

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
VIJAYAWADA | WEDNESDAY | 14 APRIL 2021

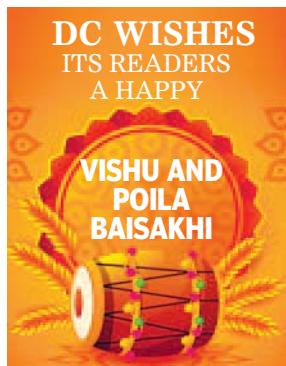
WEATHER

Max: 38.0°C
Min: 24.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
38/24 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Shuddha
Chaturdasi till 3.57 pm
Star: Pushyami till 10 pm
Varjyam: 7.17 am to 8.46 am
Durmuhurtam: 6.49 am to 8.20 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HIJRI CALENDAR
Ramzan 1,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.35 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.15 pm
Maghrib: 6.25 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.52 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.22 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 7.16 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 9.06 AM



RAMZAN TIMINGS
IFTAR: 6.27 pm (Wed)
SEHRI: 4.33 am (Thurs)

COUNTER POINT



It's a free and fair elections!

SHORT TAKES

Monsoon to remain normal this year

New Delhi: The Southwest monsoon, which brings more than 75 per cent of the country's rainfall during June-September, will be normal this year, Skymet Weather said on Tuesday. The north India plains, along with a few parts of the northeast region, are likely to be at risk of being rain deficient through the season, said G.P. Sharma, the president (Meteorology) of Skymet. He said the rainfall will be 103 per cent with a five per cent error.

Sushil Chandra takes over as CEC

New Delhi: Sushil Chandra assumed charge as the 24th Chief Election Commissioner on Tuesday. He was appointed as the CEC on Monday, the day Sunil Arora demitted office. Chandra was appointed as an election commissioner on February 14, 2019, ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. He would demit office on May 14, 2022. Under him, the EC will hold assembly polls in Goa, Manipur, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.

Kerala minister quits after indictment

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala's higher education minister K.T. Jaleel resigned on Tuesday, days after the Lokayukta indicted him for nepotism, abuse of power and breach of oath of office. Jaleel has sent his resignation to the Chief Minister and it has been forwarded to the Governor, CMO sources said. The resignation has been accepted by Governor Arif Mohammad Khan, Raj Bhavan said.



Didi calls off dharna as EC acts on 3 BJP leaders

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NATION | 4

Atchannaidu's video clip blames Lokesh for mess

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 13

A video of Telugu Desam sate president K. Atchannaidu predicting doomsday to the party and ridiculing the leadership of TD general secretary Nara Lokesh went viral in social media on Tuesday. The veteran TD leader was seen saying: "17th tarvata (Tirupati bypoll day) andaru khaleeye.. party ledu bokka ledu (everyone in the party will be free after April 17 as party will have no future). We are carrying on with the party as we are associated with it from the very beginning."

The video has surfaced as a major embarrassment to the principal Opposition party, which is facing shock after shock in the series of elections — the 2019 assembly poll defeat, followed by the worst drubbing in the civic polls.

The party is seen losing its confidence as is also evident from the decision by party chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu to



Nara Lokesh



K. Atchannaidu

keep the TD out of the Zilla and Mandal Parishad polls. The poll boycott has further demoralised the party cadre and raised doubts over the future of the party.

Notably, the present video got leaked a few days before the Tirupati bypoll.

The video, apparently

17TH TARVATA

(Tirupati bypoll day) andaru khaleeye.. party ledu bokka ledu (everyone in the party will be free after April 17 as party will have no future). We are carrying on with the party as we are associated with it from the very beginning

— K. ATCHANNAIDU
Telugu Desam state president

shot with a secret camera, carried a conversation between Atchannaidu and a TD leader Venkat Rao. Their chat began over a land deal in Hyderabad and payment thereof, but went on to other matters and the party president making sensational observations about the party and Lokesh's leadership. Atchannaidu told *Deccan Chronicle* dismissively, "Too many people are indulging in mischievous things and this could be one of it."

■ Page 2: No one can spoil my relations with Lokesh

JAGAN UNVEILS GOVERNMENT CALENDAR

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 13

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has, in a first-of-its-kind gesture, released for public knowledge a government calendar detailing the implementation schedules of the state's welfare schemes for the 2021-2022 fiscal. The release was done to mark the Ugadi celebrations.

At the event held at the camp office here on Tuesday, the chief minister stressed that his government is implementing various schemes and programmes for the welfare and development of all sections of the society. He has fulfilled more than 90 per cent of the poll promises in one year's time after his takeover in 2019, he claimed.

The CM said that despite the financial difficulties due to Covid, there was no delay in implementation of the welfare schemes. For the first time, he said, the state government has prepared a calendar for welfare schemes and implemented them. Now, in another first of its kind, the YSRC government has released the calendar for the people.

The CM said the calendar for 2021-2022 was released on the occasion of the Plava Nama Samvatsara Ugadi, and it listed the schemes and programmes that will be implemented during the year, on a month-by-month basis.

■ Page 3: Details of all the schemes

Panchangam predicts good days for AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 13

The Telugu New Year Panchangam (almanac) predicts an end to the Coronavirus pandemic and good days for Andhra Pradesh this year.

During Panchanga Sravanam (almanac reading) programme conducted on Ugadi festival to mark the beginning to Plava nama samvatsara at the Chief Minister's camp office at Tadepalli on Tuesday, priest predicted that Andhra Pradesh would emerge prosperous with abundant rainfall and a surge in business due to the containment of Covid-19 this year.

Government siddhanthi Kappaganthula Subbaraju Somayajulu recited the new panchangam in the presence of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, ministers and eminent persons.

Observing that the meaning of Plava is a ship, the Chief Minister wished for abundant rainfall, good luck to farmers, and every sister would be happy.

Extending his Ugadi greetings to people, the Chief Minister wished prosperity for every house in the state and that everyone would win the war against Covid.

The siddhanthi said the state economy would improve this year due to

● OBSERVING THAT the meaning of Plava is a ship, the Chief Minister wished for abundant rainfall, good luck to farmers, and every sister would be happy.

the planetary movements of Guru and Shukra grahas. He also observed that the Chief Minister's personal horoscope also augurs well for the state. He said Guru's stay in the Kumbha rashi for nine months, which would usher in copious rains, increase milk production, education, agriculture and finance sectors, which would give best results with all-round development.

After the programme, the siddhanthi blessed the Chief Minister and presented Ugadi Pachadi. Priests of the Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanams (TTD) blessed the Chief Minister with vedic hymns and presented him the TTD Panchangam and Prasadam.

The Chief Minister felicitated the siddhanthi, Durga Malleswara Swamy temple chief priest Lingambatla Durga Prasad, Markapuram-based priest A.V.K. Narasimhacharyulu, Tenali-based priest Mamillapalli Mruthyunjaya Prasad and deputy chief priest Kota Ravi Kumar and Vedic scholar R.V.S. Yajulu.

SPORTS | 6

Sunrisers to meet RCB today

TABLOID

Covid widens gender divide in companies



Centre fast-tracks nod for foreign Covid jabs

Russia's Sputnik V will be available by the end of April

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

In a major step to improve vaccine coverage in India, the government on Tuesday announced its decision to fast-track emergency approval for all foreign-produced Covid-19 vaccines that have been approved for use in certain other countries, like the United States and European Union member states.

The first 100 beneficiaries of such foreign vaccines shall be assessed for seven days for safety outcomes before these are rolled out for further immunisation programmes within the country.

The Union health ministry said the plan is to add these jabs to the existing basket of vaccines for domestic use and increase the pace and coverage of vaccination.

India as of now is using Covishield (which is known in other countries as the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine) and the locally made Covaxin for vaccinations, while Russian shots of Sputnik V were given a formal approval on Tuesday morning after recommendation from the subject experts committee of the Drugs Controller General of India.

The SEC noted that the

THINK OF HUMANITY AND NOT JUST OUR CITIZENS, SAYS MODI

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented us an opportunity to reshape the global order by thinking about the entire humanity and not merely of those who are on our side of the borders, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday.

"We, in India, have tried to walk the talk (and) have tried to pro-

tect our 1.3 billion citizens from the pandemic" and also "supplied vaccine to over 80 countries", he said in his address at the sixth edition of the four-day Raisina Dialogue conference, which began in the national capital in virtual format on Tuesday.

He also admitted that the supplies have been modest but the demand was huge.

■ Full report on Page 4

U.S. SUSPENDS USE OF J&J SHOT AFTER CLOTS

Washington, April 13: The US is recommending a pause in using the single-dose Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine to investigate reports of potentially dangerous blood clots. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the US FDA said Tuesday they were investigating unusual clots that occurred 6 to 13 days after vaccination.

■ Full report on Page 4

Festive mode



Devotees visit the Golden Temple on the occasion of Baisakhi festival, in Amritsar, on Tuesday.

— PTI

2 Al-Badr ultras among 5 held in J&K

Srinagar, April 13: Police arrested two militants and three militant associates of terror outfit Al-Badr and seized arms and ammunition from their possession in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district, officials said on Tuesday.

"Police in Handwara busted a terror module of

proscribed terror outfit Al-Badr and arrested two active terrorists and three terrorist associates. Incriminating material, including arms and ammunition, have been recovered," a police spokesperson said.

He said acting on a specific information regarding the movement of mili-

tants on Baramulla-Handwara highway in the north Kashmir district, a special checkpoint was established near Kachloo Crossing by security forces. During checking of vehicles, three people riding a motorcycle tried to escape from the spot but were apprehended by the alert forces, he said.

— PTI

COVID-19 | CARE

Health authorities will provide the jab at 1,400 Covid vaccination centres

State plans to vaccinate 4 lakh people today

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 13

Andhra Pradesh will take up a massive Covid-19 vaccination drive on Wednesday with a target to vaccinate four lakh beneficiaries. Though the centre announced Tika Utsav from April 11 to 14 and AP targeted to administer vaccine to 24 lakh beneficiaries at the rate of six lakh doses per day, there was no vaccination on April 12 and 13 as doses were not available. On the first day

of Tika Utsav too on April 11, AP vaccinated only 2.38 lakh beneficiaries.

However, as the state government has received from the centre 6.40 lakh doses including 4.40 lakh doses of Covishield and two lakh doses of Covaxin on Monday night and Tuesday afternoon, the state government has come up with plans to take up a massive vaccination programme on the last day of Tika Utsav.

Accordingly, state health authorities will provide the jab at 1,400 Covid vacci-

● THE STATE government has received from the centre 6.40 lakh doses including 4.40 lakh doses of Covishield and two lakh doses of Covaxin on Monday night and Tuesday afternoon, the government has come up with plans to take up a massive vaccination programme on the last day of Tika Utsav.

nation centres by deploying additional health personnel. 500 persons on an average will be administered the vaccine at each centre from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm on Wednesday, with the main target of covering people aged over 45 and 60

years, apart with healthcare and frontline workers.

Authorities have directed all district medical and health officers and also district immunisation officers to gear up for the occasion by making all necessary arrangements, including

mobilisation of beneficiaries. So far, 82-83 percent of healthcare workers and 50 percent frontline workers have been administered the dose. Remaining have been advised to take their dose on Wednesday.

State health director Dr. T. Geetha Prasadini said, "We are taking up a special Covid-19 vaccination programme to administer the vaccine to nearly four lakh targeted beneficiaries on the last day of Tika Utsav on Wednesday. People who cannot take it on the day

can take their jab on Thursday. After that, based on the available stock, we will continue the vaccination programme in the state."

State health authorities say the centre is insisting on exhausting existing stocks of vaccine doses before releasing the fresh stocks. This is the reason why the state government is taking up a massive drive to exhaust the existing stocks and place fresh indents for additional doses.

Appearing for the NGO, senior lawyer Nikhil Nayyar told the court that earlier the Supreme Court had in the Sterile case said that the green tribunal can't strike down rules or regulations...

Therefore, it would be fallacious to state that the tribunal has powers of judicial review akin to that of a high court exercising constitutional powers under Article 226 of the Constitution... We must never forget the distinction between a superior court of record and courts of limited jurisdiction."

IN BRIEF

'NOBODY CAN SPOIL MY RELATIONSHIP WITH LOKESH'

From page 1

He tweeted that the video was the handiwork of chief minister Jagan who, he said, was resorting to "stone throwing and circulating a distorted version of my conversation," out of fear of the YSRC losing the Tirupati bypoll. "Nobody can spoil my relationship with Lokesh," he said.

Taking potshots at Atchannaidu, municipal administration minister Botsa Satyanarayanan said he could have openly announced that TD would be shut very soon, but "he being the president of the AP unit, he may have limitations and could share his anguish only with his own party leaders."

The conversation begins with Venkat Rao complaining to Naidu that Lokesh was neglecting his repeated request to help him get Rs 3 crore from builder K.L. Narayana, though Chandrababu Naidu and film actor Balakrishna had promised to help him out.

When Rao said Lokesh did not receive him properly when he went to meet him,

the TD state president was seen saying, "ippudu andariki ante. Yevvariki vinadam ledu. Evvari badhalu vallavi" (Lokesh is not listening to anyone. We are all having issues).

Reacting to Rao repeatedly complaining against Lokesh, the TD state president said, "aa manishulu baagunte party ki ee parishthi enduku vuntundi"

It was an open secret in political circles that Atchannaidu and Lokesh have strained relations and the latter tried to halt the appointment of the several-time MLA from Srikakulam district as party president for AP.

Atchannaidu had been arrested by the Jagan-led state government in a corruption case a few months ago.

NOTICES SERVED TO GOVT FOR FAILING TO IMPLEMENT RTEDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 13

A notice under Section 166 of IPC was served to the state government for failing to implement the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, resulting in deprivation of access to quality education to nearly one lakh children belonging to the poor and vulnerable sections in private schools every academic year in AP.

Advocate Thandava Yogesh served the notices under Section 166 of IPC recently, dealing with a public servant disobeying the law with an intent to cause injury to any person and shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year with or without fine. The notices were served to the Chief Minister, minister for education, school education principal secretary, commissioner of school education and to all the district education officers in the state.

Earlier, the advocate filed a PIL in 2017 in the High Court seeking direction for implementation of section 12 (1)(C) of Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, read with AP RTE Rules, 2010, Rule 14.15 and 16.

The act deals with provision of reservation for admission in private schools for children belonging to the poor and vulnerable sections in Class I at least 25 per cent in an academic year.

However, in 2010, a private school management obtained a stay order from the High Court on implementation of RTE, 2009 Section 12 (1)(C). In 2012, the Supreme Court adjudicated the RTE, 2009 Section 12 (1)(C) as valid.

In 2014 also, the Supreme Court Constitution Bench declared the same Act as valid. The SC also issued direction in a case that any stay order issued by a court to be valid for six months only.

Despite such an order, the AP government has been maintaining that a stay order has been there on implementation of the Act and is failing to ensure implementation of the Act by the private educational institutions for several years.

Advocate Yogesh said, "As the state government failed to ensure the Act to be implemented by the private schools for several years, I served notices to the government under Section 166 of IPC.

My objective is to ensure social justice to the children by enabling them to get quality education in private schools under the Act."

Naidu is politicising hurling of stones: Suresh

Minister says TD supremo was trying to damage healthy relations between people and government

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 13

Education minister Adimulapu Suresh accused TD national president N. Chandrababu Naidu of trying damage the healthy relations between people and the state government.

Addressing a public meeting at Manubolu on Tuesday as part of his campaign in favour of YSRC Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection candidate M. Gurumoorthy, the minister said the former CM is playing politics by raising a hue and cry over hurling of stones on his road-show at Tirupati on Monday night.

He charged that the stones were hurled by TD people themselves to gain sympathy. Maintaining that TD will be forgotten soon, he called upon people to ensure a thumping majority for Gurumoorthy.

Stressing that Naidu was trying to do politics with stones, Suresh sarcastically said that the TD supremo got patent rights for the culture of throwing chappals and stones on own party leaders.

"Chandrababu Naidu is yearning for public sympathy through shortcuts. Women are certain to reprimand him if he continues to blabber about Amma Vodi benefits are going for Ayya buddi (father liquor)," the minister said.

Speaking on the occasion, Venkatagiri legislator Anam Ramanarayana Reddy took pot shots against nominees of BJP, Congress and TD contesting the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat. He said they had supported the TD nominee for 15 years but she shifted to Telugu Desam.

He pointed out that the BJP nominee lives in Karnataka and speaks only Kannada. Congress nominee Dr. Chinta Mohan used to stay in Kerala. But it is only YSRC nominee Gurumoorthy who is the most accessible among all others, he said while appealing to people to vote for Gurumoorthy.

Government whip Prabhakar Reddy, legislators Kakani Govardhan Reddy, Silpa Chakrapani and K. Parthasarathy also spoke.

Meanwhile, the YSRC leaders under the supervision Anam Ramanarayana Reddy making arrangements for a huge rally at Venkatagiri town on Wednesday at 8 am.

The rally will commence at Kasi Viswanadha Swamy temple after offering prayers to the presiding deity. It will pass through Kasipeta Centre, Dwaraka Hotel Centre, Rajavari Veedhi, Vinayaka temple, Pilerramma temple and conclude at MRO Office Centre.

Ramanarayana Reddy appealed to all the party cadres and supporters to take part in the rally and bless the party nominee for Tirupati byelection Dr Gurumoorthy.

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 13

BJP national secretary and AP in-charge Sunil Deodhar demanded that YSR Congress nominee from Tirupati Lok Sabha seat should be disqualified as he is contesting a seat reserved for SCs though he is a Christian.

THOUSANDS OF DEVOTEES TAKE PART IN SRISAILAM RATHOTSAVAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL APRIL 13

Ugadi festival was celebrated at Srisaillam with thousands of devotees participating in the Rathotsavam. Around 90 per cent of devotees were from the neighbouring Karnataka state.

Every street in Srisaillam witnessed traditional dances by Kannadigas to their spiritual tune. Chants of "Om Namah Shivaya" rent the air, though many pilgrims seemed exhausted after their long trek. Temple officials organised special progra-



Venkatagiri legislator Anam Ramanarayana Reddy pays tributes to the bust of former chief minister late Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy at Manubolu on Tuesday. Education minister Adimulapu Suresh and other leaders are also seen. — DC

CHINTA VOWS TO MAKE VENKATAGIRI AS AP'S CAPITAL

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 13

Former MP and Congress nominee for Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll Dr Chinta Mohan surprised the residents of Venkatagiri town with a peculiar promise that he would put all his efforts to make Venkatagiri as capital of Andhra Pradesh if they vote for the Congress.

Addressing the gathering during a public meeting at Venkatagiri on Tuesday, he accused TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu of taking away the capital to Thullur (Amaravati) even when 1 lakh acres of government land was available between Venkatagiri and Yerpedu.

He maintained that Venkatagiri has all the qualities necessary for a state capital while hinting that a major part of AP was under Venkatagiri when it was ruled by kings.

Referring to the popularity of handloom saris produced at Venkatagiri all over the country, he said it should have been considered as the capital city of AP, but unfortunately TD supremo Chandrababu Naidu opted for Tulluru, probably due to its proximity to Guntur and Krishna districts.

He lamented over disregarding the availability of a huge chunk of government lands near Venkatagiri and the potential of the region.

"Besides one lakh acres of land, the area is close to Kandaleru reservoir, national highway, and the international airport at Tirupati. The area is also safe from earthquakes and floods, yet the region has been neglected. If Congress is supported, I will try to make Venkatagiri the Capital city of the state," said Chinta Mohan.

He said they would be approaching the Election Commission of India to disqualify the YSRC candidate Gurumoorthy. He maintained that any SC who has converted to Christianity cannot contest from a seat reserved for SCs.

He was speaking to media persons after taking part in a programme

No one can do anything to me as long as Lord is with me, says Naidu

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 13

Opposition leader and former Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu has alleged that he is being targeted by "hawala ministers and gambler ministers" of the YSR Congress.

Naidu stated this on Tuesday as he addressed a roadshow in Gudur as part of the campaign for TD nominee Panabaka Lakshmi in the Tirupati by-election.

Referring to the stone-pelting incident while he held a roadshow in Tirupati a day ago, Naidu alleged that the police were seeking evidence rather than arresting the culprits.

Stressing that the state of affairs in AP was often shocking him, Naidu said, "Stones were hitting us. There were those who were injured, there was blood too. After all these, the police are unmoved and simply seeking evidence from us."

The former chief minister said, "Am I afraid of being stoned after being Chief Minister for 14 years? Militants used 24 claymore explosives to kill me. Nothing happens to me as long as Tirupati's Lord Venkateswara is with me. No one can do anything on me."

Naidu assured the people that there would not be any corruption, threats, false cases, and exploitation of natural resources if the Telugu Desam Party candidate is elected for the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat.

Naidu said the ruling party, out to win the election, is trying to misuse the police at times of attacks on the opposition leaders.

"The government has failed to control Covid-19 spread in the state and the people have to live with the infection for the rest of



TD chief and former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu addresses a road show in Gudur on Tuesday. — DC

FORMER CM CLAIMS THAT TELUGU NEW YEAR BELONGS TO DESAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 13

TD national president N. Chandrababu Naidu turned philosophical while taking part in the Ugadi celebrations at the TD office in Tirupati. He said positive results are certain if everyone does their duty religiously. The New Year belonged to the TD, he said.

"Panchanga Sravanam is very important even from the angle of science as it gives us the guidance to overcome difficult times. Darkness is certainly replaced by light, and vice versa; and the clock never stops. Positivity and self-confidence in all our deeds are the key to success," the former CM observed.

Naidu greeted the Telugu people living in

● Positivity and self-confidence in all our deeds are the key to success, the former CM observed

● We have to fight for the people collectively once again, Naidu said.

two states and other parts of the word on the occasion of Ugadi. "We have worked 40 years for the welfare of the people. We have to fight for the people collectively once again without any fear," he said.

TD state president K. Atchannaidu, former minister Chinnarajappa, TD nominee for Tirupati Lok Sabha seat Panabaka Lakshmi, Veda Pundit Gautham Sarma, TD leaders Sugunamma and Narasimha Yadav were among those present.

their lives. Yet, the Jagan virus is more dangerous than the Covid-19 virus and the people should prefer their voting right to change the scenario for the better," the TD leader said. Naidu said the interests of the students are being ignored.

He asked whether any-

one from the Gudur region got government employment in the recent past.

The TD chief said the Nadu-Nedu programme is not for improving the education sector but for swallowing the funds.

"MLAs and others are making big bucks through the programme."

TD seeks protection to Naidu, punish guilty

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 13

Telugu Desam senior leader and former minister K Kala Venkatrao has alleged that the incident of "stone-pelting" on former chief minister and TD national president Nara Chandrababu Naidu is proof of the anarchic "Raja Reddy Rajyngam" prevailing in Andhra Pradesh.

He said here on Tuesday that the YSRC is realising that defeat is inevitable. "Its rowdy mob pelted stones at Naidu at the instigation of chief minister Jagan Reddy. The culprits must be arrested and adequate protection provided to the TD chief," he said.

The stone-pelting allegedly took place during the road show of

Chandrababu Naidu in Tirupati on Monday. "This is a direct proof of the Rajareddy Rajyngam. This mirrors the undemocratic style of governance prevailing in the state," Venkatrao said.

He said Jagan Reddy is terrorizing voters and weakening the Opposition.

Venkatrao alleged that there was no development during the two-year rule of the YSRC. "What was evident were the YSRC's attacks and the government's partisan attitude towards the Opposition."

"On the other hand, the Opposition leaders who questioned mafia rule of Jagan Reddy have been charged with aggravated assault, murder and physical threat."

Botsa: Naidu enacting a 'stone-age' drama

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 13

TD supremo Nara Chandrababu Naidu is trying to make a mountain out of a pebble, said municipal minister Botsa Satyanarayana while talking to the media in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

He said Chandrababu Naidu knows very well that his party is facing another debacle at Tirupati and hence he was enacting different kinds of dramas.

Satyanarayana said the police and his friendly TV channel made it clear that there was no trace of attack on Naidu with stones during his public meeting in Tirupati. Yet, he abused the police and the Chief Minister. Later, he staged a dharna.

"He called out a party worker and told him to bring the stone and the worker brought a small pebble. Naidu is still resorting to stone-age gimmicks," the minister said and added that such gimmicks were common to Naidu.

When Mallela Babji attacked N.T. Rama Rao, he enacted a big drama to draw the attention of the people, he said.

He said that victory and defeat were common in politics and Naidu should accept the defeat with dignity.

Asserting that the party

NO STONE PELTING ON NAIDU: HM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 13

Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharita refuted the allegation that there was stone-pelting during Naidu's meeting in Tirupati. She said there was no need for the YSRC to indulge in such acts. "Rather, the Telugu Desam is trying to earn the sympathy of the people to win the by-election."

Speaking to the media in Guntur on Tuesday, Sucharita said Naidu was spreading lies. "He has started a new drama realising that the TD would fail miserably in the Tirupati byelection."

Responding to criticism over the Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy murder case, she said the CBI is investigating the case.

candidate would win the election hands down, Satyanarayana said Gurumoorthy will get 80 per cent of the votes while the BJP and TD candidates would lose their deposits.

"Fearing losses, Pawan Kalyan went into quarantine and Chandrababu is playing his own tricks," the minister said.

DIG condemns TD chief's comments

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 13

Anantapur DIG Kranti Rana Tata condemned allegations that police pelted stones on the roadshow of TD chief Chandrababu Naidu at Tirupati on Monday night.

Speaking to media persons at Tirupati on Tuesday, the DIG said they have not found any

evidence related to hurling of stones or commotion at Naidu's meeting, whether in the CCTV footage, media footage, or video footage on mobile phones.

The DIG said yet they have formed special teams to probe the incident.

He expressed displeasure over comments of Chandrababu Naidu against police.

Fighting with dung cakes to be organised in Kairuppala

Donkey race follows Ugadi in Kurnool

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, APRIL 13

As Ugadi festival heralds a new year, the festivities continue through the following day in Kurnool district, where enthusiastic youth cheer donkeys to race through the slush and mud. "Donkey race which draws huge crowds from neighbouring mandals to Kallur Chowdeshwari temple on Wednesday is the most awaited event," said Ramanjaneyulu, the organiser.

Slush was arranged for about three-feet in depth near the temple and donkeys were made to race around with bullock carts called as 'Gadidala pradakshina' in it. The onlookers encourage donkeys to run as they find wallowing in mud slush most challenging and tiresome. The winner donkey gets the trophy of achievement while youths jump into slush and smear and play a sport as part of Ugadi festivities, the organisers said. On the

● About 30,000 people attend the event and it is a big social gathering in this part of the district.

other hand, people of Kairuppala in Asapari mandal take part in the traditional 'pidakala samaram' (fighting with dung cakes) when a procession of Lord Veerabhadra Swamy was taken out.

As many as 50 persons were injured in the fight

but none lodged a complaint, Veerabhadra Swamy temple EO G Ramprasad has said. This fight of hitting cow dung cakes and throwing them like missiles take place when the Lord was taken out of the village on a pleasure trip and while being brought into the village, a group of villagers obstructed it. Soon another group of villagers intervenes and both the groups hurl dung cakes at each other. Veerabhadra Swamy was taken into the tem-

ple even while the dispute goes on, the villagers said.

It is believed that Lord Veerabhadra Swamy and goddess Bhadrakali got separated for some time after an affair. Taking sides of gods, villagers also get divided into groups and fight with each other in the same way every Ugadi.

Aspari sub-inspector Giribabu said about 30,000 people attend the event and it is a big social gathering in this part of the district.

IN BRIEF

Big rally against VSP privatisation

Visakhapatnam: Students and youth organisations have decided to take out a "Youth March" on April 16 to protest against the privatisation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. A poster in this regard was launched at the Gandhi statue near RTC Complex in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday. Visakhapatnam district secretary of DYFI L.J. Naidu, who was present at the poster launch, said the youth would be ready to sacrifice their lives to protect the steel plant. He said the youth and students have been fighting along with the trade unions since the agitation started two months ago.

KGGH HEADLESS AS COVID-19 CASES SURGE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, APRIL 13

The Kurnool Government General Hospital (KGGH), with 300 Covid-19 patients undergoing treatment, is directionless as the Superintendent of the Hospital Dr G. Narendranath Reddy has been tested positive. He is not attending the hospital, and neither he had assigned the duties to the Deputy Superintendent Dr C. Prabhakar Reddy. Patients face problems as no one is taking any responsibility to guide them on patient administration and treatment management. A few house surgeons and an assistant professor in the gynaecology department were also tested positive, said a source. When contacted, the deputy superintendent said he had not been assigned any responsibility.

Meanwhile, The District Medical and Health Officer, Dr Ram Giddaiah said Covid-19 Tika Utsav would resume on Wednesday as the district got 35,000 doses on Tuesday. He said the replenishment of stocks resumed after we exhausted the entire supply and placed reorders to continue the inoculation in the district. The inventory management of the vaccination is imperative as the government has taken it up as a drive to vaccinate all the people above 45 years of age.

He said there are about 8 lakh people in the age group of above 45 years out of which 2 lakhs have been inoculated. Our main focus is frontline workers and medical staff followed by the cases having comorbidities.

5 ARRESTED FOR TRANSPORTING GANJA

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 13

Maredumilli police arrested five persons in different cases on the charges of transporting ganja and seized 460 kg of ganja.

According to Maredumilli Circle Inspector Mr Ravi Kumar, when the police conducted vehicle inspections, two accused Balaji of Karnataka and Chinna Rathod Govind of Telangana State were found carrying 400 kg of ganja in 20 plastic bags worth ₹8 lakh by a van. In another case, 54 kg of Ganja was seized from Jeeram Ramireddy of Y. Ramavaram mandal in East Godavari at Madduluru junction. In this case, Marigela Tata Rao and Marigela Narayana absconded from the spot. Gopiseti Kumar and Bejjipuram Srinivasa Rao of Vijayawada were arrested.

₹8.30 CRORE SANCTIONED TO AKNU

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 13

The Central Government sanctioned ₹8.30 crore for the establishment of a swimming pool and indoor stadium in Adikavi Nannayya University. Rajamahendravaram MP Margani Bharat said that the central team visited the University previously and sent proposals of ₹20.85 crore for setting up the international stadium in the University and Khel India sanctioned ₹8.30 crore in the first phase. He said that a film institute would come up to the University soon, and Nannayya Museum will be established at a cost of ₹12 crore and set up a Human Resources Centre in the University. He also said that educational institutions run by Hithakarini Samajam would be merged with the education department soon.

Ugadi celebrations were celebrated at the MP camp office on Tuesday.

Vaccine made mandatory for frontline people

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 13

Health officials said 1.2 lakh doses arrived in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday, and of them 80,000 were dispatched to Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts. They said Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam received 40,000 each and Vizianagaram 38,000.

Health officials of the three districts said it has been mandatory for frontline workers left over to get inoculated, after which others who have crossed 45 will get the dose.

"All the doses will be given on a single day on Wednesday," said Visakhapatnam district immunisation officer Dr Jeevan Rani. Officials of

Health officials of the three districts said it has been mandatory for frontline workers left over to get inoculated, after which others who have crossed 45 will get the dose.

Srikakulam and Vizianagaram also said they would wind off the process in a day.

All the village and ward secretariats have been asked to be ready to complete the process. In Visakhapatnam, all the 27 urban health centres, government hospitals and PHCs in the agency will conduct the process.

There has been a demand for the vaccine as the districts have shown a sudden spike in cases during the last week.

AP records 4,228 +ve cases, 10 deaths

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 13

Andhra Pradesh continues to register a surge in fresh cases of Coronavirus infections day by day, almost from April 1 onwards in the second wave of the pandemic and it recorded 4,228 cases and 10 deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported here that out of 35,582 samples tested, 4,228 persons were found infected with confirmed Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,54,98,728 persons tested for Covid-19 so far in the state, 9,32,892 were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,99,721 recovered while undergoing treatment while 25,850 are still active with the virus.

Chittoor district found to be the worst hit by continuing to register the highest number of Covid-19 infections daily and on Tuesday, it registered 842, followed by 622 in Guntur, 538 in East Godavari, 414 in Visakhapatnam, 334 in Kadapa, 284 in Prakasam,

271 in Srikakulam, 268 in Nellore, 261 in Krishna, 130 in Vizianagaram, 128 in Anantapur, 88 in Kurnool and 48 in West Godavari.

Among Coronavirus cumulative active cases, Chittoor recorded the highest at 4,947 followed by 3,246 in Guntur, 3,043 in Visakhapatnam, 2,876 in Krishna, 1,939 in Nellore, 1,743 in Srikakulam, 1,558 in East Godavari, 1,531 in Prakasam, 1,480 in Kurnool, 1,323 in Kadapa, 1,157 in Anantapur, 710 in Vizianagaram and 297 in West Godavari.

With regard to the Covid-19 deaths, Chittoor district registered four, followed by two in Nellore and one each in Guntur, Krishna, Kurnool and Visakhapatnam, raising the death toll to 7,321.

The state health authorities discharged 1,483 Covid-19 infected patients after recovery in the last 24 hours.

AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,90,238 samples per one million population and registered the a positive rate of 6.02.

Araku tourism hit for second year

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 13

Summer tourism of Araku valley draws blank for the second consecutive year with a handful of locals visiting attractive places like Borra caves, Ananthagiri, Araku Valley and Chhaprai.

"Only a few hundreds of local people are visiting the valley, and they are not staying overnight. The second wave surge has scared many outsiders, and for the second consecutive year, no tourist from West Bengal visited the Agency," said the divisional manager of AP Tourism Development Corporation, Giri Prasad Reddy.

Talking to *DC* on Tuesday, Reddy said AP TDC hotels and resorts were booked till Ugadi as three holidays preceded the festival, but no fresh enquiries were received. Rajdhani Hotel, the best

and famous hotel in Araku Valley, has no visitors, and the management is not hoping to get any customers in the immediate future due to the surge in the second wave of Covid-19.

"By this time, all our 33 rooms were getting filled and till the onset of southwest monsoons, the rush remained. Many stayed in tents due to lack of accommodation. But after the virus outbreak last March, things have changed for the worse for agency hotels," said a hotel representative.

He said though the agency is free from the virus since last November, only young couples visit the valley and return by 4 pm. He added that this would hit hard on the people who depended on tourism for gainful employment.

Last year the government opened up hotels after June 10.

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 13

The Ramzan prayers would be performed once again amidst restrictions imposed by the government in the wake of a surge in Coronavirus cases. The Muslims had observed Ramzan fast under the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic last year also.

The Islamic month of Ramzan, which is considered a holy month by the Muslims, will begin on

Wednesday. The government has issued a set of Corona guidelines for the prayers to be conducted in mosques.

The AP State Waqf Board (APSWB) issued a circular on the commencement of Ramzan instructing all managing bodies of Waqf institutions to make necessary arrangements at mosques and Idgah grounds to avoid inconvenience to the namazis following the Covid-19 protocol.

According to APSWB's



A priest offers prasadam to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy after Panchanga Sravanam on the occasion of Ugadi celebrations on Tuesday. — DC

Plava Nama begins on fruitful note in Tirumala

Navadhanya art and Janur art steals the show on Ugadi

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 13

On the auspicious occasion of Plavanama Ugadi, the Garden wing of TTD made spectacular floral decorations that caught the attention of the devotees on Tuesday.

Starting from the temple entrance to Golden Threshold, the dioramas made of fruits and flowers brought an aesthetic feel of Bhooloka Vaikuntha to the pilgrims.

Matching the occasion, splendid decorations were made in a big way with tonnes of varieties of traditional flowers and thousands of cut flowers. Florists, cutlery artists from Karnataka, and AP did decorations with innovative concepts.

On the whole, eight tonnes of traditional flowers, 70,000 cut flowers were donated by donors from Hyderabad, Salem, while decorations were done by artists from Vijayawada and Bengaluru.

This year unique dioramas using Janur art for the first time were displayed, which stood as a special attraction. Janur art is one where the floral decorations are made using Coconut leaves as the supportive background over a steel mesh.

The roof of Dhwaaja Mandapam was decked with Tooti-Frooti sky with varieties of fruits, flowers hanging colourfully. Another special attraction was Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy, made of Navadhanayas.

The Dasavataras in watermelon also remained a cynosure inside the temple while the elephants, Sri Krishna Leela, outside the temple caught the attention of pilgrims. Garden Superintendent of TTD Srinivasulu supervised the arrangements.

UGADI IS FESTIVAL OF MOTHER NATURE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 13

Ugadi is usually revered as the festival of Mother Nature since the perfect spring season begins during this time, said Hindu Dharma Prachara Parishat secretary Rajago-

palan. Ugadi Mahotsavam was observed with grandeur in Mahati Auditorium in Tirupati on Tuesday. The Plavanama Ugadi was welcomed in a befitting way Mangaladhwani, Veda Swasti, Bhakti Sangeet, traditional fancy dress.

entry and exit of the mosque must be maintained," it directed.

The Namazis/Musallies visiting the waqf institutions must use masks mandatorily and follow social distance. Hugging and handshake need to be avoided. Only asymptomatic persons would be allowed in the mosques. Senior citizens, children and people with cough, cold or fever are advised to avoid visiting the masjid.

The APSWB has also

schemes to be implemented.

June 2021
YSR Cheyutha, Jagananna Vidya Kanuka and other regular schemes to be taken up.

July 2021
The second phase of the Jagananna Vidya Devena, the YSR Kapu Nestham, the YSR Vahana Mitra and other regular schemes to be implemented.

August 2021
Zero Interest loans to farmers (Kharif-2020), Industrial subsidies to MSMEs and spinning mills, the YSR Nethanna Nestham, the payments to Agrigold victims and other regular schemes.

September 2021
YSR Aasara and other regular schemes.

October -2021
Second phase of the YSR

Rytu Bharosa, the Jagananna Chedodu, the Jagananna Thodu and other regular schemes.

November -2021
YSR EBC Nestham and other regular schemes.

December -2022
Second phase of the Jagananna Vasati Devena and third phase of the Jagananna Vidya Devena, the YSR Law Nestham and other regular schemes.

January- 2022
The third phase of YSR Rytu Bharosa, the Jagananna Amma Vodi, the increase of YSR Pension amount to ₹2,500 and other regular schemes.

February- 2022
The fourth phase of the Jagananna Vidya Devena and other regular schemes.

Covid hits Ugadi celebrations

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 13

The traditional Ugadi celebrations remained muted in Godavari districts because of the surging cases of Covid-19 disease.

The state government used to celebrate Ugadi as an official festival by arranging Panchanga Sravanam (citation of the Telugu new almanac calendar) programme, recitation of poetry and other cultural activities.

The government could not celebrate the festival officially due to Covid-19 lockdown last year. This year also the Ugadi celebrations were low-profile

and officials did not take up any culture programmes due to the second wave of Covid scare. Though there was no lockdown this year, the state culture department has not given permission or issued any instructions to the district administrations to hold the festival.

Many poets and artists who were eagerly waiting for the fete to prove their talent and also receive awards, were disappointed. Sources, however, said the shortage of funds at the culture department is another reason for the muted celebrations.

"We welcome the government's decision to suspend the official celebration of traditional festivals like "Ugadi" to prevent gathering at one place. But the government did not ban other programmes which led to overcrowding. For example, the government has held felicitation functions to volunteers, which was attended by thousands of people", said Chinta Gopi Sarma Siddanti, an almanac writer and also Bhuvaneshwari Peetham chief at Peddapuram.

SPIRITUAL BOOKS RELEASED

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 13

A series of spiritual books released on the auspicious day of Plavanama Samvatsara Telugu Ugadi on Tuesday in Tirumala. TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy, EO Dr K.S.

Jawahar Reddy released these books in Ranganayakula Mandapam.

They said the coffee table book gives a broad view of Tirumala temple and TTD activities while the five other spiritual books written by Vedic exponents.

JAGAN WISHES RAMADAN KAREEM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 13

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy wished the Muslims of Telugu states on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. He wished that all the Muslim brothers and sisters would observe this holy month of fasting, which is observed with strict observance of the rules and regulations for a month, and may Allah bless them.

Mr Jagan said that this month is of utmost importance to Muslims as the revelation of the Holy Quran by the great Prophet Muhammad took place during the month of Ramadan. He said Ramadan is not only the initiation of fasting, but also the great initiation into eradicating evil feelings, iniquity and hatred in man.

ASTANAM HELD AT KASAPURAM HANUMAN SHRINE

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, APRIL 13

Ugadi astanam held at Kasapuram Lord Hanuman temple in Guntakal mandal in the district. The historic temple has a tradition of annual Ugadi celebrations every year. In view of the Covid 19 pandemic, the endowment department took necessary measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 during the Telugu New Year celebrations that started on Tuesday.

The Hanuman temple has five centuries-old historic as Sri Vyasaraja Theertha, Rajaguru of Vijayanagar Empire consecrated the Lord Hanuman statue found inside a tree near Nettikanti in Guntakal mandal. As part of his tour, the saint set up the idol of Lord Hanuman by inserting a saligram in one of the eyes of Lord Hanuman statue. The temple became a healing centre for people with psychological disorders, mostly with demons' assumptions.

The Hanuman temple has been part of Ugadi Celebrations every year. The Anantapur endowment department assistant commissioner Ramanjineyulu led celebrations at Kasapuram temple. As part of celebrations, panchanga shravanam was held at temple premises. Gramotsavam held in the main streets of Kasapuram on Tuesday night.

Assistant commissioner Ramanjineyulu said the Covid-19 norms being followed at all parts of temple premises.

DON'T INDULGE IN BETTING: SP

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 13

The East Godavari Superintendent of Police urged the cricket lovers and the youths not to indulge in any cricket betting and fall into a trap of cricket bookies on the eve of IPL match. He said that the cricket bookies are making use of the innocence of the youths.

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SHORT TAKES

K.J. JALEEL QUILTS AFTER LOKAYUKTA INDICTMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
APRIL 13

Kerala higher education minister K.T. Jaleel who was indicted by Lokayukta for nepotism, abuse of power and breach of oath of office, resigned here on Tuesday.

Jaleel sent his resignation to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and the latter forwarded it to Governor Arif Mohammad Khan.

In an emotional Facebook post Jaleel said that those who were baying for his blood could find some relief now. The minister's resignation came hours before the Kerala High Court was scheduled to hear his plea challenging the Lokayukta damning report.

In his petition Jaleel had contended that the Lokayukta findings were not based on evidence or proper investigations, hence the ruling should be set aside by the high court. The Lokayukta had indicted him of appointing his close relative K.T. Adeb by altering the educational qualifications needed for the post of general manager, state minorities development finance corporation.

The division bench of Lokayukta had ruled that the charge of abuse of power, favouritism and nepotism against Jaleel had been proved.

It was the Muslim Youth League leadership which had first alleged that Jaleel's cousin Adeb, was appointed general manager, flouting rules.

At the time of appointment, Adeb was working as manager of a private bank.

This forum is satisfied that the allegation of abuse of power, favouritism, nepotism and violation of oath of office is substantiated against Dr K.T. Jaleel, minister for Higher education and minority welfare," the Lokayukta had observed.

Mistakes of past need not constrain our thinking: PM

Says experiences, expertise, resources must in the fight against pandemic

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented us an opportunity to reshape the world order and we must think of the entire humanity and not merely of those who are on our side of the borders, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday, adding that "we in India have tried to walk the talk (and) have tried to protect our own 1.3 billion citizens from the pandemic" but that despite many constraints, India had still "supplied vaccine to over 80 countries". Acknowledging that "the supplies have been modest" and the "demands huge", he said it would "be a long time before the entire humanity can be vaccinated".

Advocating that that "humanity as a whole must be at the centre of our thinking and action", PM Modi promised that India would continue to share its "experiences, expertise and resources with the entire humanity in the fight against the pandemic", adding that the "mistakes and misdeeds of the past seven decades need not constrain our thinking for the future".

PM Modi further pointed out that "while humanity has not faced the Third World War, the threat of violence has not reduced in people's lives" and that "with a number of proxy wars and unending terror attacks, the prospect of violence is ever present".

The Prime Minister was delivering an address at



Guest workers arriving from Maharashtra rest outside Patna junction on Tuesday, as Coronavirus cases spike across the country. — PTI

the four-day sixth edition of the Raisina Dialogue conference in the Capital that began in Virtual format on Tuesday. Calling upon the participants "to emerge as a powerful voice for a human centric approach", he reminded them that "while we may be used to having Plan A and plan B, there is no Planet B, only planet Earth" and that "we must remember that we hold this planet merely as trustees for our future Generations".

The Raisina Dialogue is "India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics, held annually since 2016" and is "jointly organised by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the (think-tank) Observer Research Foundation (ORF).

PM Modi said, "Is it per-

haps because in the race of economic development the concern for welfare of humanity has been left behind. Is it perhaps because in the age of competition, the spirit of cooperation has been forgotten. After the end of the second world war, over the next few decades many structures and institutions were created but under the shadow of the two wars they were aimed at answering only one question, how to prevent the Third World War? Today, I submit to you that this was the wrong question, as a result all the steps taken were like treating a patient symptoms without addressing the underlying causes. Or to put it differently, all the steps taken were to prevent the last war not the next one."

Maha Imposes Stern Curbs Till May 1

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, APRIL 13

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday announced imposition of prohibitory orders — the section 144 of CrPC (sanchar-bandhi) from 8.00 pm on Wednesday to 7.00 am May 1 in order to break the chain of the Coronavirus.

Public transport will continue to function only for essential workers and for essential activities for general public.

"Nobody would be allowed to use the public transport without a valid reason excluding the people notified under essential services in an order

CONG: KUMBH RETURNEES MAY WORSEN CRISIS

Mumbai: Senior Congress leader and Maharashtra Cabinet minister Asalam Shaikh criticised the BJP led-Uttarakhand government for not enforcing the Covid related norms in Kumbh Mela. Shaikh stated that these were the same people who alleged that Tablighi Jamaat had spread the virus. Shiv Sena Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut also expressed apprehension that the people returning from Kumbh mela in Haridwar will turn out to be potential carriers of Covid.

issued by the disaster management unit of the Relief and Rehabilitation department," Thackeray said in his video address to people.

Stating that the situation is very grim in Maharashtra, Thackeray said that the government would use this 15 days period to scale up its health infrastructure.

The Maharashtra on Tuesday reported 60,212 new cases taking total positive cases to 5,93,042. The state also reported 281 deaths on Tuesday.

Underlining the shortage of oxygen and Remdesivir injection among other things, Thackeray said, "at present, 1,200 MT oxygen is being produced in our state."

Didi calls off Dharna as EC acts against three BJP leaders

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, APRIL 13

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday wrapped up her dharna in protest against the Election Commission's "undemocratic and unconstitutional" ban on her campaign for 24 hours in the Assembly election within few hours after the Election Commission ordered similar steps, in a balancing act, against three Bharatiya Janata Party leaders — Rahul Sinha, state chief and Midnapore MP Dilip Ghosh and Nandigram candidate Suvendu Adhikari — over their controversial remarks.

Though the Trinamul Congress supremo had announced she would sit on dharna from 12 noon, she reached the Gandhi Statue at the Maidan, which falls under the authority of the Army's Eastern Command as it is defence land, quite early.

From 11.45 am Banerjee, in her wheelchair, began her silent protest, also a rare scene, sitting there alone.

As she was seen talking on her mobile before getting busy at painting, it came to light that her party's application to the defence ministry for permission for her demonstration at the venue was yet to be cleared.

Eastern Wing Commander Mandeep Huda said: "We have received the application from the Trinamul Congress for a no objection certificate for the Gandhi statue protest. It was received at 9.40 am today. It is under process. We have not yet issued the NOC for that. We are processing it as per laid down procedures and guidelines."

Meanwhile the EC, in wake of the TMC's questions on its impartiality,

ordered a 48-hour campaign ban, starting from 12 noon on Tuesday, on Habra Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Rahul Sinha for his inflammatory remarks on the killings of four persons by the Central paramilitary forces at Shitalkuchi in Cooch Behar during the fourth phase of the polls.

"Not four, eight people should have been shot dead by the Central forces there! The Central forces should be issued a show-cause notice asking why they killed only four and not eight. Goons are trying to deprive people of their democratic rights. Central forces responded appropriately. If it happens again, they will answer again," the former state Bharatiya Janata Party president had claimed at a campaign rally on Monday.

After the order, he however said: "I hold the EC in high respect. But it is a severe punishment to me."

The EC also served a show-cause notice to Ghosh directing him to explain his recent threat to "repeat the Shitalkuchi-style killings at many places" during the polls by 10 am on Wednesday.

The poll panel also warned and advised Adhikari, after getting his reply to its notice on his "begum" remark, in a veiled reference to Banerjee, and his assertion that voting for his political opponent would imply voting for a "mini-Pakistan", "to desist from using such statements while making public utterances during the period when the Model Code of Conduct is in force".

Five hours before the end of the ban on her campaign, Banerjee cut short her dharna at around 3 pm and headed for home at Harish Chatterjee Street in Kalighat.

WORLD

Vatican probe: U.S. Bishop quits

Rome, April 13: A Minnesota bishop who was investigated by the Vatican for allegedly interfering with past investigations into clergy sexual abuse has resigned.

The Vatican said Tuesday that Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Bishop Michael Hoeppner and named a temporary replacement to run the Crookston diocese. The Vatican did not say why Francis accepted the resignation, but the Vatican in 2019 authorised an investigation into claims that Hoeppner had engaged in "acts or omissions intended to interfere with or avoid civil or canonical investigations of clerical sexual misconduct."

HK's LEGISLATIVE POLL TO TAKE PLACE IN DEC.

Hong Kong, April 13: Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said Tuesday that the semiautonomous Chinese territory's legislative elections will take place in December, more than a year after they were postponed by authorities citing public health risks from the Coronavirus pandemic.

Lam also said that laws will be amended so that inciting voters not to vote or to cast blank or invalid votes will be made illegal, although voters themselves are free to boycott voting or cast votes as they wish. "When a person willfully obstructs or prevents any person from voting at an election, we will consider it corrupt conduct," said Lam.

Lam said that the elections will take place on Dec. 19. The elections were initially slated to be held last September. Lam was speaking a day ahead of the first reading of draft amendments to various laws in the city's legislature, to accommodate Beijing's planned changes to the city's electoral system. Beijing in March announced changes to Hong Kong's electoral system, expanding the number of seats in the legislature while reducing the number of directly-elected seats from 35 to 20.

The move is part of a two-phase effort to rein in political protest and opposition in Hong Kong, which is part of China but has had a more liberal political system.

Iran to enrich uranium to highest level

Dubai, April 13: Iran will begin enriching uranium to 60 per cent purity, higher than the programme ever has before though still short of weapons grade, after an attack on its Natanz nuclear facility, an Iranian negotiator said Tuesday. The announcement marks a significant escalation after the sabotage, suspected to have been carried out by Israel. It could result in further action by Israel, whose Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed never to allow Tehran to obtain a nuclear weapon, and further raise tensions across the Mideast. Nuclear negotiator Abbas Araghchi's comment, quoted by the state-run IRNA news agency, came after Iran's foreign minister warned that the weekend assault could hurt ongoing negotiations over its tattered atomic deal with world powers.

Those talks are aimed at finding a way for the United States to re-enter the agreement, the goal of which is to limit Iran's enrichment of uranium in exchange relief on sanctions.

Iran had been enriching up to 20 per cent. That is a short technical step to weapons-grade levels of 90 per cent.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said it was aware of the media reports but had no comment at the time. Press TV, the Iranian state televi-

JAPAN'S MOVE TO RELEASE N-PLANT WATER: CHINA OBJECTS

Beijing, April 13: China on Tuesday objected to Japan's move to release treated radioactive water from the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant into the sea, warning Tokyo that "it reserves the right to make further reactions". Japan decided on Tuesday to release treated radioactive water from crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant into the sea, having assessed there will be no negative impact on human health or the environment despite concerns from local fishermen and neighbouring countries, Japan Times reported. Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga met with members of his Cabinet to formalise the decision. — PTI

sion's English-language arm, separately said that the IAEA had been informed of the move.

It said the enrichment would begin as of Wednesday. The broadcaster also quoted the negotiator as saying Iran would introduce another 1,000 centrifuges at Natanz, without elaborating. — AP

US suggests 'pause' in use of J&J vax over blood clot fears

Recommendations by health authorities is blow to immunisation campaign

Washington, April 13: US health authorities recommended a "pause" Tuesday in the use of the Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine "out of an abundance of caution" over potential links to a rare type of blood clot, in a blow to the country's immunisation campaign. The disorder appears similar to that observed in rare cases of people who received the AstraZeneca vaccine in Europe — and the shots by both companies are based on adenovirus vector technology. The US Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control are assessing the "potential significance" of six reported cases of a type of clot in the brain called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST) in combination with low levels of blood platelets (thrombocytopenia).

All the cases involved women between the ages of 18 and 48, and symptoms occurred six to 14 days after vaccination.

As of Monday more than 6.8 million doses of the single-shot J&J vaccine had been administered in the US — meaning that the rare effect appears to have been detected in around one in a million cases.

"People who have received the J&J vaccine who develop severe headache, abdominal pain, leg pain, or shortness of breath within three weeks after



Demonstrators argue with police in riot gear during a protest against restriction measures to curb the spread of Covid-19, at the Circus Maximus in Rome, on Tuesday.

vaccination should contact their health care provider," the FDA said. The CDC will convene a meeting of a top expert committee on Wednesday to further assess these cases and their significance, and the FDA will also carry out its own investigation. "Until that process is complete, we are recommending this pause out of an abundance of caution," it said, to ensure the medical community was aware of the development and could develop appropriate treatment plans. The pause deals a hit to

the United States' Covid vaccination campaign, which has so far administered 45 percent of the adult population at least one dose — among the most rapid rates in the world.

The J&J vaccine was celebrated for the fact it can be stored at fridge temperature and requires just one dose — unlike Pfizer and Moderna that need two and require freezing.

But even before the pause, the company was affected by supply problems after a contractor spoiled 15 million doses that never ended up shipping. Nonetheless, with Pfizer

and Moderna continuing to deliver their hundreds of millions of promised doses on time, the US is likely to maintain a high vaccination pace.

The FDA said that normally, an anticoagulant drug called heparin is used to treat these blood clots, but in this case administering heparin might be dangerous.

That might be because the disorder resembles a rare reaction to heparin, in which the body forms antibodies in response to the thinner which in turn triggers platelets to form dangerous clots. — AFP

J&J DELAYS EUROPE VAX ROLLOUT

Berlin, April 13: Johnson & Johnson said Tuesday it is delaying the rollout of its Coronavirus vaccine in Europe amid a US probe into reports of rare blood clots in some recipients.

The announcement came after regulators in the United States said they were recommending a "pause" in administration of the single-dose shot to investigate reports of potentially dangerous blood clots. "We have been reviewing these cases with European health authorities," Johnson & Johnson said.

"We have made the decision to proactively delay the rollout of our vaccine in Europe," The delay is a further blow to vaccination drives in European nations, plagued by supply shortages, logistical problems and concerns over unusual blood clots in a small number of people who received the AstraZeneca vaccine. The blood clot reports prompted several countries to limit the vaccine to older age groups, which are more at risk from serious illness when infected with Covid-19. The European Medicines Agency, the EU's equivalent to the FDA, said last Friday that it was reviewing cases reported in the US of blood clotting. — AP

500 troops to be added by US in Germany: Austin

Berlin, April 13: Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin announced on Tuesday that he is expanding the US military presence in Germany by 500 troops, suggesting he will not carry out a Trump administration order to withdraw thousands of them. "This planned increase in US personnel under-

scores our commitment to Germany and the entire NATO alliance," Austin said in a notable counterpoint to the Trump administration's repeated complaints that Germany is a weak partner on defence and security.

Austin made the announcement after talks with German Defence Minister

Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer on his first tour of Europe since becoming Pentagon chief in January. Kramp-Karrenbauer welcomed the announcement as a "strong signal" of a healthy US-German relationship. They also discussed a pending decision by President Joe Biden on whether to withdraw com-

pletely from Afghanistan by May 1, a deadline the Trump administration pledged to the Taliban militants.

Germany is a key part of the US-led coalition in Afghanistan. Austin said at a joint news conference with Kramp-Karrenbauer that the extra 500 US troops will be stationed

permanently in Germany's Wiesbaden area as early as this fall.

"These forces will strengthen deterrence and defence in Europe. They will augment our existing abilities to prevent conflict, and, if necessary, fight and win," Austin said in prepared remarks. "This move will also create more

space, more cyber, and more electronic warfare capabilities in Europe," he added, and he said it will "greatly improve our ability to surge forces at a moment's notice to defend our allies."

Last year, President Donald Trump ordered the withdrawal of 12,000 troops from Germany as

retribution for what he considered Germany's refusal to spend more on its own defence. Austin suspended that move shortly after taking office. He said decisions on troop levels would be made as part of a comprehensive review of the US military presence around the world, including in Europe. — AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,544.06	1.38
Nifty 50	14,504.80	1.36
S&P 500*	4,133.82	0.14
Dollar (₹)	75.06	-0.40
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.11	-0.69
Euro (₹)	89.33	-0.50
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,093▼130	0.28
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	63.99	1.12
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.011	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.661	-0.015

China's March exports rise 30.6% as demand revives

China's exports rose 30.6 per cent over a year ago in March as global consumer demand strengthened and traders watched for signs of what President Joe Biden might do about reviving tariff war talks with Beijing. Exports rose to 241.1 billion, decelerating from the dramatic 60.6 per cent rebound in the first two months of 2021, customs data showed. Imports rose 38.1 per cent over a year ago to 227.3 billion in a sign of reviving Chinese activity.



■ Dues to Centre, states, staff extinguish with plan passage SC: Dues not payable if not part of IBC resolution plan

New Delhi, April 13: In an important judgement, the Supreme Court on Tuesday held that all dues, including statutory ones, payable by ailing companies to the Centre, states and their tax authorities shall stand extinguished if they are not part of approved resolution plan to revive firms under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

The apex court said the principal objects of IBC is to provide for revival of the Corporate Debtor and to make it a going concern and remedied the mischief by which tax and other authorities used to keep pursuing such companies to pay their dues leading to a situation which made resolution plans for their revival unworkable.

A bench comprising justices R. F. Nariman, B. R. Gavai and Hrishikesh Roy, deciding a batch of pleas against several orders of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, held



that the 2019 amendment made to a provision of the IBC is clarificatory and declaratory in nature and so will be effective from the date on which IBC has come into effect in 2016.

As per the amendment made in 2019 in section 31 of IBC, any debt in respect of the payment of dues arising under any law for the time being in force, including the ones owed to the Central Government, any State Government or any local authority, which does not form a part of the approved resolution plan, shall stand extinguished.

Once a resolution plan is duly approved by the adju-

dicating authority, the claims as provided in the resolution plan shall stand frozen and will be binding on the Corporate Debtor and its employees, members, creditors, including the Central Government, any State Government or any local authority, guarantors and other stakeholders, Justice Gavai, who wrote the 139-page judgement, said.

It said on the date of approval of the resolution plan, all claims, which are not a part of the resolution plan, shall stand extinguished and no person will be entitled to initiate or continue any proceedings

in respect to a claim which is not part of the revival package. Consequently all the dues, including the statutory dues owed to the Central Government, any State Government or any local authority, if not part of the resolution plan, shall stand extinguished and no proceedings in respect of such dues for the period prior to the date on which the Adjudicating Authority grants its approval under Section 31 could be continued, the bench held.

The top court was faced with the question whether any creditor, including central or state governments, was bound by the Resolution Plan once it is approved by an adjudicating authority under IBC.

The other issue was as to whether after approval of the resolution plan a creditor is entitled to initiate any proceedings for recovery of any of the dues from the corporate debtor, which are not a part of the Resolution Plan. — PTI

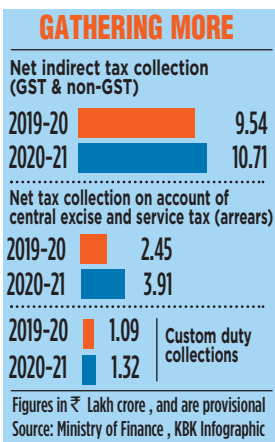
Indirect taxes up 12% in FY21

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 13

Helped by a 59 per cent increase in excise duties, the country's indirect tax collections went up 12.3 per cent in the pandemic-hit FY21.

Indirect tax collections--which include GST, customs, central excise and service tax arrears--for FY21 stood at Rs 10.71 lakh crore against the actual collections of Rs 9.54 lakh crore in FY20, as per the provisional figures published by the Ministry of Finance. The collections are 8.29 per cent higher than the revised estimates of Rs 9.89 lakh crore.

Central excise and service tax arrears in FY21 grew 59 per cent to Rs 3.91 lakh crore compared to Rs 2.45 lakh crore in the previous fiscal. Diesel and petrol



are the biggest contributors to excise duties and the multiple hikes in petrol and diesel prices throughout the fiscal supported the increase in excise duties despite lower consumption.

Net customs duty collec-

tions too registered a growth of 21 per cent to Rs 1.32 lakh crore compared to Rs 1.09 lakh crore in the previous fiscal.

However, net tax collection on account of GST of the Centre, which includes CGST, IGST and compensation cess, was down 8 per cent to Rs 5.48 lakh crore against Rs 5.99 lakh crore in the previous financial year. Considering the sub-subsided economy, the revised estimates of net GST collection was kept at Rs 5.15 lakh crore.

The GST collections were severely affected in the first half of the financial year on account of the Covid-led disruptions. However, in the second half, the GST collections registered a good growth and collections exceeded Rs 1 lakh crore in each of the last six months.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

NON-LIFE GROSS DIRECT PREMIUM UP 5% IN FY21

New Delhi, April 13: The gross direct premium written by the non-life insurance companies saw a 5.2 per cent rise in 2020-21 to Rs 1,98,734.68 crore, Irdai data showed. All the non-life insurance companies had written gross direct premium of Rs 1,88,916.61 crore in 2019-20. In March 2021, the total premium by all the players stood at Rs 19,298.85 crore, up by over 17 per cent from Rs 15,635.42 crore a year ago. Among the 25 general insurers, the total premium in FY21 rose by 3.35 per cent to Rs 1,69,840.05 crore. — PTI

BIS LICENCE FEE CUT FOR STARTUPS

New Delhi, April 13: The Centre slashed the annual marking fee to get a new BIS licence and certification by 50 per cent for micro-industry startups and women entrepreneurs. It also said the services of BIS are now made available free of cost to everyone and can be down-

loaded from e-BIS port. The Bureau of Indian Standards issues licences with a standard mark to help identify the unit which has made the product at a specific location. "The government has given 50 per cent rebate on (new) BIS certification of products for start-up, micro-industry and women entrepreneurs," minister Piyush Goyal tweeted. — PTI

INDIA-EU TRADE TALKS TO RESUME



Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said resumption of formal negotiations on India-EU trade deal during the leadership summit next month in Porto, Portugal, would help further strengthen ties with the European Union. The negotiations between India and the European Union on a free trade agreement have been stalled since May 2013, when both sides failed to bridge substantial gaps on crucial issues, including data security status for the IT sector. The negotiations with the 27-nation grouping were launched in June 2007. — PTI

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Bhuvneshwar is Player of Month

Dubai: Experienced India seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar on Tuesday won the ICC Player of the Month award for his superlative show in the limited overs series against England in March.

The 31-year-old Indian took six wickets at an economy rate of 4.65 in the three ODIs, while capturing four wickets at a fantastic economy rate of 6.38 in the five T20Is to emerge as the standout bowler on either side in the white ball series.

Bhuvneshwar became the third successive Indian recipient of the award since its inception early this year. — PTI

Kane wins Hadlee medal for 4th time

Wellington: New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson won his fourth Sir Richard Hadlee medal for excelling across formats and was also adjudged the 'Test Player of the Year' in the country's annual cricket awards on Tuesday.

Devon Conway won the men's ODI and T20 Player of the Year during the 2020-21 awards season which was conducted digitally for a second year running because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Williamson's incredible home Test summer helped him clinch the two awards alongside the Redpath Cup for first-class batting, after he amassed a whopping 639 runs in just four innings at an average of 159. — PTI

Wizards snap Jazz winning home run

Los Angeles: Bradley Bkeal scored 34 points and Russell Westbrook bagged a triple double as the Washington Wizards ended the Utah Jazz's 24-game home winning streak with a 125-121 victory in Salt Lake City on Monday. Donovan Mitchell delivered a 42-point gem for Utah but could not prevent the under-strength Western Conference leaders from sliding to a surprise defeat against a Wizards team struggling near the foot of the East. Utah, with Mike Conley and Jordan Clarkson absent from the line-up, looked to be racing towards a 25th straight home victory after a dazzling opening quarter saw them put up 42 points. — AFP

Star-studded field for India Open Marin, Momota among top entries as badminton action returns to India

New Delhi, April 13: Olympic champion Carolina Marin and World No. 1 Kento Momota will headline a star-studded field of international shuttlers when the India Open Super 500 event is held here from May 11 to 16, albeit behind closed doors due to the raging Covid-19 pandemic.

The \$400,000 tournament, one of the last few qualification events for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, has attracted 228 (114 men and 114 women) entries from 33 different national associations, including China.

However, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) said "due to the rapidly rising Covid-19 cases in the country, the tournament will be contested in a bio-secure bubble without spectators and media while implementing strict Covid-19 safety protocols."

"All the players and officials coming from South Africa, Brazil, Middle East and European countries including UK will be serving a 7-day quarantine period and have to report in the capital city



on May 3," BAI said in a release.

"... Players and officials from rest of the world can arrive on May 6 and undergo a 4-day quarantine period."

On the court, three-time world champion Marin will lead the women's singles category along with other Top-10 shuttlers such as Akane Yamaguchi, 2019 world

champion P.V. Sindhu, Korea's An Se-Young and Thailand's Pornpawee Chochuwong.

India boasts of the largest contingent with 48 players (27 women and 21

men), while Malaysia has fielded the second biggest squad with 26 shuttlers, which includes 10 women and 16 men.

A total of 10 shuttlers (4 women and 6 men) from China are also part of the participants list.

Among the men, two-time world champion Momota, defending champion Viktor Axelson, Anders Antonsen and reigning All England Open champion Zhi Jia Lee will be in the fray.

Srikanth Kidambi will lead the Indian charge along with B. Sai Pranee, H.S. Prannoy and Parupalli Kashyap. The last date for withdrawal of entry is April 19 while the draw will be announced on April 20.

The governing body said "Delhi Government will conduct RT-PCR test on arrival on May 3 and 6 as well as on May 9 and 14.

"We are really happy to finally be able to resume badminton action. But with the recent spike in cases, we have to be more cautious," BAI general secretary Ajay Singhania said. — PTI

SA WOMEN CRICKETERS STUCK IN BANGLADESH AFTER POSITIVE TEST

Dhaka, April 13: Five members of a South African women's cricket team have become stranded in Bangladesh after testing positive for Covid-19, officials said Tuesday.

Seventeen other members of the South Africa Emerging team left Bangladesh late Monday, before the country imposed a ban on international flights over a surge in new cases there.

The five remaining have been put into isolation in Dhaka, said Shafiu Alam Nadel of the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

"All members of the South African team gave Covid-19 test samples before their departure from Sylhet. Five of them tested positive," said Himangshu Lal Roy, deputy director of the

Osmani Medical College in the northeastern city.

The team's fifth match was due to start on Tuesday in Sylhet.

But they cut short the tour because of the flight ban, which will last from Wednesday until April 14, as part of efforts to combat the new spread of infections in the South Asian nation.

The five in isolation will be tested again and if the results are negative "we will send them back home at the earliest possible time," said Nadel.

Documents seen by AFP indicated that team manager Matshipi Marcia Letsoalo and players Sinalo Jaftha, Leah Jones, Nobulumko Baneti and Robyn Searle had been left behind. — AFP

Indian women to tour England in June-July

London, April 13: The Indian women's cricket team will play a historic one-off Test against England in Bristol as part of a multi-format series that will also feature three ODIs and as many T20 Internationals across June-July.

The Test will be played at the Bristol County Ground from June 16-19, kicking off the England team's summer. The match was first confirmed by BCCI secretary Jay Shah earlier this year but the exact date and venue were unveiled by the host board on Tuesday.

While the Indian women's team will take part in a Test for the first time since 2014, England

THE FIXTURES

■ June 16-19: Test match - Bristol County Ground
■ June 27: 1st ODI - Bristol County Ground
■ June 30: 2nd ODI - The Cooper Associates County Ground, Taunton
■ July 3: 3rd ODI - New Road, Worcester
■ July 9: 1st T20I - County Ground, Northampton
■ July 11: 2nd T20I - Central County Ground, Hove
■ July 15: 3rd T20I - The Cloudmont County Ground, Chelmsford.

last played a red-ball game during the 2019 Ashes.

The one-off Test will be followed by three ODIs and T20Is each with the tour concluding on July 15

in Chelmsford.

After announcing its home fixtures, England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chief executive officer Tom Harrison, said: "We're really looking forward to a busy summer in what is a huge year for our England Women's team, and we're very excited about hosting India and New Zealand."

"The two international series will sit either side of The Hundred, and with the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy and the new Regional Twenty20 competition running throughout the summer, it's a fixture list that offers a lot for both our players and our fans," Hrrison added. — PTI

TOKYO | OLYMPICS

No fans at torch relay in Osaka

Tokyo, April 13: The torch relay for the Tokyo Olympics ran through a mostly empty Osaka city park on Tuesday, showing the risks of trying to hold the postponed games during a pandemic.

It came on the same day that the government said new coronavirus cases in Osaka hit 1,099, a single-day record for Japan's second largest metropolitan area.

The torch relay began three weeks ago in north-eastern Japan, attempting to navigate around the pandemic with a total of 10,000 runners crisscrossing the country and bound for the opening ceremony on July 23 in Tokyo.

Osaka, which announced plans last week to take the relay off city streets and bar the public, became the first detour since the relay began. Organizers warned beforehand there may be more.

Wednesday's second leg in Osaka — the day the Tokyo countdown clock hits 100 day to go — will be in the same park under the same closed-doors conditions.

New Covid-19 cases are rising across Japan, where fewer than 1% of

● Osaka, which announced plans last week to take the relay off city streets and bar the public, became the first detour since the relay began.

residents have been vaccinated in very slow rollout. Japan has attributed about 9,500 deaths to Covid-19, far fewer than many countries but higher than most neighbours in Asia.

Osaka, Tokyo and other parts of Japan have declared "quasi-emergency" conditions until early May with bars and restaurants being asked to close by 8 pm.

Many runners arrived in Osaka's Expo '70 Commemorative Park by bus and ran short legs carrying the torch alongside metal barriers or in empty park space.

They were accompanied by security officials who jogged or walked alongside, and followed by an "escort" or "promotional" vehicle festooned with logos of major Olympic sponsors Coca-Cola and Toyota. — AP

EX-INDIA HOCKEY PLAYER BALBIR SINGH JR NO MORE

Chandigarh, April 13: Balbir Singh Junior, who was a member of the silver medal-winning 1958 Asian Games Indian hockey team, died here at the age of 88, his daughter Mandeep Samra said on Tuesday. He is survived by his wife, daughter and son. "My father passed away in sleep on Sunday morning due to heart failure," his daughter said.

His son is settled in Canada and could not attend the last rites of his father because of the pandemic. Born on May 2, 1932, at Sansarpur in Jalandhar, also known as the nursery of Indian hockey Balbir Singh Junior had played alongside legends like Balbir Singh Senior, Leslie Claudius, Prithipal Singh, Balkishan and Charles Stephen among others.

Singh took to hockey when he was six years old. He studied at Lyallpur Khalsa College in Jalandhar and was first selected to play for the Indian hockey team in 1951 during the tour of Afghanistan.

He was part of the Punjab state hockey team and also captained Panjab University team. — PTI

