

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | THURSDAY | 8 APRIL 2021

WEATHER

Max: 38.0°C
Min: 23.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Humid.
Max/Min temp.
38/23 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Titthi: Phalguna Bahula Dwadasi till 3.16 am (Friday)
Star: Satabhisham till 4.57 am (Friday)
Variyam: 11.10 am to 12.51 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.15 am to 11.04 am; 3.10 pm to 3.59 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Sha'ban 25,1442 AH
PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.40 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.30 pm
Maghrib: 5.48 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.51 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.17 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 3.36 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 4.11 PM

COUNTER POINT

Voting for us is not enough... we will have to win to give you all freebies!

SHORT TAKES

Photo of missing commando out

Bijapur: A photograph of Rakeshwar Singh Manhas sitting in a hut was released by Maoists who abducted the CoBRA commando after the fierce gun battle on April 3. However, his family said the photograph of Manhas, a commando with the 210th CoBRA battalion of the CRPF, was 12 months old.

■ Report on Page 4

Tribunals reforms ordinance issued

New Delhi: The government has issued an ordinance which does away with certain appellate tribunals, including the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT) set up to hear appeals of filmmakers, and transfers their functions to other existing judicial bodies. The Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021, issued by the Ministry of Law and Justice, was notified on Sunday.

INSIDE

■ STATE... PAGE 2
TD's former MLA Varma joins YSRC

■ STATE... PAGE 3
Pictographic inscriptions found at Srisailem temple

DIRECTOR'S | CUT

Ace filmmaker to launch new OTT platform Spark

OTT heralded new era: RGV

SRIRAM KARRI | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

On April 7, Ram Gopal Varma turned 59. He might as well be 18 or 24 or 36. He couldn't care less. His energy, perpetual insistence on living in the present and enjoying every moment, seeking no gratification from the public by way of approvals or peer adulation, all these qualify him to be a teenager, in mind, and forever.

His intrepid courting of controversies with zeal, one



after another, is his passport into every slice of life. "I have done more genres than any other film director," he gasconades. "Maybe every single genre

out there." "You have not done mythologies. Or a historical," he retorts, wondering if he would be offended. He, for sure, can't be

offended. He has a more open mind than anyone else our society is familiar with. He does not judge and wishes rather to understand. In a Dostoevsky-ish fervour, he focuses his emulous passion towards the truest subalterns of society — the rejects and the outcasts, the rebels against morality and the enemies of the state — criminals, underworld dons, hired assassins, and their ilk.

■ Page 2: India will see its first lesbian duet: Ramu



WORLD | 5

US military finds Xi closing in on Taipei



SPORTS | 8

Vinicius double sinks Liverpool

TABLOID

Surviving emotional nutrition



HC allows election to MPTC,ZPTCs today

No counting of votes till plea is disposed

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Andhra Pradesh High Court has given a green signal for conducting elections to zilla parishad and mandal parishad territorial constituencies as scheduled on Thursday. However, it has directed that counting of votes should not be taken up until the disposal of the writ petition.

A division bench, comprising Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami and C. Praveen Kumar, set aside the single judge bench interim stay order and directed the registry to list the petition for April 15 as the single judge bench had fixed it for the next hearing.

The court observed that the single judge, while granting the interim

order, had virtually allowed the writ petition, though it is still pending disposal and the order was also having a ring of finality as a direction was issued to the SEC for issue of fresh notification for conduct of MPTC and ZPTC polls.

The court further observed that while issuing the interim order, the single judge did not consider the aspect related to elections held after the order of the Supreme Court in respect of gram panchayats and municipal corporations and municipalities, as model code of conduct was not imposed for a period of four weeks.

The court observed that it was of the considered opinion that there were contentious issues to be adjudicated in the writ

petition and considering the matter in its entirety, the interim order was set aside.

The State Election Commission moved a house motion on April 6 with a plea to allow it conduct of elections on April 8 as it was resuming a paused election process and was not conducting polls afresh. Another petition filed by the Telugu Desam and other parties challenged the election notification issued by the SEC on April 1 stating that it violated the Supreme Court direction to maintain a four-week time from the date of issue of notification to conduct of polls for implementation of model code of conduct.

■ Page 2: Poll code enforced for 10 days: Plea

CM: Fast track Polavaram plan

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has instructed officials to speed up works of Polavaram project in the next 45 days with emphasis on cofferdam, spill channel and concrete works.

Reviewing works of various irrigation projects at his office in Tadepalli on Wednesday, the CM asked officials to also expedite completion of Nellore and Sangam barrages, tunnels 2 of Owk and Veligonda, apart from Veligonda head regulators 1 & 2.

Officials informed the Chief Minister that works on Polavaram cofferdam, apart from approach channel, are progressing at a brisk pace and will be completed by May. The

CM told officials that there is no shortage of funds when it comes to implementing Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) works for those displaced by the project.

Officials told the CM that Nellore and Sangam barrages will be completed by May. Chemical pouring works at Owk Tunnel 2 are going on at a brisk pace and will be completed by August to carry total 20,000 cusecs of water. Officials said Tunnel 1 of Veligonda project has been completed while Tunnel 2 of the project will be built by December. Steps are being taken to release water through Veligonda Tunnel 1 by September.

■ Page 2: CM wants row with Odisha resolved

INTEREST RATES NOT CHANGED BY CENTRAL BANK

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 7

Faced with renewed challenges to growth and inflationary pressures, the Reserve Bank of India-led monetary policy committee (MPC) in its first bi monthly policy review for FY22 on Wednesday kept the policy repo rate unchanged and decided to continue with its accommodative stance "as long as necessary" to ensure a durable economic recovery, especially since the second pandemic wave threatens the country's growth prospects. The central bank also chose to focus on supporting desired financial conditions through new instruments.

■ Full report on Page 7

TTD halts free darshan tokens as temporary step

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has decided to temporarily suspend issuance of free Sarva Darshan tokens to devotees under current booking system from 12th of this month. It has taken this decision following Covid-19 cases rising once again across the country as well as in the temple city.

In a statement on Wednesday, TTD made it clear that Slotted Sarva

Darshan (SSD) tokens will be issued at Bhudevi complex and Vishnu Nivasam in Tirupati only till the evening of April 11.

"There has been a spurt in Coronavirus cases in Tirupati city again. Since thousands of devotees wait at Bhudevi complex and Vishnu Nivasam for SSD tokens, the prospect of Covid-19 cases multiplying is likely. Hence, the temple body has decided to temporarily suspend issuance of free darshan tokens," a temple

official explained. He pointed out that Shirdi temple in Maharashtra has already suspended darshan for devotees following spurt in Covid-19 cases. TTD has asked devotees to take note of this development and refrain from visiting counters in Tirupati till further orders. Just last week, devasthanams had resolved to reduce issue of free darshan tokens from 22,000 to 15,000 a day.

■ Page 3: No word on other darshans



STUDENTS LEARNT MANY LESSONS THIS YEAR: MODI

New Delhi, April 7: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said students might have lost a year of their lives due to the coronavirus pandemic but they have learnt lot of lessons of true value of essential things.

In his annual interaction called *Pariksha Pe Charcha* with students ahead of board exams, he said the Covid-19 pandemic has taught everyone not to take anything for granted like regular school days and attending office.

"The pandemic has taught us to fight the unexpected. People have realised the importance of not taking anything for granted like regular school days, attending office," Modi said. — PTI

Encounters: J&K bans live coverage

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 7

The Jammu and Kashmir police has banned the "live" coverage of all encounters between the security forces and separatist militants and of "law and order situations", but used a somewhat obnoxious phrase to justify its plan to keep reporters and photographers away.

"Don't interfere in the professional and bona fide duty of police and the security forces at encounter

sites," IGP Ajay Kumar told the media. Responding to that, the Valley's media fraternity said reporters or camerapersons do not "interfere" in the work of the forces but discharge their professional duty while covering encounters, their aftermath or law and order situations.

Farooq Javed Khan, president of the Kashmir Photographers' Association, said: "First of all, we have to verify if the statement attributed to the IGP in identical reports circulat-

ed by local news agencies is really his. And if he has used the phrase 'don't interfere', then we would say it is obnoxious and, therefore, unacceptable." He added: "While covering encounters and law and order situations we strictly follow the rulebook and never exceed our brief. If we are not allowed to discharge our professional responsibility, then what are we there for?"

The Kashmir Press Club and various Valley-based media organisations, in a

joint statement, said the IGP's statement has created anguish among the media. "If this is a part of the official policy of the police, it appears to be a tactic to coerce journalists into not reporting the facts. It also seems a part of measures by the authorities to suppress freedom of the press. Summoning journalists to police stations, filing FIRs and seeking informal explanations for their work has intensified in the past two years", the statement said.

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IN BRIEF

CM WANTS ROW WITH ODISHA RESOLVED

From page 1

They said Vamsadhara Nagavali, Vamsadhara Phase 2 and Stage 2 works will be completed by July.

CM Jagan directed officials to resolve pending issues with neighbouring Odisha with regard to construction of Neradi Barrage. He pointed out that considerable money could be saved if irrigation projects are completed within the stipulated time. The Chief Minister said priority should also be given to Mahendra Tanaya, Madduvalasa Phase 2 and Tarakarama Sagar projects.

Reviewing works of Rayalaseema, Palnadu Drought Mitigation projects, Jagan Mohan Reddy asked officials to prepare an action plan to expedite their works.

Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, irrigation secretary J. Shyamala Rao, principal secretary (Finance) S. S. Rawat, ENC C. Narayana Reddy and other senior officials were among those present at the CM's review meeting.

POLL CODE ENFORCED FOR 10 DAYS: PLEA

from page 1

SEC's counsel C.V. Mohan Reddy submitted to the court that the order of the apex court should be understood as the maximum period for implementation of poll code and said that the SEC did not implement it either for the local body polls or the municipal polls.

He said that though the four-week model code of conduct was not implemented for municipal polls, it was not questioned earlier.

Petitioner and Telugu Desam leader Varla Ramaiah's counsel Vedula Venkata Ramana submitted that the order of the Supreme Court to implement model code of conduct four weeks prior to the date of election, was not followed by the SEC as it imposed poll code only for 10 days with respect to election to MPTCs and ZPTCs.

DURGA TEMPLE EO TRANSFERRED, NEW EO POSTED

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

The executive officer of Durga temple, Vijayawada, M.V. Suresh Babu, was transferred and the government posted D. Brahmaramba as the new EO of the temple.

The vigilance department and ACB officials had found lot of irregularities during their checks at Durga temple in February and submitted a report to the government, recommending disciplinary action against the erring staff and officials.

The opposition parties levelled allegations against Suresh Babu several times about his involvement in various irregularities.

The endowments department suspended 16 temple staff, including five superintendent-rank officials for the alleged irregularities and now EO has been transferred.

Dr G. Vani Mohan, principal secretary to the government, issued transfer orders on Wednesday, posting Suresh Babu as Regional Joint Commissioner, endowments department, Rajahmundry.

Brahmaramba working at Rajahmundry is to become the new EO with immediate effect.

The officials of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) had submitted a detailed report to the government on the irregularities in Kanaka Durga temple. According to the ACB official's report, Suresh Babu was involved in serious financial irregularities. The ACB further mentioned in its report that the Suresh Babu had disobeyed the orders of the endowments commissioner.

The ACB report revealed that Suresh Babu made payments against the audit rules and objections. The ACB in its detailed report mentioned that the EO made payments for tenders, quotations and equipment purchases against the regulations.

On the complaints received from a few devotees, sleuths of ACB and the Vigilance department had conducted surprise raids at the temple. The officials continued their raids for the next two days and verified the records at prasadam counter, sari auction counter, ticket counter, sanitation, protocol section, IT and security system.

2.46 crore people expected to cast their vote in Parishad polls

Arrangements are in place to provide PPE kits to Corona-infected voters

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Nearly 2.46 crore voters are expected to exercise their franchise to elect their representatives to 515 zilla parishad and 7,220 mandal parishad territorial constituencies in the polls to be held from 7 am to 5 pm on Thursday.

Out of 660 ZPTCs, polling will be held only in 515 as elections were withheld in eight constituencies for varied reasons while 126 ZPTCs were elected unanimously. Eleven contestants fielded by the political parties have died since March, 2020. There are 2,058 candidates in fray at present.

Similarly, out of 10,047 MPTCs, polling will only be held in 7,220 as elections were withheld in 375 constituencies while 2,371 MPTCs were elected unanimously. As many as 81 contestants have died since March, 2020. There are 18,782 contestants at present.

Election authorities have set up 27,751 polling stations all over the state and out of them, 6,492 are categorised as sensitive and another 6,314 as hypersensitive. Nearly 247 polling stations are considered to be extremist-affected. Webcasting facility has been arranged in 3,538 polling stations. They have arranged 43,830 big, 12,898 medium and 46,502 small ballot boxes.

In the wake of the prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic, the election authorities have arranged protective material like face masks, hand sanitizers, thermal scanners and gloves at polling stations. For voters infected with coronavirus, arrangements are in place to provide them PPE kits.

Election authorities are coordinating with police personnel to ensure peaceful elections. One officer from the commissioner of panchayat raj and rural development will monitor the process in each of the 13 districts while it also be followed through webcasting from the office of commissioner of panchayat raj.

With regard to counting of votes, 275 counting centres have been set up with all security arrangements and also in compliance with Covid-19 protocol.

A command and control centre has been set up to monitor election and counting processes at the office of commissioner of panchayat raj.

● **THE PREVALENCE OF Covid-19 pandemic, the election authorities have arranged protective material like face masks, hand sanitizers, thermal scanners and gloves at polling stations.**



Bapatla former TD MLA Manthena Anantha Varma joins the YSRC in the presence of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at the CM's Camp Office on Wednesday. Deputy Speaker Kona Raghuapati (right) and YSRC state general-secretary Lella Appireddy (left) are also seen.

TD'S FORMER MLA ANANTHA VARMA JOINS YSRC IN JAGAN'S PRESENCE

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Bapatla's former Telugu Desam MLA Manthena Anantha Varma joined the YSR Congress in the presence of Jagan Mohan Reddy at the camp office on Wednesday.

TD leaders Manthena Subbaraju, V. Venkateswara Raju, M.V.



Election staff collect gloves, face mask and sanitiser bottles from officials at Montessori college in Vijayawada on Wednesday, before proceeding to their voting centres of ZPTC and MPTC elections.

Jagan to campaign in temple city on April 14

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

Intensifying the ruling party's campaigning further in the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection, Chief Minister and YSRC president Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is likely to campaign in the temple city on April 14 in support of his party candidate Dr. M. Gurumurthy.

As per the tentative schedule, Jagan is likely to address a public meeting on the same day evening to seek votes for the YSRC candidate. In this regard, Chittoor district YSRC party in-charge and TTD chairman Y.V.

Subbareddy, Panchayat Raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy, Government Whip C. Bhaskar Reddy and others on Wednesday inspected the ground at Yogananda Engineering College near Renigunta to hold a public meeting.

The senior leaders also inspected Annamalah circle and other nearby places in Tirupati to chalk out a route map for Jagan's poll campaigning. Deputy Chief Minister K. Narayanaswamy, MLAs Bhumana Karunakar, Biyyapu Madhusudhan Reddy and party candidate M. Gurumurthy were also involved in making

arrangements for CM's visit and campaign.

In the meanwhile, the Tirupati LS byelection scene has warmed up at once with Jagan Mohan Reddy and Chandrababu Naidu deciding to campaign in the pilgrim city in support of their respective party candidates.

Naidu has been scheduled to campaign on the same day that Jagan conducts his poll campaign in Tirupati on April 14. Both the party leaders are putting all their efforts and making elaborate arrangements for making their respective party chiefs' public meetings a grand success.

Jyoti asks fisherfolk to vote for BJP candidate

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, MARCH 7

Union Minister Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti claimed that the Centre has been providing sizable funds to develop infrastructure in coastal areas, especially for traditional fishing communities.

Addressing an election campaign for K. Ratna Prabha, BJP nominee, at Muthukur, She said the government has been devising many schemes for extending support to the fishermen across the country under Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana.

Speaking on the occasion, MLC Vakati Narayana Reddy said the party had picked up former chief secretary of Karnataka K. Rathna Prabha for Tirupati LS bypoll since she was having enormous experience in administration and public service.

POLLING OFFICIALS RUSH TO THEIR LOCATIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, APRIL 7

After a division bench of the high court gave its green signal on Wednesday to hold the Parishat elections, polling officials in all the mandal headquarters rushed to the polling stations assigned to them.

Nellore SP Bhaskar Bhushan said they have deputed 2,667 police personnel including 9 DSPs, 31 CI/RIs, 408 ASI/HCs and 1,034 constables to ensure peaceful polling.

Prakasam SP Siddharth Kaushal said they have deputed 8,496 police personnel to ensure peaceful polls on Thursday.

NAIDU TO PRAY AT TIRUMALA BEFORE POLL CAMPAIGN

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

Telugu Desam supremo and former chief minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu is going to kick start his election campaign for the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection after offering prayers to Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala on Thursday.

As per the tentative schedule, Naidu will arrive at Tirupati airport on Thursday morning. Later, he will motor up to Tirupati to offer prayers at the hill shrine. He is scheduled to tour all the seven Assembly segments under Tirupati parliamentary constituency to campaign in support of party's candidate Panabaka Lakshmi.

Winding up the Tirumala visit, the TD chief will meet the party leaders and workers at a private convention centre in Renigunta. He will then address his first public meeting of the Tirupati LS byelection at Beri Vari Mandapam in Srikalahasti town in the evening.

According to party sources, accompanied by the party nominee Panabaka Lakshmi and other senior leaders, Naidu is set to cover at least one Assembly constituency a day.

From April 9 to 12, he will cover Gudur, Sullurpetta, Sarvepalli and Venkatagiri Assembly segments in the Nellore district and he is expected to campaign in Satyavedu in Chittoor district on April 13. He will take part in road shows and address public meetings in Tirupati on April 14 and April 15 till the campaign ends at 5 pm on the last day before the bypoll.

YSRC LEADERS ARE DISTRIBUTING MONEY: ANURADHA

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Telugu Desam state general secretary Panchumarthy Anuradha on Wednesday accused the ruling YSR Congress leaders and ministers of camping and distributing illegal money in Tirupati for the parliamentary byelection as they were afraid of defeat in a free and fair election.

She said that the seven ministers, who were made campaign incharges in the seven Assembly segments, were taking the electioneering to a new low.



YSR Congress MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy and party candidate Dr. M. Gurumurthy campaign for the Lok Sabha byelection in Tirupati on Wednesday.

Gurumurthy carries out door-to-door campaign

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy on Wednesday exuded confidence that the welfare schemes of the state government ensure a mammoth win of the YSRC nominee Dr. M. Gurumurthy in the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection, scheduled for April 17.

The two went on a door-to-door campaign in the 47th division of temple

city, seeking votes.

Speaking to media persons, Bhumana said that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has made sure that all scheme benefits would reach the doorstep of the people.

He lauded Tirupati people for their unprecedented support to the YSRC during the municipal elections.

Gurumurthy said he will continue to be in public service if given a chance in the ensuing poll.

Panabaka: Vote for TD to achieve self-respect of AP

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

Panabaka Lakshmi, Telugu Desam's contestant for Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection, assured that the lost self-respect of the Andhra people can only be achieved by voting to the TD, which left the NDA alliance and resigned to central ministerial positions after betrayal by the BJP.

Addressing the media at a press conference here on Wednesday, the six-time MP said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who promised a 'Special Category Status' to AP in an election meeting in Tirupati, has later sidelined his promise, citing the Niti Aayog recommendations. "How the BJP sanctioned thousands of crores to Bihar state before the Assembly elections and why the Niti Aayog was silent on the same", she said.

"The state of affairs is so pathetic that we cannot explain to our children where the state capital is, even after the PM laid the foundation stone. The indifference of the Centre towards farmers is also appalling", she added. She found fault with the Centre's move towards privatisation of banks, Vizag steel plant, etc.

Taking a dig at the AP Chief Minister and the ruling YSRC for failing to achieve SCS and other AP Reorganisation Act promises even after winning the 22 Lok Sabha seats, she stressed that this amounts to cheating the people who supported Jagan's slogan of 'one chance'.

"The state government has failed to provide MSP and cancelled the subsidy on farm mechanisation equipment. They also failed to speed up the Gudur flyover works and completing land acquisition process for Nadikudi-Srikalahasti and Gudur-Dugarajapatnam railway lines," she said.

Suresh seeks disqualification of rebel MP Raghurama

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

YSR Congress MP Nandigam Suresh appealed to the Lok Sabha Speaker to disqualify Narasapuram MP K. Raghurama Krishnam Raju for violating party discipline and making wild allegations against the party president.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, he said that Raju had indulged in violation of party discipline under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution of India and stern action has to be taken against him to set an example for avoiding such instances in the future. He said that the party shall suspend him in case the Speaker fails to take action against him.

Suresh said that Raju has no moral right to speak on Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's cases as there are CBI and ACB cases against him, and stated that he had approached the TD and the BJP seeking respite from those cases.

"Where you ever threatened or under pressure from the underworld," I ask. He is making a movie called the D-Company, on Dawood Ibrahim, and tries to recreate the Bombay of the '80s.

"I tried to understand criminals. What motivates them? What fears they have and how they face them? I did not try to humanise them but I did present their points of view too. Why would they want to hurt me?"

Have you lost your genius? I ask him. "Maybe I never had it. It is insane to think I can make another *Shiva* or *Kshana Kshanam* but am not making it. I or anyone else can only make a film. It is the viewers who make it a hit or a phenomenon. I can only enjoy the process of the next shoot, and that's all there is to it."

Why do you like to shock people and create controversies, I feel like asking. I don't. That is the whole point of being RGV. And I had quite clearly not come to talk to Rajamouli.

From Page 1

"I don't believe in God, so I can't be interested in mythology," he says. "I don't have the patience for history — the research it would take... like, I don't want to lose my time getting the costumes details correct."

I wish to ask him how for a man who does not believe in God he loves ghosts, but I let that pass.

RGV decides to invite me inside of an editing studio where he shares with me a promo of *Dangerous*, a movie he stresses is India's first truly lesbian love story on screen. Flashes of Shabhana Aazmi and Nandita Das in *Fire*, an avant-garde polemic movie which opened Deepa Mehta's brilliant and epic trilogy; but I am not want to mention *Fire*, lest a reference to Ram Gopal Varma's *Aag* being funny. Has he seen *Four More Shots Please*, I wonder.

Almost reading my mind, he expands the qualifier, "In *Dangerous*, India will see its first lesbian duet."

He is set to launch Spark OTT along with a partner, very shortly, which will also fuse RGV World.

"I am at the peak of my career and life. Filmmakers can pitch their ideas," he says, and he would find the funding, professionals, team and wherewithal to take it to fruition. He has launched more newcomers than most other Telugu film directors put together.

Does he believe in providing opportunities to talent or prefer being a mentor? No, he says, reverting to the familiar safe zone to fustigate social mores. "I don't believe in helping anyone. I just want to do what gives me pleasure in the same moment. At this point, I want to see not tens but hundreds of films being made."

Is this the most-amazing era of filmmaking, the most democratised context, where digital technology has broken barriers in production, editing, and then, when YouTube of the world have broken distribution too, and the OTT has ended even the tyrant

ny of the film theatre screens.

"Yes. Filmmakers can boldly speak out their thoughts today. Many barriers have been broken. I made a film recently with my mobile phone, spending ₹3,000 to ₹3,500 but earned a lot from it. Today, you can make a movie in five or 20 minutes, or in one hour," he beams with youthful exuberance.

Spark will not only be about bringing to the cloud everything RGV wishes himself to create in future, but will be an entry and launch platform for talented filmmakers. All what one has to do is send him a two-odd minute trailer of an idea. If RGV likes it, it could become the next *Shiva* or *Satya*, or *Sarkar* or *Company*.

We speak about censorship and morality, discuss pornography and the dangers of children getting access to things they are not ready yet for.

"With an internet-connected mobile phone, what can people today not see or know of? If we cannot cen-

sor the internet, we should stay away from censorship of OTT also. They used to take 20 days to give a censor clearance for a movie.

The sheer number of films, short films and documentaries on OTT and Internet makes this impossible. Besides, as a society we have surely moved past the idea that five people can dictate to a billion what they can see, or cannot."

We look at another trailer: a movie called *Ladki*. "India's first martial arts movie with a lady protagonist," he reveals. "It is an Indo-Chinese production."

I reflect within the silence and soothing calm of martial arts movies I have personally loved — *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* or Zhang Yimou's *Hero*. RGV's take is loud, very loud. But he's clearly in love with making changes as he focuses his attention on even the minute details.

RGV is a good litmus test for society. In an age where we are easily offended, or hurt, when the authority refuses to be questioned and tries to

IN BRIEF

No word on other darshans

From page 1: With rising Coronavirus cases, it has decided to suspend them altogether. However, TTD has not made any announcement with regard to continuation or suspension of other darshans, including the online ₹300 special entry and VIP break.

CONSTABLE LAUDED FOR CARING A BABY AS MOM CAST VOTE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

A police constable from AP carried and lulled a one-month old crying baby as its mother was waiting in a queue to cast her vote at a polling booth in Tamil Nadu, winning the hearts of many people.

The AP Police in a tweet said that the AP Police's humane face at Tamil Nadu Elections was exhibited when a police constable hailing from Anantapur was deployed at Tamil Nadu Assembly polls. After seeing the one-month-old baby crying as its mother was standing in a queue to wait for her turn to cast the vote at a polling booth, the police constable noticed it and took the baby in his arms and sat under a tent and cooed the baby to stop crying until its mother returned after casting her vote.

POLICE CRACK DESECRATION OF IDOLS CASE

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

The Chittoor district police on Wednesday cracked the Hindu idols desecration case reported at Sri Subramaniam Swamy temple located atop a hill near Gonuguru village of Kuppam constituency in Chittoor district on Tuesday. The police have taken the accused woman into custody under medical health Act and produced her before a psychiatrist as she was found to be mentally unsound.

Disclosing the case details to media persons in Kuppam on Wednesday, SP Mr Senthil Kumar said, following a complaint received at the Kuppam Urban PS on Tuesday over the desecration of idols by unknown miscreants at a Subramaniam Swamy temple near Gonuguru village, the district police has immediately jumped into action and deployed three special teams to investigate the case.

"During the course of investigation, we followed the leads presented by the temple management, priest and a few locals, who voiced their suspicions over a woman named Jyothi. She was mentally unsound and used to visit this temple at odd hours, according to locals. Following the lead, we have traced Jyothi, who confessed to the police that she had desecrated the idols on March 31 under the influence of today," the SP said.

The SP said, when they have tried asking Jyothi, if she had anything to do with this incident, she revealed that on 31st of March, after consuming toddy at a local store, she went to the temple and desecrated the idols and subsequently placed them in a ditch 20 metres away from the temple.

"She also told the police that she went back to the village the same day and claimed that "She has killed Murugan" in front of villagers. None of the villagers had taken it seriously due to her mental condition," the SP added.

According to the SP, the temple was located at an isolated location and was rarely visited by the devotees, and that too on special occasions. Even the priest visits the temple only once a week. The temple management, priest and locals. It was only on April 6 the matter came to light when the priest visited the temple.

The SP claimed that the AP Police is doing everything they could do to create awareness and protect every place of worship. "Throughout the process we are also ensuring citizen participation to make it more effective. We request the citizens to approach us in case they spot something suspicious in their vicinity or anywhere else and also take active part in the process of spreading awareness. Do not fall prey to fake news," he said.

According to the SP, the temple was located at an isolated location and was rarely visited by the devotees, and that too on special occasions. Even the priest visits the temple only once a week.

Homebound



Inmates of AU Engineering College Women's Hostels move out of their hostel complex to their houses after completing quarantine period for Covid-19 at AU Engineering College in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

AP reports 2,331 cases, 11 deaths

10 districts registered three digit single day surge, Guntur topped

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Andhra Pradesh continues to witness steep surge in Coronavirus infections in the last few days since the beginning of the second wave of the pandemic and it registered 2,331 fresh infections and 11 deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported here on Wednesday that out of 31,812 samples tested, 2,331 persons were found infected with the confirmed Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,53,02,583 samples tested so far in the state, 9,13,274 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,92,736 were recovered in the course of treatment while 13,276 are still



A medical staff administers Covid vaccine to a person at the Government ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus infections, 10 districts out of 13, registered three digit single

day surge. Among them, Guntur topped with 368 followed by 327 in Krishna, 298 in Visakhapatnam, 296 in

● Four deaths in Chittoor, two in Kurnool and one each in Anantapur, East Godavari, Krishna, Nellore and Visakhapatnam districts.

Chittoor, 202 in Anantapur, 186 in Nellore, 176 in Kurnool, 149 in Kadapa, 123 in Srikakulam, 110 in Prakasam, 47 in Vizianagaram, 29 in East Godavari and 20 in West Godavari.

Chittoor district found to be the worst hit with the highest number of Coronavirus active cases at 2,227 followed by 1,951 in Guntur, 1,844 in Visakhapatnam, 1,830 in Krishna, 1,215 in Nellore,

763 in East Godavari, 754 in Prakasam, 644 in Kurnool, 591 in Srikakulam, 543 in Anantapur, 467 in Kadapa, 254 in Vizianagaram and 193 in West Godavari.

The number of deaths of Coronavirus infected patients also witnessed a surge to 11 with four in Chittoor, two in Kurnool and one each in Anantapur, East Godavari, Krishna, Nellore and Visakhapatnam districts. Death toll rose to 7,262.

The state health authorities discharged 853 Coronavirus infected patients after recovery in the last 24 hours.

AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,86,565 samples per one million population and registered positive rate at 5.97.

Inter 1st yr student ends life in Guntur

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

An Intermediate first-year girl student committed suicide at Guntur. According to the Nallapadu police, a resident of Mittameedapalle of Veludruthi mandal in Guntur district, Nallapu Lavanya, 17, was studying Intermediate first year in Vignan Women's College at Palakalur in Guntur city. She was staying with three others in a room and the four girl students went to study on Wednesday morning. But Lavanya returned to the room after one hour. The three roommates later returned to the room after completion of study hour and found

● The student was staying in a room with three other students. Police trying to find out reason for her suicide

● 17-year-old girl was studying in Vignan Women's College

Lavanya hanging to the window. They immediately informed the same to College management who further informed to police about the incident.

The police rushed to the spot and shifted the body for autopsy by registering a case. The police further investigating about the cause of suicide. The police informed about the incident to parents and relatives.

Pictographic inscriptions found at Srisaillam temple

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, APRIL 7

Srisaillam temple authorities said for the first time stone inscriptions with scripts resembling Harappa culture were found.

At least 20 stone inscriptions unearthed while digging near Vibhuti Matham on Wednesday. It is said these inscriptions may date back to 2000 BC. The executive officer K.S. Rama Rao said the entire area is cordoned off and special permission was sought from the government to excavate the area.

Disclosing this to *Deccan Chronicle*, the executive officer said it was a "historic find" as none of the inscriptions found earlier in Srisaillam resembled the script which is picto-



graphic. It was in Indus script opening up new vistas in further research into the antiquity of the Srisaillam kshetram. We have found 20 inscriptions. But we are hopeful more of such inscriptions would be dug out if we carry excavations around Vibhuti Matham and Rudraksha Matham areas, the EO said.

The Srisaillam inscrip-

tions now point to the fact that a thriving society was present in the prehistoric days, said Telugu University, Professor Chandrasekhar Reddy. He said these inscriptions belong to Before Christ 2500-3700 and a thorough study is needed to be done to contextualize the life of people in the Srisaillam area.

The executive officer said with this Srisaillam would be ranked as one of the foremost centres of pristine purity as civilization thrived here before Christ. Besides being Sakthi Peeth and one of the 12 Jyotirlingas in the country, the finding of new inscriptions would rank Srisaillam into a new league of cultural importance in the country, he said.

V-P lauds postal cover on Ashram

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 7

The Vice President, Mr M. Venkaiah Naidu, expressed happiness about the commemoration of the Centenary Celebrations of Pinakini Satyagraha Ashram in Pallipadu Village, Nellore District, Andhra Pradesh through a Special Postal Cover release by India Post.

In a statement on Wednesday, he said that this release is due recognition and honour to the Ashram, inaugurated by Gandhiji himself, and the values of the Mahatma it has always espoused.

Complimenting the Department of Posts for this initiative, Mr Naidu said that through this release, the spirit and ideals of our freedom struggle are brought closer to the current generations.

He encouraged the youth to visit the Ashram, get inspired by the great sacrifices of our freedom fighters and partake in our nation-building.

According to Mr Venkaiah Naidu, Pinakini Satyagraha Ashram in Pallipadu, Nellore District, was started by Mahatma Gandhi on April 7, 1921, and is popularly known as the Second Sabarmati.

Located on the banks of river Pennar, it is the first Ashram in the southern part of India. Gandhiji visited the Ashram again on 11th May, 1929, stayed there and started the "Harijanoddhara Movement" from the local Harijanawada and later he extended the movement to other parts of the country as part of the freedom struggle.

The Ashram is a centre for Mahatma's values and philosophy and seeks to educate people about them. The Ashram is celebrating its Centenary on 7th April 2021. Meanwhile Ms Ganesam Kapana, Convener of Pinakini Satyagraha Ashram dwelt at length on the plans to give a facelift to the 100 years old Ashram during centenary celebrations held on Wednesday.

District Chairman of Red Cross Society P. Chandrasekhar Reddy released the postal Cover with Ashram photo brought out by the Postal Department.

Co-convener of the Ashram, Ravindra Reddy, Management Committee members, Vice-Chairman of IRCS, D. Sudheer Naidu, treasurer Suresh Kumar Jain, and senior officials of the postal department were present.

4 persons die due to water contamination

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, APRIL 7

Four persons were reportedly died of diarrhea after drinking contaminated water and at least hundred people have been admitted in hospitals at Panyam, Nandyal and Adoni towns of Kurnool district. Apart from this, one pregnant woman suffered abortion in Gorukallu village of Panyam mandal.

The deceased were identified as Ella Krishnaiah alias Kittu, 35, Uppari Ushain, 65, and Maddamma, 80, residents of Gorukallu village. Another death was reported from Adoni town and the deceased was identified as Rangamma, 50, resident of Arunjyothi Nagar in the town.

Diarrhea is spreading in the said areas for the past three days at various parts of the district and the locals alleged that the cause of contaminated water supply from municipalities and rural water schemes.

The medical and health, panchayat raj and rural water supply departments are drawing flak for their negligence in doing the needful, Kondappa, a villager of Gorukallu alleged. Not only these areas, lot of complaints are being reported from different parts of the district, it is said.

K. Swarupa Rani, a private school teacher and resident of Adoni town criticised that the drainage and drinking water pipelines were laid many years ago and have not been changed for reasons known only to the officials. Ignoring the leakages in pipelines is one of the main reasons for the spread of the disease, he added.

Corporators want civic issues solved

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

The newly-elected corporators of the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation have sought to resolve civic issues giving top priority to sanitation. YSR Congress Vijaya-wada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu conducted a meeting with central constituency corporators and VMC officials here on

Wednesday. During the meeting, the corporators asked the city commissioner to increase the sanitation staff in some divisions depending on the population.

When the corporators pointed out the issues related to schools in their divisions, the officials told that the works are underway in 18 primary schools and 12 high schools.

Light to moderate rain likely in state

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Isolated places of north coastal Andhra Pradesh and Yanam are likely to witness light to moderate rain or thundershowers for the next four days from April 8 to 11.

Amaravati Meteorological Centre in a weather bulletin issued here on Wednesday warned thundershowers accompanied with gusty winds (30-40 kmph) along with lightning very likely to occur at isolated places over

north Coastal AP covering districts Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari and West Godavari, in the next three days from April 9 to 11.

It forecast mainly dry weather to prevail over south coastal AP covering Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Nellore in the next four days from April 8 to 11. So is the case with four districts in Rayalaseema covering Anantapur, Kurnool, Kadapa and Chittoor from April 8 to 10.

GREEN | DRIVE

Acacia trees to be replaced with eco-friendly plants

TTD to take up massive plantation

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

With an aim to conserve the rich green vegetation and to preserve the biodiversity of Seshachala ranges, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) is contemplating a massive plantation programme soon, replacing the Acacia auriculiformis (Tumma) trees, which has spread its tentacles ruthlessly affecting the biodiversity of Tirumala forests.

Under the instructions of TTD EO Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy, the DFO of TTD Avula Chandrasekhar has

chalked out a detailed action plan to take up the plantation programme in the Seshachala ranges. It was during his inspection in the areas of Dharmagiri, Kumaradhara-Pasupudhara wilds, the TTD EO has noticed a meagre growth of plant species, movement of birds, animals etc. wherever there is Acacia plantation and called for an expert opinion to know the reason.

Accordingly, Dr B.M.K. Reddy, chairman, AP State Biodiversity and other professors were approached, who gave alarming facts over the depletion of greenery in

the Seshachala ranges. The experts stated that Acacia, which was grown in about 890 hectares in Tirumala forest cover, has a Ph value between 4.4 and 4.5.

Because of this high acidity, no other plants are germinating besides Acacia.

Even no animal or bird can also feed on Acacia. Even the honeybee cannot transport the nectar from its pollen which is ultimately resulting in the hindrance of other plants and affecting animal life as well.

Apart from this, Acacia is a fast growing species after bamboo and easily

attracts fire and has no wind tolerance because of its lateral roots.

The plantation of Acacia happened in 1983. Being an Australian plant breed of Australia, Acacia, which has a history of around 50 years across the world, was considered as a fast-growing species as it consumes less water and grows fast on rocky patches as well in deserts. Over a period of time, the biologists across the world, however, realised that this species critically disturbs other flora, fauna and aves and almost many countries have now banned the

growth of Acacia.

According to the DFO, because of the widespread Acacia in the last three and a half decades, nearly 76 creepers and 49 plant species have joined the endangered list – an alarming situation that has been impacting on the greenery, ecology and wildlife of Tirumala. To overcome this situation, TTD has decided to extensively grow indigenous plant species in the place of Acacia.

"Of 890 hectares where Acacia has spread, 240 hectares will be retained while the remaining 650 hectares will be replaced," he said.

VIJAYAWADA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION (VMC)			
'E' Procurement Notice No.02/VMC/AE/2021-22, Dt.07-04-2021			
Sl. No.	Name of work	Estimate Amount Rs. in Lakhs	
1	Providing boundary basement wall in place of old damaged GI chain link mesh and development of plantation, Supply and Delivery of 60 Ltrs capacity HDPE Dust Bins and Manufacturing supply and delivery of Wheel Barrows (Total: 3 works)	158.77	
Contact: Superintending Engineer (Projects), VMC, Vijayawada-520 001 Further details can be seen @ e' procurement market place @ www.tender.aeprocurement.gov.in Download of bid documents starts from - 09-04-2021 @ 04.00 P.M. Last date / time for receipt of tender from - 23-04-2021 up to 4.30 P.M. Sd/- For COMMISSIONER			

SHORT TAKES

COP SUSPENDED FOR DANCING IN UNIFORM

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 7

An assistant sub-inspector of police has been suspended after a video showing five cops, including a woman home guard, in uniform dancing to the tune of a popular Odia song inside a police station in Odisha's Jajpur district has gone viral on social media, an officer said.

In the video, the faces and uniforms of the dancing police personnel are seen smeared in colours while other employees of the Panikoi police station are seen clapping and cheering the five while performing Nagin dance.

The incident which violated rules may have taken place on the occasion of the Holi festival, Jajpur superintendent of police (SP) Rahul PR said.

Assistant sub-inspector (ASI) Sanjay Dash was placed under suspension after preliminary inquiry, he said.

"We have launched a probe and action will be taken against the other police personnel involved in the incident on the basis of the inquiry report," the SP said.

An unidentified person captured the video and posted it on social media.

ACCUSED IN HONEY TRAP CASE HELD AFTER TWO YEARS

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, APRIL 7

One of the accused in the infamous honey trapping and blackmailing racket that surfaced in September, 2019 was on Wednesday arrested in a village in Madhya Pradesh.

Rupa Ahirwar was arrested by the special investigation team (SIT) constituted to probe the sensational case in her village of Panautha in Chhatarpur district, police said. Rupa had been absconding for the last two years. She was suspected to be an accomplice of Arti Dayal, one of the key accused in the scandal.

The racket came to light when an engineer of Indore Municipal Corporation Harbhajan Singh lodged a complaint with the local police station on September 19, 2019 alleging that a woman member of the racket was blackmailing him for money.

Police conducted a series of raids in the houses of the accused in the case and seized laptop, mobile phones, pen drives and other electronic gadgets containing objectionable materials.

Around 4,000 sleaze videos and audios, sex chats and photographs showing some influential people who included bureaucrats and politicians in compromising position with some members of the racket.

Four women and one man were arrested in connection with the scandal and they were currently lodged in jail in Indore.



Sister of CRPF Commando Rakeshwar Singh Manhas reacts during a protest, demanding his release from the captivity of Maoists, in Jammu on Wednesday. — PTI

Maoists show jawan's photo to claim custody

DKSZC wants govt to nominate interlocutors for talks

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC RAIPUR, APRIL 7

The Maoists on Wednesday released a picture to establish that the jawan missing in the April 3 Naxalite ambush on the security forces in Terram area on the Sukma-Bijapur border in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar region has been held hostage by them.

This development comes hours after the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee (DKSZC) of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) issued a press release confirming that the missing CoBRA commando, Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, was in their custody as a "prisoner" and that he was safe.

The press release issued by DKSZC spokesman Vikalp late on Tuesday evening asked the government to nominate interlocutors to negotiate the release of the "hostage".

"The jawan will be safe as long as he is in our custody", the press release said.

The picture released by the Maoists shows the CoBRA commando sitting on a green tarpaulin in a makeshift hut made of dry palm leaves, possibly in a forest. The jawan seemed in a relaxed mood in the photo as there was absolutely no sign of anxiety on his face as usually seen in the case of a hostage.

The jawan's colleagues

Photograph of commando 1-yr-old; could be ploy: Kin

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 7

The family of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawan who went missing during a deadly encounter with the Naxalite-Maoist militants in Chhattisgarh at the weekend has said that his photograph doing the rounds on an instant messaging platform is almost 12 months old.

It rejected the claims that it was snapped and released by Maoists after taking CRPF's Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, a resident of Jammu, "captive". Manhas went missing after a joint team of the CRPF and two other security forces clashed with Maoists at the borders between

Chhattisgarh's Sukma and Bijapur districts on Saturday. As many as 22 security personnel were killed and many more injured during the encounter. However, the CRPF's Director General, Kuldip Singh, had claimed inflicting huge losses on the Maoists. He also said there is no confirmation yet that Manhas has been held captive by Maoists.

The missing contable's family members, friends and neighbours held a protest demonstration along the Jammu-Poonch National Highway on Wednesday, demanding his safe release and strong action against Maoists. His cousin Praveen Singh Manhad said that the photograph of the missing jawan that has sur-

faced on social media with the message that he is safe in captivity is almost a year-old. "I had seen it on his phone during his last visit to home," he told reporters. He added that releasing the photograph through a social networking platform could be a "ploy" by Maoists.

He echoed the sentiment of Manhas' family and friends and said, "Our anxiety is increasing with every passing hour. We're concerned about his safety and security and urge the government to take swift and stern action to secure his return and against the Maoists."

A report said that several journalists in Chhattisgarh received the photo on their WhatsApp on Wednesday.

said the photo looked old and he seemed to have no injury either in the picture.

A senior police officer posted in Bastar told this newspaper the police was verifying the authenticity of the photograph and trying to identify the location of the missing jawan.

Sources, meanwhile, said the missing jawan's

location has been identified. But they refused to elaborate further in the interest of his security.

The issue figured in the state Cabinet meeting chaired by Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Wednesday. Baghel indicated efforts were on to secure the missing jawan's safe release.

In another develop-

ment, local AAP leader Soni Sori has volunteered to negotiate the release of the missing jawan with his captors. The "self-appointed" interlocutor told the media before venturing into the forest, "My main objective is to identify the location where the jawan is held hostage and what is his condition".

SC to hear Centre's plea to close case on Italian marines

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

The Centre on Wednesday moved the Supreme Court seeking to bring down the curtains on the nearly decade old Italian marine case relating to the killing of two Indian fishermen, telling the top court that it was an "urgent" issue between India and Italy.

As solicitor general Tushar Mehta in a "mentioning" urged the court to deal with the matter, Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde heading a bench also comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian reminded him that in the hearing of the matter on August 6, 2020, the court had asked the Centre to get the orders for withdrawal of the case from the trial court.

CJI Bobde had, during the August 6, 2020, hearing of the matter when Centre had approached the top court for closing the case, said, "The fact is there is a criminal charge being tried here in India where the victims' families are also appearing. Without applying for withdrawal of prosecution

● **CJI BOBDE** had, during the August 6, 2020, hearing of the matter when Centre had approached the top court for closing the case, said, the fact is there is a criminal charge being tried here in India where the victims' families are also appearing. Without applying for withdrawal of prosecution before the trial court, how can you come before the top court? Why don't you apply for withdrawal there?"

● **WHILE ASKING** the court to deal with the matter, Mehta informed the bench that the families of the victims have been paid compensation.

before the trial court, how can you come before the top court? Why don't you apply for withdrawal there?"

However, the court today agreed to hear the Centre's plea on Friday.

While asking the court to deal with the matter, Mehta informed the bench that the families of the victims have been paid compensation. Two Italian marines —

Chief Master Sergeant Massimiliano Latorre and Sergeant Major Salvatore Griore — are facing prosecution for killing two Indian fishermen from Kerala in 2012 mistaking them as pirates.

The two marines were on board Italian ship Enrica Lexie when they shot the two fishermen off Kochi port.

In the August 6 hearing of the matter, the court had asked the Centre to implead the families of the victim fishermen and pay them adequate compensation before the curtains could be brought on the case. Chief Justice Bobde had said, "You have to ensure adequate compensation. You bring the cheque here and we will hand it over to the victims' families."

The issue of whether the Italian marines will be tried in India or in Italy was adjudicated by the Hague based International Tribunal on Law of the Sea (ITLOS). On May 21, 2020, it ruled that two marines will face trial in Italy. India has already conveyed to the top court that it has accepted the ITLOS ruling.



Bipin Rawat

CHINA CAPABLE OF CYBER ATTACK ON INDIA, SAYS CDS

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat said on Wednesday that China is capable of launching cyber attacks on India which can disrupt "large amount of our systems." He said that the biggest differential between India and China lies in the field of cyber.

Gen Rawat said that India is trying to develop some kind of relationship with Western nations to see how better we can get support from them at least during peace time which will help us to overcome the differential in technology with China. "While we are trying to create firewalls for cyber attacks yet we are quite sure that they will be able to break through the cyberwalls and firewalls and we will have cyber attacks. But what we are trying to do is how long will your system be down and how will you able to operate through that phase of cyber attack that you have been put through," he said.

Waze names two ministers in letter

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, APRIL 7

In yet another major setback to the Uddhav Thackeray government, arrested cop Sachin Waze on Wednesday submitted a five-page letter in the court naming Anil Deshmukh and Shiv Sena minister Anil Parab.

The handwritten letter claims while Deshmukh asked Waze to collect money from bars and restaurants, Parab gave him the task to collect money from BMC contractors.

The letter also mentions names of Sharad Pawar and Ajit Pawar (confirmation awaited on this). However, the judge refused to accept the handwritten letter and asked him to follow the procedure, which means he would be required to record his statement under section 164 of CrPC.

In the letter, Waze claimed that Deshmukh had demanded ₹2 crore from him to continue his service in the Mumbai police and Parab asked him to collect money from some contractors in Mumbai.

"I duly was reinstated in service on June 6, 2020. That soon after my reinstatement there were certain agitators

to reverse the reinstatement. Apparently, then it was ordered by (NCP president) Sharad Pawar to again place me under suspension. That, at that time the then home minister sir (Deshmukh) also told me that he will convince Pawar saheb and for that purpose he (Hm sir) asked me to pay ₹2 crore (Syc.)." Waze claimed in the handwritten letter.

Waze claimed that at a meeting in the state's Sahyadri guest house, Parab had asked him to look into a complaint related to the Saifee Burhani Upliftment Trust (SBUT) which was under preliminary enquiry. SBUT is a non-profit organisation tasked with carrying out a mega redevelopment project in the Bhandi Bazaar area of south Mumbai. Parab had asked him to bring the trustees of the SBUT to him for "negotiation" about the enquiry, Waze claimed.

The suspended officer further claimed that Parab had asked him to collect ₹2 crore from each of the controversial BMC contractors.

He also claimed that he refused to follow instructions by both the ministers.

Kerala: Youth killed in post-poll clash

Kannur (Kerala), April 7: A 22-year-old Youth League activist, who was seriously injured in a post-poll clash allegedly between workers of the CPI(M) and the IUML in this district, died on Wednesday, even as political violence erupted in many parts of Kerala after the culmination of crucial assembly election.

The deceased identified as Mansur, a native of Chokli here, had suffered critical injuries to his leg and was admitted to a private hospital in Kozhikode, where he was declared dead by the doctors, police said.

An alleged CPI(M) activist was taken into custody by the police soon after the incident, sources said.

The Youth league is the youth wing of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), a key ally of the opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF).

According to local witnesses, the shocking incident happened when a clash broke out in Paral area in Koothuparamba constituency over allegations of bogus voting by around 8 pm on Tuesday.

A group of people waylaid Mansur and his brother Muhsin, a UDF poll agent, near their home and hurled bombs at them before attacking the youth with sharp weapons, they said.

Muhsin, who also sustained serious injuries, was rushed to the private hospital in Kozhikode.

Some of their family mem-

bers including women, who were injured in the melee were admitted to a hospital at Thalassery.

"They attacked me after asking and confirming my name. My brother was injured when he tried to stop them from attacking me," Muhsin told a television channel from the hospital on Wednesday.

Abdullah, their father, also said his sons were attacked by the assailants in front of his eyes.

Though the attackers had targeted Muhsin, the younger son was killed when he tried to stop their bid against his brother, he added.

While IUML alleged that the ruling CPI(M) was behind the killing of Mansur, the Left party dismissed the charge and took a stand that it was not a political murder.

However, putting the ruling party in a fix, police on Wednesday said it was suspected to be a political murder and said more than 10 people might be involved in the incident.

Kannur district police chief R. Ilango, who visited the crime scene, said investigation is going on and the prime focus is to nab all the accused at the earliest.

"We suspect it to be a political murder. The investigation is going on and so we cannot come to a final conclusion at this stage. We are probing the conspiracy angle also," he told reporters here.

— PTI

POLL | TIME

BJP will win 63 to 68 seats in 91 constituencies, says Shah; Won't cross 30: Mamata

Shah, Didi predict WB poll results

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, APRIL 7

Union home minister Amit Shah and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday competed with each other in putting their parties ahead of their opponents in the last three phases of the Assembly election in the state.

While Shah predicted that the BJP would win anything in between 63 and 68 seats out of the 91 constituencies, Banerjee made a forecast that the Trinamul Congress would bag majority of the seats.

Shah, who led multiple roadshows including one at a key seat: Singur in Hooghly for BJP candidate Rabindranath Bhattacharya, also a TMC turncoat, said, "Three phases of polls have been held in West Bengal so far. The BJP has already taken a lead by winning 63-68 seats out of the 91 ahead of the TMC, Communists and Congress. On May 2 the BJP will emerge as the winner with more than 200 seats to form it's government in the state. Banerjee's frustration is getting reflected in her speech and behaviour. This confirms the BJP's victory."



TMC MP Abhishek banerjee during a roadshow in support of party candidate Manoj Tiwari for Assembly polls, at Kadamtala in Howrah district on Wednesday. — PTI

Teasing Chief Minister's nephew Abhishek Banerjee, the star campaigner of the BJP, Shah asked the crowd during a roadshow at Mullickfatak in Howrah, "Do you want a government of Tolabaj (extortion), syndicate raj and Bhatija Kalyan (nephew welfare)? The Goondaism in Bengal is run by Bhaipo." He attacked Banerjee since he was also then leading a

roadshow at Shibpur in the city. Addressing a TMC rally in Jadavpur of South Kolkata, Banerjee mocked Shah's forecast while giving reference to his party's performance in the recent past in the states.

"In 2018, he claimed that BJP would win 65 seats in Chhattisgarh but his party ended up with 15. Next year he talked of getting an absolute majority in

Jharkhand but got 25 out of 81. In Maharashtra, he bragged about winning two-third of the seats but got one-third finally. In New Delhi, they got eight out of 70 despite claiming of getting all. Today he predicted again. According to me, they will hardly get 25-30 seats with the help of CPM. Moreover we lost in these seats across Bankura and Purulia earlier," she said.

CRPF working at behest of BJP: Didi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, APRIL 7

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday accused Central paramilitary forces, especially the CRPF, of harassing voters at the behest of the BJP and asked voters not to be deterred by their intimidation but to gherao them and lodge FIR against them if they foment trouble in the remaining five phases of Assembly elections in West Bengal.

She also alleged 10 murders in this election and urged the EC to ensure that there is no further blood bath and no public harassment by Central forces.

Hours after the TMC chief's controversial appeal to voters issued at a party rally in Coochbehar North Assembly constituency in north Bengal, the EC issued a notice to her for an earlier appeal she allegedly made to Muslim voters while campaigning in Hooghly.

She had urged them not to allow their votes to get split among different political parties. Banerjee has been asked to respond to the EC's notice within the next 48 hours.

The notice said the poll panel had received a complaint from a BJP delegation alleging that on April 3 Banerjee appealed to Muslim voters not to let their votes get split among different political parties.

"Kanyashree, Kanyashree, there are scholarships up to the university. There is Shishashree for SCs and STs. For the general category there is Swami Vivekananda Scholarship. There is Aikyashree for my brothers and sisters belonging to the minority community and I have given it to 2 crores and 35 lakh beneficiaries. I am requesting my minority brothers and sisters with folded hands don't divide the minority votes after listening to the devil person who had taken money from the BJP," the notice quoted Banerjee as saying.

SHORT TAKES

OUTRAGE AFTER
IMRAN LINKS RAPE
TO WOMEN'S DRESS

Islamabad: Pakistan rights campaigners have accused Prime Minister Imran Khan of “baffling ignorance” after the former playboy cricketer blamed how women dress for a rise in rape cases.

In a weekend interview on live television, Oxford-educated Khan said an increase in rapes indicated the “consequences in any society where vulgarity is on the rise”.

“The incidents of rape of women... (have) actually very rapidly increased in society,” he said. He advised women to cover up to prevent temptation. “This entire concept of purdah is to avoid temptation, not everyone has the willpower to avoid it,” he said, using a term that can refer to modest dress or the segregation of the sexes.

AUSTRIAN GROUP
FILES PLAINT ON
GOOGLE AD TRACK

Vienna: An Austrian online privacy campaign group said on Wednesday it has filed a complaint against Google over what it says is a tracking code “illegally” installed on Android phones.

The complaint from NOYB relates to Google's Android Advertising Identifier (AAID) and has been lodged with the CNIL, France's data protection authority.

According to NOYB, the AAID code is created “without the user's knowledge or consent” and “functions like a licence plate that uniquely identifies the phone of a user and can be shared among companies”. Furthermore, NOYB (none of your business) says users do not have the option of deleting the code, with only the possibility of generating a new tracking ID.

It says this violates the requirement under the EU's e-Privacy Directive for users to give informed consent for such tracking.

ACTOR ZACH
AVERY HELD FOR
PONZI SCHEME

Los Angeles: Actor Zach Avery has been arrested in connection with a massive Hollywood Ponzi scheme.

According to Los Angeles Times, Avery, whose real name is Zachary J. Horwitz, was taken into custody on Tuesday with the federal investigators alleging that he defrauded investors out of more than USD 227 million. Horwitz has appeared in minor roles in movies such as “*Fury*”, “*Curvature*”, “*Farming*” and “*The White Crow*”. He is accused of fabricating licensing deals with Netflix, HBO, as well as other platforms, in order to secure funding for his film distribution company, 1inMM Capital LLC, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

In a criminal complaint filed Monday in United States District Court, FBI agent John Verrastro alleged that Horwitz cheated investors of significant sums by persuading them to invest in 1inMM Capital.

ACTIVISTS GUILTY
FOR DEMOCRACY
RALLY IN HK

Hong Kong: Three veteran Hong Kong pro-democracy activists, including well-known publisher Jimmy Lai, have pleaded guilty to taking part in an unauthorised rally that resulted in violence between police and participants, media reported on Wednesday.

Lai is already being held in custody on other charges related to his outspoken opposition to China's crackdown on civil liberties in the former British colony.

Last Thursday, seven of Hong Kong's leading pro-democracy advocates, including Lai and an 82-year-old veteran of the movement, were convicted for organising and participating in a march during massive anti-government protests in 2019 that triggered Beijing's crackdown.

While Lai will be returned to jail, ex-legislator Lee Cheuk-yan and Yeng Sum, a former chairman of the Democratic Party, are believed to be negotiating bail terms. The charges carry prison terms of up to five years.

The court was shown footage of the three at the Aug. 31, 2019, event that led to clashes in various parts of the cramped city of more than 7 million that was hovering at the edge of chaos at the time.

Sinking ship



The unmanned Dutch cargo ship *Eemslift Hendrika* rolls in heavy seas, carrying heavy oil and diesel on board in the Norwegian Sea about 130 kilometres off the coast of Alesund. The crew was evacuated following a distress call from the vessel, and the Norwegian Coastal Administration said on Tuesday they have dispatched a Coast Guard ship to inspect the situation.

— AP

US military warns China
on fast track for Taiwan

Years of military buildup have given China added strength

Washington, April 7:

The American military is warning that China is probably accelerating its timetable for capturing control of Taiwan, the island democracy that has been the chief source of tension between Washington and Beijing for decades and is widely seen as the most likely trigger for a potentially catastrophic U.S.-China war.

The worry about Taiwan comes as China wields new strength from years of military buildup. It has become more aggressive with Taiwan and more assertive in sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea. Beijing also has become more confrontational with Washington; senior Chinese officials traded sharp and unusually public barbs with Secretary of State Antony Blinken in talks in Alaska last month.

A military move against Taiwan, however, would be a test of US support for the island that Beijing views as a breakaway province. For the Biden administration, it could present the choice of abandoning a friendly, democratic entity or risking what could become an all-out war over a cause that is not on the radar of most Americans. The United States has long pledged to help Taiwan

Taiwan blasts China's
fighter jet incursions

Taipei, April 7: Taiwan blasted China's fighter jet incursions as “self-defeating” on Wednesday as 15 more of Beijing's planes crossed into the island's air defence zone.

Taipei's defence ministry said it scrambled aircraft to broadcast warning messages to the latest incursion, which included 12 Chinese fighters.

China has ramped up the use of such drills to record levels over the past year as a way to pile pressure on self-ruled Taiwan which it regards as its own territory.

Beijing has vowed to one

day seize the island, by force if needed.

The latest incursion comes as Taiwan mourns its worst train crash in decades, an event that killed 50 people and prompted a rare message of condolence from Chinese President Xi Jinping.

But Taiwanese foreign minister Joseph Wu accused Beijing on Wednesday of sending “very mixed signals” by offering sympathy for the train crash while buzzing the island with its fighters. “I would say that the policy is self-defeating,” Wu told reporters.

“It's not going to meet the purpose of the Chinese government whether they want to win hearts and minds of the Taiwanese people or they are going to intimidate the Taiwanese people,” he added. Democratic and self-ruled Taiwan lives under the constant threat of invasion by authoritarian China.

And the sabre-rattling has increased dramatically since Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen won election in 2016, as she rejects the idea that the island is part of “one China”.

— AFP

defend itself, but it has deliberately left unclear how far it would go in response to a Chinese attack.

This accumulation of concerns meshes with the administration's view that China is a frontline challenge for the United States and that more must be done soon — militarily, diplomatically and by other means — to deter Beijing as it seeks to sup-

plant the United States as the predominant power in Asia.

Some American military leaders see Taiwan as potentially the most immediate flashpoint.

“We have indications that the risks are actually going up,” Adm. Philip Davidson, the most senior U.S. military commander in the Asia-Pacific region, told a Senate panel last month, referring to a

Chinese military move on Taiwan.

“The threat is manifest during this decade — in fact, in the next six years,” Davidson said.

Days later, Davidson's expected successor, Adm. John Aquilino, declined to back up the six-year time-frame but told senators at his confirmation hearing: “My opinion is, this problem is much closer to us than most think.” — AP

Myanmar junta attacks
town that resisted arms

Yangon, April 7: Security forces on Wednesday stormed a town in north-western Myanmar where some residents had used homemade hunting rifles to resist the military's February seizure of power, killing at least 11 civilians and injuring many others, local news reports said.

If the 11 deaths are confirmed, it would be one of the highest single-day death tolls outside the country's two largest cities, Yangon and Mandalay.

The online news site Khonumthung Burmese said the attack on Kalay began before dawn.

Videos on the site included what appeared to be sounds of rifle fire, high-caliber weapons and grenade explosions.

Posts on social media said rocket-propelled grenades were used in the attack, but provided no evidence.

The news site said that in addition to the seven fatalities, many people were wounded and arrested in the town, also known as Kalemoyo or Kale. Over half the town's population are members of the Chin ethnic minority.

Most of the deaths occurred in the morning, but more were reported in the afternoon, bringing

the total to 11, according to the news sites *The Irrawaddy* and *Myanmar Now*.

Security forces have killed at least 581 protesters and bystanders through Tuesday in their crackdown on protests against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors casualties and arrests.

The protesters, who have organised themselves in a “Kalay Civil Army,” inflicted more casualties in the following days, it said.

— AP

APEX | PREDATORS

Paris, April 7: Hungry polar bears are increasingly foraging on seabird eggs as climate change shrinks their Arctic hunting grounds, but research published Wednesday on the phenomenon highlights the struggle these apex predators have to adapt to their rapidly changing environment.

The climate change threat to polar bears is well known, driven by the extraordinary pace of change in the Arctic,

which is warming twice as fast as the planet as a whole. This is already leading to dwindling sea ice, cutting short the time they have to hunt seals, their preferred prey.

With a growing imperative to find alternative sustenance, polar bears have been pushed further afield in search of food, including scavenging in areas populated by humans.

Some bears are also coming ashore at the same time seabirds are nesting

and are snacking on their eggs.

To measure how efficient these top-of-the-food-chain predators were at this foraging — and therefore how useful the eggs are to provide energy in their diets — researchers in Canada used drones to monitor them feeding from common eider duck nests on Mitivik Island, in Nunavut.

The study, published in the journal Royal Society Open Science, tracked how

EU drug regulator sees clot
as ‘very rare’ vax side effect

The Hague, April 7: The EU's drug regulator said on Wednesday that blood clots should be listed as a “very rare” side effect of the AstraZeneca Coronavirus vaccine but that the jab's benefits continue to outweigh the risks.

No specific risk factors, including age, have been identified for thrombosis with the AstraZeneca shot, which could stem from an immune response, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) said.

The watchdog's findings came after several countries halted the use of the vaccine following dozens of cases of people with clots in blood vessels draining from the brain after receiving jabs, some of them fatal.

“EMA's safety committee has concluded today that unusual blood clots with low blood platelets should be listed as very rare side effects” of the AstraZeneca jab, the Amsterdam-based watchdog said in a statement.

But it stressed that it believed people should continue to take the vaccine as part of the battle against the disease.

“The safety committee has confirmed that the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine in preventing Covid-19 overall outweigh the risk of side effects,” EMA chief Emer Cooke told a news conference. “It is saving lives.” Despite the fact that many of the cases have been reported in women under 55, prompting a number of countries to restrict the vaccine's use to older people, the regulator said it had not been able to pinpoint those at risk.

“Specific risk factors such as age, gender or medical history have not been able to be confirmed, as the rare events are seen in all ages,” Cooke said.

ROUHANI: NUKE
TALKS OPEN
‘NEW CHAPTER’

Tehran, April 7: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that talks in Vienna on rescuing a troubled 2015 nuclear deal had opened a “new chapter”.

An Iranian delegation met on Tuesday with representatives of the remaining parties to the agreement to discuss how to bring Washington back into it and end crippling US sanctions and Iranian countermeasures.

US President Joe Biden has said he is ready to reverse the decision of his predecessor Donald Trump to withdraw from the agreement and reimpose unilateral sanctions.

But differences remain over the mechanics of the move as Tehran has since responded by suspending compliance with some of its own obligations under the deal.

— AFP

Biden makes jab
open to all adults

Washington, April 7: President Joe Biden has announced that he's bumping up his deadline by two weeks for states to make all adults in the US eligible for Coronavirus vaccines.

But even as he expressed optimism about the pace of vaccinations, he warned Americans that the nation is not yet out of the woods when it comes to the pandemic. “Let me be deadly earnest with you: We aren't at the finish line. We still have a lot of work to do. We're still in a life and death race against this virus,” Biden said in remarks at the White House.

The president warned that “new variants of the virus are spreading and they're moving quickly. Cases are going back up, hospitalisations are no longer declining.” He added that “the pandemic remains dangerous,” and encouraged Americans to continue to wash their hands, socially distance and wear masks.

Biden added that while his administration is on schedule to meet his new goal of distributing 200 million doses of the vaccine during his first 100 days, it will still take time for enough Americans to get vaccinated to slow the spread of the virus. — AP

MERKEL BACKS
‘LOCKDOWN’ TO
TAME COVID-19

Berlin, April 7: Chancellor Angela Merkel is in favour of tightening virus restrictions in Germany for a short period to stem rising case numbers, her spokeswoman said on Wednesday.

Merkel backs calls for a “short national lockdown”, Ulrike Demmer said, noting that the country's health system was under growing pressure.

Germany has been in some form of shutdown since November, but has struggled to bring case numbers under control in recent weeks with a surge in the British variant of the virus.

— AFP

Iranian freighter
hit by ‘explosion’

Tehran, April 7: An Iranian freighter was hit by an “explosion” in the Red Sea, Tehran said on Wednesday, after US media reported Israel had struck the ship in retaliation for past Iranian strikes on its vessels.

Iran was at pains to stress that the freighter was a civilian ship, although other sources said it had been used by Iranian commandos as a base for shipping protection and other duties in the area. The explosion comes at a sensitive time as US President Joe Biden attempts to revive a 2015 nuclear deal with Iran which was strongly opposed by Israel and abandoned by his predecessor Donald Trump in 2018.

The blast struck the “Iranian commercial vessel” MV Saviz off the coast of Djibouti on Tuesday morning, foreign ministry spokesman Said Khatibzadeh said,

adding an inquiry had been opened into the cause.

“The accident caused no casualties and a technical investigation is under way to determine its circumstances and origin,” the spokesman said.

“Our country will take all necessary steps through international bodies in this regard,” Khatibzadeh said the Saviz was a “civilian vessel” that had been deployed in coordination with the International Maritime Organization to protect shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Many foreign governments have stationed protection vessels in the area since a rash of attacks by Somali pirates between 2000 and 2010.

“This ship has been serving as Iran's logistics station — for technical and logistical support — in the Red Sea,” the spokesman added. — AFP

EU slams Ursula ‘sofagate’ at summit

Brussels, April 7: The European Commission hit out on Wednesday at a diplomatic snub that left its head Ursula von der Leyen without a chair as male counterparts sat down at a meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Video from Tuesday's encounter in Ankara showed von der Leyen

flummoxed as the Turkish leader and European Council president Charles Michel took the only two chairs in front of their flags.

“Ehm,” muttered the former German defence minister, appearing unsure where to go.

Eventually she was seated on a sofa a little further away from her counter-

parts, opposite Turkey's foreign minister — someone below her in the protocol pecking order.

“The president of the commission was clearly surprised,” European Commission spokesman Eric Mamer said, insisting von der Leyen should have been treated “exactly in the same manner” as Michel.

— AFP



Many polar bears are already facing a climate-driven threat as dwindling sea ice cuts short the time they have to hunt seals, their preferred prey.

— AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

8 APRIL 2021

Nurture is the best policy, but watch out for inflation

In the wake of heightened uncertainty caused by the second wave of coronavirus cases across the world, especially in India, the Reserve Bank of India has left key lending rates unchanged once again and committed to continue an accommodative stance for the monetary policy. This open-ended policy gives comfort to participants in equity and bond markets, in particular, and borrowers, in general.

The central bank claimed that rural demand remains buoyant and record agriculture production in 2020-21 bodes well for its resilience. Urban demand, which it said has gained traction, is expected to get a boost with the vaccination drive. Though high-frequency lead and coincident indicators, including the Goods and Service Tax receipts, reveal that economic activity is normalising, the six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) preferred to remain

The RBI's announcement to purchase bonds worth ₹1 lakh crore from the secondary market to keep long-term rates in check has attracted most praise

cautious about interest rate to support the growth in the economy in view of a surge in coronavirus infections. A low-interest rate regime is considered a key weapon to revive consumer demand and induce normalcy in the economy. It would affect sectors like construction, automobiles and consumer durable goods, which will have a trickle-down effect on the economy.

Despite a worsening Covid situation in the country, the RBI predicted a 10.5 per cent growth in the Indian economy — the elusive double-digit growth figure that Indian governments have been running after. In support of its favourable assessment of the economy, the RBI listed three factors — the vaccination programme being speeded up and increasingly extended to the wider segments of the population; the gradual release of pent-up demand; and the investment-enhancing and growth-supportive reform measures taken by the government.

While the policy was broadly appreciated by all economists, the RBI's announcement to purchase bonds worth ₹1 lakh crore from the secondary market to keep long-term rates in check has attracted most of their praise. The move, analysts claimed, would anchor bond yields in the secondary bond market. Indian bond yields have risen sharply after finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed to borrow ₹12 lakh crore in the previous fiscal. After the Tuesday announcement, the bond yields declined by 0.12 percentage points.

The RBI, however, is concerned about the recurrence of global financial market volatility like the bout experienced in late February, which could accentuate the downside risks for India. Though the country has enough firepower in terms of foreign exchange reserves to handle any global volatility, the central bank must remain vigilant to prevent the repeat of the “2013 US taper tantrums”.

An elevated inflation rate is also a cause of concern for the RBI, though it has decided to accord priority to economic growth in the near future. It projected retail inflation to be around five per cent in the current fiscal, which is one percentage point higher than the RBI's mandated four per cent inflation rate. It, however, hinted at a coordinated action by the Centre and states to bring down tax on petrol and diesel. If the tax on fuel was brought down, it would be happy news for the common man.

Clear the air on Rafale

The new series of reports that has come in the French media about the alleged kickbacks in the ₹59,000 crore deal between the governments of India and France to buy 36 Rafale medium multi-role combat aircraft is disquieting. As per the report in Mediapart, a Paris-based investigative website, France's anti-corruption agency National Financial Prosecutor's Office, or Parquet National Financier (PNF), had in 2017 reported about the suspicious payment of half a million euros to an Indian middleman for making models of the fighter jets. The same middleman is under investigation by Indian agencies for his role in the Augusta Westland helicopter deal, which is also mired in controversy and corruption. The French agency did not pursue the case and closed the complaint filed by a well-known anti-corruption NGO “Sherpa”, the reports said.

The government of India had in 2015 cancelled the negotiations between public sector Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Dassault Aviation, the makers of Rafale, for the purchase of 126 aircraft. The protracted discussions, started in 2012, were about to close, according to the then CEO of Dassault, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a new deal to buy 36 aircraft. The government blunted criticism against the deal that it violated the defence procurement procedure by stating that it was a government-to-government deal. The Supreme Court also did not find merit in the plea that there were political intervention and corruption in the deal that required to be investigated. It is clear that there need be no middleman in a government-to-government deal but the latest revelation raises questions about the very claim the government had advanced. There had already been suspicions about the government's ignorance about Dassault's choice of Reliance Defence as its Indian partner to meet its commitment as per the offset clause in the deal. The government will have to consider instituting an investigation by a credible agency or even a judicial commission to clear the air instead of allowing every fresh controversy to become a stick to beat it with.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

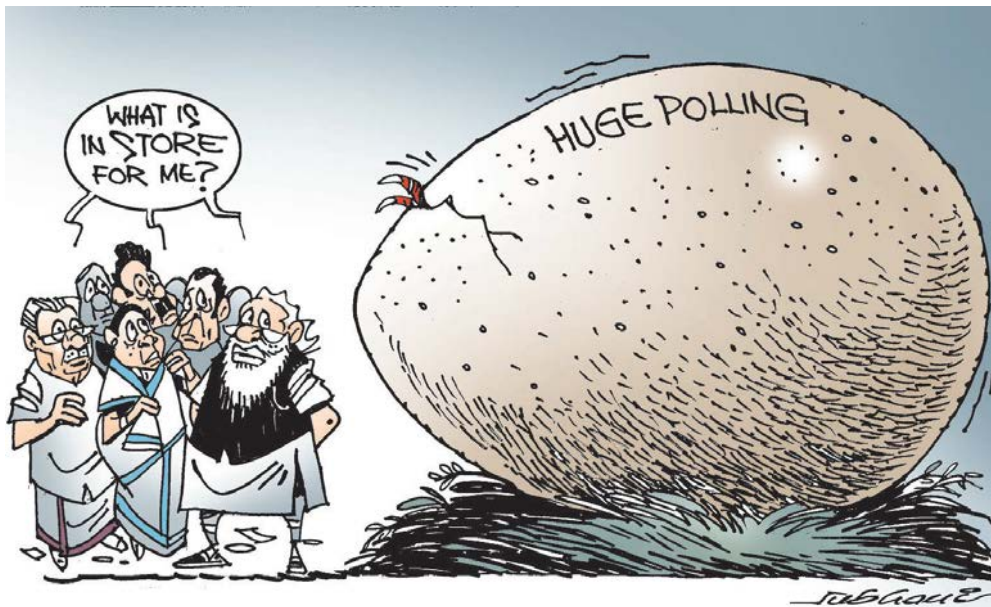
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Subhani



As Covid-19 spikes, the season of fear is back...



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

Loss comes in many forms in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. There is the loss of lives and livelihoods; and then there is the loss of words as we understood them once. The “normal” of yesteryear may never return.

And yet, there were flickers of hope as the new year began.

Newspapers were full of stories about the consistent fall in India's active Covid-19 caseload. Antibody surveys showed that a significant part of the population in major cities — including New Delhi — had already been exposed to the virus, raising hopes of a slowing spread. On January 16 this year, India rolled out the world's largest vaccination drive against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes the Covid-19 pandemic. In the first phase, the priority was inoculating healthcare and frontline workers. Then it expanded to the public, taking age and co-morbidities into consideration. More than 8.31 crore jabs have been given so far.

But the season of fear is back.

Infections started to shoot up several few weeks ago, particularly in Maharashtra. Now, the daily rise in Covid-19 cases in the country has crossed 100,000, from 20,000 infections in less than a month. Mumbai, India's financial capital, is among the 10 districts in the country with the highest number of new Covid-19 cases. Delhi, the national capital, is not as badly hit as Mumbai as of now, but from this week, night curfew has been imposed on the city. Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, along with peri-urban areas, have recorded a sharp spike in Covid cases recently; the fear is that the infection may spread from these small towns to rural areas.

Even the Union health ministry is compelled to admit that the recent spike in coronavirus cases in India is spreading faster in the country compared to last year.

How did we get here? The short answer: We got here because of complacency, by ignoring early alerts by health experts. Part of the problem has also been mixed messaging, and the government's reluctance to accept and communicate unpalatable truths.

Even as government health advisories tell ordinary people to observe social distancing, avoid big crowds and wear masks at all times, there is ample evidence of many politicians on the campaign trail doing just the opposite.

One telling example: Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who recently said there was no need to wear masks in the state as there was no coronavirus there anymore.

Even as one writes, huge crowds continue to gather at election rallies in many states as well as at religious gatherings.

How did we slip up?

Prof. Bhramar Mukherjee, a biostatistician at the University of Michigan in the United States, who has been tracking India's coronavirus outbreak, told me she had tweeted about the uptick on February 18. But when she mentioned this to her close family and friends at that time, they thought “I was crying wolf”, she says.

“The public sentiment that Covid is no longer an issue, with even the more cautious people letting their guard down, has certainly contributed to this aftermath,” says Prof. Mukherjee. She also points out that the sero-survey results gave a false complacency and a false sense of security, thinking that we are nearing infection-induced herd immunity.

We need to accept that even in the post-inoculated world, our public health systems have to remain on high alert for the foreseeable future

“Taking advantage of the valley of the virus curve, we needed to accelerate the vaccination drive while case counts were low instead of relying on ephemeral infection immunity.”

Prof. Mukherjee is not the only one who was warning against complacency. In February, many of India's leading epidemiologists, like Dr Giridhara R. Babu, were flagging the need to keep the focus on detection of Covid cases and clusters in the community. Dr Babu also listed some of the imperatives at primary health centres — testing needed to be available, ditto for notification within 24 hours, quick contact tracing, genomic sequencing of clusters and vulnerability assessment. “The number of deaths occurring in hospitals should be reported daily. The number of Covid-19 deaths occurring in the community should also be reported daily and reviewed regularly at different levels,” Dr Babu tweeted on February 23.

Although it is late, identifying excess deaths earlier can save more lives. Instead of addressing these important but active containment efforts, the tendency is to push often passive mitigation measures such as lockdowns, seal-downs and curfews, he had pointed out.

Now, we are hearing a lot about new variants of the virus, but how closely are we tracking them?

Arguably, the biggest challenge of this pandemic is negotiating the sea of unknowns. But even so, many things could have been done, say experts.

“We could have started intensified vaccination and ring vaccination in high transmission areas as an exception to the general 45+ or 65+ rule followed for the rest of the country,” says Prof.

Mukherjee. Ring vaccination is where you vaccinate the surrounding “ring”, or circle of interaction of anyone who is infected or tests positive. This includes people who are not eligible by the age-based criterion.

What is the road ahead?

“Vaccination is one of the strategies, but it is not the only strategy. We should have three-four strategies working in parallel. After we give the vaccine, the adequate antibody response will take a few weeks. Second, along with vaccination, we need an aggressive testing, tracking and isolation policy. Six months ago, it was being done very aggressively by states, but we have now become lax. If a person tests positive, no one really goes and checks who they have come in contact with, and we fail to break the chain of transmission,” Dr Randeep Guleria, director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, recently told a national newspaper.

There is an obvious need to identify areas where surges are taking place, develop them into containment zones, test everyone in that area, isolate those who are positive, quarantine those who have come in close contact with patients and test them after five to seven days, and not allow people from that area to go to another area, as Dr Guleria suggests.

See-sawing between laxity and lockdown is not a solution. It will destroy both lives and livelihoods. We need to accept that even in the post-inoculated world, our public health systems have to remain on high alert for the foreseeable future. “The history of infectious diseases tells us that outbreaks can happen even after a high degree of vaccination. You have to track each case and contact trace,” as Prof. Mukherjee points out.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

COVID RULES

The alarming surge in Covid cases can be attributed to people not adhering to rules and lack of containment measures (*Ban all large gatherings, give everyone vaccines, DC, April 7*). Authorities must micro-manage the vaccination and pay attention to the regions experiencing surge. People must realise that they can't afford another lockdown. Let us not allow the pandemic to play havoc by adhering to the guidelines.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

DECIMATE MAOISTS

The Red Corridor still eludes governments at the Centre and states (*Need to rethink strategy to tackle Maoist menace, DC, April 7*). Several strategies were adopted for development of tribal areas to control the Maoists. Nothing concrete has happened so far. New strategies are announced at every massacre and forgotten. The time is ripe for a committed Messiah to emerge and act decisively to decimate Maoists.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

CURB FAKE NEWS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi must introspect about his party's role first before blaming the Opposition for spreading rumours (*PM slams Oppn for spreading rumours, DC, April 7*). His party's IT cell and social media lead in circulating fake news. Last December, Twitter flagged a tweet by BJP's IT cell head as “manipulated media” for an edited clip about farmers protest. In order to curb fake news, all parties must get their act together.

Sajid Farooq
Kurnool

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

360 villages reduced to ashes in East Pak

JESSORE, APRIL. 7
Hordes of marauding Pakistani commandoes have blazed a trail of death and desolation along this black-topped road which connects the two ravished cities of Dacca and Jessore.

During my 50-mile-long journey on the palm-fringed road, I counted 360 roadside villages reduced to ashed by bands of West Pakistani troopers who are firmly garrisoned in the Jessore Cantonment.

Maleeha Lodhi



Uncivil society: Is regulation alone enough to curb fake news?

THE danger that misleading or false information poses to society has been grimly demonstrated during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the deadly threat from the virus, many people's response across the world has often been shaped by misinformation fed through digital platforms. This has either made them trivialise the disease or resort to “cures” without any basis in science and only because they were circulated in social messaging as a ‘remedy’. Vaccine hesitancy in many parts of the world has also largely been driven by rumour and conspiracy theories.

This prompted the World Health Organisation early in the pandemic to coin the term “infodemic” to refer to the flood of information and exponential spread of fabricated content. The head of WHO, Tedros Adhanom, declared: “We're not just battling the virus, we're also battling the trolls and conspiracy theorists that push misinformation and undermine the outbreak response.” Top UN officials repeatedly warned of the grave social and health ramifications of the proliferation of misinformation.

While the global health crisis has seen a stream of false stories the reality is that fake news is all around us today. This presents new challenges to social stability in what has been called the post-truth era, a term that emerged a few years ago.

Fake news is of course not new. Disinformation has been used by countries against adversaries throughout history. What distinguishes fake news from propaganda is that individuals and non-state actors are now using it with abandon in the digital age. This makes it unprecedentedly pervasive.

What explains the omnipresence of fake news today? It is generally agreed that this has much to do with the proliferation of information channels and expansion of social media in the digital era. Communication technology now dominates our lives like never before. Online platforms are widely regarded as the main vehicles for the spread of misinformation. Fake news easily circulates due to the magnifying power of social media and becomes viral in this mostly unregulated environment. Anonymity on social media platforms

gives the purveyors of false stories and trolls the comfort that they will not be held accountable for the lies or hate messages they disseminate. Anyone can post fake news on social media without fear of retribution.

Facebook and Twitter have been the object of mounting global criticism for this reason. Despite the raging controversy over their role, social media giants who wield immense power have yet to undertake effective self-regulation. A Unesco report notes that steps taken are at best “patchy”. As Timothy Garton Ash once wrote in *The Guardian*, these digital platforms have become “unprecedentedly powerful amplifiers of lies” and “the profit motive pushes them towards the dark side, via algorithmic maximization of the currency of attention”. In fact, their business model prevents them from instituting real checks on divisive content and “digital wildfires”.

The spread of fake news has also been linked to the rise of populist leaders who feel no compunction in knowingly selling fact-free narratives. Trump perfected the politics of lies. He consciously

used ‘alternative facts’ and manipulated opinion by espousing conspiracy theories and fabricating threats to further his political career. But he wasn't alone. Demagogues and their followers across the world have employed similar means for political gain, playing on people's vulnerabilities by communicating falsehoods.

A plausible connection has also been made between the prevalence of fake news and political polarisation. This is because in polarised society and politics people choose to believe what their partisan side transmits or what accords with their own views. They only listen to news media or follow online sites which echo their own bias. Living in information or digital ‘bubbles’ makes them susceptible to anything disseminated by their chosen information channel, true or false.

The harmful repercussions of the fake news phenomenon are manifold. An environment where truth is blurred can have far-reaching consequences — misleading people, damaging social cohesion by eroding a sense of shared interest, debasing politics, undermining civic obligations, and

even sowing public disorder.

Also, as president Barack Obama once famously remarked “fake news is a threat to democracy”. When political debate is degraded by falsehoods and bereft of reason, democracy is jeopardised. By playing off and reinforcing polarisation, narratives based on untruths that demonise “the other” corrode a sense of community and are deeply divisive. Trust also declines in public institutions as misleading information often sows doubts and cynicism. The pernicious effects of hate speech, harassment, online extremism and lies spread against minorities need no elaboration.

How these dangers can be mitigated is an imposing challenge of our times. Solutions offered range from greater online regulation, increased monitoring and oversight by social media companies to removing toxic content and ending user anonymity. How effective they can be remains to be seen. Regulating technology is one thing but it is uncivil human behaviour that really needs to change.

By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49661.76	0.94
Nifty 50	14819.00	0.92
S&P 500*	4,073.50	-0.01
Dollar (₹)	74.55	1.52
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.03	1.44
Euro (₹)	88.58	2.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,768.587	1.28
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	62.81	0.11
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.082	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.647	-0.009

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Drug firms asked to ramp up remdesivir output

The government said that all seven manufacturers of remdesivir have been asked to ramp up production to full capacity by next week. The direction comes against reports of shortages of the critical Covid-19 drug. "There are seven players who produce remdesivir. I have asked all players to ramp up production to full capacity by next week," Mansukh Mandaviya, minister of state for chemicals and fertilisers, said.

Wipro appoints Subha Tatavarti as CTO



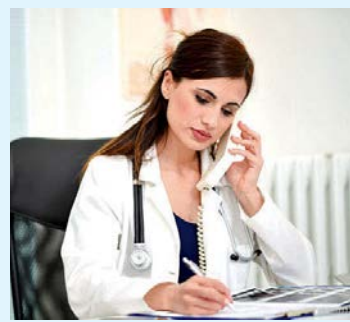
Wipro said it has appointed former Walmart executive Subha Tatavarti as its chief technology officer. The company also appointed Suzanne Dann as senior vice president and sector head for capital markets and insurance, North America region. Tatavarti will lead Wipro's Service Transformation, Topcoder, Robotics, SVC, Technovation Centre, Open Innovation and Applied Research teams, Wipro said.

Aravind appointed as CFO of Tanla Platforms Ltd

Tanla Platforms, India's largest CPaaS provider, on Wednesday appointed Aravind Viswanathan as the chief financial officer. He would take charge on June 1. "Aravind is the right person to join me and our leadership team to help continue Tanla's remarkable momentum and drive our next phase of hyper growth, global expansion, and customer success," said Uday Reddy, the chairman and CEO of Tanla Platforms.

Practo online consultations in 15 languages

Integrated healthcare company Practo announced the launch of online consultations in 15 vernacular languages. This initiative will allow users to choose a doctor who can speak in their preferred language. Currently, this service covers 15 languages, with more to be added soon, it said in a release, adding that with this, Practo is one step closer to breaking down access barriers for 200 mn users in the future.



■ Rates on hold; accommodative stance to remain RBI opts for status quo

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 7

Faced with renewed challenges to growth and inflationary pressures, the Reserve Bank of India-led monetary policy committee (MPC) in its first bi-monthly policy review for FY22 on Wednesday kept the policy repo rate unchanged and decided to continue with its accommodative stance "as long as necessary" to ensure a durable economic recovery, especially since the second pandemic wave threatens the country's growth prospects.

The central bank also chose to focus on supporting desired financial conditions through new instruments, the highlight being the 'G-sec acquisition programme' (GSAP) to ease yields on government bonds (G-secs).

While economic activity is normalising in spite of the surge in infections, the second wave of the pandemic is adding uncertainty to the economic outlook, said RBI governor

BACKING UP GROWTH

► MPC decides to retain repo rate at 4%, reverse repo at 3.35%, and marginal standing facility at 4.25%

► Stance to remain accommodative till recovery is ensured

► CPI inflation trajectory faces both upside and downside pressures. RBI's 5.2% forecast for the first half of this fiscal is slightly higher than the 5-5.2%

Shaktikanta Das.

"The recent surge in Covid-19 infections, however, adds uncertainty to the domestic growth outlook amidst tightening of restrictions by some state governments..Fiscal and monetary authorities stand ready to act in a coordinated manner to limit its spillovers to the economy at large and contain its fall-

estimated in February
► For FY22 CPI Inflation is expected at 5%,
► FY22 GDP forecast unchanged at 10.5%.

► While growth prospects have brightened with vaccination, the second pandemic wave has brought new uncertainties

► Under G-Sec acquisition programme 1.0, RBI will buy ₹1 lakh crore in Q1

out on the ongoing recovery. There is concern around rising cases of infections but as Martin Luther King Jr had said and I quote: "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope" said Das in his monetary policy statement.

The MPC believes the consumer price index-

Paytm, Airtel, India Post and Fino Payments Bank are some of the top players in the payments bank segment.

Welcoming the measure, Satish Gupta, MD & CEO of Paytm Payments Bank Ltd, said this will enable the bank to cater to the growing needs of its customers. "Similarly, the increase in the current limit on the outstanding balance in full KYC PPIs (prepaid payment instruments) from Rs 1 lakh to

Rs 2 lakh will incentivise migration to full KYC PPIs, which will further bring financial inclusion across the country."

In another move, now non-bank payment operators can also use RTGS and NEFT systems. The central bank proposed to enable payment system operators like PPIs, card networks, white label ATM operators and trade receivable discounting system (TREDS) platforms regulated by it to take

Fintech gets leg-up; wallet limit doubled to ₹2 L

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 7

The Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday announced a slew of measures to further boost the digital fintech ecosystem. In a major move, payment banks can now hold a maximum end of day balance of Rs 2 lakh per customer from Rs 1 lakh earlier. This will be a relief to shopkeepers who use payment bank wallets to receive payments.

Rupee sees steep fall but bond yields cool

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 7

The rupee plunged to a four-month-low on Wednesday, but the bond market cheered as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) pledged to buy Rs 1 lakh crore of government bonds this quarter to cap borrowing costs.

The rupee fell 1.6 per cent, the biggest fall since August 2019, to close at 74.5650 per dollar. While policy rates were kept unchanged, the RBI announced a G-Sec acquisition programme (GSAP) of Rs 1 lakh crore in Q1FY22, with as much as Rs 25,000 crore of open market operations (OMO) purchase lined up on April 15. According to analysts, this would help cool bond yields and support the government's market borrowing programme. Notably, RBI's net purchases in FY21 were Rs 3.13 lakh crore and this sets the tone for a similar of higher purchases in FY22.

The gesture was well-received by the bond mar-

ket, as the yield on the benchmark 10-year government bond fell by nearly 6 basis points to 6.078 per cent, as soon as the governor's speech ended.

The secondary market G-Sec acquisition programme (G-SAP 1.0) gives indicative calendar of purchase of government securities by the RBI and provides the market sufficient guidance to plan its liquidity management well. It is also expected to help smoothen the government borrowing programme.

"A defined primary liquidity infusion via the bond programme is de-facto a secondary QE of RBI," said Madhavi Arora, economist at Emkay Global Financial Services Ltd. "This will imply massive narrow money growth and primary liquidity which is clearly going to put depreciation pressure on INR."

In his statement, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das, said the central bank is keen to have an orderly movement in the finan-

cial markets and would not want excess volatility to take hold. Among the most important announcements were the extension of the targeted long-term repo operations (TLTRO) scheme till September, 30 from March 31—a big help for 26 sectors allowed to benefit under this scheme.

The RBI announced Rs 50,000 crore liquidity support to all India financial institutions to lend to productive sectors. This money will go to Nabard (Rs 25,000 crore) which will be used for on-lending to support agriculture and allied activities, the rural non-farm sector and non-banking financial companies-micro finance institutions. Also, Rs 10,000 crore will be extended to National Housing Bank for one year to support the housing sector.

Further, to meet the funding requirements of micro, small and medium enterprises, Sidbi will be sanctioned Rs 15,000 crore for a period of up to one year.

linked (CPI) inflation trajectory faces both upside and downside pressures. RBI expects inflation to rise marginally in FY22 though it expects food inflation to soften. Its 5.2 per cent forecast for the first half of this fiscal was slightly higher than the 5-5.2 per cent estimated in February. For fiscal 2022 as a whole, it expects 5 per cent. On the other hand, the gross domestic product (GDP) forecast was unchanged at 10.5 per cent for this fiscal.

The RBI announced a slew of liquidity infusing measures; prime being government securities acquisition programme (GSAP), under which it will commit upfront a specific amount of open market purchases of G-secs. At the same time, it announced variable reverse repo operations to normalise liquidity at the shorter end of the yield curve. Another key regulatory measure was extension of on-tap TLTRO scheme by six months till end-September.

direct memberships in centralised payment systems (CPS)-RTGS (real-time gross settlement) and NEFT (national electronic fund transfer).

Furthermore, the RBI has also proposed to make interoperability mandatory for full-KYC PPIs and for all payment acceptance infrastructure. Guidelines for adoption of interoperability on a voluntary basis for full-KYC PPIs were issued back in October 2018.

MEIL'S FIRST MAKE IN INDIA OIL RIG BEGINS OPERATION

New Delhi, April 7: Megha Engineering & Infrastructures Ltd (MEIL) on Wednesday said its first indigenously-made oil drilling rig has started operation at the Kalol oil fields in Ahmedabad.

The rig, which became operational on Wednesday, is part of an order worth Rs 6,000 crore for 47 drilling rigs.

MEIL is the first company in the private sector to manufacture and use rigs used in oil and fuel extraction with advanced technology, a company statement said.

As part of the Centre's Make in India programme, MEIL has manufactured these rigs for the first time in the country, it added.

With a capacity of 1500 HP (horse power) these rigs can easily dig oil wells up to 4,000 metres (four kilometres) depth from the ground surface. These rigs have a life span of about 40 years.

In 2019, MEIL received a tender worth Rs 6,000 crore to manufacture 47 drilling rigs. —PTI

Dovish stance leads to broad-based buying

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 7

The market gained close to one per cent as banks, auto and tech stocks gained after the RBI announced status quo in interest rates and maintained an accommodative monetary policy stance in view of the challenging times.

The Sensex gained 460.37 points, or 0.94 per cent, closing at 49,661.76 while the Nifty-50 closed 135.55 points, or 0.92 per cent, up at 14,819.05.

The prospect of low interest rate remaining in the near future led to gains for mid-cap and small-cap stocks, with Nifty Mid-cap 50 and Mid-cap 100 indices gaining 1.35 per cent and 1.32 per cent, respectively, while the Nifty Small-cap 100 Index gained 1.71 per cent.

Among the sectoral indices interest rate sensitive Nifty Bank gained 1.51 per cent, as yield of government securities fell sharply. The Nifty Auto gained 1.59 per cent while the Nifty Realty gained 0.9 per cent.

The Nifty PSU Bank index gained 1.95 per cent. The 10-year government bond yield fell to 6.082 per cent and touching 6.059 intra-day.

Both foreign portfolio investors and domestic institutions turned net buyers of equities worth Rs 227.42 and Rs 381.08 crore, respectively.

Sebi slaps ₹25-cr fine on Ambanis

New Delhi, April 7: The Sebi on Wednesday imposed a total penalty of Rs 25 crore on Mukesh Ambani, Anil Ambani, other individuals and entities for non-compliance with takeover norms in a Reliance Industries case dating back to 2000.

Others penalised by the watchdog include Nita Ambani and Tina Ambani, wives of Mukesh and Anil Ambanis.

RIL's promoters and persons acting in concert (PAC) failed to disclose the acquisition of more than 5 per cent stake in the company way back in 2000, the regulator said in its 85-page order.

In 2005, Mukesh and Anil had split the business empire built by their father Dhirubhai Ambani.

As per the order, 6.83 per cent shares that were acquired by RIL promoters together with PACs consequent to exercise of option on warrants attached with non-convertible secured redeemable debentures were in excess of ceiling of 5 per cent prescribed under the takeover regu-

PLI schemes for solar modules, AC, LED lights okayed

FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

The government on Wednesday approved a production linked incentive (PLI) schemes for boosting domestic manufacturing capacities of solar PV modules and white goods like air conditioners and LED lights, with a combined budgetary outlay of more than Rs 10,700 crore.

The PLI scheme for solar photovoltaic modules has an outlay of Rs 4,500 crore and is aimed at adding 10,000 MW manufacturing capacity of integrated solar PV modules entailing direct investment of Rs 17,200 crore.

This PLI scheme is likely to create direct employment of around 30,000 and indirect employment of 1.2 lakh, according to the government.

Solar energy capacity addition now depends largely upon imported solar PV cells and modules as the domestic manufacturing industry has limited operational capacities of solar PV cells and modules, a government statement said.

The PLI will be disbursed for five years post commissioning of solar PV manufacturing plants, on sales of high efficiency

solar PV modules.

The PLI scheme for white goods, approved by the Union Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has an outlay of Rs 6,238 crore.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said the approval of the scheme for ACs and LEDs will give a boost to domestic manufacturing.

The prime objective of the scheme is to make manufacturing in India globally competitive by removing sectoral disabilities, creating economies of scale and ensuring efficiencies.

It is designed to create a complete component ecosystem in India and make India an integral part of the global supply chains. The scheme is expected to attract global investments, generate large-scale employment opportunities and enhance exports substantially.

"The PLI scheme for white goods shall extend an incentive of 4 per cent to 6 per cent on incremental sales of goods manufactured in India for a period of five years to companies engaged in manufacturing of air conditioners and LED lights," another official statement said.

New Intel chip launched

FC BUREAU
HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

Intel on Wednesday launched new 3rd Gen Intel Xeon Scalable processors, its most advanced, highest performance data centre platform optimised to power the industry's broadest range of workloads.

Code-named "Ice Lake", the 3rd Gen Intel Xeon Scalable processors deliver a significant performance increase compared with the prior generation, with an average 46 per cent improvement on popular data centre workloads.

The processors also add new and enhanced platform capabilities, including Intel SGX for built-in security, and Intel Crypto Acceleration and Intel DL Boost for AI acceleration.

"The future of technology is being shaped by several infections, including the proliferation of the cloud, AI, the rapid adoption of 5G and computing at the edge. As the pace of this digital disruption accelerates, Intel's technology and leadership products are more critical than ever," said Prakash Mallya, VP and MD, sales, marketing and communications Group, Intel India.

In India, early adopters of the new 3rd Gen Intel Xeon Scalable platform include CtrlS, ESDS, Pi Datacenters, Reliance Jio and Wipro Ltd. Additionally, key hardware and software ecosystem players have market-ready solutions to enable customers to efficiently deploy Intel's latest technologies and enhance performance across workloads.

Nurse squeezes extra doses of vaccine with air bubbles

ESSI LEHTO
HELSINKI, APRIL 7

Finnish nurse Sari Roos is teaching her colleagues a vaccination technique that enables her to squeeze more doses out of Covid-19 vaccine vials, helping to stretch scarce supplies and ensure more people can be inoculated.

Her air-bubble trick makes it possible to extract an elusive seventh dose from vials of the vaccine from Pfizer—one more than the six approved by Europe's health regulator that can normally only be drawn with a special needle and syringe.

Such "low-dead-space"



shot utensils are in short supply, making Roos' trick all the more valuable as countries seek to protect people against new, more infectious coronavirus strains that are spreading a third wave of infection. Roos' technique, similar to one used in Denmark, begins by drawing some

vaccine liquid and then pushing it back into the bottle to get rid of air in the syringe. She then draws the exact dose and completes it with sterile air from the bottle.

The dose is then injected with minimal waste.

"The purpose of the air is to push all the liquid into the patient from the needle and close the injection channel so it won't bleed," Roos told Reuters at Helsinki's Laakso hospital where she works as a training nurse.

Her success has drawn the attention of colleagues at home and abroad who are keen to get more shots from each vial. —Reuters

SHORT TAKES

Olympic torch is off Osaka streets

Tokyo: The Tokyo Olympic torch relay will not run through the streets of Osaka prefecture next week because of rising Covid-19 cases.

The move is a setback for Tokyo organisers, who began the relay two weeks ago from northeastern Fukushima prefecture with 10,000 runners planning to crisscross Japan over the course of four months. The Olympics open in just over 100 days on July 23. In a last-minute change of plans, organisers said in a statement Wednesday that runners and the torch will be involved in some event in an Osaka city park on the days when the relay was to cross the entire prefecture. That was to be April 13-14. "Given the circumstances, the Osaka prefectural authorities today requested Tokyo 2020 to hold the Osaka segment of the Olympic torch relay in Expo '70 Commemorative Park rather than on public roads," Tokyo organisers said. — *AP*

Judo team pull out of Oly qualies

New Delhi: A 16-member Indian judo team has been forced to withdraw from the ongoing Asia-Oceania Olympic qualifiers in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan after a player tested positive for Coronavirus just before the start of the tournament. The judoka tested positive after landing in Kyrgyzstan. "Yes, one player of the team tested positive upon landing in Bishkek just a before the official weighing on April 5, forcing the entire squad to withdraw as per the guidelines of International Judo Federation," a source in the Judo Federation of India (JFI) said. "The team comprised 12 judokas and four coaches," it added. The Asia-Oceania Championships in Bishkek started on Tuesday and will end on Saturday. Prominent judokas in the team included Shushila Devi (women's 48kg), Jasleen Singh Saini (men's 66kg), Tulika Mann (women's 78kg) and Avtar Singh (men's 100kg). — *PTI*

Indian archers fully vaccinated

Pune: The Olympic-bound Indian archers on Wednesday took their second shots of Covid-19 vaccine, becoming the first fully vaccinated lot of athletes from the country ahead of the Tokyo Games. In an initiative undertaken by the Army Sports Institute, where the national camp for the recurve archers is being held, all the eight senior archers, the coaches and support staff were administered the second shot at the Military Hospital here. The eight archers included Atanu Das, Tarundeep Rai, Pravin Jadhav and B Dhiraj (reserve) in men's and Deepika Kumari, Ankita Bhakat, Komolika Bari and Madhu Vedwan (reserve) in the women's section. "Second and final dose of the vaccine is done. Thank you so much Army Sports Institute for making everything smooth and convenient," Atanu Das captioned his vaccination photo on his Instagram handle. Former world number Deepika Kumari and India's most senior archer Tarundeep Rai also shared their vaccination photographs. — *PTI*

Hockey team are off to flying start

Buenos Aires: The Indian men's hockey team made a positive start to its tour of Argentina, beating the reigning Olympic champions 4-3 in the first practice match here. Nilakanta Sharma (16th minute), Harmanpreet Singh (28th), Rupinder Pal Singh (33rd) and Varun Kumar (47th) were the goal scorers for India late on Tuesday night. Dragflicker Leandro Tolini (35th, 53rd) and Maico Casella (41st) scored for the home team. — *PTI*

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Europa League Quarterfinals (first legs): Arsenal vs Slavia Praha from 12:30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1; Granada vs Manchester United from 12:30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2; Ajax vs Roma from 12:30 am (Friday) on Sony Six, HD

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Royals look to rule

Will Samson-Sangakkara partnership work for Rajasthan?

New Delhi, April 7: A restructured Rajasthan Royals will aim to build a new legacy but a weak Indian contingent and overdependence on foreign recruits could hurt the inaugural edition winners' chance for glory in the upcoming IPL.

RR have made some changes in management as well as the squad ahead of the new season. Sanju Samson replaced Steve Smith, who was released, as skipper while coach Andrew McDonald has also gone with Sri Lankan legend Kumar Sangakkara stepping in as director of cricket.

To strengthen their pace attack RR bought South African all-rounder Chris Morris for a whopping ₹16.25 crore, making him the most expensive buy in the IPL auction history.

However, an injury to Archer ruling him out of at least the first few games, is a massive blow.

Here's is a SWOT analysis of the side that will take on Punjab Kings in Mumbai on April 12.

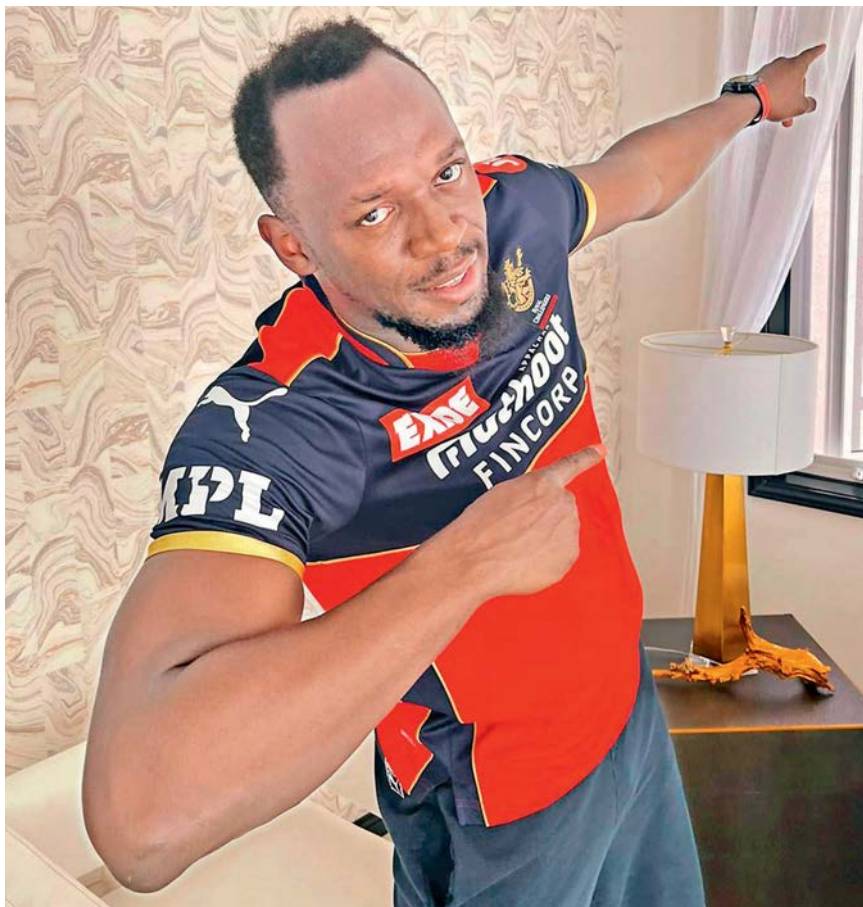
STRENGTH

RR boast of a number of destructive batsmen. Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes are two match-winning players who can trample any opposition while Samson is a minefield of talent.

David Miller and Morris are two other powerful strikers and Liam Livingstone can turn the match on its head. Last season's revelation, all-rounder Rahul Tewatia, has also showcased his ability to whack the ball outside the park.

WEAKNESS

For Royals, the problem is their weak Indian core



World's fastest sprinter and the 11-time world champion Usain Bolt posted this pic of his in a Royal Challengers Bangalore jersey on Twitter and wrote 'Challengers, just letting you know, I am still the fastest cat around,' while tagging captain Virat Kohli, star batsman AB de Villiers, Puma cricket and the RCB team handle. — *Usain Bolt*

which hasn't been consistent. Samson has rarely performed in five straight games in any of the editions in the past few years. Pacer Jaydev Unadkat, bought for ₹11.5 crore in 2018, has been unable to deliver.

OPPORTUNITY

Samson's form and consistency have always been a question mark. He has failed to capitalised on the

handful of chances provided to him in T20s. With Suryakumar Yadav and Ishan Kishan doing brilliantly on their T20 debuts, Sanju have the perfect opportunity for him to prove his leadership skills in order to make the Indian team for the World Cup.

THREAT

With Samson at the helm, his lack of experience in

NOW, SAMS OF RCB CONTRACTS CORONAVIRUS

Chennai, April 7: Royal Challengers Bangalore's Australian allrounder Daniel Sams on Wednesday tested positive for Covid-19 ahead of the IPL starting on April 9 here, but opener Devdutt Padikkal recovered from the dreaded infection to join the side.

According to a statement issued by RCB on its Twitter handle, the 28-year-old allrounder arrived in India on April 3 and had a negative Covid-19 test report at that time. RCB will take on defending champions Mumbai Indians in the tournament-opener on Friday. "His (Sams) report from the 2nd test on 7th April came positive. Sams is currently asymptomatic and he is currently in isolation at a designated medical facility," the RCB said.

"Royal Challengers Bangalore medical team is in constant touch with Daniel Sams and continue to monitor his health and abide by the BCCI protocols," RCB added.

Daniel became the second RCB player to test positive for the infection after left-handed opening batsman Padikkal.

"Devidutt Padikkal, has joined the team on 7th April 2021 with negative reports for Covid-19 as per BCCI protocols. RCB medical team was in constant touch with Devdutt to ensure his safety and well-being," RCB stated in a separate release. — *PTI*

WE'VE BACK UP PLANS FOR T20 WC IN INDIA: ICC CEO

New Delhi, April 7: ICC's interim CEO Geoff Allardice on Wednesday said the body has backup plans in place for the T20 World Cup in India later this year but is currently not entertaining any thoughts of moving it out of the country despite a surge in Covid-19 cases here.

The tournament is scheduled to be held in October-November in India, which is reporting over one lakh daily cases for the past few days. Amid the Covid surge, the IPL is due to start on Friday in Chennai behind closed doors.

"We are certainly proceeding with the event as planned," Allardice said during a virtual media round-table.

"Plan B we have, but we haven't activated those plans yet. We are working with the BCCI, we do have backup plans that can be activated if the time comes," Allardice further added. — *PTI*

Hardik opens up on mental health

Chennai, April 7: India and Mumbai Indians hard-hitting all-rounder Hardik Pandya on Wednesday said he realised the importance of mental health while playing international cricket and credited his family for keeping him in the "right space".

"When I play international cricket, mentally I realized, because the kind of pressure that came into your life. Obviously, life change for us, but as an individual, you need to cope with all the things," Hardik said in a video posted by Mumbai Indians on its official Twitter handle.

"So for me I realised that mental health is also important, where my family played a big role to make sure that I am in right space," he added.

The focus on mental health has grown in the last year with the Covid-19 pandemic forcing players to stay in bio-bubbles,



Hardik Pandya

where their life is restricted to hotels and stadiums.

The 27-year-old will turn up for Mumbai Indians in the lung-opener of the IPL when the defending champions take on Royal Challengers Bangalore on Friday here.

"Just making sure that in the day, you are doing some activity which is adding to your fitness, that's very important. And if you look after small things, it's going to be grateful that it is going to look after your body," he said. — *PTI*



Mahendra Singh Dhoni (left) and T. Natarajan in this file photo.

MS ADVICE HELPED: NATARAJAN

New Delhi, April 7: Left-arm yorker specialist T. Natarajan says former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni's advice to bowl slow bouncers and cutters during his break-out IPL season last year helped him get better at his craft.

The 30-year-old Natarajan, who bowled a maximum 71 yorkers among all pacers in the last IPL, dismissed big names such as Dhoni and AB de Villiers during the

season. "Speaking to somebody like Dhoni itself is a big thing. He spoke to me about fitness and encouraged me, saying that I will keep getting better with experience. He said, use slow bouncers, cutters, and variations like that. It has been useful for me," Natarajan was quoted as saying by *ESPNCricinfo*.

Before that, Dhoni was dismissed by the SRH pacer, who also shone during India's tour of

Australia following a surprise call-up to the national team.

Recalling that wicket, he said, "I pitched one in the slot and he hit me for a big six — 102 metres or something. The next ball I got his wicket (and didn't celebrate) — I was just thinking about that previous ball. After coming back to the dressing room, though, I was happy after finishing the match, I also had a chat with him." — *PTI*

Vinicius double sinks Liverpool

Madrid, April 7: Vinicius Junior scored twice as Real Madrid made Liverpool pay for more defensive errors on Tuesday, a 3-1 victory putting them in sight of the Champions League semifinals.

Vinicius and Marco Asensio both profited in the first half after darting behind Liverpool's makeshift back-line before a throw-in gave Vinicius a simple finish in the second. Mohamed Salah's strike shortly after the interval briefly made it a contest at Valdebebas, with an away goal certainly a significant consolation for Liverpool to take into the second leg at Anfield next week.

But without fans and with a miserable recent record at home, Jurgen Klopp will know his side have it all to do to avoid his team's season becoming solely about scraping into the Premier League's top four.

Except for two spells after half-time and at the finish, when their opponents were holding on to what they had, Liverpool were overpowered by Real Madrid, whose only disappointment might be missing out on a clearer margin ahead of the return in eight days' time.

Before then, they go up against Barcelona on Saturday and this result, their fifth consecutive victory, should be another huge boost to morale going into what will be a crucial fixture in La Liga's title race. Madrid were without Sergio Ramos, who

THE RESULTS

(QUARTERFINALS FIRST LEGS)

Real Madrid (Vinicius Junior 27, 65, Asensio 36)	3
Liverpool (Salah 51)	1
Manchester City (De Bruyne 19, Foden 90)	2
Borussia Dortmund (Reus 84)	1

throughout was bellowing at his team from the stands, while Raphael Varane testing positive for Covid-19 on Tuesday morning meant both sides were fielding patched-up back fours.

FODEN DENTS DORTMUND

Pep Guardiola said Manchester City "felt the pressure" of expectancy in the Champions League as they needed Phil Foden's 90th minute winner to take a slender 2-1 lead from the first leg of their quarterfinal tie against Borussia Dortmund on Tuesday.

Haaland, who is being touted as a potential replacement for Sergio Aguero at City next season, didn't have the best of auditions to live up to a valuation far exceeding £100 million. European football's hottest young talent struggled to make an impact, beyond setting up an equaliser on the turn for captain Marco Reus to cancel out Kevin De Bruyne's first-half strike.

Both the sides will meet again in Germany on April 14. — *AFP*



Liverpool's Nathaniel Phillips challenges Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior (right) during their UEFA Champions League first leg quarterfinal match at the Alfredo di Stefano stadium in Valdebebas in the outskirts of Madrid on Tuesday. Real Madrid won 3-1. — *AFP*

EX-FOOTBALLER SHYAM TESTS +VE, IN HOSPITAL

Kolkata, April 7: Legendary Indian forward and chairman of the All India Football Federation's technical committee Shyam Thapa has tested positive for Covid-19 and has been hospitalised.

The 73-year-old got himself admitted to a private hospital here on Tuesday evening after his test report came positive on Monday.

"I was feeling tasteless and there was a loss of appetite. My test report came positive and as a precautionary measure I got myself admitted. Now, I'm feeling stable and much better," Thapa, who helped India bag a bronze medal in the Merdeka Tournament and the Bangkok Asian Games in 1970, said.

Thapa was administered the first shot of Covid-19 vaccine on March 20.

"The second shot was due yesterday but now it has been postponed," he added.

Famous for his bicycle kick and back volleys, Thapa made his name for East Bengal in the mid 1960s and early 70s before joining Mohun Bagan in 1977 during an illustrious career. — *PTI*

24 athletes Covid +ve in SAI Bhopal

New Delhi, April 7: As many as 24 sportspersons and 12 support staff members have tested positive for the Coronavirus at the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) Bhopal centre but none of the athletes are Olympics-bound.

According to SAI, the positive cases came to light during two rounds of precautionary tests on April 3 and 6. The SAI Bhopal Center doesn't house any Olympic probable.

"In the two rounds of testing, a total of 36 people have tested positive for Covid, out of whom 24 are athletes, and the other 12 who are staff of NCOE (National Centre of Excellence)," a SAI official said.

"None of the athletes who have tested positive are Olympic-bound. Some of the athletes who tested positive had returned from

wushu and judo competitions," the official added.

In order to contain the spread of the virus, the athletes, who have tested positive, have been shifted to a hospital as a precautionary measure.

"None of the athletes are critical."

The SAI had further instructed all the NCOEs to strictly follow its existing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with stress on conducting regular precautionary tests.

On March 31, 30 sportspersons and support staff across disciplines were found to be Covid-19 positive after 741 precautionary tests were conducted at the National Centres of Excellence in Patiala and Bengaluru. However, the positive results in both the centres did not include any Tokyo Olympic-bound athlete. — *PTI*