procurement of their produce especially amid Covid-19 pandemic.

Delhi CM asks officials to expedite projects of wastewater reuse, groundwater recharge

PTI
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday directed officials to expedite all ongoing projects related to wastewater reuse and groundwater recharge to increase the availability of drinking water in the national capital.

At a review meeting with officials from the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) and the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC), Kejriwal asked officers to expedite negotiations



Rafale scam was indeed a scam! Prime Minister, why would Dassault need to pay bribe worth Rs 8 crore to middleman named Gupta

AIMIM CHIEF ASADUDDIN OWAISI

TAKING POTSHTS AT PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI OVER RAFALE DEAL



THUMBNAILS



Traffic jam at Gurugram-Delhi Expressway due to construction of Dwarka Expressway Link Road, in Gurugram district on Monday.

AGENCIES

Russian FM arrives: Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov is arriving in New Delhi late on Monday night amid concern in Indian circles over the fact that he will pay a rare visit to Pakistan after concluding talks with Indian leaders. New Delhi has not been enthused over the developing relationship between Moscow and Islamabad over the past few years since India still depends largely on military hardware from Russia. SNS

Adityanath receives first dose of Covid-19 vaccine: UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday received his first dose of a Covid-19 vaccine in Lucknow and he appealed to all those eligible to get inoculated. PTI

Umar Farooq's release ahead of Ramzan sought: Moderate Hurriyat Conference on Monday demanded the release of its chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, who has completed 20 months under house arrest, and other 'political' detainees ahead of Ramzan. PTI

Cancelling Stalin's candidature, four others: AIADMK to CEO

SNS & PTI
CHENNAI, 5 APRIL

The ruling AIADMK on Monday urged the Chief Electoral Officer to 'cancel' the candidature of DMK president M K Stalin and four others of his party for the 6 April Assembly polls, alleging 'distribution of cash' to voters. Elaborate arrangements have been made for peaceful polling.

Associates of Stalin, who is contesting from Kolathur constituency here, have been 'distributing Rs 5,000 to voters', party's joint secretary of the advocate's wing, R M Babu Murugavel, alleged in a petition to the CEO, Tamil Nadu, Satyabrata Sahoo.

Women self-help groups were 'paid' Rs 10,000 each to act, canvass and cast votes in Stalin's favour and voters were remitted Rs 5,000 through 'G-Pay,' he alleged.

The state has 1,29,165 ballot units ready for Tuesday and 91,180 each of control units and VVPAT machines. According to Sahoo, polling will take place in 88,937 polling stations across the 234 constituencies and a total of 4,17,521 personnel will be involved in the mammoth exercise.

Apart from polling officials, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has also engaged 1,58,263 police and non-police officers to ensure a peaceful election.

According to him state election commission has earmarked 537 critical polling stations and 10,813 vulnerable polling stations.

CEO said the number of vulnerable booths may undergo some last-minute changes based on the ground situation in the locality of the polling station. Webcasting of polling has been arranged in 46,203 polling stations as per ECI's instructions and 8,014 micro-observers have been appointed to supervise and observe polling across the state. Voters can confirm their polling stations by calling 1950 helpline after adding the STD code of their place, since several auxiliary polling stations have also come up this time, Sahoo added.

Surveillance teams have so far seized cash and valuables worth Rs 428.46 crore.

After unparalleled electioneering, Kerala set for Assembly polls today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

T'PURAM, 5 APRIL

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

The total electorate in the state includes 1,32,83,724 male voters, 1,41,62,025 women voters and 290 transgenders, according to Election Commission figures.

As the high-octane public campaign drew to a close last night, the southern state is now witnessing silent electioneering in which candidates and party workers are busy visiting homes and institutions to seek votes at the last minute.

An array of ministers and several senior MLAs from both the traditional coalitions - the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Congress-headed United Democratic Front (UDF) are seeking another term in the 6 April polls.

Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, health minister KK Shailaja, Devaswom minister Dakakampani Surendran, power minister MM Mani and higher education minister KK Aleel are among the prominent figures trying their electoral luck with the ruling side.

Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala, former chief minister Oommen Chandy, senior leaders K Muraleedharan, PT Thomas and Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan are among those contesting from the UDF fold.

The election is crucial for an array of BJP leaders, including former Mizoram Governor Kummanam Rajasekaran, Metroman E Sreedharan, who joined the saffron party recently, state president K Surendran, senior leader Shobha Surendran, Rajya Sabha members Suresh Gopi and KJ Alphon and others.

The 6 April poll is equally significant for Kerala Congress (M) chief Jose K Mani who recently snapped decades-long ties with the UDF and joined hands with the Left Front.

It would be a litmus test especially for Congress leader Rahul Gandhi personally as he had camped in the state for several days and taken part in dozens of corner meetings and rallies across Kerala to campaign for the UDF.

The release of the election manifesto also drew much attention this time as the three fronts came out with populist promises, including pension for housewives, raising of welfare pensions, free gas cylinders for poor, free laptops for economically backward students and so on.

To consolidate votes of majority community and keep devotees with them, the BJP even promised in their manifesto a law to contain alleged 'love jihad' and even a state legislation to protect the customs and

CURTAIN RAISER

eral days and taken part in dozens of corner meetings and rallies across Kerala to campaign for the UDF.

The ruling LDF is hoping to retain power for a second consecutive term breaking the state's four-decades-old trend of alternating between the UDF every five year.

While the UDF is all confident to form their government when the results are out on 2 May, the BJP-led NDA is leaving no stone unturned to garner maximum number of seats to become a decisive force in the state's rule.

Since the Election Commission of India (ECI) announced the poll dates on 26 February, Kerala had been witnessing unprecedented competitive spirit between all the three political fronts - from carrying out maximum number of rallies and meetings to bringing in all possible national leaders to woo the voters.

The state this time saw multiple visits by leaders from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to consolidate votes of majority community and keep devotees with them, the BJP even promised in their manifesto a law to contain alleged 'love jihad' and even a state legislation to protect the customs and

Union home minister Amit Shah and a dozen of their Cabinet colleagues, including Nirmala Sitharaman, Rajnath Singh and Pralhad Joshi and UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath to Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Sachin Pilot, A K Antony and Salman Khurshid.

The topics of faith, religion, development and welfare have taken a centre-stage throughout the campaigns.

The state witnessed how the ruling LDF strived hard to bring focus of the poll debate on the government's achievements in the development and welfare fronts in the last five years and its much celebrated Covid-19 and flood management.

Since the 1980s, the LDF and UDF have alternatively formed the government with neither able to gain back-to-back victories in Kerala.

If the ruling front can manage to buck the trend in the state this time, it will be history.

traditions of the Sabarimala temple.

The BJP also tried to reach out to the Christian community during the campaign. Many national and state leaders of the saffron party could be seen meeting the cardinal, bishops and church leaders during the period.

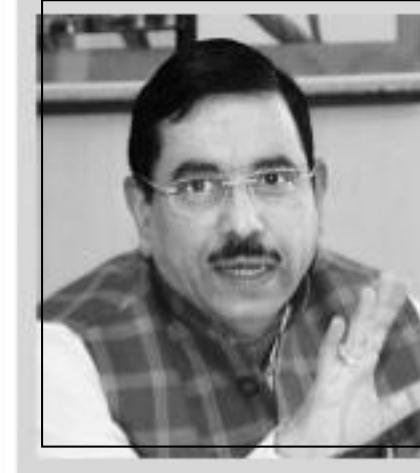
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Joshi: BJP will emerge as credible 3rd alternative



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The BJP will emerge as a credible third alternative in Kerala politics dominated by two alliances - LDF and UDF - and will improve its tally in the Assembly polls, said Union minister and the saffron party's elections in charge for the state, Pralhad Joshi. Taking potshots

at CPI(M)-led LDF and Congress-led UDF, he said both alliances are "tough competitors in corruption" and have done nothing for state's economic prosperity.

Dubbing Rahul Gandhi a "non-serious politician", he said: "The Congress is sinking and he is busy in political gimmicks." He even doesn't know that there is an Union Ministry of Fisheries," Joshi said. Asserting that the BJP will make its presence felt strongly in the upcoming Assembly elections, he said, "Kerala always had a significant vote base which is ideologically inclined towards the BJP, but was not confident of its victory earlier." But now this vote will shift towards the BJP and it will emerge as a new alternative in the LDF-UDF-dominated political landscape of the state.

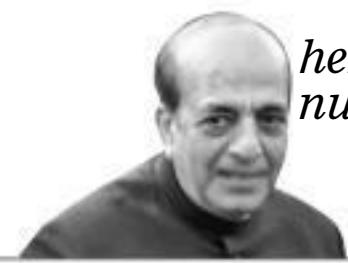
TENDER

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT ``NOTICE INVITING TENDERS``

Sealed item rate tender on PWD Form No. 6 & 8 are hereby invited by the Executive Engineer, Una Division HPPWD Una H.P. on behalf of Governor of H.P. for the following works from the approved and eligible contractors/ firms enlisted in PWD Department so as to reach in this office or before 22.04.2021 upto 11.00 A.M. and will be opened on the same day at 11.30 A.M. in presence of the intending contractor s or their authorized representatives who may like to be present. If it happens to be holiday on the day of opening of tender the same will be opened on next working day at the same time. The application for obtaining the tender forms will be received latest by 16.04.2021 upto 12.00 Noon against cash payment (non-refundable) and the tender form can be had from this office upto 20.04.2021 during the office hours.

The earnest money in the shape of N.S.C./Time Deposit Account/ Saving Accounts/ F.D. Rs if any of the Post Office, Nationalized Bank in H.P. duly pledged in favour of the Executive Engineer, Una Division HPPWD Una, will be received along with the applications for obtaining tender forms. The applications received without earnest money shall summarily be rejected. The Executive Engineer reserves the right to reject any tender without assigning any reason. The conditional / telegraphic tenders shall also be rejected. The scope of the work can be increased/ decreased without any notice. The offers of the tenderer(s) shall be kept open for 120 days from the date of opening the tender(s).

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated cost	EMD	Time Limit	Cost of tender	Eligible class of contractor
1 2	1 Construction of Toilet Block at Govt. Sen. Sec. School Una (Girls); District Una (HP) (SH: C/O Building portion)	29,69,077/-	53,100/-	Six months	1,500/-	Class-C & D
2	2 Construction of 2Nos. class rooms at Govt. Sen. Sec. School Jakhera Dist.Una (HP) (SH: C/O Building portion)	19,28,757/-	36,450/-	Six months	500/-	Class-C & D
3	3 Construction One room at 1st floor and Hall at 2nd floor in Govt Sen. Sec. school Behdala (SH: C/O Building portion)	18,94,322/-	36,000/-	Six months	500/-	Class-C & D
4	4 Restoration of Rein damages of Pathi Jhundan Mohalla Ward No 5 Mehtabpur, District Una (SH: C/O Retaining wall at RD 0/045 to 0/098 , U-shape drain & Cement Concrete Pavement etc.)	14,98,510/-	30,000/-	Two months	500/-	Class-C & D
5	5 Construction of Hall with Verandah & Stair case on 1st floor at Govt. Sen. Sec. School Nangran Dist. Una (HP)	13,49,403/-	27,000/-	Four months	500/-	Class-C & D
6	6 Construction of 2Nos. Class Rooms at Govt. Sen. Sec. School Charatgarh Dist.Una (HP) (SH: C/O Building portion on 1st floor)	13,12,309/-	26,300/-	Four months	500/-	Class-C & D
7	7 Annual surfacing on link road Baba Bodeshash road Bhadsali District Una (HP) In km.0/0 to 1/500 (SH: P/L 30mm thick BC)	13,10,810/-	26,250/-	One month	500/-	Class-A, B, C & D
8	8 Construction of link road to village Lalisingi to Jhalera near brick kiln via Bell Ram km.0/0 to 4/300 (SH: P/L premix carpet with seal coat & R/wall)	13,10,571/-	26,250/-	One month	500/-	Class-A, B, C & D
9	9 Construction of Link road to village Rampur, District Una (HP) km.0/0 to 1/0 (SH: C/O R/Walls, CC Pavement, tarring and drain in km.0/0 to 0/360)	12,98,395/-	26,000/-	Two months	500/-	Class-C & D
10	10 Construction of RCC Box culvert to Goushala at Harijan basti Saloh ,District Una (HP) (DC Deposit)	12,95,100/-	25,910/-	Two months	500/-	Class-C & D
11	11 Construction of Missing CD on Badehar Khuli Pekhuketa road km.0/0 to 3/600 (SH: C/O 3mtr. span RCC culvert at RD 1/540)	11,57,073/-	23,200/-	One month	500/-	Class-C & D
12	12 Repair and maintenance of Regional Hospital Una Distt. Una (SH: P/L Paver blocks in campus of building)	10,30,510/-	20,650/-	One month	500/-	Class-C & D
13	13 Construction of Multipurpose Hall building at Bangam Tehsil & Distt.Una(HP) (SH:P/L 80mm thick paver block 1 court yard of Hall)	9,46,798/-	19,000/-	One month	500/-	Class-C & D
14	14 Construction of Ram Lite ground and Market ground at Sanoli Distt.Una (HP) (SH: P/L CC Pavement)	7,95,093/-	16,000/-	One month	500/-	Class-C & D
15	15 Construction of Boundary wall Govt. Sen. Sec. School Jakhera Tensil & Distt.Una(HP)	6,00,000/-	12,000/-	One month	500/-	Class-C & D
16	16 Construction of Link road to village Kuthar Kalan Kuthar Khurd from Una Sighar road upto Rakkar km.0/0 to 2/700 (SH: P/L Paver block in RD.0/427 to 0/495)	4,96,978/-	10,000/-	One month	350/-	Class-C & D
17	17 Improvement of Black spot on Santokgarh Pollan road km.0/0 to 10/400 (SH: C/O Edge wall with crash barrier at RD.0/200 to 0/315) (LHS)	4,96,403/-	10,000/-	One month	350/-	Class-C & D
18	18 Repair of interlocking paver blocks in Front of Community centre GP Kuthar Khurd Under (Deposit work)	3,99,796/-	8,000/-	One month	350/-	Class-C & D
19	19 Restoration of Rain damage on approach road to IRB Bangar (SH: P/L 30mm thick , BC in km.0/0 to 0/350 (Deposit work)	3,70,520/-	7,500/-	One month	350/-	Class-A, B, C & D
20	20 Construction of Shed for Car Parking at 15th Circle office Rakkar (SH: C/O Shed for car parking under Non-residential building head).	3,52,591/-	7,100/-	One month	350/-	Class-C & D
21	21 Construction of Lalitaw Gondpur road km.0/0 to 6/0 (SH: C/O Retaining wall at RD.3/640 to 3/735)	3,51,119/-	7,100/-	One month	350/-	Class-C & D
22	22 A/R & M/O Residential building Type-IV qtr. No.1 and Type-II qtr.No.1 in DC Colony Una	2,98,510/-	5,970/-	One month	350/-	Class-C & D
23	23 Restoration of rain damage on Old Una Amb road near Himatkash college GP School Lalsingi (SH: C/O RCC slab culvert & U-shape drain) (Balance work)	2,86,				



here is scope to build a parallel Silicon Valley here given the number of software engineers the state trains every year.

FORMER UNION MINISTER DINESH TRIVEDI

CLAIMS BREAKING CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AND CORRUPTION KEY TO BENGAL'S ECONOMIC REVIVAL

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, TUESDAY 06 APRIL 2021

05

THUMBNAILS



Election Commission initiated an awareness campaign inside a tram in Kolkata on Monday.

■ BISWAJIT GHOSH

Phase 3: New faces fight turncoats in WB

South 24 Parganas comprising 16 seats have been the fortress of TMC; Swapan and Kanti in fray and TMC has brought in several new faces

SOMA MOOKHERJEE
TIRTHANKAR MITRA
KOLKATA, 5 APRIL

In the third phase of elections tomorrow, 31 constituencies have new faces wrestling with turncoats. Political sway and its quotient deficit encapsulate the volatile climate.

Former speaker of dissolved state Assembly, Biman Banerjee will contest from

Baruipur (west). Former minister of state minority affairs department, Giasuddin Mills will tussle in Mograhat (west) for TMC. Both these seats are in the pivotal South 24 Parganas where five out of 16 seats are in the Sunderban.

Amid tempest of turmoil and dissent, TMC had made significant changes. Sonali Guha has been replaced by Mohan Chandra Naskar at Santacchha; actor Debashree

Roy was removed to bring in Alok Jaldatta at Raidighi and Pannalal Halder replaced Deepak Halder in Diamond Harbour, after Halder defected to BJP.

In Raidighi, the new TMC candidate enters into a duel between veteran CPI-M leader Kanti Ganguly and BJP's Santanu Bapuli.

Ganguly's results will bear a reflection on his political career because he had been

defeated twice in this constituency.

Once a Left bastion, Hooghly's political components have undergone a paradigm shift in the last decade with the once dominant red getting increasingly marginalised. One of the Red bastion during the 34-year regime, it began eroding in 2011, and finally was decimated during 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Party ideologue Swapan Dasgupta has resigned from Rajya Sabha to contest in Tarakeswar constituency. Trinamul too has fielded a fresh face, Ramendra Singh Roy, replacing Rachpal Singh, ex-IPS officer.

At Arambagh, Trinamul's nominee had spearheaded the campaign of her husband Saumitra Khan at Bishnupur parliamentary segment. But the couple had parted ways and Sujata Mondal Khan will con-

test as a Trinamul nominee from Arambagh, the Assembly where the reputation of former chief minister Prafulla Chandra Sen is pristine.

TMC candidate Karabi Manua will contest from Haripal after Trinamul leadership decided to relocate her to Singur.

Amra in Howrah remains an island of Congress influence. But defending Amra is no bagatelle for veteran Con-

gress leader Asit Mitra after Trinamul put up Sukanto Paul, a local.

Fielding SK Sabir Ahmed at Jagatballavpur, Indian Secular Front leadership is eyeing the seat which has a large proportion of minorities. The ISF's hopes of success are based on resentment among TMC ranks with candidate Sitanath Ghosh who has replaced sitting legislator Md Abdul Gani.

WB govt saved jobless Jessop, Dunlop workers: Mamata

HEMANT JACOB
HOOGHLY, 5 APRIL

Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee in her series of election rallies for the Assembly seats of Chinshurah, Chanditala and Konnagar on Monday spewed venom at "anti-Bengal" Narendra Modi-led BJP government for its "deliberate non-co operation" in industrial development thus depriving lakhs of educated youths from job opportunities.

She cautioned the voters that the BJP is trying to play the religion card for political mileage and stick to the faith and belief in the ideology of Sri Ramkrishna and Vivekananda. "All are sons and daughters of one almighty God who is worshipped in different forms and service to mankind is service to God."

She said the Jessop and the Dunlop factories, the two giant industries, are not func-

tions rendering thousands of workers jobless who are passing days in great distress with their families.

Miss Banerjee said: "From 2016 I have been repeatedly asking the central government to promptly take steps

towards the reopening of the two factories. Even we passed a bill in the Assembly empowering the state government to take over both the sick industries. Repeatedly we appealed to the BJP government to take steps so that the state government could legally take over both the industries and make them operational, but till date the anti-industry, and anti-worker central government deliberately paid no heed to our repeated requests."

"Our government is providing Rs 10,000 every month in cash and Rs 473 every month as ESI. So far the state government has spent nearly Rs 15 crore to save the lives of jobless workers of Jessop and Dunlop factories,"

The Dunlop factory owner is a great friend of the BJP leaders. That is why that party is more concerned about its friendship with Pawan Ruiya than taking the initiative towards opening the Jessop

and the Dunlop factories." She said a dedicated freight corridor will be soon inaugurated at Dankuni. More than Rs 72,000 crore will be invested to set up industries in the areas creating immense opportunity of thousands of jobs soon after the functioning of Deuchapachami coal mines.

Mamata said the Centre has mischievous motives for holding an eight-phase election when the Covid graph is rising.

At Chanditala she said the soil of Chanditala sends out the message of communal harmony. Chanditala has the holy Shrine Furfuri Sharif, temples, gurdwaras and church. "People irrespective of religion co-exist here," Mamata said.

At Uttarpara she lashed out at the previous ruling party MLA Prabir Ghosal who later switched over to the BJP. She appealed to vote in favour of Kanchan Mallick.

BJP chief JP Nadda blasted TMC misrule which he claimed has suffocated the people. Nadda participated in a roadshow in Tollygunge area.

Nadda's Tollygunge roadshow commenced at a tram depot at 3.15 pm to Garia Crossing, covering a little over 4km. Nadda was drumming up support for Union minister Babul Supriyo, BJP's Tollygunge candidate and actor who made her debut DJB's Payal Sarkar, who is slogging for Behala (east).

During the roadshow, Nadda said people of Bengal is seeking full freedom from "TMC anarchy". "People want to establish a state free from extortion racket, syndicate raj, cut-money culture, and hooliganism. People want to bid Mamata Banerjee adieu and welcome BJP," he said.

Nadda said that Babul, who

is a popular Bollywood singer, left Mumbai to serve the people of Bengal. "Babul is offering his service for the people of the state. Like Babul, actor Payal Sarkar is also dedicating herself to the service of people although she is an established actor. Both are social workers. Please you bless them," he urged the gathering.

Standing atop a lorry, decorated with flowers and BJP flags, Nadda, with Supriyo and Sarkar by his side, was seen waving at the crowd, amid

chants of "Jai Shri Ram", "Narendra Modi Zindabad" and "JP Nadda Zindabad" by party supporters.

Hundreds of people queued up on both sides of the road as the rally inch ed forward through the crowded streets.

He also assured BJP workers, who joined the roadshow, that BJP will form the government with more than 200 seats in Assembly poll. Regarding coal scam issue he said that those involved in this scam will be punished.

Nadda's rally today at Seerampur, in the morning was cancelled due to organisational meeting. His rally later in the evening at Chunchura, was also cancelled. The state BJP said his rallies were cancelled as he had to rush back to Delhi to attend an "urgent meeting" without giving any details of the meeting. The TMC, however, said Nadda did not attend rallies as attendance at these meets were thin.

TMC worker booked after blast at home

CPM eyes migrant workers' votes

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 5 APRIL

The CPI-M politburo today appealed all migrant labourers in Bengal, to vote for Sanjukta Morcha, reminding them of the "horrors" they allegedly were subjected to due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's abrupt announcement of "unplanned lockdown", last year.

The CPI-M politburo member, Md Salim, today took to digital medium, appealing to all migrant labourers to vote for Sanjukta Morcha since the TMC at the Centre and the Trinamul Congress-led Bengal government had allegedly adopted an inhuman stance during the lockdown period when lakhs of migrant labourers were stuck in states across the country.

Salim said, "PM Modi implemented lockdown in the same and sudden manner as he did before announcing demonetisation. It was totally unplanned despite knowing, in India, about four crore people were in transit from one state to another or when they were attacked in Uttar Pradesh and slapped with false cases. There was even dirty politics over how much money should these labourers pay to avail a train back home."

"In Bengal, chief minister Mamata Banerjee decided to insult them by using the term 'corona express' to describe the trains which brought them home. Mamata refused to admit that it is the failure of her government in setting up industries and creating jobs which forced these labourers from Bengal to go to another state for employment" said Salim.

He alleged that Modi government showed lackadaisical approach in making the right arrangements during the Covid pandemic which is distributing PPE kits, readying infrastructure in hospitals and making arrangements to bring back the migrant labourers.

The CPI-M leader highlighted that as per the Constitution of India the subject of migrant labourers fall under the responsibility of the Centre who remained silent when migrant labourers died while walking back home from one state to another or when they were attacked in Uttar Pradesh and slapped with false cases. There was even dirty politics over how much money should these labourers pay to avail a train back home."

"In Bengal, chief minister Mamata Banerjee decided to insult them by using the term 'corona express' to describe the trains which brought them home. Mamata refused to admit that it is the failure of her government in setting up industries and creating jobs which forced these labourers from Bengal to go to another state for employment" said Salim.

Convene meeting for CBI director's appointment before 2 May: SC



NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Centre to consider convening before 2 May the meeting of a high-powered committee consisting of the Prime Minister and others for appointment of CBI director observing that in-charge arrangements for the post cannot go on.

The top court bench was

informed by the Centre that meeting of the committee will be convened after 2 May.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner NGO Common Cause, claimed before the bench that the Centre is delaying the meeting of the panel as it wants to bypass the present CJ SA Bobde who is retiring on 23 April.

PUBLIC NOTICE	
The following four members of the society namely Smt. Latika Nayak W/o. Sh. Anil Kumar Nayak R/o. 6-A, Evershine Apartment, Vikaspuri, New Delhi-110018, M.No. 372, Vilas Jindal S/o. Sh. L.N. Jindal R/o.M-13, Parvana Vihar, Plot No. 52, Sector-9, Rohini, Delhi-110085, M.No. 498, Smt. Amar Preet Kaur Wahi W/o. Sh. Ravi Wahi R/o. 149, 2nd Floor, Kucha Seth, Daulatabad Kalyan, Dist. Nashik, Maharashtra-422006, & Smt. Prabhla Singhal nomine & W/o. Late Sh. Shiv Narain Singhil S/o. Late Sh. Gangaram Singhil R/o. 28, Paschim Vihar, Opposite Ordinance Depot, Rohitkhera, New Delhi-110063, M.No. 302 have resigned from the membership of The All Faith Co-op. Group Housing Society Ltd. (Regn. No. 1709-G/H) 133, First Floor, Shiva Market, Pitampura, Delhi-110034. Concerned person may file aobjection to the society or with the RCS Office, Parliament Street, New Delhi-110001 within 15 days.	
The All Faith C.G.H.S.Limited Sukhbir Singh Sd/- Secretary	
Note : Qualification & Experience as per NCTE Norms.	
Walk in Interview on 27.04.2021 at 10:00 am at College Premises with your cv/resume supplemented with original testimonials along with passport size photograph.	
By President Governing Body	

DEBT RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-I, DELHI

4th Floor, Jeevan Tara Building, Parliament Street, New Delhi-110001

OA No. 54/2020 ORIENTAL BANK OF COMMERCE Versus SH. GAURAV SHARMA DEFENDANT

To, APPLICANT (Defendant No. 01)

Sh. Gaurav Sharma, C-9/854, Sector C, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070

Also At : 202, Samrat Ashok CGHS Enclave, Sector 18A, Plot No. 6, Dwarka, New Delhi-110075, & Allo At: E-9/14, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-110057

2. St. Prem Dutt Sharma (Defendant No. 02)

S/o Shri Partha Lal Sharma, E-9/14, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi-110057

Also At : C-9/854, Sector C, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070, Also At : 202, Samrat Ashok CGHS Enclave, Sector 18A, Plot No. 6, Dwarka, New Delhi-110075

3. Ms. Jaypee Infotech Ltd. (Defendant No. 04)

Jaypee Greens, Sector 128, Noida-201304, UP Also At : Aman Project - Aman Jaypee Greens, Sector-151, Noida-201304

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case for recovery of Rs. 23,26,320.00 (Rupees Twenty Three Lacs Twenty Six Thousand Three Hundred Twenty Only) against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance before D.R.T. Registrar on 17.05.2021 at 10.30 A.M. (for further details kindly visit D.R.T. website www.tribunal.gov.in Phone Number 011-23748473).

Please note that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic Situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conference and for that purpose-

(i) All the Advocates/Litigants shall download the "Cisco Webex" application/Software;

(ii) "Meeting ID" and "Password" for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by Registrars/Recovery Officer-I and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date of D.R.T. Official Portal i.e. "drt.gov.in" under the Public Notice Head.

(iii) In any exigency qua that, the Advocates/Litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No. 011-23748473.

Given under my hand and seal of the Tribunal on this 01st February of 2021

By Order of this Tribunal
For Registrar

Mr. Amit K. Dar, Lt. Registrar

DRT-1, New Delhi, Phone No: 011-23748473, Email: drt1delhi-dfs@nic.in

Bengalis don't bow to threats: Jaya



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 5 APRIL

In an apparent dig at the BJP, Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan said on Monday that no one has ever succeeded by "intimidating" Bengalis.

Addressing a press conference at the Trinamul Congress headquarters here, the veteran actor hailed chief minister Mamata Banerjee, asserting that she was fighting a battle all alone for democracy in Bengal.

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

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

She said no one has ever succeeded by "intimidating" Bengalis, in an apparent dig, targeting the BJP.

"Bengalis never bow their heads before threat or intimidation," she added.

Power of trade

Source raw materials from a country, use them to manufacture finished products on an industrial scale in your own country, and then send these products back into the raw-material exporting country for sale. That's what school textbooks taught us British colonialism did to India over two centuries. Going by what we export to and import from China, 21st century colonialism seems to be the name of the game. That, at least, is what the data indicates. For, figures between 2014-15 and 2019-20 show that the export of low-value raw materials and import of high-value manufactured goods have marked Sino-Indian trade ties. The power of trade and its consequent economic heft is, by far, the weightiest factor in the asymmetrical relationship between the Asian giants and that is not changing anytime soon. India's exports to China over the last six years have been only a fifth in value of India's imports from China. While average exports to China have been \$13 billion in the six years ending 2019-20, the average value of imports from China has been \$66 billion in the same period. India's exports have ranged from food items like fish and pepper to essential inputs like iron ores, granite stones, petroleum products and cotton yarn. Its imports from China include automatic data processing machines, telephone equipment, video phones, electronic circuits, transistors, semiconductor devices, antibiotics, fertilisers, sound-recording devices, TV cameras, automobile components, and project goods. The unvarnished truth is that the current trade patterns accurately reflect India's manufacturing capabilities - or lack thereof, to be precise.

The Indian government, thankfully, gets it. The PLI (production linked incentive) schemes for various sectors, the Atmanirbhar initiative, the Make in India policy, pushing the China plus one global supply chain thesis et al. are reflective of the Indian economic-strategic policy establishment recognising that power flows through trade in the contemporary world. But India has a long, long way to go. The finished products imported from China, it must not be forgotten, are to meet India's domestic demand for these goods and are not being forced on the country. In that sense, it is not coercive colonialism of the British kind which is playing out; it is more a result of China's unparalleled competitiveness in manufacturing relevant product lines. For example, the telecom revolution in India resulted in the import of telecom equipment and mobile phones in large quantities from China which dominates the electronic hardware market. India's telecom and mobile phone manufacturing industry is still at a nascent stage despite the fillip provided to the sector by a well-designed PLI scheme. The key is to be realistic. India is not overnight going to start competing with China in manufacturing terms. But from being just an exporter of raw materials to focussing on value added exports such as cancer drugs, auto components, and processed foods is a good first step.

Parlour & the Prince

Jordan is in crisis, with Prince Hamzah bin Hussein being placed 'under house arrest' by his half-brother, King Abdullah, on Sunday. This seemingly is part of the crackdown on critics, and the prince is in unsplendid isolation as his internet and phone lines have been cut. The crisis appears to be more acute than the one that plagues the Saudi palace in Riyadh after the murder of the journalist, Jamal Khashoggi. Prince Hamzah has accused the country's leaders of corruption, incompetence and harassment. The critical allegation has been levelled after several high-level arrests, said to be linked to an alleged coup attempt. Prince Hamzah has been ordered to stop actions that could be used to target Jordan's "security and stability". The move apparently comes after the Prince visited tribal leaders and is said to have garnered some support. He has denied any wrongdoing or that he was part of any conspiracy. His predicament has caused a flutter in the regional geopolitical roost, notably in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Both countries have pledged support for King Abdullah. Further afield and across the Atlantic, the United States, which is allied with Jordan in its campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, described the monarch as a key partner who has its full support. Jordan has little by way of natural resources and its economy has been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. It has also absorbed waves of refugees from the civil war in neighbouring Syria.

In the video recorded on Saturday, the Prince said that the chief of the general staff had told him he was not allowed to go out or communicate with people because of criticisms of the government or the king, articulated at meetings where he had been present. "I am not the person responsible for the breakdown in governance, the corruption and for the incompetence that has been prevalent in our governing structure for the last 15 to 20 years and has been getting worse. Jordan's crisis has reached a point where no one is able to speak or express one's opinion on anything without being bullied, arrested, harassed and threatened." Tensions within the royal household were manifest for some time. The crisis that confronts royalty appears to have spun badly out of control. While Jordan's royals are not the first of the world's royal families to experience such crisis this year, the country does have certain unique problems of its own. Covid has challenged its economy; the country, for all the opulence of the al-Salaam Palace in Amman, is in poor shape and public dissatisfaction has deepened. The country is reportedly gripped by fear, where anyone who criticises the government risks arrest by the secret police. The palace may have shot itself in the foot, and it shall take some time for the wound to heal.

Myanmar logjam

The coup may have been driven by the military's goal to preserve its central role in Burmese politics. The Defence Services Act imposes a mandatory retirement age of 65 for the Armed Forces' Commander-in-Chief. Min Aung Hlaing, the incumbent, would have been forced to retire on his 65th birthday in July 2021



A coup d'état in Myanmar began on 1 February 2021, when democratically elected members of the ruling party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), were deposed by the Tatmadaw - Myanmar's military - which vested power in a stratocracy with a year-long state of emergency under Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Min Aung Hlaing. It also declared the results of the November 2020 general election invalid and stated its intent to hold a new election at the end of the state of emergency. However, a majority of Myanmar's people support the results of the election. President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were detained, along with ministers, their deputies and members of Parliament.

On 3 February 2021, Win Myint was charged with breaching campaign guidelines and Covid-19 pandemic restrictions under section 25 of the Natural Disaster Management Law. Aung San Suu Kyi was charged with breaching emergency Covid-19 laws and for illegally importing and using radio and communication devices, specifically six ICOM devices from her security team and a walkie-talkie, which are restricted in Myanmar and need clearance from military-related agencies before acquisition.

The activist group, Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) said on April 3 that the security forces have killed 550 people, 46 of them children, since the military overthrew the elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb. 1. Despite the repression, opponents of the coup march every day in cities and towns across the country, often holding what they call "guerrilla rallies", small, quick

shows of defiance before security forces can respond. Authorities also issued warrants for 18 show business celebrities including social media influencers and journalists under a law against material intended to cause a member of the armed forces to mutiny or disregard their duty, state media reported late on April 2.

In the November 2020 elections, Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy pulled off a truly extraordinary victory, winning 85 per cent of the vote. That alone should have warned the army that it would face strong resistance to its February coup. Nearly two months on, the demonstrations show no signs of abating. The protesters have also attacked Chinese businesses because they believe China is backing the army.

The coup may have been driven by the military's goal to preserve its central role in Burmese politics. The Defence Services Act imposes a mandatory retirement age of 65 for the Armed Forces' Commander-in-Chief. Min Aung Hlaing, the incumbent, would have been forced to retire on his 65th birthday in July 2021. Further, the Constitution empowers solely the President, in consultation with the National Defence and Security Council, with the authority to appoint Min Aung Hlaing's successor, which could have provided an opportunity for the civilian arm of the government to appoint a more reform-minded military officer as Commander-in-Chief.

Hlaing's lack of power would

have exposed him to potential prosecution and accountability for alleged war crimes during the Rohingya conflict in various international courts. Min Aung Hlaing had also hinted at a potential entry into politics as a civilian, after his retirement.

The activist group Justice for Myanmar has also noted the significant financial and business interests of Min Aung Hlaing and his family, as a potential motivating factor for the coup. Min Aung Hlaing oversees two military conglomerates, the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) and Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL), while his daughter, son, and daughter-in-law have substantial business holdings in the country.

A few days before the coup, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had released \$350 million of cash to the Central Bank of Myanmar, as part of an emergency aid package, to address the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The funds came with no conditions, and without any precedent for refunds. In response to potential concerns regarding proper use of the funds by the military regime, an IMF spokesperson stated: "It would be in the interests of the government, and certainly the people of Myanmar that those funds are indeed used accordingly."

So far, the army has shown no sign of responding to international pressure. But the international community is watching closely. The US has slapped sanctions on the nation and in a recent Quad meeting it reiterated

the importance of democratic values for the region. However, the Quad should have given full support to the democratically elected government of Myanmar.

Underlying developments is the fact Myanmar has become ever more geo-strategically important. The Chinese, keen to gain overland access to the Indian Ocean via Pakistan and Myanmar, have invested \$17 billion in dams and other infrastructure.

India, all along, maintained good ties with the military and even gifted them a retired Indian Navy submarine. India has a tricky hand to play in seeking to counter China's regional strategic ambitions. It is also facing an issue with Myanmar's police and military crossing into Mizoram, which has close border and ethnic links. It is unlikely to extend any overt support to Myanmar's democratic forces. However, India should confer with other heads of state about Myanmar to forge peace with its influence.

At a media briefing, the spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs said India has urged for the release of political prisoners and supported any attempts to resolve the current situation, including through efforts of the 10-nation Association of South East Asian Nations. "We condemn any use of violence. We believe that the rule of law should prevail. We stand for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar," he said. On whether India will allow people from Myanmar to cross over to the Indian side along the Indo-Myanmar border, the spokesperson said it is being dealt with as per law as well as on humanitarian considerations. "We remain engaged on this issue with our international interlocutors and at the UN Security Council in an effort to play a balanced and constructive role," he said.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN**
ASIAN VOICES

Origins of political virus

It is no surprise those in the West who hoped to find evidence of guilt in the findings have felt disappointed about the World Health Organization report on its joint mission with China to trace the origins of the novel coronavirus. The report, released late Tuesday and a product of a joint research trip by the WHO and Chinese scientists to Wuhan last month, shed some light on the potential pathways of the virus.

Among other things, the 123-page report described the likelihood of the virus being introduced to humans via an intermediate animal host as "likely to very likely", that of it reaching humans via cold food chain products as "possible", that of it directly infecting humans as "possible to likely", and that of it being spread to humans through a lab accident as "extremely unlikely". In other words, the report gives no credence to the unfounded speculation that the pandemic was caused by a leak from a lab in Wuhan. And it highlights the significance of international collaboration on origin-tracing research in a global context. It also stands as a powerful repudiation of the shameless lies some Western politicians and pundits have churned out to slander China over the months, and a sobering reminder that more hard work is needed to determine the pandemic's history. Now that science has spoken, the international community needs to take it as an opportunity to recognize Covid-19 origin-tracing

CHINADAILY

for what it is: scientific research, not a political game. These are crucial initial findings that may help clear the ground and pave the way for future probes. But just as WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, "No single research trip can provide all the answers." Of course, the findings are not extensive, or conclusive enough. It is commonsense and a broad consensus in the medical science community that identifying the origin of a virus takes time, possibly years, perhaps decades. Therefore, the report the expert team just submitted is the beginning, by no means the end of that process.

Countries around the world need to reach a consensus that origin-tracing missions should not be probes that are based on the presumption of guilt. The aim of the missions should be about getting to know the virus better and understanding how it has evolved so as to help beat the virus at an early date as well as prevent future disease outbreaks. But a conspicuous ramifications of the origin-tracing research so far has been its rampant politicization, which has not only seriously disrupted scientific endeavors aimed at finding the true origin of the virus, but also undermined international collaboration in the fight against the pandemic. Some Western politicians and media have incubated and spread the political virus targeting China.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Short shrift to Covid protocol

SIR, The rapid surge in Covid-19 cases is the result of laxity in following the Covid protocols on the part of the masses. It seems as if the people are tired and cannot wear masks for any length of time. What is dreadful at this point in time is the fact the rate of recovery of Covid patients is continuously declining and the active cases are spiking at a rapid pace. This fast spread of Covid can only be defeated if all the people are ready to fight it collectively without being casual in their approach.

The rate of vaccination must be doubled immediately. Governments of every state where the cases are spiking must impose certain restrictions on the movement of people.

Hotels, restaurants, parks, spa centres, schools, colleges and universities must be closed for some time in order to minimise the risk. Our state government needs to go back to online classes for all classes instead of calling students back to school. This is indeed a very critical time and it is the responsibility of every citizen to behave properly in the larger interest of our countrymen.

Yours, etc., Iftekhar Ahmed, Kolkata, 5 April.

DEATHS AND IPL

SIR, It's not only surprising but also disgusting to know that the government and organisers are planning to hold the IPL tournament slated to kick off later this week amid ongoing devas-

tating second wave of Covid pandemic which has already claimed so many lives in the country and affected almost 13 million people. One fails to understand how the cricket tournament will bring positivity among the millions of countrymen when many of their fellow Indians are passing through serious suffering due to disease and also the economic struggle.

How can a person enjoy the hitting of fours and sixes when he or she is worried about getting caught by the deadly virus? How one can enjoy falling of wickets when he or she has gone jobless? How one can enjoy a match victory when he or she has lost a dear one due to coronavirus? How will the poor enjoy cricket

on empty stomachs?

Organising IPL will not bring any happiness to the masses. It's going to bring happiness only to the organisers, sponsors and players, as they may gain hugely in monetary terms. The government should step in and ban holding any such tournaments till the country comes out of the clutches of the virus.

Yours, etc., Sanjay Chopra, Mohali, 5 April.

INSPIRATIONAL

SIR, Your front-page report 'Alert bus driver saves lives' (April 4) was highly inspirational. Even while suffering a heart attack, Ashok Kumar, the driver of the private bus displayed exemplary courage and presence of mind by veering the vehicle towards the bushes. This act of bravery against severe odds has made Ashok Kumar a martyr in the true sense, a man whose memory will be savoured by passengers, who literally escaped from the jaws of death.

Even in death, he emerged triumphant by rising above his personal trauma for ensuring the collective good of others. Let his valorous feat not go unsung. His heroic exploit certainly merits a bravery award from both the Central and Himachal governments. The stretch of road near the accident site in Paonta Sahib may be named after him to perpetuate his memory.

Yours, etc., Amit Banerjee, New Delhi, 4 April.

LOSS OF A SCIENTIST

SIR, This refers to the front page report 'Panel submits report on Dr Nambi's illegal arrest' (The Statesman, 4 April).

It is unfortunate that only a few in the country continued to protest in support of the injustice done to Dr Nambi Narayanan, the then director of the cryogenic project (1994) at the world famous ISRO. A rich human resource of India was under inhuman mental torture; every sphere of his life was at the mercy of both the civil and police administration and different intelligence groups for two and a half decades.

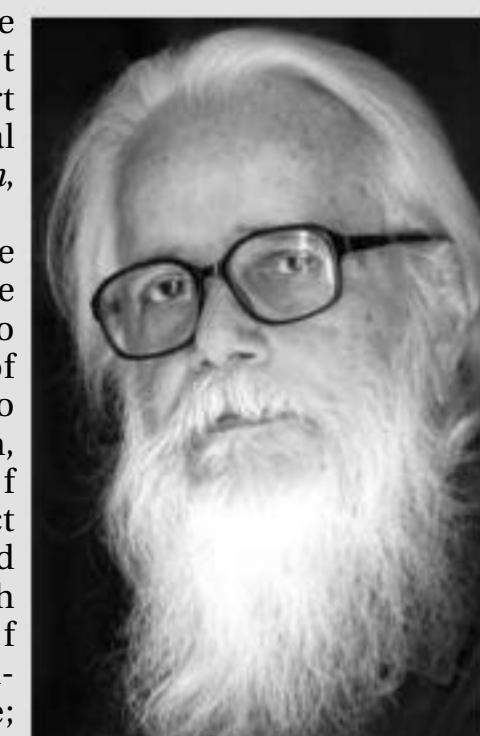
On 14 September 2018, a Supreme Court Bench led by Chief Justice Dipak Misra found "no scintilla of doubt that the appellant, a successful scientist having national reputation, has been compelled to undergo immense humiliation and ignominy."

Referring to the SC order, The Statesman published an editorial titled 'Huge Human Value' (mid-September 2018). Also citizens are thankful to The Statesman for carrying an edit-page article "Spurious spy case" written by Sam Rajappa on 29 September 2018.

Following the allegations (1994) Dr Nambi's social status was almost ruined. His close associates, friends and relatives gradually started keeping a safe distance from him; many cut off communication with his family.

The net result was that the nation was deprived of service from a ISRO scientist. Punishment to those responsible for the loss of this scientist's talents to the nation should be meted out as early as possible.

Yours, etc., Rupam Guha, 5 April, Kolkata.



HARSHA KAKAR

Afghanistan as a nation has only witnessed wars and bloodshed for the past four decades. Its turmoil began with the Soviet invasion in December 1979 and continues to date. The US entered after the 9/11 attack. After two decades, the US is now firming its plans to pull out. It has realised that it would never achieve the goals that it had set for itself when it entered Afghanistan. At the end of the day, it would leave the country in a similar mess as Libya or Iraq, where multiple terrorist groups continue fighting one another as also the elected government for control of territory. Ultimately, it is only the populace which suffers and bears the brunt of the violence.

Unlike Donald Trump, who was pushing the Afghan government to sign a peace deal with the Taliban, President Joe Biden is seeking to bring forth an interim inclusive government involving the Taliban and the current elected dispensation in a power sharing formula. This is not being attempted by conviction and convincing, but by arm-twisting and coercion. In addition, the US is planning to delay its troop pull out beyond the agreed date of 1 May. NATO has already announced that it would not adhere to the 1 May date. The US also plans to shift the current Doha talks to Istanbul, hoping Turkey and Pakistan could push both sides for a ceasefire, where Qatar failed.

This current plan is another half-baked thought process of the US and is destined for failure. Afghanistan has never been a nation state, but a collection of nations loosely governed by Kabul. Loyalties are more to local warlords and tribal chiefs than to Kabul. Even the warring sides are unwilling to accept the US proposal.

The Taliban are not desirous of joining any coalition government. President Ashraf Ghani, disagreeing with the US proposal, has prepared a counter suggestion where he states that in case the Taliban sign a peace deal, he would resign, and fresh elections could be held to determine the new government in the country. The Taliban have no intention of participating in elections but desire the country on a platter. The Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh stated that his country's fate cannot be decided by '20 people in a room.' He was refer-

Support for Taliban must cease for Afghan peace

ring to the forthcoming conference, proposed by the US, to be hosted under the aegis of the UN, in Turkey.

The Taliban spokesperson, Suhail Shaheen, stated post the Moscow talks, "We hope that this will not happen (US delay in withdrawal), that they withdraw, and we focus on the settlement, peaceful settlement of the Afghan issue, in order to bring about a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire at the end of reaching a political roadmap (for) Afghanistan." He threatened to recommence attacks on NATO forces in case they remain. Meanwhile, violence continues in Afghanistan, where the Taliban currently control 50 per cent of the country. The al Qaeda and the ISIK are slowly gaining ground.

There are also differing perceptions between Afghanistan's neighbours and allies. At the recently concluded Heart of Asia conference, Pakistan's foreign minister, SM Qureshi stated that Pakistan has regularly cautioned "against the role of spoilers both within and outside Afghanistan." He was hinting at India, whom he has regularly accused of supporting the Afghan government and acting against the deal being pushed by the US and Pakistan. Pakistan is pushing for the US to adhere to the 1 May date.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar speaking at the same conference stated, "For a durable peace in Afghanistan, what we need is genuine double peace, that is, peace within Afghanistan and peace around Afghanistan. It requires harmonizing the interests of all, both within and around that country." He was commenting on Pakistan's support to the Taliban whose levels of violence have not reduced. Unless Taliban's bases in Pakistan are closed, there would be no reduction of violence in Afghanistan.

Ashraf Ghani, the Afghan President stated, "We acknowledge and appreciate the support and commitment of our other partners such as Iran, India, Saudi Arabia, UAE as well as our Central Asian neighbours to the



Afghanistan peace process." There was no mention of Pakistan. Ghani has accused Pakistan on multiple occasions of harbouring and supporting the Taliban. He has stated that the capability of the Taliban would end as soon as Pakistan stops providing support.

Indian soft power remains strong within Afghanistan. India has been training Afghan officer cadets for a long time. This is projection of Indian military soft power. India has also been supplying military hardware to Afghanistan. In addition, Indian scholarships have led to the creation of an educated elite, which, in case democracy continues in Afghanistan, could form the backbone of future governance. India's investment in

development has won it hearts and minds around the country. Hence, despite all claims, India will remain a key player in the country.

In this scenario of changing policies, disagreements between internal players and those who seek to influence the country, what could be the future of Afghanistan? While the Taliban may come forward for talks, they are unlikely to agree to any power-sharing agreements. They are aware that at some stage the US and NATO forces would pull out in a similar manner as the Soviets did. This would open the country to a bloody civil war where casualties would be immense. The reality being missed is that unlike other nations, sanctions and global criticism would have no impact on

the country or the Taliban. The gains made by Afghanistan over decades would be wiped clean.

The nation will only witness more violence in the years ahead. A US intelligence report states that if the US withdraws from Afghanistan before a peace deal is reached with the Taliban, the country will fall under their control in 2-3 years. That could potentially open doors for al-Qaeda to rebuild its strength within the country. Peace in Afghanistan is still miles away and nowhere on the horizon. It can only come if support to the Taliban ceases, which is unlikely. Till then the populace will pay a heavy price.

The writer is a retired Major-General of the Indian Army.

Finding it so hard to breathe



NUHASH HUMAYUN

On March 23, nearly two weeks ago, I tested positive for Covid-19. My symptoms are random and sporadic: dry coughs, intense fever, headaches, and a loss of appetite. It's surreal - not to be sick, but to be a certain kind of sick that the entire world is talking about. I have the very disease that's causing global lockdowns, tripling hand sanitiser sales, and shutting down schools. I caught the big bad virus.

The disease is real, the symptoms are real, but here's something they don't tell you - it's devastating for your emotional and mental health.

When I received the text message stating that my Covid-19 result is pos-

itive, I was, well, overwhelmed. The realisation hit me that I would have to isolate myself for a very long time. Weeks, perhaps months. My small room in an apartment would be my entire life - and the tiny adjacent balcony would be my great outdoors.

Yet this was hardly the most overwhelming part. It was the overflow of information. In the middle of a global pandemic, everyone is an expert. My family, relatives in Texas, best friend's cousin - everyone knows exactly what to do when you have Covid. They're not just sure, they're positive.

I was suddenly bombarded with lists of medicine, home remedies, and Covid-home-exercise plans. My inbox is littered with condolences as if I had already died as well as huge lists of

vitamins to take. Some of the lists overlap, others are wildly contradictory. One list mentions a glass of milk every day, another says avoid milk altogether since Covid patients are lactose intolerant. Going on the Internet was worse: do I believe the CDC website which says I should self-isolate for a month, or the MIT one which says if I don't have symptoms for 24 hours, I should get re-tested?

There was an age where medical information was hard to come by. Doctors were the only ones who really knew anything, and they'd consult heavy books before prescribing things. Before that were darker times when no one truly knew what to do when one was sick, suggesting ailments like cocaine or chopping peo-

ple's limbs off for minor illnesses. I wondered if the current age of excessive information was truly any different from the age of no information at all.

As your friends and co-workers find out you "have it", their reaction is sympathetic, but you can tell there is another thought looming. They are ruminating and calculating the last time they saw you. They are wondering how many feet away from you they were. They are telling their other friends who were there too. There are WhatsApp groups and Messenger threads where you are already being talked about, parallel to them typing, "aww feel better" to you. You know this because within two minutes of you texting a co-worker, your entire office texts you, asking how you are doing. Within one minute of texting a loved one, her roommate's friend is "randomly" checking up on you.

Of course, this is rational and necessary, to retrace your steps and take safety measures. No one is against you, they are just for themselves. They just want to feel safe, this isn't personal, right? Yet, why does it feel so personal? You feel like you let the world down. You weren't safe, you took the mask off at the restaurant and you didn't wash your hands for 20 seconds. Your family might be infected by you, your household help might get the virus. You feel like you're filthy, and anyone who is in touch with you is now scared of you. How do you know someone didn't contract the disease from you and die? Shame on you.

Then there's the isolation. You think you're used to the lockdown, but the entire perspective changes when you become the Covid patient. Suddenly, you're not staying home to pro-

tect yourself. You're locked up in your bedroom to protect the world - from you. The isolation eats at you slowly, invading your thoughts. At first, you think you have all the free time in the world. You'll get some much-needed rest, get a little bit of work done every day - micro productivity. But being stuck in one room for over a week kills your perception of night and day, work and leisure. There is no work-life separation, there are no boundaries, not to mention your symptoms keep coming and going, leading you to wonder if the entire result was a false positive.

I wish there was a conclusive way to tie up all these thoughts and emotions, but there isn't one. I wish I could write, I can't wait to recover and test negative again, but it's not that simple.

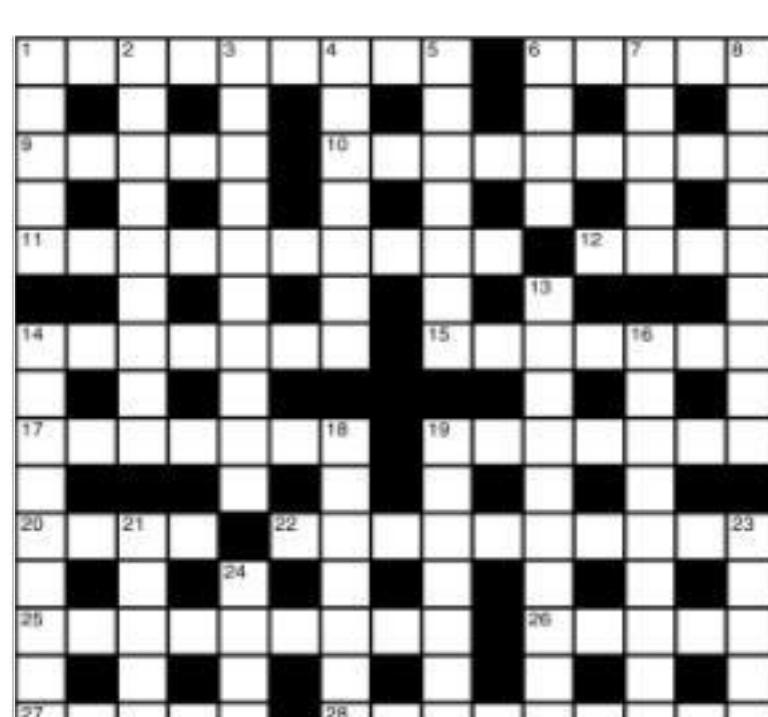
See, while the isolation is killing me, its coldness also feels warmly familiar. I am almost nostalgic of March 2020, when the first lockdown started. The most terrifying realisation from my isolation was the emotional toll that my "normal" life had on me. As a filmmaker, a communications consultant, and a writer, my "normal" was a relentless hustle. I had no time to breathe, yet all the time to prove myself to a world where the only way to establish one's worth is to be constantly productive.

Yet, I am too tired, too isolated to have an epiphany about my lifestyle. All I know is, while my physical symptoms will hopefully soon wear down, the emotional burden of this experience will continue to be an invisible weight that I must keep lifting. And just like the physical symptoms, it makes it harder to breathe.

The Daily Star/ANN

NO 28875

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

ACROSS

- See 21 Down
- Superficial attractiveness demands explanation (5)
- Puzzle in south chasing westbound taxi provider (5)
- Friends married by cleric in reduced expense (9)
- Arouse hostility against one incorrectly (10)
- Counter happening to pass 100 (4)
- See 7 Down
- Villainous group terribly secret seizing power (7)
- John who scored where Hibernian at home? (7)
- Old man very strict - bit of a nag (7)
- Legendary figure making comeback? (4)
- Untamed shrew entertaining (22/24)

animal dancing couple preferred? (7,3,4)

- One who flies through the air antenna first (9)
- Firm female support for lethal Asian striker (5)
- Astronaut Fred takes year inside crater (5)
- Irritation that gets right into damaged retina? (9)
- Choice of stem and stern for Argonaut given a vessel (5)
- Society girl in Underground, sent up to visit poet (9)
- Old Berliner keen to cross street on island? (4,6)
- Wear out high-stepping horse (7)
- Retribution in northeast confused State: Independent to probe? (7)

Attempt with publicity to provoke (4)

- Interviewer: pay for her revised, and victory claimed! (5,7)
- He's in a spy novel going on pointlessly (9)
- Pedigree pet for each Welshwoman on boat (7,3)
- Attempt to conceal bad news in overwhelming defeat (9)
- Article by magazine about graduate touring one country (5,6)
- Choose to keep current dispatch for Mars? (7)
- Range of colourings allowed having spread around (7)
- Rippling he-man Hardy rang couple in schism (5,3,6)
- Pipe diameter associated with showers (5)
- See 22 Across

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

The Senate of the new University of Patna made an interesting contribution on Monday to the controversy which has gone on for many years as to the comparative advantages of imparting instruction, especially in the higher walks of education, in English or in the vernacular. On the face of it, the acquisition of knowledge through the medium of a foreign tongue must be extremely difficult. That it is not impossible, however, is proved by the very large number of Indians who succeed in the task. Nor is the phenomenon peculiar to India. Hundreds of young men in England and Scotland proceed to the French, and formerly to the German Universities; and return to their native country the richer for the experience. Appearances, moreover, point to the probability that the Indian student finds English especially congenial to his mental make-up, and for three-quarters of a century he has manifested a passionate eagerness in the study of English which has in itself constituted a powerful argument for the encouragement of English in every possible way. This possibly has led to an undue neglect of the vernaculars, and it may be that the resolution adopted on Monday by the University of Patna may prove a useful corrective. It is noteworthy that, whereas the gentleman who introduced the topic proposed to make the vernaculars compulsory in studying for the matriculation examination, it was eventually decided to make it permissive.

NEWS ITEMS

SIKH GURDWARAS AND SHRINES BILL

In the Punjab Legislative Council today, the Hon. Mr. Fazli Hussain, Minister for Education, introduced the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill and after a prolonged discussion the Bill was referred to a Select Committee consisting of Sir John Maynard, Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, Lala Harkishen Lal, Sardar Mahtab Singh, Sardar Dasaunder Singh, Raja Narendra Nath, Sardar Kartar Singh, Mr. Ellis and the mover. The Select Committee were requested to submit its report by April 7 and it will be presented to the Council on the following day. An amendment moved by Raja Narendra Nath that the consideration of the Bill be postponed till May 15 in order to elicit public opinion was lost by 13 votes to 40. The Council adjourned till April 8.

TRIAL BY NON-COOPERATION COURT

A case is being heard in the court of the Sub-Divisional Officer of Madhubani in which Dwarka Marwari and six others of Jainagar have been placed on trial. The case for the prosecution is that in pursuance of the non-cooperation movement, the accused have formed an association at Jainagar with the object of trying all offences and deciding all disputes arising in that locality, and that in cases tried by them they have passed orders and sentences which are not only monstrous but against all sense of humanity. For instance, it is alleged that a woman who beat another woman was by way of punishment kept in custody for the whole day by the accused. The case has been adjourned for the examination of defence witnesses.

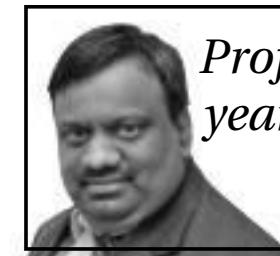
ALL-INDIA WAR MEMORIAL

After three days of dignified ceremonial in Delhi the setting for the pageantry connected with the Duke of Connaught's visit today shifted three miles south to the Delhi which has still to be. The All-India War Memorial, the foundation stone of which His Royal Highness laid today will take the form of a great archway designed by Sir Edward Lutyens to straddle the fine processionals way which he and his colleagues have made a feature of the vista seen looking eastward from the vast Secretariat now rising on the site of the new Capital. Hitherto the Duke has been concerned to inaugurate the new institutions which are designed to transmute the political life of the country.

SERIOUS CONDITION OF CARUSO

Signor Caruso, following upon a relapse last night, is believed to be dying, and Extreme Unction has been administered. A later message says that after taking farewell of the members of the Metropolitan Opera Company at his bedside Caruso rallied, but his condition is still serious. The famous singer has had a series of illnesses since early December. He was first injured by the fall of a stage pillar. He then strained his side in slipping and falling on the stage, after which he burst a small blood vessel in his throat while singing at Brooklyn. Having recovered from these, he successively developed lumbago and pleurisy, the latter necessitating two operations. He has lately been suffering from acute empyema.





Profitability of fertiliser industry in financial year 2021-22 is expected to remain healthy.

SABYASACHI MAJUMDAR

GROUP HEAD & SENIOR V-P (CORPORATE RATINGS), ICRA

THUMBNAILS

HDFC Bank's advances up 14%: HDFC Bank's advances registered near 14 per cent growth by end of March 2021 at Rs 11.32 lakh crore, while deposits were up by over 16 per cent at Rs 13.35 lakh crore, the lender said on Monday. "The bank's advances aggregated to approximately Rs 11.32 lakh crore as of 31 March 2021, a growth of around 13.9 per cent over Rs 9.93 lakh crore as of 31 March 2020, and a growth of around 4.6 per cent over Rs 10.82 lakh crore as of 31 December 2020," HDFC Bank said. PTI

NHAI cash chase: The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) on Monday filed draft papers with Sebi for floating an Infrastructure Investment Trust through which it seeks to raise Rs 5,100 crore. InvITs are instruments on the pattern of mutual funds and are designed to pool small sums of money from a number of investors to invest in assets that give cash flow over a period of time. NHAI plans to mop up total of Rs 5,100 crore through fresh issue, as per the draft papers filed with the Securities and Exchange Board of India. PTI

Marico expectation: FMCG major Marico on Monday said it has witnessed healthy momentum building across its key portfolios and expects low double-digit bottomline growth in the fourth quarter of last fiscal after being impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Marico, in a quarterly update for the quarter ended 31 March 2021, said its India business delivered a very strong double-digit volume growth, albeit on a low but relatively stronger base when compared to key peers in the sector. PTI

Canon CEO: Imaging technologies major Canon India Pvt Ltd on Monday announced the appointment of Manabu Yamazaki as its new president and CEO, effective 1 April 2021. Yamazaki takes over from Kazutada Kobayashi, who was at the helm for 9 years leading growth in the Indian market, the company said in a statement. He will be spearheading Canon's business strategy and operations in India and is tasked to strengthen the existing core businesses and bolster the growth in the brand's imaging expertise in newer multiple areas in India. PTI

Radiance purchase: Radiance Renewables has acquired 152.5 MW rooftop solar assets from Azure Power Global for Rs 536.5 crore. Radiance is subsidiary of a green growth equity fund managed by Everstone Group firm EverSource Capital. The transaction is through the green growth equity fund, an equal joint venture between Singapore-based private equity firm Everstone Group and British solar green energy major Lightsource, the group said on Monday. PTI

Equity benchmarks plunge on surge in Covid-19 cases

Record jump in Covid-19 cases unnerves investors and fans fears over the economic recovery

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

Equity benchmarks wilted under widespread selling today as a record single-day jump in Covid-19 cases in the country unnerved investors and fanned fears over the economic recovery.

A sharp plunge in the rupee added to the concerns, traders said.

After plunging over 1,400 points earlier in the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex pared some losses to finish at 49,159.32 points, down 870.51 points or 1.74 per cent.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty sank 229.55 points or 1.54 per cent to 14,637.80 points.

Bajaj Finance was the top laggard in the Sensex pack, plunging 5.81 per cent, followed by IndusInd Bank, SBI, M&M, Axis Bank, Bajaj Auto and ICICI Bank.

IT stocks stood tall amid the carnage, with HCL Tech leading the gainers' chart with a jump of 3.08 per cent.

TCS, Infosys, Bharti Airtel and Tech Mahindra were the

SENSEX SINKS 870 POINTS

► After plunging over 1,400 points earlier in the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex pared some losses to finish at 49,159.32 points, down 870.51 points or 1.74 per cent.
► 2) Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty sank 229.55 points or 1.54 per cent to 14,637.80 points.
► IT stocks stood tall amid the carnage, with HCL Tech leading the gainers' chart with a jump of 3.08 per cent.



other winners, gaining up to 2.32 per cent.

India recorded an all-time high of 1,03,558 coronavirus infections in a day, pushing the nationwide Covid-19 tally to 1,25,89,067, according to the Union health ministry data updated today.

The single-day rise in cases surpassed the earlier peak of 97,894 infections reported on 17 September last year, mak-

ing it the highest since the pandemic began.

"The market witnessed a huge sell-off today as India's second wave of Covid-19 is getting bigger than anticipated and is expected to ruin the pace of economic recovery. High valuation added further concern due to a possible downgrade in Q1 FY22 earnings," said Vinod Nair, head of research at Geojit Financial Services.

A policy decision in the upcoming monetary policy committee (MPC) announcement and Q4 earnings will define the market volatility in the coming days, he added.

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

The MPC will announce its decision on 7 April.

The rise in Covid-19 cases in India is a sobering reminder that challenges to recovery still remain, said Lalitabha Srivastava, AVP, research, Sharekhan, by BNP Paribas.

The provisional numbers of key banks indicate a consolidating trend in terms of advances growth but encouraging performance on deposit and CASA front, he added.

BSE realty, bankex, finance, auto, consumer durables and capital goods tanked up to 3.62 per cent, while IT, teck, metal and telecom ended in the

green. Broader BSE mid-cap and small-cap indices fell up to 1.13 per cent.

On the macroeconomic front, India's manufacturing sector activity lost further growth momentum and fell to a seven-month low in March as demand was constrained by the escalation of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 57.5 in February to a seven-month low of 55.4 in March.

The rise in daily new cases in Seoul and Tokyo ended on a positive note. Markets in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Australia were closed for holidays.

Stock exchanges in Europe were also closed.

Meanwhile, the global oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 2.20 per cent lower at \$63.43 per barrel.

The rupee declined by 18 paise to close at 73.30 against the US dollar on strong American currency and risk aversion in the domestic market.

Gross NPAs of banks may rise to 9.6-9.7%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

As the impact of various relief measures, including a moratorium on loan repayment and asset classification standstill wanes off, gross non-performing assets of banks may likely rise to 9.6-9.7 per cent by 31 March 2021, says a report.

According to Icra Ratings, GNPs (gross non-performing assets) of banks may worsen further to 9.9-10.2 per cent by 31 March 2022.

The rating agency, in a report, said despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the debt servicing ability of borrowers, the gross fresh slippages for banks stood much lower at Rs 1.8 lakh crore during the first nine months of fiscal 2020-21 as compared to Rs 3.6 lakh crore during the finan-

cial year 2020.

This has been driven by various relief measures such as the moratorium on loan repayment and asset classification standstill wanes off, gross non-performing assets of banks may likely rise to 9.6-9.7 per cent by 31 March 2021, and 9.9-10.2 per cent by 31 March 2022.

As the impact of these interventions wanes off, the asset quality pressures are likely to resurface. We expect the GNPs (excluding write-offs) to rise to 9.6-9.7 per cent by 31 March 2021, and 9.9-10.2 per cent by 31 March 2022, from 8.6 per cent as on 31 March 2020, the report said.

As of 31 December 2020, the GNPs and NNPs (net non-performing assets) of the banks stood at 8.3 per cent and 2.7 per cent, as compared to 8.6 percent and 3 per cent, respectively, as of 31 March 2020.

Byju's acquires Aakash for about \$1 billion

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Ed-tech startup Byju's today said it has acquired Aakash Educational Services Ltd (AESL) to bolster its presence in the test preparation segment in the country.

According to sources, the deal is worth close to \$1 billion (about Rs 7,300 crore) - making it the biggest acquisition by Byju's to date.

The companies, however, did not comment on the financial details of the deal. As part of the transaction, Aakash founders and Blackstone will become shareholders in Byju's.

Byju's, which is the most valued ed-tech startup in the country, is backed by marquee investors like Mary Meeker, Yuri Milner, Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative, Tencent, Sequoia Capital, Tiger Global and others. It is estimated

to have raised over \$2 billion in funding to date.

According to the sources, Byju's is in talks to raise an additional \$600-700 million in funding that will help in further growth acceleration.

In the past, Byju's had acquired TutorVista and EduRite (from Pearson in 2017) and Osmo in 2019. Last year, the General Atlantic-backed company had bought coding training platform WhiteHat Jr for \$300 million.

"This will be the largest integration in the education space in India, especially in the startup space... Covid has really opened the gates to online education significantly and going forward, we believe that all kinds of models in education will exist in K-12, test prep and even in higher education," AESL managing director Aakash Chaudhary said.

Together with Byju's, AESL will be able to provide students

BYJU'S BIGGEST PURCHASE

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► The compa-

nies, however, did not comment on the financial details of the deal. As part of the transaction, Aakash founders and Blackstone will become shareholders in Byju's.

with the education it was providing but at a much larger scale with multiple delivery channels that can be innovated out of both ecosystems (online and offline), he added.

After the integration, Byju's will make further investments to accelerate Aakash's growth, he noted.

Chaudhary said AESL will continue to operate as a separate entity and further expand its presence in the country.

"At Aakash, we are looking

to transform student experiences by steering innovative and personalised learning programmes. The future of learning is hybrid and this union will bring together the best of offline and online learning, as we combine our expertise to create impactful experiences for students," Byju Raaveendran, founder and CEO of Byju's, said.

The addition of Aakash is a significant step towards strengthening its product offering, he added.

(including franchisees), and a student count of more than 2.5 lakh. In 2019, private equity firm Blackstone had picked up a 37.5 per cent stake in AESL.

While the company hadn't disclosed the financial details, sources had said the Rs 1,350 crore transaction had valued AESL at \$500 million (over Rs 3,545 crore).

"Our complementary strengths will enable us to build capabilities, create engaging and personalised learning programmes. The future of learning is hybrid and this union will bring together the best of offline and online learning, as we combine our expertise to create impactful experiences for students," Byju Raaveendran, founder and CEO of Byju's, said.

The addition of Aakash is a significant step towards strengthening its product offering, he added.

Manufacturing loses growth momentum

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

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

The seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 57.5 in February to a seven-month low of 55.4 in March.

However, the latest reading was indicative of a substantial improvement in the health of the sector that outpaced the long-run series

REPORT CARD FOR MARCH

► The seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 57.5 in February to a seven-month low of 55.4 in March.
► However, the latest reading was indicative of a substantial improvement in the health of the sector that outpaced the long-run series

average, it said.
► In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"With Covid-19 restrictions expanded and lockdown measures re-introduced in many states, Indian manufacturers look set to experience a challenging month in April," Lima said.

India recorded an all-time high of 1,03,558 coronavirus infections in a day, pushing the nationwide Covid-19 tally to 1,25,89,067, according to the Union health ministry data updated today.

On the price front, the rate of input cost inflation was among the strongest seen over the past three years.

However, selling prices increased only moderately as companies limited their adjustments to retain a competitive edge and boost sales.

The survey noted that employment declined in March, taking the current sequence of job shedding to a year. Panellists indicated that the fall stemmed from Covid-19 restrictions related to workforces. Despite the reduction in payroll numbers, outstanding business rose only marginally, Lima said.

Business confidence waned in March. While some firms foresaw output growth in the coming 12 months, the vast majority predicted no change from present levels.

On the price front, the rate of input cost inflation was among the strongest seen over the past three years. However, selling prices increased only moderately as companies limited their adjustments to retain a competitive edge and boost sales.

Krishnapatnam Port, located on the east coast of India in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh, is an all-weather, deep-water port that has multi-cargo facility with a current capacity of 64 million tons per annum (MTPA).

APSEZ, the flagship transportation arm of the diversified Adani Group, is announcing the acquisition of the residual 25 per cent stake in Adani Krishnapatnam Port, (Krishnapatnam Port) for Rs

2,800 crore, the company said in a statement.

With a waterfront of 20 km and 6,800 acres of land, Krishnapatnam Port has a master plan capacity of 300 MTPA and a 50-year concession, it said.

Together with the 75 per cent ownership acquired in October 2020, the acquisi-

tion implies an enterprise value of Rs 13,675 crore implying an EV/FY21 EBITDA multiple of 10.3x, the company said.

The port is expected to have volumes of 38 MT, revenues of Rs 1,840 crore and EBITDA of Rs 1,325 crore in FY21, it said.

Karan Adani, chief executive officer and whole-time director of APSEZ said: "The consolidation of our ownership in Krishnapatnam Port reinforces APSEZ's stride towards 500 MMT by 2025 and achieving our broader strategy of cargo parity between west and east coasts of India."

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With a waterfront of 20 km and 6,800 acres of land, Krishnapatnam Port has a master plan capacity of 300 MTPA and a 50-year con-

cession, it said.

He said Krishnapatnam Port is on track to handle double the traffic by 2025 and will deliver high growth through a multi-product and cargo enhancement strategy while enhancing return on capital employed.

SBI increases home loan rate to 6.95%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

As per information posted on its website, the new rate effective 1 April is 6.95 per cent.

The hike in minimum home loan rate by SBI is likely to prompt other lenders to follow suit.

The bank will also levy a consolidated processing fee on home loans. This will be 0.40 per cent of the loan amount and goods and services tax (GST) subject to a maximum of Rs 10,000 and maximum of Rs 30,000 plus GST.

Last month, SBI had waived off home loan processing fees till 31 March to cash in on festive fervour.



we are not imposing a lockdown or closing our factories. We are only imposing minor restrictions so that this wave doesn't spread rapidly.

PAKISTAN PRIME MINISTER IMRAN KHAN
TALKING ON THE THIRD WAVE OF COVID-19 IN THE COUNTRY

The Statesman
NEW DELHI, TUESDAY 06 APRIL 2021

09

Rescue hampered by distance as more rain falls in Indonesia

Flash flooding killed at least 17 people elsewhere and at least 42 are missing

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LEMBATA, 5 APRIL

Rescuers were hampered by damaged bridges and roads and a lack of heavy equipment Monday after torrential rains caused multiple disasters on remote eastern Indonesian islands as well as East Timor.

At least 55 people have died and more than 40 are missing in Indonesia, and 11 deaths were reported in East Timor. The tropical cyclone causing the damage is expected to continue affecting the Southeast Asian nations for days while moving south toward Australia. Mud tumbled down from surrounding hills onto dozens of homes in Lamene village shortly after midnight Sunday on Adonara island in East Nusa Tenggara province. Rescuers recovered 38 bodies and at least five people were injured, said Lenny Ola, who heads the local disaster agency. Flash flooding killed at least 17 people elsewhere and at least 42 are missing, according to the National Disaster Mitigation



Agency Relief efforts were hampered by power outages, blocked roads covered in thick mud and debris, as well as the remoteness of the area on an island that only can be reached by sea which is now surrounded by high waves, said the agency's spokesman, Raditya Jati. Photos released by the agency showed rescuers and police and military personnel taking residents to shelters. The bodies of three people were recovered after being swept away by floods in Oyang Barang village, where 40 houses were also destroyed, Ola said. Hundreds of people fled submerged homes, some

of which were carried off by the floodwaters. In another village, Waiburak, three people were killed and seven missing after overnight rains caused rivers to burst their banks, sending muddy water into large areas of East Flores district, Ola said. Four injured people were being treated at a local health clinic. The rains also caused cold lava to tumble down the slopes of Ili Lewotolok volcano and hit several villages. That disaster on Lemabata island killed at least 11, while at least 16 others were still buried under tons of cold lava, Jati said. The lava was left after the volcano had erupted

in November. Hundreds of people were still involved in the rescue efforts as of Monday. At least nine villages have been affected by flash floods and a landslide that cut five bridges on the island, he said.

President Joko Widodo said he had ordered his cabinet ministers and the chiefs of the military, police and disaster agency to carry out emergency response measures and search and rescue operations as quickly as possible.

I can feel the grief of our brothers and sisters there caused by this disaster, Widodo told a televised address, offering his deep condolences to the victims. In East Timor, 11 people were killed in the capital, Dili, as the rains caused flooding, overflowing dams and landslides. We are still searching for the areas impacted by the natural disasters and the toll could rise, said Joaquim Jos Gusmo dos Reis Martins, the nation's secretary of state for civil protection.

Tropical Cyclone Seroja has produced high waves, strong winds and heavy rains for the past three days and its

effects were expected to last until Friday, said Dwikorita Karawati, the head of Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysical Agency.

She warned that the cyclone could trigger tidal waves up to 4 meters (more than 13 feet) on Sumba, Flores and Rote islands in East Nusa Tenggara province and up to 6 meters (19.6 feet) in the southern part of the province and in the Banda Sea and Indian Ocean.

Authorities were still collecting information about the full scale of casualties and damage in the affected areas, Jati said. Severe flooding also has been reported in Bima, a town in the neighboring province of West Nusa Tenggara, forcing more than 10,000 people to flee.

Seasonal rains frequently cause flooding and landslides in Indonesia, an archipelago of 17,000 islands where millions of people live in mountainous areas or near fertile flood plains. Australian forecasters have warned residents in Western Australia state's far north that the tropical cyclone was intensifying and moving toward them.

Bangladesh imposes 7-day nationwide lockdown amidst spike in Covid-19 cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHAKA, 5 APRIL

Bangladesh on Monday clamped a week-long nationwide lockdown, suspending public transport and shutting markets to combat the surge in coronavirus cases in the country, amidst demonstrations by small business owners against the move.

According to a government circular issued on Sunday, the directives will remain in effect from 6am of April 5 till 12 midnight of April 11, the Dhaka Tribune reported.

People have been asked not to move out from their homes from 6 pm to 6 am, the report said.

The decision was taken in light of the current situation in the country where the rate of infections and deaths have increased in recent weeks. The government has said that they are increasing the number of COVID-19-designated hospitals and ICU beds to deal with the rising number of patients, it said.

Bangladesh has registered 7,087 fresh COVID-19 cases,

taking the tally to 637,364, in the last 24 hours until Sunday which is the highest number of infections since the start of the pandemic, the United News of Bangladesh reported. Besides, the deaths due to coronavirus rose to 9,266 with 53 news fatalities during this period. The mortality rate fell to 1.45 on Sunday from Saturday's 1.46 per cent.

All public transport services (roads, river, railway and domestic flights) were suspended and only emergency services remained operational.

However, all government/nongovernment/autonomous offices, courts and private offices will be able to facilitate the commute of their employees to work using their own transport on a limited scale.

Thousands of people left Dhaka on Sunday fearing getting trapped during the lockdown. Most of the people who left were unemployed or in poverty. Many shop owners and employees have, however, taken to the streets protesting the government's decision to shut down all shopping malls and

markets during the weeklong lockdown, the Dhaka Tribune reported. Several hundred traders staged their demonstrations in Dhaka's New Market area blocking the road. This is the second time lockdown has been imposed in Bangladesh. The country earlier imposed a 66-day lockdown from March 26 to May 30 last year when a nationwide holiday was also enforced.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged people to help curb the spread of the virus in a speech in Parliament.

I know everyone will face difficulties. Despite this, I say lives should be given preference over everything, Hasina said Sunday.

Hasina has sought everyone's cooperation to combat the ongoing second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Bangladesh.

Speaking on the new strain of coronavirus in the country, the premier said: The damage done by the new virus variant is hard to detect right away. One's condition worsens suddenly. For this, we have to be careful."

Bangladesh: At least 26 dead as launch capsizes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHAKA, 5 APRIL

Hasan, sank after colliding with the cargo ship, SKL-3, at the mouth of the Syedpur Koila Ghat on the Shitalakkhya River in Munshiganj. Police and onlookers said the cargo vessel fled the scene after the collision, it said. The launch was en route Munshiganj, the report said. A seven-member committee headed by Additional District Magistrate (ADM) has been formed to investigate the incident, Narayanganj Deputy Commissioner Mostain Billah said.

The district administration will give a compensation of Tk25,000 (USD 296) to each of

the deceased's family for the burial process, he added. The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority has also formed a four-member to probe the mishap, the report said. The launch had an estimated 150 passengers. Port Police Officer-in-Charge (OC) Deepak Chandra Saha confirmed that 50-60 of them were able to swim in the two banks, but three of them had to be rushed to the hospital.

Narayanganj District Deputy Director of Fire Service Abdullah Al Arefin said due to the storm, they were late in starting the rescue work.

Jordan prince Hamzah remains defiant in new audio recording

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BEIRUT, 5 APRIL

Jordan's Prince Hamzah says he has been threatened by the country's security agencies but does not plan to follow their unacceptable orders that he remain confined at home and cut off from public communication, according to a new voice recording released Mon-

day. The recording, which circulated online, indicates that tensions are running high between Jordan's King Abdullah II and his half-brother Hamzah, a former crown prince. The United States quickly sided with Abdullah, a close Western ally in a volatile region. Jordanian authorities said on Sunday they had foiled a malicious plot by Hamzah

to destabilise the kingdom with foreign support. Hamzah has denied being part of any plot and says he is being targeted for speaking out against corruption and poor governance.

The army chief of staff came to me and issued threats in the name of heads of security agencies, Hamzah says in the recording.

"When an army chief of staff says that, this is something that I think is unacceptable.

An individual close to the prince confirmed the authenticity of the recording, speaking on condition of anonymity because of security concerns. The individual said the recording is a few days old and was made after the army chief threatened the prince.

Israel PM Netanyahu back in court as parties weigh in on his fate

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JERUSALEM, 5 APRIL

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was back in court for his corruption trial on Monday as the country's political parties were set to weigh in on whether he should form the next government after a closely divided election or step down to focus on his legal woes.

Between witness testimony in a Jerusalem courtroom and the consultations at the president's office across town, it promised to be a day of extraordinary political drama, bringing into sharp focus Netanyahu's increasingly desperate efforts to stay in power.

He is Israel's longest-serving prime minister and has

clung to power through four hard-fought elections in less than two years, even as he has faced allegations of bribery, fraud and breach of trust.

The March 23 election was largely a referendum on his leadership but produced no clear verdict. Israel's political parties, meanwhile, began meeting with President Reuven Rivlin to recommend which candidate should be tasked with forming the next government. After each election, Israel's president is responsible for designating a party leader to try to put together a governing majority. That decision is usually clear cut, but Rivlin faces a difficult choice given the fragmented election results that left the Knesset, Israel's parliament, divided between 13 parties with broad ideological differences.

Neither Netanyahu's allies nor his foes secured a governing majority.

So his fate could come down to Naftali Bennett, a right-wing former ally with whom he has strained ties, and

Mansour Abbas, the leader of a small Arab Islamist party who also has yet to commit to either the pro- or anti-Netanyahu blocs.

Rivlin was quoted by Israeli media as saying he did not see how any ruling coalition could be formed and expressing

concern Israel would go into a fifth round of elections.

At the Jerusalem District Court, Netanyahu sat with his lawyers as lead prosecutor Liat Ben-Ari read out the charges against him. The relationship between Netanyahu and the defendants became currency, something that could be traded, she said. The currency could distort a public servant's judgment. Netanyahu's lawyers sought to make a rebuttal but were cut off by Judge Rivka Friedman-Feldman, who said they had already responded to the charges earlier in the trial.

The judge then ordered a brief recess, during which Netanyahu left the courthouse. Outside the courtroom, dozens of supporters and

opponents of the prime minister gathered to protest on opposite sides of the building amid heavy police presence, highlighting Israel's deep divisions. Anti-Netanyahu protesters have held weekly demonstrations for months, calling on him to resign.

Just a few kilometers (miles) away, a delegation from Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party formally recommended him as prime minister in a meeting with Rivlin.

Netanyahu is charged with accepting bribes, fraud and breach of trust in three cases.

The first involves Netanyahu allegedly receiving gifts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from wealthy friends, including Hollywood film producer

Arnon Milchan and Australian billionaire James Packer. In the second case, Netanyahu is accused of trying to orchestrate positive coverage in a major Israeli paper in exchange for curbing distribution of a free pro-Netanyahu tabloid.

The third, dubbed Case 4000, which will be the focus of Monday's first witness testimony, alleges that Netanyahu backed legislation worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the owner of Israeli telecom giant Bezeq in return for positive coverage on its news site Walla. Netanyahu has denied any wrongdoing, dismissing the charges against him as part of a media and law enforcement witch hunt to unseat him. His trial began last year and could last for another two

years.

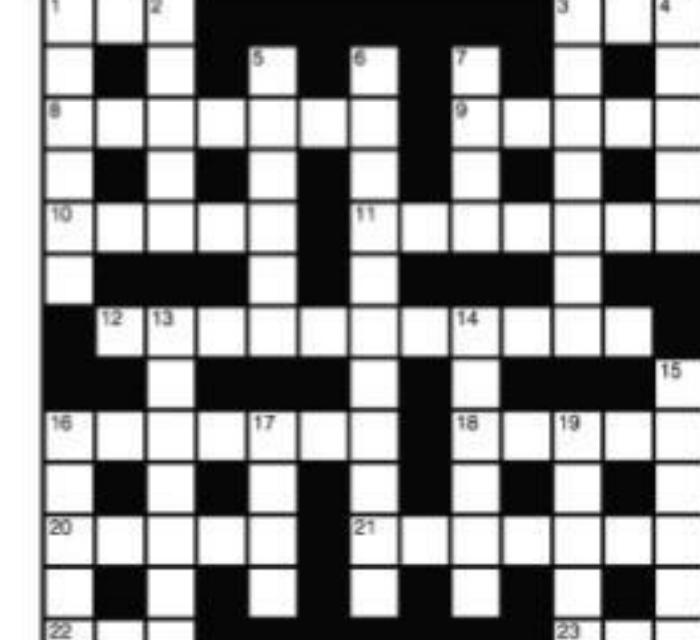
In January, prosecutors alleged 315 instances of Walla being requested to amend its coverage so it was more favorable to Netanyahu and his family. They said 150 of them involved Netanyahu himself.

According to the charges, Shaul Elovitch, CEO of Bezeq, exerted heavy and continuous pressure on Ilan Yeshua, the former chief editor of Walla, to change articles on the website to meet the demands of Netanyahu and his family.

Yeshua, who took the stand after Netanyahu left, said he regularly received requests from Elovitch and aides to the prime minister, asking him to smear the prime minister's political opponents, including Bennett.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Standard score (3)
3 Item of winter sport equipment (3)
4 Hot red sauce (7)
5 Hit hard (5)
10 Church tax (5)
11 Set alight (7)
12 Besides (11)
16 Footwear item (7)
18 Sailing vessel (5)
20 Storey (5)
21 Impartial (7)
22 Flow (3)
23 Organ of sight (3)

DOWN
1 Edible tuber (6)
2 Automaton (5)
3 Disperse (7)
4 Annoyed (5)
5 Facet (6)
6 Overbearing (11)
7 Water bird (4)
13 Mythical creature (7)
14 Cosmetics (4-2)
15 Postpone (6)
16 As yet (2,3)
17 Saucy (4)
19 Austrian cake (5)

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD
ACROSS 1 Show of 1 War, 2 Nowt (Worn-out), 3 Unclear, 4 Rainbow, 5 Nasal, 6 Wagered, 7 Stale, 8 Numerical, 9 Sight, 10 Throb, 11 Enlarge, 12 Show of 1 War, 13 Hectare, 14 Interfering, 15 Fuss, 16 Reply, 17 Elect, 18 Agree, 19 Austrian cake (5)

By arrangement with The Independent
Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



DADDY DAZE/John Kovaleski



NEED TO KNOW

HOSPITALS

22586262, 22585007

RAILWAY INQUIRY

23860626

ROADWAYS INQUIRY

23864470

PORTWAYS INQUIRY

23868709

AIRPORTS INQUIRIES

23868737

FLIGHT INQUIRIES

23868737

SHIPPING INQUIRIES

23868737

GENERAL INQUIRIES

23868737

TELEGRAMS

23868737

TELEGRAPHIC MESSAGES

23868737

TELETYPE MESSAGES



Russian military movements near its shared border with Ukraine posed no threat to Ukraine or anyone else

KREMLIN SPOKESMAN DMITRY PESKOV

AFTER NATO VOICED CONCERN OVER RUSSIAN MILITARY BUILD-UP NEAR EASTERN UKRAINE

THUMBNAILS



Waves from the North Sea crash against the Tynemouth Lighthouse on the north east coast of England, where cold winds have brought freezing temperatures on Monday. Recent warm weather has changed as temperatures have dropped.

Philippines extends lockdown: The Philippine government extended a lockdown by another week on Monday after an alarming spike in coronavirus infections continued to surge and started to overwhelm many hospitals in the capital and outlying regions. AP

Greece: Retail stores across most of Greece were allowed to reopen Monday despite an ongoing surge in Covid-19 infections, as the country battles to emerge from deep recession. Stores in greater Athens opened for pickup services only but remain closed in Thessaloniki and Patras. AP

Poland: Polish hospitals struggled over the Easter weekend with a massive number of people infected with Covid-19 following a huge surge in infections across Central and Eastern Europe. Tougher restrictions were ordered in Poland for two weeks. AP

EU sounds alarm at Russian troops' Ukraine border moves

BRUSSELS, 5 APRIL

The European Union has pledged its "unwavering" support for Ukraine's government, with the EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, expressing major worries over Russian troop movements.

"Following with severe concern the Russian military activities surrounding Ukraine," Borrell wrote online after a phone call with Ukraine's foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba. "Unwavering EU support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Borrell said he would hold further talks on the issue with Kiev's top diplomat and foreign ministers from the EU's 27 nations at a meeting later this month.

Ukraine this week accused Russia of massing thousands of military personnel on its northern and eastern borders as well as on the Crimean peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014. US warns Nord Stream pipeline is a Russian geopolitical project.

The Kremlin did not deny the recent troop movements but insisted that Moscow was "not threatening anyone".

Reports of a buildup have swirled amid an escalation of armed clashes along the front line between Ukraine's forces and Russian-backed separatists.

The long-simmering conflict has claimed more than 13,000 lives since 2014, according to the UN. Western leaders including Joe Biden have said they are standing by Ukraine. AGENCIES

Rapid Covid tests twice weekly for all in England

Experts: More people getting tested will help identify new Covid variants

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, 5 APRIL

Everyone in England will be able to access free, regular, rapid coronavirus testing from later this week to track asymptomatic Covid-19 cases, the UK government announced on Monday.

As a step forward to start lifting lockdown restrictions for all businesses, shops and restaurants, anyone will be able to access the free, rapid lateral flow tests for themselves and their families to use twice a week starting this Friday.

The vaccine programme has been a shot in the arm for scientists to track and trace any new variants of coronavirus more effectively because more people getting a test will increase the ability to identify and control mutations.

Massive efforts have been made by the British public to stop the spread of the virus. As we continue to make good progress on our vaccine programme and with our roadmap to cautiously easing restrictions underway, regular rapid testing is even more important to make sure those efforts are not wasted, said UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

That's why we're now rolling out free rapid tests to everyone across England helping us to stop outbreaks in their tracks, so we can get back to seeing the people we love and doing the things we enjoy, he said.

Rapid testing has so far been available to those most at risk and people who need to leave home for work, including frontline National Health



Service (NHS) workers, care home staff and residents, and schoolchildren and their families. Now rapid testing will be offered to everyone, with people encouraged to take regular tests.

The vaccine programme has been a shot in the arm for the whole country, but reclaiming our lost freedoms and getting back to normal hinges on us all getting tested regularly, said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

The British public have shown over the last year that they quickly adapt and always do what is right in the interest of public health, and I know they will do their bit by getting tested regularly in the months ahead, he said.

Rapid testing detects cases quickly, meaning positive cases can isolate immediately. Since rapid testing was introduced, over 1,20,000 positive cases that would not have been found otherwise have already been identified.

Over 1,00,000 businesses in England have already registered their interest to provide rapid tests to their employees, and the offer of free testing is being expanded to companies with over 10 workers where on-site testing is impossible.

The expanded regular test-

Boris Johnson expected to unveil Covid passports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON, 5 APRIL

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to unveil a series of measures later on Monday as part of plans to start unlocking the UK from its coronavirus lockdown, including so-called Covid passports for mass events and a traffic lights system for foreign travel.

After a Cabinet meeting to finalise the latest set of plans, Johnson will host a Press conference to set out details of the next stage in his roadmap which will see non-essential shops reopen and pubs and restaurants start serving outdoors from 12 April.

"One of the things we don't want to see and just as the vaccination programme is working so well is getting new variants or risking new variants getting imported into this country," UK health minister Edward

Argar told the BBC.

As part of the announcements, Johnson is expected to lay out details of trial events in the coming months that will explore how ventilation and testing before and after events could help audiences back into arenas and auditoriums.

The pilot schemes involving what is being dubbed as "Covid-status certification" will include the football FA Cup final and are expected to involve a smartphone app or a paper certificate.

The trials will last until mid-May, when the next phase of lockdown easing is scheduled before a complete easing of restrictions by 21 June under Johnson's roadmap.

Non-essential international travel remains banned under current lockdown rules and the government advice continues to go against booking any overseas trips for summer.

ing offer for the public will be delivered through a home ordering system, at community testing sites or through collection at pharmacies.

If testing at home, individuals will need to register their results online or by calling 119. They should self-isolate if positive and order a follow up confirmatory PCR test.

Scotland, Wales and North-

ern Ireland are following their own, similar paths out of a strict lockdown that was imposed at the beginning of this year.

Britain is able to pursue a recovery after it gave AstraZeneca and Pfizer shots to well over half the adult population. A reopening of schools in March has also not yet led to a spike in cases, despite increased testing.

EASTER POMP



Dressed in folk costumes, young members of the Marcal Dance and Folk Art Association pour water on a young woman in Menföcsanak, near Györ, Hungary on Monday. According to an old Hungarian tradition, on Easter Monday young men pour water on young women, who in exchange present their sprinklers with hand-decorated coloured eggs.

AP

Trial in Floyd's death expected to turn to ex-cop's training

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MINNEAPOLIS, 5 APRIL

The trial of a former Minneapolis police officer in George Floyd's death is expected to turn toward the officer's training on Monday after a first week that was dominated by emotional testimony from eyewitnesses and devastating video of Floyd's arrest.

Derek Chauvin, 45, is charged with murder and manslaughter in the May 25 death of Floyd. Chauvin, who is white, is accused of pinning his knee on the 46-year-old Black man's neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds as Floyd lay face-down in handcuffs outside of a corner market.

Prosecutors say Chauvin's knee killed Floyd. The defense argues that Chauvin didn't do what he was trained to do and that Floyd's use of drugs and underlying health conditions caused his death.

Floyd's treatment by police was captured on widely seen bystander video that soon sparked protests that rocked Minneapolis and quickly spread to other US cities and beyond. The video, plus officers' body-camera video and previously unseen bystander footage, was a heavy component of the first week of the trial, reawakening traumatic memories for viewers of the live-streamed trial.

Police Chief Medaria Arradondo is expected to testify during the trial's second week, perhaps as early as Monday. Arradondo, the city's first Black chief, fired Chauvin, who joined the department in 1985, said he has never been trained to kneel on someone's neck if their hands are cuffed behind.

LATEST ATTACK PUSHES US CAPITOL POLICE FURTHER TOWARD CRISIS

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, 5 APRIL

The US Capitol Police are struggling. One officer was killed and another injured when a driver slammed into them at a barricade Friday afternoon.

The attack comes after officers were overrun and injured when a violent mob of Trump supporters overran the Capitol on 6 January, breaking through insufficient barriers and pushing their way to within steps of lawmakers. One officer died and another killed himself.

Scores of officers are considering early retirement, top leaders have resigned and those in office face increasing criticism. Security concerns over the events of the past four months may alter not only how the department operates, but also whether the historically public grounds can remain open.

The head of the Capitol Police union said officers are reeling following the death on Friday of Officer Billy Evans, who was on the force for 18 years. He was struck at a Capitol entrance by a man who, according to investigators, suffered from delusions and suicidal thoughts.

Evans' death comes after Officer Brian Sicknick, who was among hundreds of officers trying to fight off rioters without the necessary equipment or planning, died following the January 6 riot.

Officer Howard Liebhengood died by suicide shortly afterward.

Hundreds of officers are considering retirement or



finding jobs elsewhere, union chair Gus Papathanasiou said in a statement.

They continue to work even as we rapidly approach a crisis in morale and force numbers," he said, noting that officers are dealing with "massive amounts of forced overtime."

Dozens of officers were injured on January 6 and others have been held out of working during an internal investigation into the department's response, including the officer who fatally shot a 35-year-old woman attempting to climb through a broken window as she and others massed at a barricaded doorway.

That's further depleted a force that has more than 200 vacant positions, roughly 10 per cent of its authorized force level.

In the months since the insurrection, many officers have routinely worked 12-hour days or longer to protect the building during Biden's January 20 inauguration and impeachment proceedings against former President Donald Trump.

This rips the scab off and continues to provide a level of uncertainty and worry about the workplace and what's happening there, said

Rep. Tim Ryan, an Ohio Democrat who chairs a subcommittee overseeing Capitol Police funding.

And I think this is very personal for so many of us who have come to really love and respect the Capitol Police even more than we already had, because of what they did on January 6, and then immediately turning it around to make sure that the inauguration was safe.

Acting Chief Yogananda Pittman received a vote of no confidence from the union in February, reflecting widespread distrust among the rank and file. Pittman was assistant chief in charge of intelligence during the riot and has admitted she did not see an FBI assessment the day before warning of war at the Capitol.

Steven Sund, who resigned in January as the agency's chief amid scrutiny over whether the police force was adequately prepared for the riot, told The Associated Press that officers he had spoken to were on edge.

The grief and crises that have engulfed the Capitol Police are also part of broader social forces that have tested the country, Sund said.

There's the impact of the pandemic on the American psyche," Sund said. The statement was issued amid a debate over whether Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who withdrew Turkey from the Montreux Convention to protect women last month, could also pull the country out of the 1936 Treaty of Montreux, which regulates the passage through the straits.

Turkey: Ex-admirals detained over statement on Straits agreement

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ANKARA (TURKEY), 5 APRIL

Turkish authorities on Monday detained 10 former admirals after a group of more than 100 retired top navy officers issued a midnight statement that government officials tied to Turkey's history of military coups.

The 10 retired admirals were detained as part of an investigation, launched by the chief prosecutor in Ankara on Sunday, over suspicions that they had reached an agreement with the aim of committing a crime against the security of the state and the constitutional order, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported.

Four others were not detained because of their advanced ages but were asked to report to the authorities within three days, Anadolu reported.

A total of 103 retired admirals signed the statement declaring their commitment to an international treaty that regulates shipping through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, which link the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea. The 14 suspects are believed to have organized the declaration.

The statement was issued amid a debate over whether Erdogan, who withdrew Turkey from the Montreux Convention to protect women last month, could also pull the country out of the 1936 Treaty of Montreux, which regulates the passage through the straits.

The suspects were detained at their homes in Ankara, Istanbul and Kocaeli, and were to be questioned by the chief prosecutor's office in the capital.

and other international treaties.

Erdogan's plans to build an alternative waterway to the north of Istanbul that would bypass the Bosphorus, had also sparked debate over the Montreux treaty.

The fact that withdrawing from the Montreux Convention was opened to debate as part of talks on Canal Istanbul and the authority to exit from international treaties was met with concern, the retired admirals said in a declaration released late Saturday.

The statement triggered strong condemnation by ruling party and government officials who drew a parallel with statements that accompanied past military takeovers in Turkey.

Turkey experienced coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980, and a 1997 military intervention caused the resignation of an Islamist-led coalition government. In 2016, a failed coup led to more than 250 deaths.

Anadolu reported that those detained include Cem Gurdeniz, the name behind Turkey's controversial Blue Homeland doctrine, which claims vast sections of the Mediterranean and Aegean and its undesignated energy deposits. The concept is at odds with Greece and Cyprus' claims in the region.

The suspects were detained at their homes in Ankara, Istanbul and Kocaeli, and were to be questioned by the chief prosecutor's office in the capital.

Florida works to avoid 'catastrophic' pond collapse

ASSOCIATED PRESS
PALMETTO, 5 APRIL

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said Sunday that crews are working to prevent the collapse of a large wastewater pond in the Tampa Bay area while evacuating the area to avoid a "catastrophic flood."

Manatee County officials say the latest models show that a breach at the old phosphate plant reservoir has the potential to gush out 340 million gallons of water in a matter of minutes, risking a 20-foot-high wall of water.

"What we are looking at now is trying to prevent and

respond to, if need be, a real catastrophic flood situation," DeSantis said at a press conference after flying over the old Piney Point phosphate mine.

Authorities have closed off portions of the US Highway 41 and ordered evacuations of 316 homes. Some families were placed in local hotels.

Officials began evacuating about 345 inmates from a local jail about 1 mile (1.6 kilometers) away from the 77-acre pond first floor on Sunday afternoon, the Tampa Bay Times reported.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection says the water in the pond is



primarily salt water mixed with wastewater and storm water. It has elevated levels of phosphorous and nitrogen and is acidic, but not expected to be toxic, the agency says. Crews have been discharging water since the pond began leaking in March. On Friday, a significant leak that was detected escalated the

response and prompted the first evacuations and a declaration of a state of emergency on Saturday. A portion of the containment wall in the reservoir shifted, leading officials to think a collapse could occur at any time.

Hopes said the team is nearly doubling the amount of water being pumped out of the pond and taken to Port Manatee. Currently about 22,000 gallons of water are being discharged per minute, and Hopes said he expects the risk of collapse to decrease by Tuesday.

Early Sunday, officials saw an increase of water leaking out, but Hopes says it seems to have plateaued. The water running out on its own is going to Piney Point creek and into Cockroach Bay, an aquatic preserve in the Tampa Bay north of the facility.

"Looking at the water that has been removed and the somewhat stability of the cur-

rent breach, I think the team is much more comfortable today than we were yesterday," he said. "We are not out of the critical area yet."

Hopes



RAJIV GULSHAN

Hospitality is all about the human experience. Hospitality education, in turn, has its fundamentals set around human capital and the way it can be leveraged for an optimal service experience. The pandemic has affected the education industry across the world and hospitality education is certainly on the path to be reshaped as well, calling for a more robust, long-term reform.

One of the defining features of hospitality education is real-world learning. There is an equal focus on both the theoretical as well as the practical. Students learn from past and current organisational models, case studies and industry stories, and the industry immersion enables them to put the theory into practical use. In short, the course prepares students for the industry even before they enter it.

Like all sectors, the last year was no different for the hospitality industry, but it has certainly reshaped the way it operates, and the way education is imparted. New opportunities have emerged, and there could not be a better time to adapt and be part of an industry that is ready to move on to the next defining phase.

While Covid-19 might have acted as a trigger for change in the country's

education model for more individualisation, flexibility and global reach, there is a need for hospitality education in India to redesign for the better.

Time to upgrade academic curriculum

Undergraduate courses must provide students with knowledge, but at the same time, they should also impart an enriching learning experience. Knowing more is becoming less relevant in society today, while soft skills like problem-solving, social skills, critical thinking, creativity, and inspiration are turning out to be more crucial. Current curricula must incorporate life skills as an integral part of the delivery strategy.

It is all about skilling

With the National Education Policy coming into existence, the curriculum should now move from just the operational side of education to teach students business skills and help develop an entrepreneurial outlook. It is critical to enable social-emotional learning to instil universally applicable practical skills that will prepare students for a world of opportunities.

It requires educational institutions to build a skill set for students that will be transferable, regardless of the industry they join. The need to

learn soft skills is as important as hard skills in today's environment and the curriculum for hospitality education must include business acumen, entrepreneurial thinking, and consumer behaviour.

Efficient adoption of technology

Technology is becoming a catalyst for education to reach people in all parts of the world. Technological advancements like artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, robots and chatbots are revolutionising the way hospitality businesses operate and will continue to shape the way students learn, interact and work.

The future belongs to only those who will be able to truly harness technology to deliver the expected levels of customer experience. Modern curriculum demands the incorporation of lessons that drive innovative and entrepreneurial mindset.

Collaboration between academia and industry

Education is no longer restricted to physical spaces of classrooms and colleges. It is imperative to expose students to industry learning and work experience during their programme. While they must get practical exposure in the industry, the need of the hour is to have better organised internships and more efficient

integration of the student-industry ecosystem.

For that, both academia and industry must work in increased collaboration so that internships add value to the entire student experience. It will help the industry in strengthening its quality of human capital and retain the interest of students, which is often lacking when their training experience is not progressive.

Welcoming and broad industry approach

A trend that is likely to change with the introduction of the NEP is the seamless movement of students, graduates and professionals from one industry to another. Students should be able to move in and out of different fields without facing many barriers. For this to become the norm, higher education has to prepare students for a multitude of careers that are centred on delivering brilliant customer experience. It can be achieved with a wholesome and versatile hospitality education that teaches holistic professional skills relevant across industries, departments and positions.

Universities and institutes can constantly monitor the industry and accordingly reflect on and revise the current modules. For instance, to keep in tune with the current scenario, they can integrate with the syllabus factors such as self-discovery and mindful learning. It is crucial to anticipate the needs of the sector and take education a step ahead so that students who enter the industry are at the forefront of changes and ready to embrace them.

Commencing a leadership series through a structured research scaffold, wherein students explore how leaders around the world historically handled similar challenging times can be a pertinent approach. Under the curriculum, cases relating to previous pandemics, plagues, famines can be studied, and debates can ensue on whether the leaders' reactions saved or destroyed the general populace or the country's economy.

Such kinds of research-oriented studies give students a deeper understanding of human nature. When integrated into the curriculum, they allow students to appreciate the need to be proficient in sound judgment and self-knowledge. Moreover, incorporating historical data and philosophy into the curriculum not only provides a valuable social background for leadership foundation, but also helps convey vital messages from the past so that we can better reflect on our practices today.

The writer is dean of academics, Indian School of Hospitality, Haryana

Revamping for the better

Incorporating historical data and philosophy into the hospitality education curriculum can help convey vital messages from the past



PLUS POINTS

Student traders

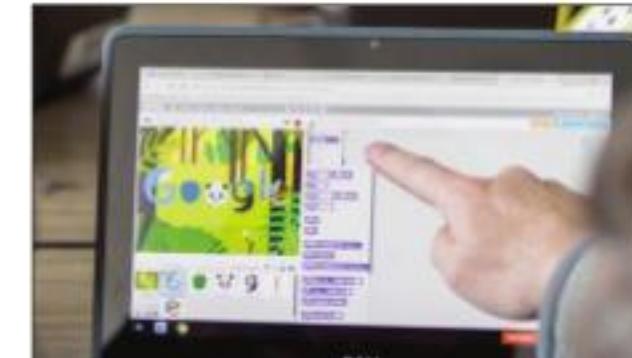


To help students step into the world of stocks and investment, StockGro joined hands with the Indian Institute of Management-Raipur to be the co-organiser of the institute's business spectacle – Virtual Stock Trading Competition.

During the week-long extravaganza, the teams participated in a two-day trading simulation event on the StockGro platform. Every individual player was tested based on their ability to invest the right virtual amount in the stocks and the one with the highest yield was declared the round winner.

The trading competition was followed by a 20-minutes online quiz in which the qualifying teams attempted to display their financial knowledge and know-how. During the game, each team had a predetermined set of stock of all industries and had to predict asset performance based on the sector. Cash prizes were handed out after the quiz.

Coding workshop



Indian Institute of Technology-Madras-incubated start-up "Grab Your Vernacular Imprint" is collaborating with the All India Council for Technical Education to upskill one million Indians in coding through a one-day free workshop called AI-For-India 1.0.

Targeted towards students, IT professionals, and anyone in the age group of eight to 80 years interested in coding, the event is scheduled to be conducted on 24 April. In this workshop, participants can learn to build a face recognition app using Python from industry experts. All the participants will gain free access to Guvi's Python course that helps them understand the concepts of the programming language.

Registrations have already begun and can be done on the website: https://www.givi.in/ai-for-india?utm_source=online&utm_medium=articles&utm_campaign=aiforindia

Girls in Stem



A study published by Quest Alliance cites that women only constitute about 14 per cent of the 280,000 scientists, engineers in research and development institutes in India. This alarming number is a clear indication of low participation of women in Stem – science, technology, engineering, and mathematics - disciplines.

Quest Alliance, in partnership with IBM, is trying to tackle this gender disparity by designing programmes like "Stem for Girls", that use coding as a means for self-expression. As part of the programme, Quest Alliance organised a Stem for Girls Hackathon with participation from 90 students across Karnataka, Telangana and Odisha in a two-month long process. Each team consisted of three girls.

Alumni lauded



The Indian Institute of Technology-Guwahati recently celebrated Alumni Awards 2020 in recognition of its alumni network's glorious professional achievements and contributions to society. The award ceremony was organised by the alumni and external relations office of the Institute in the presence of professor T G Sitharam, director, IIT-Guwahati, as the chief guest and Arman Mathur, president, IIT-Guwahati Alumni Association, as the guest of honour on 27 March.

Sitharam said, "I congratulate our alumni for their extraordinary achievements and success, and wish them the best for their future. It is a proud moment for me to announce that IIT-Guwahati has created the Alumni Portal to bridge the gap and create a special bond between the current and former students of our prestigious Institute."

NEW GENERATION OF WORKERS

VANYA GAMBHIR

ing demand.

Complex roles

Thanks to the exponential development in technologies with changes in consumption habits and marketing methods, web professions, particularly e-commerce, are transforming.

To find candidates that meet the specific needs of a company, the human resources manager must be a true expert who understands each profession's specificities. Today, a company that wants to succeed in its development on the web must know the difference between a webmaster, developer, Search Engine Optimisation specialist and data analyst.

A company, which does not understand specificities of different trades, risks recruiting a profile that does not really correspond to its needs or complement its digital development strategy.

Demanding candidates

Today, a growing number of companies entrust recruitment to firms specialising in the digital and e-commerce professions. But even for recruiting specialists, attracting the best candidates can be complicated.

With the growth of the e-commerce market, a good candidate will sometimes fit into dozens of positions.

Today, digital professionals are less impressed by traditional benefits such as meal vouchers or a 13th-month bonus. They seek a comfortable and rewarding work environment. Remote working is one of the advantages sought after by professionals these days and companies that want to retain the best profiles have every interest in adapting to this trend.

Boom in web/mobile sales and development profiles

Many jobs are expected to be created in the next few years in the sales and development sectors of web and mobiles. A common denominator of

With a sharp rise in online shopping, e-commerce markets are expanding operations, thereby creating a plethora of fresh job roles



this sectoral growth seems to emerge at the heart of the e-commerce segment.

The online retail sector's web development and data processing needs to represent a 58 per cent increase in developer profiles and 45 per cent in analysts. To fully understand the increases, it suffices to review e-commerce leaders' impact in terms of strategy and innovation. The big names in e-commerce have built their successes in web development and data processing. They set up algorithms and recommendation systems to analyse better as well as predict demand, manage stocks through geo-location, and even optimise marketing campaign conversions rates.

Logistics is a strong link in online sales

The success of online commerce lies primarily on the speed and apparent simplicity of transactions on the Internet. In addition to the lower

costs induced by the absence of a physical store, it is the flexibility and responsiveness of exchanges that attract individuals and professionals.

The promise of e-commerce goes beyond the product's sole framework and must ensure that quality services are provided to establish itself as a long-term benchmark in a relatively young sector.

Logistics and transport services, which take into account transparency of information, stock status, delivery, reliability, and after-sales service, are an obvious key to the success of any online sales business. Career opportunities in logistics sectors are all the more important today as there are many approaches, internalised or outsourced. The size and number of orders generated may lead some online sales players to internalise their logistics.

Thriving industry for creative people

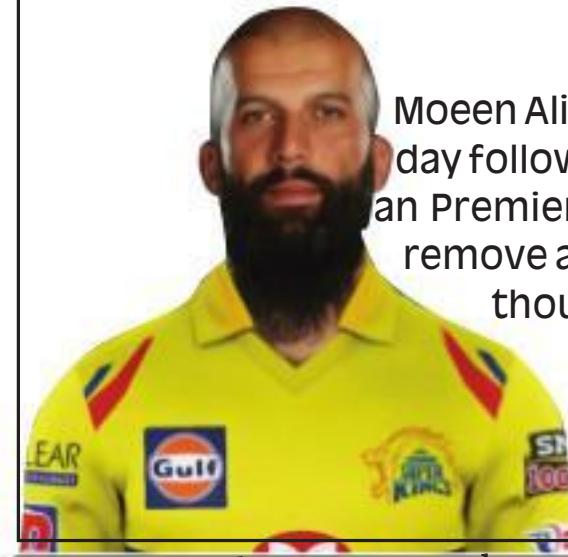
The focus of e-commerce is generally on providing quality content, with the creative aspect being overlooked.

Now that Google has started considering User Experience/User Interface of the website for ranking purposes, however, e-commerce platforms have started focusing on the creative aspect. That is why they too have started hiring content writers, copywriters, photographers and web designers.

The growth of e-commerce means that the demand for jobs will likely exceed supply soon. The industry will create a new generation of workers in the retail sector, including SEO specialists, e-commerce merchants, data analysts, user experience managers, social media managers, e-retail logistics and warehousing specialists to name a few.

The writer is chief operating officer, Khojdeal, Haryana

A LOT IN A LOGO?



Moeen Ali (in photo, left) compelled attention on Sunday following reports that he had requested his Indian Premier League franchise Chennai Super Kings to remove an alcohol brand's logo from his jersey. CSK, though, denied that an appeal had been made.

For more updates www.thestatesman.com

THUMBNAILS

Manunians win: Mason Greenwood completed a strong comeback by Manchester United in a 2-1 win over Brighton that strengthened the team's grip on second place in the Premier League. United look to underline their progress by finishing as runner-up.

Spurs held: Tottenham Hotspur caved in again on Sunday, conceding an 85th-minute goal to draw 2-2 at Newcastle and stay outside the top four of the Premier League. Tottenham are fifth, engaged in a tussle with perhaps six rivals to reach Europe's elite competition.

Southampton victorious: Southampton eased their relegation concerns by coming from two goals down to beat Burnley 3-2 for just a second win in the Premier League since the start of January. Nathan Redmond completed the comeback in the thrilling game.

Berlin derby: The Berlin derby saw fireworks outside the stadium and bad-tempered clashes on the field as Union Berlin and Hertha Berlin had a hard-fought 1-1 draw in the Bundesliga. Union denied Hertha an important win in their battle against relegation.

Dijon beaten: Marseille laboured to a 2-0 home win against last-place Dijon but strengthened their bid for a Europa League place after their rivals dropped points over the weekend. The win moved sixth-place Marseille one point behind Lens in fifth.

Martial injured: Manchester United's France forward Anthony Martial could miss the rest of the current season because of a knee injury sustained on international duty, the Premier League club said on Sunday. Manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer confirmed the news.

Artificial intelligence: Cricket coverage in the future could feature extensive use of Artificial Intelligence, which would enhance the quality of replays and make decision-making easier for umpires, it has been claimed. The change could come about in the next 12 months.

Irani dead: Former Mumbai cricketer and Kanga League giant Mehli Irani has died in Dubai. He was 90. A left-handed batsman who kept wicket, Irani played for the Kanga League for 50 years, representing Bombay Gymkhana and Parsee Cyclists at club level.

Miami Open: Hubert Hurkacz of Poland, ranked 37th, won the biggest title of his career by beating 19-year-old Jannik Sinner of Italy 7-6 (4), 6-4 in Sunday's Miami Open final. He improved to 10-0 in Florida this year, including the Delray Beach title in January.

Tournaments cancelled: Two Super 100 badminton tournaments - the Russian Open 2021 and Indonesia Masters - have been cancelled due to COVID-19 related restrictions, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) said on Monday. "The ongoing COVID-19 restrictions and complications left local organisers no choice but to cancel the tournaments," a BWF statement read.

Indian women lose 0-1 to Uzbekistan: The Indian women's football team slumped to a 0-1 defeat in its first friendly against Uzbekistan, courtesy a late strike by Mafatuna Shoyimova in Tashkent on Monday. While both sides created ample scoring opportunities, Uzbekistan found the back of the net with a late free-kick by Shoyimova in the 87th minute to grab the bragging rights. As the Uzbeks started off on a higher tempo in near-freezing conditions, India keeper Aditi Chauhan was called into action early on, as she did well to get down and grab a low cross from point-blank range.

Under new captain, Delhi Capitals target the title

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Delhi Capitals lost their captain well before the 2021 Indian Premier League started but it was the factor that made them arguably the most intriguing team going into the new season.

Shreyas Iyer's replacement as skipper of the team this year will be 23-year-old wicket-keeper-batsman Rishabh Pant (in photo), who couldn't make much of an impression last season. But he has put up career-defining performances since then for the Indian team.

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

He was dropped from the subsequent limited-overs tour of Australia but then turned things around in India's 2-1 Test series win. Impressive performances followed during the series against England and that preceded his becoming captain of the franchise.

Iyer's absence does leave a hole for DC in batting and it puts more pressure on the top order to perform. This brings into the focus Prithvi Shaw, who, unlike Pant, was dropped from the team after a string of failures last season and lost his place in the Indian set-up as well owing to his struggles with the bat.



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wickets in powerplay sessions and death overs.

Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin are valuable spin options for DC, although the former's

positive Covid-19 test puts him in doubt over his participation in the first match at least. It was a tale of two halves for DC last season - they started

emphatically winning seven out of their first nine matches. They, however, struggled towards the end of the league stage and, in the final, they lost to Mumbai Indians by five wickets. "We want to go one step further this year and that's the Delhi Capitals team goal. We have the players to win the title. We were very close last year and the plus-point for this season is that most of our players, such as Rishabh Pant, have been playing a lot of cricket. They have been in touch with the game and therefore they are in good rhythm going into the IPL," said assistant coach Mohammad Kaif.

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

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

Considering the match-timings, teams practicing at the CCI and MCA are scheduled to practice in 2 sessions – from 4pm to 6.30pm and 7.30pm to 10pm," wrote Sri-rang Gholap, Under-Secretary of the Disaster Management, Relief and Rehabilitation department, in a letter issued to the BCCI.

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

The city recorded more than 11,000 COVID-19 cases on Sunday.

"... permission has been requested for teams and the IPL staff (to) be allowed to practice inside the grounds after 8pm and they may be allowed free movement from the ground to their respective hotels after the said time. "Accordingly, permission is being hereby accorded for the said request subject to scrupulous adherence to the bio-bubble," stated the letter, a copy of which is in possession of PTI.

Pakistan keen on hockey exchanges

KARACHI, 5 APRIL

Senior officials of the cash-strapped Pakistan Hockey Federation will push for a revival of bilateral exchanges with India during the sport's 47th international congress in New Delhi next month.

PHF officials will be taking up resumption of series against India at neutral venues on the sidelines of the 47th international hockey federation - or FIH - statutory congress. The meetings are scheduled to be held from 19 May to 23 May in the Indian capital city. A senior PHF official said it was an important meeting as the FIH president and executive board members would be elected for the next four years.

"The meeting will give us an opportunity to talk to Indian hockey federation officials on the possibility of reviving bilateral ties that could benefit both Pakistan and India and hockey followers in either country," he said.

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