

ASTROGUIDE

Plava; Uttarayana

Tithi: Chaitra Shuddha Chaviti till 6.04 pm

Star: Rohini 11.38 pm

Varjyam: 2.36 pm to 4.24 pm; 5.54 am to 7.42 am (Saturday)

Durmuhurtam: 8.32 am to 9.22 am; 12.40 pm to 1.30 pm

Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

HIJRI CALENDAR

Ramzan 3,1442 AH

PRAYERS (SHAHI MASJID)

Fajar: 4.43 am

Zohar: 12.10 pm

Asar: 4.33 pm

Maghrib: 6.24 pm

Isha: 7.38 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.24 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.55 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 8.42 AM


MOONSET TOMORROW 10.48 PM

RAMZAN TIMINGS

IFTAR: 6.24 pm (Today)

SEHRI: 4.33 am (Tomorrow)

COUNTER POINT



No need. I am going to a safe place... my leader's election rally!

SHORT TAKES

SC: Give deadline to appoint judges

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Centre to apprise it of a reasonable time frame within which it can respond to the recommendations made by its collegium for appointment of judges as the government said that it will adhere to the timeline fixed in the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP).

UP poll: Ballot boxes snatched

Agra (UP): Four people were injured and two ballot boxes were snatched in a clash between two groups during polling for the Uttar Pradesh panchayat election on Thursday. SP (East) Ashok Venkat said the incident was reported in Rihawali village of Agra Rural constituency. He said the clash broke out between supporters of candidates.

Olympics may be cancelled

Tokyo: Storm clouds were once again gathering over the Tokyo Olympics. Top politician Toshiro Nikai, the ruling party's number two, said the games must be cancelled "without hesitation" if the virus situation is too severe. Although officials dismissed Nikai's remarks, public opinion is turning against the event with towns cancelling torch events.

## Centre gets HC notice on sale of Vizag Steel Plant

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday served notices to the Central government to file its response within four weeks on its decision to privatise Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP). A division bench comprising Justice Joymalya Bagchi and Justice Ganga Rao heard a petition filed by a retired IPS officer, V.V. Lakshmi Narayana, challenging the Union Cabinet's decision on divesting its stake in VSP. Petitioner's counsel Adi Narayana Rao argued that the decision to privatise VSP was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs without taking into consideration various alternatives available to turn around VSP as suggested by both the state government and the petitioner and that no discussion was taken up on the criteria for selecting public sector entities

for privatisation. Counsel informed the court that the plant was having the latest infrastructure and the right to life of thousands of farmers, who parted with their lands for setting up the plant, was infringed upon as most of them were not given permanent employment as assured by the company at the time of land acquisition. He referred to the case of Narmada Bachao Andolan, where the Supreme Court reiterated the importance of fulfilling the promise which was made at the time of acquiring the land. Advocate-General S. Sriram submitted that the state government has written a letter to the Centre suggesting several alternatives for the revival of the RINL and requested for a review of the Union Cabinet's decision to sell VSP. After hearing the counsels, the court posted the hearing after four weeks.



Dr M. Gurumurthy, YSRC candidate for the Lok Sabha bypoll in Tirupati, along with MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy, campaigns in Tirupati on Thursday. — DC

## Campaign comes to end in Tirupati

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

After campaigning for the prestigious Tirupati (SC) Lok Sabha bypoll came to end on Thursday, all political parties have begun analysing reports from the ground level. The election is scheduled to be conducted on Saturday, April 17. The ruling party's candidate Dr Maddila Gurumurthy is set against four-time MP and former Union minister Panabaka Lakshmi from the Telugu Desam, former Karnataka chief secretary K. Ratna Prabha from the BJP. Janashakti combine, six-time MP Chinta Mohan from the Congress and N. Yadagiri from the CPI(M). In the 2019 elections, Durga Prasad secured 7,22,877 votes and won against the TD's Lakshmi by a margin of 2,28,376

votes. She secured 4,94,501 votes, followed by Chinta Mohan (Congress) and B. Srihari Rao (BJP) got 24,039 and 16,125 votes respectively. Buoyed by the massive victory that the YSRC secured in the panchayat and civic body elections in the state, the ruling YSRC appears to be confident about its victory. However, senior leaders including Y.V. Subba Reddy, Dy. CM Narayana Swamy, minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy and others have camped in the constituency and monitored party campaigns. Accompanied by the YSRC's local legislators, Dr Gurumurthy covered their respective Assembly segments and organised many public meetings.

■ Page 2: Oppn parties put all efforts to win LS poll

# Centre to boost oxygen supply

To import 50,000 MT medical oxygen and increase domestic production

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

India on Thursday crossed the two-lakh mark for new Covid-19 cases with over 1,038 deaths. The country now has over 15 lakh active cases. Of this, Maharashtra alone accounts for nearly 40 per cent of the total active caseload. According to Union health ministry officials, Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh are among the states where double mutant coronavirus strain — coded as B.1.617 — was found. Experts believe this double mutant variant could be the main reason for the rapid spread of Covid under the new wave. "It is reasonable to say that the variant (double mutation) is of concern because it has been found in a significant number of people. And it is not just because it has been found in a certain number of people but we know that these particular mutations have (also) got physiological effects on our context," Principal scientific adviser to Prime Minister K. Vijay Raghavan told a media house in an interview.

With several states reporting a shortage of medical oxygen in view of rising Covid cases, an inter-ministerial empowered group of central government officials on Thursday initiated actions to address shortage and panic.

The government has decided to import 50,000 MT of medical oxygen to address the immediate shortage as the empowered group initiated mapping of 12 high burden states to oxygen sources.

Reliance Industries Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd have diverted oxygen from their refineries to the government hospitals, free of cost.

Maharashtra topped the list of states that consumed vast amounts of oxygen followed by Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, and Rajasthan. These states are also reporting the most number of daily cases.

According to officials, India's daily production capacity of medical oxygen (7,127 MT) and stock (50,000 MT) is "comfortably more" than the daily consumption (3,842 MT) at present.

According to officials at the Union health ministry, with increasing cases, medical oxygen consumption will need to keep pace with the requirements of the states.

For this, the current oxygen stocks in the country, including the industrial oxygen stocks with the manufacturing plants, is more than 50,000 MTs.

Along with the ramped up production of the oxygen manufacturing units and the surplus stocks available, the present availability of oxygen is sufficient.



A health worker conducts Covid-19 test at Indira Gandhi Stadium in Vijayawada on Thursday. — DECCAN CHRONICLE

## Keep a tab on pvt hospital charges, CM tells officials

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday directed officials to provide beds to Covid-19 patients within three hours and make arrangements to make Remdesivir injections and oxygen cylinders available to hospitals for treatment.

During a review meeting on Covid-19 and Coronavirus vaccination organised in view of a sudden spurt in cases in the state, he directed the officials to ensure that treatment was provided through 104 services and asked them to give wide publicity to it.

"The patients should be admitted to hospitals or advised for home isolation based on suggestions of doctors," the Chief Minister said.

He also praised the officials for administering

● Jagan Mohan Reddy told the officials to allot the 1902 toll-free number for grievances and that people should call 104 for any queries on Covid-19.

6.21 lakh doses of Coronavirus vaccine in one day and said he would write a letter to the Central government for more Covid vaccine stocks.

He added that ambulance services should be provided and the treatment should be expedited with the help of ASHA workers. He said the health of the people in home isolation should be followed up.

Jagan Mohan Reddy told the officials to allot the 1902 toll-free number for grievances and that people should call 104 for any

queries on Covid-19. He also directed the officials to fix prices for treatment in private hospitals and ensure they don't overcharge and that there should not be any scarcity of beds for Covid patients. He said the charges for treatment should be displayed at all hospitals and the details on whom to complain, if the hospitals charge more, should be displayed in hospitals prominently.

The Chief Minister also directed the officials to maintain a record on the availability of beds in Arogyasri-empanelled hospitals and private hospitals.

He also said that a special focus should be laid on hospital care, sanitation and quality food in hospitals and added that quality of medication and providing medicine at the time are also important.

## NEET PG EXAMS POSTPONED DUE TO COVID SPIKE

New Delhi, April 15: In view of a spike in the number of Covid-19 cases, the National Eligibility-Cum-Entrance Test (postgraduate), which was scheduled to be held on April 18, has been postponed, Union health minister Harsh Vardhan said on Thursday.

The decision was taken keeping the well-being of the young medical students in mind, the health minister added.

"In light of the surge in #Covid19 cases, Government of India has decided to postpone #NeetPG2021 exam which was earlier scheduled to be held on April 18. Next date to be decided later. Decision has been taken keeping wellbeing of our young medical students in mind," Vardhan said in a tweet. — PTI

## CONG CANDIDATE DIES DUE TO COVID IN WEST BENGAL

Kolkata, April 15: Congress candidate Rezaul Haque, who tested positive for Covid-19 two days ago, died at a hospital here early on Thursday, health department sources said.

Haque, 46, the party's nominee from Samsherganj Assembly constituency in Murshidabad district, was initially admitted to a private hospital in Jangipur on Wednesday following bouts of breathing trouble, they said.

He was later referred to a medical facility in Kolkata after his condition deteriorated at night. Haque died around 5 am, the sources said.

Meanwhile, the EC countermanded polling for the Samsherganj seat and said the future course of action over voting would be decided soon. "The entire electoral exercise for the constituency will be conducted from scratch for this seat," EC said. — PTI

# New Covid cases cross 5K in AP

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

Andhra Pradesh on Thursday said that it has registered 5,086 new Coronavirus cases and 14 deaths in the last 24 hours.

"Out of 35,741 samples tested, 5,086 persons were found to be infected with the Coronavirus. Out of 1,55,70,201 samples tested so far, 9,42,135 persons were found infected with the virus. Of them, 9,03,072 people have recovered while 31,710 are still active with the virus," said state health officials.

Eleven districts registered more than 200 each on Thursday indicating the intensity of the spread of the virus while only two districts — Kadapa and West Godavari — have registered two-digit numbers. Chittoor reported the highest at 835 followed by 626 in Kurnool, 611 in Guntur, 568 in Srikakulam, 450 in East Godavari, 432 in Visakhapatnam, 396 in Krishna, 354 in Anantapur, 248 in Vizianagaram, 236 in Prakasam, 223 in Nellore.

Chittoor district recorded the highest number of

● Eleven districts registered more than 200 each indicating the intensity of the spread while Kadapa and West Godavari registered two-digit numbers.

cumulative Coronavirus active cases at 5,732, followed by 3,573 in Guntur, 3,434 in Visakhapatnam, 3,307 in Krishna, 2,721 in Srikakulam, 2,550 in East Godavari, 2,355 in Kurnool, 2,086 in Nellore, 1,857 in Prakasam, 1,513 in Anantapur, 1,288 in Kadapa, 927 in

Vizianagaram and 367 in West Godavari.

Chittoor topped the state by recording Covid-related deaths followed by two each in Anantapur, Kurnool and Visakhapatnam and one each in Guntur, Kadapa and Krishna.

The state health authorities discharged 1,745 Coronavirus-infected patients after recovery from several hospitals in the state. The state conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,91,577 samples per one million population and registered the positive rate at 6.05.

## India, France ink Gaganyaan pact

New Delhi: Space agencies of India and France on Thursday signed an agreement for cooperation for the country's first human space mission Gaganyaan, the French space agency CNES said. The agreement was announced during French foreign affairs minister Jean-Yves Le Drian visit.

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, APRIL 15

With the development activity increasing in the vicinity of Kakinada Deep Water Port, the habitat of migratory birds has come under threat. The migratory birds, as a result, changed their routes towards Uppada shore and Yanam.

The mudflats near Kakinada Deep Water Port were a rich habitat for the migratory birds. The mud-

## New port work disrupts old habitat, forces birds to relocate

# Migratory birds' habitat destroyed

flats were known as the Central Asian FlyWay for the birds as it had Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary and some of the other creeks nearby.

After travelling for months, more than 110 varieties of different species come to the Kakinada coast and Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary in the winter season. But the Kumbhabhishekam habitat was disturbed after the expansion of the seventh berth and other develop-

ment activities in the vicinity of mudflats.

Previously, these birds, especially Indian Skimmer and Great Knot, used to roam near the port, but the number of these birds has been gradually dwindling," said environmentalist K. Mruthyunjaya Rao.

He said the season for Indian Skimmer was almost over and a few birds were visible at present on the coast. "These birds will come to the coast

from Chambal and Mahanadi from July," he said.

"In the summer, the river gets almost dried up and the sand bars, merged with each other, will lead to an increase of human ingress, dogs and other carnivores, trampling by cattle, threatening these species," he said.

He said that the governments should protect the important creek, which is an important habitat for migratory birds and sug-

gested the government should carry out further studies in the Godavari Estuary.

According to sources, 250 Indian Skimmer, which is mostly found in the Chambal River in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and are in the red list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, were found last year, but this year the number dwindled to 230. They breed in rivers during the summer from March to May.

## Unseasonal rains hit horticulture hard

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

Unseasonal rains, accompanied by gales, damaged several horticulture crops in nearly 1,696 hectares with an estimated loss of ₹64.13 crore in parts of Andhra Pradesh.

Based on preliminary reports, horticulture crops like banana, cashew nut, cocoa, papaya, oil palm, coconut and several varieties of vegetables suffered great damage or loss in parts of five districts

including Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, West Godavari, Guntur and Kadapa.

Horticulture authorities assessed the number of farmers affected in the rains and gales to be 7,331 and input subsidy worth ₹4.08 crore to be given to the eligible affected farmers whose crops suffered damages in more than 33 per cent area of their land-holding.

■ Page 3: Gale broke electric poles into half in state



## IN BRIEF

**HC TO HEAR MPTC, ZPTC POLL PROCESS ON APRIL 19****DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

The Andhra Pradesh High Court to hear a batch of petitions on MPTC/ZPTC election process on April 19.

The High Court held hearing on a batch of petitions filed by the Telugu Desam and others challenging the election notification issued for conduct of MPTC/ZPTC polls on the norm of four weeks gap from the date of issue of notification to conduct of polls for implementation of poll code, on Thursday. The HC posted the next hearing in the case to April 19 to hear the arguments from all the parties on the issue.

**EX-MLA GETS BAIL IN POLICE OFFICER ABUSING CASE****DC CORRESPONDENT**  
SRIKAKULAM, APRIL 15

Former Amadalavalasa MLA and TD leader Kuna Ravi Kumar surrendered to the police and later obtained bail from Rajam court in Srikakulam on Thursday.

The police filed a case against Ravi Kumar for allegedly abusing a DSP-rank police officer in Ponduru during Parishad elections. Two days ago, a posse of police personnel raided his house in Srikakulam town and conducted searches. Since then he has been absconding.

**VOLUNTEERS TOLD TO RENDER THEIR SERVICES TO NEEDY****DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

The Village /Ward volunteers were told to render their services to the needy sections of the society.

Minister for endowment Vellampalli Srinivas Rao along with YSRC East in-charge Devineni Avinash, Vijayawada mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi and VMC Commissioner Prasanna Venkatesh presented Seva Mitra, Seva Ratna and Seva Vajra awards.

Srinivas Rao said that AP is the first state to introduce a volunteer system. Amazed at the services being rendered by volunteers, other states are toeing the line, he said. He stated that there is no corruption in the volunteers system.

Avinash objected to the comments made by Naidu while terming volunteers as gunny-bag coolies.

He assured volunteers about resolving their issues by taking them to the notice of the Chief Minister.

**CID ISSUES NOTICE TO UMA FOR DISTORTING JAGAN'S WORDS****DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

The CID has issued notices to former minister and Telugu Desam leader Devineni Umamaheshwara Rao, seeking his presence before it for a hearing at its Kurnool office following a complaint that he distorted chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's words.

The notice was attached to the wall of his residence in Gollapudi Thursday morning. In the complaint, Rao is accused of distorting the words of the CM and showing morphed videos through a Tablet/I-phone on April 7 during the Tirupati byelection campaign.

Rao alleged the summons were politically motivated and sought 10 days' time to appear before the CID.

Advocate N. Narayana Reddy, president of the YSRC legal cell's core committee for Kurnool district lodged the complaint with the CID. Following this, a case was registered under sections 464, 465, 468, 469, 470, 471, 505 and 120 (b) of IPC.

The CID notice asked Rao to attend the inquiry along with the electronic gadget and videos in the CID office at 10.30am on April 15.

Rao said he was not worried over fake cases being foisted on him and claimed that he showed the words of CM Jagan from the original videos. He said that he had criticised the "hypothection" of Krishna river waters by the YSRC government under which AP would lose its rights on the river water.

"At present, I am busy in the election campaign and byelection work in Nellore district. Hence I am unable to attend the inquiry. I would require 10 days' time to attend the hearing," he wrote back to the CID.

# TD's defeat is imminent in Tirupati bypoll: Peddireddy

**Stone-throwing incident was stage-managed by Naidu, says minister****DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

Claiming that the Telugu Desam's defeat is imminent in the forthcoming Tirupati (SC) Lok Sabha byelection, panchayat raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy alleged that the stone-throwing incident was stage-managed by TD chief Chandrababu Naidu to gain sympathy among people.

Addressing the media here on Thursday, Peddireddy reiterated his challenge to Naidu that YSRC MPs would resign in case the party loses in Tirupati bypoll and that the TD MPs should quit otherwise.

"The Opposition leader and his son Nara Lokesh don't have guts to take up my challenge. But Lokesh posed a drama, challenging the CM to swear at Alipiri on the allegations regarding Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy murder case. As both the father and son duo have no courage to seek votes in the byelection, they are trying to divert people's attention with these cheap tactics", the minister said.

Accusing the TD chief of trying to gain sympathy among the public by staging a stone-throwing drama, Peddireddy said there was no evidence of stone throwing found in the footage, retrieved from the CC cameras in the vicinity where Naidu addressed the public meeting. He added that a TD activist Akula Venkatesh said it was not a stone, but the shirt he threw on Naidu.

"Naidu should give an explanation on the video that went viral on social media, in which TD state president K. Atchannaaidu spoke against the party and Nara Lokesh, while saying that there is no confidence in the leadership of Naidu and Lokesh among the TD leaders," he asked.

Peddireddy said the BJP-Jana Sena combine has been trying to secure more votes than NOTA in the byelection.

Claiming that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has implemented more welfare schemes and development works in the last 22 months and gave good governance when compared to 14 years governance of Naidu, the minister said that the YSRC chief is working with welfare and development as his agenda in the state. He urged the people of Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency to vote for Dr M. Gurumurthy and make him win with a huge majority.



Panchayat Raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy addresses the media during a press conference in Tirupati on Thursday.

## Oppn spreading false propaganda: Sajjala

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

Asserting that the 22-month governance of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will ensure YSRC win in the Tirupati byelection, government adviser (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said that opposition parties are confined to false propaganda rather than publicising achievements during their regime.

Speaking to the media here on Thursday, Ramakrishna Reddy said that running out of issues for campaign, opposition parties have been targeting the Chief Minister personally and spreading communal hatred.

He slammed TD, BJP and Pawan Kalyan for not fulfilling promises made during the 2014 elections,

including special category status. He said BJP and TD should tell what they have done for the state or explain the reasons why they did not fulfill the promises made.

The YSRC leader slammed TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu and Nara Lokesh for not demanding an explanation from Atchannaaidu or issuing him a show-cause notice and letting him accompany them despite his anti-party comments.

He said Jagan Mohan Reddy has written a letter to the electorate of Tirupati parliamentary constituency explaining the welfare schemes and development works and sought votes for YSRC but did not criticise opposition parties. He said YSRC has never influenced voters.

## Chinta calls Naidu, Jagan corrupt leaders

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

Calling former chief minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu and present Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy as corrupt leaders, Congress Working Committee (CWC) special invitee and party candidate for Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection Chinta Mohan questioned how they both could earn thousands of crores within a short span of time after they came into power.

Speaking to the media here on Thursday, he claimed that his party had spent only ₹3 lakh for campaigning in the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection while Telugu Desam and YSRC are spending ₹20 and ₹30 crores respectively.

He took a jibe at both Naidu and Jagan, stating that they both have backstabbed the Congress.

"When the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made Naidu the minister, he backstabbed her as well as his father-in-law and TD founder-president N.T. Rama Rao. Now, Jagan has already committed 99 mistakes and he is on the edge of his 100th mistake by distributing money to the voters", he alleged.

On the other hand, BJP has focused on the Hindutva agenda by targeting the YSRC candidate. Lacked with the secondary cadre, the BJP was said to be lagged behind in terms of electioneering when compared to other parties — except a few impressive public meetings took part by JS chief Pawan Kalyan and some senior central leaders of BJP.

However, they managed to target their rival candi-

date and YSRC chief based on their religious affiliation. The YSRC's Gurumurthy filed his nomination as a person belonging to a Scheduled Caste Hindu.

However, the BJP leaders accused him of giving incorrect information about his religion in his nomination papers and accused him of converting to Christianity and demanded election authorities to disqualify his candidature.

However, they managed to target their rival candi-

## 17.11 LAKH VOTERS TO CAST VOTE IN TIRUPATI BYPOLL ON APRIL 17

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA/NELLORE, APRIL 15

Nearly 17.11 lakh voters are expected to cast their vote in the Tirupati bypoll scheduled to be held on April 17.

AP Chief Electoral Officer K. Vijayanand told mediapersons here on Thursday that 17,11,195 voters, including 8,38,540 women, were expected to exercise their franchise at 2,470 polling stations set up for the bypoll.

Explaining about the arrangements for conduct of bypoll, the CEO stated that in the wake of prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic, a polling station was set up for every 1,000 voters and added that for the first time, voters aged above 80 years to get the facility of postal ballot.

Meanwhile, in Nellore, officials under the directions of district collector and Tirupati LS Constituency Returning Officer K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu are gearing up for the Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll.

The parliament segment consists of Sarvepalli, Gudur, Venkatagiri, and Sullurpeta assembly segments in Nellore and Satyavedu, Srikalahasti, and Tirupati constituencies in Chittoor district.

In view of summer and Corona protocol, Election Commission extended the polling hours up to 7 pm from 7 am for the benefit of voters. The presiding officers would conduct mock polling at 6 am to check the EVMs before going ahead with actual polling.

Medical teams are also being deputed for all the polling stations for medical assistance to voters.

For the first time, web-casting is being arranged in 50 per cent of the total 2,470 polling stations to keep a close watch on the polling booths. Similarly, videographers have been hired to cover the polling in all the polling locations.

Returning Officer Chakradhar Babu said there are going to use to Ballot units since there are 28 candidates in the fray and in addition to NOTA.

According to the RO, 10,850 polling personnel are being deputed for election duties and all of them have been vaccinated considering the risk of infection.

With regard to security arrangements, 23 companies of central troops, 3 companies of special forces besides the civil police personnel are being deployed for monitoring the law-and-order situation at the polling stations. Special forces are being sent to 877 locations identified as critical polling stations.

The Returning Officer advised the outsiders involved in the campaign in any constituency to leave the place immediately while pointing to screening by police from 7 pm on Thursday as the campaign came to an end.



N. Chandrababu Naidu

Surukupalli and Nandam, while he was coming from Satyavedu, Naidu alleged that the YSRC mafia has been digging sand up to 60, 70 feet, despite the Green Tribunal put a stay on sand digging.

"During the two years rule of YSRC, the prices of essentials have been increased to many folds,

## TD complains to EC, alleges police bias

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

The Telugu Desam has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against some police officials, alleging that they were showing bias towards the ruling YSR Congress in the Tirupati byelection and sought action against them.

The TD team, led by its MLC Paruchuri Ashok Babu, submitted the complaint to the chief electoral officer on Thursday evening.

The complaint said, "As the polling day for Tirupati parliamentary constituency byelection approaches, the ruling YSRC has intensified the implementation of its sinister designs."

It said that as part of threatening the Opposition Telugu Desam, the YSRC has clandestinely entered into an agreement with a section of the police force. As per this, the police are threatening polling agents of TD. "For instance, sub-inspector Sekhar Babu of Ojili mandal and circle inspector Narasimha Yadav of Vakadu have been summoning TD village-level leaders outside the village and demanding of them to avoid appointing their booth agents."

Further, the police offi-

cials were threatening the TD leaders that the YSRC will be in power for another three years and anything could happen to them.

"Similarly, Siva Kumar Reddy, Inspector of Police, Yerpedu, has been working in favour of the YSRC and is threatening the TD leaders with dire consequences if they continued with the party."

They claimed that in the recently concluded local body elections, the same Inspector had filed numerous false cases against TD leaders and activists.

In this context, the TD urged the chief electoral officer to deploy additional security forces in all booths in Yerpedu mandal as "a section of the police force is working in connivance with the YSRC."

The TD leaders alleged that the YSRC government has been misusing village/ward volunteers by deploying them for the ruling party's election campaign. "Village/ward volunteers are actively campaigning in favour of YSRC and are threatening voters that the people would lose their state government benefits if they do not vote for the YSRC."

"The YSRC leaders have grabbed postal ballots from government staff after obtaining their signature," the TD leaders said.

## PUBLIC TOLD TO CONTACT ELECTION OBSERVERS TO LODGE COMPLAINTS

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NELLORE, APRIL 15

Nodal Officer to Election Observers for the bypoll to Tirupati Parliament Constituency has appealed to the public to bring any complaints regarding the byelection to their notice.

According to the Nodal Officer, Dinesh Kumar, IAS, General Observer, has been staying in Room No. 417 at Haritha Hotel in Nellore. His phone number is 9701487685 and mail address is

dineshpate.Election@gmail.com.

Expenditure Observer Anand Kumar, IRAS, has been staying at Room No. 523 in Minerva Grand Hotel at Nellore. He can be contacted on mobile number 7780697430 and email: anand16may@yahoo.com.

Similarly, Police Observer Rajeev Kumar, IPS, has been staying in Room No. 401 at Haritha Hotel in Nellore. His mobile number is 9908468319 and his email is: adgphomeguard@gmail.com.

## BJP asks ECI to ensure fair polls

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

Andhra Pradesh BJP complained to the Election Commission of India seeking its intervention to prevent misuse of the state government machinery for conduct of bypoll to Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency in a free and fair manner.

BJP state president Somu Veerajulu wrote a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner on Thursday alleging that the ruling YSRC government was abusing the government machinery to obtain illegitimate political gains in the bypoll scheduled to be held on April 17. He alleged that the ruling party was misusing the village/ward volunteers though appointed by the state government in every gram panchayat and urban ward, in the guise of delivering government services to the local residents at their doorstep.

The BJP senior leader said that the volunteers were taking part in door-to-door campaign by distributing a letter written

by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to the voters seeking their votes for the YSRC's nominee in the bypoll.

He requested the ECI to order removal of volunteers from their villages/wards till the completion of election process, to deploy central paramilitary forces, to video record the polling at the polling stations and to disqualify YSRC nominee Dr M. Gurumoorthy on the grounds that he professes a religion other than Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist in violation of the Constitution (SC) Order, 1950.

In another letter addressed to the CEC, the AP BJP president sought disqualification of the YSRC nominee Dr M. Gurumoorthy, alleging that he was canvassing in the bypoll by appealing to the voters on religious sentiments and said that an election pamphlet was brought by him displaying the image of Lord Venkateswara prominently on it, in violation of certain provisions in the Representation of People's Act, 1951.

## TIRUPATI | BYPOLL Sanctity of temple town has been destroyed, alleges TD chief

## Naidu calls upon voters to safeguard AP future

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

Launching a scathing attack on the ruling YSRC over various issues, including the spate of attacks on the Hindu temples across the state, rising prices of essentials and alleged illegal mining of sand, Telugu Desam chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu called upon the people of Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency to take advantage of the byelection and vote for his party to safeguard the future of AP.

Addressing the media at a press conference here on Thursday, the former chief minister said that the Tirupati Parliament

byelection is not just limited to temple city, but people should use it as a 'Vajrayudham' — a diamond weapon — to teach a befitting lesson to the ruling party.

"We all should recall what the YSRC leaders have done to the state during their two-year rule. Now, the onus is on the Tirupati electorate to protect the state, as the victory of TD in this byelection will not only change the political face of the state but also solve many issues", he added.

Claiming that he had seen hundreds of JCBs and tippers plundering sand in the river-belt between Uthukkotai,

we have witnessed attacks on people, exploitation of natural resources, corruption and human rights violations in the state. AP is being robbed in all possible ways and now we are the number one state in debt and price rise", he noted.

He asked, "What is Jagan Reddy doing when all these unfortunate developments were taking place in the state? Is he sleeping or installed any DND board (Don't disturb me) at his office or imposed Section 144 at his home?"

He alleged that there was no fee reimbursement scheme in the state as the arrears have crossed ₹1,000 crore. "Jagan had

closed down the scheme and now he was also not able to feed residential schoolchildren. Salaries are not being paid to the government employees. Since he destroyed the economy by taking debts, the financial system of the state has reached the point of collapse", he said.

Stating that the sanctity of Tirupati has been completely destroyed, Naidu alleged that the ruling party leaders have turned the temple city into a red sander smuggling den. He also alleged that the lands of common people and government are being occupied illegally by the private persons backed by the ruling party.



## SHORT TAKES

NGT EXPERT PANEL  
IMPOSES ₹17.08 CR  
FINE ON ONGCDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

National Green Tribunal constituted expert committee recommended for imposition of fine on ONGC to the tune of Rs 17.08 crore for a series of violations in exploration of oil and gas in Krishna-Godavari basin located in both the East and West Godavari districts in AP.

In the matter of Venkatapathi Raja versus Union of India represented by the secretary, Union ministry of environment and forests, New Delhi, the NGT constituted an expert committee to take up a joint inspection on violations. The expert committee comprising Amalapuram Sub Collector Himanshu Kaushik; Narasapuram Sub Collector K.S. Viswanathan; Scientist-C Dr. C. Pal Pandu from Union ministry of environment and forests; prof. M. Deepa, department of chemical engineering, Andhra University; P. Ravindranath, senior environmental engineer, APPCB, Visakhapatnam and Scientist-D Mahima T. Central Pollution Control Board, Chennai.

The petitioner filed an application at NGT, Southern Bench, Chennai alleging that air, sound, soil and water pollution were being caused on account of activities being carried out by M/s GAIL India Limited and M/z ONGC in KG Basin in Godavari districts in AP.

The committee observed non-compliance to the several norms on various issues recommended to the NGT to impose fine to pay towards environmental compensation to the Central Pollution Control Board. Accordingly, ONGC's Tatipaka Group Gathering Station to pay ₹7.28 crore, Kesanapalli GGS to pay ₹4.11 crore and Odalarevu GGS to pay ₹5.68 crore.

CPCB SCIENTIST  
VISTS TYCHE  
INDUSTRIES

**Kakinada:** The team headed by Central Pollution Control Board Scientist T. Mahima visited Tyche Industries on Thursday at Sarpavaram, in the aftermath of two persons died and four were injured when a reactor blasted in the company last month. They visited the blasting place and observed the surroundings. They interacted with the victims and inquired about the incident. Mahima said that a report would be submitted to the NGT on April 30.

ADIKAVI NANNAYYA  
VARSITY TO START  
ONLINE CLASSES

**Kakinada:** In view of the increasing Covid-19 cases, the Adikavi Nannayya University will start online classes to the students. The Vice Chancellor of the University Registrar Professor T. Ashok said that the online classes will start from April 16. He said that University students are asked to vacate the hostels and go back home and attend online classes. He said that after decreasing Covid-19, the students will be allowed to colleges and university for their education and until then they should attend online classes.

**SOUTH CENTRAL RAILWAY**  
Follow us on [@SCRRailwayIndia](#)  
Details of the Tender Notices of S.C Railway can be seen on our website: [www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in](#)

**Tender Notice No./B/E/EGS/01/2021-22 Dt:12.04.2021**

For and on behalf of the President of India, the undersigned invites e-Tender for the following works up to 15.00 hours and the date mentioned below.

**S.No.: 1 Tender Notice No.:** B.E.29/1/EGS/01/2021-22. **Name of work:** Vijayawada - Construction of 3rd Pit line at Coaching Department COA-Power Supply arrangements. **Tender value (₹):** 6948913/- **EMD (₹):** NIL **Cost Tender document (₹):** NIL **Period of completion:** 180 days **Date of closing:** 04.05.2021

**S.No.: 2 Tender Notice No.:** B.E.29/1/EGS/02/2021-22. **Name of work:** Vijayawada - Annual Maintenance contract for lifts on PF No.1, 4 & 5, 6 & 7, 10 and near Clock Tower-5 Nos. for a period of 3 years at Vijayawada Railway Station. **Tender value (₹):** 3600258/- **EMD (₹):** NIL **Cost Tender document (₹):** 3000/- **Period of completion:** 36 Months **Date of closing:** 04.05.2021

The prospective tenderers are advised to visit website **"www.ireps.gov.in"** before the date of tender closing to note any changes / corrigenda for any tender.

**Divisional Railway Manager A0368 (Electrical), Vijayawada**

For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at [https://www.ireps.gov.in](#) or [www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in](#)

Staff shortage hits KGGH  
as Covid caseload surges

Kurnool district reported 626 positive cases and two deaths

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL APRIL 15

Kurnool General Hospital is under stress as corona positive cases are on the rise. On Thursday, the district reported 626 positive cases and two deaths. The KGGH has 363 Covid-19 patients under treatment as 60 of them are in serious condition. The hospital requires at least 100 male and female ward boys immediately, the in-charge superintendent, Dr Bhagawan raises a red flag. He said there is no Covid-19 control room to monitor the surge in cases, he said.

The KGGH Superintendent Dr Narendranath Reddy who tested positive a few days back has not delegated duties to his deputies. The hospital administration is struggling to handle the surge of cases as already 303 positive cases and 60 critical cases under oxygen supply are being treated here. Kurnool general hospital superintendent in-charge Dr Bhagavan said already 500 beds are kept ready and 150 more beds would be added as it is feared that the explosion of cases would choke the patient's services.

There is a severe shortage of male and female words boys. Dr Bhagawan however said permission to recruit ward boys has been sent to the district collector and awaiting the instructions. Lack of Covid-19 control rooms in the district is having an impact in handling the rising number of Covid admissions in the hospital. The hospital staff is under constant threat of being turned positive for Covid-19 as one Gynecology head and an assistant proffer and a few house surgeons were also quarantined, he said. On the other hand, 626 cases in a day is the highest number reported in the district during the second wave.



People come out of the Government ENT Hospital while the Covid-19 tests are not done due to the unavailability of Reagent kits for RT-PCR Covid test in Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

AP REVIVES COVID COMMAND  
AND CONTROL CENTREDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 15

In the wake of rise in Coronavirus cases, the state government revived the State Covid Command and Control Centre with immediate effect.

The state government issued an order on Thursday reviving the Covid Command and Control Centre by appointment of special officers for Covid-19 management and also for vaccination in the state.

Principal secretary, transport, roads and buildings M.T. Krishna Babu to look after quality monitoring of food and sanitation in Covid hospitals and Covid Care Centres.

Principal secretary, Covid management and vaccination, M. Ravi Chandra to take care of primary contact tracing and testing and testing on demand facility. Commercial tax commissioner Peeyush Kumar to monitor the help desk and CCTV.

## COVID PATIENT DIES BY SUICIDE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 15

A 55 year old Covid patient, currently undergoing treatment at the CSR Block (Covid ward) at King George Hospital died by suicide by jumping from the fourth floor of the building in

Visakhapatnam on Thursday. KGH superintendent Dr P Mythili said the woman was admitted along with three others recently. The other three were discharged on Thursday and making arrangements to leave for home. She was alone in the ICU ward and jumped from the building.

Avenging daughter's rape, man  
hacks six of a family in VizagDC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 15

Avenging daughter's rape and subsequent blackmail, a middle-aged man hacked to death six members of a family including two infants in Juttada village under Pendurthy mandal in Visakhapatnam in the early hours of Thursday. The accused was identified as Battina Appala Raju, the victims' neighbour. Appalaraju wanted to kill B. Vijay Kiran, who raped his daughter, and his family members but ended up killing all his family members.

The deceased were identified as Vijay Kiran's father Bamidi Ramana

(57), Kiran's wife Bamidi Usha Rani (30), Kiran's son B. Uday (2), Kiran's daughter B. Urvasi (six months), Allu Ramadevi (53), mother of Usha Rani and Nakettlu Aruna, relative of Usha Rani. The victims were found in a pool of blood.

The police said Vijay Kiran allegedly raped Appala Raju's daughter (20-year-old victim) in 2018. A case has been registered against Vijay Kiran and the case is under trial. The rape victim reported that the accused Vijay Kiran, a married person, moved very closely with Appalaraju family and called the victim to his house and offered sedative laced soft drinks to her. He

later allegedly raped her several times.

Kiran's wife Bamidi Usha Rani blackmailed the rape victim by showing her semi-nude photos and demanded money from her Maniyala Vinay, Bammidi Sai, Pilleni Durga Prasad and Challa Nagaraju also co-operated the rape accused and blackmailed her for money.

Later the complainant's brother Bathina Vijay Prasad noticed WhatsApp messages in his sister's phone, immediately challenged the Vijay Kiran family. But they threatened to kill him. The police filed a charge sheet against the accused Vijay Kiran and the case is pending in the court.

Four of a family found dead in Vizag  
Top student suspected as accusedDC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 15

Four members of a family were found dead under suspicious circumstances in a flat in Aditya Fortune Towers at Mithilapuri Colony, Madhurawada under PM Palem police station limits in Visakhapatnam city.

The deceased were identified as Sunkari Bangaru Naidu (49), Dr Sunkari Nirmala (44), Sunkari Deepak (21) and Sunkari Kashyap (19).

The police said neighbours heard shouting at 2 am and two hours later they found smoke emanating from the flat. Fire tenders rushed to the spot and broke open the front door with a crowbar. They found bodies of Bangaru Naidu, Dr Nirmala and Kashyap scattered from the main door to hall and bedroom. The body of Deepak was

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 15

Deepak, who was suspected to have killed his parents and younger brother in the apartment on Wednesday night, was a brilliant student and determined to get into civil services. He also participated in meelo evaru kotiswarudu hosted by actor Chirajeivi and came close to winning the first prize, his uncle Ramu Naidu said. After passing out from NIT, Warangal, he moved to New Delhi to get coaching

which went out of hands. The elder son might have stabbed his parents and younger brother as stab wounds and lacerated wounds were found on the bodies.

working as a chemical engineer for some years in Bahrain, Bangaru opened his own business and expanded during subsequent years. "He wanted to open his business branch in Visakhapatnam and began constructing his own house, close to the present Aditya Fortune Towers where the family perished," Ramu told few reporters in Gantayada.

The villagers who were shocked to learn the incident said Bangaru opened an ashram on the outskirts of his village to house destitute persons.

OFFICIALS IN TIGHT  
SPOT FOLLOWING  
SPURT IN CASESDC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, APRIL 15

Sudden spurt in the Covid positive cases during last two weeks have been causing jitters not only to the medical and health officials but also to the district officials monitoring the situation.

There is no hyperbole in stating that Nellore officials have to recall the medical and paramedical staff, they hired temporarily when Covid was at its peak in Nellore district last year.

Chittoor authorities already gave a call to all the medical personnel who worked on temporary basis last year to return to work after cases started increasing at alarming rate.

Sources in medical and health department said there is an urgent need to increase the number of Covid tests to avoid delay in detecting the cases to prevent wild-spread of the dreaded virus.

"We hired more than 20 odd data entry operators, a team of technicians, and other staff to collect swab samples for RT-PCR tests to give results within 24 hours last year but we have skeletal staff now" a medical officer said lamenting over the situation.

Taking advantage of the situation, private hospitals, labs and scanning centers have been fleecing the Covid patients.

Relative of an aged couple from Hyderabad who is infected by Covid, said a private hospital in Pogathota told them to take them away when their condition turned critical after charging more than ₹2.50 lakh for the treatment.

LANDLORD  
ATTACKS BANK  
STAFF IN  
SRIKALAHASTIDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

In a bizarre incident, a landlord who leased out his premises to Andhra Bank and Union bank of India - located adjacent to each other near Srikalahasti's I town police station, has allegedly attacked the bank manager and security staff, who were on duty, on Thursday.

According to the police, following the amalgamation of Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank into the Union bank of India last year, the management has decided to vacate one among the two branches (Andhra Bank and Union Bank) located side by side in the Srikalahasti town. The bank officials have decided to continue the existing Andhra Bank premises and surrender back the Union bank of India premises to the common landlord M. Prasad and communicated the same to the latter in March this year. However, he asked the bank officials to continue their operations from the Union bank of India premises and vacate the Andhra Bank premises.

BODY STUFFED  
IN LUGGAGE  
BAG FOUND  
IN KUPPAMDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 15

A chopped body of a man with its head cut off and stuffed into a luggage bag was found dumped on the side of Kuppam-Krishnagiri highway close to Nadumuru Gurukul high school near Kuppam town in Chittoor district on Thursday morning.

According to the police, passers-by noticed a luggage bag covered with a plastic covering lying in a suspicious state near the bridge close to the Gurukul school. On an information about the suspicious bag, a police team reached the spot and retrieved the bag only to found the lower part of the body of a man.

"Upon opening the bag, lower part of a man in his late 20s or early 30s was found inside. We did a thorough search in the vicinity but not found the remaining body parts including the head. We found no clues at the spot and working out on it. We have informed our counterparts in nearby Tamil Nadu and Karnataka as part of Standard Operation procedure", Kuppam CI Sridhar said.

The Police shifted the half-chopped dead body to government hospital for an autopsy. They also informed the same to their Tamil Nadu and Karnataka State counterparts at Krishnagiri, Tirupattur and KGF Police Stations. The Kuppam Police have registered a case on this and further investigation is being done.

Gale broke electric  
poles into half in state

FROM PAGE 1

The authorities claim that the gale was so powerful that they broke electric poles in the middle, and uprooted the stems of banana crops in parts of Chagallu, Denduluru, T. Narasapuram and Dwaraka Tirumala mandals in West Godavari. The banana plantations in parts of Kadapa, Guntur and Vizianagaram also bore the brunt.

The horticulture authorities claim that the chilli farmers saved the harvested crop which was kept on platforms for drying by covering them with tarpaulin

clothes in anticipation of the rainfall. Horticulture commissioner S.S. Sreedhar directed the officials in the affected districts to estimate the extent of crop damage due to the rains and gales and submit a final report soon.

Horticulture additional director K. Balaji Naik said, "We have received preliminary crop damage reports from five districts in the state due to rains with gales and we are taking necessary measures to provide input subsidy to the eligible affected farmers to help them resume cultivation."

Reputed Guntur doc gets  
distinguished farmer award

**Vijayawada:** A practicing doctor who also follows innovative methods in natural farming in his agricultural fields have been bestowed with the Visishtha Rythu (distinguished farmer) award from NG Ranga Agriculture University. Dr Yeraguti Sambasiva Reddy is a famous doctor in Guntur city. He raises crops in his 15-acre farmland in his native village Kunkalagunta in Nekarikallu mandal of Guntur district. The NGRAU presented the award for his highly commendable efforts in natural farming. University officials said Dr Reddy was taking a lot of interest in agricultural activities and invented a new equipment, at a cost of just ₹500, by way of making a few changes to the Inapa Gorru (drill plough) that would ease the works of agriculture coolies.

The government selected Dr Sambasiva Reddy for the award on the occasion of Ugadi. Due to Corona-related problems, it was presented only on Thursday.

University faculty and staff felicitated Dr. Sambasiva Reddy and presented him with the Visishtha Rythu award.

Dr. Reddy said he was having a keen interest in agriculture young age and hence started cultivation of various crops through zero-based natural farming process. He tried various methods and found natural farming useful to get good quality and quantity yields with less expenditure. He said that during cultivation the agriculture workers faced a lot of difficulties in farmlands during ploughing hence he made changes to Inapa Gorru (drill plough) which eased agriculture works of coolies.

**PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LIMITED**  
(Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala)  
Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001  
Corporate Identity No. U40100PB2010SGC03813 | Website: [www.pspcl.in](#)  
(Contact No. 9646107236 E-mail se-mm1-ggstsp@pspccl.in)

**Disposal Notice** **Dated: 09.04.2021**

Chief Engineer/GGSSTP, PO-Ghanauli, Rupnagar-140113 invites interested parties to identify the equipments/spares to be used as spares in their respective plants from the permanently closed 2x210 MW units of stage-I (KWU/ BHEL make design) installed at GGSSTP, Ropar. The equipments/ spares installed on above units are available for sale on "as is where is basis". For detailed specifications of equipments, please refer to [https://eproc.punjab.gov.in](#)

**Note:** Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at [https://eproc.punjab.gov.in](#)

RTP-14/21 76155/12/201/2021/3703

**CLASSIFIEDS**

**FOR SALE PROPERTY COMMERCIAL**

✓ **FOUR STORIED** building plinth area 9000sqft 3 sides road 220sqyds Commercial use for sale - Srinagar colony Yellareddiguda Hyderabad Contact: 9848014329 - 9.00am to 6.30pm (W/2122/AT000070)

**FLATS**

2 & 3 BHK Luxury Flats for Sale, 1120 Sft, 1315 Sft, 1445 Sft, 2 lifts, clear title, fully ventilated, cctv, all amenities between Rs.46 lacs to 73 lacs. Near to Bharati Vidya Bhavan, inside Shergate, King Koti. Ph:8297517169, 8688982640, 8074181927. (B/2122/C00055)

**PLOTS**

**800 SQ.YDS** East facing 100% vaasthu in gated community, fully developed colony like swimming pool, club house, park, 24hrs security. Suitable for Villa, 5 minutes drive from Appa Junction ORR Exit-18. Contact 9 3 4 6 6 0 1 9 1 9 . (A/2122/C00004)

**SITUATION VACANT TECHNICAL**

**MIG WELDERS** (SSC/ITI) 4posts, Tig Welders (ITI)- Radiography Quality 2posts, Electrical Engineer/ Machine Operator For Automation 2posts, EDP/System Administrator (B.TECH) 2posts. 2years Experience in Relevant Field Contact With Original Testimonials 15th,

16th,17th April-2021. 10am-3pm @EPE Process Filters & Accumulators Pvt Ltd. 59-A, C.I.E (Expn), Gandhinagar, Balanagar, Hyderabad-37. Ph:040-23085750/ 040-2 3 0 8 5 9 3 7 . (HYMM/2122/C00491)

**EDUCATIONAL DISTANCE EDUCATION**

✓ **ONLY FOR Educational Consultants/ Academies. No Advance Fee. Students please no call. Contact for Verifiable +Fast Track :Graduation (15,000)/B.Ed.-M.Ed. -NCTE-Recognised (30000)/BBA- MBA-BCA-MCA (20-25,000)/from Government University. WES Documentation & Attestation Support Available. 47-years Educational Experience. Shiksha Bharti. Varanasi. Mobile: 9519759663, 9915103781. Email: shikshabharti88@yahoo.com (HYMM/2122/C00511)**

**NOTICE**

Readers are advised to make appropriate enquiries while responding to advertisements in these columns. Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd. does not vouch for any claims made by the Advertisers. The Printer, Publisher, Editor and Owner of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd. shall not be held responsible / liable for any consequences, in case such claims are found to be false.



## SHORT TAKES

## CONG. WANTS SPL PACKAGE FOR DABBAWALAS

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC  
MUMBAI, APRIL 15

Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole on Thursday sought a relief package for taxi drivers, flower vendors, salon workers and Mumbai's dabbawala among others. Patole wrote a letter in this regard to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray stating that these sections of the society should be incorporated in the relief package which has been announced by the state government.

Two days ago, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had announced several sops from monetary reliefs to free distribution of food grains for the vulnerable sections including registered auto drivers, construction workers and hawkers. In addition to this, financial assistance will be provided to the economically weaker sections below the poverty line families, women, senior citizens, widows, disabled and tribal communities. Close to seven crore beneficiaries of Food Security schemes in Maharashtra would be given free food grains including 3 kg wheat and 2 kg rice per person for a month.

In his letter to the Chief Minister, the Congress state president said that during *Sanchar Bandi* (curfew), vegetable vendors, flower vendors and flower cultivators are going to be hit badly.

## STATES TOLD TO MAKE GOOD USE OF MEDICAL OXYGEN

**New Delhi, April 15:** The Centre on Thursday asked states to make rational use of medical oxygen and ensure there is no wastage while stressing that there is sufficient stock of oxygen in the country.

Medical oxygen is a critical component in the treatment of Covid-19 affected patients. An inter-ministerial Empowered Group (EG2) of officers was constituted during the Covid pandemic in March 2020 to ensure the availability of essential medical equipment including medical oxygen to the affected states, the Union health ministry said.

Along with the ramped up production of the oxygen manufacturing units and the surplus stocks available, the present availability of oxygen is sufficient, the ministry said.

Besides, states have been asked to set up control rooms to ensure smooth supply of oxygen to the districts according to need and review requirement of cylinders, tankers etc. the ministry said in a statement.

A detailed daily mapping of sources for supply of medical oxygen to the affected states is under preparation to ensure uninterrupted oxygen supply, it said.

The exercise will be carried out on the basis of detailed daily deliberations between officers of department for promotion of industry and internal trade, health ministry, various critically affected states.

## INDIA, FRANCE SIGN PACT ON GAGANYAAN

**New Delhi, April 15:** Space agencies of India and France on Thursday signed an agreement for cooperation for the country's first human space mission Gaganyaan, the French space agency CNES said.

The agreement was announced during French Foreign Affairs minister Jean-Yves Le Drian visit to the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) headquarters.

ISRO has asked CNES to help prepare for Gaganyaan missions and to serve as its single European contact in this domain.

"Under the terms of the agreement, CNES will train India's flight physicians and CAPCOM mission control teams in France at the CADMOS centre for the development of microgravity applications and space operations at CNES in Toulouse and at the European Astronaut Centre (EAC) in Cologne, Germany," the CNES said.

The agreement provides for the CNES to support implementation of a scientific experiment plan on validation missions, exchange information on food packaging and the nutrition programme, and above all the use by Indian astronauts of French equipment, consumables and medical instruments.



**DELHI**  
A health worker collects swab sample from a woman for Covid-19 test at MCD dispensary in Jangpura. — PTI



**AGARTALA**  
Devotees wait in a long queue to offer prayers on the occasion of Bengali New Year on Thursday. — PTI



**AMRITSAR**  
People, not adhering to norms, walk at the Heritage Street near Golden Temple. — PTI

## Weekend lockdown in Delhi till April 30

■ Gyms, malls, auditoriums to remain closed ■ Restaurants to operate home-delivery services

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced a curfew this coming weekend and the closure of malls, gymnasiums and auditoriums till April 30 as part of sweeping restrictions to break the chain of the Covid-19 infection in the city. According to an official order, the weekend curfew will be effective from 10 pm on April 16 (Friday) to 5 am on April 19 (Monday), even as gymnasiums, auditoriums, malls, spas, entertainment parks and assembly halls will remain closed in the national capital till April 30.

Cinema halls will function with only 30 per cent capacity. However, officials said a decision to extend the weekend curfew will be taken after reviewing the Covid-19 situation next week. There will be no in-house dining in restaurants, the Chief Minister said at an online press conference a day after the city recorded the biggest single-day jump of 17,282 Covid-19 cases.

However, the restaurants will be allowed to operate home-delivery and take-away services, he said, adding that bars will remain closed till April 30. The Chief Minister made these announcements after he met Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal. He said the essential services and weddings will not be affected by the weekend curfew and passes will be provided to those attending weddings.

In its order, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) said during the weekend curfew, the movement of people for wedding-related (up to 50 people) and funeral-related (up to 20 people) gatherings will be allowed. People going to airports,



**KOLKATA**  
West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a roadshow campaign for state Assembly polls, amid the rise in Covid-19 cases across the country, in Kolkata on Thursday. — PTI

## EC rules out clubbing poll phases

RAJIB CHOWDHURI & PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI | DC  
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE, APRIL 15

Undeterred by the exponential rise in daily cases of the Coronavirus disease across the country and West Bengal, the Election Commission of India (EC) ruled out a possibility of clubbing the remaining phases of the ongoing Assembly elections in the state due to lack of availability of another 1,500 companies

of the Central paramilitary forces.

"There is no such plan of clubbing" the three poll phases, the Election Commission said after new Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra took stock of the ground reality from various poll observers deputed in the state and chief electoral officer West Bengal Ariz Aftab in a video conference.

At the meeting, opinions were also sought from them about the deployment and distribution of

the Central forces in case of clubbing the last three poll phases after the state recorded daily new Covid-19 cases at 6,769 till Thursday with 22 fresh deaths in the last 24 hours, sources said.

This time, election to the West Bengal Assembly is being held in eight phases. Polling for four phases have ended and the fifth phase will be held on Saturday. Polling for the sixth, seventh and the eighth phase will be held on April 22, April 26 and April 29, respectively.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday evening also appealed to the EC to club the "remaining phases" of the polls into one, within few hours of the central poll panel's decision to go ahead with the existing poll schedule even after the deadly virus claimed a Congress candidate's life and infected two others, including one from the TMC in the state. She also stressing that her party had opposed the prolonged eight-phase poll schedule.

railway stations and ISBTs will be allowed to proceed on the production of valid tickets.

However, those going for vaccination will be

required to apply for a curfew pass. Mediapersons have been exempted from the weekend curfew.

People dealing in food, groceries, fruits, vegetables

and dairy products will also have to seek a curfew pass for their movement.

Kejriwal said the reason behind the weekend curfew was that on these days,

people often indulged in recreation and other such activities that could be "curtailed" and "curbed" without much inconvenience to them.

## ‘Tika ustav’ another sham by govt: Rahul

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 15

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi once again lashed out at the BJP-led central government over the Covid-19 'mismanagement'. He alleged that the "tika ustav" was just another sham by the government and further that there are no beds, ventilators or vaccines available.

Through his official Twitter handle, he tweeted, "There are no tests, no beds in hospitals. There are no ventilators, no oxygen. There are no vac-

cines also. The utsav is a pretense".

Gandhi's attack comes in the wake of India reporting an unprecedented increase in Covid-19 cases with over 2,00,000 cases being reported on Thursday, the biggest single-day hike since the beginning of the pandemic.

Rahul Gandhi has been actively using social media and other platforms to highlight the 'deficiencies' of the central government in managing the outcome of the Coronavirus pandemic.

## J&amp;K defers shifting of ‘Darbar’

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 15

The Jammu and Kashmir authorities have deferred 'Darbar move', the biannual shifting of the civil secretariat or the seat of the government and other offices from winter capital Jammu to summer capital Srinagar in view of the surge in Covid-19 cases.

The 'Darbar' was scheduled to close in Jammu later this month and reopen in Srinagar on May 10. But now the secretariat will function at both Jammu and Srinagar "in an equitable manner", J&K's Lieutenant

Governor, Manoj Sinha, said on Thursday.

"In view of sharply rising cases of Covid in J&K, the Govt has taken few important decisions ensuring safety of employees. Darbar move deferred because of Covid, Secretariat to function in both Srinagar & Jammu, office functioning not to be affected because of e-office," he tweeted.

He added, "Secretaries will function from both locations in an equitable manner Office functioning will not be affected as files to move electronically between both Secretariats in e-Office."

## MAHA OPPOSES OPENING OF JAIN TRUSTS TO DISTRIBUTE 'PIOUS FOOD'

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC  
MUMBAI, APRIL 15

A day after the Bombay High Court refused permission to a city mosque to open up for Ramzan prayers, the Maharashtra government opposed a petition by two Jain Trusts seeking permission for devotees to collect food from the trust's premises during the nine-day-long Ayambil fast.

A division bench of Justice S.C. Gupte and

Justice Abhay Ahuja have deferred the hearing till Friday on two petitions filed by two Jain Trusts seeking an urgent relief by allowing devotees to take away "pious boiled cooked food" from the premises of the trust for nine days between April 19 and April 27.

The main prayer of the petitioners was to quash the state dictat and allow them and other 48 Jain Trusts to open their temples with SOPs in place.



Prem Singh Patel

## MP MINISTER STIRS ROW, SAYS 'PEOPLE GET OLD, THEY MUST DIE'

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC  
BHOPAL, APRIL 15

An 'uncharitable' comment by a minister in Shivraj government on spiraling Covid-19 deaths in Madhya Pradesh has sparked a huge row here with Opposition Congress calling it "shockingly insensitive".

State animal husbandry minister Prem Singh Patel while seeking to downplay the sudden spurt in fatalities due to Coronavirus infections in MP, said "people get old, they have to die".

He was speaking to reporters in Barwani in MP late on Thursday.

"Deaths are occurring. Nobody can stop death. People get old, they have to die", Patel said.

The minister's comment comes at a time when the situation has worsened in the state with hospitals running out of beds for patients and mortuaries overflowing with bodies of the Covid-19 victims.

## DIET | PLAN

Pet food makers cite ambiguous biz environment, absence of uniform framework

## India's 29 million pets facing shortage of food

**New Delhi, April 15:** India, which has an estimated pet animal population of 29 million, is facing a shortage of pet foods, a government body said on Thursday and urged the industry to boost local production by taking advantage of the existing central schemes.

Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) chairman O.P. Chaudhary, addressing a webinar organised by industry body PHDCCI, said the industry players can avail credit facility given under the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Scheme

(AHIDS) for setting up animal feed manufacturing facilities.

However, pet food makers such as Mars International India and Royal Canine India said higher taxes, ambiguous business environment, absence of uniform framework and quality standards are major hindrances for the sector's growth.

"On an average, India requires 30,000 tonnes of pet foods. In India, there are pet food manufacturers but not sufficient enough to meet demand and quality," Chaudhary said while addressing the

webinar on the pet food industry.

Some quantity of pet foods are imported but are costly to reach the people at affordable prices, he said, adding that the scarcity of pet foods was faced during the Covid-19 lockdown last year and the government had intervened.

Asserting that a balanced nutritious diet is key to keep the pets healthy, Chaudhary said, however, pet foods are not reachable to every Indian pet owner because of the cost and availability.

Overall, animal nutrition is a concern for

Indian livestock sector as there is about 35-40 per cent shortage of animal feed and fodder, he added.

Stating that the pet industry in India is growing at a faster rate, the AWBI chairman said the government is taking measures to address the demand-supply gap and assisting the private sector to invest in setting up of animal feed plant under the ₹15,000 crore worth AHIDF scheme.

Under the scheme, up to 90 per cent credit is given at a lower rate form scheduled banks to the individuals, MSME (Micro, Small

and Medium Enterprises), FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations) and Section 8 companies for infrastructure development, he said.

"The pet food industry can avail the opportunities to manufacture pet food in India and meet the demand," he added.

Further, the chairman said animal feed is not regulated in India at present. "There is no system in place for meeting licensing norms. Therefore, it is the high time to establish the pet food plants."

He also said that raw materials required for pet

food is available in the country. India is producing 8.1 million tonnes of meat, out of which chicken meat is 50 per cent.

"The offals are wasted and same can be utilised for pet food manufacturing. Not only chicken and meat, India is sufficiently producing foodgrains which can also be utilised," he added.

According to AWBI Secretary Sujit Kumar Dutta, there is a huge opportunity in research and development of pet foods as many are demanding vegetarian pet foods. — PTI



## IN BRIEF

**Taiwan transport minister resigns**

**Taipei, April 15:** Taiwan's government on Thursday said it had accepted the resignation of its transport minister following a train crash earlier this month that killed 49 people, the island's deadliest in decades.

The April 2 crash was caused by a railway maintenance truck that slid down an embankment and onto the track moments before a high-speed train passed by.

The accident, which left more than 200 injured, plunged Taiwan into mourning.

**Lawmaker caught naked**

**Ottawa, April 15:** A Canadian Parliament member was caught stark naked in a virtual meeting of the House of Commons. William Amos, who has represented the Quebec district of Pontiac since 2015, appeared on the screens of his fellow lawmakers completely naked Wednesday.

A screenshot obtained by *The Canadian Press* shows Amos standing behind a desk between the Quebec and Canadian flags, his private parts hidden by what appears to be a mobile phone in one hand.

**Xi to attend climate summit**

**Beijing, April 15:** Chinese President Xi Jinping will join an online French-German climate summit "at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron", Beijing's foreign ministry said Thursday.

The virtual discussions with the key European Union nations — to be held on Friday — come as US envoy John Kerry is in China for environment talks.

Kerry is not expected to meet with Xi, on a trip which has so far taken place behind closed doors.

**Russia threatens Ukraine: Kiev**

**Kiev, April 15:** Ukraine's foreign minister said Thursday that Russia was flagrantly threatening Ukraine with destruction, as Western countries raise the alarm over an escalation of the separatist conflict.

Foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba said during a press conference that Russian pundits and officials are "openly threatening Ukraine with war and the destruction of Ukrainian statehood." "We condemn Russia's aggravation of the security situation, Moscow's actions and statements aimed at escalating military tensions."

**U.S. to sell F-35s to the UAE**

**Washington, April 15:** President Joe Biden's administration indicated Wednesday it was moving forward with a \$23 billion sale of F-35 fighter-jets to the UAE but was considering restrictions and would not deliver them soon. The State Department shortly after Biden's inauguration in January ordered a review of the massive arms package, which was approved by former president Donald Trump.

Responding to a lawsuit seeking to block the sale, the State Department said it planned a "robust and sustained dialogue" with the UAE.

**CHAUVIN WON'T TESTIFY AT FLOYD TRIAL**

**Minneapolis, April 15:** The defence at the murder trial of former Officer Derek Chauvin in the death of George Floyd wrapped up its case Thursday without putting Chauvin on the stand, presenting two days of testimony to the prosecution's two weeks.

Chauvin informed the court that he would not testify, saying he would invoke his Fifth Amendment right not to take the stand. "Is this your decision not to testify?" Judge Peter Cahill asked. "It is, your honour," Chauvin said.

Some prosecution rebuttal testimony was expected to follow Thursday. Closing arguments are set for Monday, after which the racially diverse jury will begin deliberating at the barbed-wire-ringed courthouse, with Minneapolis on edge against a repeat of the protests and violence that broke out last spring over Floyd's death.

The question of whether Chauvin would testify was the subject of weeks of speculation. The risks were high: Testifying could have opened him up to devastating cross-examination, with prosecutors replaying the video of the arrest and forcing Chauvin to explain why he kept pressing down on Floyd.

**WHO: Europe surpasses 1 million Covid-19 deaths**

**Geneva, April 15:** A top official from the World Health Organisation says Europe has surpassed 1 million deaths from Covid-19 and the situation remains serious, with about 1.6 million new cases reported each week in the region.

Addressing recent concerns about vaccines, Dr Hans Kluge also said the risk of people suffering blood clots is far higher for people with Covid-19 than people who receive AstraZeneca's Coronavirus vaccine.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to Greece, Kluge did point to early signs that transmission may be slowing across several countries and cited declining incidence among the oldest people.

He said the proportion of Covid-19 deaths among people over 80, who have been prioritised for vaccines, had dropped to nearly 30% the lowest level in the pandemic.

For now, the risk of suffering blood clots is much higher for someone with Covid-19 than for someone who has taken the AstraZeneca vaccine, he said.

Let there be no doubt

**LEATHER LINING IN GANESHA BAG: BRAND SORRY**

**London, April 15:** A global fashion brand known for its bedazzled handbags issued an apology and ceased the production of a Ganesha clutch bag with leather lining after protests by Indian diaspora groups in the United Kingdom.

Judith Leiber said that it would replace the lining with synthetic after concerns were raised about the use of leather alongside the image of a Hindu deity. "We are deeply sorry to hear that our Ganesha bag has caused offence to the Hindu community," said Lela Katsune, President of Judith Leiber Couture. — PTI

**COPS CHARGE MAN WITH AXE NEAR QUEEN RESIDENCE**

**London, April 15:** British police say they have charged a London man who was spotted carrying an axe near Buckingham Palace.

The city's Metropolitan Police force said private security guards working on The Mall, a main road outside the palace, detained a suspect Tuesday evening after they were alerted to reports of a man carrying what appeared to be an axe. Police said 46-year-old Vladyslav Dryhval was charged Thursday with possessing an offensive weapon and possessing a bladed article.

Dryhval was remanded into custody and was due to appear at Westminster Magistrates' Court Thursday. Police said there were no reports of injuries and that it was not being treated as terrorism-related. Buckingham Palace is Queen Elizabeth II's official London residence, though the monarch has stayed at Windsor Castle during the pandemic. — AP

**Novartis, Roche team up on drug**

**Zurich, April 15:** Novartis announced Thursday it will join forces with fellow Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche to produce tocilizumab, a drug being tested for its effectiveness against Covid-19-linked pneumonia.

It is the third time Novartis has made its production capacities available to a competitor during the Coronavirus pandemic, as several laboratories strike unprecedented partnerships to fight the global crisis.

Novartis is already collaborating with BioNTech and CureVac in producing Covid-19 vaccines.

The new tocilizumab deal will see Roche's manufacturing expertise transferred to the Novartis Drug Substance Singapo-

re production site during the second quarter of 2021.

"Novartis is fully committed to collaborating with Roche in offering our proven biologics production capabilities," said Steffen Lang, the firm's technical operations chief.

"As one of the world's largest producers of medicines, Novartis can mobilise its manufacturing capabilities on multiple fronts." Sold as Actemra or RoActemra depending on the market, tocilizumab is a treatment for rheumatoid arthritis which is also being tested in clinical trials investigating its safety and efficacy against Covid-19-associated pneumonia. — AFP

about it, the AstraZeneca vaccine is effective in reducing Covid-19 hospitalisation and preventing

deaths, he added, saying WHO recommends its use for all eligible adults. — AFP

**French nationals in Pak told to leave**

**Islamabad, April 15:** The French embassy here on Thursday advised all French nationals in Pakistan to temporarily leave the country after violent protests by a radical religious group that has now been banned by the government.

The Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) took to streets on Monday to launch violent protests to force the government to expel the French ambassador over blasphemous caricatures published last year. Though no French citizen was reportedly targeted so far but the embassy has urged all the French citizens to leave Pakistan, apparently as a precautionary measure.

Due to the serious threats to French interests in Pakistan, French nationals and French companies are advised to temporarily leave the country, the embassy said in an email message to its citizens in

● **THE TEHREEK-I-LABAIK Pakistan took to streets on Monday to launch violent protests to force the government to expel the French ambassador over blasphemous caricatures published last year.**

Pakistan. It said that the departures will be carried out by existing commercial airlines.

Interior minister Sheikh Rashid announced on Wednesday to ban the TLP and officials said that Prime Minister Imran Khan and his cabinet endorsed the summary by the interior ministry to outlaw the group.

The trouble began after police arrested the TLP chief Saad Rizvi on Monday ahead of the April 20 deadline by the group to expel the French ambassador. — PTI

**US expels 10 Russian diplomats**

**Washington, April 15:** The United States announced sanctions and the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats Thursday in retaliation for what Washington says is the Kremlin's US election interference, a massive cyber attack and other hostile activity.

President Joe Biden's broadside against Russia came the same week as he offered to meet President Vladimir Putin for their first summit — a meeting US officials say remains "vital" so that the two countries can deescalate.

In an executive order, Biden widened restrictions on US banks trading in Russian government debt, expelled 10 diplomats who include alleged spies, and sanctioned 32 individuals accused of meddling in the 2020 presidential election.

Biden's order "sends a signal that the United States will impose costs in a strategic and economical-

**Moscow, April 15:** The Kremlin said Thursday that planned US sanctions against Russia in retaliation for alleged election interference and hacking will not "help" a potential summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his United States counterpart Joe Biden.

Biden in a phone call with Putin on Tuesday invited him to hold a summit on neutral ground, as tensions between the West and Russia have escalated in recent weeks over the

**Harry lost honorary titles when he gave up royal duties last year**

**COVID | CURBS**

**Philip funeral: Seniors to skip uniforms**

**London, April 15:** Senior royals must wear civilian clothes to Prince Philip's funeral, defusing potential tensions over who would be allowed to don military uniforms.

Queen Elizabeth II's decision means Prince Harry won't risk being the only member of the royal family not in uniform during Saturday's funeral for his grandfather, who died last week at the age of 99.

Members of the royal family often wear uniforms to public events by virtue of their honorary

roles with the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. But Harry lost his honorary military titles when he decided to give up frontline royal duties last year.

As a result, protocol suggests that Harry, an army veteran who served two tours of duty in Afghanistan, may only wear a suit with medals at royal functions, Britain's *Press Association* reported.

The decision also sidesteps another potential controversy after reports that Prince Andrew con-

sidered wearing an admiral's uniform to his father's funeral. Andrew retains his military titles even though he was forced to step away from royal duties after a disastrous interview with the BBC about his acquaintance with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The funeral is scheduled to take place Saturday at Windsor Castle, with attendance limited to 30 because of Coronavirus restrictions. Philip, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh, served in the



This photo taken and received from an anonymous source via Facebook on Thursday shows protesters marching during a demonstration against the military coup in Mogok in Myanmar. — AFP PHOTO / ANONYMOUS SOURCE

**Myanmar troops shoot at health staff, 1 killed****Protesting medicos flee for safety to a nearby mosque**

**Yangon, April 15:** Myanmar's military opened fire on protesting healthcare workers Thursday, killing at least one bystander as the demonstrators fled for safety to a nearby mosque.

The country has been in turmoil since the military seized power from civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb. 1, triggering a massive uprising that the junta has sought to quell using lethal force.

But protesters have continued taking to the streets, this week using the Myanmar New Year holiday of Thingyan as their latest rallying point as the normal festivities have been cancelled.

In Myanmar's second-largest city Mandalay, a demonstration by medical workers Thursday turned violent when soldiers opened fire, sending them running to the mosque.

"They were shooting everywhere... they were targeting the Sule mosque compound because people in there were hiding protesters," said an eyewitness.

A 30-year-old man who lived in the compound was shot dead, and at least two others were injured, said a doctor who treated the wo-

**London, April 15:** The ousted Myanmar ambassador to Britain has appealed to the British government to help him as he faced eviction from his London residence.

Kyaw Zwar Minn had to spend a night in his car last week after his country's military attaché barred him from the embassy in central London.

He told reporters from behind the padlocked gates of his residence in northwest London on Thursday that he is not going to

und. "The man who died was shot from the back and it penetrated through his chest," he said.

A medic who participated in the protest said he saw the arrest of six nurses and doctors during the crackdown. "We lost contact with some medical team members as well," he said. Myanmar's health-

care workers have been at the forefront of a nationwide civil disobedience movement, refusing to return to work under a military regime. Their absence has left many of the country's hospitals understaffed during the pandemic.

Civil servants from other sectors have followed suit, bringing the operation of

go today and intends to stay despite orders from his former staff that he has to move out. The former diplomat had called for the release of former elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was detained after the military took power in a coup on Feb. 1.

Asked what he would do over the next few days, he replied: Who can tell? The last time they seized the embassy without warning, so I need to be careful.

He did not elaborate on

what kind of help he wanted from the British government.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said last week he condemned the bullying actions of the Myanmar military regime in London.

More than 700 people in Myanmar have been killed in a brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protesters and others opposed to February's coup. — AP

**Blinken in Kabul to sell Biden troop withdrawal plan**

**Kabul, April 15:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on Thursday to sell Afghan leaders and a wary public on President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all American troops from the country and end America's longest war.

Blinken sought to assure senior Afghan politicians that the United States remains committed to the country despite Biden's announcement a day earlier that the 2,500 US soldiers remaining in the country would be coming home by the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that led to the US invasion in 2001.

"I wanted to demonstrate with my visit the ongoing commitment of the United States to the Islamic Republic and the people of Afghanistan," Blinken told Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as they met at the presidential palace in Kabul.

"The partnership is changing, but the partnership itself is enduring." "We respect the decision and are adjusting our priorities," Ghani told Blinken, expressing gratitude for the sacrifices of US troops. Later, in a meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the National Reconciliation Council, Blinken repeated his message, saying that "we have a new chapter, but it is a new chapter that we're writing together."

"We are grateful to your people, your country, your administration," Abdull-

**OZ TO WITHDRAW LAST 80 TROOPS IN SEPTEMBER**

**Canberra, April 15:** Australia would complete its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in Sep. in line with the United States and other allies, the PM said Thursday.

Australia's contribution to the Nato-led mission had once exceeded 15,000 personnel, but only 80 remain. "In line with the United States and other allies and partners, the last remaining Australian troops will depart Afghanistan in Sep.," PM Scott Morrison said, without nominating a day.

"The decision represents a significant milestone in Australia's military history," he added. President Joe Biden plans to withdraw the last 2,500 US troops from Afghanistan before the 20th anniversary of the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the US that triggered the campaign. — AP

ah said. Nato immediately followed Biden's lead on Wednesday, saying its roughly 7,000 non-American forces in Afghanistan would be departing within a few months, ending the foreign military presence that had been a fact of life for a generation of Afghans already reeling from more than 40 years of conflict. — AP



DECCAN Chronicle

16 APRIL 2021

Biden's Afghan exit will hurt India, aid Pakistan

US president Joe Biden's decision to go beyond his predecessor Donald Trump's deadline of May 1 this year for all US forces to pull out of Afghanistan is not unexpected. The Americans people have been long fed up with their longest war which has cost trillions of dollars and 2000 soldiers. The US got Osama bin Laden (hiding in Pakistan with the support of the Army) and that's when the grudge match really ended.

The nation-building project in Afghanistan, beloved of many US Democrats and just a few Republicans too may be, was not going anywhere. So, there appeared no point hanging in there. There were no strategic dimensions to remaining engaged in Afghanistan either. In the current US assessment, if the Taliban were to once again be back in the saddle in Kabul as is more than likely, there is little chance they will seek to cross the oceans and attack the American mainland as the al-Qaeda under bin-Laden had done. America currently has more pressing strategic concerns than Afghanistan — namely China, Russia, Iran, climate change, the Covid pandemic.

India may be required to do much diplomatic footwork, especially in relation to the Taliban

When Mr Biden was vice-president to President Barack Obama, he was among those whose advice was to retain a small counter-terrorism force in Afghanistan. That advice is now evidently deemed obsolete. But why did the Biden administration not adhere to the Trump deadline? Nothing would have been lost by doing so.

The reasons appear mainly to do with optics. Pulling out a large body of soldiers and rolling up a vast military infrastructure, even when no rearguard fighting may be on the cards, takes time-consuming planning. Besides, sticking to the deadline set by a predecessor who has turned ignominious may not bring credit in domestic politics. Besides, extending the deadline entails no extra costs for America.

From the Taliban perspective, with Pakistan's help if they have held on for so long after being ousted from power in 2001, what is a few months more? The Taliban know they have nothing to lose. In fact, the extra four months may work to the Taliban's advantage as it give them more time to launch more vicious attacks, one of whose (intended) outcomes may be to push domestic Afghan factions into submission before the much-touted "interim" government is brought into some kind of shape through talks. That shape is overwhelmingly likely to be the one that the Taliban want.

The US was desperately after a "responsible" withdrawal. Historically, the Americans wanted to look good in comparison to the Soviet Union, the withdrawal of whose troops from Afghanistan in the late 1980s was widely deemed ignominious. But the Afghans aren't likely to be fooled by appearances. The international community neither.

The US pullout, which hardly offers America any political gains in the region, may be expected to make the position of Pakistan, China and, to some extent, even Russia, firmer than hitherto. India, in contrast, may be required to do much diplomatic footwork, especially in relation to the Taliban. Historically, after the Taliban interregnum India had aligned its position with that of the government in Kabul. It may be obliged to stick to that broad line even after the return of the Taliban, no matter in what form. New Delhi has a difficult task on its hands.

Let all follow CBSE's example

With the daily caseload of Covid-19 infections crossing two lakhs, an unprecedented and alarming milestone as yet, on Thursday, the country needs to pull up its socks and fight the virus with all available tools. Precious time has already been lost in augmenting the healthcare system or streamlining the inoculation programme by ensuring adequate availability of vaccine. Any fresh move could take time. In the meanwhile, the government must take whatever steps it can, expeditiously. One major step has been taken when the Central Board of Secondary Education put off the Class 12 examinations and scrapped the ones in Class 10. The government must now see to it that the other national and well as state boards follow suit and eliminate the chances of the pandemic spreading through examination halls.

The government must also target the other potential superspreader events such as religious, political and social gatherings. West Bengal has four more phases of the polling, and electioneering is in full swing with mammoth rallies. The government must check with the Election Commission how it may be possible to curtail electioneering. India has some religious festivals every season; the Kumbh Mela in which millions of devotees attend is under way. Healthcare experts have been demanding restrictions on it but none has been imposed yet. The government must, in consultation with the state government in Uttarakhand and the organisers of the festival, explore the possibility of cutting the duration of the festivities short and impose stricter controls on the attendees. The Muslim community has entered into the annual fasting period, which normally ends with a community feast every day and with grand gatherings at the end of the month. The government must consult the community leaders and see how the events do not end up spreading the virus. The absence of a concerted, coordinated and result-oriented approach could land the nation in a larger mess than what it had found itself in when the virus came with the first wave.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER  
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR  
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax : 040-27805256  
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234

Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P.), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285

Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilalpalay Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433

Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennamudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-2254747/48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

Coimbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph: 0422 2231255  
Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No.H/SD-348/2006-08

Subhani



Covid: Who'll pay price for irresponsible netas?



Karan Thapar

As I See It

Nowhere are politicians perfect. They all make mistakes. Though they may atone for them later, usually in defeat, they're almost always disinclined to apologise. But I'm not put off by that. If you want them to take decisions, some are bound to be wrong. That's a fact of life. But what irks me is irresponsibility. In particular, refusing to take tough decisions because it does not politically suit them to do so. For this there can be no excuse and little forgiveness.

Faced with the raging second surge of Covid-19, which is relentlessly soaring at nearly 200,000 cases a day, our politicians have behaved irresponsibly. Worse, they continue to do so. Undeterred by criticism from the media and grave warnings from doctors and public health experts, they are now passing the buck.

What am I referring to? The electoral rallies with several lakh people that were held till very recently in Kerala, Assam and Tamil Nadu and which will continue to dominate the political horizon in West Bengal for the rest of this month. But I am also talking of the Shahi Snans, which have started in Haridwar and will continue for another two weeks. Like the political rallies, these religious baths will attract hundreds of thousands of people, if not millions, and there will be no social distancing and precious little mask wearing.

The rallies and snans could easily become super-spreader events. Some perhaps already have. Others are likely to follow. But even if by some miracle that doesn't happen, is it worth the risk? That may sound like

a rhetorical question but, quite frankly, it is not.

So why are they permitted? Let's take the political rallies first. They are an easy, simple and time-tested way of attracting large crowds and addressing them at one go. They also attract television attention and newspaper coverage. Therefore, they get talked about and that, it's hoped, will create political momentum. This is why politicians are so reluctant to abjure them.

In comparison, virtual campaigning is more difficult, the response isn't easy to assess, and it doesn't create any buzz. Therefore, citing the excuse of democracy, our politicians have continued to physically campaign as if the Covid-19 pandemic belongs to another and far-off world.

In fact, when questioned they've either been defiant, or they have blamed the Election Commission. This is what Hemanta Biswa Sarma said earlier this month: "There is no Covid in Assam... there is no need to wear a mask in Assam. Why wear masks unnecessarily and create a panic?". Incidentally, he is the state's health minister.

Days later, at a press conference in West Bengal, Union home minister Amit Shah was asked how he justified massive political rallies when the virus was surging past 100,000 cases a day. (Since then, it's crossed a yet higher peak of nearly 200,000 a day.) Without a blush or a moment's hesitation, he said the question should be asked of the Election Commission. It has set the rules and guidelines and his rallies are fully in accord with them. Sadly, I don't recall any journalist asking Mr Shah if this is an adequate answer from the nation's home minister or simply an irresponsible attempt to pass the buck.

ter or simply an irresponsible attempt to pass the buck.

A day later the commission spoke out but almost sotto voce and certainly ineffectively. As a national newspaper put it, the commission "will not hesitate in banning rallies and meetings if precautions are not adhered to". Not surprisingly, they weren't, and equally unsurprisingly the commission retreated to its earlier convenient silence. And so the irresponsibility continues.

Now, let's come to the shahi snans. When Tirath Singh Rawat took over as chief minister of Uttarakhand, he dispensed with his predecessor's insistence on a prior Covid test before participating in a snan. "Nobody will be stopped in the name of Covid-19 as we are sure that faith in God will overcome the fear of the virus", he glibly though very confidently told another national newspaper. Days later he tested positive.

Meanwhile, one newspaper, quoting government officials, said one crore people were expected to visit Haridwar on April 14, which was Baisakhi, whilst two crore more were anticipated between April 11 and 14. Photographs and WhatsApp clips showed that in fact happened. I fear they could soon realise the truth of the old cliché "God helps those who help themselves".

The government will tell you that banning or even restraining the long-awaited and deeply loved

The government will tell you that banning or even restraining the long-awaited and deeply loved religious events is hard to do. Of course it is. It could make governments unpopular. But then who said being PM during the worst crisis of the century is easy?

religious events is hard to do. Of course it is. It could make governments unpopular. In a democracy, no one wants that. But then who said that being Prime Minister or chief minister during the worst health crisis in a century is easy? Yet, if British PM Boris Johnson could enforce stringent curbs over Christmas and Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel during Easter, do Prime Minister Modi and CM Rawat lack the strength to behave similarly? If Mr Johnson and Ms Merkel can take unpopularity on the chin, are our netas made of weaker stuff? Or could it be that our lot have deliberately chosen not to act because not only is it easier not to do so but that will also ensure that they remain the darling of the masses?

Finally, just one question remains: how heavy a price will we pay for this irresponsibility? We know the damage the rallies and snans could do can only be estimated two weeks later. That's not too far away. But chances are... it won't be the politicians who will suffer. It will be the poor people of India. The former will bask in their electoral triumphs or boast of their administrative expertise. The latter could end up infected, with sickness and possibly worse to follow.

And then? Before you answer, remember, this is India. I doubt if anyone will hold the errant politicians to account. They come from all our political parties and they'll all get away with it. But it's likely to be very different for the majority, who are poor. If they get infected, fall ill and even die, who will care for and mourn them? They've paid the price of political incompetence for generations, possibly centuries. And as they've always done, they'll pick themselves up, place their faith in God and carry on. I doubt if this time will be any different.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

TESTING TIMES

Due to the alarming surge in Covid-19 cases, the cancellation and postponement of Class X and Class XII exams respectively is welcome and a respite from a tense situation to worrisome parents and anxious students (CBSE Class XII exams put off, no Class X test, DC, April 15). However, in the education sector, the government at the Centre needs to devise with earnest intent and come up with a long-term strategy using technology in order to save careers.

Dr C. Ghanshyam  
Visakhapatnam

COVID CARE

With Covid second wave reaching epic proportions, I request the GHMC to close or seize all roadside eateries, chai stalls, pan shops, and drinking rooms. Request public to eat and drink only homemade food before it turns fatal.

Joseph Cherian  
Secunderabad

CO-WIN APP

With the apparent shortage of vaccines, Covid vaccination centres are not able to vaccinate registered people on schedule dates. Further, the Co-Win app allows registration despite this situation ignoring the ground reality that there are no vaccines. This is creating anxiety.

S. Sridhar  
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Bill to revise ST structure likely

HYDERABAD, April. 15 The Chief Minister, Mr. K. Brahmananda Reddi, said here today that a legislation revising the Sales Tax structure would most probably be introduced in the June session of the State Assembly.

Speaking at the 54th annual meeting of the Federation of Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, he said that the Government was awaiting the report of the Bhootalingam Committee. The committee had been appointed to study the existing Sales Tax structure and suggest revision to take it broad based.

Kamal Davar

Ramping security or building trust: How best to tame India's Maoists?

The audacious ambush by Naxals in the Bijapur badlands of the Chhattisgarh state, killing 22 Special Forces policemen and injuring 30 others on April 3, 2021, brought forth the discomfiting reality of India's inadequate preparedness in dealing with its most serious internal security affliction, namely, the Naxal-Maoist challenge. That these avoidable casualties are attributed to an operation which was mounted by our own forces to nab the charismatic young Naxal leader, Madvi Hidma, in the Tekulguda region of Bastar — a hotbed of Naxal activities since decades — makes this tragic incident all the more embarrassing for those who conceived and mounted it.

The video released by the Naxals, of the release ceremony of police commando, Rakeshwar Singh Minhas, captured by them in this botched-up police operation with a large turnout of cheering local villagers should warn the Indian state to streamline its strategy to combat Left Wing Extremism (LWE) — the generic and official name for the Naxal-Maoist insurgency.

Though some in the security establishment have felt that over the years the Maoist-Naxal threat has reduced considerably with the "Red Corridor"

shrinking gradually, the official statistics of India's ministry of home affairs do not convey the same improvement in the internal security operations to counter LWE. MHA figures reveal that only 46 districts are now seriously affected by LWE while 90 districts over 11 states are covered under the special security-related expenditure scheme of the government. The official MHA website also conveys that between 2004 and 2019, 8,197 civilians have been killed by the Naxals, mostly tribals, after brutal tortures as they were branded as "police informers". In addition, between 2018 and November 2020, 460 Naxals were eliminated whilst 161 security forces personnel lost their lives in the same period.

During the past 15 years or so, the deadly dimensions of Naxal-related violence have manifested many times, surprising our security forces dealing with the Naxal insurgency, primarily in states like Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Odisha, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar. It cannot be ever forgotten how in one of the largest Naxal attacks on security forces personnel, Maoists had killed 75 CRPF personnel in Dantewada district on April 6, 2010. Similarly, on May 25, 2013,

25 senior Congress leaders including former Union Minister Vidya Charan Shukla were massacred in Darbha Valley in Chhattisgarh. The Naxals have successfully snatched weapons from security personnel after killing them, continue employing high-intensity IEDs at will in various innovative ambushes and even managed to hijack a train! The list of Naxal successes is, unfortunately, rather exhaustive.

It will be prudent for India's security establishment to factor in the reality that the burgeoning Maoist-Naxal threat has a distinct external dimension with the wily Chinese supplying arms and ammunition to the Naxals through the "Red Corridor" via our North-East and the Nepal border. These insurgents derive their inspiration from the late Chinese Communist supreme, Mao Zedong, who had once declared that "revolutionary warfare is never confined within the bounds of military action because the purpose is to destroy an existing society and its institutions and replace them with a completely new structure". It is not surprising thus that the Naxal movement, which emerged from the cauldron of agrarian unrest in an unknown West Bengal village of Naxalbari has, over the years, acquired a separatist

and a grave violent orientation.

Though, unquestionably, governments at the Centre and states have brought in some improvements in the fight to counter LWE, yet the recurrence of deadly incidents, occurring off and on, should propel the Centre to conceive and implement a National Strategy. Basic factors, including shameful economic and social disparities that exist in our nation, may give rise to rural and urban unrest but remain largely unaddressed in most of the states. Some well-meaning people have argued that a major root cause of growing Naxalism has been the willful reluctance of the states and the Centre to not promulgate the Ninth and Fifth Schedules of the Constitution which enforces relevant land laws and which will benefit the tribals and poor inhabiting the forests. However, to merely attribute the spread of LWE to poverty and lack of development will be a rather simplistic formulation.

As the Centre and state governments reach out to the poor and hapless to alleviate their sufferings, Naxal leadership must be contacted to give up their armed struggles, embrace the amnesty announced by the governments and join the national mainstream. In the past, unfortunately, it has been experi-

enced that the LWE leadership has not only refused the administration's peace and rehabilitation efforts, but also deliberately targeted developmental activities of the government in the remote areas. Schools, hospitals, post offices and even the labour force engaged in some construction works have been violently attacked.

With alacrity, the Centre will have to re-energise its security strategies to combat the Naxals. Better training, modern light equipment and weaponry for the police and the central forces earmarked for these operations have to be ensured. Above all, ground-level intelligence structure using locals needs to be re-invigorated. High-tech gadgetry including sophisticated communication and monitoring equipment, helicopters and drones need to be extensively fielded. The Indian Army must train police and paramilitary commandos in special operations and leadership skills at the combat levels. Finally, synergy between the Centre and states machinery to effectively combat the highly motivated Naxals is paramount.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, was founder of the Defence Intelligence Agency and deputy chief of the Integrated Defence Staff



quick  
BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	48,803.68 0.53
Nifty 50	14,581.50 0.53
S&P 500*	4,160.59 0.87
Dollar (₹)	74.91 0.21
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.34 0.12
Euro (₹)	89.76 0.09
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,301▲159 0.003
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.62 0.06
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.126 -0.03
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.588 -0.048

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

WPI inflation  
spikes to 7.39%  
in March

The wholesale price-based inflation shot up to over 8-year high of 7.39 per cent in March on rising crude oil and metal prices. The low base of March last year, when the data was computed with a low response rate due to the lockdown, contributed to the spike in inflation in March 2021. The WPI inflation was 4.17 per cent in February 2021 and 0.42 per cent in March 2020. This is the third month of up-tick seen in Wholesale Price Index-based inflation.

■ UAE Exchange, Repco among applicants  
8 apply for SFBs,  
universal banksFALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, APRIL 15

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday said that four applicants each have applied for 'on-tap' licences to start universal banks and small finance banks under the private sector. The four that have applied for universal bank licences are Abu Dhabi-based remittance house UAE Exchange, government-owned multi state co-operative named Repco Bank, Flipkart co-founder Sachin Bansal-led NBFC MFI called Chaitanya India Fin Credit Pvt Ltd and ex-Citi Banker Pankaj Vaish & others.

This is not the first time that UAE Exchange is attempting a banking foray. It had applied for a universal banking licence in June 2017 as well.

Applicants for small finance banks are VSoft Technologies Private Limited—a provider of banking and payment solutions to financial institutions—Calicut City Service Co-operative Bank Limited, Akhil Kumar Gupta and Dvara Kshetriya Gramin



Financial Services Private Limited.

Set up in 2002, Calicut City Service Co-operative Bank caters to customers in the city of Kozhikode in Kerala. In March 31, 2019, the cooperative bank had 1.48 lakh members. It has 24 branches across the city. Dvara Kshetriya Gramin Financial Services, incorporated in 2008, by Dvara Trust provides financial services in rural areas. Details about Akhil Kumar Gupta were not available.

The applications will now be evaluated by the standing external advisory committee, set up by the RBI last month, under former deputy governor Shyamala Gopinath.

In the last round, the RBI gave two universal banking licences in April 2014 to

IDFC First Bank and Bandhan Bank. It gave 10 SFB licences in 2018, including to Janalakshmi, Ujjivan, RGVN (North East), among others.

The RBI had issued guidelines for on-tap licensing of universal banks in the private sector on August 1, 2016 and of SFBs on December 5, 2019. By the 2016 guidelines, entities seeking universal bank licences must be individuals/entities with at least 10 years senior-level experience in banking and finance, private companies or groups with at least 10 years of good track record. Groups or companies seeking licences must have assets of Rs 5,000 crore and their non-financial businesses don't account for 40 per cent of these assets.

Farm jobs  
increase by  
9 mn in FY21SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

Employment in agriculture went up by 9 million in March 2021, a year after the pandemic struck the nation. Rural India has seen a churn as people who lost non-farm jobs have gone for farm jobs, finds private think-tank CMIE.

As people lost jobs, they moved from one kind of job to another in hunt for a new occupation. Large numbers eventually migrated to agriculture. As a result, employment in agriculture at the last count, in March 2021, was higher by 8 per cent compared to year-ago numbers.

Over 6 million salaried jobs were lost in rural India in 2020-21 and most of these would have migrated to farming. Rural India also saw nearly 3 million business persons being rendered unemployed.

However, productivity of this additional employment is low. Agricultural output is estimated to have increased by 2-3 per cent in almost each of the four quarters of 2020-21. The 8 per cent increase in labour implies a sharp fall in labour productivity.

"We believe that this huge influx of labour into agriculture during 2020-21 is largely disguised unemployment. It hides the greater employment challenge in March 2021 than the 5.4 million net jobs lost at the end of March 2021," said Mahesh Vyas, CEO, CMIE.

Travel M&A begins: Flipkart  
to buy Cleartrip in distress saleSANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, APRIL 15

Marking the beginning of mergers & acquisitions in the pandemic-hit travel sector, Flipkart is acquiring online travel aggregator Cleartrip in a distress sale.

The e-commerce major on Thursday announced its decision to buy 100 per cent of Cleartrip's shareholding. The deal could be a mix of cash and equity and will see Cleartrip valued at \$40 million.

Cleartrip had raised \$75 million so far and was reportedly valued at \$300 million in 2016. Concur Technologies, DAG Ventures and Gund Investment are the key investors of



Cleartrip, which reported revenues of Rs 319 crore and loss of Rs 14 crore in FY20, according to Tofler.

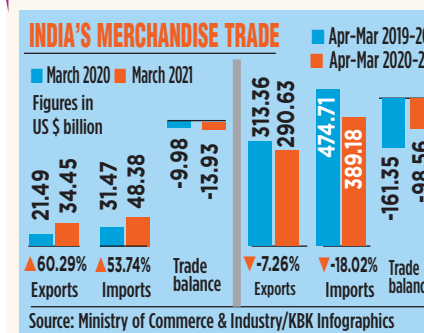
Cleartrip will continue to operate as a separate brand, retaining all employees while working closely with Flipkart to further develop technology solutions to make travel simple for customers.

Cleartrip, founded in 2006, has been competing with MakeMyTrip, Yatra,

Expix, and Booking.com. Most of the online travel aggregators have been suffering losses even before pandemic due to heavy competition and thin margins. The pandemic further hit the travel as well as hospitality industry badly. According to HVS Anarock, these industries will increasingly witness mergers and acquisition in 2021 owing to the financial stress.

"The Flipkart Group is committed to transforming customer experiences through digital commerce. This investment will help strengthen our wide range of offerings for customers," said Kalyan Krishnamurthy, CEO, Flipkart Group.

## BUSINESS BRIEFS



## WIPRO Q4 NET PROFIT UP 27.7%

New Delhi, April 15: Wipro on Thursday posted a 27.7 per cent jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,972 crore for the March 2021 quarter, and exuded confidence of sustaining strong growth momentum in the coming quarters. Wipro had posted a net profit (attributable to equity holders) of Rs 2,326.1 crore a year ago, as per Ind-AS.

Its revenue from operations rose by 3.4 per cent to Rs 16,245.4 crore from Rs 15,711 crore in the same period last fiscal. Wipro—which gets a bulk of its topline from IT services—said it expects revenues from that unit to be in the range of \$2,195 to \$2,238 million in the June 2021 quarter. This translates into a sequential growth of 2-4 per cent.—PTI

## AMBANI SENDS OXYGEN TO MAHA



Mukesh Ambani

April 15: Mukesh Ambani is diverting oxygen produced at his refineries to help India battle a savage coronavirus outbreak that's paralysed the commercial capital. Reliance Industries Ltd, has started supplying oxygen from Jamnagar to Maharashtra at no cost, a company official said. Maharashtra will get 100 tonnes of the gas from Reliance, Eknath Shinde, urban development minister, said in a tweet. RIL is diverting some oxygen streams meant for its petcoke gasification units after making it suitable for medical use, the official said.

—Debjit Chakraborty/Bloomberg

## GAMES

## SHORT TAKES

Chess wizard  
Anand bereaved

Chennai: Five-time world chess champion Viswanathan Anand's father, K Viswanathan, died here on Thursday following brief illness. He was 92 and breathed his last at a city hospital, family sources said.

A former General Manager of the Southern Railway, Viswanathan is survived by two sons and a daughter.

Anand's wife Aruna described him as a great support to the celebrated chess player.

"He was a great support to Anand. He witnessed all of Anand's world championship victories," Aruna said.

"A simple man, he made sure his son had the right values. He took great pride in his achievements," she added. —PTI

Djokovic bows out  
of Monte Carlo

Monte Carlo: World number one Novak Djokovic crashed out of the Monte Carlo Masters in the last 16 on Thursday following a shock 6-4, 7-5 defeat by Britain's Dan Evans. Djokovic, the Monte Carlo champion in 2013 and 2015, was broken five times by the 33rd-ranked Evans and suffered his first loss of the year, having won the Australian Open for the ninth time in February. "To be honest this has been one of the worst matches from my side I can recall in the last few years," said Djokovic. "I felt awful on the court overall. Nothing worked. Just one of those days." —AFP

Aditi gets off to  
season's best start

Kapolei, US: Indian golfer Aditi Ashok carded three birdies in her first five holes to get off to her best start of the 2021 LPGA season with a 3-under 69 in the first round of the Lotte Championship. Aditi, playing her fifth event of the year, was under 70 for the first time this year and that should augur well for the 23-year-old from Bengaluru, who has made the cut in all four previous starts this year. Teeing off from the tenth, she birdied the 10th, 13th and 14th and turned in 3-under. Aditi was four shots behind co-leader Britanny Altomare and Filipina Yuka Saso (64). —PTI

## Olympics could be cancelled

Tokyo, April 15: A senior Japanese politician said cancelling the Tokyo Olympics over the coronavirus remains a possibility on Thursday, as a surge in cases renews concerns about the Games with less than 100 days to go.

Toshiro Nikai, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's number two, said the Olympics must be cancelled "without hesitation" if the virus situation is too severe.

A year after their historic postponement, the 2020 Olympics remain beset by pandemic problems, with parts of the torch relay forced behind closed doors and public support consistently low.

Organisers and Olympic officials insist the Games

will go ahead safely, but Nikai said Thursday that all options were on the table. "We need to make a decision depending on the situation at the time," he told the private TBS television network.

"We need to cancel it without hesitation if they're no longer possible," added Nikai, who is the LDP's secretary general.

Asked if he considered cancellation an option, Nikai said: "Yes of course. If infection spreads because of the Olympics, I don't know what the Olympics is for."

He added however that he sees the Games as an "opportunity", and it was "important for Japan to foster excitement with

● Toshiro Nikai, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's number two, said the Olympics must be cancelled "without hesitation" if the virus situation is too severe.

support from the public". "We definitely want to make a success. In order to do so, there are various issues to solve. It's important to solve them one by one."

'MIGHT BE NO SPECTATORS'

The comments were quickly dismissed by an unnamed LDP official, who told the Jiji news

agency: "The Games will not be cancelled."

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said she had "been told that the comment meant it is an option".

"I take it as a message of strong encouragement that we contain the coronavirus by all means," she said.

Japan's vaccine minister meanwhile mooted the possibility of a total ban on spectators at the Games.

"We'll hold the Olympics in a form that is feasible," the Asahi newspaper quoted Taro Kono as saying.

"There might be no spectators."

Nikai's remarks come with fresh worries in Japan about what experts have called a fourth wave of infections.

Record numbers of cases have been reported in Osaka in recent days, and the government has been forced to authorise new restrictions just weeks after lifting a virus state of emergency.

Compounding the problem is the comparatively slow roll-out of the vaccine in Japan, which has so far only approved the Pfizer/BioNTech version.

Around 1.1 million people in the country of 126 million have received a first dose of vaccine so far, with the roll-out only expanding to the elderly this week. Despite the problems, Olympic organisers insist the Games can be held safely and have released virus rulebooks to allay public fears. —AFP

Hardik promoted  
in BCCI contracts

New Delhi, April 15: The star trio of India captain Virat Kohli, his white-ball deputy Rohit Sharma and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah retained their top bracket BCCI contracts, worth ₹7 crore each, while all-rounder Hardik Pandya earned a promotion despite an injury-plagued season.

A total of 28 cricketers were awarded central contracts in four categories on Thursday.

At this moment in Indian cricket, there are only three certainties across formats and the scenario hasn't changed with Kohli, Rohit and Bumrah being the elite of elites.

All-rounder Pandya is one of the notable promotions to Grade A, which is worth ₹5 crore, despite the fact that he endured a back injury which has prevented him from bowling for much of the last year. He was in Grade B last year.

"Hardik is very much in line to play Test matches in England and will be one of the most important players after our A+ cricketers when we play the T20 World Cup. So Hardik's promotion is about what he brings to the team. That's what the selectors have factored in," a senior BCCI official said on conditions of anonymity.

LIST OF BCCI'S  
ANNUAL CONTRACTS

GRADE A+ (₹7 crore): Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah.

GRADE A (₹5 crore): R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Shikhar Dhawan, K.L. Rahul, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, Rishabh Pant, Hardik Pandya.

GRADE B (₹3 crore): Wriddhiman Saha, Umesh Yadav, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Shardul Thakur, Mayank Agarwal.

GRADE C (₹1 crore): Kuldeep Yadav, Navdeep Saini, Deepak Chahar, Shubman Gill, Hanuma Vihari, Axar Patel, Shreyas Iyer, Washington Sundar, Yuzvendra Chahal, Mohammed Siraj.

Rookies Shubman Gill and Mohammed Siraj have got their maiden central contracts worth ₹1 crore in Grade C while Shardul Thakur has been elevated to group B. The trio has been rewarded for lion-hearted performances during India's historic Test triumph in Australia this year.

Among the demotions, pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar has dropped to Grade B, which is worth ₹3 crore, while Kedar Jadhav has been dropped for good. —PTI

ALL-WIN DAY FOR INDIAN  
BOXERS AT YOUTH WORLDS

New Delhi, April 15: It was a second successive all-win day for Indian boxers at the youth world championships in Kielce, Poland with two from the women's contingent advancing to the quarterfinals after clinching dominating triumphs.

Poonam (57kg) and Vinka (60kg) when their bouts comprehensively to make the last-eight stage on Wednesday. While Poonam defeated Hungary's Beata Varga, Vinka sailed past Bosnia and Herzegovina's Tara Bohatjuk.

In the men's draw, Asian youth silver-medallist Ankit Narwal (64kg) advanced to the second round after a comprehensive 5-0 win over Slovakia's Miroslav Herceg.

In the 91kg category, Vishal Gupta notched up a comfortable unanimous victory over Bulgaria's Georgi Stoev to enter the round of 16. Also entering the pre-quarters was Vikas (52kg) after getting the better of Bulgaria's Yassen Radev 5-0.

—PTI



Manchester City's Phil Foden (right) celebrates after scoring against Borussia Dortmund in their Champions League quarterfinal second leg match in Dortmund, western Germany, on Wednesday.

—AFP

## THE RESULTS

Borussia Dortmund (Bellingham 15)	1
Manchester City (Mahrez 55-pen, Foden 75)	2
(Manchester City win 4-2 on aggregate)	
Liverpool	0
Real Madrid (Real Madrid win 3-1 on aggregate)	0

goals. "We saw yesterday how strong they (PSG) are, Neymar is an excellent player and they have eliminated the world's best team," said Guardiola.

"It's time to celebrate and drink a lot of wine, then prepare to face Chelsea (in the FA Cup semi-finals on Saturday)."

City had bowed out at the quarter-final stage in each of the last three seasons, and had to come from behind at Signal Iduna Park as Dortmund shrugged off their indifferent Bundesliga form to take the lead on 15 minutes.

Four days after scoring his first Bundesliga goal, Bellingham also hit the back of the net for the first time in the Champions League. —AFP



ORANGE

Nitish Rana, KKR

137

Sanju Samson, RR

123

Manish Pandey, SRH

99

PURPLE

Harshal Patel, RCB

7

Andre Russell, KKR

6

Avesh Khan, DC

5



Chris Lynn of Mumbai Indians winds down by surfing in Chennai

### Kohli rebuked for breaching code

Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Virat Kohli has been reprimanded for breaching the IPL's Code of Conduct after he was seen kicking a chair in frustration following his dismissal in the game against Sunrisers Hyderabad here. Kohli was not at his fluent best in the game on Wednesday which RCB won the by six runs.

"Kohli admitted to the Level 1 offence 2.2 of the IPL's Code of Conduct. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding," said the IPL in a statement.

Vengalil Narayan Kutty was the match referee in the game while Nitin Menon and Ulhas Gandhi were the on-field umpires.

### Shams, back-up for Covid-stricken Axar

Delhi Capitals on Thursday dropped in young Mumbai left-arm spinner Shams Mulani as IPL's first short term Covid-19 replacement as he was brought in for Axar Patel, who is yet to recover from the dreaded virus and is still in a medical care facility.

DC also has substituted injured captain Shreyas Iyer with Karnataka off-spinner Aniruddha Joshi. However, the media release issued by the IPL doesn't have any details about paceman Anrich Nortje's RT-PCR result, which is believed to be positive.

"DC have brought in Shams Mulani as a short-term Covid-19 replacement for Axar Patel," the release stated.

### Umps got no-ball right: SRH coach

Sunrisers Hyderabad coach Trevor Bayliss has said the umpires got it right by calling Harshal Patel's waist-high full toss a no-ball in the final over before RCB clinched the game by six runs in the IPL here.

SRH skipper David Warner was not happy with that call.

"He (Warner) was a little animated because we weren't playing very good cricket and we lost," Bayliss said referring to Warner.

"I think the umpires got it right. There was a bit of conjecture over obviously the second high no-ball, but the first one was not directed at the batter's body, so that wasn't a warning," Bayliss said.

# RAJASTUN DELHI

## Miller, Morris shine as Royals turn tables on Capitals

Mumbai, April 15: David Miller's combative 43-ball 62 and Chris Morris' timely onslaught (36 not out) powered Rajasthan Royals to a dramatic three-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in their IPL match here on Thursday.

Opting to bowl, RR pacer Jaydev Unadkat took three wickets for 15 runs to restrict the Capitals to 147 for 8.

Miller then anchored the Royals' chase but it was Morris whose blitzkrieg took Royals home with two balls to spare. It is Royals' first win of the season.

The Royals were 17 for 3 in the fourth over and 42 for 5 at the halfway mark. They needed 58 from the last five overs and 12 from the final over.

Morris ended the run chase with a six off Tom Curran.

Royals' run chase was, however, in tatters as soon as it started. Chris Woakes removed openers Manan Vohra (9) and Jos Buttler (1) in a space of three balls in the third over.

In the next over, Kagiso Rabada dismissed the dangerous Royals captain Sanju Samson — the only centurion so far this season — with Shikhar Dhawan taking the catch at the slip.

Shivam Dube (2) perished while playing an unnecessary uppish shot at a length ball off Avesh Khan with Dhawan taking his 78th catch of the IPL.

The same pair worked in tandem two overs later with Dhawan taking his third catch of the day after Riyan Parag (2) had miscued an Avesh Khan delivery.

The Royals were 52 for 5 at the halfway mark and by then the asking rate has gone up to nearly 10 an over.

But, Miller and Rahul Tewatia (19) kept the Royals in the hunt with a 48-run stand for the sixth wicket before Rabada came back to give the much-needed breakthrough for the Capitals.

Earlier, a brilliant three-wicket burst from pacer Jaydev Unadkat helped RR restrict DC to 147 for 8.

Unadkat (3/15 off 4



David Miller of Rajasthan Royals plays a shot during the IPL match against Delhi Capitals at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Thursday.

overs) dismissed Prithvi Shaw, Shikhar Dhawan and Ajinkya Rahane to trigger DC's top-order collapse from which they never recovered fully.

Captain Rishabh Pant's blistering 32-ball 51, studded with nine fours, was not enough as DC could only post a modest total after being put in to bat.

DC made a disastrous start as they were two wickets down for 16 runs in the fourth over with

Unadkat dismissing the opening duo of Shaw (2) and Dhawan (9) cheaply.

Shaw was the first to go in the second over, caught at backward point before Dhawan perished while attempting a ramp shot with RR captain and wicketkeeper Sanju Samson taking a stunning diving catch to his right.

Ajinkya Rahane's (8) underwhelming IPL form continued as he offered an easy caught and bowled

chance to Unadkat with a slow ball that clocked just 110km per hour.

DC were 36 for 3 at the end of power-play but the slump continued as Marcus Stoinis (0), foxed by a Mustafizur Rahman (2/29) delivery, checked his shot at the last minute to offer a running catch to Jos Buttler.

The run rate started increasing once captain Pant came to the crease but still DC were 57 for 4 at

### SCORECARD

**Delhi Capitals:** Prithvi Shaw c Miller b Jaydev Unadkat 2, Shikhar Dhawan c Sanju Samson b Jaydev Unadkat 9, Ajinkya Rahane c & b Jaydev Unadkat 8, Rishabh Pant run out 51, Marcus Stoinis c Jos Buttler b Mustafizur Rahman 0, Lalit Yadav c Rahul Tewatia b Chris Morris 20, Tom Curran b Mustafizur Rahman 21, Chris Woakes not out 15, Ravichandran Ashwin run out 7, Kagiso Rabada not out 9. Extras (W-5) 5. **Total (for 8 wickets in 20 overs) 147.**

**FoW:** 5-1, 16-2, 36-3, 37-4, 88-5, 100-6, 128-7, 136-8.

**Bowling:** Chetan Sakariya 4-0-33-0, Jaydev Unadkat 4-0-15-3, Chris Morris 3-0-27-1, Mustafizur Rahman 4-0-29-2, Riyan Parag 2-0-16-0, Rahul Tewatia 3-0-27-0.

**Rajasthan Royals:** Jos Buttler c Rishabh Pant b Chris Woakes 2, Manan Vohra c Kagiso Rabada b Chris Woakes 9, Sanju Samson c Shikhar Dhawan b Kagiso Rabada 4, Shivam Dube c Shikhar Dhawan b Avesh Khan 2, David Miller c Lalit Yadav b Avesh Khan 62, Riyan Parag c Shikhar Dhawan b Avesh Khan 2, Rahul Tewatia c Lalit Yadav b Kagiso Rabada 19, Chris Morris not out 36, Jaydev Unadkat not out 11. Extras (W-1, LB-2) 3. **Total (for 7 wickets in 19.4 overs) 150.**

**FoW:** 13-1, 13-2, 17-3, 36-4, 42-5, 90/6, 104/7.

**Bowling:** Chris Woakes 4-0-22-2, Avesh Khan 4-0-32-3, Kagiso Rabada 4-0-30-2, Ravichandran Ashwin 3-0-14-0, Tom Curran 3-4-0-35-0, Marcus Stoinis 1-0-15-0.

the halfway mark. Once he had a full measure of the pitch, Pant opened up and hit four boundaries, three of which were consecutive, to take 20 runs from the 11th over bowled by Rahul Tewatia.

Pant reached his fifty off 30 balls in the 12th over, with a four off Mustafizur but he was run out the next over with bowler Riyan Parag's throw crashing onto the stumps.

— PTI

## SIRAJ HEAPS PRAISES ON SHAHBABZ & RAJAT

Chennai, April 15: Royal Challengers Bangalore pacer Mohammad Siraj feels that spin bowling all-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed has justified his selection in the playing eleven, following a match-winning performance against Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL here.

Ahmed picked up three wickets in an over to stage a remarkable turnaround for RCB on Wednesday night as the team defended 149 for 8 for their second win in as many games.

Ahmed even came out to bat at number three ahead of Glenn Maxwell and AB de Villiers, a reflection Virat Kohli's faith in the ability of the left-hander.

"Both Shahbaz Ahmed and Rajat Patidar (who played the last game as Devdutt Padikkal was unavailable) have been brilliant in the practice games," Siraj said in the post-match press conference.

"Shahbaz, as an all-rounder, gives us that extra option with his left-arm spin. The wicket was slow and turning also. Shahbaz Ahmed fitted into it for this game and did the job for us," he added.

"We had overs left of Washington Sundar too. But Virat bhaji thought with two right-handers at the crease, a left-arm spinner could be brought.

"He created a chance with Manish Pandey in his first over, and that's why he bowled another, and that changed the game for us," said Siraj.

— PTI

POINTS TABLE						
Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
RCB	2	2	0	0	4	+0.175
MI	2	1	1	0	2	+0.225
PBKS	1	1	0	0	2	+0.200
DC	2	1	1	0	2	+0.195
RR	2	1	1	0	2	+0.052
KKR	2	1	1	0	2	+0.000
SRH	2	0	2	0	0	-0.400
CSK	1	0	1	0	0	-0.779

## Dhoni & Co. look for winning ways

Mumbai, April 15: Chennai Super Kings would look for inspiration from skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni and a much-improved bowling effort when they take on a power-packed Punjab Kings in the IPL here on Friday.

The two sides experienced contrasting fortunes in their respective tournament opener.

While CSK lost by seven wickets against Delhi Capitals, Punjab Kings eked out a four-run win over Rajasthan Royals in a high-scoring thriller.

With the dew playing a crucial role at Wankhede, the side winning the toss would want to bowl first.

In their first match here, CSK posted a competitive 188 for seven, riding on fine contributions from Suresh Raina (54), Moeen Ali (36), Sam Curran (34), Ravindra Jadeja (26) and Ambati Rayudu (23).

Despite failures from the opening duo of Rituraj Gaikwad and Faf du Plessis besides skipper Dhoni, CSK managed to put up a decent total on the board.

But the Chennai outfit's bowling unit looked completely out of sorts and clueless against the DC opening duo of Shikhar Dhawan and Prithvi Shaw, who were ominous from the word go and stitched a 138-run stand to take the game away from CSK.

The likes of Deepak Chahar, Sam Curran, Shardul Thakur, Jadeja and Moeen Ali all went for big runs and looked rusty.

And come Friday, the onus would be on master tactician Dhoni to inspire his teammates to lift their performance and give Punjab a run for their money. But for that to happen, the CSK skipper himself needs to lead from the front after failing to score against DC.

Punjab Kings, on the other hand, had a narrow escape against RR the other despite posting a mammoth 221 for 6 on the board. Opening the batting, KL Rahul played a captain's knock of 91 off just 50 balls. He was ably

### Live on TV

Chennai Super Kings vs Punjab Kings  
from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD1

### HEAD to HEAD

Matches 23  
CSK 14 PK 8

### TIE 1

● Punjab Kings beat Chennai Super Kings in Super over after match ended in a tie at Chennai in 2010.

### FOR THE RECORD

● Lokesh Rahul who scored 4933 runs in 140 innings of 153 matches, needs 67 runs to become the 11th Indian and 70th batsman overall to score 5000 runs in Twenty-20 matches.

● Faf du Plessis who scored 5930 runs in 224 innings of 240 matches, needs 70 runs to become the sixth South African and 45th batsman overall to score 6000 runs in Twenty-20 matches.

### LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

● Chennai Super Kings beat Punjab Kings by 10 wickets at Dubai.

● Chennai Super Kings defeated Punjab Kings by 9 wickets at Abu Dhabi.

STATS: S. PERVEZ QAISER

supported by big-hitting Chris Gayle (40 off 28) and Deepak Hooda (64 off 28).

For Punjab Kings and Rahul, batting is not at all area of concern as they showed with their performance in the opener, but just like CSK, the bowling unit remains a major worry. RR skipper Sanju Samson almost single-handedly took the game away from Punjab Kings with his whirlwind 63-ball 119-run knock in their opener, but fell short just by four runs in the end.

Young Arshdeep Singh (3/35) eventually emerged as Punjab's saviour.

Besides Arshdeep, veteran Mohammad Shami (2/33) too had a decent outing with the ball but the performance of Jhye Richardson (1/55) and Riley Meredith (1/49) should be a concern for Punjab.

— PTI



Chennai Super Kings captain M. S. Dhoni (left) and Suresh Raina chat during a training session.

— CSK

## Maxwell showing a lot of maturity, says Katich

Chennai, April 15: Glenn Maxwell is proving to be a multi-utility player for Royal Challengers Bangalore besides showing ominous form with the bat early in the IPL, feels head coach Simon Katich.

The 32-year-old, who was snapped by RCB for ₹14.25 crore, already has justified the faith shown in him by playing two match-winning knocks in their back-to-back wins this season.

The Australian is also looking to shed the perennial under-performer tag in the IPL.

"He's shown a lot of maturity, particularly today (against SRH on



Glenn Maxwell

Wednesday), when wicket-ends were falling around him... He summed up the conditions really well, and took the game deep, that's credit to him for his experience for summing it up and then executing right at the end when we needed some quick runs," said Katich.

In the IPL 2020 held in the UAE, Maxwell endured a dismal run with then Kings XI Punjab, scoring 108 runs from 13 matches at 15.42.

He failed to hit a single six and also struggled to get the team over the line on many a times as the Punjab franchise finally gave up on the Aussie ahead of this year's auction.

"He's been magnificent. He's had a big role for us, first in the field helping Virat out there with field positioning to have the right guys in the right places at the right time. He has really embraced it," Katich said in a video posted on their website.

— PTI

## IPL '21 is bang on track with a hugely local flavour



Hemant Kenkre  
Silly Point

'Expected' is an epigram commonly used when it comes to describing the vagaries in the game of cricket. As the Indian Premier League (IPL) keeps its trickle on sluggish pitches like the ones seen in Chennai, the results are far from what a

fan would expect. Who, for that matter, would have imagined the kind of turnaround wins by holders Mumbai Indians (MI) and pretenders Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) in their last matches?

Neither would Punjab Kings (PBKS) fans have

wanted their skipper Lokesh Rahul to ask Arshdeep Singh to bowl the last, crucial over with other experienced bowlers around. The 22-year old Sikh kept the faith his skipper had in him and stopped a rampaging Sanju Samson from crossing the line for Rajasthan Royals (RR) in a close game which Punjab won by 4 runs.

The contrasting stories that the IPL has had so far has brought into the limelight a new lot of heroes — the uncapped players. Some of whom are not

even on the fringe of national selection. When a Harshal Patel and Shahbaz Ahmed turned around two matches for RCB and were featured prominently in the news the next day, the search engines must have been on overdrive. Ditto with Rahul Tripathi, Avesh Khan, Chetan Sakariya who played pivotal roles for their teams in the past week of the IPL.

As predicted in my last column, the 2021 edition IPL was going to be one where newer, local talent would be wanting to make

their mark, which is exactly what has happened in the tournament so far. The uncapped players, that have shown tremendous resilience, particularly in challenging circumstances, have reposed the faith that IPL talent scouts had in them to play the most prized Twenty20 tournament in the world. Players, considered also rans and the bits-and-pieces type (with due apologies to them) are now standing up and being counted.

With six of the eight teams being led by Indians

(Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad being the exceptions) the IPL now has a more domestic flavour. Finally, after 13 years, team planners have realised that the value of going local is reaping more rewards than punting on international stars. And, it does not disturb the bank balance. To watch a Sanju Samson lead RR with two international captains, Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes (now injured) in the team is a delight. Likewise when Rishab Pant goes out for the toss for Delhi Capitals instead of the experienced

Australian Steve Smith or Ajinkya Rahane.

IPL 2021 is bang on track with a hugely local flavour which warms the cockles of ones heart. With relatively unknown (and uncapped players) making headlines, local is now getting 'hyper-local' which is a great sign for Indian cricket. This, coupled with the uncertainties of the game, promises a much more exciting tournament than previous editions. Fans are now eagerly watching and waiting for more 'local' twists in the IPL tale.