

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | THURSDAY | 8 APRIL 2021

WEATHER

Max: 38.3°C
Min: 24.6°C
RH: 25%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Partly cloudy sky. Max/Min temp. 38/25°C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Bahula Dwadasi till 3.16 am (Friday)
Star: Satabhisham till 4.57 am (Friday)
Varjyam: 11.10 am to 12.51 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.15 am to 11.04 am; 3.10 pm to 3.59 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm

HIJRI CALENDAR
Sha'ban 25, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.04 am
Zohar: 12.28 pm
Asar: 4.38 pm
Maghrib: 6.36 pm
Isha: 7.44 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.30 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.04 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 3.50 AM
MOONSET TODAY 3.33 PM

COUNTER POINT



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

SHORT TAKES

Maoists release jawan's picture

Raipur: The Maoists on Wednesday released a picture to establish that Rakeshwar Singh Manhas, the CoBRA commando 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.

■ Full report on Page 4

RBI keeps key rates unchanged

Mumbai: The Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday kept the policy repo rate unchanged and continued 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.

■ Full report on Page 7

Tribunal reforms ordinance issued

New Delhi: The Centre has issued an ordinance which does away with certain appellate tribunals, including the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal set up to hear appeals of filmmakers, and transfers their functions to other existing judicial bodies. It was notified on Sunday.

DIRECTOR'S CUT

Ace filmmaker to launch new OTT platform Spark

OTT heralded new era: RGV

SRIRAM KARRI | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

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

His intrepid courting of controversies with zeal, one



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

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.

RAM GOPAL VARMA

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

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

■ Pg 3: India will see its first lesbian duet dance: Ramu

WORLD | 5

US military finds Xi closing in on Taipei



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SPORTS | 8

Vinicius double sinks Liverpool

TABLOID

Surviving emotional nutrition



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HC hits out at officials for ignoring its orders

Warns they will not get away with apologies

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

The Telangana High Court on Wednesday repeatedly advised officials of the state machinery at various levels to be careful and prompt in implementing court orders.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijaysen Reddy stated: "If the state and its machinery show scant regard to the orders of the court, then the court will also treat them with equal distinct. If the officials have the confidence that they can get away from the contempt case by filing an appeal, then this court will shake and stir their confidence."

The court hinted that from now on, every contempt case against any officer will be listed out from the records of the high court and if it was found that any officer was involved in a contempt of court, then it would take a serious view of this.

NALGONDA DIST COLLECTOR TO FEED ORPHANS

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

In another contempt appeal, the High Court directed Prashant J. Patil, working as the district collector in Nalgonda, to feed the orphans every weekend for six months, as a punishment for his willful disobedience of the court orders.

The division bench headed by Chief Justice Hima Kohli directed the collector to spend two hours every weekend to serve the destitute in one of the orphanages in Nalgonda.

■ Page 2: Patil disobeyed court's order on paddy

Opining that nowadays, a go-easy attitude has developed among the contemptor officials, Justice

B. Vijaysen Reddy reminisced the situations wherein the issuance of a Form-1 Notice by the high court to any official would, in the past, have ended the entire case. Now, the officials seem to have the confidence (to take such things easy) and come to the conclusion that, even if they are contemptors in a contempt case, they can get away with it by filing an appeal and offering an apology. But, the court cannot spare the contemptors," Justice Reddy clarified.

The court observed that the contempt cases and contempt appeal cases are being filed in larger numbers, and this is forcing the high court to arrange two judges to exclusively pursue these cases. The division bench was dealing with various contempt appeals filed by contemptor officials who were found guilty in contempt cases, and ordered for punishments.

■ Page 2: Addl collector disregarded court's order



STUDENTS LEARNT MANY LESSONS THIS YEAR: MODI

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

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

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

Encounters: J&K bans live coverage

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 7

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

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

forces at encounter sites," IGP Ajay Kumar told the media.

Responding to that, the Valley's media fraternity said that reporters or camerapersons do not "interfere" in the work of the security forces but only discharge their duty while covering encounters.

It is pertinent to note that images of the security forces targeting private houses and other buildings in which militants were holed up during counter-

insurgency operations went viral recently. It was alleged that the security forces used flame-inducing gunpowder, mortar shells and IEDs in such actions and the resultant devastation has been seen by critics as a step to punish the alleged abettors and supporters of militants.

The security forces' officials reject this criticism as unwarranted, and say it is unavoidable collateral damage, which they claim they try to keep under

check. They also claim that the media's presence, particularly that of photographers and videographers, further provokes protesters near the encounter sites and leaders to more stone-pelting for the benefit of the cameras.

Last week, a video showing a policeman kicking a press photographer near an encounter site in southern Pulwama district also went viral and evoked much criticism of the police.

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SHORT TAKES

GOVERNOR TO INTERACT WITH ADIVASIS

Khammam: Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan will interact with adivasis, particularly women of Pusukunta, a remote forest village in Dammamet mandal of Bhadradri-Kothagudem district at 10.30 am on Thursday online. Telangana Governor office joint secretary Jai Bhavani Sankar visited the Pusukunta village and explained the village situation to the Governor. Tamilisai decided to interact with the locals of the village and know their problems.

COVID-19 +VE CASES ON RISE IN ADILABAD

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, APRIL 7

The Covid-19 positive cases are on rise and a total of 57 deaths due to Covid took place till in the old Adilabad district.

A woman died of virus in the Adilabad town on Tuesday. The Covid virus is fast-spreading in the rural alike in urban areas. Many people are admitted at Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Adilabad, with covid symptoms. Some people are taking treatment at Private hospitals and hiding the information that they are tested positive.

Still, many people are hesitant to come forward to take vaccination against covid virus.

TS MARKS 1,914 FRESH CASES, 5 DEATHS IN 24 HRS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

The state reported 1,914 new Covid-19 cases with the GHMC accounting for 393 cases. It has been noticed that the spread of the virus is more in densely populated areas.

The overall cases in the state is at 3,16,649. With five deaths, the toll has risen to 1,734. Total active cases in the state are 11,617 and of them 6,634 are in home and institutional isolation. Around 74,274 samples were tested. Of them 63,077 were in government undertakings. Medchal Malkajgiri recorded 205, Ranga Reddy 169 and Sangareddy 76 new cases.

Nizamabad reported 179 new cases. It recorded 678 cases from March 31 to April 6. A reason for the increase is that it borders Maharashtra, which is reeling under a near second wave. There have also been marriage functions, new mall inaugurations and other social gatherings, stated government surveillance team members in the district.

Nirmal recorded 104, Karimnagar 80, Kama-reddy 64, Jagtial 68 and other districts are also now showing double digit numbers.

KCR DOING GREAT INJUSTICE TO MINORITIES: CONG

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

Former minister Mohammed Ali Shabbir has raised severe objection over TRS government's decision to convert regular employees of Mecca Masjid and Royal Mosque into outsourcing staff.

In an open letter, the Congress leader pointed to the circular issued by Minorities' Welfare Department that regular jobs of 30 employees of the two historic mosques, one near Charminar and the other in Public Gardens, will be converted into "outsourcing or contract" employment with effect from March 31, 2021.

"This circular has created unrest among employees, their families and common Muslims. It should be withdrawn immediately," he demanded in his letter addressed to Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao.

Shabbir pointed out that employees of both historic mosques have been rendering selfless service since many years in upkeep and maintenance of Mecca Masjid and Royal Masjid.

"It is atrocious to privatise their jobs and deprive them of good salaries and other benefits," he remarked. Employees of both mosques retire at the age of 65 years.

They also get 15 days' leave per annum and ₹3 lakh at the time of retirement. Once they are "outsourced", they will be denied these benefits, he pointed out.

Jana: KCR renamed schemes of Congress, fooled people

Dares CM to tell at least one new project completed in Nalgonda

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC
NAGARJUNASAGAR, APRIL 7

Kunduru Jana Reddy, the Congress heavyweight and a veteran seven-time MLA from Nagarjunasagar (known as Chalakurthy constituency until 2009) is facing the toughest battle of his political career spanning nearly four decades from two new political entrants from the TRS and the BJP in the Nagarjunasagar Assembly bypoll on April 17. He was first elected as MLA from the Telugu Desam in 1983.

Barring in 1994 and 2018 Assembly polls, Jana won as MLA for seven terms and served as minister for 17 years, which is a record of sorts in Telugu politics. Jana is depending on his clean image apart from the sympathy factor that he lost in the 2018 elections. Jana Reddy is giving an impetus to the campaign reeling up the development done by him as an MLA and minister. He is also challenging the ruling TRS that he would sit at home without campaigning and were they willing to do the same if they believed in the development done by them and let the voters decide who is better. In an exclusive interview to *Deccan Chronicle* at his Nagarjunasagar residence, Jana Reddy says why it is important for people to elect Congress in the bypoll to save democracy in Telangana and to check the abuse of money power in elections which has become a norm under TRS regime for past six years.

Q Why did you offer to contest this bypoll without campaigning and challenging the ruling TRS to do the same?

This is just a bypoll. Congress will neither form the government if it wins this seat nor Congress government will fall if it loses this seat because Congress is anyways not in power. For TRS too, this theory

holds good. The outcome of this bypoll will have no impact on TRS government. Under this scenario, let us all confine to our homes and leave the decision to voters whom to elect. TRS says that they have developed Nagarjunasagar constituency during its six-year rule and I did nothing in the last three decades. Let voters decide who did what. My challenge is aimed at this objective and nothing else.

In the name of campaigning, the TRS is deploying tens of ministers, dozens of MLAs, MLCs, MPs and hundreds of local elected representatives from village level to district level. In the name of campaigning, they are luring voters with money, liquor and other inducements. When they claim that all the development was done by TRS, where is the need for all this hungama? Let us provide an environment to conduct free and fair polls, avoid inducements to voters by confining to our homes.

Q But campaigning in elections is the right and responsibility of political parties in a democracy? How can you find fault with it?

I totally agree with this argument. But unfortunately, the ruling TRS had completely commercialised the elections in Telangana ever since it assumed office in 2014. We never witnessed such abuse of money power and government machinery in elections as is being witnessed now. There is an urge to strengthen democracy in my challenge but no ill-intentions.

Q Your achievements as seven-time MLA of Nagarjunasagar?

I worked for the development of the constituency and succeeded in solving many issues faced by the people. My constituency is unique and should not be seen like any other constituency. It is surrounded by forests and irrigation projects and getting forest and

EXCLUSIVE



K. Jana Reddy

● I WORKED for the development of the constituency and succeeded in solving many issues faced by the people. My constituency is unique and should not be seen like any other constituency, Jana Reddy said.

environmental approvals to take up development programmes is an herculean task. Despite this, I secured permissions to lay BT roads extending over 975 kilometres in my constituency which is higher than Gajwel, Siddipet, Siricilla constituencies represented by Chandrashekar Rao, Harish Rao and Rama Rao. I could secure approval for a drinking water scheme with ₹25 crore. Entire land in Nagarjunasagar was under purview of PWD but I succeeded in pursuing the government in 1983 to provide ownership to the residents of 2,000 quarters at a nominal payment of ₹100 at Nagarjunasagar. Due to my efforts, penalties imposed on people under the pretext of unauthorised constructions were also cancelled by the state government in 1985. A residential school was set up at Nagarjunasagar about 35 years ago. Of the three residential schools set up in united AP then, one came up in Nagarjunasagar due to my efforts.

Q Despite this you were defeated in 2018 election?

As a ruling party, the TRS indulged in gross misuse of power to defeat me in 2018. They went to the extent of threatening beneficiaries of welfare schemes that their names will be removed from the list of beneficiaries if TRS candidate is not elected. Despite this, I lost with a lesser margin of 7,700 votes. I was polled 76,000 votes and TRS got 84,000 votes. This is no mean achievement after continuing to serve as MLA for 30 years.

Q But opposition parties ridicule that you are afraid of campaigning as people would pose questions on lack of development in Nagarjunasagar during your three to four decades stint as MLA and minister and to avoid this situation you have raked up the issue of 'no campaigning'?

TRS leaders are uttering total lies on the development of Nagarjunasagar during my tenure. I am ready for an open debate with anyone on this issue. I challenged this several times earlier. But no TRS leader accepts my challenge. If they have guts, they should come out with facts and figures on what development they did and I will answer them. Locals in Nagarjunasagar knew very well what development I did.

Q TRS campaigns that its welfare schemes and development programmes have reached every household and seeking votes in return?

This is yet another lie of TRS. TRS government's welfare schemes are nothing but the continuation of our previous Congress government's welfare schemes which also reached every household then. It's the Congress government which introduced pensions for poor, free power to agriculture, crop loan waiver, Arogyasri, fee reimbursement, scholarships.

What Chandrashekar Rao did was simply renamed those schemes

and continuing the same. He failed to implement even the renamed schemes properly. What he did new was Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima. But he stopped all other financial assistance, subsidy schemes to farmers like interest free loans, pavalu vaddi loans. ₹5 lakh compensation for families of farmers who commit suicide under the guise of Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima. The end result is farmers are getting the same financial assistance now what they used to get during Congress regime. But Congress built new irrigation projects in Nalgonda district. I dare Chandrashekar Rao to tell at least one new project launched and completed in Nalgonda district or elsewhere in state except misleading people by completing pending projects of Congress government and renaming them under the guise of redesign of projects.

Q The ruling party argues you were rejected in 2018 and Nagarjunasagar people elected Nomula Narasimhaiah for five years until 2023. Due to untimely death of Narasimhaiah, this bypoll came and it would have been ideal for Jana Reddy to leave the seat to Nomula's family instead of contesting against the wishes of people?

I am ready to quit from this election even today if Chandrashekar Rao makes a public appeal to my party high command to leave the seat to TRS in the bypoll. I made this proposal earlier also but there was no response. If Chandrashekar Rao makes this appeal, I will strive to convince my party high command to withdraw from this bypoll. If there is no response, what can I do? As a party which made the six-decade long dream of statehood to Telangana a reality, the Congress has every right to contest any election in Telangana and seek votes from people.



A video grab of Nomula Bhagat with a cheetah in Zambia in 2016

Bhagat slams Oppn. for focussing on wild walk abroad

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC
HALIA, APRIL 7

TRS candidate Nomula Bhagat's "walk with cheetah" has become a talking point in Nagarjunasagar bypoll. A five-year-old video that shows Bhagat taking a cheetah for a walk surfaced on social media platforms and has gone viral.

While the TRS and Bhagat's supporters hail Bhagat as "real hero" for his act, his opponents accuse him of adopting a flamboyant lifestyle, which is uncalled-for for those in politics and public life. However, Bhagat defended his act saying it was shot in Zambia in 2016, adding that he loves adventures and travelled to Zambia along with his family and friends. He said opposition parties were raking up this issue ahead of the April 17 bypoll as they don't have anything worthy to talk against TRS.

"This activity is unique and nowhere else will you have such an opportunity to walk with cheetahs except in Zambia. In fact, Zambia tourism promotes this activity for adventure lovers. The

zoo authorities permit this activity under the supervision of experts. Though they are wild animals, they are trained vigorously to ensure they don't harm visitors. Since I love adventures, I did it. What's wrong in this? Is this the issue concerning the public or the country or our state? When Opposition parties don't have anything worthwhile to speak, they rake up such silly issues for political mileage," Bhagat said.

Surprisingly, Bhagat too is unaware of his video going viral until film director Ramgopal Varma tweeted on April 3 that if he had a vote he will vote for the "real hero" Bhagat who is taking a cheetah for a walk. In his tweet, Varma also likened Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar with a tiger and his son K.T. Rama Rao with a lion. "I am busy with campaigning since March 30. When some of my friends informed me about this video going viral, I felt very surprised as I too forgot about this video which was shot in 2016. I posted that video on my Instagram account then."

Edapally, Garmillapalle impose self-lockdown

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 7

With 49 persons test positive for Coronavirus in Edapally village of Mahadevpur mandal and 16 persons in Garmillapalle village under Tekumata mandal of Jayashankar Bhupalpally district on Wednesday forcing the villagers to impose a self-lockdown. In Edapally, 500 people underwent the test and the 49 people who tested positive have been put in home isolation.

According to information, the villagers conducted Jatar in the village recently, which has caused the rapid spread. The Edapally village forms the state border with Maharashtra, and the people from the neighbouring state attended the religious gathering.

In Garimellapally, a family went on a trip to Vemulawada six days ago. They have attended functions during the gap. Most of their neighbours and close relatives contracted with the virus.

The village gram panchayat imposed self lockdown restricting the movement of people in the village. About 80 people from the same colony in Kaleswaram village underwent corona tests and 17 of them were diagnosed with Corona virus. They all participated in a religious gathering in the village recently. District collector Krishna Aditya said they are preparing quarantine centres for those who are affected with the virus.

He urged officials to take steps to stop the spread of the virus.

TD loses its sole MLA in TS to TRS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

It is finally curtains for Telugu Desam Legislature Party in Telangana with its lone member and Aswaraoopet MLA M. Nageshwar Rao quitting TD and joining the ruling Telangana Rashtira Samithi.

The MLA formally joined the party at Pragati Bhavan on Wednesday in presence of Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao. Another TD MLA Sandra Venkata Veeraiiah had quit and joined TRS much earlier. Both Nageshwar Rao and Venkata Veeraiiah later in the day met assembly speaker Pocharam Srinivasa Reddy and submitted a letter seeking merger of

TDLP with TRS Legislature Party. Soon thereafter, assembly secretary V. Narasimha Chary issued a bulletin merging TDLP with TRSLP, thereby formally ending presence of Telugu Desam Party in the Telangana

Legislative Assembly.

Telugu Desam had won as many as 15 seats in elections held immediately after bifurcation of united Andhra Pradesh and formation of Telangana in 2014.

In 2018, only two of its candidates succeeded in becoming MLAs, both from erstwhile Khammam district. Veeraiiah, who is an accused in note-for-vote case involving former TD leader and now Congress MP A. Revanth Reddy, joined the ruling TRS a year after getting elected from Sattupalli in 2018.

Apparently under pressure from TD national president N. Chandrababu Naidu, the Aswaraoopet MLA deferred his wish to join TRS till Wednesday.

Speaking to media, Nageshwar Rao maintained that he joined TRS as he could not do justice to his constituents during the last two years. Being the ruling party MLA will help him develop his constituency in a better way, he added.

Bhagat: CM's work will ensure my win

Former MLA's son confident of sympathy factor working in his favour

EXCLUSIVE



Nomula Bhagat

'non local' besides ill-experienced in politics? What's your take on this?

I may be half the age of Congress candidate K. Jana Reddy but age doesn't matter for a political leader in public life if one is sincere and committed to serving the people and his constituency. I believe people vote for TRS, Chandrashekar Rao garu and Rama Rao garu in the election and not Bhagat. They are bigger than me. I will act as per the directions of the party leadership. Coming to local and non local issues, Nagarjunasagar people already gave a verdict in December 2018 by electing my father as MLA. Non local is a non issue now. Opposition leaders or candidates who claim themselves as locals should realise that they don't own a house in Nagarjunasagar constituency and they stay in Hyderabad. They only run part-time camp offices in Nagarjunasagar. But my father had built his own house in Halia in

Nagarjunasagar constituency in 2016 even before he was elected MLA and stayed there till he breathed his last and was accessible to people all the time. Now I also reside in the same house. Now those people should answer who are non-locals.

Q What chances do you stand in this election where you are pitted against Congress strongman Jana Reddy and the BJP which is claiming to repeat Dubbak bypoll result?

The tremendous response I have been getting from the people wherever I campaign since March 30 proves beyond doubt that my victory is certain. I already campaigned in 85 villages and covered three out of six mandals. I will cover all the remaining villages and mandals. I noticed everywhere that people are keen to vote for TRS and give me an opportunity to serve them to complete the balance development works promised by my late father. For this reason, I am looking at majority and not victory, which is imminent.

Coming to Jana Reddy garu, people are questioning what he will do now if he wins when he failed to develop the constituency after winning seven times as MLA and working as minister for 17 years. They already rejected Jana Reddy in 2018. BJP neither has leaders or cadre in Nagarjunasagar. People here never owned BJP as their party and they were polled just about 2,000 votes in 2018 Assembly polls.

Q What makes you so confident of winning

OTHER STORIES

Two die as roof collapses

Warangal: Two miners die after the roof of a mine in the sixth incline of Singareni's Kakatiya Khani collapsed in Bhupalpally. The deceased were identified as T. Shankar-aiyah, K. Narasaiyah. Singareni authorities launched a rescue operation to bring the bodies out of the mine. Bhupalpally general manager Nirikshana Raju said the rescue is underway and the cause of the mishap is also yet to be ascertained. Knowing about the incident, Minister for Panchayat Raj Errabelli Dayakar Rao spoke to the singareni authorities and enquired about the circumstances that led to the incident and ordered them to take appropriate remedial action.

The Minister expressed condolences to the families of the deceased. He said the government would take care of those families.

The Minister directed the Singareni authorities to take appropriate precautions so that such incidents are not repeated.

LOCKDOWN, NIGHT CURFEW RULED OUT IN TS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

There will be no lockdown or night curfew in Telangana but the testing of samples will be increased to more than one lakh per day stated health minister Etala Rajender. The second wave in the state is under control and the situation will be reviewed from time to time.

He was participating in a review meeting with superintendents of government hospitals to take stock of medicines, oxygen facilities, manpower and home kits.

Rajender said, "There are sufficient medicines, oxygen lines, healthcare workers and also home kits for patients. Government hospitals, public health centres and health officials are tracking the situation and people are urged not to panic. If they contract the virus they must opt for government hospitals where home kits are available and there," are also sufficient beds."

Rajender urged people not to go to private hospitals but take treatment at government hospitals where top-grade facilities were available. There are many asymptomatic patients and there are testing centres in all government facilities. Testing is presently being done on 50,000 samples per day but it will be increased to 1.5 lakh if required.

Isolation centres are also available in all the 33 districts for those who do not have a facility at home. There is a surge in cases in all districts and the border districts of Nizamabad, Nirmal, Adilabad, Kamareddy and others are seeing an increase in Covid cases every day.

The minister said, "We share a long border with Mahara shtra and 60 per cent of the cases in these districts are due to travel between the two states. Surveillance officials are alert and they are tracking the cases of those who are testing positive."

Similarly Hyderabad, Ranga reddy and Medchal Malkajgiri are cosmopolitan hubs with people from different states residing and hence a surge in cases."

Most of the people reporting the disease are mild cases. Unlike last year where testing and tracing took time, people are now informing healthcare workers in the locality and also their contacts, which simplifies the process to trace secondary contacts.

Those who have been given government home kits are being monitored by doctors from public health centres.

Rajender stated that the daily report of cases, follow-up and evaluation of the situation is carried out and reported to a high-level technical committee, which is monitored by Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao.

He said, "At present the situation is under control and there is no need to impose severe restrictions. Evolving situation will be assessed by the Chief Minister from time to time and appropriate decisions will be taken, accordingly."

"The second wave might last for months but if people co-operate and take the right precautions then it will help in controlling the spread of the virus," the minister said.

TRS aims to win GWMC polls

Ministers urge cadre to once again carry party flag to victory

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 7

Elated with the victory in the recent graduates' constituency MLC elections, the TRS is once again planing to retain the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) in the upcoming elections.

Gearing up party ranks for the elections, ministers Satyavathi Rathod and Errabelli Dayakar Rao along with chief whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar urged them to once again carry the party flag to victory during an election preparatory meeting held in Warangal on Wednesday.

Minister for Panchayat Raj Errabelli Dayakar Rao questioned the Modi government which was on a privatisation spree of all the public sector units (PSUs) how jobs could be created and reservations implemented to the distressed sections.

He stated that the BJP, which has failed to keep its promise to provide 2 crore jobs has no right to criticise the TRS government.

He called out to the party cadre to fight with the party leadership in case of any grievance but never leave the party.

Satyavathi Rathod said that the BJP had done



■ **SATYAVATHI RATHOD** said that the BJP had done nothing for state. "The BJP will bite the dust in the ensuing GWMC elections. TRS is the only party in the country that looks after its cadres".



■ **MINISTER FOR Panchayat Raj Errabelli Dayakar Rao** stated that the BJP, which has failed to keep its promise to provide 2 cr jobs has no right to criticise the TRS govt.



■ **CHIEF WHIP Vinay Bhaskar** said "People would only believe in BJP when it succeeds to bring Railway coach factory to Kazipet."

nothing for Telangana. "The BJP will bite the dust in the ensuing GWMC elections. TRS is the only party in the country that looks after its cadres," she noted.

Chief whip D. Vinay Bhaskar said that BJP leaders have no guts to reach out to the people. "People would only believe in BJP when it

succeeds to bring Railway coach factory to Kazipet," he said.

Vinay informed that Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development K.T. Rama Rao will address party cadres besides inaugurating several developmental programmes on April 14 in Warangal.

Brother, cousin sexually abused me, alleges sister

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, APRIL 7

Vishwambari (name changed), 20 years, lodged a complaint in Ramavaram police station in Kothagudem against her brother and cousin for sexually harassing her for the last 13 years.

In her complaint, she mentioned, that her brother Susheel sexually abused her at the age of seven and she is suffering with sexual abuse for the last thirteen years. She said that even her cousin Varma Ajay Kumar also sexually harassed me often. Both Ajay and Susheel are threatened me not to complain anybody about it. She revealed that when she took the issue to the notice of her mother and parents of her cousin, they told her not to make it "an issue". "It is common," they told her she said in the complaint.

She said that her cousin Ajay and brother

ONE OF THE ACCUSED DIES BY SUICIDE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, APRIL 7

Varma Ajay Kumar, cousin of Vishwambari (name changed) died by suicide in his house in Ramavaram of Kothagudem on Wednesday after knowing that she had lodged a complaint against him with the police. Ajay, who is working

in a software company in Bengaluru, was staying in Kothagudem as part of Work from Home. Ramavaram police station circle inspector Satyanarayana said that they have taken up investigation into the complaint. Meanwhile, Vishwambari was admitted to the Sakhi Centre in Kothagudem.

● **SHE REVEALED** that when she took the issue to the notice of her mother and parents of her cousin, they told her not to make it "an issue". "It is common," they told her she said in the complaint. She said that her cousin Ajay and brother Susheel used to harass many times during lock down.

er Susheel used to harass many times during lock down. She said that she suffered

from abdominal pain and went to hospital. Knowing that my brothers were angry over me for going to hospital without informing to them. "I am unable to bear the harassment of my brothers and I lodged a complaint in the police station after taking advice from my friends", she said. She said that she had a life threat from her family friends and asked police to save by taking action against her family members.

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."

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

Patil disobeyed court's order on paddy

FROM PAGE 1

This should be done for six months. "If he misses any weekend, that should be adjustable by serving an extra day," the court ruled.

The compliance of these orders should be submitted before the high court after it was certified by the authority of the orphanage home and the district principal judge of Nalgonda, with details as to how many hours and the dates thereof he, Patil, had served in the orphanage. This report should be filed on October 30.

Patil, who was the then joint collector, civil supplies, Warangal district, had been found guilty in a contempt case for willfully disobeying the orders of the single judge by not allotting custom-milled paddy for the Kharif season 2015-16 to G. Chandrashekar, proprietor of Parameshwara Binny Rice Mill, Parvathagiri mandal, Warangal, despite the fact that there were orders from the court that he allots the custom-milled paddy.

The single judge had directed Patil and D. Sandhyarani, the then DSO of Warangal, now reiterated to pay a fine of ₹2,000 and in default, suffer simple imprisonment of six weeks.

Challenging the orders, both Patil and Sandhya Rani filed contempt appeals. On an earlier occasion, the division bench directed Prashant J Patil to do social service, if he wants to avoid punishment.

On Wednesday, special counsel for Telangana representing Patil submitted

● **THE SINGLE** judge had directed Patil and D. Sandhyarani, the then DSO of Warangal, now reiterated to pay a fine of ₹2,000 and in default, suffer simple imprisonment of six weeks.

that the collector will undertake the task of enrolling more girl students in schools, treating this as a social service, as there was a reduction in girls' admissions.

The bench disagreed with the proposal by saying was his statutory duty as collector of the district. It directed him to serve the orphanage home in Nalgonda town, in which there are 40 inmates.

The court also directed Sandhyarani, retired and suffering from bad health, to arrange the food in one of the orphanage homes in Malkajgiri on Ugadi and Srirama Navami festival days. As she was unable to serve in the orphanage home, due to the ill health, the court directed her to arrange food for two days.

The court, while disposing of the contempt appeal, observed that in the event of the district collector of Nalgonda facing any contempt proceedings in future, he shall on his own place a copy of this order along with the reply to the contempt petition for the perusal of the concerned court.

If the court finds that these orders had not been complied with, then the punishment will be revived automatically.

ADDL COLLECTOR DISREGARDED ORDER

FROM PAGE 1

In the contempt appeals filed by the then additional collector Veera Reddy, Sangareddy, the RDO and tehsildar, Chief Justice Kohli directed the Registry of the high court to verify, collect and collate information from the court records to ascertain the fact that in how many contempt proceedings did the name of the then additional collector, Sangareddy appeared, and how many orders passed against the contemnor in these contempt proceedings.

The court directed the registrar to furnish such data to the court by June 16.

When the court asked about the earlier history of contempt cases against Veera Reddy and other officials, no answer came. So, the court directed the registrar to collate the information about these officials.

"Veera Reddy, the then additional collector of Sangareddy as also the RDO and tehsildar there had deliberately violated the orders of the single judge and willfully interfered with the peaceful possession and enjoyment of the land admeasuring Ac. 5.01 guntas in Kandi Chinnapur village, Sangareddy district, pertaining to E.J. David and three others, despite clear orders from the court, not to interfere with the said land," the court noted.

The unconditional apology tendered by the then additional collector in the form of an affidavit was allowed only to the extent of granting an exemption for him in an appearance before the court only for one day, on the ground that he tested Covid positive.

But, the order in the contempt case will remain alive, the court said.

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

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

Sources, meanwhile, said the missing jawan's location has been identified. But they refused to elaborate further in the interest of his security.

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

In another development, 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.

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 surfaced on social media with the message that he is safe in captivity is almost a year-old. "I had seen it on his phone during his last visit to home," he told reporters.

He added that releasing the photograph through a social networking platform could be a "ploy" by Maoists.

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, Kuldiep 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.

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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 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.

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.

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

Shah, Didi predict WB poll results

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, APRIL 7

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

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

Shah, who led multiple roadshows including one at a key seat: Singur in Hooghly for BJP candidate Rabindranath Bhattacharya, also a TMC turncoat, said, "Three phases of polls have been held in West Bengal so far. The BJP has already taken a lead by winning 63-68 seats out of the 91 ahead of the TMC, Communists and Congress.

On May 2 the BJP will emerge as the winner with more than 200 seats to form it's government in the state. Banerjee's frustration is getting reflected in her speech and behaviour. This confirms the BJP's victory."

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

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

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

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

CRPF working at behest of BJP: Didi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

OUTRAGE AFTER IMRAN LINKS RAPE TO WOMEN'S DRESS

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

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

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

AUSTRIAN GROUP FILES PLAINT ON GOOGLE AD TRACK

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

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

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

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

ACTOR ZACH AVERY HELD FOR PONZI SCHEME

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

According to Los Angeles Times, Avery, whose real name is Zachary J. Horwitz, was taken into custody on Tuesday with the federal investigators alleging that he defrauded investors out of more than USD 227 million. Horwitz has appeared in minor roles in movies such as “Fury”, “Curvature”, “Farming” and “The White Crow”. He is accused of fabricating licensing deals with Netflix, HBO, as well as other platforms, in order to secure funding for his film distribution company, linMM 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 linMM 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 party 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 Kalembo or Kale. Over half the town's population are members of the Chin ethnic minority.

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

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

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

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

— AP

APEX | PREDATORS

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

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

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

Polar bears snack on eggs as Arctic shrinks

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

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

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

and are snacking on their eggs.

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

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

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

Biden makes jab open to all adults

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

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

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

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

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

“The safety committee has confirmed that the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine in preventing Covid-19 overall outweigh the risk of side effects,” EMA chief Emer Cooke told a news conference. “It is saving lives.”

Despite the fact that many of the cases have been reported in women under 55, prompting a number of countries to restrict the vaccine's use to older people, the regulator said it had not been able to pinpoint those at risk.

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

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 deadlly earnest with you: We aren't at the finish line. We still have a lot of work to do. We're still in a life and death race against this virus,” Biden said in remarks at the White House.

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

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

MERKEL BACKS ‘LOCKDOWN’ TO TAME COVID-19

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

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

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

— AFP

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

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,

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 counterpart,

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

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

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

— AFP



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



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 Augusta Westland helicopter deal, which is also mired in controversy and corruption. The French agency did not pursue the case and closed the complaint filed by a well-known anti-corruption NGO “Sherpa”, the reports said.

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

DECCAN CHRONICLE

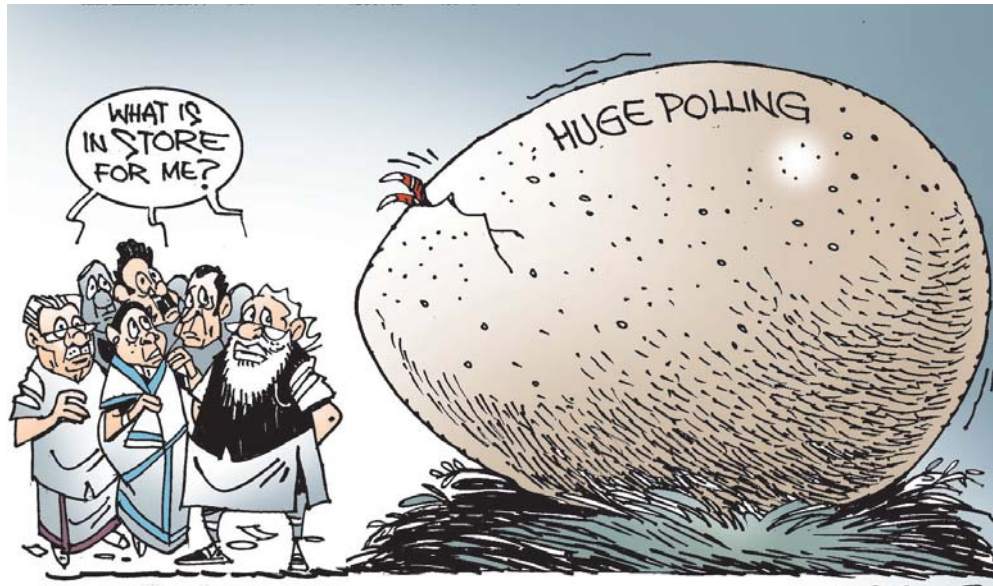
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Subhani



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



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

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

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

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

But the season of fear is back.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is the road ahead?

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

FAST-TRACK COURT

A man accused of rape in 2011 is being sentenced in 2021, 10 years later (*Man sentenced for raping woman, DC, April 7*). The great news is that this is a fast-track court that re-establishes the speed of our judicial system for the umpteenth time.

K.R.K.S. Murthy
Hyderabad

PLAN AND ACHIEVE

It is gratifying that the IMF expects India's economy to grow at 12.5 per cent this financial year (*India to grow by 12.5%, says IMF, DC, April 7*). All departments in various sectors contributing to the GDP should plan a target of 13 per cent to 15 per cent growth and put all out efforts to achieve them. Even if some departments fail to meet their targets, the average growth would be good.

G.V.N. Murthy
Hyderabad

FIGHT MAOISTS

The security forces are doing a great job keeping Maoist activities under check (*Need to rethink strategy to tackle Maoist menace, DC, April 7*). However, Maoists still manage to attack our forces. Whenever it happens, we blame them. This is unfair. All parties must rise above their narrow loyalties and in the larger interests of the nation, unite to declare Maoists as enemies and fight them.

K. Srinivasa Charyulu
Hyderabad

PM'S JIBES

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's continuous attack on TMC chief Mamata Banerjee is awkward (*TMC will cease to exist in WB: Modi, DC, April 7*). He must wait for the results and respect the voters choice. No Prime Minister has ever acted in such a way.

Zakaria Sultan
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

360 villages reduced to ashes in East Pak

JESSORE, APRIL. 7

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

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

Maleeha Lodhi



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ly 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.

Aravind appointed as CFO of Tanla Platforms Ltd

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

Practo online consultations in 15 languages

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



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

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

BACKING UP GROWTH

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

► Stance to remain accommodative till recovery is ensured

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

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

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-

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-

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

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

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 systems. The central bank proposed to enable payment system operators like PPIs, card networks, white label ATM operators and trade receivable discounting system (TReDS) platforms regulated by it to take

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 Nifty50 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.

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 Mallaya, VP and MD, sales, marketing and communications Group, Intel India.

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

Nurse squeezes extra doses of vaccine with air bubbles

ESSI LEHTO HELSINKI, APRIL 7

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

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

Such "low-dead-space"



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

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

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

The dose is then injected with minimal waste.

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

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

SHORT TAKES

Olympic torch is off Osaka streets

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

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

Judo team pull out of Oly qualies

New Delhi: A 16-member Indian judo team has been forced to withdraw from the ongoing Asia-Oceania Olympic qualifiers in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan after a player tested positive for Coronavirus just before the start of the tournament. The judoka tested positive after landing in Kyrgyzstan. "Yes, one player of the team tested positive upon landing in Bishkek just a before the official weighing on April 5, forcing the entire squad to withdraw as per the guidelines of International Judo Federation," a source in the Judo Federation of India (JFI) said.

"The team comprised 12 judokas and four coaches," it added. The Asia-Oceania Championships in Bishkek started on Tuesday and will end on Saturday. Prominent judokas in the team included Shushila Devi (women's 48kg), Jasleen Singh Saini (men's 66kg), Tulika Mann (women's 78kg) and Avtar Singh (men's 100kg). — *PTI*

Royals look to rule

Will Samson-Sangakkara partnership work for Rajasthan?

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

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

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

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

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

STRENGTH

RR boast of a number of destructive batsmen. Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes are 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 which hasn't been consistent. Samson has rarely performed in five straight



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*

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 capitalise 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 the role and the impact

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.

The Royal Challengers Bangalore will take on defending champions Mumbai Indians in the tournament-opener on Friday.

"His (Sams') report from the 2nd test on 7th April came positive. Sams is currently asymptomatic and he is currently in isolation at a designated medical facility," the RCB said.

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

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

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

TCA affiliation up at BCCI meeting

New Delhi, April 7: Following the unsanctioned conduct of the Bihar Cricket League, the BCCI is likely to form a working group to streamline the organisation of T20 events around the country in its Apex Council meeting on April 16.

The Bihar Cricket Association completed the league last month despite BCCI's directive in the middle of the event stating that it was staging the tournament without the required approval.

Following the success of the IPL, state T20 leagues began mushrooming around the country but most of them have come under the scanner for corruption, something which is seen as a big challenge by BCCI's new anti-corruption unit.

Also among the 14-point agenda is discussion on a representation made by Telangana Cricket Association and state of affairs in Jammu and Kashmir cricket, a body

which the High Court has asked BCCI to run till the elections are held.

The TCA had made its pitch earlier and could be a step closer to becoming an associate member of the BCCI.

The BCCI might also grant recognition to the Differently Aabled Cricket Council of India, having conducted fruitful talks with the stakeholders recently.

Other business on the agenda include appointment of the Indian women's team's support staff and its international assignments.

There will also be talks on how to conduct the 2021-2022 domestic season.

The Indian cricket board could also finalise its stand on backing the ICC's bid for cricket's inclusion in the 2028 Olympics. If it decides to support the game's inclusion in the Summer Games, it might have to give up on its autonomy and become a national sports federation. — *PTI*

NETHRA 1ST INDIAN WOMAN SAILOR TO QUALIFY FOR OLY

New Delhi, April 7: Nethra Kumanan on Wednesday became the first Indian woman sailor to qualify for the Olympics after she was assured of a top-place finish in the laser radial event of the Asian Qualifiers in Oman.

The 23-year-old has a 21-point advantage over her nearest rival, who also happens to be an Indian — Ramya Saravanan — in the Laser Radial Class event with one race to go on Thursday.

Chennai-based Nethra currently has 18 points while Saravanan has 39 on the penultimate day of competitions in Mussanah Open Championship, which is a joint Asian and African Olympic qualifying event. In sailing, the athlete who has the least points wins the competition. The final race on Thursday is a 20 pointer and Nethra has sealed it with one round to go.

"Yes, Kumanan has qualified for the Tokyo Olympics with one race to go on the final day on Thursday," Asian Sailing Federation President Malav Shroff said.

"The final race is a 20 pointer but the point gap with her nearest Asian rival, also an Indian, is more than 20," said Shroff who himself represented India in Olympic sailing event in the 2004 Athens Games. — *PTI*

CITY CLIPS



Winners and runners-up of the TSTA State Ranking Tennis Tournament pose with their trophies at the Secunderabad Club.

Dhiraj's double at Secunderabad Club

V. Dhiraj Reddy bagged a grand double by winning the singles titles in the boys U-16 and U-18 categories at the TSTA State Ranking Tennis Tournament held at the Secunderabad Club.

In the U-16 final, Dhiraj was stretched before defeating Sri Hari Donde 6-3, 6-7(3-7), 10-6. In the U-18 title round, he beat Rushi Chakra Budidha 5-7, 6-1, 10-6.

THE RESULTS

■ **Boys U-16 final:** V. Dhiraj Reddy bt Sri Hari Donde 6-3, 6-7(3-7), 10-6. **Semifinals:** V. Dhiraj Reddy bt A. Vijay Sarathi 9-2; Sri Hari Donde bt Shashank Chilla 9-2.

■ **Boys U-18 final:** V. Dhiraj Reddy bt Rushi Chakra Budidha 5-7, 6-1, 10-6. **Semifinals:** Rushi Chakra Budidha bt Tanmay Raj Bhatnagar 9-2; V. Dhiraj Reddy bt Saneet Uppati 9-4.

■ **Girls U-16 final:** Sai Ananya Varanasi bt Nysha Baruah 6-2, 6-0. **Semifinals:** Sai Ananya Varanasi bt Harshleen Kaur 9-2; Nysha Baruah bt D. Hasini Yadav 3-2 conceded.

■ **Girls U-18 final:** Nysha Baruah bt Veda Ravipati 6-1, 6-1. **Semifinals:** Nysha Baruah bt P. Nanditha Reddy 9-2; Veda Ravipati bt Kathayavani Reddy 9-1.

■ **Women's final:** Charitha Vasi Reddy bt Jayti Tanna 2-6, 6-0, 10-2. **Semifinals:** Charitha Vasi Reddy bt Juvieria Fatima 9-5; Jayti Tanna bt Laharika Gangoni 9-3.

■ **Men's final:** Jaidev Reddy bt Rushi Chakra Budidha 7-6 (2), 5-1 conceded. **Semifinals:** Jaidev Reddy bt Anirudh Behera 9-2; Rushi Chakra Budidha bt Aditya Kodakalla 9-1.

Mixed luck for Dedeepya at AITA event

Hyderabad girl Y. Sai Dedeepya entered the singles semifinals of the AITA ₹1 lakh Women's tennis tournament being played in Bengaluru. In the quarterfinals, Dedeepya defeated Avishka Gupta of Jharkhand 6-2, 6-4. In the semifinals she will play Statemate Veda Varshitha. Partnering Avishka Gupta of Jharkhand in the doubles, Dedeepya lost to the combination of Snigdha (Karnataka) & Veda Varshitha (Telangana) 1-6, 6-4, 6-10.

Royal Club put four past Wanaparthy

Royal Club 'A' defeated Wanaparthy 4-3 in the Dhyan Chand Cup 5-a-side Hockey Tournament being organised by Gymkhana Hockey Club at the Gymkhana Ground in Secunderabad.

Yaswanth, E. Aditya, S. Sandeep and Raju scored a goal each for the winners while T. Venkatesh got all three for Wanaparthy.

In another match, Indur Hockey Club beat Youth League 3-1. Rakesh, Kapil and Jayvardhan scored for the winners while S. Mahesh reduced the margin for Youth League. Rasoolpura 'B' played out a 1-1 draw with Mohd Sporting with Ravi Teja and Vinod scoring for either side respectively.

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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.

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

THE RESULTS

(QUARTERFINALS FIRST LEGS)

Real Madrid 3
(Vinicius Junior 27, 65, Asensio 36)
Liverpool 1
(Salah 51)

Manchester City 2
(De Bruyne 19, Foden 90)
Borussia Dortmund 1
(Reus 84)

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

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

of the return in eight days' time.

Before then, they go up against Barcelona on Saturday and this result, their fifth consecutive victory, should be another huge boost to morale going into what will be a crucial fixture in the Spanish league's title race. — *AFP*

24 athletes Covid +ve in SAI Bhopal

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

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

"In the two rounds of testing, a total of 36 people have tested positive for Covid, out of whom 24 are athletes, and the other 12 who are staff of NCOE

(National Centre of Excellence)," a SAI official said.

"Some of the athletes who tested positive had returned from wushu and judo competitions," the official added.

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

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

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