

CRESCENT IS NOT SIGHTED, RAMZAN FROM TOMORROW

ATHER MOIN | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 12

The moon crescent, which marks the commencement of the holy month of Ramzan, was not spotted in Hyderabad and other parts of the country on Monday. Ramzan will begin from Wednesday. Taraweeh, the special Ramzan prayers, will begin on Tuesday, and end with the sighting of the next moon.

Markazi Ruyat-e-Hilaal Committee of Sadar Majlis Ulema-e-Deccan made the announcement following a meeting for moon sighting.

Committee general secretary Moulana Qubool Badsha Shuttari, confirmed that the moon could not be sighted due to thick clouds.

■ Page 2: Moon not sighted in AP also



KTR's final warning to BJP

Says TRS won't refrain from paying back BJP in the same coin

ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC
WARANGAL, APRIL 12

The TRS that has maintained a patient demeanour to the taunts of the BJP will now respond in the same coin, warned the party's working president and IT minister K.T. Rama Rao here on Monday.

Addressing the media here, he demanded that the BJP leaders stop abusing Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao.

"This is a final warning to the BJP leaders. It is not for us to abuse Prime Minister Modi or home minister



Minister K.T. Rama Rao at an event in Warangal. — DC

Amit Shah. We have a better vocabulary when it comes to abusing. BJP leaders are forgetting the

stature of KCR while speaking about him. They think abusing the CM increases their image. If they contin-

ue with this, we too will start speaking out in the same manner," he said.

On the ABVP activists obstructing his convoy earlier in the day, Rama Rao said the government had listed out the 1,32,899 jobs it provided during the past seven years. "PM Modi promised two crore jobs per year. Were 14 crore job given in the past seven years of the BJP rule at the Centre," he asked.

The minister said the BJP is on a spree of selling PSUs to private entities and it does not have moral right to speak about government jobs.

TRS will make Warangal a futuristic city, says KTR

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 12

K.T. Rama Rao, municipal administration and urban development minister, on Monday said it is the TRS government's responsibility to transform Warangal into a futuristic city just as Hyderabad was made a global city.

In the city to inaugurate and lay foundation stones for various development projects, he said Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has a special plan of action to develop Warangal and it would be executed at any cost.

"The Metro is on the cards and about ₹2,500

crore worth of development and beautification projects are being inaugurated today itself. The day also marks honouring the promise to ensure drinking water supply to every household in Rampur. This has been possible because the Chief Minister has a special liking for the people of Warangal and that is why he gave priority to allotment of the required funds," Rao stated.

Criticising the Union government for denying a wagon factory to Warangal, he said it has affected employment opportunities for the locals.

"When I questioned them about this on social media,

I was hit with abuses from BJP activists but they never gave an answer. The coach factory in Latur was announced in 2018 and it has already been completed but what was promised to Telangana in 2014 is yet to see the light of the day," he noted.

The BJP promised 'ache din' and asked everyone to open a Jan Dhan account so as to be credited with ₹15 lakh each. This continues to remain a ruse. Making it worse, prices of fuel, gas and fertilizers have been hiked, he pointed out.

He appealed to the people to vote for the TRS keeping in mind the change it has brought for people.

BJP, BJYM YOUTH LEADERS STAY PUT IN N'SAGAR TENTS

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 12

They were been denied a decent place to stay but several youth belonging to the BJP converted this into an opportunity to take the party's message to the rural masses, in particular the tribal areas, in Nagarjunasagar which is going for a bypoll on April 17.

As all hotels and resorts were booked by TRS leaders, and locals allegedly warned against accommodating BJP workers, they came up with this unique idea — staying put in trekking tents in tandas (tribal hamlets) each night, interacting with the inhabitants.

■ Full report on Page 2

Mamata out of campaign for 24 hours

New Delhi, April 12: The Election Commission on Monday barred West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee from campaigning for 24 hours for her remarks against central forces and a statement which had alleged religious overtones. The ban started at 8 pm on Monday.

The "commission hereby condemns such statements potent with serious law and order problems across the state(s) and sternly warns Mamata Banerjee and advises her to desist from using such statements while making public utterances during the period when Model Code of Conduct is in force," the order said.

On her speech which had alleged religious overtones, the Election Commission (EC) said that Banerjee has "selectively chosen" parts of her speech in her reply dated April 9 and "did not mention anything on the context of key parts of her speech".

Mamata Banerjee had denied the charges.

Lashing out at the ban, Mamata Banerjee later said she would stage a dharna at Gandhi Murti, Kolkata, from 12 noon on Tuesday to protest against the poll panel's "unconstitutional decision".

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi pilloried Mamata Banerjee



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign rally for state assembly polls, in Nadia, on Monday. — PTI

over a TMC leader likening the Scheduled Castes to beggars and claimed she could not have made the "seriously objectionable" comment without the permission of the CM.

Modi said the people of Bengal have hit so many fours and sixes in the first four phases of the Assembly polls that the BJP has already completed its century and Mamata Banerjee's "innings is over." He continued: "People have clean bowled Didi in Nandigram, and her innings in Bengal is over."

SPUTNIK VACCINE GETS NOD FROM CENTRE'S PANEL

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 12

Even as India surpassed Brazil to become the second most infected country in the world, the Drugs Controller General of India on Monday approved Dr Reddy's Laboratories Ltd's application to grant emergency-use authorisation to Russia's Sputnik V vaccine.

The Sputnik V vaccine has been developed by the Gamaleya National Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology of Russia. This is the third vaccine approved by the Indian government for use on its population.

DRL will produce around 750 million doses of the Sputnik V vaccine.

Russian Ambassador to India Nikolay R. Kudashev said: "We note the reports that a committee of experts recommended Sputnik V for use in India. This step would definitely contribute to the efforts of the Indian government to counter the COVID19 pandemic. We hope the approval by the DCGI will be completed soon."

In the last 24 hours, 1.69 lakh fresh cases of COVID-19 were detected in India along with 904 deaths. The total number of cases with UK, South Africa and Brazil variants of COVID virus in the country is now 948.

A huge volume of the caseload is in Maharashtra followed by Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Karnataka. In UP, the ongoing Kumbh Mela has contributed immensely.

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WEATHER



Max: 35.6°C
Min: 25.2°C
RH: 69%
Rainfall: 12.8mm

Forecast: Cloudy sky. Rain likely in evening. Max/Min temp. 36/25 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Shuddha Padyami till 10.17 am
Star: Ashwini till 2.19 pm
Variyam: 9.51 am to 11.38 am
Durmuhurtam: 8.34 am to 9.23 am; 11.06 pm to 11.53 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
HJRI CALENDAR
Sha'ban 30,1442 AH
PRAVERS
Fajar: 4.59 am
Zohar: 12.27 pm
Asar: 4.37 pm
Maghrib: 6.38 pm
Isha: 7.47 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.01 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.31 PM
MOONSET 7.37 PM
MOONRISE 6.48 AM

COUNTER POINT



**Not gold and diamonds...
let's smuggle Covid
vaccine and medicine!**

OTHER STORIES

**MOON NOT SIGHTED
IN AP ALSO**

FROM PAGE 1

The committee did not receive any testimony of the new moon being sighted from any part of the country, he said. President, Jamiat Ulema of Krishna district, Moulana Mohammed Hussain Ahmed, confirmed that the crescent was not sighted in Andhra Pradesh and the first Ramzan will be observed on Wednesday in the state.

PODU: VILLAGERS THRASH FOREST BEAT OFFICERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOTHAGUDEM, APRIL 12

Three forest beat officers were thrashed and one of them tied to a tree in D-Kothuru forest in the limits of Chintaguppa village of Dummugudem mandal in Bhadracharya district on Monday.

According to available details, the officers Sodi Rajesh, Hussain and Vijaya went to Compartment-46 in D-Kothuru forest beat area to level the 27-hectare forest land to raise seedlings in the coming Haritha Haram. They were there for trench cutting around the land to mark it as belonging to the forest. While they were on the job, taking the help of labourers of Chintaguppa and a dozer, the residents of Chintaguppa rushed to the spot and thrashed the forest officials alleging that they came to seize podu land from them. The locals asked them to leave the place. At one stage, they tied Sodi Rajesh to a tree to create fear among them.

Later, the forest officials reached the police station in Dummugudem and lodged a complaint. Circle inspector N Venkateswarlu took the complaint and started investigation. The forest officials identified some of the villagers, who had attacked them.

THUDUMDEBBA LEADERS FELICITATE SP

Adilabad: Adivasi Hakkula Porata Samiti (Thudumdebba) leaders on Monday felicitated outgoing Adilabad superintendent of police Vishnu S Warrior at his camp office in the Adilabad town. Vishnu S Warrior has been transferred as police commissioner, Khammam. A team of Thudumdebba leaders led by district president Godam Ganesh thanked the outgoing SP Vishnu S Warrior for positively responding to the problems faced by the Adivasis when brought to his notice and tried to resolve them.

TRS steers voters to 'car' ahead of bypoll

Party uses sample EVM papers to ensure voters get vote right

L. VENKAT RAM
REDDY | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 12

As April 17 polling day is nearing, the Telangana Rastra Samiti (TRS) has gone into a mission mode to educate voters of the Nagarjunasagar Assembly constituency about exercising their franchise for ruling party symbol car in the correct manner.

The party is using sample EVMs papers to ensure voters cast their votes for the TRS correctly, without confusing the party symbol with similar looking images on the machine.

The TRS is taking extra precautions this time to avoid the past experience of losing votes to independent candidates who have been allotted similar-looking symbols like truck, iron box, road roller, tractor, chapati

maker and so on. Voters, particularly in rural areas, had been confusing the TRS car symbol with these images.

Significantly, the ruling party believes it lost Huzurnagar Assembly poll in December 2018 and Dubbak bypoll in December 2020 owing to such confusion.

Though Election Commission removed truck and iron box symbols during 2019 Lok Sabha elections following a request made by TRS after 2018 Assembly polls, the party says the commission has allotted other similar looking symbols in Nagarjunasagar constituency to independent.

As many as 45 contestants are contesting from the Nagarjunasagar constituency. Barring three major parties—TRS, Congress

and BJP—the rest are either independents or those representing smaller parties. Election Commission has been forced to use two EVMs to accommodate all of them.

Incidentally, the three major parties will figure in the first EVM. But this EVM has a few independent candidates with symbols like road roller, tractor and chapati maker, which TRS leaders say look like their party symbol car.

After 2018 December Assembly polls, TRS president and Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao had formally lodged a complaint with the Election Commission of India saying TRS lost several votes to the truck symbol in several Assembly seats. Due to this, TRS candidate lost from one seat and victo-

ry margins of the party got reduced considerably in around 12 Assembly seats, the CM pointed out.

In the Dubbak Assembly bypoll, independent candidate Bandaru Nagaraju, who was allotted the chapati maker symbol, polled 3,570 votes, while the TRS lost this election to the BJP with just 1,118 votes. TRS leaders point out that all other independents polled votes in single digits. This is ample proof that TRS voters got confused and voted for Nagaraju. Otherwise, the ruling party would have easily won Dubbak, they claimed.

This is precisely the reason why TRS leaders are taking the issue very seriously and educating their party voters to vote in the right manner for the car symbol.

HC NOT INCLINED TO THWART TRS PARTY MEETING

VIJINI
VAMSHIDHARA | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 12

The Telangana High Court on Monday effectively allowed the holding of a public meeting by the TRS in Anumal village in Nalgonda on April 14 for Nagarjunasagar Assembly byelection. The court adjourned the hearing of two petitions against the meeting to April 15, after the judge said she was not convinced of the need to thwart the meeting. Justice G. Sri Devi heard two writ petitions filed by two different petitioners seeking a direction to the TRS to restrain from holding the public meeting in Nalgonda.

They argued that the meeting would be a violation of the Covid protocols and Election Commission guidelines on such meetings. One petition was filed by Ch. Saideah, a resident of Halia, Anumula mandal, who is contesting as an independent.

K.K. Mahender Reddy, counsel for the petitioner, said the TRS was trying to gather more than 50,000 people, which would be a violation of the EC guidelines vis-à-vis the Covid situation. The state government had also issued an order on March 27, imposing restrictions on public gatherings and congregations, counsel noted. Justice Sri Devi said she was not convinced by the contentions raised by counsel. The judge also took into consideration the contentions put forth by Advocate-General B.S. Prasad that all political parties are holding public meetings everywhere.

Another writ petition filed by Goli Saidi Reddy and Goli Srinivas Reddy, both agriculturists from Anumula, challenged the decision of the TRS in holding such a huge gathering on their 1.16-acre land.



BJP youth live in trekking tents in tandas (tribal hamlets) to take the party's message to the rural masses for Nagarjunasagar bypolls. — DC

Unique trend by BJP youths for Sagar polls

N. VAMSI
SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 12

They were been denied a decent place to stay but several youth belonging to the Bharatiya Janata Party converted this into an opportunity to take the party's message to the rural masses, in particular the tribal areas, in Nagarjunasagar which is going for a bypoll on April 17.

As all hotels and resorts were booked by Telangana Rashtra Samiti leaders, and locals who offered to accommodate the BJP workers were allegedly threatened by ruling party activists, they came up with

what definitely is a unique trend in poll campaigning — staying put in trekking tents in tandas (tribal hamlets) each night, interacting with the inhabitants, understanding their problems and propagating the BJP's development mantra before moving on to the next tando the next morning. "This gave us a great opportunity to develop a bond with the locals," said BJP leader P.M. Sai Prasad, who earlier served as national vice-president of party wing, the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha. "We are cooking our food and sometimes the locals are sharing their food with

us," he said. The youth teams under Sai Prasad have been vigorously campaigning for party candidate Dr P. Ravi Kumar for the last six days, putting aside the difficulties caused by lack of a proper place to sleep or even relieve themselves. "Of course, we are trained to face harsh conditions since our Rashtriya Swamsevaka Sangh and BJYM days," Prasad pointed out. The BJP workers toured several habitations including Seethal tando, Dokkalavai tando and Rajavaram and explained to the voters the need to support a strong political force alternative to the TRS and Congress.

Festival fun



Women pluck Mangoes to start preparations for Ugadi festival at a Mango garden in Karimnagar on Monday. —Yelabaka Radhakrishna

ABVP activists obstruct KTR's convoy in Warangal

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 12

Demanding immediate filling of jobs in government sector and solving issues in state universities, ABVP activists on Monday obstructed the convoy of IT minister K.T. Rama Rao during his visit to Warangal.

Despite police making preventive arrests of several opposition leaders across the district, the activists managed to get past police lines and sprang onto the road in front of the moving convoy of Rama Rao at Pochamma Maidan. Lying on the road, they raised slogans against the state government.

The police immediately tried to pull them away but they refused to budge. The protestors were taken off the road after a scuffle and the convoy was delayed by about 15 minutes.

Several opposition party leaders as well as student

union leaders were either under house-arrest or taken into preventive custody ahead of Rao's visit.

Kakatiya University student union JAC chairman Thirupathi Yadav said that despite several appeals to public representatives regarding problems faced by students in universities, there has been no response. In addition to this, the police are harassing them with prior arrests, he said.

"We fought in the statehood agitation so that we could get jobs and the future generations would lead a better life. However, we are still at the receiving end. The TRS government promised an unemployment allowance but that is nowhere in sight. We will continue to obstruct TRS leaders," he said.

Bhartiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) Warangal Urban district president Siddam Naresh Patel said that police had forced themselves into his house in the

early hours of Monday and took him away. "By feeling insecure with the presence of opposition parties, the ruling party has accepted its incompetence. The days of KCR rule are numbered," Naresh said.

BJP Warangal Urban district president Rao Padma was also arrested. The ABVP condemned the arrest of its leaders who had obstructed the convoy. ABVP state secretary Praveen Reddy said the students wanted to ask the minister to at least respond to the death of Boda Sunil Naik, who committed suicide citing the government's insincerity in providing jobs. "The student movement cannot be stopped by arrests and the KCR government is scripting its own downfall by treating the unemployed youth brutally. It is sad that even seven years after the formation of the state, unemployed youth are still committing suicides," Praveen said.

KTR inaugurates ₹2,500 cr worth development works

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 12

Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban development KT Rama Rao on Monday inaugurated and laid foundations to ₹2500 crore worth of development works in Warangal.

In a whirlwind tour throughout the day, the minister went on a spree of launching the daily drinking water supply under the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation at Rampur. Water from the Dharmasagar reservoir are pumped to the households from the overhead service

reservoir (OHSR) with a capacity of eight lakh litres.

Later, he laid foundations and inaugurated for the construction of double bedroom houses, Shadikhana, Huj House, fruit markets, integrated veg and non-veg markets, a business complex, road, ROB, RUBs, storm water drain cum duct Foreshore development of Waddepally lake, beautification of junctions, jain sites, theme parks, cultural hub, bhadrakali geo-bio diversity park and decorative lighting.

KTR addressed two public meetings during the day at

Khila Warangal and New Shyampet.

At the end of a busy day, the minister left to Hyderabad by road. Minister for Panchayat Raj Errabelli Dayakar Rao said KTR has brought the Ugadi festival one day ahead to Warangal by inaugurating ₹2500 crore worth of works here.

"The calendars and astrologers say that water will be available in abundance in this new Telugu year of Plava.

As an indication daily water supply has been launched in the city today," Errabelli said.

MAN VS | WILD

Police foil BJP leaders' bid to get people from Kondapally, other places to occupy reserve forest

Podu farmlands battle enters deep into tiger territory

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 12

The battle for rights over 'podu' farmlands has moved deep into the heart of tiger territory in the reserve forest in Komaram Bheem-Asifabad district where Phalguna, a tigress who migrated from Mahārashtra, led to revival of the fortune of its species in Telangana state.

A protest by villagers led by BJP leader Dr Palvai Harish Babu on April 8, demanding that people who occupied forest land illegally in the Kadamba reserve forest block of the Penchikolpet forest range, epitomises the conflict between people demanding pattas over illegally occupied forest land and wildlife in the state.

It was in the Kadamba area that Phalguna, the tigress, gave birth to four cubs in 2016, the first to be

born in the unified Adilabad district in many years. Phalguna gave birth to another litter of three cubs, making her the poster-girl among tiger conservationists for revival of her species' fortunes in Telangana state.

In fact, such was the enthusiasm that Phalguna's first litter evoked that then forests minister Joga Ramanna, along with Sirpur-Kagaznagar MLA from the TRS, Koneru Konappa, Mudhole MLA G. Vittal Reddy, and D.S. Redya Naik from Dornakal, on August 31, 2016, presenting Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao with a framed picture of Phalguna with her cubs near her den.

Even more significantly, India Post in 2018 issued a postage stamp with a picture of Phalguna with her first litter to mark her sig-



Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao receives on August 31, 2016, a portrait of Phalguna and her cubs from her first litter in the Kadamba forest of Komaram Bheem-Asifabad district in this file picture. — DC

nificant contribution to Telangana's and India's tiger population. The department also issued a picture postcard of Phalguna.

Before Phalguna's arrival in 2015 from the Tadoba-Andhari tiger

range in Maharashtra and her settling down in the forest corridor connecting the Kawal tiger reserve in Adilabad and Maharashtra, there were barely any tigers in the district, save for the odd or occasional migrant from

Maharashtra. While some presumably made their way back into Maharashtra, some were killed in the unified Adilabad district by local poachers.

According to wildlife experts, all the tigers in

northern Telangana, over the years, were picked off one by one by poachers who left Kawal tiger reserve without a single tiger for some years. It was only last year that presence of tigers, who moved in from Maharashtra, were found in the Eturunagar Wildlife Sanctuary in the former Warangal district. This sanctuary too was once home to tigers but over the years, they were wiped out by poachers.

It is into this tiger heartland of Telangana state, in what is now the Asifabad district, that the latest battle over Podu land rights has moved into with the BJP leaders leading people from Kondapally and a few others, moved into grab forest land into the reserve forest areas in Kondapally North, Kondapally West, Kondapally South and Bombaiguda beats on

April 8. The attempt to forcibly occupy forest land ended with the police removing the protesters from the forest areas and the BJP accusing the police of beating up the occupiers and its leaders.

At least two women police officials suffered bleeding injuries in the attacks by the villagers on the security detail that sought to evict the encroachers from the forest land in this episode. It may be recalled that the state government has been repeatedly promising those practicing 'Podu' or shifting cultivation will be given pattas and this is believed to have emboldened people, as well as leaders of political parties, including the ruling TRS, to force the issue and keep the state forest department out of the forest areas that have been illegally occupied.

OTHER **STORIES**
DELIMITATION OF DIVISIONS DONE IN KHAMMAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, APRIL 12

The boundaries of almost all the erstwhile 50 divisions in Khammam Municipal Corporation (KMC) have been changed and now there are 60 divisions in the civic body. Nearly 25 colonies, including Sriramagiri Colony, TNGOs Colony, Venugopalnagar Colony and Vijayanagar Colony have been divided and incorporated in two divisions. The entire Ramannapet village has been carved out as the 60th division and Danavaigudem as the 59th. The areas of Ramanagutta, Doranna Colony, part of Raparthinagar, B C Colony were included in the 58th division while Divyangula Colony, Sriramagiri, Lambadi Colony, Hanuman Nagar and Jagajivanramnagar will be in 57th division. Congress corporator V Narasimha Rao said that the officials carved out divisions as per the whims and fancies of TRS bosses. He said that many colonies have been divided as two divisions.

Vijayanagar Colony, which was in 25th ward earlier, was divided into two divisions as 55 and 56 divisions. Some parts of Vijaynagar Colony, Venugopalanagar and Dwarakanagar are in 56th division. Kaikondaigudem village and part of TNGOs Colony were incorporated in the first division and SFS School area and Pandurangapuram in the second. Dwansalapuram Colony, Agrapharam, Kothur, Kotha Colony and part of Sriramanagar were in sixteenth division. Meanwhile, reservations of division will be announced in a day or two. About 30 divisions will be reserved for various categories. The target of TRS is to win not less than 50 divisions in Khammam Municipal Corporation.

● **ERSTWHILE 50 divisions in KMC have been changed and now there are 60 divisions in the civic body.**

Supply of fake cotton seeds rise in Adilabad

Agriculture officials failed to keep a close watch on menace

DC CORRESPONDENT
MANCHERIAL, APRIL 12

Spurious Bt cotton seeds are being supplied to villages by organised gangs much before the Kharif season by taking the advantage of the Covid epidemic situation in the old Adilabad district. Agriculture department officials are failing to take action even as this occurs every year and is seriously affecting cotton cultivators. Police said on Monday that they busted such a racket in the district. Middlemen from Andhra Pradesh recruited agents at local levels and are supplying the spurious seeds through them to

farmers. The police appealed to farmers to purchase cotton seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers only from licensed shops and not from middlemen or unknown persons. On April 4, the task force police seized 160kg of spurious cotton seeds worth Rs2.6 lakh at Bheemaram in this district and arrested two persons belonging to Dornipadu village in Kurnool district. During the police investigation, it was learnt that Melikota Ramasheshayya came to Bheemaram to sell hand over the “manufactured” seeds to local agent Ippalapalli Sammaiah. Many middlemen from

Andhra Pradesh and bordering Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan are supplying spurious cotton seeds to their agents in the north Telangana districts. The menace of fraudulent supply of spurious cotton seeds is noticed every year during the Kharif and rabi seasons in the old Adilabad district. In another incident, on April 6, Kotapalli police seized 400 packets of spurious cotton seeds worth Rs3 lakh while this was being transported in a car from Maharashtra on the inter-state bridge at Rapanapalli village in Kotapalli mandal of Mancherial district.

Police arrested two persons hailing from Nagpur. For quite a few years, cotton farmers are suffering huge losses by sowing spurious cotton seeds that fail to germinate or poor-quality seeds that give low yield and this menace has increased in recent years. Farmers have to spend a lot of money in terms of pesticides and fertilizers as they try to raise the cotton crop. Agriculture officials have failed to keep a close watch on the sales of spurious cotton seeds despite having information that these are entering into local markets.

English medium in ZPHS from next year: ZP chief

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 12

The governing body of the Jagtial Zilla Parishad has decided to introduce English medium in government-run primary and high schools from the next academic year. A meeting of the panel presided over by chairperson Dava Vasantha passed a resolution to this effect and passed on its copies to the principals and chairmen of the Vidya committees on Monday. Vasantha said the education imparted in these schools will be of high standards matching with the levels of the corporate schools. Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has



ZP Chairperson, Dava Vasantha hands over the resolution papers to the principals of parishad schools in Jagtial on Monday. —BY ARRANGEMENT

● **ONCE THE situation returned to normalcy, they will be reopened,” she said.**

taken steps for strengthening the government schools by providing all kinds of basic facilities along with good infrastructure, she

noted. “Keeping in view the spread of the second wave of coronavirus, the government ordered closure of schools in the state. Once the situation returned to normalcy, they will be reopened,” she said.

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SHORT TAKES

MP DEFERS 10, 12 EXAMS AMID SURGE IN CASES

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, APRIL 12

Madhya Pradesh government on Monday announced fresh curbs to tackle Covid-19 pandemic amid surge in Coronavirus cases in the state.

Accordingly, the 10th and 12th board exams in the state have been deferred to June while total lockdown has been enforced in Bhopal for six days till April 19.

"The 10th and 12th board examinations, schedule to commence from April 30 and May 1 respectively, have been deferred to June. The date for these board examinations will be announced later", state education minister Inder Singh Parmar said.

He said the school hostels barring that of Jawhar Navodaya Vidyalaya would be closed down till further order.

Meanwhile, the state government on Monday decided to enforce six-day shutdown in Bhopal in the wake of sudden spurt in Coronavirus cases in the capital.

Bhopal on Monday reported 823 fresh positive cases and three deaths.

Total lockdown for nine have been enforced in 11 cities in the state since six in the evening on Friday.

RAINFALL LIKELY IN SEVERAL PARTS OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 12: Several parts of the country are likely to receive rainfall in the next five days due to different cyclonic circulations, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Monday.

According to the National Weather Forecasting Centre of the IMD, under the influence of trough and cyclonic circulations over the south peninsula, scattered to fairly widespread rainfall with thunderstorm, lightning and gusty winds of 30-40 kilometres per hour are very likely over south west peninsular India in the next five days.

The IMD said isolated heavy rainfall is also likely over south and ghat areas of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Mahe, coastal and south interior Karnataka during April 14-16.

Another cyclonic circulation lies over southwest Madhya Pradesh and neighbouring areas. Under its influence, isolated rainfall with thunderstorm, lightning and gusty winds (30-40 kmph) is very likely over Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Gangetic West Bengal and Odisha during next 4-5 days and over Jharkhand during next 24 hours.

ON-BOARD MEALS BANNED IN FLIGHTS LESS THAN 2 HOURS

New Delhi, April 12: Airlines are not permitted to serve meals in flights that have a duration of less than two hours, the civil aviation ministry said on Monday, as Coronavirus cases continue to soar in the country.

The ban will come into effect from Thursday, the ministry said in its order.

When scheduled domestic flights were resumed on May 25 after Coronavirus lockdown last year, the ministry had allowed the airlines to serve in-flight meals under certain conditions.

Modifying the previous order, the ministry's fresh directive said: "The airlines, operating flights on domestic sectors, may provide meals services on board, where the in-flight duration is two hours or more." The ministry stated it has decided to review the on-board meal services in domestic flights.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a rally for West Bengal Assembly polls at Barasat in North 24 Parganas district on Monday.

— PTI

Don't scare BJP, you will serve under our feet: Ghosh to cops

Warns of sending Bengal cops to Bihar if they disagree with views of BJP

PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI | DC BEHRAMPUR (WEST BENGAL), APRIL 12

A day after warning of more Shitalkuchi-style killings in the remaining phases of the Assembly election in West Bengal, state BJP chief Dilip Ghosh threatened to send state police personnel to neighbouring Bihar if they disagreed with the views of the saffron party.

On Monday the Midnapore BJP MP, undeterred by complaints of intimidation and the TMC's demand for a ban on him for his threat of repeating the Shitalkuchi killings, told the police at a party rally at Suti in Murshidabad: "Don't try to threaten the BJP. Remember, we are coming to power, and you will have to serve under our feet. If you do not agree with us, go to Bihar, buy land and live there. I will arrange it for you."

He also claimed: "We will bring back your lost pride and glory like the Ashoka symbol and independence, like the Uttar Pradesh police, so that no more Central paramilitary forces will be needed to combat law and order situations during elections." In the evening Ghosh, however, swung into damage control mode on his threat to repeat the Shitalkuchi-style killings. He said: "We do not want a repetition of the Shitalkuchi incident, where TMC miscreants tried to loot EVMs and the

guns of Central forces, instigated by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. We demand that she be punished."

At another BJP rally at Farakka, Ghosh tried hard to woo Muslims, saying: "The Congress always won here. Though the situation is changing now, there is no change in the condition of poor Muslims. Murshidabad is one of the most backward districts in

India. Muslims were used as a vote bank here. While 70 per cent of Muslims remained backward, the youth of the community are either implicated in illegal activities like terrorism or are forced to work as migrant workers in other states. In comparison, Muslims are safe and living better in UP and Gujarat under the BJP."

State Congress chief removed from the face, the body turned out to be a person other than her husband. The dead body was taken back to the hospital and after much hue and cry, the wife found her husband alive. The PMCH authorities later dismissed the health manager Anjali Kumari on charges of "negligence".

Sources said that the hospital authority is also trying to find out whether other doctors or officials were involved in the incident. The health manager was dismissed by the hospital authorities immediately after the matter surfaced, sources said.

turned took out grand Shobha Yatras through the main thoroughfare of the pilgrimage city to gather at Brahma Kund, Hari ki Pauri for the holy bath on the occasion of Somvati Amavasya.

Marching barefoot to their destination with many of them not wearing masks or observing social distancing, the seers took a dip in the river as they were showered with flower petals from helicopters flying above on behalf of Uttarakhand government.

While Har ki Pauri, considered the holiest of the Ghats was reserved exclusively for the akhadas from 7 am onwards, common people also took the holy dip on the other ghats of the Ganga, revered by millions as a goddess.

The mela administration claimed that approximately 17.31 lakh devotees had taken the holy dip in the Ganga till 10 am.

Uttarakhand DGP Ashok Kumar said the Shahi Snan was being conducted smoothly throughout the Mela Kshetra from Haridwar to Devprayag. So far, seers of three out of a total of 13 akhadas have bathed in the river at Har ki Pauri while bathing by devotees is underway at the other ghats, the DGP said.

Seers of Niranjani Akhadas led by their Mahamandaleshwar Acharya Kailashanand Giri were the first to take a dip in the river on the occasion. Seers of Ananda Akhada also took bath along with them.

They were followed by Joona Akhada saints led by Acharya Kailashanand. Former King of Nepal Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah was also among those who took a dip in the Ganga on the occasion.



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee during an election campaign for State Assembly polls at Ranaghat in Nadia district on Monday.

— PTI

imposed here for the polls. Though it is not publicly spoken about anywhere, it has been put in place. I can challenge them every moment and at every point.

Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said at Bhagabangola: "Bengal is not the land of the fathers of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah. It is our Bengal. It is the land of Hindus and Muslims. We are safe under the constitutional rights of India. We will not allow the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens."

Constitutionally you are wrong. My point is constitutionally, factually and legally is correct," the Trinamul Congress supreme told the EC at a party rally in Dum Dum of North Kolkata.

She claimed, "We have undertaken a lot of development work. We will complete ten years in power in the next two months. The tenure includes four elections out of which two were about parliament while the two others were about Assembly. Meanwhile Covid-19 pandemic has been underway. So we actually got a time of only five-six years for work. If BJP can show me a single instance of its work against our volume of work in these years, I will then quit politics."

Coronavirus cases in the state, which saw the numbers breaching 10,000 on Sunday, he said the Prime Minister had also spoken to him about the measures taken by his government.

"(I told him) we have imposed night curfew in the districts where the Coronavirus cases are rising," Yediyurappa said.

He insisted that people should wear face masks, use hand sanitisers and maintain social distancing.

— PTI

TMC SPREADING LIES ABOUT NRC, SAYS SHAH

Kalimpong/Dhupguri (WB), April 12: Seeking to allay fears created among the people of the hills by TMC's "lies", Union home minister Amit Shah asserted on Monday that the National Register of Citizens (NRC) will have no impact on the Gorkhas.

Shah, during an address after a roadshow in Kalimpong, said as long as the Narendra Modi-led BJP government is there at the Centre, no Gorkha will be harmed.

"NRC has not yet been implemented, but whenever it is done, not a single Gorkha will be asked to leave," the senior BJP leader said.

"The Trinamul Congress is lying about the possible fallout of NRC on the Gorkhas in order to create fear among them," he said.

Noting that Darjeeling and Kalimpong have suffered atrocities for long, Shah claimed in 1986, over 1,200 Gorkhas lost their lives, but they did not get justice.

The home minister also alleged that the Mamata Banerjee-government has also been responsible for the death of many Gorkhas in recent times.

"We will form an SIT and send those responsible for the wrongdoings behind bars," Shah said.

— PTI

Assam polls: 12 BPF candidates moved to C'garh

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC RAIPUR, APRIL 12

Bodoland People's Front (BPF), an electoral ally of Congress in Assam, has shifted its candidates to Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh fearing horse-trading.

Sources said nine out of 11 candidates of the party landed in Raipur on Monday and were taken to a private resort on the outskirts of the state capital.

"Nine candidates of BPF along with half-a-dozen senior leaders of the party arrived here. They were taken to a resort on the outskirts of Raipur. They are scheduled to spend their 'vacation' in Chhattisgarh till May 2 when the results of Assam assembly polls are scheduled to be announced", a senior Congress leader told this newspaper here requesting not to be quoted.

Sources said Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel who was appointed poll observer by Congress for Assembly elections in Assam, greeted the BPF

candidates after they arrived here.

When contacted by this newspaper, media cell chief of Congress in Chhattisgarh Sailesh Nitin Trivedy, however, said he was not aware of the development. "Let me verify it", he said.

The three-phase Assembly polls in Assam which ended on April 6 promises to throw up a nail-biting verdict with ruling BJP locked in a keen contest with 10-party Opposition grand alliance led by Congress.

On Sunday, Pramila Rani Verma, the only BPF candidate who stayed put in Assam, told the local media in Guwahati that other party candidates left Assam on Saturday.

Assam's minority-based All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), another constituent of Congress-led grand alliance, sent all its candidates to Congress-ruled Rajasthan in a chartered plane to thwart any bid by BJP to poach them.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Ghelot has sponsored their stay in Rajasthan.

'Cyclone Fani' to decide Pipili fate

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 12

Nearly two years have passed since the cyclonic storm Fani ravaged Odisha's coastal Puri district. However, the wounds and injuries it inflicted are still explicitly visible on the landscape of the area. Many trees in villages still lie uprooted blocking walkways while other battered plants are yet to regain their green cover.

The degree of destruction the cyclone wrought can be seen in the pastoral villages. People are living in huts and shanties built with bits and pieces collected from the collapsed houses. The Union government had provided ₹95,000 ex-gratia for the affected people to rebuild their houses. However, discrepancy in identification of the affected persons and nepotism in selection of the beneficiaries has deprived many deserving people of the ex-gratia.

Scores of people are seen living perilously in shanties and sheds covered with torn and tattered polythene sheets and

coconut leaves. And this "deliberate" deprivation is going to immensely influence the outcome of the Pipili Assembly by-polls.

"On April 26, 2019, my house was razed to the ground in the 250-km per hour gusty wind of Fani. We were promised many compensations, including ₹95,000 ex-gratia for rebuilding our houses and ₹5,000 for livelihood support. However, I have not received any support. I doubt some influential people deliberately omitted my name suspecting that I do not support them politically," says Mir Sabir, a mini-truck driver, hailing from Nuagudi village under Teispur gram panchayat.

Narendra Das, the ruling BJD supported Sarpanch of Teispur, admits the omission of deserving people in the beneficiaries' list. "Almost all affected persons who lost their houses in Fani were listed to get government assistance. However, after complaint petitions were filed by some people, a second survey was conducted by block-level officials. During this exercise many deserving people's names were dropped," he said.



Large number of people at flower market near Dadar station ahead of Gudi Padwa festival in Mumbai on Monday, amid surge in Covid-19 cases across country.

— PTI

HOLY BATH Devotees defy Covid norms during 2nd royal bath of Kumbh Mela

Kumbh: Thousands take a dip in Ganga

Dehradun, April 12: Amid rising Coronavirus cases in the country, thousands of saffron-clad seers and ash-smeared Nagas flouted Covid-19 norms and converged at Har Ki Pauri in Haridwar for a holy dip in the Ganga during the second royal bath of the Kumbh Mela on Monday.

The seers of different akhadas, led by their Mahamandaleshwaras, by

turns took out grand Shobha Yatras through the main thoroughfare of the pilgrimage city to gather at Brahma Kund, Hari ki Pauri for the holy bath on the occasion of Somvati Amavasya.

Marching barefoot to their destination with many of them not wearing masks or observing social distancing, the seers took a dip in the river as they were showered with flower

er petals from helicopters flying above on behalf of Uttarakhand government.

While Har ki Pauri, considered the holiest of the Ghats was reserved exclusively for the akhadas from 7 am onwards, common people also took the holy dip on the other ghats of the Ganga, revered by millions as a goddess.

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taken the holy dip in the Ganga till 10 am.

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"(I told him) we have imposed night curfew in the districts where the Coronavirus cases are rising," Yediyurappa said.

He insisted that people should wear face masks, use hand sanitisers and maintain social distancing.

— PTI

PARMOD KUMAR | DC with agency inputs NEW DELHI, APRIL 12

With 44 Supreme Court staffers out of over 3,000 testing positive for the Coronavirus infection in the past one week, the Judges on Monday decided to hold the court through video-conferencing from their residences — a setback for hybrid hearing that the top court had started in March after a gap

of nearly one year.

While some judges had been coming to the apex court premises to hold court, few others have been presiding over proceedings from their residences till now.

As a consequence the hearing today was rescheduled with courts that were to assemble at 10.30 am assembled at 11.30 am and the courts that were to assemble at 11.00 am assembled at 12.00 noon.

The other notification sus-

pending physical mentioning of cases for urgent hearing by advocates from Monday till further orders. However, the mentioning of the matters for urgent hearing or listing through video-conferencing will continue.

The entire court premises including the court rooms were sanitised. While everything appeared to be in retreat, the top court officials said that the situation was not alarming.

IN BRIEF

34 migrants die as boat capsizes

Djibouti: Thirty-four migrants drowned on Monday after their boat capsized off the coast of Djibouti, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said, the second such accident in just over a month.

Survivors reported that the boat capsized in rough seas at around 4.00 am (0100 GMT) after leaving Yemen with around 60 passengers on board, an IOM official in Djibouti said, asking not to be named.

Huthis claim attack on Saudi

Dubai: Yemen's Huthis claimed on Monday to have launched drone strikes against Saudi energy giant Aramco's facilities, amid an upsurge in fighting between the insurgents and the Riyadh-backed government in northern Yemen. Neither Aramco or Saudi authorities immediately reported any attack. Huthi spokesman Yahya Saree said in a statement that the strikes took place overnight, in retaliation for the six-year military campaign led by Saudi Arabia in Yemen.

Five new species found in Tibet

Beijing: Five new animal species have been discovered in Tibet, including three kinds of frogs, one old-world monkey and a bushmaster snake, challenging the long-held view that the Himalayan mountains are a desolate and lifeless region. The discovery of the five new species was the result of an eight-year investigation of the terrestrial wildlife in the Tibet Autonomous region carried out by the regional forestry bureau, state-run Global Times reported on Monday. The discovered species are: a type of macaque (a genus of gregarious Old World monkeys), bushmaster snake (venomous), and three kinds of frogs.

Activist on trial for pornography

Moscow: A Russian court on Monday opened the trial of a feminist activist and artist charged with disseminating pornography after she shared artwork depicting female anatomy online — a case in line with the Kremlin's conservative stance promoting "traditional family values" that has been widely seen as controversial and elicited international outrage. Yulia Tsvetkova, 27, from the far-eastern city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur, faces up to six years in prison on charges reportedly related to her group on the popular social network VKontakte where colourful, stylised drawings of vaginas were posted. Tsvetkova is not allowed to give details of accusations against her.

HUAWEI, HSBC AGREE ON PAPERS FOR EXTRADITION

Hong Kong, April 12: Chinese telecommunications equipment firm Huawei said on Monday that it has reached an agreement with HSBC in Hong Kong to obtain documents that its chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou hopes will help prevent her extradition to the US.

Meng, who was detained in Canada in 2018 at the behest of US authorities, has been fighting a legal battle over the last two years as the US seeks to extradite her over allegations of bank fraud and violations of sanctions against Iran.

The US accuses Huawei of using a Hong Kong shell company called Skycom to sell equipment to Iran in violation of US sanctions. It says Meng committed fraud by misleading HSBC about the company's business dealings in Iran.

An earlier request by Meng's legal team for documents from HSBC was rejected by a court in Britain. In a court hearing on Monday, Hong Kong High Court judge Linda Chan approved the document-sharing agreement between Huawei and HSBC.

"An agreement has been reached with HSBC in relation to the Hong Kong legal proceedings for document production and an order has been approved by the court," Huawei said in a statement on Monday. It is not clear which documents Huawei has obtained or what the scope of the agreement covers.

Report: Syria used chemical weapons**2018 Saraqib attack involved chlorine: OPCW**

The Hague, April 12: The Syrian regime's air force used the chemical weapon chlorine in an attack on the town of Saraqib in 2018, the global toxic arms watchdog said on Monday after an investigation.

The report is the second by an investigations team set up by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which has the new power to apportion blame for attacks.

The OPCW said in a statement that the Investigations and Identification Team (IIT) "concludes that units of the Syrian Arab Air Force used chemical weapons in Saraqib on 4 February 2018".

"There are reasonable grounds to believe that, at approximately 21.22 on 4 February 2018, a military helicopter of the Syrian

● **THE TEAM** issued its first report a year ago, in which it said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's air force used the nerve agent sarin and chlorine in two attacks.

Arab Air Force under the control of the Tiger Forces hit eastern Saraqib by dropping at least one cylinder," the OPCW report said.

"The cylinder ruptured and released chlorine over a large area, affecting 12 named individuals," OPCW investigators interviewed 30 witnesses, analysed samples collected at the scene, reviewed symptoms reported by victims and medical staff and examined satellite imagery to reach their conclusions, the Hague-based organisation said.

"Symptoms... included shortness of breath, skin irritation, chest pain, and coughing," the report said.

However, it said it "regrets" that the Syrian regime refused to grant access to the site, some 30 miles (50 kilometres) south of Aleppo, despite repeated requests.

The team issued its first report a year ago, in which it said Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's air force used the nerve agent sarin and chlorine in two attacks on the village of Lataminah in March 2017.

Despite strong objections by Damascus and its ally Moscow, OPCW member states voted in 2018 to set up the team to attribute blame for attacks.

Negotiators in Vienna are trying to find a way to return the United States to the 2015 pact with world

EU tries to save Iran N-talks
Iran blames Israel for sabotage at Natanz site

Brussels, April 12: The European Union on Monday warned against attempts to derail talks aimed at returning the United States to the Iran nuclear deal, after Tehran accused Israel of an attack on its main Natanz site.

EU spokesman Peter Stano said the reported incident "could have been an act of sabotage" but insisted that there had been no official attribution over who was responsible.

"We still need to clarify the facts in detail as quickly as possible," he said, adding: "We reject any attempts to undermine or weaken diplomatic efforts on the nuclear agreement."

The Natanz site near Tehran was hit by a power outage on Sunday that Iran labelled "terrorism", a day after officials announced the country had started up advanced uranium enrichment centrifuges.

Negotiators in Vienna are trying to find a way to return the United States to the 2015 pact with world

Dubai, Arpil 12: Iran blamed Israel on Monday for a sabotage attack on its underground Natanz nuclear facility that damaged its centrifuges, an assault that imperils ongoing talks over Tehran's tattered nuclear deal and brings a shadow of war between the two countries into the light.

Israel has not claimed responsibility for the attack. It rarely does for operations carried out by its secret military units or its Mossad intelligence agency.

However, Israeli media widely reported that the

● **THE ATTACK** also further strains relations between the US, which under President Joe Biden is now negotiating in Vienna to re-enter the nuclear accord.

country had orchestrated a devastating cyberattack that caused a blackout at the nuclear facility. While the nature of the attack and the extent of the damage at Natanz remains unclear, a former Iranian official said the assault set off a fire while a spokesman mentioned a "possible minor

explosion."

The attack also further strains relations between the US, which under President Joe Biden is now negotiating in Vienna to re-enter the nuclear accord, and Israel, whose Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to stop the deal at all costs. Netanyahu met on Monday with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, whose arrival in Israel coincided with the first word of the attack. The two spoke briefly to journalists but took no questions.

— AP

powers aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions, after former president Donald Trump withdrew.

The EU's mediator on Friday described the talks

as "constructive", as those involved look to persuade Washington to drop sanctions reimposed by Trump and for Tehran to roll back breaches of the deal.

New US President Joe

Biden has said he wants to revive the agreement, which places limits on the Islamic republic's nuclear programme in return for relief from biting economic sanctions.

— AFP

Russia threatens to force-feed Navalny

Moscow, April 12: Russian prison officials are threatening to start force-feeding jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, his team said on Monday, after he lost eight kilograms (18 pounds) since starting a hunger strike.

"Seeing the seriousness of the hunger strike, the administration is threatening every day to start force-feeding," Navalny's team said in a post on his Twitter account.

It said Navalny, who last week said he had a cough and fever, had been transferred back to the prison barracks from its infirmary. "They are still not allowing a doctor to see him," it said. The 44-year-old opposition politician now weighed 77 kilograms

(169 pounds), it said, down from 85 kilograms (187 pounds) when he started the hunger strike on March 31. Navalny, who barely survived a poisoning with nerve agent Novichok last August, began refusing food in protest at what he said was a lack of proper medical treatment in prison for severe back pain and numbness in his legs.

Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's best-known opponent, was arrested in mid-January when he returned to Russia from Germany, where he had been treated for the poisoning, and was sentenced to two and a half years in prison on old embezzlement charges in February.

— AFP

Second Ramzan amid Covid

Ahead of the holy month of Ramzan, an Iraqi man sells food at the Shorja market in central Baghdad on Monday after the curfew imposed by authorities was eased amid Covid pandemic.

— AFP

Astra's diabetes drug suffers setback

London, April 12: British pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca on Monday said that following a trial, its diabetes drug Farxiga was not successful in treating Covid patients at risk of severe complications.

AstraZeneca, whose separate Covid vaccine rollout has been hampered by health concerns, said its trial "assessing the potential of Farxiga to treat patients hospitalised with Covid-19 who are at risk of developing serious complications... did not achieve statistical significance".

The trial was carried out alongside Saint Luke's Mid America Heart Institute and looked at potential complications including diabetes and heart failure.

"While the trial did not achieve statistical significance, the findings are very interesting and valuable, and will inform future clinical science," Saint Luke's cardiologist Mikhail Kosiborod said in a joint statement.

Public confidence in AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine has meanwhile been badly shaken by reports linking it to rare, but potentially fatal, blood clots, and by conflicting recommendations over its use.

— AFP

Virus may give rise to crimes: Europol

The Hague, April 12: The Coronavirus pandemic could fuel organised crime for years to come in Europe, a continent already at "breaking point" from an unprecedented flood of cocaine, the EU's policing agency warned Monday.

In its flagship four-yearly report, Europol said increasingly violent criminal gangs are likely to muscle in on legitimate businesses left vulnerable by the economic damage caused by Covid-19.

Criminals are also offering fake Coronavirus vaccines and home-testing kits as they seek to capitalise on global

efforts to recover from the virus, the Hague-based agency said.

"We are at the breaking point," Europol's director Catherine De Bolle said.

"The impact on the lives of citizens, on the economy, on the rule of law is too big. That's what we see from this... report." The "Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment" is an in-depth report issued every four years which will be used by EU member states to set crime-fighting priorities until 2025.

— AFP

TOKYO ADOPTS STRICT RULES TO FIGHT COVID

Tokyo, April 12: Tokyo adopted tougher measures against the Coronavirus on Monday as it struggles to curb the rapid spread of a more contagious variant ahead of the Olympics in a country where less than 1 per cent of people have been vaccinated.

Japan started its vaccination drive with medical workers and expanded on Monday to older residents, with the first shots being given in about 120 selected places around the country.

The measures remain through May 11.

BORIS URGES PUBLIC TO 'BEHAVE RESPONSIBLY'

United Kingdom, April 12: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson urged people to "behave responsibly" as the country that has had Europe's deadliest coronavirus outbreak took a big step on its roadmap toward a resumption of normal life.

Monday brought the easing of restrictions that have been in place in England since early January to suppress a surge in infections linked to a more transmissible new virus variant first identified in the southeast of the country.

Long lines formed outside some stores, including a branch of Nike Town on London's busy Oxford Street, and pubs and restaurants with outdoor space reported a flood of bookings.

Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium, said businesses that have endured months of enforced closure were "excited and desperate" to welcome customers back.

— AP

Suu Kyi hit with a new criminal charge

Yangon, April 12: Myanmar's ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi was hit with a fresh criminal charge on Monday, as the junta's tough crackdown on dissent rolls on.

The 75-year-old Nobel laureate has not been seen in public since being detained in the early hours of February 1 as the military deposed her government and seized power.

The generals have used increasingly bru-

tal methods to try to quell a growing protest movement against their rule, while Suu Kyi faces a raft of criminal charges that could see her barred for life from office.

"Amay Suu has been charged again under section 25 of the natural disaster management law," lawyer Min Min Soe said after a court hearing in the capital Naypyidaw, where Suu Kyi appeared by video link.

"She has been charged in six cases altogether — five charges in Naypyidaw and one in Yangon." The most serious charge Suu Kyi faces falls under Myanmar's official secrets laws.

Min Min Soe said Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest in Naypyidaw, appeared in good health but it is not clear if she has any idea of the turmoil that has unfolded in Myanmar over the past two months.

— AFP




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DECCAN Chronicle

13 APRIL 2021

US Navy foray: Will Delhi stand up to Washington?

When the US Seventh Fleet entered the Bay of Bengal in December 1971 to boost Pakistan's morale and threaten India's security as the birth of Bangladesh was being midwifed, New Delhi used the counterweight offered by the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed in August that year to call out Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. The Americans withdrew, cursing. Not so now.

This time the around Americans are hectoring and Indians are praying they will emerge from this with their prestige unscathed. It does really boil down to the vision of the leadership which sees the United States as the reliable heavyweight partner. The US is of course quite clear about one thing: with no country does it have a relationship that is "taller than the mountains and deeper than the seas" – China's description of its ties with Pakistan. As part of its "freedom of navigation operations" (FONOP), a warship of the US Navy's Seventh Fleet, *USS John Paul Jones*, passed through India's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) some 240 nautical km off Lakshadweep. An official Seventh Fleet communication said two things: that its action was to repudiate India's "excessive maritime claims"; and two, its action was consistent with international law and therefore the US wilfully disregarded the Indian condition of prior permission.

About the first, it's evident the US doesn't doubt the legitimacy of the extent of India's EEZ in that area. What it's saying is that it has no regard for India's domestic law which does not permit the passage of a warship of any country without permission. As for international law, the US has not endorsed the UN Conference on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). Furthermore, the US privileges its domestic laws over any international law but may not give the same consideration to other countries.

When New Delhi pointed out through diplomatic channels that the terse, even brazen, communication of the Seventh Fleet was unwarranted in respect of a friendly country that had participated in a summit of the Quad, hosted by the US President, only three weeks earlier, Washington sought to convey that its FONOP aren't country-specific. The government here seems to have fed the media the speculation that President Joe Biden is trying to signal China that its naval movements in the South China Sea should not be misunderstood by Beijing since India is getting the same treatment.

This is the overlord's show of neutrality which India is entitled to call out. But will it, or will it make excuses for the US? Surrounded by a peppery China and a hostile Pakistan, with Russia now adopting a somewhat cool stance in view of evolving zonal and international alignments, New Delhi gives the impression of standing before Washington, cap in hand.

The latter is seeking to exploit the situation to the hilt. The US and India both know the Americans had carried out FONOP in the same area in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2019. India was happy to lump it so long as no one made a song and dance about it, but this time the Americans are announcing the story aloud for all to hear. This is Mr Biden's America seeking to re-assert the doctrine of US superiority. If India doesn't make its disapprobation plain, who knows, we may have the Chinese or the Pakistani Navy follow in America's footsteps in India's EEZs.

Fresh Israeli adventurism?

Iran's Natanz nuclear enrichment facility was struck by a suspected cyberattack on Sunday, just a day after Tehran had unveiled new centrifuges on the site that can enrich uranium for use as reactor fuel in generating power or make deadly nuclear weapons. The world knows that Israel is the only power in the region with the capability to carry out such a brazen attack through cyber means that may have been launched in combination with a physical intrusion into a heavily fortified site to knock out the power source with an explosion. Far from denying the intrusion, the Israeli intelligence agency has fed the news to the world's media that its operation may have set the Iranian nuclear programme back by more than a few months.

The reason for this dangerous hit on a nuclear facility is not far to seek. Only last week Iran and the EU started negotiations to revive the Iran nuclear deal struck in 2015 under the leadership of US President Barack Obama, which his successor Donald Trump revoked in 2018 as one that gave away far too much to Iran. The negotiations in Vienna, with all parties to the nuclear deal except United States, were also to do with having about 6,000 US sanctions lifted but Iran's leverage in the talks may have been hit hard by what is typically Israeli adventurism, aimed particularly at Iran's nuclear programme, based purely on its own strategic interests.

Far from rebuking Israel, its action will probably be applauded by its friends in the United States as well as in the Middle East, where Israel has new friends like the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Joe Biden's eagerness to roll the clock back on many of Mr Trump's brash actions may have received a rude jolt from the Israeli strike, but he can do little against a powerful Jewish lobby in his own country. Ironically, US defence secretary Lloyd J. Austin was in Israel over the weekend stressing the strong ties binding the two countries. Iran stresses its nuclear ambitions are peaceful but, with its enriched uranium, can't convince the world, and there is no reining in Israel either.

Subhani



Why world can't afford to take a chance with China



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

Reflections

The white paper titled "Poverty Alleviation: China's Experience and Contribution" that Beijing issued earlier this month to mark the Communist Party of China's 100th anniversary hardly helps to explain the contradictions of a China that is as much "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma" as the old Soviet Union was in Winston Churchill's famous words.

Is China rich or poor? The evidence suggests both. Travellers in China certainly see none of South Asia's grinding poverty. But then, it's a vast land, and movement is strictly regulated. Bursting with billionaires, China holds \$3,399.90 billion in the US Treasury's foreign exchange reserves. Yet, intermediaries and snakeheads (secret society gangs) exploit illegal Chinese workers from Angola to England and Malaysia to Saipan in the Pacific.

In a year of many records, China led the pack of billionaires who bounced back according to *Forbes'* 35th annual World's Billionaires List. The one-time Middle Kingdom is now home to 626 billionaires — against 388 last year — and this is second only to the United States, which has 724. China's roaring stock market and quick recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic (for which Americans blame China) led to 205 new billionaires and the return of another 53 who had dropped out of the list. That excludes the ones based in Hong Kong and Macao, which are listed separately by *Forbes* magazine.

These crazy rich Asian Chinese seem to be getting even richer in the aftermath of the pandemic. A Chinese billionaire's \$4 billion average net worth represents a 33 per cent jump from last year. Collectively, the 626 billionaires own \$2.5 trillion, which is more than double last year's total. The top ten's \$447 billion is also nearly double last year's figure.

At the other end of the scale, India leads the world in expatriate remittances because millions of desperately poor Indians fan out across the world, and particularly so all across the Middle East, to toil in ports and plantations, on building sites and in private homes. They can't find jobs in India's sluggish economy. But why does apparently buoyant China come second in the remittance stakes? Chinese expatriate workers send back an impressive \$68 billion annually, against the spectacular \$83 billion that Indians repatriate.

That can mean two things. One, even China's economy cannot absorb the skills of all its able-bodied men (and some women).

Two, China might be flowing with milk and honey, but this is only for the privileged like the *taizidang*, or princelings, as the sons of party veterans are called.

Like the former Soviet Union, China, too, might qualify for a British journalist's dismissal as "Upper Volta with rockets".

Is China a land of peace contented with its status? Or is it arrogantly determined to be the next superpower? The UK's recent 100-page "Integrated Review of Security, Defence,

Development and Foreign Policy" suggested both. It called China a "systemic challenge to our security, prosperity and values". It also promised to "adapt to China's growing impact on many aspects of our lives as it becomes more powerful in the world".

Besides preface and conclusion, the document had five sections — "The Solemn Commitment of the CPC", "Final Victory in the Fight against Extreme Poverty", "The Strategy of Targeted Poverty Alleviation", "Exploring a New Path of Poverty Alleviation" and "A Global Community of Shared Future Free from Poverty" — that predictably applauded the Chinese people's fight in eliminating extreme poverty. They also indicated that China's novel approach would benefit the world.

However, three reported tragedies hardly bear out these lofty maxims. First, 58 illegal immigrants suffocated to death in a container in Dover. Second, 39 were similarly killed in a tractor trailer in Essex. In the third and most poignant instance, 23 labourers were drowned while picking cockles off the Lancashire coast when the tide swept in. One of them managed to dial 999, but it was too late. He could only repeat in his broken English: "Sinking water, many many, sinking water... Sinking water, sinking water."

An old saying claims that the Chinese will go wherever there is land and water. Nowadays, they will go wherever there are jobs, even though the cockle pickers received a miserable pound for a gruelling

An old saying claims that the Chinese will go wherever there is land and water. Nowadays, they will go wherever there are jobs

nine-hour day. But as a Chinese immigrant told the *Financial Times*: "By working abroad for a few months, you can live a year in China."

These economic refugees are the Han Chinese, not Uighurs or Tibetans. They are victims of what Britain's former Labour prime minister Tony Blair called a harrowing "evil trade in people". The snakeheads that can extort as much as \$70,000 to smuggle them out move people from country to country until they reach the wealthier nations of Europe, North America, Australia, or perhaps Taiwan and Japan.

A veteran Chinese Singaporean journalist bemoans in an impassioned defence of China in *The Straits Times* that "anyone without scales over his eyes and who has not succumbed to cerebral shamponing by the West will have realised by now that large parts of its media are biased, if not outright antagonistic, in their reporting of China." Bias probably, but China does not make it easier for foreigners to understand itself by presenting so many contrary faces.

Perhaps the Chinese enjoy taking the world for a ride. There was the well recorded case of an unknown Chinese man turning up at the coronation of Queen Victoria — or was it her jubilee? — in mandarin robes and a pillbox hat perched above his pigtail, without being able to say a word of English. Unsure of whether he was an envoy from the Son of Heaven, the British seated him between a marquis and an archbishop at the ceremony at Westminster Abbey. Only next day did the police discover that he was the owner of a small junk moored in the Thames.

The moral: The world can't afford to take chances with China.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS

TIKA UTSAV

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi is boasting about sufficient vaccine stocks and utsavs, many states are complaining about vaccine shortage and putting up 'no stock' boards or closing down vaccine centres (*Tika Utsav second big war against Covid-19, says PM, DC, April 12*). Why is the Centre keeping quiet?

A. Joseph
Hyderabad

Thanks to Covid-19 and now vaccination, Indians who were earlier demanding jobs are now demanding jobs. No wonder our PM has converted the vaccination programme to Tika Utsav and giving it a festival colour. Mass vaccination for India is a serious issue and a programme which began in January. The government should have focused on distribution and supply management as and when the age limit was relaxed. What will be the situation when more age groups and children are included for vaccination?

N. Nagarajan
Hyderabad

REPLACE BINS

It is sad and disgusting to see our roads, lanes and bylanes filled with garbage. Even in places where garbage bins are placed, people never dump the garbage in bins. The idea of the authorities to make Hyderabad a garbage bin free city is an utter flop. The authorities must rethink about this and clear the garbage on roads and replace the bins.

Jyothi David Raj
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Work in Govt. offices paralysed

HYDERABAD, APRIL. 12 The State Government employees commenced their indefinite strike today in pursuance of their demands bringing the work in Government offices to a standstill.

However, essential services like power, water works, transport and hospitals were not affected.

While the Joint Council of Employees' Unions and Associations claimed that the strike was a "total success," official sources put the percentage of attendance at 67.

Aakar Patel



It's wrong to say Indians have right to choose faith

Last weekend the newspapers carried the headline: "People are free to choose their religion: Supreme Court".

The report was about a public interest litigation petition which sought to stop Indians from converting out of the faith they were born into.

The judges were angry. They said: "What kind of writ petition is this? Why should a person above 18 not choose his religion?"

The petitioner was the BJP's Ashwini Upadhyaya.

The Indian judiciary has had a long history with the freedom of religion. It might be appropriate to revisit it. First, let readers understand this. You have no freedom of religion. You have no right to convert out of the faith you were born into. I do not know if our judges know this or have actually read the law. But it is a fact.

Article 25 of our Constitution reads: "All persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion".

This is apparently a fundamental right, meaning one which enjoys a high degree of protection from State encroachment. The fundamental right was drafted after a debate in which

India's Christians had specifically asked for the right to propagate (to convert other people) because it was an article of their faith. In India, Muslims do not do mass propagation; even the Tablighi Jamaat only seeks to make Muslims better Muslims. It is the Christians who believe their religion requires them to spread the good word of Jesus Christ and to invite people into their faith. They asked for this right and were given it specifically by our Constitution's makers, including arch Hindu fundamentalists like K.M. Munshi, who agreed with the Christians. Only one Hindu in the Constituent Assembly opposed the right to propagate and that was a 26-year-old Brahmin man from Odisha, Loknath Misra, whose brother Ranganath Misra and nephew Dipak Misra would both become Chief Justices of India.

Loknath Misra said that by making India secular, Hindus had done a favour to other communities and that propagation should be allowed but not made a fundamental right. He need not have worried because this right was taken away by subterfuge as has been the case for many rights in India under the approving eye of the Supreme Court. Let us see how by

looking at one just state, my own.

In 2003, under Narendra Modi, Gujarat passed a law that essentially removed all freedom of religion for Gujaratis. It requires individuals changing their faith to take the permission of the government. They had to fill out a form explaining to the district magistrate the reasons they were choosing to convert; their occupation and monthly income; how long they had been in the religion they were converting out of; to reveal whether they were Dalit or Adivasi; the date and time of their conversion; the names, addresses and ages of themselves and all in their family; the names and addresses of all guests attending the ceremony. If they did not do so within 10 days of their conversion, they faced one year in jail.

The person who is converting them has to fill out another form with all of the details referred to above and must submit, one month before the conversion, an application to the district magistrate seeking permission. The bureaucrat has one month in which to approve or deny permission. This denial of propagation obviously also affects the right of the person who wants to change their faith. One had to remain in the faith they were born

into unless the government approved.

The district magistrate must also maintain a register that has the number of applications received, approved, denied or pending which he must report every quarter. The coercion can be imagined.

Gujarat's Assembly was told in January 2020 that in the previous five years a total of 1,895 "applications" for conversion had been filed in the state. Gujarat had denied permission to convert to 889 individuals.

The government "gave permission" to 1,006 applicants, almost all of whom were Dalits in Surat converting to Buddhism. The number of Dalit applicants to convert to Buddhism had swelled because in 2014, they had been denied permission to convert in a mass ceremony. The Narendra Modi government attempted to modify the law to exclude conversions from Buddhism and Jainism to Hinduism and vice versa from the state's regulation. Meaning that Jains and Buddhists would be seen legally as Hindus and therefore would not really be "converting". But this was objected to by Gujarat's Jains, who resisted being clubbed with Hindus, and the modification was withdrawn.

I have used the example of Gujarat,

but almost all of India's states have these laws criminalising what is supposed to be a fundamental right.

The Gujarat law's punishment for propagation is three years (four if the convert was a woman, Dalit or Adivasi). But how the district magistrate's denial of permission would work at the level of faith was unclear. One priest I spoke to said India's religion laws made no sense because of the nature of belief. He said: "Suppose I stopped believing in Christ today. This would be a conversion from being a believer to a non-believer. I am supposed to take permission from the State for this change, but I have already stopped believing."

In recent months, BJP-ruled states like Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and others have passed the "love jihad" laws, which tighten the State's grip on religious freedoms further. It is totally and demonstrably false to say Indians have freedom of religion.

This is the background to which the newspapers have brought us the headline: "People are free to choose their religion: Supreme Court".

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	47883.38	-3.44
Nifty 50	14310.80	-3.53
S&P 500*	4,129.44	0.002
Dollar (₹)	75.06	-0.40
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.11	-0.69
Euro (₹)	89.33	-0.50
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,070.57	0.12
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	63.19	0.38
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.011	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.676	0.010

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Over five lakh download 'Mera Ration' app

The government's 'Mera Ration' mobile app has been downloaded by more than 5 lakh people within a month of its launch, a senior government official said. The app, launched on March 12, is helpful to ration card holders, particularly migrants, for identifying the nearest fair price shop and checking details of their entitlement and recent transactions. The Android-based app is currently available in Hindi and English.



Market falls 3.5%, investors lose ₹8.77 L cr Panic wave in mkt

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 12

Sensex and Nifty-50 fell close to 3.5 per cent on prolonged lockdown fears, as the second Covid wave became more severe with 1.69 lakh people affected in a single day.

Investors suffered a notional loss of over Rs 8.77 lakh crore, as BSE's market capitalisation dipped to Rs 200,85,806 crore from Rs 209,63,241 crore last Friday.

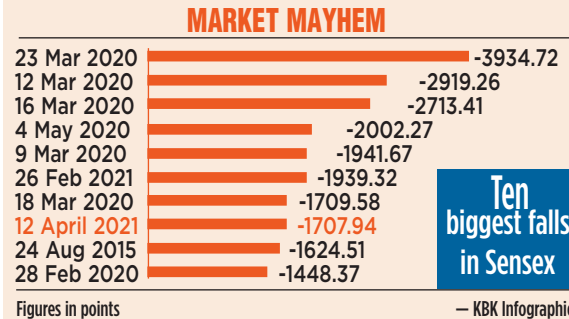
The Sensex fell 1898 points intra-day to 47883.44 with the weekend spike in cases making investors jittery, who resorted to profit taking in stocks and sectors that had run up sharply in recent weeks.

The Sensex closed below the 48000-mark, down by 1707.94 points at 47883.38 while the Nifty-50 closed 524.03 points down at 14310.80, after touching an intra-day low of 14248.70.

Foreign portfolio investors net sold stocks worth Rs 1,746.43 crore and there was little support coming from the domestic institutions as they were net buyers by just Rs 232.76 crore.

"The rising cases of Covid-19 and a fear of probable lockdown in some parts of the country led to a sell-off in our markets which resulted in a huge under performance compared to the global peers," said Ruchit Jain, analyst-technical and derivatives, Angel Broking.

NSE's India VIX index, an indicator of market volatility in coming days, climbed up 16.22 per cent to 23. Among the sectoral indices the top losers were Nifty Metal (-6.07 per cent), Realty (-7.50 per cent), Bank (-5.10 per cent).



Choppy times ahead for rupee

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 12

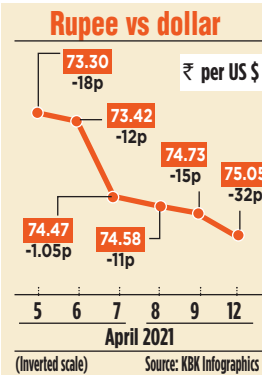
The rupee plunged below 75 against the dollar for the first time in eight months on Monday as investors worried over the likely economic fallout of several states considering lockdown restrictions and a strong dollar globally. Analysts believe volatility is ahead for the rupee, with more states joining localised lockdown to contain the Covid-19 second wave. This was the sixth straight session of loss for the rupee, during which it has depreciated by 193 paise.

At the interbank forex market, the rupee closed at 75.05 against the dollar after trading in the 74.78-75.14 range, down 32 paise.

Adding to the panic was the Reserve Bank's policy of providing more and more liquidity to the system through the government securities acquisition programme, under which it will purchase Rs 1 lakh crore worth bonds from the market. GSAP, though positive for the bond market (where yields have softened by 5-8 basis points) is not so for the currency.

There is now excess liquidity of Rs 7 lakh crore in the reverse repo basket and there will be an infusion of Rs 25,000 crore on the 15th of this month. Such high liquidity means interest rates will remain low. The problem is, the US 10-year yield is now at 1.66 per cent, while Indian bonds are being driven down. This makes India less attractive for investors.

"Choppy times are ahead for the rupee, which was definitely not expected as the liquidity dimension added by the RBI and the commentary provided have spooked the market," said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at Care Ratings.



TCS Q4 NET RISES 15% TO ₹9,246 CRORE

FC BUREAU
MUMBAI, APRIL 12

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) on Monday ushered in the March quarter earnings season, reporting a 14.9 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to Rs 9,246 crore.

The country's largest software services firm had posted a net profit of Rs 8,049 crore in the year-ago period.

In a regulatory filing, TCS said its revenue grew 9.4 per cent in the March 2021 quarter to Rs 43,705 crore from Rs 39,946 crore a year ago.

"Our investments over the last decade in building newer capabilities, and in research and innovation, position us well for the multi-year technology services opportunity ahead. While we continue to dominate in our traditional areas of strength, we are making good progress in gaining share in the growth and transformation opportunity," Rajesh Gopinathan, chief executive officer and managing director, TCS, said.

The company's net profit for the financial year ended March 2021 was up at Rs 33,388 crore (excluding legal claim provisions) against Rs 32,340 crore in the previous financial year. Its net profit on a reported basis stood at Rs 32,430 crore for FY21.

The board has proposed a final dividend of Rs 15 per equity share.

SMEs to get ₹250 cr of ₹10,900-cr PLI

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 12

Micro, small and medium enterprises, which account for the majority share of the food processing industry, will receive incentives valued at a mere Rs 250 crore in six years under the recently announced Rs 10,900-crore Performance Linked Incentive Scheme for the segment.

The draft PLI scheme says Rs 9,040 crore has been allocated for companies producing ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat foods, processed fruit and vegetables, marine products and mozzarella cheese. But only 2 per cent, or Rs 250 crore, of this amount will go into the

kitty of SMEs, that too, to those who produce organic and innovative products.

"This includes Rs 250 crore or approximately 2 per cent of the outlay, which has been earmarked for innovative/organic products in the SME sector..." said the draft. The remaining will be allocated to select large manufacturers of food products.

"The allocation for SMEs is less and is only for those who produce organic and innovative products. We will reach out to the government on this," said Piruz Khambatta, CMD of Rasna.

He says some 30,000 to 40,000 FSSAI-registered SMEs are there in the food processing industry.

INFLATION RISES, IIP CONTRACTS

FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 12

With a sharp spike in food inflation, retail inflation jumped to 5.52 per cent in March, the highest in three months, while the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) contracted by 3.6 per cent in February, data from the statistics ministry showed.

Food inflation saw a steep rise of 4.94 per cent in March from 3.87 per cent in February, but vegetable prices fell to 4.83 per cent last month from 6.27 per cent in February.

The IIP also showed a worrisome trend by contracting 3.6 per cent against an expansion of 4.5 per cent in February 2020. The IIP had contracted 1.6 per cent in January 2021 as well.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

PASSENGER VEHICLE SALES DROP 2.24% IN FY21: SIAM

Pune, April 12: Passenger vehicles sales fell 2.24 per cent to 27.11 lakh units in financial year 2020-21, down from 27.73 lakh units sold in FY20, the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) said on Monday. The two-wheeler industry has been badly hit, with a significant 13.19 per cent contraction in year-on-year sales at 151.19 lakh units. Commercial vehicle sales dropped 20.77 per cent at 5.69 lakh units and three-wheeler sales saw a 66 per cent decline at 2.16 lakh units. This dip in sales has largely been a fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, when sales came to a complete halt in April 2020. While monthly passenger vehicles sales in the last few months have set new records, the surge fuelled by more discretionary spending on cars and an affinity towards personal mobility has not compensated for the subdued months during last year's lockdown. — *Michael Gonsalves*

KALPANA SAMPAT TO HEAD PRAMERICA



Kalpana Sampat

Mumbai, April 12: Pramerica Life Insurance on Monday announced the appointment of Kalpana Sampat as its MD & CEO, from April 9. Prior to this, she was the chief operating officer at the firm. Before joining Pramerica Life, Sampat was the CEO for Swiss Reinsurance Co, India branch, and was instrumental in its launch in 2015. — *PTI*

FLIPKART PARTNERS ADANI GROUP

Chennai, April 12: Flipkart has entered a strategic and commercial partnership with the Adani group. In this two-pronged partnership, Flipkart will work with Adani Logistics to strengthen its supply chain infrastructure. Flipkart will also set up its third data centre at Adaniconnex's Chennai-based facility. Adani Logistics, on its part, will construct and lease a 534,000 sq. ft. fulfilment centre in Mumbai to Flipkart. At the AdaniConneX unit, Flipkart will be able to design its data centre. — *FC Bureau*

GAMES

SHORT TAKES

Man Utd hit back to sink Tottenham

London: Manchester United staged a superb fightback to shatter Tottenham's top-four bid with a 3-1 win, while West Ham climbed to fourth place in the Premier League as the revitalised Jesse Lingard inspired a 3-2 victory against Leicester on Sunday.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side trailed to Son Heung-min's first half strike, but United scored three times after the break through Fred, Edinson Cavani and Mason Greenwood. Second-placed United's fourth successive league win avenged their embarrassing 6-1 home defeat against Tottenham in October. — *AFP*

Son racially abused on social media

London: Tottenham Hotspur are to take action after Korean star Son Heung-min was subjected to "abhorrent racist abuse" on social media following Sunday's 3-1 defeat by Manchester United. Son is the second Spurs player in as many matches to suffer such abuse following Davinson Sanchez after the 2-2 draw with Newcastle United on April 4. Son scored Spurs's goal but was involved in a controversial incident when he went down clutching his face after contact with Scott McTominay. "Another matchday and more abhorrent racial abuse suffered by one of our players," said a Spurs statement. — *AFP*

Darmian wins it for Inter Milan

Milan: Antonio Conte's Inter Milan tightened their grip on the Serie A title on Sunday with Matteo Darmian scoring the only goal in a 1-0 win over Cagliari to stretch their winning streak to 11 games. Champions Juventus consolidated third place with a 3-1 win over Genoa as Atalanta battled to a 3-2 victory over Fiorentina to stay fourth ahead of Napoli who won 2-0 at Sampdoria. "We're starting to see the finish line," said Conte after Inter restored their 11-point lead on second-placed AC Milan who won 3-1 at Parma on Saturday. Achraf Hakimi came off the bench and set up Darmian to grab the winner with 13 minutes to go at the San Siro. — *AFP*

Hideki goes green at Augusta Matsuyama becomes first Japanese to win Masters

Augusta (United States), April 12: Hideki Matsuyama became the first Japanese man to win a major golf championship on Sunday, holding his nerve down the stretch to capture the 85th Masters after a dramatic final round.

Carrying the hopes of a nation on his shoulders, Matsuyama calmly ground out clutch pars and struck for crucial birdies in a pressure-packed march at Augusta National, hanging on over the final holes for a historic one-stroke victory.

Matsuyama took the green jacket symbolic of Masters supremacy, a top prize of \$2.07 million and a place for the ages in Japanese sports history.

"I'm really happy," he said through a translator. "Hopefully I'll be a pioneer in this and many other Japanese will follow. I'm happy to open the floodgate and many more will follow me."

"Maybe a lot of younger golfers thought, 'That's an impossibility,' but with me doing it they will realize it is possible and if they set their minds to it they can do it," he added.

After seeing his seven-stroke lead with seven holes remaining shaved to two shots with three to go, Matsuyama watched Xander Schauffele find water off the 16th tee on the way to a triple-bogey disaster. Matsuyama settled for bogey but closed with par at 17 and a bogey at 18 to fire a one-over-par 73 and finish 72 holes on 10-under 278.

USA's Will Zalatoris was second on 279 with Jordan Spieth and Schauffele sharing third on 281.

Matsuyama became only the second Asian man to win a major title after South Korea's Yang Yong-eun at the 2009 PGA Championship.

Matsuyama, ranked 25th, hadn't won since the 2017 WGC Akron tournament. The best prior majors by Japanese men were Isao Aoki's runner-up effort at the 1980 US Open and Matsuyama's share of second at the 2017 US Open. — *AFP*



Hideki Matsuyama of Japan celebrates after being awarded the Green Jacket by 2020 Masters champion Dustin Johnson (left) of the United States after he won the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club on Sunday.

Tears, cheers and shares rise as Hideki win thrills Japan

Tokyo, April 12: Thrilled Japanese golf fans welcomed Hideki Matsuyama's historic Masters victory on Monday, with broadcasters close to tears and the prime minister hailing the win as a bright spot during the pandemic.

"Matsuyama Masters" trended on Twitter and golf-related shares rose on the Tokyo stock market after the 29-year-old became the first Japanese man to capture a major golf title.

"Matsuyama opens the door of history," declared the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

In Japan, the one-stroke victory was sealed just after 8.00 am Monday morning, with some broadcasters carrying live footage of his final-round

● **TV networks ran breaking news flashes announcing the victory and several newspapers published special editions online, usually reserved for major stories.**

73 that saw him finish on 10-under par.

On the TBS station, broadcasters and commentators choked up as Matsuyama sank the final putt to claim the green jacket symbolic of Masters supremacy. "Congratulations. Thank you," a presenter said as two golf commentators next to him struggled to hold back tears.

TV networks ran breaking news flashes announc-

ing the victory and several newspapers published special editions online, usually reserved for major stories.

As Tokyo's stock market opened, shares in Value Golf, which provides services linked to the sport, jumped 14 percent, while golf club maker Graphite Design rose 16 percent.

Fans flooded to congratulate the country's new sporting hero as social media lit up.

"I can't see through my tears," one fan tweeted. Japan's prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, told reporters Matsuyama's performance had been "really wonderful".

"I think it encouraged and excited people across Japan at a time when the impact from coronavirus is lingering," he said.

Azhar writes to Justice on appointment

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 12

Against the backdrop of Sunday's acrimonious Annual General Meeting, Hyderabad Cricket Association president Mohammed Azharuddin has sent a letter to Justice (Retd) Deepak Verma, appointing the former Supreme Court judge as Ombudsman and Ethics Officer of the HCA.

"I am pleased to inform you that the 85th Annual General Meeting of the Hyderabad Cricket Association has appointed your goodness as the Ombudsman and Ethics Officer of HCA for the year 2020-21 thereby ratifying the decision of the Apex Council dated 06.06.2020," the letter signed by Azhar reads.

Justice Verma confirmed his acceptance on Monday in an email addressed to the 'President and other members of HCA.' "I hereby formally accept the appointment as Ombudsman cum Ethics Officer of the HCA," he wrote.

SNAP SHOTS

Harsha and Noorie bag tennis titles

Harsha Karthika Oruganti, Noorie Mattipati, Lemuel Sanheeth Alladi and Nikhikesh Papuula claimed titles in the TSTA State Ranking Tennis Tournament held at Ramas Tennis Academy in Sainikpuri, Secunderabad.

In the finals, Harsha beat E. Grithvika Reddy 8-1 while Noorie nailed P. Sri Lakshmi Reddy 8-7 (7-4) in Under-10 and Under-12 girls categories respectively.

In the boys section, Lemuel packed off Satya Parthiv 8-4 while Nikhikesh blanked Anish Nataraj 8-0 in Under-10 and Under-12 summit clashes respectively.

RR to meet Gymkhana in hockey final

Ranga Reddy girls set up the final with hosts R. Gymkhana Hockey Club in the Dhyani Chand Cup 5-a-side Hockey Tournament at the Gymkhana Ground in Secunderabad. In the semifinals, Ranga Reddy punished Royal Hockey Club with a 12-0 scoreline as Meghna Reddy scored five goals, Aparna four and Jyothi garnered three while Gymkhana Hockey Club routed Indur Hockey Club 4-1 as Bhavani scored three and Kusuma contributed one goal.

Former kabaddi player Tupaki no more

Former Osmania University kabaddi player Mykala Srinivas Rao passed away in Hyderabad on Monday. An advocate by profession, he was 53 and left behind his wife and daughter.

Better known as "Tupaki Seenu", the Nizam College student represented OU in the Inter-University Kabaddi Tournament at Thiruchendur in Tamil Nadu in 1987-88. Tupaki came from a sporting family — his father Eshwaraiah was a kabaddi official. The family also played a role in the development of the mini stadium for kabaddi in Tallagadda, Karwan.



M. Srinivas Rao

Swansong



Members of Team Swans pose with the trophy after being declared winners of the inaugural Hyderabad Premier Golf League on Sunday. Having reached the semifinal stage after six rounds, the event was suspended due to the spike in Covid infections in Hyderabad and winners announced on the basis of leaderboard scores till then. Team Swans had 1005.25 points, followed by Markenzo Fairways (1002.88), Civet Rangers (995.75) and Villaggio Highlanders (992.62).

