

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | THURSDAY 8 | APRIL 2021

WEATHER



Max: 39°C
Min: 22°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Panguni 26
Tithi: Dhuvadhasi
Star: Sadhayam
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
Yamagandam: 6 am to 7.30 am
PRAYERS
Fajar: 4.50 am
Lunar: 12.16 pm
Asar: 3.25 pm
Maghrib: 6.21 pm
Isha: 7.33 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.33 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.15 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 3.49 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 4.35 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+1,24,886)	(+677)
1,29,24,682	1,66,885

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+3,986)
TN: 9,11,110 12,821

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

13,33,81,413

DEATHS
28,91,875

COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES
219

uorlometers.info

US envoy for climate John Kerry calls on PM Modi

New Delhi: United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday and discussed issues relating to climate, including a forthcoming summit of 40 world leaders. Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said the discussions focussed on the climate leaders' summit as well as issues in the context of the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

J&K police bans live coverage of encounters

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 7

The Jammu and Kashmir police has banned the "live" coverage of all encounters between the security forces and separatist militants and of "law and order situations", but used a somewhat obnoxious phrase to justify its plan to keep reporters and photographers away. "Don't interfere in the professional and bona fide duty of police and the security forces at encounter sites," IGP Ajay Kumar said.

COUNTER POINT



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

In D'company of Dangerous RGV

SRIRAM KARRI | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

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



ever. His intrepid courting of controversies with zeal, one

after another, is his passport into every slice of life. "I have done more genres than any other film director," he gasconades. "Maybe every single genre out there." "You have not done mythologies. Or a historical," me retorts, wondering if he would be offended. He, for sure, can't be offended. He has a more open mind than anyone else our society is familiar with.

He does not judge and wishes rather to understand. In a Dostoevsky-ish fervour, he focuses his emulous passion towards the truest subalterns of society - the rejects and the outcasts, the rebels against morality and the enemies of the state - criminals, underworld dons, hired assassins, and their ilk. "I don't believe in God, so I can't be interested in mythology," he says. **P4**

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Udhayanidhi Stalin replies to ECI notice



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Biden makes jab open to all adults

SPORT | 8

TN sailor Nethra set to qualify for Olympics



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Saratkumar, Radhika get 1-year RI in cheque case

Special court to try MPs/MLAs suspends order

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 7

A special court trying cases against members of parliament and legislative assemblies on Wednesday convicted and sentenced actor-turned-politician and former MLA R. Sarathkumar, his wife actor Radhika Sarathkumar and film producer Listin Stephen to one year's rigorous imprisonment each in connection with cheque bounce cases. Special judge N. Alicia suspended the sentence to enable the accused to file an appeal before a sessions court.

The conviction has come in case filed by Radiance Media Pvt. Ltd, a film financing company, against Mr Sarathkumar, the founder-president of All India Samathuva Makkal Katchi, before the Metropolitan Magistrate, Saidapet, Chennai. Magic Frames, a partnership firm, wherein Mr Sarathkumar and Ms



Sarathkumar, besides Mr Stephen were partners, were arrayed as accused. The cases were transferred to the special court, exclusively to try cases against MLAs and MPs, after its formation.

According to Abudukumar, counsel for the complainant, Magic Frames borrowed Rs 1.50 crore from Radiance Media in 2014, to make a film "Pambu Sattai" in 2015 and issued two cheques. Subsequently,



Mr Sarathkumar had obtained a hand loan of Rs 50 lakh from Radiance Media and issued five cheques for Rs 10 lakh each. Magic Frames had also promised to hand over the film's television rights or the rights of their next film if they were unable to return the money. Their properties in T.Nagar too were pledged for this loan. When the cheques were presented for payment, they were dishonoured,

forcing Radiance Media to file 7 cheque bounce cases, Mr Abudukumar added.

In the meantime, the three accused approached the Madras High Court to quash all the seven cases against them. However, Justice G.K. Ilanthiraiyan had on May 8, 2019 declined to quash all the seven criminal cases against Mr Sarathkumar while quashing five criminal cases against Ms Sarathkumar and Mr Stephen. The judge also directed the trial court to complete the trial within 6 months.

The judge imposed a fine of Rs 3 crore on all the three in respect of two cheque bounce cases. Of the fine amount of Rs 3 crore, Rs 2.80 crore should be paid as compensation to the complainant. The judge also imposed a fine of Rs 50 lakh on Mr Sarathkumar in respect of the remaining five cheque bounce cases, to be payable as compensation to the complainant.

INSIDE

US MILITARY WARNS CHINA ON FAST TRACK FOR TAIWAN

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

■ PAGE 5

The day after polls, the vigil on EVMs begin

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR, D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, APRIL 7

Though an eerie silence gripped the streets the day after the single phase election concluded with no major incident, political leaders and select cadre were busy in their own ways to ensure that the ballot boxes kept in the strong rooms across the country were well guarded.

After a hectic campaign for more than a month and a busy day coordinating the poll work, most of the leaders should have taken it easy on Wednesday. But it was not to be. AIADMK co-coordinator, Edappadi K. Palaniswami, who was in his hometown

Siluvampalayam, was busy discussing with party functionaries who called on him and with others over the phone.

AIADMK coordinator O. Panneerselvam was at his home in Periyakulam and engaged with a slew of visitors who had come to plan for the future.

DMK president M.K. Stalin, who had gone to the office of I-PAC, the agency that the DMK had engaged to devise the strategy for the 2021 polls, immediately after voting ended on Tuesday, was at Anna Arivalayam on Wednesday morning meeting party functionaries and cadre.

AMMK leader T.T.V. Dhinakaran remained in Kovilpatti, from where he

had contested the elections, ensuring that no hanky panky happened with the EVMs by assigning cadre to keep a vigil at the centre where they are stored.

MNM founder Kamal Haasan, too, stayed put in Coimbatore and also visited the college where the EVMs have been locked up, and Naam Tamizhar Katchi coordinator Seeman was at his home in Virugambakkam, devising the future strategy with party functionaries.

The EVMs from the 234 constituencies, meanwhile, were all placed in the strong rooms at the 75 centres across the state and a three tier security was thrown around to keep a round-the-clock vigil. ■ **P2**

MAOISTS RELEASE PIC OF MISSING COMMANDO

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC RAIPUR, APRIL 7

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

This development comes hours after the CPI (Maoist) issued a press release confirming that the missing CoBRA commando, Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, was in their custody as a "prisoner". **P4**

CHANGE IN STRATEGY

All workplaces with 100 takers can now offer jab

TN Covid-19 daily caseload nears 4K

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

In a bid to increase the Covid-19 vaccination coverage, the Centre on Wednesday allowed private companies to vaccinate their employees at workplaces from April 11.

In a letter to all states/Union territories, Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said this was done since a substantial proportion of the 45-plus population are in the organised sector of the economy and work in offices (private or government), or in manufacturing and services. He added that to increase access to vaccines for such people, Covid-19 sessions may be held at workplaces that have 100 or more willing beneficiaries by tagging these workplaces with the existing Covid vaccination centres and asking the states to launch this scheme by Sunday.

This change in the government's plan comes as the desired target for vaccinations is yet to be achieved and amid the raging debate on vaccine availability.

India on Wednesday had about 1.16 lakh fresh Covid-19 cases, while 630 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours. Due to rising cases, the Punjab government ordered a night curfew from 9 pm till 5 am and a ban on all political, social, cultural and sports gatherings.

The Serum Institute of India, that is making the Covishield vaccine in India, has got a legal notice from its partner AstraZeneca over delays in vaccine supplies. India has halted the export of vaccines in order to first cover its own population.

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 7

The daily Covid-19 tally neared the 4000 mark in the state on Wednesday, registering another spike. The state added 3,986 new cases against 3,612 cases reported on Tuesday. The steady increase in the number since mid-March, stoking fears of tough measures being used to contain the spread as in states such as Maharashtra.

Active cases, that too have been recording a sharp surge, have touched 27,743 on Wednesday. The

number was 21,958 cases on Sunday. Chennai's contribution to this table has gone up to 10,685 cases from 8,246 by the weekend. The city had an average 3000 active cases last month.

As per the state health department data, Chennai continues to be top contributor in the new cases tally with 1,459 cases, which is a rise from 1,234 on Sunday. Chengalpattu, which registered little more than 100 cases last week, has now become the second major contributor with 390 cases on Wednesday. ■ **P2**

MAHA CLAIM OF VACCINE SHORTAGE NOT TRUE: CENTRE

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

The Maharashtra government on Wednesday claimed it faced a shortage of vaccines and at present had vaccine doses only for the next three days, and some vaccination centres have to be shut due to this. Maharashtra has the highest number of Covid positive cases in the country. The Centre, however, refuted the claim. "Stocks of vaccine in the state and in Mumbai are only for the next three days. Today 14 lakh doses are available, which means there is only three days' stock," state health minister said. **P4**

COVID-19 SPIKE HAS RBI RETAIN INTEREST RATES

Mumbai, April 7: The Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday expectedly left interest rates unchanged and maintained an accommodative stance as the economy faces a renewed threat to growth due to the resurgence of coronavirus cases.

The central bank kept the benchmark repo-chase rate unchanged at 4 per cent and maintained accommodative policy stance to support growth.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the Monetary Policy Committee kept its estimate for economic growth unchanged at 10.5 per cent for the current fiscal. — **PTI**

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INDIA | USA | SINGAPORE | MALAYSIA | UAE | QATAR | KSA | OMAN | KUWAIT | BAHRAIN

OTHER STORY

NRI donates masks, sanitisers to students

R.VALAYAPATHY| DC PERAMBALUR, APRIL 7

Malaysia-based NRI Datho S. Pragadeesh Kumar has donated anti-covid accessories, including face masks and hand sanitisers, to 4,000 plus-2 students studying in government higher secondary schools across Perambalur district.

Pragadeesh Kumar and his father Suriyaprakasam distributed the kits to the students at a function in government higher secondary school at Poolambadi. They pledged to continue help for the betterment of the village.

Pragadeesh Kumar, hailing from Poolambadi-Perur village in Perambalur district, runs a business concern 'Plus Max' in India, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Dubai, Hongkong and Africa countries dealing in oil, liquid gas, brewery and duty-free shops, resorts, goods transport, construction activities and is involved in many people-welfare schemes.

The Malaysian government recognised his services and conferred the Datho award on him a couple of years ago.

He has spent a lot of money for improving basic amenities in his village in Perambalur district, including ₹28 lakh for improving the road network, ₹20 lakh for constructing a check dam, donating books to the local public library.

Pragadeesh Kumar and his father Suriyaprakasam distributed the kits to the students at a function in government higher secondary school at Poolambadi. They pledged to continue help for the betterment of the village.

HC seeks state's view on raising court fees

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 7

Without expressing any conclusive view on the quantum of increase in court fee, the Madras high court has said the state may reconsider as to whether the quantum of increase of court fee should be from ₹200 to ₹1,000 and from ₹200 to ₹2,000 in respect of writ petitions and writ appeals and in one-go.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy sought the state's view while passing interim orders on a PIL filed by K. Vasanth, an employee of Tasmac, challenging the increase in court fee.

According to Ayyadurai, counsel for the petitioner, 166 workmen of Tasmac filed claim petitions for



minimum wages. The labour court had rejected the same. If they want to file individual petitions before the Madras high court, they have to spend more than ₹1.5 lakh towards court fee because of the exorbitant increase in fee. Hence, the petitioner has filed the present petition, he added.

The bench said the case of the petitioner was that since the remedy under Article 226 of the Constitution of India was to enforce fundamental

rights that were guaranteed under the Constitution, the costs for availing such remedy should not be such that would exclude a class of persons from availing the remedy. The next argument was that when paltry amounts were charged for applying under Article 227 of the Constitution and for seeking bail or anticipatory bail or moving criminal appeals, the exorbitant increase in court fee for writ petitions and writ appeals appears incongruous, the bench added.

The bench said the petitioner has referred to the court fees being paid in other states and union territories and submitted that outside Tamil Nadu, court fee on writ petitions do not exceed ₹500 and in most places, the amount was ₹200.

The bench said, "at the end of the day, it is a matter of policy and the court will not interfere unless it finds complete arbitrariness or the possibility of manifest injustice resulting in the exclusion of class of citizens or court fees being fixed at such levels that shock the conscience of the court. Without expressing any conclusive view at this stage, since the quantum of increase appears to be significant from ₹200 to ₹1,000 and from ₹200 to ₹2,000, the state may reconsider as to whether the quantum of increase in respect of both writ petitions and writ appeals should be so much and in one-go. Let the matter appear three weeks hence for the State's view to be obtained. List the matter on April 28."

Strictly follow norms while constructing buildings for new medical colleges: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 7

The Madras high court has directed the state authorities to construct the buildings for the proposed national medical colleges to be set up in the state strictly in accordance with the applicable norms of the Medical Commission.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy further said it will be open to the commission to depurate personnel to inspect the nature of the construction on a periodic basis, if the commission so desires.

The bench said the medical commission has indi-

cated that the state has to make an application to the medical commission for permission and ultimate license to commence the medical colleges. The state should make such applications as expeditiously as possible and upon complying with all the applicable norms, the bench added.

The bench gave the directives while disposing of a Public Interest Litigation filed by N.Rajasekaran, which sought a direction to the authorities to constitute a committee to supervise as to whether the construction work was made as per the norms fixed by the Medical Council of India in respect of construction of buildings for

all the new upcoming Government Medical Colleges in the State of Tamil Nadu to start functioning from the academic year 2021-2022 in pursuance of the representation of the petitioner dated January 23, 2020.

The bench said there was no doubt that the Medical Commission will also oversee the construction work and the final permission for the medical colleges to operate has to be issued by the Medical Commission upon being satisfied that the construction and other facilities were in accordance with the norms and what may otherwise be required.

Restore intake of 60 seats courses offered by Nellai polytechnic college: HC to AICTE

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 7

The Madras high court has directed the All India Council for Technical Education to restore the intake of all the five diploma courses conducted by the Merit Polytechnic college, run by Merit Educational and Charitable Trust, in Tirunelveli district, for the academic year 2021-2022.

Justice B.Pugalendhi gave the directive while allowing the petition filed by Merit Educational and Charitable Trust.

"The petitioner college shall also ensure that the required norms of AICTE have been complied with", the judge added.

The judge said, "Considering the rival sub-

missions made and also taking into account that the petitioner's college is in existence from the year 2011 and approval was also granted to the petitioner's college for an intake of 60 seats all along and the petitioner college was conducting the diploma courses for the past 10 years with an intake of 60 seats, this petition is allowed directing the respondents (AICTE) to restore the intake of all the five diploma courses (Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Electronic and Communication Engineering and Computer Science & Engineering) to 60 seats conducted by the petitioner college for the academic year 2021-2022".

HC upholds transfer of special revenue inspector

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 7

Pointing out that if a person is charged with misconduct, then the said person has got to be transferred or shifted and in that case, it will be construed as a stigma, is an ancient theory, the Madras high court has upheld an order of the authorities, transferring a special revenue inspector, who is facing a criminal case, from Salem district to Tirupattur district to a non-sensitive post, due to administrative reasons.

Justice S.Vaidyanathan dismissed the petition filed by G.Srinivasan, challenging his transfer.

The judge said the reference made with regard to the criminal case against the petitioner in the subject column of the impugned order was only for the purpose of indication of the case that was pending and not otherwise. Even assuming for the sake of argument that if it was taken that the order of transfer was a punishment and not an administrative reason, pending trial includes passing of final orders. It was true that a criminal case was pending against the petitioner and he can be transferred to a non-sensitive post. When the DVAC case was pending against the petitioner, there was nothing wrong in transferring and posting him in a far off place in a non-sensitive post. Mere description of the pendency of the criminal case in the subject cannot be said to be arbitrary, biased or illegal. It was pertinent to mention here that if a person was charged with misconduct, then the said person has got to be transferred or shifted and in that case, it will be construed as a stigma, was an ancient theory. Under some pretext or the other, orders were obtained against the order of transfer, with which, employees attempt to serve for decades in the same place.

Man fatally assaults step-daughter, in judicial custody

Pathanamthitta, April 7: A 23-year-old man was remanded in judicial custody on Wednesday for allegedly fatally assaulting his five-year-old step-daughter, police said.

Alex Pandiyan, a native of Tamil Nadu's Sivakasi, was arrested on Monday from his house near here based on a complaint from the child's mother. Pandiyan, an alleged drug addict, had assaulted the child on Monday,

killing her, the police said.

"It seems like he himself informed the mother about the incident. When she came home, the child was lying on the floor, injured. The mother took her to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared her as brought dead," they said.

Police arrested Pandiyan on Monday night but on early Tuesday morning, he escaped from the police

station, though handcuffed.

After nearly six hours, the police and the locals apprehended him from a nearby locality.

A police officer of the Pathanamthitta station, who was in-charge of the station at the time of his escape, was suspended on Wednesday.

Police said the preliminary autopsy report showed that the child was brutally assaulted by the accused and there were

injury marks across the body of the child.

The child, also a native of Tamil Nadu, was staying with her mother and grandmother at a rented house at Kumbazha.

The mother, who was estranged from her husband was in touch with the accused for past one year, police said.

The deceased child has a sibling who is staying with the father of the children in Tamil Nadu.

—PTI

Forest staff tranquilise wild elephant

DC CORRESPONDENT DHARMAPURI, APRIL 7

The Dharmapuri forest officials have finally tranquilised the wild male elephant that created fear among villagers near Eriyur.

Sources said the elephant moved out of the forest searching for its family. The jumbo was first spotted in the Pennagaram reserved forest (RF) and later it moved to the Patahanvadi RF.

The tusker then entered the forest fringes of Ottanoor, Nerpur, Muthurayan Kovil and Kattuvalu villages located close to the Patahanvadi RF.

The local forest department staff tried to send the jumbo back into the forest. The forest staff, not successful in its goading operation, planned to tranquilise and relocate the animal to the new place.

On Wednesday, a team of veterinarians camped at Patahanvadi and conducted search to locate the elephant. The first dart was injected around 8 am



Seduced tusker lifted by the crane.

—DC

using a darting gun. Two more shots were given to make the elephant immovable.

Later, trained forest staffs, risking their life, went beneath the animal and tied chains to its legs. The animal was lifted by a crane and was loaded on

the special vehicle used for transporting wild elephants.

The animal was moved to an undisclosed location and will be released in the forest. The tusker's movement will also be monitored till it adjusts to the new place.

Udhayanidhi Stalin replies to EC notice

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 7

DMK Youth Wing secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin gave his interim explanation to the showcase notice issued by the Election Commission of India, alleging violation of the Model Code of Conduct.

The ECI has referred to his statement relating to former Union Ministers Shushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley during his speech at Dharapuram on May 31 and sought his reply by April 7.

Denying the allegations as false and incorrect in toto, Udhayanidhi Stalin said that he reserved the right to challenge the same in accordance with law.

He said the showcase notice had not taken into consideration the whole speech but had referred to two lines.

Pointing out that the transcript of the entire speech and the copy of the complaint filed by the BJP had not been furnished, he urged the ECI to provide them in compliance with the principles of natural justice.

Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi had accused him of reaching high political office adopting short cut methods in the DMK the previous day at Dharapuram, he was answer-



ing the accusation, he said.

"The impugned speech is nothing but answer to that criticism wherein I have said that Mr Narendra Modi became Chief Minister only through short cut methods overlooking other senior leaders in BJP party while he was a Chief Minister of Gujarat," the reply said.

Udhayanidhi Stalin said that he had given the names of Advani, Yashwant Sinha, Shushma Swaraj, Arun Jaitley and did not use words like 'pressure and torture' in the speech, as alleged in the notice.

He said he made the entire speech in Tamil and words used by him conveyed meanings that were totally different from the ones mentioned in the notice.

Making it clear he never made any mention about anybody's private life, he said the showcase notice was 'utterly vague and bald.'

Three-tier security and CCTVs for strong rooms

From P1

The task of taking the EVMs to the centres was completed only in the early hours of Wednesday though polling as such concluded at 7 pm on Tuesday. In Chennai, a couple of EVMs being taken in a two wheeler drew the attention of passersby near Taramani.

They were intercepted and questioned first by the public and then by the police and it was found that the EVMs were not used for polling and were kept aside as standbys. The employees who did not wait for the official vehicle to take the spare EVMs away but decided to deposit them at the earliest to get back home were taken to task.

Otherwise, the polling agents of all the parties monitored the movement of the EVMs to the centres with a hawk's eye and went home only after the locks of the strong rooms were sealed in their presence. From Wednesday, party cadre, in batches were taking turns to remain at the designated spots at the

premises of the 75 centres and keep a vigil.

The three-tier security provided to the centres comprises the local police at the peripheral level, Tamil Nadu Special Police personnel in the second level and paramilitary forces at the inner level. A total of 18,000 personnel are said to have been assigned to guard the centres in three shifts.

While the big political parties have assigned five of their agents for a shift in a centre, the smaller parties have assigned three and less persons for the job.

Apart from the continuous vigil by the security forces and the agents of political parties, CCTV cameras have been fixed around all the centres to enable the election authorities to keep a watch over the premises day and night.

Officially, both the AIADMK and DMK leaders issued statements on Thursday urging their own functionaries and cadre and also of the alliance

parties to not lower their guard till May 2, when the electronic voting machines (EVMs) would be taken out for counting.

The statements, one by AIADMK's Mr Panneerselvam and Mr Palaniswami and the other by Mr Stalin thanked their party workers for ensuring smooth conduct of the elections despite the machinations of the opposition party and cautioned them against the other tampering with the EVMs in the strong rooms.

AIADMK leaders accused the DMK of being notorious for highhandedness and the DMK president alleged misuse of power by the ruling dispensation and partiality in the way police dealt with situations.

DMK also charged that in some constituencies there were complaints of malfunctioning of EVMs, in which votes were registered for the BJP candidate irrespective of the button the voter chose to press to cast the vote.

Covid-19 cases slowly increasing in Kovai

From P1

Coimbatore, which reported little more than 100 cases till last week, has now become another concern as it is slowly growing as a major contributor. It reported 332 new cases— an increase from 315 on Sunday.

Three districts— Chennai, Coimbatore, and Chengalp-

ettu, added a cumulative total of 2181.

The mortality rate also has recorded a spike. On Wednesday, 17 death cases, 14 of them with comorbidities, have been reported—that is an increase from 12 on Sunday. While six people died in Chennai, Chengalp-

attu recorded 2 cases. Coimbatore, Madurai, Nag-

apattinam, Salem, Thanjavur, Thiruvannamalai, Tirunelveli, Tiruppur, and Tirichy recorded one case each.

Meanwhile, the state tested at least 79,927 persons on Wednesday, down from 82,187 on Sunday. A total of 1,98,45,778 individuals have been subjected to the RT-PCR test so far in the state.



The strong room in Loyola college where EVMs are kept in the city.

—DC

OTHER STORY

Tension prevails over EVM 'tampering' in Viralmalai strongroom

DC CORRESPONDENT
PUDUKKOTTAI, APRIL 7

Tension prevailed for some time on Wednesday at the government arts college for women, where the EVMs of the Viralmalai assembly segment are kept in a strong room.

Health minister Dr. C. Vijayabaskar is seeking re-election here.

Official sources said the trouble started when the representatives of DMK candidate Palaniappan and Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhgam candidate O. Karthick Prabhakaran found the sealed tag on the EVM used for model polling at 27th booth on the floor of the counting centre, and informed their respective candidates.

Following this, Palaniappan and Karthick Prabhakaran complained to Pudukkottai Collector B. Uma Maheswari and general observer Raghu and alleged tampering in the sealed EVMs.

For the first time in the election history of Tamil Nadu, the collector and the general observer obtained permission of the Chief Election Commissioner of India and opened the sealed strong room in front of the complainant candidates and others and inspected the seals of the EVM boxes. They found the EVMs tagged seals safe and locked, sealed the strong room and restored normalcy.

The sources said they also found a box with EVM used for model polling without a sealed tag and that might have fallen down on the floor while the particular box was brought into the strong room.

The representatives of DMK candidate Palaniappan submitted a memorandum to the collector and the general observer to transfer the returning officer of the Viralmalai assembly segment.

Sluggish Chennai turnout not new

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 7

The voter turnout, just like the last assembly election in 2016, remained low in the capital city compared to other districts on Tuesday despite the month-long awareness programmes by the Election Commission.

According to data available with the district election office, the Chennai district recorded an average 59.06 per cent polling in the 16 assembly constituencies, while many districts polled more than 70 per cent votes. Around 23.95 lakh residents in the district chose to vote from a total of 40.57 lakh voters.

The officials said that compilation of data in the district was delayed due to the lack of technical expertise of over 350 polling officials to handle the app which helps the adminis-

tration to count the votes from the polling booths. The voting in the district gained momentum in the last hours. The polling rate in the city was just 40 per cent by 3 pm. Radhakrishnan Nagar constituency, which recorded just 30 per cent of votes by 3pm, polled at least 30 per cent votes in the last four hours.

The sluggish voting pattern is not a new thing in the district. In the 2016 assembly election, the city registered nearly 55 per cent votes, that was a very low turnout compared to 2011 elections which was

around 70. Similar situation prevailed for the local body elections held in October 2011. Polling percentage during the first-ever elections for the Greater Chennai Corporation in 2011 was just 48 per cent, whereas polling percentage in the previous council elections was 55 per cent in 2006.

This situation happened at a time when the Greater Chennai Corporation authorities arranged as many as 6,000 polling booths instead of 3,254 in the previous election in view of the Covid-19 situa-

tion. At least 30,000 people including polling officials and volunteers were deployed across the constituencies.

However, many took to social media to criticise the attitude of Chennai residents who refused to cast their vote on Tuesday. They said Chennaites have the habit of not turning up at polling booths in large numbers.

The netizens demanded that companies, which provided paid leave for employees on the voting day, should deduct 25 percent of their salary.

"People sit at home on voting day, eat popcorn, go to the movies, have fun, and then say goodbye to everything. These are the ones who talk about how the government should behave, how the roads should be maintained and show their genius on social media. But, they don't go out to vote. If you do not exercise your democratic right even once in five years, then you have no reason to talk about our country being a democratic nation so we need freedom in everything," Sujatha, a netizen, wrote on Facebook on Wednesday.

However, many of them believe that increasing Covid-19 cases in recent weeks could be one of the reasons for the low voter turnout in the city. The DC tried to get a response on the low turnout from a district electoral official, but he did not respond.

Palayamkottai dubious in low polling

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUNELVELI, APRIL 7

Palayamkottai, whose electorates take pride in calling themselves 'the Oxford of the South' as the constituency has many reputed educational institutions, also has a dubious record of not turning out to vote in full. Despite keeping high educational and economic standards, when compared to their counterparts in the nearby constituencies, their turnout was a low 57.76 per cent in the 2021 assembly election too.

The low voting pattern in Palayamkottai constituency, housing many state and central government employees, teachers and professors in Tirunelveli district, could be understood by the polling percentage registered in the constituency during the last four elections since 2011, when Palayamkottai registered 10 percent of votes below the state average of 78.29 percent. Then all the other four assembly constituencies in Tirunelveli district polled

above 70 per cent making the average polling percentage of the entire district 73.24.

In the 2014 Lok Sabha election, Palayamkottai assembly constituency recorded 59.90 per cent, around 8 percent lower than it polled in the 2011 assembly election. In 2016, when all the other four constituencies of Tirunelveli district polled more than 70 per cent, the turnout in Palayamkottai was 61 per cent, around 9 percent below the district average of 69.42 percent.

The Ambasamudram constituency in Tirunelveli district, having more agrarian population with a comparatively low literacy rate in the district, however consistently performs well in terms of total voting percentage as it registered the highest turnout of 72.77 per cent in Tirunelveli district in the 2016 assembly election and 71 per cent in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, proving that the agrarian society in the rural pockets take general elections more seriously than the educated elites.

73.93 % polling in Thanjavur district: Collector

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, APRIL 7

The polling in the assembly elections held on

Tuesday in Thanjavur district was 73.93 per cent, according to M. Govinda Rao, Thanjavur district collector and district elec-

tion officer.

Out of the eight assembly segments, Orathanadu recorded the maximum of 78.24 per cent followed by

Thiruvaiyaru at 78.13 per cent.

Polling in Peravurani was 77.09 per cent, Thiruvaidaimaruthur 75.8 per cent, Papanasam

74.89 per cent, Pattukottai 71.75 per cent, Kumbakonam 71.4 per cent and Thanjavur 65.71 per cent, the lowest in the district.

'Sekkizharadipodi' T.N. Ramachandran no more

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, APRIL 7

Eminent Tamil and English scholar T.N. Ramachandran, 87, popularly known as 'Sekkizharadipodi' T.N. Ramachandran, passed away in Chennai on Tuesday. The cremation took place on Wednesday.

Born at Thillaisthanam village near Thiruvaiyaru, Ramachandran lived in Thanjavur for many years till he shifted recently to his son's house in Chennai. He was an advocate, but left the profession 25 years ago and pursued his interest in Tamil and English literature. He translated Devarams of



Thiruganasambandar and Appar and Thiruvvasagam of Manikkavasagar into English. Some of his other translations include Periyapuram, Thiruvsaipa, Thirupallandu etc. Because of his devotion to Sekkizhar, who

wrote Periyapuram, and his love for Periyapuram, he was given the title 'Sekkizharadipodi'.

He helped in the translation of Bharathi's poems by the Tamil University. The library at his house in Thanjavur has 50,000 books. He conducted lessons on various books like Thiruvilaiyadal puranam and Periyapuram for youngsters. A good orator, his discourses on various subjects attracted many.

He leaves behind his wife Kalyani, sons Suresh, Ganesh, Ramesh and Mahesh. S.S. Palani Manickam, MP, and Kudavayil Balasubramanian, temple researcher, con- doled the death of TNR.

Slight dip in polling in Nilgiris

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, APRIL 7

The Nilgiris district, which comprises three assembly constituencies, witnessed a slight dip in the polling percentage this election when compared to the 2016 assembly polls. Security arrangements have been tightened at the counting centre where the polled EVMs are kept in strong rooms.

The data on Wednesday shows that Ooty assembly con-

stituency recorded 65.67 per cent of polling, where 1,39, 626 votes were polled out of total 205,882 votes. In Gudalur(reserved) constituency the figure stood at 71.39 per cent (1,36, 496 votes polled out of total 1,89,155 votes). The Coonoor constituency recorded 69.79 per cent polling (1,33,932 votes polled out of total 1,91,913 votes).

In the district as a whole, 4,10,054 votes were polled out of total 5,66, 950 votes, register-

ing 69.86 per cent. While women turnout was more in all the three constituencies, only one transgender vote was polled in the district.

When compared to the 2016 assembly polls there is a slight dip in the polling percentage in the Nilgiris. In Ooty 65.67 per cent polling was recorded this time compared to 68.01 per cent last time. In Gudalur, there was 71.39 per cent polling this time, compared to 72.73 per cent. In Coonoor,

69.79 per cent voters cast their vote this time while it was 70.81 per cent in 2016. The total polling percentage in the district is 69.86 this election, while it was 70.53 per cent in the last election.

The EVMs from all the three constituencies have been shifted to the government polytechnic college here, which is the counting centre, and are kept in strong rooms there.

A three-tier security cover has been arranged in the premises there.

COFFEE-BREAK

Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



Aries: Rescheduling and rearrangement will take up your energy. Concentrate on major issues. You will seek new directions in study and enterprise.



Taurus: Behaving like a brave heart will invite trouble on the professional and personal fronts. The day is auspicious. You would love to take on different tasks.



Gemini: Stress-related problems are likely. Use your skill and authority with discrimination and generosity. You are thoughtful and inward looking.



Cancer: You need to practice tolerance at the workplace. You get the green signal for planning a new venture. However, make sure it doesn't affect a present one.



Leo: You are worried about your family and children. Interaction with people fills you with energy. You pursue goals wholeheartedly. You have the time to chalk out future plans.



Virgo: Refrain from making illogical moves. Your efforts at structuring your house or personal space start paying off. You may draw up a long-term plan and consider investments.

You share your b'day with

Allu Arjun is an Indian film actor who works in Telugu cinema. He starred in the films like Bunny, Arya, Parugu, Badrinath, Race Gurram, Duvvada Jagannadham, Julai, Ala Vaikunthapuramlo, amongst others.



Libra: New skills, greater power and efficiency are indicated. Money matters require careful planning. A lot of chopping and changing could happen at work.



Scorpio: Sudden changes leave you flummoxed. However, you will realise that they are good for you in the long run. Expect a minor financial loss.



Sagittarius: You wish for change and it will capture everything around you. Once you overcome a weakness, glory is assured. A good time for social events.



Capricorn: A delightful day. Logical and analytical abilities will improve. Stresses will ease. Postpone big decisions. A personal issue needs attention. A spouse may prove unpredictable.

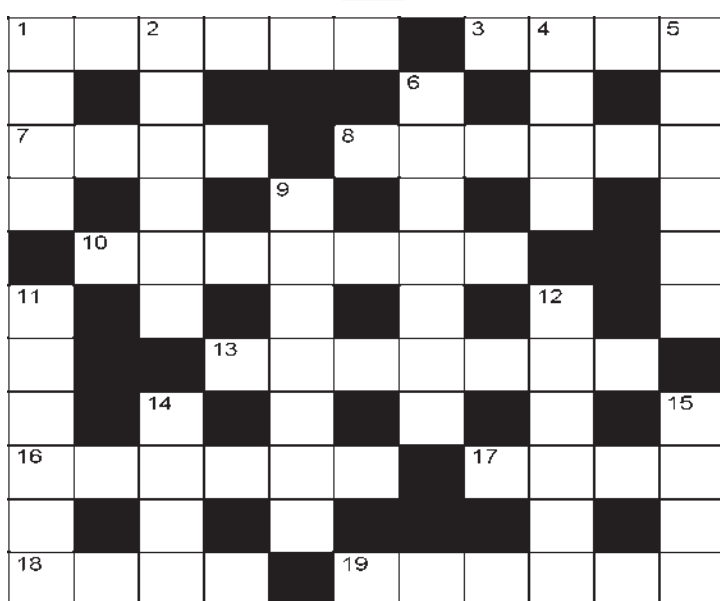


Aquarius: A relaxed start is on the cards. There will be little pressure on you. Sensible investments will yield results. Avoid standing guarantee for others. Do not react emotionally to your spouse.



Pisces: You will probably feel most comfortable at home. Business associates may be difficult. You may be eager to bring your ideas to the notice of superiors, but it's best to wait.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across
1. Request forcefully (6)
3. Wound crust (4)
7. Passport endorsement (4)
8. Short-sightedness (6)
10. Expressionless (7)
13. Trade ban (7)
16. Not acclaimed (6)
17. Excessive fervour (4)
18. Relieve (4)
19. Stock food (6)

Down
1. Prima donna (4)
2. Deluded (6)
4. Manage (4)
5. Muscular (6)
6. Night suit (7)
9. Resolute (7)
11. Bodily shape (6)
12. Tallied (6)
14. Egyptian goddess of fertility (4)
15. Make indistinct (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER
Across: 1. Threshold, 6. Remit, 7. Reins, 9. Sash, 10. Blight, 12. Infamy, 14. Orca, 17. Drama, 18. Revue, 19. Erstwhile.
Down: 2. Humus, 3. Eats, 4. Hardly, 5. Lying, 6. Rescind, 8. Situate, 11. Impact, 13. Clair, 15. Revel, 16. Arch.

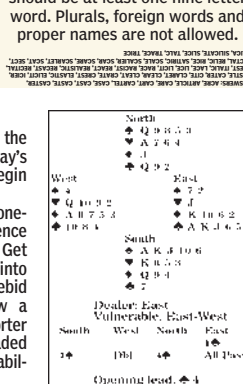
Word Mine

C
A
I
R
T
I
E
L
S

TODAY'S RATINGS: 35 AVERAGE: 40
GOOD: 45 OUTSTANDING

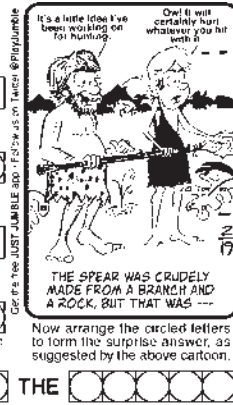
How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used once only. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

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jumble

EEOSB
RITDH
TOCEIP
CLEHNI
THE



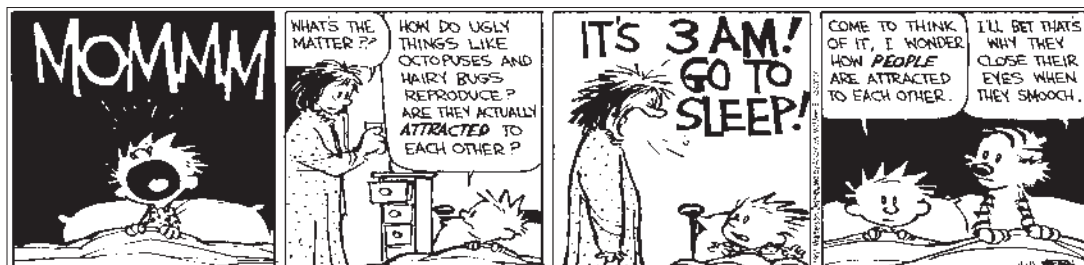
Yesterday's Jumble: GLINT TEASE SINFUL THRUSH
Answer: She wanted to go camping, but her now boyfriend was - 'RESIST-TENT'

South can afford one heart loser, but not two. If hearts are breaking 3-2, the contract is in no jeopardy, but what if they are 4-1? After ruffing the second club, declarer played a diamond. West rose with his ace and led another club. South ruffed, trumped a diamond, played a spade to his ace, ruffed the diamond queen and cashed the spade queen. What did he do next? South led a low heart from

the board and played low from hand! If East had taken the trick, he would have had to concede a fatal ruff-and-sluff. So West overtook with his queen and led the heart 10. Declarer won with his king, ran the heart eight and claimed.

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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



bridge
PHILLIP
ALDER
IT IS HARD
TO LOSE
A TRICK
UNNECESSARILY

SHORT TAKES

COP SUSPENDED FOR DANCING IN UNIFORM

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACCUSED IN HONEY TRAP CASE HELD AFTER TWO YEARS

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Maoists show jawan's photo to claim custody

DKSZC wants govt to nominate interlocutors for talks

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC RAIPUR, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

The jawan's colleagues

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

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

Sources, meanwhile, said the missing jawan's

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

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

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

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

In another develop-

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

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

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

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

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Two Italian marines —

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

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

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

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



Bipin Rawat

CHINA CAPABLE OF CYBER ATTACK ON INDIA, SAYS CDS

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

Waze names two ministers in letter

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kerala: Youth killed in post-poll clash

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some of their family mem-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

In D'company of Dangerous RGV

FROM PG 1

"I don't have the patience for history - the research it would take... like, I don't want to lose my time getting the costumes details correct."

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

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

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

He is set to launch Spark OTT along with a partner, very shortly, which will also fuse RGV World. "I am at the peak of my career and life. Filmmakers can pitch their ideas," he says, and he would find the funding, professionals, team and wherewithal to take it to fruition. He has launched more newcomers than most other Telugu film directors put together.

Does he believe in providing opportunities to talent or prefer being a mentor? No, he says, reverting to the familiar safe zone to fustigate social mores. "I don't believe in helping anyone. I just want to do what gives me pleasure

in the same moment. At this point, I want to see not tens but hundreds of films being made."

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

has ended even the tyranny of the film theatre screens.

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

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

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

"With an Internet-connected mobile phone, what can people today not see or know of? If we cannot censor the internet, we should stay away from censorship of OTT also. They used to take 20 days to give a censor clearance for a movie. The sheer number of films, short films and documentaries on OTT and Internet makes

this impossible. Besides, as a society we have surely moved past the idea that five people can dictate to a billion what they can see, or cannot."

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

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

RGV is a good litmus test for society. In an age where we are easily offended, or hurt, when the authority refuses to be questioned and tries to silence those who dare ask, he does it all.

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

OUTRAGE AFTER IMRAN LINKS RAPE TO WOMEN'S DRESS

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

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

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

AUSTRIAN GROUP FILES PLAINT ON GOOGLE AD TRACK

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

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

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

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

ACTOR ZACH AVERY HELD FOR PONZI SCHEME

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

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

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

ACTIVISTS GUILTY FOR DEMOCRACY RALLY IN HK

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

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

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

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

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

Sinking ship



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

— AP

US military warns China on fast track for Taiwan

Years of military buildup have given China added strength

Washington, April 7:

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

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

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

Taiwan blasts China's fighter jet incursions

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

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

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

Beijing has vowed to one

day seize the island, by force if needed.

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

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

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

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

— AFP

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

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

plant the United States as the predominant power in Asia.

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

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

Chinese military move on Taiwan.

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

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

— AP

Myanmar junta attacks town that resisted arms

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AP

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

Biden makes jab open to all adults

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

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

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

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

— AP

A British government committee advising on coronavirus vaccinations said Wednesday most people under 30 should be offered an alternative to the AstraZeneca jab if possible, due to concerns over blood clots.

“Adults who are aged 18 to 29 years old who do not have an underlying health condition... should be offered an alternative Covid-19 vaccine in preference to the AstraZeneca vaccine, where such an alternative vaccine is available,” Wei Shen Lim of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, said at a press conference.

There have been 79 cases of rare blood clots, resulting in 19 deaths, in people receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine in Britain, the country's medicines regulator said Wednesday.

— AFP

MERKEL BACKS ‘LOCKDOWN’ TO TAME COVID-19

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

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

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

— AFP

ROUHANI: NUKE TALKS OPEN ‘NEW CHAPTER’

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

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

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

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

— AFP

Iranian freighter hit by ‘explosion’

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

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

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

adding an inquiry had been opened into the cause.

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

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

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

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

— AFP

EU slams Ursula ‘sofagate’ at summit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

APEX | PREDATORS

Warming of Arctic twice as fast as planet is leading to dwindling sea ice

Polar bears snack on eggs as Arctic shrinks

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

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

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

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

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

and are snacking on their eggs.

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

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

the bears approached the nesting site over a period of 11 days, as the number of eggs were depleted.

“We found that later-arriving bears increasingly visited more empty nests and did not travel in an energy-minimizing way, but became less picky in the clutches they consumed,” said lead author Patrick Jagielski, of the Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research at the University of Windsor.

— AFP



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

— AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

8 APRIL 2021

Nurture is the best policy, but watch out for inflation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Clear the air on Rafale

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

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

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Subhani



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



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

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

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

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

But the season of fear is back.

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

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

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

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

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

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

How did we slip up?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is the road ahead?

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

KUDOS TO EC

April 6 Tuesday witnessed a huge democratic exercise of 234 constituencies in Tamil Nadu and almost 72 per cent of eligible voters voted from 7 am to 7 pm. Voting in Besant School in Besant Nagar was very smooth and fast. EC has made the arrangements to the best of their abilities and of course, there were some hiccups for a few and that was also well taken care of. Due to the Covid pandemic, all precautions were taken by EC headed by Mr Sahoo. We thank all the men and women as the dictum goes "First to thank & last to complain".

Kudos to the EC!

Venugopal, Email

NEED QUICK ACTION

The daily Covi-19 cases in India have crossed the one lakh mark and India is struggling to contain and control the spread. This grave situation is not only due to the laxity and lethargic attitude of the people (as accused by the government) but also due to the lackadaisical attitude and approach of the Central and state governments. When Covid-19 cases had come down from November 2020 the government should have closely monitored all pandemic protocols were followed by the public and introduced heavy fines (including arresting the offenders) with an iron hand. The centre should give orders for vaccination of all citizens without any delay and also instruct states to impose heavy fines on violators without mercy.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

SARCASTIC TWEET

This refers to the tweet of Taslima Nasreen, the exiled Bangladeshi author, on cricketer Moeen Ali. In her tweet on the cricketer, the exiled Bangladeshi author said that but for playing cricket, Moeen Ali would have gone to Syria to join ISIS. Following reactions, the author had to delete the tweet, saying that it was sarcastic. What was the necessity for such a tweet in the first place? What was she trying to convey through such tweets? It was an uncalled for, unnecessary and irresponsible tweet. While no one would question her right to tweet, in so exercising such rights, Taslima should be mindful of what she tweets, so that it does not impinge upon the rights of others.

V.S. Jayaraman, Chennai

Maleeha Lodhi



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

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

This prompted the World Health Organisation early in the pandemic to coin the term "infodemic" to refer to the flood of information and exponential spread of fabricated content. The head of WHO, Tedros Adhanom, declared: "We're not just battling the virus, we're also battling the trolls and conspiracy theorists that push misinformation and undermine the outbreak response." Top UN officials repeatedly warned of the grave social and health ramifications of the proliferation of misinformation. While the global health crisis has seen a stream of false stories the reality is that fake news is all around us today. This presents new challenges to social stability in what has been called the post-truth era, a term that emerged a few years ago.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

even sowing public disorder.

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

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

By arrangement with Dawn

quick
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49661.76	0.94
Nifty 50	14819.00	0.92
S&P 500*	4,073.50	-0.01
Dollar (₹)	74.55	1.52
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.03	1.44
Euro (₹)	88.58	2.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,768,▲587	1.28
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	62.81	0.11
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.082	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.647	-0.009

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Drug firms asked to ramp up remdesivir output

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

Wipro appoints Subha Tataavarti as CTO



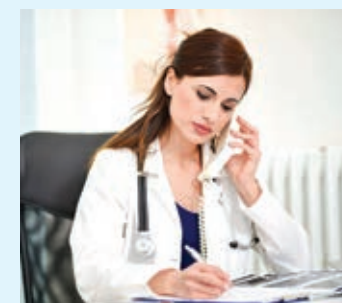
Wipro said it has appointed former Walmart executive Subha Tataavarti as its chief technology officer. The company also appointed Suzanne Dann as senior vice president and sector head for capital markets and insurance, North America region. Tataavarti will lead Wipro's Service Transformation, Topcoder,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

Vedanta's sweetened offer gets 57.5% bids

Anil Agarwal-led Vedanta Resources Ltd's sweetened offer to buy back 17.5 per cent share in its Indian flagship firm was subscribed 57.5 per cent, helping it raise its stake to about 65 per cent. The voluntary open offer to buy 65.1 crore shares in Vedanta Ltd at Rs 235 apiece received offers for 37.42 crore shares, or 57.49 per cent of the offer size. The subscription was open till 15.30 hrs on Wednesday.

Practo online consultations in 15 languages

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



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

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

BACKING UP GROWTH

- ▶ MPC decides to retain repo rate at 4%, reverse repo at 3.35%, and marginal standing facility at 4.25%
- ▶ Stance to remain accommodative till recovery is ensured
- ▶ CPI inflation trajectory faces both upside and downside pressures. RBI's 5.2% forecast for the first half of this fiscal is slightly higher than the 5-5.2%

Shaktikanta Das.

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

estimated in February

- ▶ For FY22 CPI Inflation is expected at 5%,
- ▶ FY22 GDP forecast unchanged at 10.5%.
- ▶ While growth prospects have brightened with vaccination, the second pandemic wave has brought new uncertainties
- ▶ Under G-Sec acquisition programme 1.0, RBI will buy ₹1 lakh crore in Q1

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

The MPC believes the consumer price index-

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

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rupee sees steep fall but bond yields cool

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL, 7

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

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

The gesture was well-received by the bond mar-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MEIL'S FIRST MAKE IN INDIA OIL RIG BEGINS OPERATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dovish stance leads to broad-based buying

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sebi slaps ₹25-cr fine on Ambanis

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

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

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

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

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

PLI schemes for solar modules, AC, LED lights okayed



FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

solar PV modules.

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

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

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

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

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

New Intel chip launched



FC BUREAU
HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

Nurse squeezes extra doses of vaccine with air bubbles

ESSI LEHTO
HELSINKI, APRIL 7

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

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

Such "low-dead-space"



shot utensils are in short supply, making Roos' trick all the more valuable as countries seek to protect people against new, more infectious coronavirus strains that are spreading a third wave of infection.

Roos' technique, similar to one used in Denmark, begins by drawing some

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

The dose is then injected with minimal waste.

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

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

SHORT TAKES

Olympic torch is off Osaka streets

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

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

Judo team pull out of Oly qualies

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

Indian archers fully vaccinated

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

Hockey team are off to flying start

Buenos Aires: The Indian men's hockey team made a positive start to its tour of Argentina, beating the reigning Olympic champions 4-3 in the first practice match here. Nilakanta Sharma (16th minute), Harmanpreet Singh (28th), Rupinder Pal Singh (33rd) and Varun Kumar (47th) were the goal scorers for India late on Tuesday night. Dragflicker Leandro Tolini (35th, 53rd) and Maico Casella (41st) scored for the home team. "It was a very good practice match, intensely fought by both teams. It is always nice to come up with a win against a team like Olympic Champions Argentina as it amplifies our confidence levels," India coach Graham Reid said.

Royals look to rule

Will Samson-Sangakkara partnership work for Rajasthan?

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

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

To strengthen their pace attack RR bought South African all-rounder Chris Morris for a whopping ₹16.25 crore, making him the most expensive buy in the IPL auction history. However, an injury to Archer ruling him out of at least the first few games, is a massive blow. Here's a SWOT analysis of the side that will take on Punjab Kings in Mumbai on April 12.

STRENGTH

RR boast of a number of destructive batsmen. Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes are two match-winning players who can trample any opposition while Samson is a minefield of talent. David Miller and Morris are two other powerful strikers and Liam Livingstone can turn the match on its head. Last season's revelation, all-rounder Rahul Tewatia, has also showcased his ability to whack the ball outside the park.

WEAKNESS

For Royals, the problem is their weak Indian core



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

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

OPPORTUNITY

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

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

THREAT

With Samson at the helm, his lack of experience in

NOW, SAMS OF RCB CONTRACTS CORONAVIRUS

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

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

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

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

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

Mixed doubles squash added to Asian Games

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 7

Mixed doubles squash will be contested at the Asian Games for the first time at Hangzhou 2022, confirmed David Mui, the president of the Asian Squash Federation.

It would mean five medal events in squash being held at the Games in the Chinese city next year — men's and women's singles, men's and women's team and the mixed doubles.

"I am delighted to inform you that mixed doubles will be included as one of the competition events in squash in 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, China," Mui said in an email to all the federations.

The official paid tribute to India's former World Squash Federation President N Ramachandran for mixed doubles' inclusion.

Mixed doubles squash is a part of the Commonwealth Games

programme.

"Just as importantly, I would also like to give my sincere thanks to our patron Mr N. Ramachandran for his tremendous assistance and support to make this happen," he added.

Squash has appeared at every edition of the Asian Games since Bangkok 1998.

Esports attracts entries from 27 nations

A total of 27 National Olympic Committees (NOC) have entered players in esports categories for the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games, with it set to make its medal sport debut at the Games in the Chinese city.

This was revealed as part of the first phase of the entry process for the Games. There is set to be 40 sports, 61 disciplines and 482 events at the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games, which is scheduled to run from September 10 to 25 next year.



Tamil Nadu sailor Nethra Kumanan.

TN sailor Nethra set to make history

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, APRIL 7

Tamil Nadu sailor Nethra Kumanan, in Laser Radial category, moved a step closer to clinching historic Tokyo Olympic spot on Wednesday by continuing her stellar performance in the Mussanah Open Championship 2021 in Oman.

TN's KC Ganapathy (Helm) and Varun Thakkar (Crew), in 49er class, also produced solid performances on Day 5 and are in contention for the Olympics spot.

The TN sailors will go into Thursday's medal race leading their respective categories. A finish in Thursday's medal race will ensure Nethra a Tokyo berth, making her the first Indian woman sailor to make it to the Olympics and the second overall. Punjab's Nachatar Singh Johal who competed in the Finn class at Beijing 2008 is the only Indian sailor to have competed at the

Olympics so far.

Asian Sailing Federation President Malav Shroff said Nethra's Games berth is just a formality.

"The final race is a 20 pointer but the point gap with her nearest Asian rival, also an Indian, is more than 20," he said.

Shroff said Kumanan is the only Indian so far to have booked a direct quota place by topping a qualifier while all the earlier nine Olympians made it by getting quotas that could not be filled up.

Nethra finished first in race nine and second in race 10 to keep the chasing pack at bay in Laser Radial. She will head into the medal races with a net total of 18, while Emma Charlotte Jeanne Savelon of the Netherlands, her closest competitor, is on 21. Ganapathy and Thakkar, meanwhile, started the day with a fourth-place finish in Race 13 but recovered by coming in second and third in Race 14 and 15, respectively.

CITY CLIPS

Raheel scores hat-trick

Raheel's hat-trick helped Challengers Hockey drub Loyola College 10-0 to emerge on top of the Pool A in the N.P.V. Ramasamy Udayar Hockey Cup. In Pool-B, Integral Coach Factory finished on top. **Results:** SRM IST 3 (Ranjith, Jeeva Kumar, Abhishek) bt Tamil Nadu Postal Hockey 2 (Abbas, Sundharsanam); Loyola College lost to Challengers Hockey 10 (Raheel 3, Dhamu 2, Veerathamizhan 2, Abhron, Mahendran, Ganesh); GST & Central Excise 2 (Joshua, Raja) lost to Indian Bank 4 (Somanna 4).

Boopathi takes five-for

M. Boopathi's five for 30 helped Ammu CC defeat SL XI by five wickets in the first division of the Villupuram DCA league match.

I-Division: SK XI 214 in 42.3 overs (S. Sadam Hussain 61, M. Sampath 35, S. Vijayakumar 26; A. Prabhakaran 3/47, M. Boopathi 5/30) lost to Ammu CC 217/5 in 37.5 overs (P. Ramalingam 26, S. Arun Kumar 51, S. Sivaraj 43, R. Jayaprakash 50 (not out)); United CC 'A' 270 in 49.2 overs (P. Rajesh 25, M. Nirubankumar 35, D.Suresh 30, T.Deeeparasu 60, B. Kamalanathan 50) bt SK XI 92 in 22.1 overs (B. Kamalanathan 5/14; S.Senthilkumar 3/17).

II-Division: SG CC 176 in 24.4 overs (J. Santhosh Kumar 40, K. Jagadeeswaran 42, S. Thirupathi 30; K. Srikanth 3/35) bt Mailam Engg. 122 in 24 overs (T. Dinesh 28; R. Saran Raj 3/29); Mahaveer C.A. 192/7 in 25 overs (M. Kumerasan 66; K. Vengachalapathy 51 (not out)) bt United CC 'B' 116 in 18.4 overs (A. Anandha Kumaran 5/16, M. Kumerasan 3/31); Ny. Yg. Indian CC 188/7 in 25 overs (A. Satheesh38, S. Sathish 53, S. Keerthivasan 32) bt Mundiampakkam CC 142 in 22 overs (N. Ramarajan 33, S. Muniyappan 34; D. Kumar 3/27).

III-Division: VDCA 75 in 21.5 overs (M. Rajamoorthy 4/12) lost to Power CC 76/6 in 16.2 overs (T. Vishvakannan 3/13, N. Tharun Naveen 3/29).

Behind Stumps Academy triumph

Behind Stumps Academy beat M.J. Gopalan Club to win the Chennai Cricket Club Academy's K. Bhaskaran Memorial state-level open tournament.

Brief scores: M.J. Gopalan Club 125 in 29.5 overs (U. Kishore 3/30) lost to Behind Stumps Academy 129/1 in 18.5 overs (Suresh Ganesan 51, S. Rahul 46 (not out)). **Special awards:** **Player of the final:** U. Kishore (BSA). **Best batsman:** S. Rahul (BSA). **Best bowler:** Jishnu (M.J. Gopalan Club). **Player of the tournament:** Mitun Subramaniam (BSA).



Ace spinner Harbhajan Singh of Kolkata Knight Riders throws a ball in a practice session. — *KKR*

Bhajji floors DK with work ethic

Mumbai, April 7: Harbhajan Singh's child-like enthusiasm at 40-plus has floored Kolkata Knight Riders vice-captain Dinesh Karthik, who said the veteran off-spinner's dedication and interest at this stage of his career is a testament to his character.

Karthik said the veteran of 700-plus international wickets has overwhelmed everyone by his work ethic in the last one week after he joined the IPL side here.

"He has been coming to practice sessions early, much ahead of all other players, and he has been doing it consistently. I think he is a different man now from whatever little I have seen of him this week," Karthik told KKR website on the sidelines of a practice match

at the DY Patil Stadium.

"Picking him I think wasn't easy, considering that he has been around for so long. But the amount of interest and intensity he has shown in the last one week is just fabulous," he added.

Having made his Test debut way back in 1998, Harbhajan is gearing up for his 23rd professional season.

Karthik said Harbhajan has even been attending optional training sessions, where he is batting his heart out.

"Even in a practice game that starts at 7pm, he comes at 4 o'clock. He was batting before that, he bowled to Shakib (Al Hasan) and (Eoin) Morgan, and then did his stretching again before getting into the practice game," he added. — *PTI*

FAKHAR CRACKS WHIP TO SEAL SERIES AGAINST SA

Centurion (South Africa), April 7: Fakhar Zaman hit his second successive century (101 off 104) and captain Babar Azam made 94 to set up a 28-run win for Pakistan in the series-deciding third and final one-day international against South Africa in Centurion on Wednesday. South Africa's chances of chasing down Pakistan's total of 320 for seven were effectively snuffed out by left-arm spinner Mohammad Nawaz, who took three wickets in successive overs to reduce the hosts to 140 for five in the 28th over as South Africa were bowled out for 292. — *AFP*

Brief scores: Pakistan 320/7 in 50 overs (Imam 57, Fakhar Zaman 101, B. Azam 94; K. Maharaj 3/45) bt South Africa 292 in 49.3 overs (J. Malan 70; M. Nawaz 3/34).



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

MS ADVICE HELPED: NATARAJAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vinicius double sinks Liverpool

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

Vinicius and Marco Asensio both profited in the first half after darting behind Liverpool's makeshift back-line before a simple move from a throw-in gave Vinicius a simple finish in the second.

Mohamed Salah's strike shortly after the interval briefly made it a contest at Valdebebas, with an away goal certainly a significant consolation for Liverpool to take into the second leg at Anfield next week.

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

THE RESULTS (QUARTERFINALS FIRST LEGS)

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

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

Before then, they go up against Barcelona on Saturday and this result, their fifth consecutive victory, should be another huge boost. — *AFP*

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