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NEWS ROUNDUP

Raveena Tandon reacts to rape of minor

Actress Raveena Tandon on Tuesday reacted to the appalling incident of a minor rape victim being paraded with the accused, after being beaten up by a mob in a Madhya Pradesh village. The video of the incident has gone viral.

Raveena tweeted demanding harsh punishment for the accused. She also hinted at a lack of trust on India's legal system. She used the government's "beti bachao" slogan in a hashtag.

"Appalling visuals. #betibachao. Hope the criminals even if they happen to be her own family members, are brought to justice and pay dearly for scarring the life of this 16 year old. But then our courts .that's a different story. #injusticeagainstwomen #violenceagainstwomen," the actress wrote.

In the tribal-dominated Alirajpur district of Madhya Pradesh, the rape victim, a 16-year-old girl, was paraded with the accused after being beaten up by a mob. The police have registered case against six people and arrested all the accused.



Healthy boundaries to set in your relationship

Effective boundaries keep your relationship strong and healthy. Boundaries refer to limits that you put in place to protect your well-being. When boundaries are clearly communicated, along with the consequences for breaking them, your partner understands your expectations. In an earlier post I discussed ways to establish healthy boundaries in your relationship. This post identifies some types of boundaries to consider in your couple relationship to keep it running smoothly. In order to establish effective personal boundaries, you have to know yourself, communicate your boundaries to others, and follow through with the consequences.

Expectations

You should always discuss what you expect out of someone, and what you expect to receive. A lot of people enter relationships putting the burden of healing or completing them onto someone else.

None of us, however, are anyone's god, goddess, or totem of completion. We're us, we're real, and we have needs; needs which are easy to overlook by someone else if that someone puts us on a pedestal. A relationship should be a balance of give and take, not take till there's nothing left for someone to give.

Make sure to discuss how far you're willing to go toward being someone's "fulfilment" and how you would like, in turn, to be filled.

Tolerances

Everyone has different physical pain thresholds and same goes for emotional. Let a loved one know there are

certain things you will not tolerate: being shouted at, lied to, silenced, or mistrusted – whatever it is, make it known that going past these boundaries is a journey they may not want to take.

Sexual expression

Some people like sex every morning. Some people like it in odd locations. Some do it only on holidays. Some are wild, some slow and sensual. If you and your lover don't know where your sexual boundaries are, one or both of you might spend precious time unhappily faking sexual expression, which is a clear sign of trouble on any relationship's horizon. Let your needs and preferences be known, as

avoid sticky entanglements later.

Past lives

Simply put, your past is yours. Many people incorrectly feel that it's their right or duty to split open a lover's past so that everything about the lover is laid bare like parts for examination. Let people know that what you choose to divulge unless non-disclosure presents a

direct health risk or is otherwise threatening is at your discretion. Communication is key in any relationship, but a relationship is not a therapist's couch. Unless and until you're comfortable doing so, you're in no way obligated to make yourself an open book.

Family

Relationships often exist within the eyes of Hurricane Familia, which doesn't necessarily mean terrible family interactions, but simply that the needs of both families will constantly swirl around the edges of your relationship. Setting basic boundaries on how much each other's family interaction impacts the relationship will prevent a lot of emergency restoration later.

Friendships

Your lover will never like all of your friends, nor you theirs, but that doesn't stop a lot of people from trying to determine who the other can and can't have as friends. Set mutual boundaries of respect that the other can make reasonable decisions as to who they allow to influence them and, by extension, who they allow to influence the relationship.

(Womenia Desk)



well as how much wiggle room for experimentation exists within them.

Financial

Money is generally taken to be poison in matters of the heart, but money is an inescapable part of human interactions whether you're with someone or not. There used to be a huge stigma associated with a division of "romantic" funds, but many married couples now openly maintain separate bank accounts. It isn't an issue of mistrust or an expectancy of a failed relationship; it's a matter of convenience. Discuss your financial boundaries early to

INTERNATIONAL TRANSGENDER DAY OF VISIBILITY



Transgender movements have been increasing over the past few generations because of the biases that some people would assume about the transgender community.

While there are holidays commemorating transgender people who have suffered, International Transgender Day of Visibility focuses on more of the positive aspects of what being transgender means and takes direct action in changing the biases of people who don't understand transgender.

Rachel Crandall, the head of Transgender Michigan is one of the people who asked why there isn't a holiday that celebrates who they are? Originally, the first holiday that commemorates transgender people was Transgender Day of Remembrance, a holiday that memorializes the transgender people that the world has lost.

While this day commemorates the transgender people who have died without any recognition or acceptance, Crandall decided that there should be a better way to celebrate the lives of transgenders and thus created the holiday back in 2009. Since then, Trans Student Educational Resource took over social media management in 2003 and uses it as a way to educate people about transsexuality.

Hence, International Transgender Day of Visibility is all about giving transsexuals the spotlight on this day and educate others about what it means to be transgender and to try and remove transphobia as a result. The Trans Student Educational Resource has education videos that detail stories about trans people and how they experience life.

This day encourages people to talk about the issues facing transgender people and why it's important to

talk about those issues. It's a day of recognition, allowing people to learn about the history of transgender people in the world and day all about building acceptance for a minority group that strives for safety, understanding, and well-being.



Are we ready to face the summer?

COVID-19 lockdown has gradually lifted and offices, schools, public transports etc. are slowing opening its doors for communities to resume life as usually. This has come at a time when summer is right here smiling back at us. We have spent a year inside our houses well-protected from the scorching heat of the summer. Is our skin ready to beat the heat?

Dr Kiran Godse, Dermatology & Cosmetology, Hiranandani Hospital said, "When summers approach, temperatures rise and so does the humidity level. Humidity brings in a lot of changes in our skin and hair behaviour. Our skin becomes sweaty, oily, develops acne flare ups, blackheads, whiteheads, and is prone to fungal infections, heat boils, body odours etc. Even our hair becomes frizzy with an oily scalp and dandruff."

How to tackle skin problems during summer?

For having a healthy skin during these hard summer days, few tips can be helpful. Cleanse your skin well with a gentle cleanser twice daily is optimal. In case your body becomes excessively sweaty

or one suffers from body odours, bathing twice daily will be helpful. Make sure to dry your skin well before layering clothes, preferably even use some dusting powder, since it helps absorb excess moisture and thus, prevents fungal infections, heat boils or prickly heat issues

Using a sunscreen is crucial, especially for those who suffer from Hyperpigmentation and sun sensitivity. Wearing closed footwear for a prolonged period can give rise to fungal infections and soft corns in the web spaces, so using dusting powder on the foot before wearing socks or shoes, aids in keeping your feet dry and clean.

Caring for your hair during summer?

During summers, while it is necessary to care for your skin, it is equally important to take good care of your hair. Cleansing hair at least twice a week is optimal. For those suffering from an itchy or dandruff prone scalp, using an anti-dandruff shampoo regularly keeps dandruff at bay. Oiling your hair shouldn't be done frequently as it can lead to heat boils on scalp with acne flare ups on the forehead and trunk. Just a teaspoon of oil an hour before hair wash, once a week, is adequate.

Look hot this season!

Summer is around and we couldn't be more excited. It's time to say hello to endless sunshine and the new styles that come with it. We've rounded up some summer fashion that you'll want to keep on repeat all season long. Here are some in-depth breakdown of each trend and how to wear them every day.

Brilliant whites

Practically synonymous with the season, it wouldn't be summer without a dose of white to get us in the mood for sunshine and warm temperatures. Does wearing white make you nervous? Check out our ultimate guide to how to wear white with confidence.

To nail this trend, don't be afraid to mix different shades of white and add in a print to freshen up the classic style move. Look for sundresses, gauze blouses, white jeans, and platform sandals.

All natural

Show you're down-to-earth with pieces in shades of green, beige, and white. Organic fabrics like canvas and linen are lightweight and easy to wear when the temps rise. Go natural by refreshing your wardrobe with handcrafted accessories and breathable fabrics.

Alternate necklines

Don't underestimate the power of a unique neckline—they flatter your top half and make even basics feel special. There's an art to choosing the perfect style, whether you want to balance out your shape or show off your fave assets. Incorporating this trend into your outfits is easy, and you probably already do! Depending on your style, look for strapless, one-shoulder, racerback, or halter styles.



Spotify introduces 'AmplifiHer' to support women talent

Time and again, audio listening trends and charts in India have shown that despite the presence of talented local female artists, music composers and producers, lyricists, as well as podcast creators and hosts, their voices are underrepresented in the industry. Today, Spotify India is announcing 'AmplifiHer', an initiative to put the spotlight on women in India's audio industry, as they tell their stories of growth and success, encouraging the next generation of female talent to join the creative world of music and podcasts.

Featuring female talent from across the audio industry, this initiative will go on through the year, and include three key elements to 'amplifiHer'

Encourage sharing

Master-classes, fireside



chats, and career tips and tricks from several accomplished women in the industry. This includes Aastha Atray, Alokandana Dasgupta, Asees Kaur, Heena Kriplani, Kausar Munir, Neha Bhasin, Nikhita Gandhi, Mae Thomas, Priya Saraiya, Ritnika Nayan, and Riya Mukherjee. These oppor-

tunities, identified by Spotify across digital platforms, will take place every month between April to December, and tackle different themes, ranging from how you can make the most of tech features on streaming platforms to grow your career, to why equilibrium is more important than equal-

ity in the Indian audio industry. Listen to them talk about why they want to amplify women in audio, here, and on Spotify India's Instagram stories.

Increase visibility

Ensuring artists and creators have a platform to shine on Spotify's recently launched 'Global Equal Hub', which is also available in India. This will give listeners and aspiring talent an opportunity to learn more about the women who are changing the game in India's audio industry. It spans powerful playlists such as Women of Indie India, Women of Punjabi Pop, Women of Bollywood, Bollywood Queens, Girls Like You - Telugu, among others. There are also women-led podcasts including Maed in India, Kalki Presents: My Indian Life,

The Overthink Tank, Yours Positively and more.

Elevate conversations

Through 'AmplifiHer', Spotify will launch its global Sound Up program in India. Already running in 6 countries, Sound Up is expected to come to India later this year. Sound Up is Spotify's podcast accelerator program that empowers individuals to tell their stories using podcasting, and amplifying them across the world. It gives podcasters from underrepresented communities the tools to boost their platforms and build their own shows. In India, Spotify will focus on female creators.

Spotify hopes to increase the awareness and industry conversations around women in audio in a meaningful and sustained manner using 'AmplifiHer'.

Punjab CM extends Covid curbs till April 10

CHANDIGARH

AS Covid-19 cases and deaths continue to rise in Punjab, with the UK strain emerging the most prevalent, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Tuesday ordered extension of curbs till April 10, while directing the Health Department to increase the number of vaccination sites to target priority categories on an urgent basis.

Reviewing the Covid situation with the Chief Secretary and other top officials, he said all restrictions that were in place till March 31 will now remain in force till April 10, after which they would be again reviewed.

The Chief Minister also ordered the launch of a vaccination drive in the prisons, in the wake of 40 women in Patiala's Nabha Open Jail testing positive.

Expressing grave concern over the situation, he asked Chief Secretary Vini Mahajan to issue necessary directions for carrying out testing and vaccination in busy market areas, and other crowded places. All Deputy Commissioners and Civil Surgeons were asked to identify places, such as police lines, colleges and universities, big industrial units, bus stands, and railway stations, etc, where mobile Covid vaccination centres can be set up to ramp up vaccination.

All eligible government employees, and other categories which he had requested for inclusion in vaccine coverage such as judges and teachers should be facilitated in getting vaccination to the extent of being eligible on account of being over 45 years of age, the Chief Minister said.

He directed pooling of resources available in districts with high number of cases for effective management of the pandemic and vaccination uptake. Notably, the latest data shows the UK strain of the virus to be the most prevalent in the state.



Covid-19 claims 10 more lives in UP; 918 new cases detected

LUCKNOW: Uttar Pradesh reported 10 more COVID-19 fatalities on Tuesday, pushing the death toll to 8,800, while 918 new cases took the infection tally in the state to 6,15,996. Four deaths were reported from Lucknow, two from Kanpur, and one each from Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Unnao and Auraiya, a health bulletin issued here said.

"The state reported 918 new cases of coronavirus infection in past 24 hours. While the death toll reached 8,800, the number of active cases is 9,195. The number of patients treated and discharged is now 5,98,001," it said. The bulletin said the state has so far tested over 3.47 crore samples for COVID-19, including 64,519 on Monday. (PTI)

While 326 of the 401 Covid positive samples sent initially to the NCDC for genome sequencing were found positive for the UK variant, so did 85 of the 95 samples sent to the IGIB.

The Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare, shared the updated status of the pandemic and the status of vaccination of the eligible categories of beneficiaries. The meeting was informed that the positive cases and deaths were rising rapidly in some of the districts, with projections showing

steep rise in the number of cases and a peak around April 6.

The number would be decreasing by mid or late May, as per the estimates, which suggest that Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Patiala, Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar, Hoshiarpur, and Kapurthala are expected to contribute more cases and positivity is likely to be high in the younger population of 40 years of age or less.

DGP Dinkar Gupta apprised that since the last meeting when the decision to fine protocol offenders along with RT-PCR testing was taken, 90,360 persons had been challaned and tested for Covid. He requested a special vaccination drive in police lines.

The Chief Minister also directed that strict monitoring of home isolation patients should be done, and they should be transferred to the appropriate level of healthcare facilities, if needed.

All districts have also been asked to strengthen their teams so that the data entry of Covid sampling and transportation of samples to the designated lab takes minimum time, and the result is made available within 24 hours.

On the vaccination front, the Chief Minister directed that any photo identity card shall be sufficient to approve the vaccination of eligible beneficiaries.

All districts have been ordered to increase the number of vaccination centres by including all health facilities up to the sub-centre level, dispensaries, ayurvedic and homeopathic healthcare facilities and private empanelled hospitals.

While 45 plus age group shall be slated for vaccination from April 1, all districts shall ensure that all facilities get started at vaccination centres as early as possible and latest by March 31 with a view to understand the infrastructural bottlenecks, if any, so that there is smooth increase in the number of vaccination centres and the beneficiaries get hassle-free vaccination experience. K.K. Talwar, Advisor Health to the state government, suggested that routine non-Covid treatment in some of the selected private hospitals may be deferred by two-four weeks, and more ambulance be made available to the district hospitals where there are no medical colleges.

The Chief Minister was also assured that the Health Department is ready to increase RT-PCR testing to 35,000 tests per day. (ANS)

FIRE AT GHAZIPUR LANDFILL SITE

'Strict action will be taken against East Delhi civic body'

NEW DELHI

DELHI Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Tuesday said strict action will be taken against the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) for not taking steps to prevent fire at the Ghazipur landfill site.

A section of the landfill site had caught fire on Sunday evening, worsening pollution levels in the area, he said.

A team of the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) inspected the landfill site managed by the EDMC and submitted a report. It states that the civic body has not made any arrangement to prevent such incidents at the site, Rai said. "Strict action will be taken against the EDMC," he said.

The minister said the DPCC has also written to various agencies, asking them to monitor all such sites where fire may break out due to rising temperature. Rai also urged the Centre to develop action plans to reduce pollution levels in the northern states.

"Delhi has been making efforts... Two organisations -- IQAir and the Centre for Science and Environment -- have acknowledged in their reports that air pollution levels in the city have reduced," he said.

According to IQAir's report, Delhi has succeeded in reducing pollution levels, especially PM2.5 levels, by 15 per cent. A CSE report says PM2.5 levels in Delhi have reduced by 25 per cent since 2014-15, the minister said. IQAir is a Swiss group that measures air quality levels based on the concentration of lung-damaging fine particles



known as PM2.5.

"Delhi is the first state to shut down thermal power plants. We have identified pollution hotspots and taken specific actions. All industrial units are now operating on piped natural gas. We are the first state to launch an electric vehicle policy," Rai said, listing steps taken to curb pollution levels in Delhi.

"But, pollution in neighbouring cities of Gurgaon, Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad, Bhivadi... also affects Delhi. I urge the Centre to make action plans to reduce pollution levels in northern states while it has time," he said. Rai also demanded that the Centre analyse the reports by IQAir and CSE and take required action. (PTI)

'Switch Delhi EV' enters final week

NEW DELHI: The final week of the Switch Delhi EV (electric vehicle) awareness campaign will focus on sensitising the youth of Delhi on the benefits of e-vehicles and the city government's EV policy, an official statement said on Tuesday. Calling Delhi's EV policy the "most progressive policy around the globe", Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said the campaign, which has entered its eighth and final week, was aimed at sensitising, informing and encouraging Delhi's youth to adopt electric vehicles.

"The youth of Delhi can play a huge role in making the EV movement in Delhi a mass movement. "They can drive change and be the torchbearers of this movement. The Delhi government will engage with the youth via the Switch Delhi campaign to motivate them to adopt EVs and contribute to a cleaner and greener Delhi," the minister said. Appealing to the youth of the city to pledge that the first vehicle they purchase would be an electric one, he said they must "come forward and own the ongoing EV movement in Delhi".

Gahlot also noted the range of financial and non-financial incentives offered under Delhi's EV policy. "By switching to electric two-wheelers, which have very low operating costs, an individual can make an annual saving of approximately Rs 22,000 as compared to using a petrol scooter and Rs 20,000 as compared to a petrol bike," the minister said.

"An average electric two-wheeler provides a lifetime savings of 1.98 tonnes of carbon emissions as compared to an average petrol two-wheeler which is equivalent to planting 11 trees," he added.

Air travel to be expensive from tomorrow

NEW DELHI: Fuel prices have a direct relation with the travel mode. Same is the case with air travel. Increase in prices of fuel will affect the frequency of passengers traveling via flights. The air fare will see a hike from April 1 due to the rise in fuel prices.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has increased 40 rupees for passengers for domestic passengers. Airport Security Fee (ASF) has been increased in air tickets. This airport security fee will be Rs 114.38 for international passengers. Airport security fees are used to protect the airport. Now Rs 200 will be collected from domestic passengers for airport security fees. At the same time, international travelers will have to pay \$ 12. These new rates will be applicable from 1 April. Airport security fees are charged from every passenger but some passengers are exempted from this. These include children less than 2 years old, officers holding diplomatic passports, on duty airline crew and transit passengers who take a second connecting flight within 24 hours of the first flight via a single ticket. Airport security fees are revised after every six months. In September 2020, the airport security fee was increased from Rs 150 to Rs 160, ie Rs 10. At the same time, for international travelers it was increased from \$ 4.95 to \$ 5.20.

Chhattisgarh: Woman trampled to death by elephants in Jashpur

JASHPUR

A 55-YEAR-OLD woman was trampled to death by wild elephants in Chhattisgarh's Jashpur district, officials said on Tuesday. In another incident, an elephant calf was found dead in a forest in the state's Raigarh district, they said.

On Monday, some jumbos attacked the woman, identified as Iravati Yadav, in Jashpur's Jatra Tongri forest under Badalkhol Wildlife Sanctuary, located about 400 km from the state capital Raipur, when she had gone there to collect Mahua flowers, a forest official said.

When the victim, a native of Kaliya village, did not return home, the villagers launched a search in the forest. They later found that she was trampled to death by elephants, the official said. After being alerted, forest personnel rushed to the spot and sent the body for post-mortem, he said.

The kin of the deceased have been provided an instant relief of Rs 25,000, while the remaining compensation of Rs 5.75 lakh will be given on completion of the required formalities, the official said.

"With this incident, 15 people have been killed in elephant attacks in Jashpur in the last one year," he said. Several incidents



of human-elephant conflict have been reported in the past from the thick forested northern Chhattisgarh, comprising Surguja, Surajpur, Korba, Raigarh, Jashpur, Balarampur and Korea districts. The region has witnessed several killings of villagers and widespread damage to houses and crops by rogue elephants.

Meanwhile, an elephant calf was found dead in Chhapradand forest of Raigarh district, located around 300 km from Raipur, on Monday evening, another forest official said. The carcass was recovered after some villagers informed the forest department about it, he said. "Prima facie it seems the elephant calf died after

falling from a hill. The exact cause of the death will be known after we get the autopsy report," he said.

The Chhapradand forest is adjacent to the Mainpat forest range of neighbouring Surguja district. The thick forested northern part of the state has in the past witnessed several killings of villagers by elephants as well as deaths of jumbos. Sometimes, locals illegally lay electric wires around their farms to prevent wild elephants from destroying their crops. Between June and October last year, 15 elephants, including three calves, died in the state due to various reasons, including electrocution, officials said. (PTI)

Case filed against BJP functionary for allegedly holding tehsildar captive

BALLIA (UP)

A case has been registered against a local BJP functionary and his supporters for allegedly holding a tehsildar captive for half an hour at a village here, police said on Tuesday.

Tehsildar Shiv Sagar Dubey has complained that on March 27 when he was returning from Bairia village after measuring a land, he was stopped by Shiv Kumar Verma and 20 of his associates at Chappra village, they said. Dubey has alleged that he was held captive for half an hour, threatened by them and verbally abused, Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Sanjay Yadav said. The case was lodged at the Bairia police station on Dubey's complaint against Verma on Monday, he said, adding that the accused's associates are yet to be identified. Verma is a local BJP functionary and son of Shanti Devi, the head of the Bairia Nagar Panchayat. Dubey is the tehsildar (tax officer) for Bairia. The BJP functionary, however, said that it was a "fake" case. He said he was an "active worker" of the BJP and his rival within the party -- MLA Surendra Singh -- got the case filed against him.

Singh rejected this allegation, saying, he had no role in the case. Recently, Verma had organised a programme in Bairia in which Uttar Pradesh Minister Swami Prasad Maurya, BJP MPs Virender Singh Mast and Ravindra Kushwaha had taken part. (PTI)

UP Cong team gets 69 new members

LUCKNOW: Congress interim president Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday approved the expansion of the Uttar Pradesh Congress committee by adding 69 new members. Sonia Gandhi has named Vishwa Vijay Singh, Ghyasuddin Anuragi and Deepak Kumar as vice presidents. The party president has also named 13 new general secretaries and 53 secretaries. All veterans and senior leaders have failed to find a place in the new expansion and the party had inducted young blood into the organisation. This is the second expansion of the state Congress committee and is crucial since it comes on the eve of the Panchayat elections in the state.

Fire breaks out at Kashmere Gate ISBT

NEW DELHI: A fire broke out on the sixth floor of the Kashmere Gate Inter State Bus Terminus (ISBT) here that 10 fire tenders brought under control. No one has been injured, a fire official said. "A call of fire was received at 2.26 p.m.," he said. The fire was reported from a hall located on sixth floor of the building in which furniture were gutted.

15-yr-old molested girl in UP sets herself on fire

HAMIRPUR (UP): A 15-year-old girl set herself ablaze at a village here on Tuesday morning after allegedly being molested by a boy, police said. The girl has been rushed to Kanpur for specialised treatment as she has received severe burn injuries, they said. Hamirpur Superintendent of Police (SP) Narendra Kumar Singh said on Monday afternoon the girl's family had beaten up the 16-year-old boy for allegedly molesting her. The victim's family had at that time refused to lodge a complaint. The girl's family, however, later alleged that the boy used to often tease and harass the girl and had done the same on Monday. The police had let the accused go after warning him. Disturbed by repeated harassments and molestation on Monday, the girl sprinkled kerosene on herself around 8 am on Tuesday and set herself ablaze, according to her family. Before sending the girl to Kanpur for further treatment, her statement has been recorded in front of a magistrate, the SP said, adding further action will be taken on the basis of the complaint of the girl's family. (PTI)

Ex-BSP MLA Virendra Singh passes away

BAREILLY (UP): Former BSP MLA Virendra Singh died here on Tuesday following prolonged illness. The 61-year-old breathed his last around noon. He is survived by his wife and two sons, his son Ashish told reporters. Singh had been suffering from serious health problems since 2018 and was being treated at an ICU set up at his home. He was elected as BSP MLA from Bareilly Cantonment seat in 2007 and Bithri Chainpur seat in 2012. (PTI)

SC forms committee on traffic management problem in Kaushambi

NEW DELHI

THE Supreme Court has taken note of the traffic management problem in Ghaziabad's Kaushambi area and constituted a committee comprising representatives of the statutory authorities of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh so that a "coordinated and concerted effort" can be made to resolve the issue.

The apex court, which said that a "comprehensive traffic management plan" should be presented before it, observed that a resolution of the issue would not be possible unless all the authorities concerned jointly agree on a concrete effort to manage the traffic problems. A bench headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud constituted a committee consisting of Divisional Commissioner Meerut, Chairperson of the Ghaziabad Development Authority, District

Magistrate Ghaziabad, Transport Secretary of Delhi government, Municipal Commissioner of East Delhi Municipal Corporation and other concerned authorities. The bench, also comprising Justices M R Shah and Sanjiv Khanna, said that Ghaziabad's District Magistrate shall be the nodal officer of committee.

"In the circumstances, we are of the view that, within three weeks, a comprehensive traffic management plan should be presented before this court. We propose to constitute a committee consisting of representatives of statutory authorities in the state of Uttar Pradesh as well as from the Government of NCT of Delhi so that a coordinated and concerted effort can be made by the authorities in both the jurisdictions to resolve the issue through

a unified approach," the bench said in its order passed on March 24. The bench was hearing a petition which highlighted several issues -- ranging from haphazard traffic management to environmental pollution and unrestricted dumping of municipal solid waste -- and claimed that residents of the area are suffering from serious respiratory issues.

"Essentially, the issues which have been highlighted bring focus upon improper planning and the poor implementation of development plans and statutory provisions. In order to obviate an unmanageably large canvass being opened before the court at once, we have decided to take up the problem of traffic management in the first instance," the bench noted in its order. The counsel appearing for the petitioners told the top court that residents of the area

are suffering due to several things, including haphazard parking of three wheelers and other vehicles on public roads, absence of adequate spaces for parking of public service vehicles and use of pressure horns by vehicles. The bench noted that earlier, a matter had come up before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in which issues like pollution caused by vehicular emissions, illegal parking, encroachment of roads and pavement, use of diesel generators in violation of CPCB standards was raised and the tribunal had constituted a committee.

"The efforts which have been undertaken by the NGT in the exercise of its statutory jurisdiction need to be appreciated and must continue. However, it is evident that the situation on the ground has not changed substantially, as a result of the problems which we

have noticed in the earlier part of the order," said the bench, which posted the matter for hearing on April 14. "Merely treating the matter as a law enforcement issue, particularly in the area of traffic management, will not solve the problem," it said, adding, "Experience shows that a direction by the court to the law enforcement machinery may result in some action, even high-handed action for a few days, until the position is restored to the original status which becomes the new 'normal'."

It said that a comprehensive traffic management plan has to be drawn up to deal with the situation. "This will be in addition to the directions issued by the NGT and will not detract from them or from the supervision by the NGT," it said. "Before we address the issues which are raised, we are categorically of the view that the

problems which have confronted Kaushambi and Ghaziabad, in general, cannot be treated in a manner isolated from the wider context of the National Capital Region. This is not merely a matter which pertains to the Ghaziabad Development Authority or, for that matter, other authorities within the State of Uttar Pradesh alone," it said. The bench said there has to be a coordinated effort on the part of authorities within Delhi Government, East Delhi Municipal Corporation as well as statutory authorities in Uttar Pradesh having jurisdiction in the area. "Unless all the authorities put their heads together and jointly agree on a concerted effort to manage the traffic problems, a resolution would not be possible," it said. It said some of these problems do not necessarily originate in Ghaziabad, such as the problem

which is caused by the back-up of vehicles at toll booths. "The Anand Vihar Terminal, the court has been apprised, takes care of the need of the buses of the Delhi Transport Corporation and interstate buses which originate and terminate at the terminal.

However, we do find that there is a total absence of adequate space for the parking of other public service vehicles including intra-state buses within Ghaziabad, as a result of which the vehicles are parked in a haphazard manner on public roads, including service roads," the bench said. "Merely treating it as a matter of law enforcement will not provide a long-lasting solution. Ad hoc reactions to a deeper malaise will bring no relief to the residents, users of public transport and those providing public transport," it said. (PTI/ANMI)

Edtech sector set for giant leap

EDTECH leader Byju raising \$460 million to reach a valuation of more than \$13 billion shows the momentum in the Indian edtech space. As part of the series F round, this is the first funding for the Bengaluru-headquartered firm this year. Byju had raised more than \$1 billion last year as Covid pandemic led to the surge in the user base. Led by MC Global Edtech Investment Holdings LP with participation from Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin's B Capital, this round of capital infusion reflects strong investors' appetite for edtech players in India.

According to Indian Private Equity and Venture Capital Association (IVCA) and PGA Labs data, Indian edtech startups raised over \$2.2 billion in 2020 as compared to \$553 million in 2019. While K-12 and test preparation companies accounted for the largest share of \$1.98 billion, followed by continued learning (\$142 million); higher education attracted an investment of \$84 million, pre-K at \$12 million

and B2B edtech companies at \$7 million. Out of the \$2.2 billion raised last year, \$1.35 billion was raised by Byju alone. Similarly, another major edtech player Unacademy joined the unicorn club last year after two rounds of fund raising which put the valuation of the company over \$2 billion. Another edtech player Vedantu had raised \$100 million last year as part of the series D round, taking its valuation to \$600 million.

Not only big players, but even small edtech firms are also witnessing a surge in their valuation as learners opt for digital learning amid the ongoing pandemic. As India comes in the grip of the second wave of the Covid pandemic, this momentum is unlikely to fade in the near future.

As per estimates, the education market in India is expected to grow to \$225 billion by FY25, a 14 per cent CAGR over the FY20-25 period. And domestic edtech players are likely to be major beneficiaries of this growth. As edtech firms use digital

platforms for learning, a host of technology companies are also likely to be benefitted out of this surge. For instance, edtech firms are using augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) in the learning process. So, tech firms providing AR/VR solutions are going to receive new projects from edtech players. Similarly, artificial intelligence and data analytics-based solutions are in vogue in the learning platforms, which provide new business opportunities for IT services companies. No wonder, mid-tier firms like Happiest Minds have carved out edtech as a separate vertical to cash in these emerging opportunities.

The ongoing pandemic has shown that even the traditional education system, which predominantly relies on offline classes, can draw huge benefits from online learning mode. Therefore, it will be prudent if Indian policymakers mandate a mixed learning model for students. This will not only benefit students in rural areas but will also expand the teachers' base. If such an approach is taken, domestic edtech players will immensely benefit from the new demand and the next edtech behemoth will emerge out of India.

Why India is banking on health diplomacy

DAN BANIK AND RENU MODI

INDIA has stepped up its global ambitions and foreign policy re-engagement with African countries in recent years. Its bilateral trade increased from \$7.2 billion in 2001 to \$63 billion in 2017/18. India is now the third largest export destination and the fifth largest investor on the continent.

While it plays catch-up with China's commanding presence in Africa, India has signed numerous new bilateral agreements. It has also strengthened its diplomatic presence and is actively furthering trade, infrastructure and private sector investments. In our research under a multi-year project, we found that New Delhi promotes an alternative model of development. It showcases the successes of its Green Revolution and advances in information, communication and technology. But it also highlights its ability to develop "Triple A" technology – affordable, appropriate, adaptable.

India's expertise in affordable healthcare has assumed increased significance during the ongoing pandemic. New Delhi is already reaping the benefits of an ambitious diplomatic initiative to deliver Made-in-India vaccines to developing countries. India is one of the largest producers of drugs globally. It manufactures 60 per cent of the world's vaccines. Many African countries have purchased or received these as gifts.

New Delhi's capacity and willingness to produce and share COVID-19 vaccines have further boosted the country's diplomatic heft and recognition as a global power.

India's Africa policy

India's historical footprint in Africa differs from that of other powers. New Delhi offered support for African countries in their struggle against colonial rule. Indo-African partnership followed in the post-colonial period. This was cemented by solidarity with and support for the Non-Aligned Movement and the fight against racism.

India also offered support for

South Africa in its struggle against apartheid. In addition, New Delhi points to the presence of a sizeable Indian diaspora and their economic and philanthropic contributions on the continent.

Since the early 1990s, India has moved from idealism to pragmatism and the explicit pursuit of commercial interests. The change was driven by robust economic growth at home and the need to access raw materials and new markets.

India's push for South-South cooperation relies on three broad elements. The first is a shared identity as part of the "Third World". Second is expertise in cost-effective development technologies. Third is a recurrent articulation of the principles of mutual respect and solidarity.

Its long history of being democratic and its successes in reducing poverty and preventing famines have also bolstered the legitimacy of its developmental approach in the Global South.

Since 2018, the India-Africa partnership has been based on a set of principles. These have emphasised "local priorities". They call for joint efforts to reform global institutions, combat climate change and fight global terrorism. They also highlight capacity building for agriculture, education, digital technology and cooperation on peacekeeping and maritime issues.

How and to what extent might Africa benefit from India's growing interest? We identify three broad sets of health-related opportunities and benefits that may shape the future of India-Africa relations.

Three major areas of collaboration

The first relates to India's formidable reputation as the "pharmacy of the world". It has actively contributed to meeting global demand for vaccines, over the counter medicines and low-cost generic drugs. The relatively low manufacturing costs make Indian products affordable throughout the world.

Almost 20 per cent of India's pharmaceutical exports, valued at \$17 billion, are to Africa. Southern and western regions of Africa



Since the early 1990s, India has moved from idealism to pragmatism and the explicit pursuit of commercial interests. The change was driven by robust economic growth at home and the need to access raw materials and new markets. India's push for South-South cooperation relies on three broad elements. The first is a shared identity as part of the "Third World". Second is expertise in cost-effective development technologies. Third is a recurrent articulation of the principles of mutual respect and solidarity

are the largest importers of Indian medicines. These include antiretroviral (ARV) drugs that cost only a fraction of those produced by Western companies.

The second relates to capacity building and collaboration in the health sector. Leading Indian healthcare providers are collaborating with African partners. Some have opened or plan to open speciality hospitals across Africa.

Since 2009, the Pan-African E-Network supported by India has offered tele-medicine services. This also connects Indian hospitals and educational centres with their counterparts in Africa. With its state-of-the-art medical facilities, which offer services at competitive costs, India has also emerged as an attractive destination for "medical tourism".

The third relates to India's ac-

tive "medical diplomacy". Africa's reliance on a cheap supply of essential medicines in addition to an affordable COVID-19 vaccine is only likely to increase in the near future.

But Africa's success in containing pandemics such as Ebola offers lessons to India, too. An illustrative example is Senegal, which has adapted its experiences from the 2014 Ebola outbreak to fight COVID-19. Numerous additional lessons on disease control from African countries can also be scaled up to improve India's health sector.

Future collaboration on health

India appears well-poised to share its digital capabilities for improved and affordable access to universal healthcare. New Delhi has revamped its tele-medicine and online video consulta-

tion infrastructure on the continent. This offers a cost effective and safe option for treating contagious diseases.

In the near future, India's partners may benefit from its online and mobile applications to improve accessibility and affordability of healthcare. Online platforms can be used to access information on blood banks, public hospitals, and organ donation. Mobile applications can help track the vaccine status of children and disease awareness.

But there are also some challenges that must be resolved. Combating the menace of counterfeit medicines on the African continent is one. In addition to existing measures to curb criminal activity, mobile apps can verify medicines to tackle the problem.

A major challenge is improving access to generic medicines through negotiated intellectual property rights waivers. At the World Trade Organisation, India and South Africa have taken a moral stance against "vaccine nationalism". Their joint proposal in October 2020 for a temporary waiver on drugs and COVID-19 vaccines was nevertheless rejected by the organisation.

Since then, however, mainly African countries have shown growing support for the proposal. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

'Parrikar ensured transparent, simpler defence acquisition procedures'

VISHNU MAKHJANI

MANOHAR Parrikar transformed the Ministry of Defence (MoD) from a "slumberous, mammoth and slow-moving organisation, happy to trudge along, least bothered about time-bound outcomes" and



Chief Minister over an eight-year period. His stint in New Delhi "will forever remain etched in memory, not just because we became very close friends during that period but also because of the changes he sought to bring in the functioning of the largely opaque Ministry of Defence.

"He not only grasped the intricacies and complexities of the important ministry but also put his own stamp on the day-to-day functioning in the South Block," Gokhale, a media entrepreneur, strategic affairs analyst and author of more than half-a-dozen books on military history, insurgencies and wars, writes in "Manohar Parrikar -- Brilliant Mind, Simple Life" (Bloomsbury).

(Parrikar had proposed Narendra Modi's name as the BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate at a party convention in Goa ahead of the 2014 General Election.)

Traditionally, Gokhale writes, the MoD "has been a slumberous, mammoth and slow-moving organisation, happy to trudge along, least bothered about time-bound outcomes. It had gotten used to a culture of -no decision' or -slow decision', thanks to the over-cautious and risk-averse A.K. Antony -- ironically, India's longest-serving Defence Minister -- who made it a point to take bare minimum decisions during his tenure (2007-14), lest any blame of corruption came onto him".

"In contrast, Parrikar took and implemented three big decisions that stand out in his short stint as India's Defence Minister" that Gokhale lists as "solving the complicated One Rank One Pension (OROP) issue 45 years after it had been first raised", and "to go for off-the-shelf purchase of Rafale fighter jets and convincing the Indian Air Force (IAF) to start accepting the indigenously-made Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) 'Tejas for induction". His "third and most popular decision was to order in 2016 the surgical strike in the immediate aftermath of the Uri attack in which 18 soldiers of the Indian Army were killed in action". Gokhale writes.

Defence reforms in India "have been a continuous process since 2015 (soon after Parrikar assumed office); they have been speeded up in the past five years or so. The improved transparency and increased interaction between end users and the industry has brought about a change no one thought was possible until recently. The new-found openness in the Indian Ministry of Defence is reflected in the number of increased interactions between the armed forces, academia, industry and industry associations like CII, FICCI and ASSOCHAM", Gokhale writes.

While the Rafale deal "was the biggest of the complicated cases that the MoD resolved, there were other crucial pieces of equipment that India needed, and needed as soon as possible. So all the hurdles in purchases of artillery guns (M-777 Howitzers from the US), attack and medium lift helicopters for the Army (Chinook and Apache helicopters from the US), frigates and mine counter-measure vessels for the Navy, and Akash missiles for the Air Force were removed in double quick time", Gokhale points out.

There could, however, be a long-term fallout of the Rafale deal. It had been chosen as the winner of a six-jet completion for an IAF tender for 126 medium multi-role combat aircraft (MMRCA) after a torturous effort that began in 2007. Of these, 18 were to be purchased in a fly-away condition and the remaining were to be manufactured in India by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) under a transfer of technology (ToT) agreement with Dassault Aviation.

The final negotiations faltered on two counts. Dassault maintained that 31 million man hours would be sufficient to produce 108 aircraft in India, HAL was asking for a mark-up by 2.7 times. The MoD contended this would violate the terms of the lowest bid on the basis of which the aircraft had been selected.

There was also the question of the "matrix of responsibility". India said this lay with Dassault, which was flatly turned down.

With the negotiations thus stalled, the book says Parrikar recommended that the tender for 126 aircraft be scrapped and India purchase 36 Rafale's to meet the IAF's minimum requirements. This Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on April 10, 2015 during a state visit to France at a joint press conference with then President Francois Hollande -- an announcement that caught everyone in India by surprise.

But not Gokhale. "Alerted by a source about the possibility of India scrapping the original tender and going in for off-the-shelf purchase of Rafale jets, I scooped the story on my blog News Warrior (www.nitinagokhale.blogspot.in), 10 minutes before midnight on 9 April, almost 22 hours before Modi's announcement of India deciding to buy Rafale jets off-the-shelf was made in Paris. I, however, got the numbers wrong. My report said India would buy 63 Rafale directly from Dassault Aviation," Gokhale writes.

As for the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), the cabinet on January 13 approved the procurement of 83 planes by the IAF -- 73 Mk-1A fighters and 10 Mk-1 trainers from HAL) at a cost of Rs. 45,696 crore, India's largest defence deal so far. The formal order was placed at the inauguration of the Aero India 2021 expo on February 3.

Simple arithmetic will tell you that 83 LCAs plus 36 Rafales makes up for 119 aircraft, close to the IAF's original projected requirement of 126 jets. This means that while a fresh tender has been floated for upwards of 100 MMRCAs, this is likely to die a natural death, given that HAL is in the process of developing an Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) -- though it is anybody's guess when the prototype will fly, given that the Tejas LCA was conceived in 1983, first flew in 2001, received its Initial Operational Clearance in 2013, was inducted in the Indian Air Force (IAF) in 2016.

As for the surgical strikes, Gokhale writes that Parrikar had rushed to Srinagar and Uri straight from Goa (he had gone home for the weekend), and his "first question to the Army leadership was: How can we send a strong message to Pakistan and extract revenge for the sacrifice of our soldiers? When the commanders said there were options to cross the Line of Control (LoC) but that in the past, Delhi had been reluctant to give approval for such an action lest Pakistan retaliated and matters escalated, Parrikar instantly ordered the commanders to prepare a plan and rushed back to Delhi to present the option to Prime Minister Modi and other top functionaries of the government".

The book also quotes Lt Gen. Satish Dua, then the 15 Corps Commander in Srinagar, as saying: "My first meeting with Manohar Parrikar happened at a very ill-fated moment. When the terrorist attack on the Uri camp was reported, he flew from Goa to Srinagar via Delhi. I received him. Taking details from me about the incident, he asked two questions. The first one was related to an operational issue, so I won't divulge it here but the second point he made was about a likely operation across the Line of Control. He gave an instant go ahead but told us to make sure we don't suffer a single casualty. Encouraged by his vote of confidence, we made a plan and eventually succeeded in carrying out the task assigned to us."

Within 10 days of the Uri attack, Indian Special Forces had hit at least six targets inside Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK), destroyed many terrorist camps and Pakistani Army posts, killing at least 65-70 terrorists and Pakistani Army personnel, "thanks to the decisive political decision taken by Parrikar and fully backed by Prime Minister Modi and the National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval".

"Uri became a by-word for India's new-found confidence and 'How's the josh' became a popular slogan, thanks to the movie Uri that was later made on the event," Gokhale writes.

LETTERS

Tread with care on NRC

THE write-up by Madabhushi Sridhar Acharyulu on citizenship rejection letters was forthright and specific. At the outset, when NRC is an Assam specific exercise to identify illegal migrants and determine genuine Indian citizens, mere issuance of rejection slips without following the Assam accord in letter and spirit will only compound problems than arriving at a solution.

However during the course of exercise, allegations arose that the exercise is biased with many wrongfully rejected must be necessarily looked into before coming to a logical conclusion. Agreed that Assam has long borne the brunt of migration from Bangladesh and NRC was taken up as per the provisions of the Assam accord to settle the immigrants issue once and for all. But the bone of contention arose is about issuance of rejection slips to people excluded from the NRC which led to conflicts that prima facie is in contravention to the Assam accord.

Further, as there is no deadline fixed for the purpose, the Assam government wanted re-verification to weed out only illegal immigrants is apt. Therefore, the war cry from Centre to issue rejection slips in order to send back immigrants at a time when assembly polls are underway is only an exercise in futility. At the same time, it is a reminder to Congress that the dirty politics played by its leadership has resulted in a major demographic shift which need to be rectified and settled sooner in the interest of the nation.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad

How about auditing pavements?

PRASHANTH Kumar of Delhi University has brought out openly CAG Report's glaring state of affairs in Telangana. with regard to financial mismanagement and opaqueness in the State budget (The Hans India, 30 March, 2021). The report "also reveals the fact that the state treasury is under excessive stress". Kumar has not mentioned anything about the colossal assets of hundreds and hundreds of kilometers of "sidewalks" (also called pavements/footpaths) worth hundreds of crores of rupees. Apparently they have not "audited" since they are twin-laid alongside roads. There is little or no possibility of roads being pilfered, the sidewalks can and in fact they are "shrinking" and "disappearing" as observed by Telangana High Court in their recent findings in a PIL (The Hans India, 12 February 2021).

I am therefore raising the question of "audit" of sidewalks, ever since these (sidewalks) were laid many years ago. Sidewalks are "valued lands", they are not vacant lands, they are in use 24x7, but unfortunately they remain uncared, unmaintained, unattended, unclean, unsafe, and cluttered. Propertied-owners (like shop/building/house owners) are, obviously, responsible for "shrinkages/disappearances" of the footpaths.

Even now, periodic auditing of sidewalks is possible by double-checking on original measurements (length x width) of sidewalks on the one hand and SDM Card method (sale-deed-measurements) of properties of owners lining up

the footpaths on the other hand.. For every city, we need a government-declared Custodian Of Sidewalks (COS) who will liaise with CAG. It is a matter of saving "valued lands" worth thousands of crores of rupees besides making available the mandated safety to the walking public.

Prof B R Sant, Hyderabad

Privatisation of PSUs can work

BASICALLY, privatisation policy in India has been encouraged by the need to raise resources in tough fiscal conditions. This is apparent in terms of privatisation which implies that the ownership and management of companies or assets move to private holdings. It clearly shows improving efficiency and hence achieving higher productivity and optimum allocation of resources to boost up the economy and contribute in Global trade on large scale are indeed the major outcomes according to government.

Moreover, in sectors such as defence and national security, which could be the termed 'strategic', the government may continue to play a significant role. However, in areas where there are private players and where there is already a competitive market (such as steel, pharmaceuticals), or where the market has a few dominant players but is regulated (such as telecom), it makes sense for the government to exit.

Bishal Kumar Saha, Murshidabad

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Better to be safe than sorry

IT is definitely an alarming situation that there is an increasing cases of Covid caseload in the country especially in the States of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh contributing to around 85 per cent of new Covid cases. This is certainly due to an amount of laxity in the minds of the people who have thrown away all the three types of social distancing norms in spite of the huge tremendous publicity given by the government in several media platforms.

It is important for the people to know that Covid vaccination is being done only to a very small percentage of the people step by step and still crores of population have to be vaccinated which is bound to take some more time. Even the strains of the new Covid sample are getting changed over a passage of time which is making the vaccine manufacturing companies think once again as regards the challenge in facing the new strains while preparing vaccine medicines.

It is therefore high time that the government including the state governments should implement all social distancing norms with more vigour and pressure on citizens by imposing penalties for all violators wherever required as it should be known that it is these people who are responsible for increasing covid caseloads in the country. Afterall, if health is lost, everything is lost and the government in the present situation should not attempt for another lockdown.

Katuru Durga Prasad Rao, Hyderabad

Carry out vaccination drive with vigour: AP CM

- Says it is the only solution to the recurring pandemic
- During a review as part of Spandana, reminds the calendar for implementation of various welfare schemes in April and May

AMARAVATI

CHIEF Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy directed the officials to carry out the Covid-19 vaccination drive vigorously in the state as it is the only way out to avoid Covid wave.

He discussed wide range of issues with district collectors and SPs during the Spandana video conference here on Tuesday. Village secretariats, RBKs, YSR Health Clinics, house site pattas in 90 days, Nadu-Nedu, Cheyutha Spandana, and other issues figured in the meet.

Stating that he would be taking the vaccine on April 1, he said after election process for MP/MLAs and ZPTCs is over, complete focus can be laid on vaccination. He said steps should be taken to ensure vaccination in urban areas from April 1 and village and ward secretariats should be considered a unit for it.

The Chief Minister announced the welfare activities to be implemented in April and May. He said volunteers would be felicitated on



Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy addressing officials of districts as part of Spandana through video conference on Tuesday

April 13, and Jagananna Vidya Deevena on April 16. He said YSR interest free loans scheme for farmers would be implemented on April 20 and YSR interest free loans scheme for DWACRA women would be implemented on April 23. Jagananna Vasati Devena would be implemented in April 28 and the money will be credited in three phases. Rythu Bharosa on May 13, Matyakara Bharosa on May 18 and Kharif Insurance (2020) on May 25.

The Chief Minister said 94 per cent of distribution of house site pattas was completed and remaining 1,69,588 pattas should be distributed soon and distribution of around 47,000 pattas under TIDCO was completed. He said every eligible beneficiary should receive house site and directed the officials to take steps to complete verification of pending applications. He asked them to complete land acquisition for providing house sites to new applicants.

Congratulating district collectors for achieving record in MGN-

REGS works by logging 25.50 crore mandays for financial year 2020-21, he said it was a matter of pride that the state stood third in implementation of the scheme despite being a small state. He said Rs 5,818 crore was given directly as wages to the labourers. The district collectors and joint collectors should own this programme and review the works regularly.

The Chief Minister said construction works of Village Secretariats, RBKs and Village Clinics should be expedited. He said 9,899 Bulk Milk Cooling centres need to be set up across the state of which work has started in 3,841 places.

The second phase of Nadu-Nedu in schools would start by end of April. The officials said the works of first phase in 15,715 schools is almost completed except for painting works in some schools.

The Chief Minister said 55,607 Anganwadis will be converted into pre-primary schools and the medium of instruction would be English.

Govt blames Covid, TDP for debts

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

THE state government defended the rising debts of the state during 2020-21 citing Covid affect. It said the governments were forced to impose lockdowns to protect the people from the deadly virus resulting in a steep fall in revenues. It also pointed out that the Central government was forced to make a borrowing of Rs 18,48,655 crore in the year.

In a statement released here on Tuesday, the state government stated that before pandemic outbreak, the economic growth in the country was dismal and GDP (gross domestic product) during 2019-20 stood at 4.18 per cent. The same trend reflected in several states too.

In addition, with the unjust bifurcation of state, non-fulfilment of the commitments made to the state and the mis-governance from 2014 to 2019, borrowings had increased. Owing to the alarming increase in liabilities of the state over the period from 2014 to 2019 during the TDP rule, the servicing cost of the debt has risen to more than Rs 25,000 crore, the state government claimed.

The statement said the current government has formulated many interventions to ensure good progress in all sectors, including modernisation of educational



- Points out that Centre too has to borrow Rs 18,48,655 cr in FY 2020-21
- Says that AP suffered at least Rs 14,742 cr revenue loss owing to lockdown
- Alleges that due to ‘mis-governance’ from 2014 to 2019, borrowings had risen, which pushed up debt servicing costs to more than Rs 25,000 cr

infrastructure, improving existing medical colleges. The present government ensured transparency and objectivity in delivery of the schemes, essentially through Direct Benefit Transfer mode that is completely devoid of any form of corruption or favouritism. It is important to note that

even the opposition parties are not expressing any doubts regarding the delivery of promises by the present government, the statement claimed. “The Covid 19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on the state finances. Even if the assessment of the financial loss is done on a conservative basis, it will be a

minimum of Rs 21,500 crore. Revenue loss on account of state share in Central taxes alone is Rs 7,780 crore and loss on account of state’s own revenues is Rs 6961 crore, taking the total revenue loss to Rs 14,742 crore.

The additional expenditure that is entirely on account of the pandemic is close to Rs 6,700 crore. If the loss on account of several lost opportunities is evaluated, it would additionally run into several thousands of crores,” the state government explained.

As on March 31, 2021, the state government’s debt stands at Rs 3,48,998.11 crore, registering 34.70% growth as against Central government’s Rs 1,12,50,391.76 crore, which amounts to 32.86 per cent debt growth.

NATION AT RISK

Continued from P1

Meanwhile, speaking on the coronavirus situation in the country, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said that the weekly national average positivity rate is currently 5.65 per cent. Of the 11,064 genome samples sequenced, UK variant detected in 807, South African variant in 47 and Brazilian variant found in one, Bhushan further said. Covaxin, Covishield vaccines are effective against UK, Brazilian variants of coronavirus, and work against South African variant going on, he said. Bhushan also said that many States are not isolating positive patients and that people are being told to isolate at home. “It must be monitored if people are isolating at home. If they can’t, they must be quarantined institutionally. Delhi was able to bring numbers under control through it.”

Impose ‘spot fines’: DGCA to airlines

Continued from P1

“The possibility of taking punitive action, such as levy of spot fines in accordance with law, shall also be explored with the local police authorities so as to serve a deterrent for violation of Covid-19 protocol,” the circular read.

“During the surveillance of some airports, it has come to notice that compliance is not satisfactory,” it added.

“All airport operators, therefore, are requested to ensure that the instructions on Covid-19 protocol from the standpoint of wearing face masks properly, covering nose and mouth, as well as maintaining social distance norms within the airport premises are followed scrupulously,” DGCA said.

Earlier this month, DGCA had issued a notice informing that passengers who don’t wear masks properly inside the flight will be de-boarded. These rules will apply if they don’t follow Covid appropriate behaviour.

Nod for Sputnik vaccine soon: Dr Reddy’s

Continued from P1

The data on trials is currently with the Indian regulator and the firm expects it to get approved in the next few weeks, he added. “Now, what we have done in India, in addition to all this, we also conducted trials in India and evaluated the vaccine on the Indian population for both safety as well as for immunogenicity. This data is currently with the Indian regulator and we expect it to get approved in the next few weeks,” he said.

Dr Reddy’s has partnered with the Russia Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) to bring the Sputnik V vaccine to India and other nations. The webinar on ‘India’s vaccination journey and the second wave of Covid-19’ was conducted by the All India Professional Congress (AIPC), Telangana.

LDF betrayed Kerala for a few pieces of gold: PM

Continued from P1

The PM also attacked the ruling LDF over the gold smuggling scam and said that just like Judas betrayed Lord Jesus Christ for a few pieces of silver, LDF has betrayed Kerala for a few pieces of gold. “Judas betrayed Lord Christ for a few pieces of silver. LDF has betrayed Kerala for a few pieces of gold,” he said while attacking the Pinarayi Vijayan government on the high-profile gold smuggling case.

“Today I have come among you to seek your blessings for

the BJP in the upcoming state elections. I have come here with a vision that is refreshingly different from the current situation in Kerala,” he said further.

“Left parties have been in power here many times. But their leaders still behave like junior-level goons. Under them, political rivals are killed, hacked and beaten. BJP govt in Kerala will stop this violence,” Modi remarked while raking up the recent incidents of the political violence in the poll-bound state.

We have nothing to do with seized hair: TTD

- Clarifies that all its stock of hair offered by devotees is sold on e-auction platform to international bidders
- After the sale as per prescribed procedure and deduction of GST, the TTD will not interfere on issues like whether the bidder has international export permits or to whom they disperse the stock

HANS NEWS SERVICE
TIRUMALA

TTD on Tuesday clarified that the recent seizure of 120 bags of (tonsured) human hair on the border of Mizoram-Myanmar by Assam Rifles has nothing to do with TTD. It said all of its stock of tonsured hair (donated) by devotees as part of their vow is being sold on the e-auction platform to international bidders. Many temples in the country do carry out sales of human hair offered by devotees. TTD also executes human hair sale on e-platform for every three months and it is a routine process, TTD stated.

TTD hands over the hair stock through e-tenders to the successful bidders after deducting prescribed GST. Thereafter, TTD will not interfere on issues like whether the bidder possessed international export permits or where all they dispose of their stock to whom, once it is sold and hand over the stock to the bidder..

However, TTD said that it will blacklist the companies or the bidders if the authorities officially sought based on any charge or infringement of rules.

It may be noted here that in February, Assam Rifles seized 120 bags of human hair for want of valid documents. In the subsequent enquiries by the authorities, it came to light that the human hair consignment was from TTD and it was also found during investigation that such consignments brought from many temple manage-

Ayyanna alleges YSRCP hand in human hair smuggling

AMARAVATI

FORMER minister and TDP senior leader Ch Ayyanna Patrudu on Tuesday blamed the ruling YSRCP “gangsters” for the illegal trafficking of human hair from the highly respected Balaji temple at Tirumala to foreign countries.

Ayyanna Patrudu said that the seizure of devotees’ hair worth Rs 2 crore by the Assam Rifles in the North-East exposed the unlawful smuggling activities going on in an unchecked way. From this, it was clear how the YSRCP leaders were running mafia even in human hair apart from sand, cement, liquor among others.

In a statement here, the TDP leader demanded an explanation from the Jagan Mohan Reddy government to the people on why it failed to curb the hair mafia menace at the highly revered Tirumala temple. By indulging in such ungodly activities, the YSRCP leaders were launching non-stop attacks on the sentiments of the Hindu devotees. It was unfortunate that the Jagan regime remained indifferent to the protection of the sanctity of the Seven Hills.

He pointed out that the Serchhip Battalion of 23 Sector Assam Rifles caught smugglers and seized 120 bags of human hair belonging to Tirumala temple. The seizure was made at the Mizoram border. The smugglers were transport-

- Says ruling party mafia targeting Balaji devotees’ hair for easy money
- Rs 2 cr worth hair seized by Assam Rifles while being smuggled to Myanmar on its way to China via Thailand
- Accuses ‘Pulivendula gangs’ of terrorising people to grab the lands

ing the hair to Myanmar and then to Thailand where it would be processed and shipped to China. The processed hair would be used in making wigs meant for trade worldwide.

The TDP leader said that when Rs 2 crore worth hair was caught in just one catch, it can be imagined how much more devotees’ hair was being looted and diverted everyday from the Balaji temple..

Ayyanna Patrudu accused the YSRCP regime of promoting mafia gangs to plunder all resources of the state in the past 22 months of its misrule. They began with the sand exploitation by causing its severe shortage in the initial days that eventually led to collapse of the construction industry altogether and suicides by the workers who went out of work. The YSRCP mafia had got an iron grip on the liquor distilleries and sale in the name of the government shops, he said.

ments were being smuggled to Myanmar and from there to Thailand where the human hair is processed and sent to China from where to various countries after processing them into wigs.

The seizure of the human hair which was widely reported in the media which also raised many doubts on how the hair sold by temples being cor-

nered by international smugglers.

Meanwhile, TDP leader P R Mohan criticised the TDP for simply washing its hands off on the issue by stating that it is nothing to do with it and wanted the TTD to verify the antecedents of the purchaser to avoid the human hair offered by devotees going into the hands of smugglers.

Opposition demands cancellation of GO No 2

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

THE state government issued a GO No 2 on March 25 designating village revenue officers (VROs) drawing and disbursement officers (DDO) for all the functional assistants in the village secretariat, including digital assistant except panchayat secretary. VRO will act as DDO for drawing and disbursement of honorarium to village volunteers. The VRO will act as coordinator for activities related to service delivery of government schemes and ensure effective implementation of state government schemes being rendered by village secretaries.

This GO giving powers to VROs drew criticism for several political parties. Thought the revenue employees are happy over more powers to VROs, the opposition leaders termed it nothing but weakening the panchayat raj system. They said the GO will make the sarpanches dummies with no executive powers over panchayat staff, including village volunteers and they will be unable to take up development programmes in villages.

AP Congress Committee working president N Tulasi Reddy criticised the state government for diluting the powers of village sarpanches by issuing GO NO2 which he said, is against Panchayat Raj Act.

CPI state secretary K Ramakrishna demanded the state government to cancel GO No 2 which poses a threat to the panchayat raj system. He said with this GO, the sarpanches will become namesake with no powers.

BJP state president Somu Veerajulu wrote a letter to Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy questioning the bestowing powers of panchayat to revenue department, effectively to the government itself at the cost of elected representatives. He said the GO will weaken the panchayat raj system and the MLAs’ domination will increase in administration of gram panchayats.

Credit for Tirupati development squarely goes to BJP: GVL



HANS NEWS SERVICE
TIRUPATI

THE credit for development of Tirupati squarely goes to BJP and not to any other party, said BJP MP GVL Narasimha Rao.

Speaking to the media here on Tuesday, Narasimha Rao said various developmental initiatives were taken up only with the Central funds and added none of the MPs of other parties elected from Tirupati did nothing in bringing development projects.

“Modi mark can be seen in every development work be it international airport, development of Tirupati railway station, roads, Smart City Project in the pilgrim city,” he said reiterating what his party State president Somu Veerajulu dared the opponents of BJP for a public debate on Tirupati development.

He further said the BJP government sanctioned 3 electronic manufacturing clusters (EMCs) near Tirupati, against 38 in the whole of the country and added that plans are afoot for operation of international air services from Tirupati Airport which was developed with an outlay of Rs 7,000 crore to facilitate international flights also to accelerate the growth of Tirupati region. In addition, the Centre also sanctioned Industrial Manufacturing Clusters at Srikalahasti and Yerpedu, he added.

Seeking the voters to decide on the merit of the candidate contesting the by-election, he asked them if they want to vote to a person who rendered personal service to Chief Minister Jagan or to a person who rendered service to the public, indirectly hitting at YSRCP nominee.

He further said in the recently inaugurated Kurnool airport also, the Centre provided 80 per cent of the cost of the airport.

Modi govt restored lasting peace in Assam: Nadda

GUWAHATI

BHARATIYA Janata Party (BJP) national president JP Nadda during his election rallies on Tuesday said that Narendra Modi government has established long lasting peace in Assam and embarked on a new era of growth and development.

Addressing three election rallies at Dhamapur (Nalbari district), Bilasipara (Dhubri) and Rani (Kamrup), Nadda claimed that during the Congress regime thousands of civilians and security personnel were killed but the Modi government along with Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal-led government have totally controlled the terrorism and violence.

He said that after the Bodo accord last year, over 4,000 extremists of various outfits have surrendered to the government and deposited over 5,000 arms.

Strongly criticising the Congress, the BJP president said that Rahul Gandhi's photographs were tagged with the tea gardens of Sri Lanka and Taiwan instead of Assam. "The Congress had also supported the Toolkit campaign which defamed Indian and Assam tea," he said.

Slamming the political ideology of the Congress, Nadda said, "The party (Congress) is fighting against the Left parties in Kerala while is hand in glove with them in West Bengal with the sole motive of defeating the BJP. It has forged alliance with the religious based political parties."



Nadda said that during the Congress led UPA regime, Assam had received Rs 80,000 crore from the 13th Finance Commission while during the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's governance, Assam got Rs 1.55 lakh crore from the 14th Finance Commission besides many mega projects started and completed in the state.

Modifying over a hundred years old British era Forest Act, he said that the Modi government withdrew the tree tag from bamboo to boost the bamboo-based industry and empower lakhs of artisans across the northeastern region.

Explaining the BJP's manifesto, Nadda said that to empower the women under Assam's biggest flagship scheme "Orunodoi", the monthly payments of Rs 830 would be increased to Rs 3,000 covering 30 lakh deserving families.

"To make Assam self sufficient in production of essential produce, 'Assam Aahar Atmanirbhartha Yojana' would be launched which would drive the state towards self sufficiency in essential food items within the next five years," he said adding that two lakh government jobs would also be provided to the youths of Assam every year.

The BJP leader said that to strengthen and protect 'Namghars' and 'Satras' (traditional Vaishnavite monasteries of Assam), grants of Rs 2.5 lakh to 12,000 such traditional institutes. Introduced by Mahapurush Sri-manta Sankardeva "Namghars", literally meaning prayer house, are places for congregational worship associated with the entire Assamese community and the Ekasarna sect of Hinduism, in particular, which is native to Assam.

Nadda also said that during the

Rahul cancels Assam trip due to bad weather

NEW DELHI

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi, who was supposed to campaign in Assam on Tuesday, could not reach there due to bad weather and instead released a video appealing the voters to exercise their franchise in favour of the 'Mahajot' (Grand Alliance).

"Due to bad weather I could not reach you, but my message is clear that with the 'five guarantees', we will take Assam to the path of development and prosperity. So vote for the Mahajot with huge majority," Rahul Gandhi said. As per the programme on Tuesday, the former Congress chief was supposed to interact with women at the India Club Ground in Silchar besides addressing a public meeting at the DSA Ground in Haflong. He was also supposed to be present at a public meeting in Karbi Anglong district. (ANS)

Congress rule, poachers killed rhino indiscriminately but after the BJP came to power, the poaching of the endangered animals stopped completely. (IANS)

Ex-cricketer Dinda attacked during election campaign

MOYNA (WB): Former India speedster Ashok Dinda, the BJP's candidate from Moyna in West Bengal's Purba Medinipur, was allegedly attacked and his vehicle vandalised during the campaign on Tuesday, prompting the Election Commission to seek a report from the district authorities. Dinda was returning from a roadshow when his SUV was attacked around 4.30 pm by hundreds of goons, wielding lathi and rods, his manager said. They also hurled stones at the vehicle, injuring the former cricketer on his shoulder, he said. "The incident happened right in front of Moyna Bazar when we were returning from a roadshow. There was one local TMC goon, Shahjahan Ali, who along with others, numbering more than a hundred, attacked with lathi, rods and bricks," the manager told PTL. "There was no way we could escape as they had blocked all the roads. Dada, was sitting in the middle row and fortunately could lower his head as one huge brick flew in, shattering the front window pane," he claimed. Dinda is in severe pain following the injury to his shoulder, he said. The TMC denied the allegation, saying the attack was the result of an infighting within the BJP. (PTI)



cluding other serious offences, he added.

"The RJD is the largest party in the state. Our party leaders will again take to the streets protesting over the issue of detaining Tejashwi Yadav, Tej Pratap and other RJD leaders," Tiwari said.

Sources said the RJD and others in the Grand Alliance are busy making strategies to tackle this issue.

On March 23, the district administration did not allow the RJD leaders and supporters to gherao the Bihar Assembly due to Covid-19 guidelines. Despite this, the RJD workers took to the streets and carried out a protest march. Incidents of stone-pelting between the police and the RJD workers were

reported and the police had to resort to lathicharge. A case has been registered regarding such violent incidents.

The RJD tweeted from their official Twitter account and wrote, "Chief Minister Nitish Kumar ji, you can hang RJD workers, but we will neither be afraid nor bow down or stop our protest. We will continue our struggle under the leadership of the Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Yadav on unemployment, inflation, law and order, including other issues of public concern."

After the Assembly elections held last year, the RJD emerged as the single largest party in the state and has continuously criticised the ruling alliance of the JD(U)-BJP. (ANS)

Bihar Assembly ruckus fallout: RJD set to corner Nitish

PATNA

AFTER a brief lull due to the Holi celebrations, the political slugfest between the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) is set to break out once again. The RJD is preparing plans to corner the ruling NDA government on several issues.

The RJD is not willing to let the assault on its party MLAs in the state Assembly and the passing of the Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021 go unnoticed. It is in no mood to back down and is devising an aggressive strategy to counter the ruling NDA government in Bihar.

The RJD is also upset with the Patna Police for filing an attempt to murder charge against the Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Yadav and his brother Tej Pratap Yadav, and 20 other RJD leaders.

The RJD has made it clear that they would not seek bail in this case and the Nitish Kumar-led government should arrest Tejashwi Yadav and send him to jail.

RJD Spokesperson Mritunjay Tiwari said the people, who are currently in power, want to run the government at gunpoint. The Bihar government was registering cases against the RJD supporters under the attempt to murder charge, in-

NCP chief Sharad Pawar admitted to hospital

MUMBAI

SPARKING fresh health concerns, Nationalist Congress Party President Sharad Pawar, who has been unwell since Sunday, was rushed to the Breach Candy Hospital here after he developed fresh abdominal pains, a top party leader said on Tuesday.

NCP spokesperson and Maharashtra Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik said that Pawar, who was due to be taken to the hospital on Wednesday, was admitted to the hospital on Tuesday "since he is experiencing some pain again".

As per the previous plans revealed by Malik on Monday, Pawar, 80, was scheduled to undergo an endoscopy and surgery for gallbladder stones on



Wednesday. Earlier, the octogenarian but agile leader was on blood thinner medication, which has been stopped now due to this issue, said Malik. Several prominent personalities, including

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, singer Lata Mangeshkar and others, have enquired after Pawar's health and wished him a speedy recovery. (ANS)

FESTIVE FUN



Women tear off shirt of a man as they play 'Huraanga' at Dauji temple, near Mathura on Tuesday. Huraanga is played a day after the festival of Holi, during which men drench women with colours and women tear off clothes of the men

Following outrage Left leader apologies over remarks on Rahul

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

FOLLOWING a huge outrage, especially from the Congress, former Lok Sabha MP Joyce George on Tuesday apologised for his remarks against Rahul Gandhi.

George had said that 'women in Kerala should be wary of Rahul Gandhi'.

He made this controversial remark while campaigning for state Power Minister M.M. Mani at Erettayar in Idukki district on Monday. George was the Idukki Lok Sabha member of the Left in 2014, but lost to Congress' Deen Kuriakose in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

In his speech, George said 'Gandhi is a bachelor and he goes only to interact with girls at the college campus'. "Gandhi is a problem maker and, hence women should be wary of him," said George, while Mani was sitting on the dais.

From early Tuesday morning there was a huge public outrage, especially from the Congress



leaders, who demanded that George should be arrested and both the CPI-M and the CPI condemn the act of George. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, however without naming any or condemning the incident, just said, "it should not happen".

Following these outbursts, George in a political rally in his home district, Idukki and in the presence of CPI-M politburo member Brinda Karat said that he wished to withdraw his statement and would like to render an unconditional apology for his statement that was made.

Earlier, reacting sharply to these remarks, Kuriakose said they treated these statements with disdain and would approach the appropriate authorities.

Idukki district Congress committee president Ibrahimkutty Kallar said this showed the way George has been groomed and what he actually is. "We will be approaching the Election Commission and also organise a protest in Idukki, later in the day," said Kallar. Kerala goes to the polls on April 6 to elect 140 legislators. (ANS)

Hiran case: 2 accused sent to NIA custody till April 7

MUMBAI

A special court here on Tuesday extended, till April 7, the NIA custody of a dismissed cop and a bookie arrested in connection with the death of Thane businessman Mansukh Hiran.

The duo - jailed former cop currently on parole Vinayak Shinde and cricket bookie Nareesh Gaur - was arrested by Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) on March 21 but the case was subsequently taken over by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on March 24.

Seeking 10 days additional custody, NIA Special Public Prosecutor Sunil Gonsalves said that the probe agency has seized two mobile, one iPhone, 7 SIM cards, a blank cover of SIM card, a note with 14 mobile numbers

mentioned including 5 in the name of arrested-suspected cop and prime accused Sachin Vaze with 'Ok' written (for activation) beside them.



Sachin Vaze

He said that Gaur had given those 5 numbers to co-accused Shinde who in turn gave them to Vaze and these were later allegedly used for the conspiracy and crime pertaining to the SUV Scorpio - abandoned on February 25 near Antilia building, the home of industrialist Mukesh Ambani - followed by Hiran's mystery death on March 5.

Gonsalves argued that Vaze and Shinde were present when the conspiracy was hatched, and Gaur has given a disclosure statement after which the NIA

recovered a laptop, DVRs and other materials which were fished out from the Mithi River on Sunday (March 28).

He also contended that investigators need to find 2 of the total 14 SIM cards that emerged in the probe, want to confront the accused trio with each other, and unravel the full conspiracy of the two cases even as the NIA sleuths inch closer to cracking the motive behind these sensational crimes.

During their parallel probes, the ATS and NIA have seized or examined around half a dozen luxury cars used/driven by Vaze, recreated the crime scene near Antilia and the Thane Creek marshes (where Hiran's body was found), arrested the Shinde-Gaur duo, searched the Mumbai Police's Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU) offices, amid other aspects of the sensitive cases. Main accused Vaze is currently in NIA custody till April 3. (ANS)

Indians spend 188 bn minutes on OTT

NEW DELHI

INDIANS spent 188 billion minutes on various OTT platforms - the highest 69 billion minutes on daily soaps followed by movies with 31 billion minutes - in the month of February as free telecom bundling helped increase the number of OTT subscriptions via smartphone users, a report showed on Tuesday.

Voot dominated the daily soaps genre compared to its rivals while 'others' together grabbed 31 per cent share. Hotstar dominated the movies genre with 33 per cent share, according to Bengaluru-based market research firm RedSeer.

"With users not willing to step out of their houses, production houses of mainstream movies and OTT platforms started releasing new content online along with producing



more originals as demand kept increasing," said Nikhil Dalal and Ujjwal Chadhury from RedSeer.

Many of the post-paid users opted for bundling options provided by their telecom operator as it benefits them in varying ways. "Even broadband operators like JioFibre provide bundling options for free Prime and Netflix subscriptions. Moreover, with discounts and

offers on various players, users tend to opt for annual subscription packs," the analysts said in the report.

While the unique paid user growth rate was logged at 35 per cent in February 2021 (compared to April 2020), subscriptions increased by 8 per cent during the same period. The subscription revenue also increased significantly by 42 per cent in February.

Compared to last April, there has been a watch-time drop of six per cent in February, mostly because engagement dropped as users started moving out with normalcy returning and their favourite TV soaps started again.

"However, the good news is with more releases in the pipeline along with product improvement, the engagement is likely to increase," the report said. Over the past year, consumer behaviour has largely changed, and they now heavily rely on OTT platforms for new content.

The launch of Hotstar+Disney, Voot Select and multiple regional SVoD platforms like HoiChoi and SunNXT, along with rise in Smart TV users, has brought the growth. "This will inevitably accelerate the growth trajectory of the industry," said the report. (ANS)

TODAY'S QUOTE

Disappointed as a minority shareholder

“AS a minority shareholder of Tata Sons, I am personally disappointed by the outcome of the judgement with respect to our case. Although I will no longer be able to influence the direction of governance of the Tata group directly, I hope that the issues I have raised will cause deeper reflection


— Cyrus P Mistry, former Chairman, Tata Sons



CYBERSECURITY

Data of 9.9 cr Mobikwik users leaked

HACKERS have leaked the data such as mobile phone number, bank account details, email, and credit card numbers of 9.9 crore Indians allegedly of Mobikwik users which the digital payments company has strongly denied. The disclosure about the data leak was made by cyber security analyst Rajashekhar Rajaharia, who has also written to the RBI

FOREX (buy rates in ₹)			
US Dollar	73.88	South	
Euro	86.7	African Rand	5.62
UAE Dirham	20.51	Hong Kong Dollar	10.82
Thai Baht	2.58	Japanese Yen	0.76
British Pound	101.59	New Zealand Dollar	51.72
Australian Dollar	56.34	Saudi Riyal	21.44
Canadian Dollar	58.6	Swedish Krona	9.64
Swiss Franc	78.41	Singapore Dollar	55.35

DELHI WEDNESDAY 31 MARCH 2021

BIZ BRIEFS

BSI releases report

BSI's fourth annual Organizational Resilience Index report has noticed that leaders remain cautiously optimistic, with 57 per cent of businesses in the UK, US and India expecting their financial performance to improve this year. The index has surveyed 500 senior leaders across the globe. The concept of organizational resilience refers to an organization's ability to anticipate, prepare for, and adapt to both incremental change and sudden disruptions in order to survive. However, 64 per cent of leaders are optimistic of a better performing year in 2021. Susan Taylor Martin, Chief Executive of BSI, said: "It's encouraging to see cautious optimism about the future as business leaders focus on building back better and organizations clearly recognize the value of prioritizing the health, safety and wellbeing of employees."

GoDaddy's new campaign

GoDaddy Inc has launched a new marketing campaign encouraging small local businesses in the country to create an online presence for their business. The company aims to support local businesses in India by helping them build their own website easily and at an affordable price. For this campaign GoDaddy will be working with its current brand ambassador in India, MS Dhoni. He will be seen in the character of Bijness Bhai, a helpful business mentor, guiding and encouraging small local business owners to build their presence online. MS Dhoni said: "As an aspiring and home-grown entrepreneur myself, I understand how important it is now, more than ever, to have an online presence for your business. I am glad to be associated with GoDaddy again and help inspire local entrepreneurs across the country to have an online presence."

2-day virtual summit starts

The HOPE Consortium's World Immunisation & Logistics Virtual Summit was opened by HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, with a call to enhance collaboration in the world's approach to tackle Covid-19 and ensure a healthier future for all. The two-day virtual summit begins on Tuesday with the participation of acclaimed global healthcare and philanthropic leaders, decision makers, experts and senior government officials. The session also highlighted the next phase of the global pandemic response, which includes how this challenge can be addressed through effective transportation and technology, including data-enabled supply chains and blockchain solutions. HH Sheikh Abdullah said: "Our destiny as nations is linked, as global health security depends on the well-being of all societies."

MyGate records 70% growth

MyGate has announced that it has registered strong growth in Hyderabad in 2020. Despite the pandemic, the solution provider has added close to 400 new societies as customers and seen a 70 per cent increase in new homes in 2020. Some of the prestigious societies that have been onboarded over the year are PBEL City, Aliens Space Station, Lanco Hills, VB City and Muppa's Melody. Abhishek Kumar, COO & co-founder, MyGate, said: "2020 was a very interesting year for us. Given our product's immense utility during the lockdown, along with timely Covid-specific features, and the introduction of commerce on the app, there was a significant increase in acceptance of our product."

India Inc's fundraising at all-time high of ₹1.88 trn

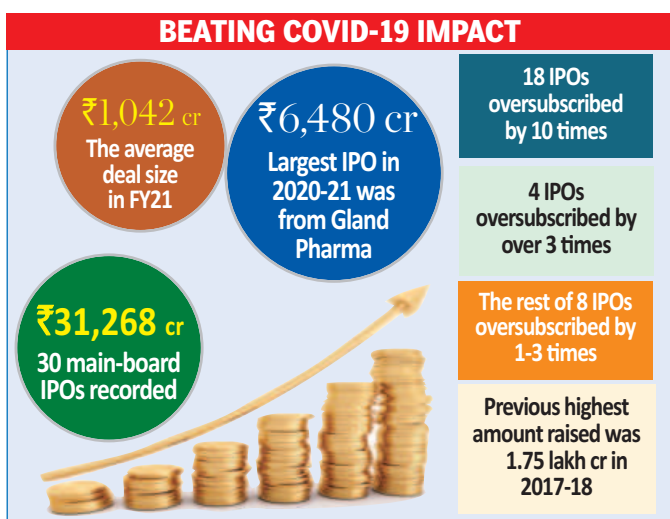
Mobilisation via public-equity market doubles from ₹91,570cr in FY20

NEW DELHI

DESPITE the entire financial year 2020-21 being overshadowed by the pandemic, Indian corporates raised an all-time high amount of Rs1.88 lakh crore through public-equity markets. This was more than double of the Rs 91,670 crore that was raised in 2019-20, according to Pranav Haldea, Managing Director, PRIME Database Group, India's premier database on the capital markets. The previous highest amount raised in a financial year was Rs1.75 lakh crore in 2017-18.

According to Haldea, contrary to the despondency due to the pandemic, 30 main-board IPOs came to the market collectively raising Rs 31,268 crore. This was an increase of 54 per cent from the Rs 20,350 crore raised through 13 IPOs in 2019-20. The largest IPO in 2020-21 was from Gland Pharma for Rs 6,480 crore. The average deal size was Rs 1,042 crore.

The overall response from the public to the mainboard IPOs of the year, according to primedatabase.com, was very good. 18 IPOs received a mega response of more than 10 times, while 4 IPOs were oversubscribed by more than 3 times and the balance 8 IPOs were



oversubscribed between 1 to 3 times. As far as retail investors are concerned, the year witnessed tremendous response from them. The highest number of applications was received by Indigo Paints (25.88 lakh) followed by Mtar Technologies (25.87 lakh) and Mazagon Dock (23.56 lakh).

According to Haldea, response to IPOs was further buoyed by strong listing performance of IPOs of the year. Of the 28 IPOs, which got listed, 19 gave a return of over 10

per cent (based on closing price on listing date). Burger King gave a stupendous return of 131 per cent followed by Happiest Minds Technologies (123 per cent) and Indigo Paints (109 per cent). Moreover, 18 of the 28 IPOs (listed thus far) are trading above the issue price (closing price of March 26, 2021).

The IPO pipeline continues to remain strong with 18 companies holding Sebi approval proposing to raise nearly Rs18,000 crore and another 14 companies are awaiting

Sebi approval to raise nearly Rs 23,000 crore.

Offers for Sale (OFS) through stock exchanges, which is for dilution of promoters' holdings, saw an increase from Rs 17,326 crore in 2019-20 to Rs 30,114 crore in 2020-21. Of this, the Government's divestment accounted for Rs 19,927 crore or 66 per cent of the overall amount. The largest OFS was that of Tata Communications (Rs 5,386 crore) followed by Hindustan Aeronautics (Rs 4,961 crore) and IRCTC (Rs 4,408 crore). OFS accounted for 11 per cent of the total year's public equity markets amount.

FPOs made a comeback after several years. This was primarily on account of the mega Yes Bank FPO, which raised Rs 15,000 crore. Overall, 2 companies mobilised Rs 15,029 crore through FPOs. 31 companies mobilised Rs 78,731 crore through QIPs, highest ever in a financial year. This was 54 per cent higher than Rs 51,216 crore raised in the previous year. The largest QIP of 2020-21 was from ICICI Bank raising Rs 15,000 crore, accounting for 19 per cent of the total QIP amount. QIPs were dominated by banks, NBFCs and real estate companies with them accounting for 84 per cent (Rs 66,141 crore) of the overall amount.

SEBI asks fund houses to avoid investing in debt funds

KUMUD DAS
MUMBAI

THE market regulator Sebi has asked the fund houses to avoid investing in debt funds so as to avoid volatility in these funds. Keeping it in view, a set of guidelines has been issued by AMFI, the industry body, on the issue of Valuation of AT-1 Bonds and Tier-2 Bonds.

In its letter addressed to the fund houses on March 10, Sebi has inter alia stated that the maturity of all perpetual bonds shall be treated as 100 years from the date of issuance of the bond for the purpose of valuation. Based on the representation of the Mutual Fund Industry, Sebi has decided that the deemed residual maturity for the purpose of valuation of existing as well as new bonds issued under Basel-III framework for implementation of the aforesaid circular shall be as per a glide path specified in another Sebi circular dated March 22.

Further, Sebi has advised AMFI to issue detailed guidelines with respect to valuation



Sebi has advised AMFI to issue detailed guidelines with respect to valuation of bonds issued under Basel-III

of bonds issued under Basel-III. AMFI has urged all the 44 fund houses to take note of the guidelines for uniform implementation from April 1.

"What happens that fund houses normally invest in debt funds. As the maturity of the currently existing funds is normally 10-30 years, they have become volatile now. Hence, to avoid it, the AMFI has issued a guideline on the instruction of SEBI so as to avoid ongoing volatility in the bond market", DP Singh, Chief Business Officer, SBI

Mutual Fund told *Bizz Buzz*. The current size of the industry with 44 players stands at Rs 36 lakh crore. Total investment in these instruments by MF industry is around 35K crore, which is around 2 per cent of total debt AUM, he said. As of now, eligible schemes are allowed to invest up to 10 per cent of the portfolio in these securities. "This amendment will bring in confidence and security to the investor community," says Nilesh Karani, vice president, Research, magnum. As per AMFI guidelines, AMCs shall adopt maturity of 100 years for perpetual bond issued by banks. There will be a glide path for smooth implementation.

TCS in for brand rejig

NEW DELHI

INDIA's largest IT services firm Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) on Tuesday unveiled its new brand statement - 'Building on Belief' - that encapsulates long-term partnerships, collaborative approach and investments in research and innovation by the company to help customers achieve purpose-led transformation goals. The new statement also reflects TCS' own belief that it, along with its customers, can harness collective knowledge to innovate in ways that result in better futures for individuals, communities and the planet. "For decades, we have worked with our customers with a shared purpose- leveraging the power of innovation, knowledge and technology to transform businesses," TCS Chief Marketing Officer Rajashree R said. She added that the new brand articulation and purpose statement pave the way to engage with customers as their growth and transformation partners and bring together TCS' contextual knowledge and expertise to help them master their journey.

"We are excited to take this new articulation of our brand to our clients, associates and all other stakeholders," she said during a virtual briefing. The company said 'Building on Belief' represents a



brand promise based on TCS' core strengths, including a long-term approach based on shared purpose that benefits clients through the breadth of reach and ubiquity of involvement; innovation and the responsible, sustainable and strategic view it provides; and the ability to harness collective knowledge to create technology-led solutions for transformative, measurable impact. TCS will activate its new brand statement in the coming weeks and will also be leveraged across the various marathons that the company supports across the globe. Rajashree noted that TCS will undertake a 360-degree integrated marketing campaign for the new programme, and will also "spend a lot of effort and focus in communicating this to associates through town halls". In a statement, TCS MD and CEO Rajesh Gopinathan said every innovation and every transformational journey begin with the belief that it will make the world better.

Muthoottu Mini issues ₹250-cr NCDs

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

MUTHOOTTU Mini, a non-banking financial company (NBFC), announced the opening of its public issue of non-convertible debentures (NCDs) of the face value of Rs1,000 each. The issue opened on March 30, 2021, and will close on April 23, 2021, with an option of early closure or extension. The company is issuing the NCDs for 14th time to the public. The NCD issue aggregates to Rs 125 crore, with an option to retain over-subscription up to Rs. 125 crore, aggregating up to a total of Rs250 crore. They are offered in secured and unsecured debentures with a value of Rs 200 crore and Rs50 crore respectively.

The 14th issue offers various options for subscription of NCDs with coupon rates ranging from 9.00 per cent - 10.25 per cent per annum. The issue also offers effective annualized yield of up to 10.22 per cent p.a. on redemption for secured NCDs and 10.41 per cent per annum for unsecured NCDs. Net proceeds of the issue will be utilized for the purpose of onward lending, financing, and for repayment or prepayment of principal and interest on borrowings of the Company.

Torrent Gas takes over Sanwariya Gas

NEW DELHI

TORRENT Gas on Tuesday said it has signed an agreement to take over Sanwariya Gas which has a licence to retail CNG to automobiles and piped gas to households for cooking purposes in Mathura.

The acquisition cements Torrent's city gas distribution network that is now spread over 33 districts in seven States and one union territory. "Torrent Gas, through its wholly-owned subsidiary, has signed a share purchase agreement (SPA) with the promoters of Sanwariya Gas for the takeover of the company which has the authorisation from Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB), to provide compressed natural gas (CNG) and piped natural gas (PNG) in the geographical area of Mathura," the firm said in a state-



ment. It did not provide the value of the deal. The transaction is subject to approval from PNGRB and fulfilment of other condition precedents.

With this acquisition, Torrent Gas has authorised to set up a city gas distribution (CGD) network across 17 geographical areas spread over 33 districts in seven states and one UT. Torrent Gas plans to invest over Rs 8,000 crore in the development of the CGD network in these districts over the next five years, of which Rs 1,500 crore has already been invested, the statement said.

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

MSMEs in India are in recovery mode as several initiatives by the Centre supported by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) are helping them weather the adverse impact caused by the Covid-19, according to a senior official at RBI, Hyderabad region. "To address the stress and open new opportunities in the MSME sector, the ECLGS and CGSSD introduced by the government were supported by various monetary and regulatory measures by the Reserve Bank of India in the form of interest rate cuts, higher structural and durable liquidity, moratorium on debt servicing, asset classification standstill, loan restructuring package and CRR exemptions on credit disbursed to new MSME borrowers," said K Nikhila, Regional Director (RD) of Hyderabad region — Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Financial Inclusion and Development Department (FIDD) of RBI, Hyderabad region, conducted 22nd meeting of the Empowered Committee (EC) on MSMEs of Telangana State for the quarter ended December 31, 2020.

RBI measures helping MSMEs tide over Covid impact: RD

Hyderabad Regional Director chaired the meeting. SLBC Con- venger, senior officials from Government of Telangana, major commercial banks, NABARD, SIDBI, KVIC, MSME-DI and representatives from industry associations, took part in the meeting.

Addressing the participants, Nikhila further stated that "MSMEs have a vast network of more than six crore enterprises contributing 30 per cent to the nominal GDP and around 48 per cent to exports. The MSME sector has been rendered especially vulnerable by the pandemic, necessitating concerted efforts to combat the stress and focus on revival of the sector."

The industries department to follow up the Telangana State Industrial Infrastructure Corporation Ltd (TSIIC) for resolving the long-pending action point pertaining to the issue flagged by SIDBI regard-



ing the problem in creation of mortgage of the industrial land allotted by TSIIC to the MSME units, Nikhila added.

The FIDD meeting discussed performance of MSMEs under various schemes and review of credit from banks. The meeting took up among the following among other things: review of flow of credit to MSME Sector and related issues, review of performance of banks

against the recommendations of PM's Task Force on MSMEs, performance under PM SVANidhi, PMMY, PM Stand-up India, PMSME Scheme, NPAs in MSME sector, framework for revival and rehabilitation of MSMEs, structured mechanism for monitoring credit flow to MSMEs, recovery under SARFAESI Act, onetime restructuring of MSME advances, Collateral-free loans and coverage under CGTMSE, cluster financing — banking facilities to units in MSME clusters; credit flow under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan Package, performance under Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) and Credit Guarantee Scheme for Subordinate Debt (CGSSD), financial literacy initiatives of banks, RBI and capacity building of branch level functionaries.

New Champions League Format

AGREEMENT DELAYED FOR A MONTH

WASHINGTON

A decision on the new Champions League format has been delayed until next month after hitting a late stumbling block over how the commercial and broadcasting rights will be sold to European football's elite competition.

UEFA hoped to use an executive committee meeting on Wednesday to ratify the expansion of the group stage from 32 to 36 teams, jumping from six to 10 rounds of matches from 2024.

There is broad agreement between European clubs and domestic leagues on the new format after years of wrangling. But UEFA has to resolve the broad details with the European Club Association over the creation of a joint venture to sell rights to the Champions League, a person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Clubs will gain a say only in the marketing and television rights sales of the competition, leaving UEFA to still control the sporting and governance aspects, the person said on condition of anonymity to discuss confidential talks.

UEFA wants a minimum guarantee of revenue to protect its financial position, while also taking a 6.5% cut of the cash generated by the joint venture that would replace Switzerland-based agency TEAM Marketing, which has had exclusive rights from UEFA to sell the Champions League since 1992.

The Champions League currently shares almost 2 billion euros (\$2.4 billion) each season among 32 clubs, who are split into eight groups of four to start with. The new format will add 100 games as a 36-team single-standings league is created, adding in four more clubs from the current format. That would guarantee 10 games for each of the 36 teams, against 10 different opponents with balanced schedules based on seedings.

The current format consists of six group games against three opponents. The top eight teams would advance to the round of 16. The next best 16 teams would enter a two-leg play-off to complete the bracket.

The tournament would also play matches for the first time on Thursdays which has previously been reserved for the Europa League. While the second-tier competition is envisaged to stay at 32 teams, it is also set to adopt a variation of the "Swiss System" format from chess tournaments. So the number of rounds in the group stage would rise from six to eight.

UEFA confirmed the future of club competitions from 2024 would still be discussed at the executive committee meeting on Wednesday. "However, any official decision in this respect will only be made at the next UEFA executive committee meeting on 19 April, in order to finalize ongoing discussions," the governing body said in a statement.

European Leagues president Lars-Christer Olsson said last week he received "guarantees that no clubs are taking over the club competitions from UEFA" during a conversation with the governing body's leadership. "It's UEFA club competitions and they will always have the final say," Olsson said. "That is not handed over to any other body for decision making."

Porto is technically the home team for the first leg. UEFA has previously said the away goals rule will apply even when games are played at neutral venues.

Because of travel limits between England and Portugal, Arsenal and Benfica were previously forced to play in Rome and Athens when they met in the Europa League.

Chelsea to face Porto in neutral Spain

NYON, SWITZERLAND

CHELSEA and Porto will play both legs of the Champions League quarterfinals in neutral Spain because of travel restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic.

UEFA said Tuesday the Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan Stadium in Seville will stage the games on April 7 and 13. The venue is the home of Sevilla and hosted Champions League games earlier this season.

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FIXTURES

- Quarterfinal 1: Manchester City vs. Borussia Dortmund
- Quarterfinal 2: Porto vs. Chelsea
- Quarterfinal 3: Bayern Munich vs. Paris Saint-Germain
- Quarterfinal 4: Real Madrid vs. Liverpool

The quarterfinal matches will take place April 6-7 and April 13-14



B'desh's DLS target changed 3 times during 2nd T20I chase

NAPIER (NEW ZEALAND)



New Zealand beat Bangladesh by 28 runs amid confusion surrounding the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern target

BANGLADESH played the first nine balls of their innings in the second T20I against New Zealand without knowing their correct target on Tuesday at the McLean Park.

New Zealand's innings had to be closed at 173/5 in 17.5 overs after which Bangladesh went into bat chasing a revised target of 148 in 16 overs.

However, play was stopped after just nine balls. On resumption of play after five minutes, the players were told that their revised target was 170 in 16 overs.

"Right and now we can play. 170 confirmed as what Bangladesh will need to win from 16 overs. Play returns at McLean Park. #NZvBAN," said a tweet from the BlackCaps Twitter account upon resumption of play. This too was later corrected to 171 only after the 13th over of the chase.

Bangladesh eventually fell 28 runs short of the DLS target. Phillips was the star of the show during the New Zealand innings, smashing five fours and two

sixes in a 62-run partnership with Mitchell that came off just 27 balls. "I don't think I have been involved in a game before where batters go out and don't know what the DLS target is. There was a lot of rain around. Nobody had any idea of how many we needed after five or six overs. I don't think the game should have started until it was finalized, before there was a clear indication of what is required, and what we needed at certain stages. I don't quite think it (the conduct of the match) was good enough this evening," Bangladesh coach Russell Domingo was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo. "When we met the match referee) they were still waiting for the printouts and calculations to take place. I think if you are waiting, the game can't start before you get it. What was explained now was that they normally get it one or two balls into the innings, but hadn't received it yet. They were waiting for it. There were delays and all sorts of stuff. No excuses (for the defeat), but this is just very frustrating for us," he said.

Bangladesh captain Mahmudullah, meanwhile, didn't make much of the confusion. "I think there was a bit of confusion because we didn't know what the DLS score was, it kept changing on the scoreboard. It can happen in the game. First five overs we were on track but we didn't finish well enough," he said in the post-match presentation ceremony.

New Zealand all-rounder Jimmy Neesham tweeted, "How is it possible to start a run chase without knowing what you're chasing? Crazy stuff. #NZvBAN"

Brief scores: New Zealand 173/5 in 17.5 overs (Glenn Phillips 58 not out, Daryl Mitchell 34 not out; Mahedi Hasan 2/45) beat Bangladesh 142/7 in 16 overs (Soumya Sarkar 51; Tim Southee 2/21, Hamish Bennett 2/31) by 28 runs (DLS method).

MI hand in India's series wins over England

NEW DELHI

DEFENDING IPL champions Mumbai Indians, who will start the 2021 season as favourites, will be buoyed by the match-winning performances of their players during India's recent limited-overs series against England.

The Pandya brothers, both Hardik and Krunal, Rohit Sharma as well as Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav played key roles in helping India win the T20 International series 3-2 and the ODI series 2-1.

Mumbai Indians skipper Sharma, who is also the India vice-captain and opener, made a quickfire 64 to help India post a huge 224-run total

in the fifth and final T20 International that India won to clinch the series. That apart he gave some good starts in the ODI series although he couldn't get a big score.

Earlier, in the T20I series, Ishan Kishan made a 32-ball 56 on his international debut to help India win the second T20 International and level the series 1-1.

Suryakumar Yadav then clicked in the fourth T20 International, hammering 57 off 31 balls to help India make 185 and win the match to again square the series at 2-2 and stay alive. Yadav made 32 off 17 balls in the fifth and final T20I as well.

The Pandya brothers, Krunal and

Hardik, too did well.

Hardik bowled 17 overs in the five-match T20 series and conceded just 6.94 runs an over while picking three wickets. He also made a 17-ball 39 not out in the fifth and final T20I to help India set up a 224-run total. His tight nine-over spell in the last ODI, in which he conceded just 48 runs, played a key role in India's seven-run win in the third and final ODI that clinched the series for India.

Hardik's brother Krunal scored a 31-ball 58 not out that powered India to 317 and helped them win the first ODI. India were struggling at 205 for five in 40.3 overs at one stage before Krunal's hard-hitting saw them get to a challenging total.

Harmanpreet Covid +ve

NEW DELHI

INDIA women's T20I captain Harmanpreet Kaur said on Tuesday that she has tested positive for Covid-19 and has quarantined herself. Harmanpreet also asked all those who have come in contact with her in the past seven days to get themselves tested.

"Unfortunately I have tested positive for Covid-19. I am feeling OK and I have quarantined myself by following all the advised guidelines advised by the authorities and my doctors," she said in a statement she put up on her social media handles.

"A humble request to all those people who have come in contact with me in last 7 days to please get themselves tested to be on the safer side. By God's grace and your well wishes, I will be back on the field soon. I urge you all to please wear mask and stay safe," Harmanpreet further said.

Harmanpreet, 32, had last played for India in the fifth ODI



against South Africa in Lucknow on March 17. She then missed the subsequent T20I series due to a hip-flexor injury, with opener Smriti Mandhana captaining the team instead.

Harmanpreet is the latest among several cricketers who have tested positive, including a host of former players who played in the Road Safety World Series. Sachin Tendulkar, Irfan Pathan, Yusuf Pathan and Subramanian Badrinath all recently announced that they have tested positive.

Kohli's Indians 'cooked', onus on BCCI to give players respite

NEW DELHI

AFTER India skipper Virat Kohli's criticism of scheduling of international matches during the times of Covid-19 pandemic, the Indian cricket board could look into the matter while drawing up the calendar for future matches if the pandemic doesn't subside.

"As of now, nothing has been discussed among the Board officials. But in case it comes up, it will be discussed in the Apex Council meeting," said a senior official of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to IANS.

It has been learned that the BCCI could take up the matter, though as of now hosting of the Indian Premier League (IPL) with the top players appearing in it despite the rise in Covid-19 cases, remains the priority for the BCCI.

A successful and incident-free completion of IPL is important since India is scheduled to host the T20 World Cup in October-November.

Kohli criticised the scheduling after the third and final ODI against England, saying, "Scheduling needs to be looked at in future because playing in bio-bubbles for so long, two to three months, is going to be very, very difficult, going forward."

Kohli talked about mental strength of players as well. "You can't expect everyone to be at the same level of mental strength. Sometimes you do get cooked and you do feel like a bit of a change," he said.

The India captain's lament appears valid considering that the rival players from England got plenty of rest due to a rotation policy of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB).

England's stand-in captain for the last two ODIs, Jos Buttler, said after the series: "It's been great that everyone's health has been really looked after and whenever it's possible to get out of the bubble and back in."

Buttler himself benefitted from it. He played the first Test against India in Chennai after appearing

in the two preceding Tests in Sri Lanka. Then he was rested, and sent to England to give him a break while the next three Tests were played in India. He returned for the limited-overs leg of the India tour.

Jonny Bairstow missed the first two Tests on the tour of India and returned for the final two Tests and the limited-overs leg. Moeen Ali missed the last two Tests before returning for the limited-overs leg.

Indian players, however, have not had such luxury.

The Indians have been constantly on tour since September 2020 when they travelled to the UAE for the IPL and then followed it up immediately by flying down to Australia for a full series. The large Indian squad returned and then geared up for the full series against England, re-entering the bio-bubble just after a week of their arrival.

After almost two-month long series against England, they play the IPL. The all-



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કોનું, બંધાવું કોનસાગુતુનાને હંભાવું...