

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VISAKHAPATNAM | THURSDAY | 8 APRIL 2021

## WEATHER



Max: 34.2°C  
Min: 24.8°C  
RH: 82%  
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Mist.  
Max/Min temp.  
34/24 °C

## ASTROGUIDE

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

### HJRI CALENDAR

Sha'ban 25, 1442 AH

### PRAYERS

#### (ROYAL MOSQUE)

Fajar: 5.50 am

Zohar: 1.30 pm

Asar: 4.45 pm

Maghrib: 6.15 pm

Isha: 8.15 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.11 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.46 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 3.13 PM

MOONSET TOMORROW 3.31 AM

## COUNTER POINT



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

## SHORT TAKES

### Photo of missing commando out

**Bijapur:** A photograph of Rakeshwar Singh Manhas sitting in a hut was released by Maoists who abducted the CoBRA commando after the fierce gun battle on April 3. However, his family said the photograph of Manhas, a commando with the 210th CoBRA battalion of the CRPF, was 12 months old.

■ Report on Page 4

### Tribunals reforms ordinance issued

**New Delhi:** The government has issued an ordinance which does away with certain appellate tribunals, including the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT) set up to hear appeals of filmmakers, and transfers their functions to other existing judicial bodies. The Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021, issued by the Ministry of Law and Justice, was notified on Sunday.

## INSIDE

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TD's former MLA Varma joins YSRC

■ STATE... PAGE 3  
Pictographic inscriptions found at Srisailem temple

## DIRECTOR'S CUT

**Ace filmmaker to launch new OTT platform Spark**

# OTT heralded new era: RGV

SRIRAM KARRI | DC  
HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

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

His intrepid courting of controversies with zeal, one



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

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

**RAM GOPAL VARMA**

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

■ Page 2: India will see its first lesbian duet Ramu

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**US military finds Xi closing in on Taipei**



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## SPORTS | 8

**Vinicius double sinks Liverpool**

## TABLOID

**Surviving emotional nutrition**



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# HC allows election to MPTC, ZPTCs today

**No counting of votes till plea is disposed**

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Andhra Pradesh High Court has given a green signal for conducting elections to zilla parishad and mandal parishad territorial constituencies as scheduled on Thursday. However, it has directed that counting of votes should not be taken up until the disposal of the writ petition.

A division bench, comprising Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami and C. Praveen Kumar, set aside the single judge bench interim stay order and directed the registry to list the petition for April 15 as the single judge bench had fixed it for the next hearing.

The court observed that the single judge, while granting the interim

order, had virtually allowed the writ petition, though it is still pending disposal and the order was also having a ring of finality as a direction was issued to the SEC for issue of fresh notification for conduct of MPTC and ZPTC polls.

The court further observed that while issuing the interim order, the single judge did not consider the aspect related to elections held after the order of the Supreme Court in respect of gram panchayats and municipal corporations and municipalities, as model code of conduct was not imposed for a period of four weeks.

The court observed that it was of the considered opinion that there were contentious issues to be adjudicated in the writ

petition and considering the matter in its entirety, the interim order was set aside.

The State Election Commission moved a house motion on April 6 with a plea to allow it conduct of elections on April 8 as it was resuming a paused election process and was not conducting polls afresh. Another petition filed by the Telugu Desam and other parties challenged the election notification issued by the SEC on April 1 stating that it violated the Supreme Court direction to maintain a four-week time from the date of issue of notification to conduct of polls for implementation of model code of conduct.

■ Page 2: Poll code enforced for 10 days: Plea

## INTEREST RATES NOT CHANGED BY CENTRAL BANK

FALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, APRIL 7

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

■ Page 2: CM wants row with Odisha resolved

■ Full report on Page 7

# TTD halts free darshan tokens as temporary step

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has decided to temporarily suspend issuance of free Sarva Darshan tokens to devotees under current booking system from 12th of this month. It has taken this decision following Covid-19 cases rising once again across the country as well as in the temple city.

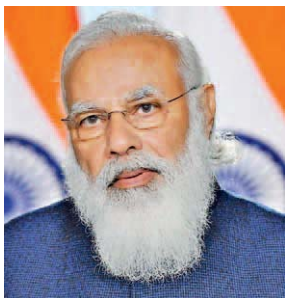
In a statement on Wednesday, TTD made it clear that Slotted Sarva

Darshan (SSD) tokens will be issued at Bhudevi complex and Vishnu Nivasam in Tirupati only till the evening of April 11.

"There has been a spurt in Coronavirus cases in Tirupati city again. Since thousands of devotees wait at Bhudevi complex and Vishnu Nivasam for SSD tokens, the prospect of Covid-19 cases multiplying is likely. Hence, the temple body has decided to temporarily suspend issuance of free darshan tokens," a temple

official explained. He pointed out that Shirdi temple in Maharashtra has already suspended darshan for devotees following spurt in Covid-19 cases. TTD has asked devotees to take note of this development and refrain from visiting counters in Tirupati till further orders. Just last week, devasthanams had resolved to reduce issue of free darshan tokens from 22,000 to 15,000 a day.

■ Page 3: No word on other darshans



## STUDENTS LEARNT MANY LESSONS THIS YEAR: MODI

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

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

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

# Centre allows jabs at places of work

**Move aimed at faster vaccination of people**

VINEETA PANDEY  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

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

In a letter to all states/Union territories, Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan said this was done since a substantial proportion of the 45-plus population are in the organised sector of the economy and work in offices (private or government), or in manufacturing and services.

He added that to increase access to vaccines for such people, Covid-19 sessions may be held at workplaces that have 100 or more willing beneficiaries by tagging these workplaces with the existing Covid vaccination centres and asking the states to launch this scheme by Sunday.

This change in the gov-

ernment's plan comes as the desired target for vaccinations is yet to be achieved. The change of strategy comes amid the raging debate on vaccine availability.

On Wednesday, the Maharashtra government claimed it faced a shortage of vaccines and at present had vaccine doses only for the next three days, and some vaccination centres have to be shut due to this. Maharashtra has the highest number of Covid positive cases in the country.

"Stocks of vaccine in the state and in Mumbai are only for the next three days. Today 14 lakh doses are available, which means there is only three days' stock. Every week we need 40 lakh doses, that is if we vaccinate five lakh people every day. We requested the Centre to send more vaccines as this is the state with the highest number of cases every day," said state health minister Rajesh Tope.

He said he had told Union health minister Harsh Vardhan about this during a videoconference on Tuesday evening.

However, Dr Harsh Vardhan said: "This is nothing but an attempt to divert attention from the Maharashtra government's repeated failures to control the spread of the pandemic. The inability of the Maharashtra government to act responsibly is beyond comprehension. To spread panic among people is to compound the folly further... Allegations about a vaccine shortage are utterly baseless."

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, meanwhile, criticised this strategy on Wednesday, saying: "It is ridiculous to debate needs and wants. Every Indian deserves the chance to a safe life." Health ministry officials had said Tuesday that the vaccine strategy was to cover those who needed it, and not those who want it.

# Encounters: J&K bans live coverage

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 7

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

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

sites," IGP Ajay Kumar told the media. Responding to that, the Valley's media fraternity said reporters or camerapersons do not "interfere" in the work of the forces but discharge their professional duty while covering encounters, their aftermath or law and order situations.

Farooq Javed Khan, president of the Kashmir Photographers' Association, said: "First of all, we have to verify if the statement attributed to the IGP in identical reports circulat-

ed by local news agencies is really his. And if he has used the phrase 'don't interfere', then we would say it is obnoxious and, therefore, unacceptable." He added: "While covering encounters and law and order situations we strictly follow the rulebook and never exceed our brief. If we are not allowed to discharge our professional responsibility, then what are we there for?"

The Kashmir Press Club and various Valley-based media organisations, in a

joint statement, said the IGP's statement has created anguish among the media. "If this is a part of the official policy of the police, it appears to be a tactic to coerce journalists into not reporting the facts. It also seems a part of measures by the authorities to suppress freedom of the press. Summoning journalists to police stations, filing FIRs and seeking informal explanations for their work has intensified in the past two years", the statement said.

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## IN BRIEF CM WANTS ROW WITH ODISHA RESOLVED

From page 1

They said Vamsadhara Nagavali, Vansadhara Phase 2 and Stage 2 works will be completed by July.

CM Jagan directed officials to resolve pending issues with neighbouring Odisha with regard to construction of Neradi Barrage. He pointed out that considerable money could be saved if irrigation projects are completed within the stipulated time. The Chief Minister said priority should also be given to Mahendra Tanaya, Madduvalasa Phase 2 and Tarakarama Sagar projects.

Reviewing works of Rayalaseema, Palnadu Drought Mitigation projects, Jagan Mohan Reddy asked officials to prepare an action plan to expedite their works.

Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, irrigation secretary J. Shyamala Rao, principal secretary (Finance) S. S. Rawat, ENC C. Narayana Reddy and other senior officials were among those present at the CM's review meeting.

## POLL CODE ENFORCED FOR 10 DAYS: PLEA

from page 1

SEC's counsel C.V. Mohan Reddy submitted to the court that the order of the apex court should be understood as the maximum period for implementation of poll code and said that the SEC did not implement it either for the local body polls or the municipal polls.

He said that though the four-week model code of conduct was not implemented for municipal polls, it was not questioned earlier.

Petitioner and Telugu Desam leader Varla Ramalaiah's counsel Vedula Venkata Ramana submitted that the order of the Supreme Court to implement model code of conduct four weeks prior to the date of election, was not followed by the SEC as it imposed poll code only for 10 days with respect to election to MPTCs and ZPTCs.

## DURGA TEMPLE EO TRANSFERRED, NEW EO POSTED

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

The executive officer of Durga temple, Vijayawada, M.V. Suresh Babu, was transferred and the government posted D. Brahmaramba as the new EO of the temple.

The vigilance department and ACB officials had found lot of irregularities during their checks at Durga temple in February and submitted a report to the government, recommending disciplinary action against the erring staff and officials.

The opposition parties levelled allegations against Suresh Babu several times about his involvement in various irregularities.

The endowments department suspended 16 temple staff, including five superintendent-rank officials for the alleged irregularities and now EO has been transferred.

Dr G. Vani Mohan, principal secretary to the government, issued transfer orders on Wednesday, posting Suresh Babu as Regional Joint Commissioner, endowments department, Rajahmundry.

Brahmaramba working at Rajahmundry is to become the new EO with immediate effect.

The officials of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) had submitted a detailed report to the government on the irregularities in Kanaka Durga temple. According to the ACB official's report, Suresh Babu was involved in serious financial irregularities. The ACB further mentioned in its report that the Suresh Babu had disobeyed the orders of the endowments commissioner.

The ACB report revealed that Suresh Babu made payments against the audit rules and objections. The ACB in its detailed report mentioned that the EO made payments for tenders, quotations and equipment purchases against the regulations.

On the complaints received from a few devotees, sleuths of ACB and the Vigilance department had conducted surprise raids at the temple. The officials continued their raids for the next two days and verified the records at prasadam counter, sari auction counter, ticket counter, sanitation, protocol section, IT and security system.

# 2.46 crore people expected to cast their vote in Parishad polls

## Arrangements are in place to provide PPE kits to Corona-infected voters

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Nearly 2.46 crore voters are expected to exercise their franchise to elect their representatives to 515 zilla parishad and 7,220 mandal parishad territorial constituencies in the polls to be held from 7 am to 5 pm on Thursday.

Out of 660 ZPTCs, polling will be held only in 515 as elections were withheld in eight constituencies for varied reasons while 126 ZPTCs were elected unanimously. Eleven contestants fielded by the political parties have died since March, 2020. There are 2,058 candidates in fray at present.

Similarly, out of 10,047 MPTCs, polling will only be held in 7,220 as elections were withheld in 375 constituencies while 2,371 MPTCs were elected unanimously. As many as 81 contestants have died since March, 2020. There are 18,782 contestants at present.

Election authorities have set up 27,751 polling stations all over the state and out of them, 6,492 are categorised as sensitive and another 6,314 as hypersensitive. Nearly 247 polling stations are considered to be extremely-affected. Webcasting facility has been arranged in 3,538 polling stations. They have arranged 43,830 big, 12,898 medium and 46,502 small ballot boxes.

In the wake of the prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic, the election authorities have arranged protective material like face masks, hand sanitizers, thermal scanners and gloves at polling stations. For voters infected with coronavirus, arrangements are in place to provide them PPE kits.

Election authorities are coordinating with police personnel to ensure peaceful elections. One officer from the commissioner of panchayat raj and rural development will monitor the process in each of the 13 districts while it also be followed through webcasting from the office of commissioner of panchayat raj.

With regard to counting of votes, 275 counting centres have been set up with all security arrangements and also in compliance with Covid-19 protocol.

A command and control centre has been set up to monitor election and counting processes at the office of commissioner of panchayat raj.

● **THE PREVALENCE of Covid-19 pandemic, the election authorities have arranged protective material like face masks, hand sanitizers, thermal scanners and gloves at polling stations.**



Bapatla former TD MLA Manthana Anantha Varma joins the YSRC in the presence of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at the CM's Camp Office on Wednesday, Deputy Speaker Kona Raghupati (right) and YSRC state general-secretary Lella Appireddy (left) are also seen.

## TD'S FORMER MLA ANANTHA VARMA JOINS YSRC IN JAGAN'S PRESENCE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Bapatla's former Telugu Desam MLA Manthana Anantha Varma joined the YSRC Congress in the presence of Jagan Mohan Reddy at the camp office on Wednesday.

TD leaders Manthana Subbaraju, V. Venkateswara Raju, M.V.



Election staff collect gloves, face mask and sanitiser bottles from officials at Montessori college in Vijayawada on Wednesday, before proceeding to their voting centres of ZPTC and MPTC elections.

# Jagan to campaign in temple city on April 14

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

Intensifying the ruling party's campaigning further in the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection, Chief Minister and YSRC president Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is likely to campaign in the temple city on April 14 in support of his party candidate Dr. M. Gurumurthy.

As per the tentative schedule, Jagan is likely to address a public meeting on the same day evening to seek votes for the YSRC candidate. In this regard, Chittoor district YSRC party in-charge and TTD chairman Y.V.

Subbareddy, Panchayat Raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy, Government Whip C. Bhaskar Reddy and others on Wednesday inspected the ground at Yogananda Engineering College near Renigunta to hold a public meeting. The senior leaders also inspected Annamaiah circle and other nearby places in Tirupati to chalk out a route map for Jagan's poll campaigning. Deputy Chief Minister K. Narayanaswamy, MLAs Bhumana Karunakar, Biyyapu Madhusudhan Reddy and party candidate M. Gurumurthy were also involved in making

arrangements for CM's visit and campaign.

In the meanwhile, the Tirupati LS byelection scene has warmed up at once with Jagan Mohan Reddy and Chandrababu Naidu deciding to campaign in the pilgrim city in support of their respective party candidates.

Naidu has been scheduled to campaign on the same day that Jagan conducts his poll campaign in Tirupati on April 14. Both the party leaders are putting all their efforts and making elaborate arrangements for making their respective party chiefs' public meetings a grand success.

## SEC APPEALS TO VOTERS TO FOLLOW COVID PROTOCOL

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7:

The State Election Commission appealed to all voters to exercise their franchise freely and without fear by observing Covid-19 protocols like wearing face masks, using sanitisers and maintaining social distancing at the polling stations.

State Election Commissioner Nilam Sawhney reviewed arrangements for conduct of polls to the MPTCs/ZPTCs with the district collectors and SPs/commissioners of police on Wednesday.

She said all arrangements were made for conduct of polls as per schedule and added that officials with polling material were being sent to the assigned polling stations to make the arrangements.

## Jyoti asks fisherfolk to vote for BJP candidate

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MARCH 7

Union Minister Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti claimed that the Centre has been providing sizable funds to develop infrastructure in coastal areas, especially for traditional fishing communities.

Addressing an election campaign for K. Ratna Prabha, BJP nominee, at Muthukur, She said the government has been devising many schemes for extending support to the fishermen across the country under Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana.

Speaking on the occasion, MLC Vakati Narayana Reddy said the party had picked up former chief secretary of Karnataka K. Rathna Prabha for Tirupati LS bypoll since she was having enormous experience in administration and public service.

## POLLING OFFICIALS RUSH TO THEIR LOCATIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, APRIL 7

After a division bench of the high court gave its green signal on Wednesday to hold the Parishat elections, polling officials in all the mandal headquarters rushed to the polling stations assigned to them.

Nellore SP Bhaskar Bhushan said they have deployed 2,667 police personnel including 9 DSPs, 31 CI/RIs, 408 ASI/HCs and 1,034 constables to ensure peaceful polling.

Prakasam SP Siddharth Kaushal said they have deployed 8,496 police personnel to ensure peaceful polls on Thursday.

## NAIDU TO PRAY AT TIRUMALA BEFORE POLL CAMPAIGN

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

Telugu Desam supremo and former chief minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu is going to kick start his election campaign for the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection after offering prayers to Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala on Thursday.

As per the tentative schedule, Naidu will arrive at Tirupati airport on Thursday morning. Later, he will motor up to Tirupati to offer prayers at the hill shrine. He is scheduled to tour all the seven Assembly segments under Tirupati parliamentary constituency to campaign in support of party's candidate Panabaka Lakshmi.

Winding up the Tirumala visit, the TD chief will meet the party leaders and workers at a private convention centre in Renigunta. He will then address his first public meeting of the Tirupati LS byelection at Beri Vari Mandapam in Srikalahasti town in the evening.

According to party sources, accompanied by the party nominee Panabaka Lakshmi and other senior leaders, Naidu is set to cover at least one Assembly constituency a day.

From April 9 to 12, he will cover Gudur, Sullurpet, Sarvepalli and Venkatagiri Assembly segments in the Nellore district and he is expected to campaign in Satyavedu in Chittoor district on April 13. He will take part in road shows and address public meetings in Tirupati on April 14 and April 15 till the campaign ends at 5 pm on the last day before the bypoll.

## YSRC LEADERS ARE DISTRIBUTING MONEY: ANURADHA

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Telugu Desam state general secretary Panchumarthy Anuradha on Wednesday accused the ruling YSR Congress leaders and ministers of camping and distributing illegal money in Tirupati for the parliamentary byelection as they were afraid of defeat in a free and fair election.

She said that the seven ministers, who were made campaign incharges in the seven Assembly segments, were taking the electioneering to a new low.



YSR Congress MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy and party candidate Dr. M. Gurumurthy campaign for the Lok Sabha byelection in Tirupati on Wednesday.

## Gurumurthy carries out door-to-door campaign

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy on Wednesday exuded confidence that the welfare schemes of the state government ensure a mammoth win of the YSRC nominee Dr M. Gurumurthy in the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection, scheduled for April 17.

The two went on a door-to-door campaign in the 47th division of temple

city, seeking votes.

Speaking to media persons, Bhumana said that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has made sure that all scheme benefits would reach the doorstep of the people.

He lauded Tirupati people for their unprecedented support to the YSRC during the municipal elections.

Gurumurthy said he will continue to be in public service if given a chance in the ensuing poll.

## Panabaka: Vote for TD to achieve self-respect of AP

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

Panabaka Lakshmi, Telugu Desam's contestant for Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection, assured that the lost self-respect of the Andhra people can only be achieved by voting to the TD, which left the NDA alliance and resigned to central ministerial positions after betrayal by the BJP.

Addressing the media at a press conference here on Wednesday, the six-time MP said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who promised a 'Special Category Status' to AP in an election meeting in Tirupati, has later sidelined his promise, citing the Niti Aayog recommendations. "How the BJP sanctioned thousands of crores to Bihar state before the Assembly elections and why the Niti Aayog was silent on the same", she said.

"The state of affairs is so pathetic that we cannot explain to our children where the state capital is, even after the PM laid the foundation stone. The indifference of the Centre towards farmers is also appalling", she added. She found fault with the Centre's move towards privatisation of banks, Vizag steel plant, etc.

Taking a dig at the AP Chief Minister and the ruling YSRC for failing to achieve SCS and other AP Reorganisation Act promises even after winning the 22 Lok Sabha seats, she stressed that this amounts to cheating the people who supported Jagan's slogan of 'one chance'.

"The state government has failed to provide MSP and cancelled the subsidy on farm mechanisation equipment. They also failed to speed up the Gudur flyover works and completing land acquisition process for Nadikudi-Srikalahasti and Gudur-Dugarajapatnam railway lines," she said.

## Suresh seeks disqualification of rebel MP Raghurama

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

YSR Congress MP Nandigam Suresh appealed to the Lok Sabha Speaker to disqualify Narasapuram MP K. Raghurama Krishnam Raju for violating party discipline and making wild allegations against the party president.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, he said that Raju had indulged in violation of party discipline under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution of India and stern action has to be taken against him to set an example for avoiding such instances in the future. He said that the party shall suspend him in case the Speaker fails to take action against him.

Suresh said that Raju has no moral right to speak on Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's cases as there are CBI and ACB cases against him, and stated that he had approached the TD and the BJP seeking respite from those cases.

# India will see its first lesbian duet dance: Ramu

From Page 1

"I don't believe in God, so I can't be interested in mythology," he says. "I don't have the patience for history — the research it would take... like, I don't want to lose my time getting the costumes details correct."

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

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

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

He is set to launch Spark OTT along with a partner, very shortly, which will also fuse RGV World.

"I am at the peak of my career and life. Filmmakers can pitch their ideas," he says, and he would find the funding, professionals, team and wherewithal to take it to fruition. He has launched more newcomers than most other Telugu film directors put together.

Does he believe in providing opportunities to talent or prefer being a mentor? No, he says, reverting to the familiar safe zone to fustigate social mores. "I don't believe in helping anyone. I just want to do what gives me pleasure in the same moment. At this point, I want to see not tens but hundreds of films being made."

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

ny of the film theatre screens.

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

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

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

"With an internet-connected mobile phone, what can people today not see or know of? If we cannot cen-

sor the internet, we should stay away from censorship of OTT also. They used to take 20 days to give a censor clearance for a movie. The sheer number of films, short films and documentaries on OTT and Internet makes this impossible. Besides, as a society we have surely moved past the idea that five people can dictate to a billion what they can see, or cannot."

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

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

RGV is a good litmus test for society. In an age where we are easily offended, or hurt, when the authority refuses to be questioned and tries to

silence those who dare ask, he does it all.

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

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

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

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



## IN BRIEF

## No word on other darshans

From page 1: With rising Coronavirus cases, it has decided to suspend them altogether. However, TTD has not made any announcement with regard to continuation or suspension of other darshans, including the online ₹300 special entry and VIP break.

## CONSTABLE LAUDED FOR CARING A BABY AS MOM CAST VOTE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

A police constable from AP carried and lulled a one-month old crying baby as its mother was waiting in a queue to cast her vote at a polling booth in Tamil Nadu, winning the hearts of many people.

The AP Police in a tweet said that the AP Police's humane face at Tamil Nadu Elections was exhibited when a police constable hailing from Anantapur was deployed at Tamil Nadu Assembly polls. After seeing the one-month-old baby crying as its mother was standing in a queue to wait for her turn to cast the vote at a polling booth, the police constable noticed it and took the baby in his arms and sat under a tent and cajoled the baby to stop crying until its mother returned after casting her vote.

## Homebound



Inmates of AU Engineering College Women's Hostels move out of their hostel complex to their houses after completing quarantine period for Covid-19 at AU Engineering College in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

## AP reports 2,331 cases, 11 deaths

## 10 districts registered three digit single day surge, Guntur topped

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Andhra Pradesh continues to witness steep surge in Coronavirus infections in the last few days since the beginning of the second wave of the pandemic and it registered 2,331 fresh infections and 11 deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported here on Wednesday that out of 31,812 samples tested, 2,331 persons were found infected with the confirmed Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,53,02,583 samples tested so far in the state, 9,13,274 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,92,736 were recovered in the course of treatment while 13,276 are still



A medical staff administers Covid vaccine to a person at the Government ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus infections, 10 districts out of 13, reg-

istered three digit single day surge. Among them, Guntur topped with 368 followed by 327 in

● Four deaths in Chittoor, two in Kurnool and one each in Anantapur, East Godavari, Krishna, Nellore and Visakhapatnam districts.

Krishna, 298 in Visakhapatnam, 296 in Chittoor, 202 in Anantapur, 186 in Nellore, 176 in Kurnool, 149 in Kadapa, 123 in Srikakulam, 110 in Prakasam, 47 in Vizianagaram, 29 in East Godavari and 20 in West Godavari.

Chittoor district found to be the worst hit with the highest number of Coronavirus active cases at 2,227 followed by 1,951 in Guntur, 1,844 in Visakhapatnam, 1,830 in Krishna, 1,215 in Nellore,

763 in East Godavari, 754 in Prakasam, 644 in Kurnool, 591 in Srikakulam, 543 in Anantapur, 467 in Kadapa, 254 in Vizianagaram and 193 in West Godavari.

The number of deaths of Coronavirus infected patients also witnessed a surge to 11 with four in Chittoor, two in Kurnool and one each in Anantapur, East Godavari, Krishna, Nellore and Visakhapatnam districts. Death toll rose to 7,262.

The state health authorities discharged 853 Coronavirus infected patients after recovery in the last 24 hours.

AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,86,565 samples per one million population and registered positive rate at 5.97.

## 4 PERSONS DIE DUE TO WATER CONTAMINATION

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, APRIL 7

Four persons were reportedly died of diarrhea after drinking contaminated water and at least hundred people have been admitted in hospitals at Panyam, Nandyal and Adoni towns of Kurnool district. Apart from this, one pregnant woman suffered abortion in Gorukallu village.

The deceased were identified as Ella Krishnaiah alias Kittu, 35, Uppari Ushain, 65, and Maddamma, 80, residents of Gorukallu.

## Pictographic inscriptions found at Srisailem temple

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, APRIL 7

Srisailem temple authorities said for the first time stone inscriptions with scripts resembling Harappa culture were found.

At least 20 stone inscriptions unearthed while digging near Vibhuti Matham on Wednesday. It is said these inscriptions may date back to 2000 BC. The executive officer K.S. Rama Rao said the entire area is cordoned off and special permission was sought from the govern-

ment to excavate the area.

Disclosing this to *Deccan Chronicle*, the executive officer said it was a "historic find" as none of the inscriptions found earlier in Srisailem resembled the script which is pictographic.

It was in Indus script opening up new vistas in further research into the antiquity of the Srisailem kshetram. We have found 20 inscriptions. But we are hopeful more of such inscriptions would be dug out if we carry excavations around Vibhuti Matham and Rudraksha

Matham areas, the EO said.

The Srisailem inscriptions now point to the fact that a thriving society was present in the prehistoric days, said Telugu University, Professor Chandrasekhar Reddy. He said these inscriptions belong to Before Christ 2500-3700 and a thorough study is needed to be done to contextualize the life of people in the Srisailem area. The executive officer said with this Srisailem would be ranked as one of the foremost centres of pristine purity.

## GREEN | DRIVE

## Acacia trees to be replaced with eco-friendly plants

## TTD to take up plantation drive

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, APRIL 7

With an aim to conserve the rich green vegetation and to preserve the biodiversity of Seshachala ranges, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) is contemplating a massive plantation programme soon, replacing the Acacia auriculiformis (Tumma) trees, which has spread its tentacles ruthlessly affecting the biodiversity of Tirumala forests.

Under the instructions of TTD EO Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy, the DFO of TTD Avula Chandrasekhar has chalked out a detailed action plan to take up the plantation programme in the Seshachala ranges. It was during his inspection in the areas of Dharmagiri, Kumaradhara-Pasupudhara

wilds, the TTD EO has noticed a meagre growth of plant species, movement of birds, animals etc. wherever there is Acacia plantation and called for an expert opinion to know the reason.

Accordingly, Dr B.M.K. Reddy, chairman, AP State Biodiversity and other professors were approached, who gave alarming facts over the depletion of greenery in the Seshachala ranges. The experts stated that Acacia, which was grown in about 890 hectares in Tirumala forest cover, has a Ph value between 4.4 and 4.5. Because of this high acidity, no other plants are germinating besides Acacia.

Even no animal or bird can also feed on Acacia. Even the honeybee cannot transport the nectar from its pollen which is ulti-

mately resulting in the hindrance of other plants and affecting animal life as well.

Apart from this, Acacia is a fast growing species after bamboo and easily attracts fire and has no wind tolerance because of its lateral roots.

The plantation of Acacia happened in 1983. Being an Australian plant breed of Australia, Acacia, which has a history of around 50 years across the world, was considered as a fast-growing species as it consumes less water and grows fast on rocky patches as well in deserts. Over a period of time, the biologists across the world, however, realised that this species critically disturbs other flora, fauna and aves and almost many countries have now banned the growth of Acacia.

According to the DFO,

because of the widespread Acacia in the last three and a half decades, nearly 76 creepers and 49 plant species have joined the endangered list – an alarming situation that has been impacting on the greenery, ecology and wildlife of Tirumala. To overcome this situation, TTD has decided to extensively grow indigenous plant species in the place of Acacia.

"Of 890 hectares where Acacia has spread, 240 hectares will be retained while the remaining 650 hectares will be replaced with other Indigenous species in a phased manner. The entire project cost is projected at around ₹20 crore. During the first phase in 2021-22, the plantation activity will be taken up in 80 hectares of land," TTD DFO Chandra Sekhar said.

## Corporators want civic issues solved

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

The newly-elected corporators of the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation have sought to resolve civic issues giving top priority to sanitation. YSR Congress Vijaya-wada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu conducted a meeting with central constituency corporators and VMC officials here on Wednesday.

During the meeting, the corporators asked the city commissioner to increase the sanitation staff in some divisions depending on the population.

They deplored the delay in the replacement of damaged street lights.

When the corporators pointed out the issues related to schools in their divisions, the officials told that

the works are underway in 18 primary schools and 12 high schools in the constituency.

Vishnu also brought the issue to the notice of the city commissioner that the bio-plant in Division 59 of Ramanagar colony was emitting foul smell causing trouble for the residents.

VMC commissioner Prasanna Venkatesh expressed anger over the negligence of staff and directed them to initiate measures for the betterment of sanitation.

Later, the officials briefed and created awareness among the corporators on the various government schemes being implemented by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, including distribution of house site pattas and others for the middle-class families.

## Light to moderate rain likely in state

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

Isolated places of north coastal Andhra Pradesh and Yanam are likely to witness light to moderate rain or thundershowers for the next four days from April 8 to 11.

Amaravati Meteorological Centre in a weather bulletin issued here on Wednesday warned thundershowers accompanied with gusty winds (30-40 kmph) along with lightning very likely to occur at isolated places over

north Coastal AP covering districts-Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari and West Godavari, in the next three days from April 9 to 11.

It forecast mainly dry weather to prevail over south coastal AP covering Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Nellore in the next four days from April 8 to 11. So is the case with four districts in Rayalaseema covering Anantapur, Kurnool, Kadapa and Chittoor from April 8 to 10.

## FOUR ARRESTED ON CHARGES OF MURDER

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 7

Vizianagaram police cracked the mystery behind the murder of a man by arresting four accused in the case.

According to police, K. Ravi, hailing from Pinavemali village falling under Vizianagaram rural police, went missing and was found dead under suspicious circumstances on February 17. In the course of inquiry, the police arrested four persons and found that sexual jealousy was the motive for the murder.

Ravi and Pydiraju hailing from the same village of Pinavemali developed an illicit affair with the same woman.

However, Pydiraju wanted to eliminate Ravi and accordingly, the latter was invited for a liquor party and was murdered by strangulation. Their efforts to cover up the murder as a suicide by hanging to a tree failed and they dumped the body in a well. The shepherds found the body and alerted the villagers who in turn informed the police.

● K. Ravi, hailing from Pinavemali village falling under Vizianagaram rural police, went missing and was found dead under suspicious circumstances on February 17. In the course of inquiry, the police arrested four persons and found that sexual jealousy was the motive for the murder.

## INTER 1ST YEAR STUDENT ENDS LIFE IN GUNTUR

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 7

An Intermediate first-year girl student committed suicide at Guntur. According to the Nallapadu police, a resident of Mittameedapalle of Veludruthi mandal in Guntur district, Nallapu Lavanya, 17, was studying Intermediate first year in Vignam Women's College at Palakaluri in Guntur city. She was staying with three others in a room and the four girl students went to study on Wednesday morning. But Lavanya returned to the room after one hour. The three roommates later returned to the room after completion of study hour and found Lavanya hanging to the window. They immediately informed the same to College management who further informed to police about the incident.

The police rushed to the spot and shifted the body for autopsy by registering a case. The police further investigating about the cause of suicide. The police informed about the incident to parents and relatives.

● The student was staying in a room with three other students.



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SHORT TAKES

COP SUSPENDED FOR DANCING IN UNIFORM

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACCUSED IN HONEY TRAP CASE HELD AFTER TWO YEARS

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

— PTI

Maoists show jawan's photo to claim custody

DKSZC wants govt to nominate interlocutors for talks

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC RAIPUR, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

The jawan's colleagues

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

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

Sources, meanwhile, said the missing jawan's

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Two Italian marines —

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

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

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

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



Bipin Rawat

CHINA CAPABLE OF CYBER ATTACK ON INDIA, SAYS CDS

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat said on Wednesday that China is capable of launching cyber attacks on India which can disrupt "large amount of our systems."

He said that the biggest differential between India and China lies in the field of cyber.

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

Waze names two ministers in letter

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kerala: Youth killed in post-poll clash

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some of their family mem-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

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

Shah, Didi predict WB poll results

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, APRIL 7

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

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

Shah, who led multiple roadshows including one at a key seat: Singur in Hooghly for BJP candidate Rabindranath Bhattacharya, said, "Three phases of polls have been held in West Bengal so far. The BJP has already taken a lead by winning 63-68 seats out of the 91 ahead of the TMC, Communists and Congress. On May 2 the BJP will emerge as the winner with more than 200 seats to form it's government in the state. Banerjee's frustration is getting reflected in her speech and behaviour. This confirms the BJP's victory."



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

— PTI

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

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

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

Jharkhand but got 25 out of 81. In Maharashtra, he bragged about winning two-third of the seats but got one-third finally. In New Delhi, they got eight out of 70 despite claiming of getting all. Today he predicted again. According to me, they will hardly get 25-30 seats with the help of CPM. Moreover we lost in these seats across Bankura and Purulia earlier," she said.

CRPF working at behest of BJP: Didi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC with agency inputs NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, APRIL 7

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

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

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



## SHORT TAKES

## OUTRAGE AFTER IMRAN LINKS RAPE TO WOMEN'S DRESS

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

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

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

## AUSTRIAN GROUP FILES PLAINT ON GOOGLE AD TRACK

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

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

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

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

## ACTOR ZACH AVERY HELD FOR PONZI SCHEME

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

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

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

## ACTIVISTS GUILTY FOR DEMOCRACY RALLY IN HK

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

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

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

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

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

## Sinking ship



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

— AP

# US military warns China on fast track for Taiwan

Years of military buildup have given China added strength

**Washington, April 7:**

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

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

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

# Taiwan blasts China’s fighter jet incursions

**Taipei, April 7:**

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

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

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

Beijing has vowed to one

day seize the island, by force if needed.

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

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

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

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

— AFP

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

# Biden makes jab open to all adults

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

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

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

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

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

“The safety committee has confirmed that the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine in preventing Covid-19 overall outweigh the risk of side effects,” EMA chief Emer Cooke told a news conference. “It is saving lives.” Despite the fact that many of the cases have been reported in women under 55, prompting a number of countries to restrict the vaccine’s use to older people, the regulator said it had not been able to pinpoint those at risk.

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

## ROUHANI: NUKE TALKS OPEN ‘NEW CHAPTER’

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

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

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

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

— AFP

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

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

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

adding an inquiry had been opened into the cause.

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

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

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

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

— AFP

# EU slams Ursula ‘sofagate’ at summit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

## APEX | PREDATORS

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

# Polar bears snack on eggs as Arctic shrinks

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

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

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

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

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

and are snacking on their eggs.

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

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

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

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

— AFP



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

— AFP



# DECCAN Chronicle

8 APRIL 2021

## Nurture is the best policy, but watch out for inflation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Clear the air on Rafale

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

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

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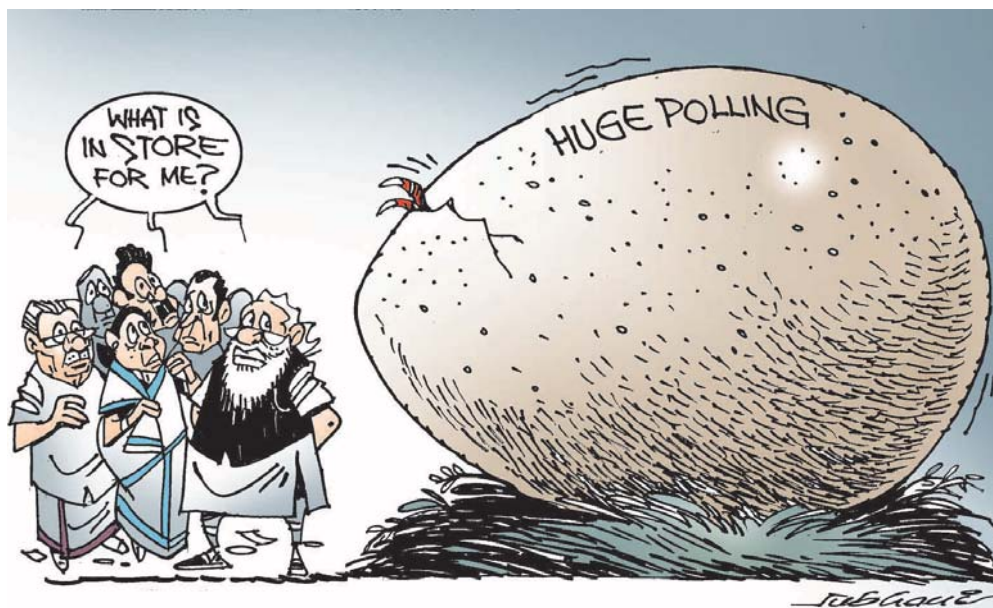
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Subhani



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



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

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

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

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

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

Even the Union health ministry is compelled to admit that the recent spike in coronavirus cases in India is spreading faster in the country compared to last year. How did we get here?

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

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

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

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

How did we slip up?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is the road ahead?

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

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

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

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

### LETTERS

#### COVID RULES

The alarming surge in Covid cases can be attributed to people not adhering to rules and lack of containment measures (*Ban all large gatherings, give everyone vaccines, DC, April 7*). Authorities must micro-manage the vaccination and pay attention to the regions experiencing surge. People must realise that they can't afford another lockdown. Let us not allow the pandemic to play havoc by adhering to the guidelines.

**Dr C. Ghanshyam**  
Visakhapatnam

#### DECIMATE MAOISTS

The Red Corridor still eludes governments at the Centre and states (*Need to rethink strategy to tackle Maoist menace, DC, April 7*). Several strategies were adopted for development of tribal areas to control the Maoists. Nothing concrete has happened so far. New strategies are announced at every massacre and forgotten. The time is ripe for a committed Messiah to emerge and act decisively to decimate Maoists.

**K. Nehru Patnaik**  
Visakhapatnam

#### CURB FAKE NEWS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi must introspect about his party's role first before blaming the Opposition for spreading rumours (*PM slams Oppn for spreading rumours, DC, April 7*). His party's IT cell and social media lead in circulating fake news. Last December, Twitter flagged a tweet by BJP's IT cell head as "manipulated media" for an edited clip about farmers protest. In order to curb fake news, all parties must get their act together.

**Sajid Farooq**  
Kurnool

### 50 YEARS AGO IN

## DECCAN Chronicle

#### 360 villages reduced to ashes in East Pak

JESSORE, APRIL. 7  
Hordes of marauding Pakistani commandoes have blazed a trail of death and desolation along this black-topped road which connects the two ravished cities of Dacca and Jessore.

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

Maleeha Lodhi



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

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

This prompted the World Health Organisation early in the pandemic to coin the term "infodemic" to refer to the flood of information and exponential spread of fabricated content. The head of WHO, Tedros Adhanom, declared: "We're not just battling the virus, we're also battling the trolls and conspiracy theorists that push misinformation and undermine the outbreak response." Top UN officials repeatedly warned of the grave social and health ramifications of the proliferation of misinformation.

While the global health crisis has seen a stream of false stories the reality is that fake news is all around us today. This presents new challenges to social stability in what has been called the post-truth era, a term that emerged a few years ago.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

even sowing public disorder.

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

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

*By arrangement with Dawn*



quick BITES

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

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Drug firms asked to ramp up remdesivir output

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

Wipro appoints Subha Tataavarti as CTO



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

Aravind appointed as CFO of Tanla Platforms Ltd

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

Practo online consultations in 15 languages

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



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

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

BACKING UP GROWTH

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

Shaktikanta Das.

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

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

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

The MPC believes the consumer price index-

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

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

Dovish stance leads to broad-based buying

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

PLI schemes for solar modules, AC, LED lights okayed



FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

solar PV modules.

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

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

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

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

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

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

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rupee sees steep fall but bond yields cool

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL, 7

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

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

The gesture was well-received by the bond mar-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MEIL'S FIRST MAKE IN INDIA OIL RIG BEGINS OPERATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sebi slaps ₹25-cr fine on Ambanis

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

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

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

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

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

lations.

Thus, the obligation to make a public announcement about acquiring the shares arose on January 7, 2000. This was the date on which the PACs were allotted RIL equity shares on exercise of warrants issued in January 1994, the order noted.

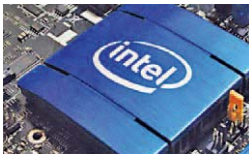
However, the Securities and Exchange Board of India found that the promoters and PACs have not made any public announcement for acquiring the shares.

Since the promoters and PACs have not made any public announcement for acquiring shares, it is alleged that they have violated the provisions of the takeover regulations.

According to the order, various individuals and entities failed to "make public announcement, deprived the shareholders of their statutory rights/opportunity to exit from the company".

The regulator has imposed the penalty of Rs 25 crore, to be paid jointly and severally, by the individuals and entities concerned. — PTI

New Intel chip launched



FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, APRIL 7

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

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

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

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

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

Nurse squeezes extra doses of vaccine with air bubbles

ESSI LEHTO HELSINKI, APRIL 7

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

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

Such "low-dead-space"



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

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

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

The dose is then injected with minimal waste.

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

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



## SHORT TAKES

## Olympic torch is off Osaka streets

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

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

## Judo team pull out of Oly qualies

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

## Royals look to rule

## Will Samson-Sangakkara partnership work for Rajasthan?

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

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

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

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

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

## STRENGTH

RR boast of a number of destructive batsmen. Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes are match-winning players who can trample any opposition while Samson is a minefield of talent.

David Miller and Morris are two other powerful strikers and Liam Livingstone can turn the match on its head. Last season's revelation, all-rounder Rahul Tewatia, has also showcased his ability to whack the ball outside the park.

## WEAKNESS

For Royals, the problem is their weak Indian core which hasn't been consistent. Samson has rarely performed in five straight



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

— Usain Bolt

games in any of the editions in the past few years. Pacer Jaydev Unadkat, bought for ₹11.5 crore in 2018, has been unable to deliver.

## OPPORTUNITY

Samson's form and consistency have always been a question mark. He has failed to capitalise on the handful of chances provided to him in T20Is.

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

## THREAT

With Samson at the helm, his lack of experience in the role and the impact

that it might have on his batting are factors that must be taken into account.

Also, the team is heavily dependent on Archer. While they have Morris to rely on, the pace attack seems weak in the 26-year-old England pacer's absence. The franchise would desperately hope Archer joins the side at the earliest.

— PTI

## TCA affiliation up at BCCI meeting

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

## NETHRA 1ST INDIAN WOMAN SAILOR TO QUALIFY FOR OLY

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

## CITY CLIPS



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

## Dhiraj's double at Secunderabad Club

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

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

## THE RESULTS

■ **Boys U-16 final:** V. Dhiraj Reddy bt Sri Hari Donde 6-3, 6-7(3-7), 10-6. **Semifinals:** V. Dhiraj Reddy bt A. Vijay Sarathi 9-2; Sri Hari Donde bt Shashank Chilla 9-2. ■ **Boys U-18 final:** V. Dhiraj Reddy bt Rushi Chakra Budidha 5-7, 6-1, 10-6. **Semifinals:** Rushi Chakra Budidha bt Tamay Raj Bhatnagar 9-2; V. Dhiraj Reddy bt Saneet Uppti 9-4. ■ **Girls U-16 final:** Sai Ananya Varanasi bt Nysha Baruah 6-2, 6-0. **Semifinals:** Sai Ananya Varanasi bt Harshleen Kaur 9-2; Nysha Baruah bt D Hasini Yadav 3-2. ■ **Girls U-18 final:** Nysha Baruah bt Veda Ravipati 6-1, 6-1. **Semifinals:** Nysha Baruah bt P Nanditha Reddy 9-2; Veda Ravipati bt Kathayani Reddy 9-1. ■ **Women's final:** Charitha Vasi Reddy bt Jayti Tanna 2-6, 6-0, 10-2. **Semifinals:** Charitha Vasi Reddy bt Juevira Fatima 9-5; Jayti Tanna bt Laharika Gangoni 9-3. ■ **Men's final:** Jaidev Reddy bt Rushi Chakra Budidha 7-6 (2), 5-1. **Semifinals:** Jaidev Reddy bt Anirudh Behera 9-2; Rushi Chakra Budidha bt Aditya Kodakalla 9-1.

## Mixed luck for Dedeepya at AITA event

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

## Royal Club put four past Wanaparthy

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

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

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

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## Vinicius double sinks Liverpool

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

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

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

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

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

## THE RESULTS

## (QUARTERFINALS FIRST LEGS)

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

## Live on TV

## FOOTBALL

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

of the return in eight days' time.

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

— AFP

## 24 athletes Covid +ve in SAI Bhopal

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

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