

WEATHER

Max: 37.2°C
Min: 25.2°C
RH: 30%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Max/Min temp.
37/25°C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Suddha Shashti till
10.31 pm
Star: Arudra till 5 am (Monday)
Varjyam: 11.48 am to 1.33 pm
Durmuhurtam: 4.49 pm to
5.39 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Ramzan 5,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 4.55 am
Zohar: 12.25 pm
Asar: 4.38 pm
Maghrib: 6.38 pm
Isha: 7.48 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.32 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.58 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 9.28 AM
MOONSET TODAY 11 PM

RAMZAN TIMINGS

IFTAR: 6.38 pm (Today)
SEHRI: 4.33 am (Tomorrow)

COUNTER POINT

Let us loot vaccines
and oxygen from
the hospital!

SHORT TAKES

Deep Sidhu gets
bail: RF violence

New Delhi: A Delhi court has granted bail to actor-activist Deep Sidhu, who was arrested in connection with the Red Fort violence on Republic Day. Special Judge Neelofer Abida Perveen granted relief to the accused on Friday on a personal bond of ₹30,000 and two sureties of a like amount.

Lalu gets bail in
Dumka case

Ranchi: Jharkhand High Court on Saturday granted bail to RJD president Lalu Prasad in Dumka treasury case of the multi-crore rupees fodder scam, paving way for his release from jail. The bail was allowed to Prasad by Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh. The court directed him neither to leave the country without permission nor change his address and mobile number during the bail period.

WhatsApp weak
link discovered

New Delhi: Country's cyber security agency CERT-In has cautioned WhatsApp users about certain vulnerabilities detected in the popular instant messaging app that could lead to breach of sensitive information. A "high" severity rating advisory was issued by the CERT-In, or the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team.

Tamil comedian
Vivekh dead

Chennai: Popular Tamil actor Vivekh who won the hearts of millions of people by his sharp wit and noted for his social work and promoting the cause of environmental protection died here on Saturday. The 59-year-old comedian died in the early hours, SIMS Hospital vice president Dr Raju Sivasamy said. ■ Full report on page 5

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Covid toll crosses
3 million worldwide

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Dhoni is the heartbeat
of CSK, says Fleming

TABLOID

The 'Supreme'
bias

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TS BJP LEADERS IN TROUBLE FOR MEETING KTR

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS I DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

The BJP central leadership took serious note of a delegation of state party leaders meeting TRS working president K.T. Rama Rao with a request to not field a candidate for the GHMC Lingojiguda division byelection.

The bypoll was necessitated by the death of BJP corporator-elect Akula Ramesh Goud. The state BJP has decided to field his son Akhil Goud. A delegation led by N. Ramchander Rao, who recently lost the Legislative Council polls, met Rama Rao at the latter's residence on Friday and put forth the proposal which the TRS leader immediately agreed to.

Party sources said the development did not go down well with the central leadership which is actively considering issuing showcause notices to the BJP leaders including Ramchander Rao involved in the exercise.

■ **Page 2: No tacit pact in TS, says BJP leader**

RAMZAN TIMINGS

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COUNTER POINT

Let us loot vaccines
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PAK TEAM TO TRAVEL TO INDIA FOR WORLD T20

New Delhi, April 17: The Pakistan cricket team, led by Babar Azam, will have no difficulty in travelling to India for the ICC World T20 in October as the government is set to grant visas to the players. It was learnt that BCCI secretary Jay Shah has informed the apex council about government's decision on giving visas to the Pakistan players. "The visa issue of Pakistan cricket team was sorted. However whether the fans can travel across the border to watch matches is still not clear," an apex council member said. — PTI

Lalu gets bail in Dumka case

Ranchi: Jharkhand High Court on Saturday granted bail to RJD president Lalu Prasad in Dumka treasury case of the multi-crore rupees fodder scam, paving way for his release from jail. The bail was allowed to Prasad by Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh. The court directed him neither to leave the country without permission nor change his address and mobile number during the bail period.

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A man whose leg was in a plaster cast crawls to the bus stand outside Gandhi Hospital after he was refused further treatment. GGH has once again been designated as a Covid-19 hospital. — S. SURENDER REDDY

Vaccination suspended as vaccines yet to come

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

The state government has halted Covid-19 vaccinations all 1,077 state-run centres for a day on Sunday due a shortage. Director of Health Services Dr G. Srinivasa Rao announced late on Saturday evening that, "There will not be any vaccination at government Covid vaccination centres on April 18. Vaccination will resume on April 19."

Earlier in the day, addressing a press conference, Dr Rao had said that Telangana state was running short of vaccines and was hoping that a promised delivery of 2.7 lakh doses by the Centre would materialise late on Saturday or on Sunday morning.

He had said that there were just enough doses for one day. "If the supplies do not come, then we will have just around 2 lakh doses left with us that might last us for Sunday or just spill over a

Bars, pubs viewed as Covid hotspots

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

People visiting bars and pubs and gatherings with just a few hundred people, are among the reasons for the very fast spread of Covid during the current second wave in the state, according to the official at the helm of the battle to contain the disease.

Dr G. Srinivasa Rao, director of health services, said that as part of the tracing and tracking of contacts of people found to be Covid positive, his department staff found that 40 Covid cases were linked to just one pub, another 32 cases were linked to one bar.

■ **Report on Page 2**

Blood banks run dry due to Covid

NARENDER PULLOOR | DC
NIZAMABAD, APRIL 17

Blood banks are running dry as Covid-19 pandemic adversely affected the blood donation process in the erstwhile Nizamabad district area.

As a result, blood is being supplied only for emergency cases.

The closure of educational institutions has affected the blood donation camps as youths are a major source for blood donation.

The Red Cross blood bank in Nizamabad is collecting less than 1,000 units of blood per month due to the pandemic. Earlier, it used to collect more than 3,000 units.

The Red Cross blood bank in Kamareddy and blood storage centres in Bodhan, Armoor and Banswada towns have also been facing a shortage.

Government and private hospitals prefer to provide treatment for Covid-19 patients and halted general surgeries and treatments.

Due to Covid-19 pandemic, social gatherings like meetings, marriages and functions halted in Nizamabad and

Teachers panic when asked to report at school daily to take class in pandemic

Only 10% govt students attend online classes

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

Only 10 per cent of students in nearly every government school are attending the online/digital classes, since the final exams have been cancelled, several government teachers told *Deccan Chronicle*.

Despite this, teachers are being asked to go to school from 8 am to 12.30 pm. This has created panic amid the pandemic, and teachers believe it is a waste of time and effort to go to the school every day.

"Teachers go to school for 4 hours, while classes start at 10 am. Hardly any student attends the class, since exams have been cancelled and the course has been completed. In this heat, and amid the Covid-19 cases, it is unfair to be mandating teachers to attend school," said Chava Ravi, general secretary, Telangana State United Teachers' Federation (TSUTF). Most teachers in the rural areas over the past months have had the added responsibility of going to the house of every

■ **ATTENDANCE HAD improved once the schools reopened for physical classes, especially in the rural areas.**

■ **AS PER government data, 75-80 per cent students had started to attend school regularly.**

TRS upbeat over high poll turnout

89% polling is highest in 3 Sagar polls

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC
HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

The ruling Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) is upbeat following the record 89 per cent polling, the highest in the past three elections, recorded in the Nagarjunasagar Assembly byelection on Saturday.

TRS leaders said the higher polling percentage in recent Legislative Council elections had worked in favour of TRS and the same would be repeated in Nagarjunasagar.

They exuded confidence of securing a majority that would be higher than what was recorded in the 2018 December Assembly elections.

In 2018, TRS candidate Nomula Narasimhaiah had won with a majority of 7,726 votes over Congress candidate K. Jana Reddy and TRS is confident that Narasimhaiah's son Bhagat will surpass his father's margin of victory. The leaders claimed that

■ **More reports on Page 5**

the higher poll percentage was due to the success of the party's 'micro-level booth management', under which it appointed an in-charge for every 20 voters.

■ **Page 2: Mission Chanakya gives edge to TRS**

Errabelli: People don't believe in BJP's promises

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 17

The people of Warangal are not ready to believe the fake statements of BJP and will surely vote the TRS to power, said Panchayat Raj minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao.

Addressing media persons on Saturday, he said the BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar gives meaningless statements which will not even be considered by the people.

He will surely receive a fitting lesson from the citizens of Warangal during the GWMC elections.

The war is going to be one-sided again this time. The people of the state reposed faith in TRS in the two MLC elections recently. The same would be repeated here, he said.

Mr Dayakar noted that the TRS has spent a large sum of funds for the development of the city, which is evident from the recent visit of MA&UD minister K.T. Rama Rao's visit. Not only these, but there would also be more development activities in the future, he assured.

The minister stated that BJP president Bandi Sanjay has not come to his senses despite the people of the state reducing them to fourth place in the recent MLC elections.

"The BJP party has restricted itself to just making statements. Not even a single promise has

● **THE MINISTER** said BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar gives meaningless statements which will not even be considered by the people.

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been fulfilled. Medical colleges, Nizamabad turmeric board, Kazipet coach factory, Bayyaram steel plant, Tribal University, the list goes on. Before contesting the elections, the BJP must declare what it has done for Warangal," Rao challenged.

MLC Kadiam Srihari said the coach factory in Kazipet in the right of the people of Telangana. He sought to know why all the coach factories are in North India and none in the South.

"We will fight for our right," he declared.

Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar said the BJP cannot fool the people of Warangal and the result will be seen in the upcoming GWMC elections.

roads, markets, buses and Metro trains remained largely empty on Saturday as the national capital, grappling with soaring Covid-19 cases, observed weekend curfew, with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal sending both an SOS and a warning.

The Covid-19 situation in Delhi has become "very serious and worrisome", and hospital beds, oxygen, remdesivir and tocilizumab for patients are in short supply, Mr Kejriwal said on Saturday.

The number of Covid-19 cases are rising rapidly with 24,000 fresh cases reported in the last 24 hours.

The Chief Minister said he spoke with Union health minister Harsh Vardhan and requested him for oxygen, remdesivir and tocilizumab.

The positivity rate in Delhi has reached 24 per cent — one in four of all people being tested are positive, he said.

"The situation is very serious and worrisome," Mr Kejriwal said.

"Cases have gone up really fast. That is why we are facing shortages even though everything seemed under control until a few days ago. But the speed at which this corona is growing, no one knows where its peak will be," he added.

"Any health infrastructure has limitations. The government is trying its best to increase the number of beds. I hope that we will be able to add 6,000 more beds in the next two to four days," he said.

Delhi led major cities across India into a week-end lockdown Saturday as the country confronts a fierce new coronavirus wave, with more than 2.3 lakh fresh daily cases that has left many states struggling for drugs and hospital beds.

The country added another record 2.34 lakh cases on Saturday to pass 1.45 crore overall and 1,341 deaths took its pandemic total to 175,649 deaths.

SHORT TAKES

DISRUPTIONS DUE TO SHORTAGE OF JAB

From Page 1

There were some disruptions because of shortages lately in some of the 1,334 vaccination centres including so-me private ones.

“If a person is unable to get vaccinated on a particular day, please go again, the vaccine supply position will improve,” he said.

OWASI: ALLOT MORE GARBAGE VANS FOR SPECIAL DRIVE

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

MIM president and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi asked GHMC commissioner D.S. Lokesh Kumar to allot additional garbage lifting vehicles for a special drive during Ramzan and exempt slum dwellers from paying the fee to door-to-door garbage collectors. He along GHMC Charminar zonal commissioner Ashok Samrat inspected various areas in the Old City and took stock of the sanitation and clearing of garbage amidst the complaints over civic issues. He visited Petlaburj, Mehndi, Khilwat, Minar Garden and Doodhbowli and instructed officials to ensure prompt lifting of garbage.

NO TACIT PACT IN TS, SAYS BJP LEADER

From page 1

“We were not consulted before they met KTR,” a central BJP leader who is involved in Telangana party affairs told this correspondent.

The party was of the view that such meetings would leave an impression among the people that the BJP had adopted a blow-hot-blow-cold approach towards the ruling dispensation. The BJP leaders going to Rama Rao the day before the Nagarjunasagar bypoll also irked the central leadership, sources added.

“We don’t have any alliance nor will we have any tacit understanding with any political force in Telangana,” the central leader pointed out. On the party’s request to the TRS to not field any candidate on sympathetic grounds, he said that going by the same logic the BJP should not have contested the Dubbak or the Nagarjunasagar bypolls which were held due to the death of incumbent legislators.

The BJP central leadership also took note of group rivalries growing in the state BJP unit and its leaders not taking the Nagarjunasagar bypoll with all seriousness. A recent meeting where a few BJP leaders discussed countering state unit president Bandi Sanjay on some of his decisions also went to the notice of the central leadership. The leadership is studying if there is a split between the dominant and emerging castes at the state level and will address the issue before things go out of hands, sources added. “The Nagarjunasagar bypoll is a thing of the past now. We will ensure such mishandling is not repeated,” said the central leader.

Meanwhile Ramchander Rao told Deccan Chronicle that he had no information about the central leadership taking serious note of his meeting with Rama Rao. “Our meeting was in the knowledge of and with the approval of the party,” he said. Asked if the central leaders overseeing the state affairs were consulted, he said they may not be aware of the development.

Why civic elections during Covid, asks Uttam

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

TPCC president N. Uttam Kumar Reddy on Saturday stated that elections to the urban local bodies (ULBs) were being with “political malice.” The Congress leader said that Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao had got the State Election Commission to go for the polls fearing an adverse outcome at Nagarjunasagar.

“The Chief Minister wanted the municipal elections process to be completed before the announcement of result of Nagarjunasagar constituency results,” he said. He was addressing party leaders and workers at an event where Ramasahay-



TRS Khammam leader Madhavi Reddy along with her aides join the Congress in the presence of TPCC chief N. Uttam Kumar Reddy at Gandhi Bhavan in Hyderabad on Saturday.

am Madhavi Reddy, TRS leader from Paleru Assembly constituency of Kham-

Day of the voter



Clockwise from above: Congress candidate K. Jana Reddy, TRS candidate Nomula Bhagath and BJP candidate Dr P. Ravi Kumar Naik, show their inked fingers after casting their ballot in the Nagarjunasagar byelection at different polling stations on Saturday.

— BY ARRANGEMENT



N’sagar bypoll sees record 89% turnout

Voters thronged polling stations despite scorching heat

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

Voter turnout in the Nagarjunasagar byelection crossed 80 per cent for the third consecutive time. While it was 86.62 per cent polling in 2018, it was 80.03 per cent in 2014.

This year, a whopping 89 per cent of voters exercised their franchise out of the total 2,19,745 voters. 1,10,838 were women.

As many as 41 candidates, including three women, are in the fray from the constituency.

After inspecting a polling station at Pylon Colony in Nagarjunasagar, chief electoral officer Shashank Goel said that all major contestants, including TRS candidate Nomula Bhagath,

- SATURDAY’S POLLING was held in 346 polling stations, including 108 deemed ‘critical’. Officials said as there were 41 contestants, three EVM ballot units along with one controlling unit and a VVPAT were used at each polling booth.
- EACH EVM ballot unit has the capacity of having names of 16 candidates.

K. Jana Reddy (Congress) and Dr P. Ravi Kumar Naikm (BJP) had voted. He said ensuring Covid-19 guidelines at poll stations had resulted in the highest voting percentage. He said that EVMs have been shifted to their strong rooms in Nalgonda in the presence of representatives from all political parties.

Serpentine queues were seen all through the day. Voters thronged polling stations despite the scorching heat.

Barring a few stray incidents, polling was peaceful.

Meanwhile, polling was delayed by a few minutes due to technical problems at polling booth number 137 at Thotipeta in Tirumalgi (Sagar) mandal.

Nagarjunasagar constituency has always witnessed a high voter turnout. In the 2018 elections, TRS candidate Nomula Narsimhaiah defeated Congress veteran K Jana Reddy with a margin of 7,726 votes

(4.31%). It was sweet revenge for him as in 2014, he had lost to Jana Reddy.

The constituency comprises seven mandals, including Gurrampode, Tirumalagirisagar, Peddavoora, Nidamanuru, Madgulapalli, Tripuraram and Anumula.

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The bye-election was necessitated by the death of Nomula Narsimhaiah.

2 SENTENCED UNDER POCSO IN LAST 2 DAYS

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

In the last two days, the child-friendly court in the city sentenced two persons under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act for sexually assaulting minors.

In the first case, 40-year-old Sukrat Singh Uikey, who sexually assaulted a five-year-old girl, was sentenced to 20 years rigorous imprisonment. The victim was his neighbour.

In the second case, the accused Shaik Riyaz, 35, autorickshaw driver, barged into the 13-year-old victim’s house and tried to force himself on her while she was alone at home. Meanwhile, her mother returned home and Riyaz fled from the spot.

has become easier to become a High Court judge than a designated senior counsel. Judges of Apex Court themselves said that conditions for seniority appear to be stricter than those for appointing judges.

Points-based assessment like number of years of standing as an advocate (20 points), reported and unreported judgments, which indicates legal formulations advanced by the advocate in the course of proceedings (40 points), publications by the applicant advocate (15 points), testing of personality, pro bono matters, and interaction (25 points) are considered for selecting senior advocates.

Water levels drop at reservoirs in Telangana

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

Water levels in major reservoirs across the state have dropped significantly when compared to last year.

However, officials see no drinking water problem in the summer, insisting that the existing reserves can meet the requirements.

“Drinking water is supplied through Mission Bhagiratha. Approximately 10 per cent of water has been allocated in all the projects for Mission Bhagiratha. As such, there will be no problem for drinking water either in Hyderabad or elsewhere,” a senior official of water resources department said.

The water levels in Srisaillam and Nagarjunasagar, the two major reservoirs on the Krishna, that serve the irrigation and drinking water needs of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh have fallen significantly over from last year. The FRL (full reservoir level) and gross storage of Srisaillam are at 885 feet and 215 tmc ft (thousand million cubic feet). On Saturday, the water stood at 807 feet and the dam had 33 tmc ft. Same day last year, Srisaillam had water at 815 ft and storage at 37 tmc ft.

The FRL and gross storage capacity of Nagarjunasagar are 590 ft and 312 tmc. On Saturday, water was at 541 ft and the dam had 191 tmc ft (last year: 543 ft and 195 tmc).

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- ON SATURDAY, water stood at 807 feet and the dam had 33 tmc ft. Same day last year, Srisaillam had water at 815 ft and storage at 37 tmc ft.

The AP government has sought water from Nagarjunasagar and Srisaillam to meet drinking water needs in summer. Accordingly, the Krishna River Management Board on Friday sought the consent of the TS government. The government is yet to respond.

In a meeting held on February 5, it was agreed to restrict release of water up to 834 ft in Srisaillam. However, it was observed that both TS and AP had drawn water from Srisaillam reservoir even below that level.

As such, it was decided at a meeting on April 9 not to draw water below 808.80 ft as on April 9 and use water judiciously. It was observed that the AP has exhausted its share in common reservoirs as on April 9.

However, both governments continue to draw water in

Srisaillam for power generation even at the present low level.

On the Godavari, the Sriramsagar, Mid Manair, Lower Manair and Yellampalli projects are the major reservoirs. The water levels in all these reservoirs are lower than last year.

The FRL and gross storage capacity of Sriramsagar are 1091 ft and 90 tmc. These were 1066 ft and 23 tmc as on Saturday as against 1,071 ft and 32 tmc ft last year.

The FRL and gross storage capacity of Mid Manair are 1,043 ft and 25 TMCs. Water stood at 1,022 ft and 13 tmc ft as on Saturday (last year: 1,037 ft and 23 tmc ft).

The Lower Manair has FRL of 920 ft and 24 tmc ft gross storage capacity. Water stood at 901 ft and the project had 10 tmc ft on Saturday (last year: 892 feet and 7 tmc ft).

Yellampalli project’s FRL and gross storage capacity are 485 ft and 20 tmc ft. These were 473 ft and 11 tmc ft as on Saturday (last year 461 feet and 5 tmc ft).

Thanks to the Kaleshwaram project, the water levels in Lower Manair and Yellampalli are higher than last year’s as Godavari water was lifted from Medigadda barrage.

Water for Mission Bhagiratha for the major part of Telangana is drawn from these projects and as such officials see no drinking water problem in summer, officials said.

Pvt hosps asked to treat patients till the very end

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

Private hospitals packing off terminally or critically ill Covid-19 patients, whose prognosis may not be bright, to Gandhi Hospital is nothing. It has always been the case, Gandhi Hospital superintendent Dr M. Raja Rao told reporters on Friday.

He said most private hospitals send patients on their last legs to Gandhi Hospital for various reasons, including fears that families of patients might create a scene or protest or attack doctors and staff in the event of a death.

He said every death recorded in Gandhi Hospital last year was related to Covid-19, adding, “It is not just Covid-19 patients from other hospitals who are sent to Gandhi Hospital. In 2019, we had three times the deaths we had in 2020. This is because patients from private hospitals arrive at the last minute.” Dr Raja Rao said. While in some cases private hospitals encourage families to take their patients away to Gandhi Hospital, in some instances it is the families, after being informed there is nothing more that doctors can do for their patient, who want to try and save the life by bringing such a patient to Gandhi.

STATE READY TO TREAT ALL CASES AT ITS HOSPITALS

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

Amidst increasing complaints from people trying to find treatment and beds in private hospitals for Covid-19 patients, the health department has said it was well-equipped and prepared to treat all cases in state-run institutions. “There is no need to go to a private hospital, go to the nearest government hospital where proper guidance will be provided and any patient needing admission will be provided all the needed care, attention and treatment at no cost,” Director of Health Services Dr G. Srinivasa Rao said. When his attention was drawn to some private hospitals, both small and large, exploiting Covid-19 patients and their families, Dr Rao said, “It is sad to see how some hospitals have degenerated and exploited the patients.” The government, he assured, was keeping an eye on private hospitals and would take strict action against any establishment taking patients for a ride.

Bars, pubs become virus hotspot TS asks people to put off ceremonies

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, APRIL 17

People visiting bars and pubs, as well as gatherings with just a few hundred people, are among the reasons for the very fast spread of Covid-19 during the current second wave in the state, according to the official at the helm of the battle to contain the disease.

Dr G. Srinivasa Rao, Director of Health Services, told the media here on Saturday that as part of the tracing and tracking of contacts of people found to be Covid-19 positive, his department staff discovered that 40 Covid-19 cases were linked to just one pub, another 32 cases were linked to one bar.

When a reporter asked if the health department advised the government to place restrictions on pubs, bars and restaurants and such in the wake of these findings, Dr Srinivasa Rao said people must get their priorities right.

“Is it more important to go have some drinks, join dance parties, consume liquor when other people are dying? People must choose what is important, whether to keep themselves safe and stay alive or do not bother about what is happening around

The state health department has urged people to put off events such as weddings, family gatherings and the like if possible for the next two months to prevent such events from becoming super spreader events for Covid-19 disease.

Director of Health Services Dr G. Srinivasa Rao said that if putting off such events is not possible, then they should be held with as few people as possible with safety precautions.

“This advice is not just for weddings and family functions but applies to any and every possible gathering of people. The next eight weeks are going to be critical in the battle against Covid-19,” he said.

The event was also attended by people from some villages in Telangana. “After a few days, five people went to get tested because they developed symptoms and all turned out to be Covid-19 positive. Within 15 days, we found that these five people had infected 429 others. What started with five people ended up with 443 getting infected,” he said.

- Dr G. Srinivasa Rao said that if putting off such events is not possible, then they should be held with as few people as possible with safety precautions.

OTHER STORIES

POLICE ARREST
MAN FOR POSING
AS IAS OFFICERDC CORRESPONDENT
MANCHERIAL, APRIL 17

Mancherial police on Saturday arrested a man posing as an IAS officer. Barla Laxminarayana, 22, was cheating people by projecting himself as an IAS officer and collecting money from the people promising government jobs.

Police also seized two cars, a bike, the nameplate of IAS, and cash ₹1.5 Lakh from the possession of the accused. Police said that the accused collected ₹80 lakh from 29 persons by promising them jobs.

Police arrested the accused following the complaint lodged against Laxminarayana by a couple Thallapalli Ramesh and Swetha stating that Laxminarayana took ₹3 lakh from them promising government jobs.

Giving details about the accused Laxminarayana, Mancherial DCP Udaykumar Reddy said Laxminarayana was native of Lekhalapalli village in Bheerpur Mandal of Jagtial district and was studying the third year of B. Tech in a private engineering college in Hyderabad. The accused was working as a sales representative in SBI cards division at the clock tower, in Secunderabad.

The accused stayed in his village during the Covid pandemic and started telling the villagers that he is selected for a post in Indian Railways and told one of the villager Ramesh, that he wrote UPSC exam and waiting for the results.

The accused engaged a person as a driver for his car and spread the information among the local people through his car driver that he was appointed as a joint collector for Mancherial.

MAN HELD FOR
KILLING EX-WIFE'S
HUSBAND, IN HYDDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD APRIL 17

A man who killed his ex-wife's husband in the city last month for eloping with her was nabbed by the Chikadapally police in Punjab and brought to the city. Police said Baljeet Kaur, who had a 15-year-old son with Sarwan Singh, eloped with Satnam Singh and came to Hyderabad from Punjab. Satnam Singh used to run a fast food centre in the city.

On learning that his former wife and Satnam Singh were in the city, Sarwan Singh sent his minor son to stay with the couple in March. Police said Sarwan Singh along with Arshdeep Singh reached Secunderabad on March 30. They allegedly murdered Satnam Singh in the house when he was alone, and took away his mobilephone.

COPS LAUNCH QR
CODE COMPLAINT
MODE FOR WOMENDC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 17

Women and students who are facing any form of harassment can approach the police she-teams with just scanning a 'Quick Response' (QR) code and register their complaint for a swift action.

Warangal Police Commissioner, Tarun Joshi, on Saturday launched the wall poster for 'QR Code Complaint System' which would be installed at various public places including bus stations, railway stations, cinema halls, schools, colleges etc.

Speaking on the occasion, the commissioner said it is not only an easy method for women to complain to the She Teams for help, but also ensures a secure complaint and feedback mechanism.

"Scanning the QR code with a smartphone takes the user to https://qr.tspolice.gov.in where details can be filled and submitted. A special unit in the IT section that receives the information passes it on to the She Teams quickly, so that they take action on the issue. The details of the complainants will be kept confidential," he explained.

Additional DCP K. Pushpa, Warangal She Team inspector Srinivas Rao and constable Mamatha were present among others.

● **COMMISSIONER SAID** it is not only an easy method for women to complain to the She Teams for help, but also ensures a secure complaint and feedback mechanism.

Govt sets up thermal test
checkpoint at TS borders

More cases are reported from Uttnoor, Ichoda, Adilabad

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, APRIL 17

With a steady increase in Covid-19 positive cases and deaths in old Adilabad district, the state government has set up check posts on the borders to keep a close watch on people coming from Maharashtra.

Checks posts have been set up at Kobbai in Bela Mandal, Ghanpur in Boath Mandal and Dollara in Jainad Mandal that share borders with Maharashtra. Medical and health department is conducting thermal tests on those coming to Telangana. There are also reports of local labourers barring the entry of labourers from Maharashtra. Even daily-wage workers are appealing to the



Medical staff conduct thermal test to the people coming into Adilabad from Maharashtra at check post set up at Kobbai village in Bela Mandal in the Adilabad district on Saturday.

district administration to make Covid test mandatory to all migrant labourers.

According to official sources, around 324 positive cases, including 203 men and 121 women, and two deaths

were reported in the district on Saturday. There are allegations that RIMS authorities are not giving actual figures about deaths, which was higher than their 'official' version. Most cases are from

● **There are also** reports of local labourers barring the entry of labourers from Maharashtra. Even daily-wage workers are appealing to the district administration to make Covid test mandatory to all migrant labourers.

● **AROUND 324** positive cases, including 203 men and 121 women, and two deaths were reported in the district on Saturday.

Uttnoor, Ichoda and Adilabad town.

Additional collector M. David inspected the check post at Kobbai in Bela Mandal and enquired about thermal tests on those coming into Adilabad district from Maharashtra.

Adopt preventive methods to
stay safe from Covid: SanjayDC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 17

The Bharatiya Janata Party state chief and Karimnagar MP, Bandi Sanjay Kumar on Saturday appealed people to adopt self preventive methods for protecting themselves being infected with the new strain of Coronavirus pointing out increase in the number of Covid-19 positive cases in recent times in the Karimnagar district and across the state.

Sanjay visited the Covid-19 vaccination camp established at RTC hospital in Karimnagar and took the first dose of vaccination. Speaking on the occasion, Sanjay said that to prevent the rapid spread of the second wave of Coronavirus, the Central government is distributing Covid-19 vaccination free of cost. People should utilize this opportunity and must administer with the Covid-19 vaccination without believing the myths about



BJP state chief and Karimnagar MP, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, takes first dose of Covid-19 vaccination at RTC hospital in Karimnagar on Saturday.

vaccination.

The BJP government is striving hard to face the pandemic situation by taking all kinds of preventive measures along with directing the state governments to adopt the Covid-19 guidelines strictly in their respective states.

With a perfect action plan, the Central government is distributing two doses of vaccination to the states to administer to the people for free of cost. It is

the minimum responsibility of the people to support the government in preventing the spread of second wave of Coronavirus, successfully.

As the number of Covid-19 positive cases are increasing day-to-day, people must focus on their health first by following the Covid-19 rules strictly. All the eligible persons and elderly people must take vaccination without fail, he advised.

190 NOMINATIONS FILED FOR GWMC
ELECTIONS, ON PENULTIMATE DAYDC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, APRIL 17

As many as 190 candidates filed papers for the 66 divisions in Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) which goes to polls on April 30 on the penultimate day of the nominations. In all, 256 sets of nomination papers were filed. In addition to this, 14 candidates filed 15 sets of nomination papers on the first day on Friday.

With the major political parties like

TRS, Congress and the BJP yet to announce their official list of candidates, the nomination centres are going to see a huge rush on Sunday, which happens to the last and final day for filing nominations.

The scrutiny of nominations will be held on April 19. The last date for withdrawal of nominations will be on April 22, and the date of poll will be on April 30. Counting of votes will take place on May 3.

Officials told to speed up
Rollavagu project worksDC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 17

Welfare minister Koppula Eshwar on Saturday ordered officials of the department concerned to speed up the construction works of Rollavagu project and complete the project at the earliest.

The minister along with MLA Dr Sanjay Kumar and Zilla Parishad chairperson Dava Vasanth held a review meeting with officials of the engineering department on the progress of works of Rollavagu project here at the MLA Camp office in Jagtial.

The officials informed the minister that land acquisition

● **THE OFFICIALS** informed the minister that land acquisition works of 200 acres of land from the farmers were successfully completed along with sanctioning of the compensation to those who lost their fields under the project.

works of 200 acres of land from the farmers were successfully completed along with sanctioning of the compensation to those who lost their fields under the project.

They also said that earlier they had collected the sand from the forest department for the construction of the project but now they are facing the

problems in collecting the sand for the completion of construction works of Rollavagu project. The minister asked the officials to collect the sand from the 200 acres of land that were acquired from the farmers and to speed up the construction works of the project without any delay.

He also suggested them to bring to his notice if they face any issues in completing the construction works of Rollavagu project within the prescribed time limit.

Divisional engineer Chakru Naik and assistant engineer Naga Raju were present in the review meeting along with others.

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SUSPEND TRS CORPORATOR FOR USING
FAKE CASTE CERTIFICATE, SAYS CONGDC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, APRIL 17

The BC cell of Congress party on Friday demanded that state government suspend Kola Malathi, TRS corporator from 6th Division of Karimnagar Municipal Corporation, for getting elected wrongfully in the municipal elections held in 2020. Addressing media here, Karimnagar district president of Congress BC cell Puli Anjaneyulu pointed out that the 6th Division had been allotted to BC women in the municipal elections held last year. However, TRS party candidate Kola Malathi, who belongs to Reddy community, contested the seat by submit-

ting a fake BC caste certificate and won the election. Anjaneyulu maintained that local leaders came to know the facts only later and went to court seeking justice.

Subsequently, a committee headed by district collector K. Shashanka inquired into the case and confirmed that Malathi had indeed submitted a fake caste certificate. The Congress leader said due to pressure from BC welfare minister Gangula Kamalakara, Malathi has not yet been suspended from being a corporator. He appealed to representatives of all BC unions to come on one platform and fight against such political discrimination.

STATE GOVT HALTS
INDUSTRIAL
OXYGEN SUPPLIES

Hyderabad: The state government has halted all supplies of industrial oxygen and is using all available oxygen manufacturing capacities to meet the increased demand for the life-saving gas for the increasing number of Covid-19 patients as well as ensuring availability to patients suffering from other serious health conditions that require supplemental oxygen. In pre-Covid pandemic times, the state used to use 1.2-1.3 tonnes of medical oxygen a day. Now the demand is between 2.3-2.4 tonnes a day and to ensure enough oxygen is available, Director of Health Services Dr G. Srinivasa Rao told reporters.

PUBLIC NOTICE TO WHOM SO EVER
My Client Veerly Thirupathi, S/o. Sailu has entered into Agreement of Sale, on 05-03-2021 to purchase the House with Open place bearing H.No. 24-3-196/3, to an extent of 350.00 Sq. yards (Or) 252.60 Sq. Mtrs. in Sy. No. 95 of Kazipet (J) Village, situated at Prakash Reddypet, Kazipet Mandal Warangal Mandal and Urban District within the limits of Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation as mentioned in below scheduled from Alala Sattalah, S/o. Narsimulu, Alala Lavanya and Alala Hema Daughters of Sattalah who are legal heirs and inherited said property from their Mother: Late Alala Rajeshwari, W/o. A. Sattalah, who purchased said plot to an extent of 350.00 Sq. yards, in Sy. No. 95 of Kazipet (J) Village from Singareddy Chinnapu Reddy, S/o. Marreddy through the Regd. Sale Deed Vide Doc. No. 3954/2000, dt. 11-08-2000 and she construed a building and got mutated the same on her name in Municipal Records of Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation bearing H.No. 24-3-196/3, the persons are having any objections on that property, they shall come to my office with legalized documentary evidence within a week from the date of publication of this notice and filed the written objections, that any objections will not receive within the stipulated period from anybody, the purchaser Veerly Thirupathi, S/o. Sailu will get it register the said property in his favour and raise the mortgage loan by deposit the Title Deeds and Mortgage the property in favour of and Bank (Or) the Housing Finance Institutions.
SCHEDULE OF PROPERTY: EAST: 30'-0" wide Road. WEST: H.No. 24-3-108 and 107 of B'Hari and Ismail. NORTH: Plot of others and H.No. 24-3-196/1 and SOUTH: Plot of Smt Reddy Sd/- **SRI DUSHA JANARDHAN**, Advocate. H.No. 1-7-1246, Plot No. B-33, Balamudram, Hanamkonda, Warangal Dist. Cell No. 9849494941. Dated: 17-04-2021

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18 APRIL 2021



Ranjona Banerji

Off the beaten track

Being a sport! The story of my fitness journey

After you reach a certain age and size, in my case at least, your thoughts turn to another age and size, largely imaginary. For instance, when I was little, I was very thin. This is true. I have photographic evidence. I also had no actual talent as an athlete, but I was athletic enough to be made to run various races, jump over sandpits and poles and once, with luckily no major casualties, chuck a javelin. The third leg of the “house” team, if you will, and this carried on over three “houses” in three schools and two cities.

Once I was pushed into a race outside my training or comfort zone — 400 m, because there was no one else to make up the numbers. My preferred race was the 100 m sprint. The school’s sports consultant, of whom we were in awe because he had been to the 1976 Montreal Olympics and wanted Nadia Comaneci in person, said that my hamstring muscles were not long enough for my legs, so I had a funny stride. Not good for longer runs. Anyway, desperation made the house hamstrung. And in I went. After 300 metres, my heart burst out of my 13-year-old chest and I am not ashamed to say that a friend’s sister (in a similar situation for another house) and I, walked the last 100 m together, chatting. Since we finished the race, we were not disqualified. Heads, um, held high!

The one thing I could not do was swim except for an ungainly life-saving dog paddle. Luckily then no one ever threw me into a swimming pool for some greater sporting glory. The swimming coach, whom we called Bumblebee because he had a large yellow and black motorbike and kept bellowing at us in the CCI swimming pool in Bombay (1970s, that was its name then) managed to hammer a mediocre breaststroke into me before we buzzed off to a new school in Calcutta.

School finished and thus finished organised exercise. You may not believe it now but in the 1980s, hardly no one dedicated their lives to treadmills, yoga mats and smoothies. Plus, we were undefeatable. We worked hard and played harder. There was no time for dumbbells.

As it turned out, the dumbbells were us. All that confidence was highly misplaced. And by the time you realized that time and hormones were against you, the tyres on the cars on the roads had nothing on you and your stomach, arms, thighs, hips et cetera. That’s when you wake up at the crack of dawn and walked all over Aarey Milk Colony where the best exercise was running away from laughter clubs. I tried a few gyms. A friend found an excellent place in Ahmedabad where all you had to do was lie on a series of moving tables which exercised different parts of your body. Don’t laugh. It was brilliant and actually worked.

A couple of close friends and I, in our mid to late 40s, signed up for an exercise regime. This was zeal plus hubris. Also, when your vision goes a bit, you can’t really focus on the mirror any more and you miss all those wrinkles. So having scoffed at middle-aged ladies in salwar kameezes and sneakers huffing and puffing in suburban Mumbai’s parks, we joined a gym. Not the treadmill sort. But the calisthenics and exercise sort. Why humans put themselves through this is one of life’s mysteries. Anyway, we mountain-walked and pulled long rubber bands and cross-trained and then hobbled out after an hour with not one part of our bodies working.

The zeal was such that we were horrified when we attended an afternoon “old ladies” class — all the old ladies were at least five years younger than us — and saw that they spent all their time lying on their mats flirting with the young male instructors. We shuddered in self-righteous wrath as we finished all our exercises, and never went to an afternoon class again. Instead, we sacrificed lunch and went straight from yoga to the gym. Plus, we walked all over suburban Mumbai scorning every hopeful passing auto.

At the end of the year, all we had to show for it were collapsed muscles, dodgy knees, sprained ankles and broken toes. The only worthwhile part of this exercise was the yoga.

In between I did walk up and down some hills around my parents’ home, full of self-righteousness.

Now when 60 stares at you in the face and the tyres cannot be dislodged and who the hell wants to carry those dumbbells, and the hills are so pretty to look at, technology comes to the rescue! You install some free fitness app on your phone. You carry your phone everywhere. It counts every useless step you take. From refrigerator to chocolate cake to sofa to put the plate in the sink and at the end of the day, you have walked 5 km, used up 2,500 calories and done 9,622 steps. Or some such nonsense. You are happy. You smile beatifically at the phone. The phone is thrilled at the attention and you reset for the next day. I did away with the “heart points” or whatever because I never collected any.

When my sister and I were younger, teenagers, we used to watch Jane Fonda exercise videos and eat chips.

I am not so callous nor so arrogant now. I don’t eat while I watch those exercise ads on Instagram. I just switch to the food pictures after 10 minutes of fit young people contorting into some rebel poses.

Let my fingers do the walking?

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on media affairs, politics and social trends. She tweets at @ranjona.

Subhani



Second wave gives the lie to Modi’s ‘decisive’ image



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya’s View

The time has come to call a spade a spade. And, this spade is about the government’s spectacular unpreparedness in anticipating the second wave of the pandemic, and the woeful absence of strategy and planning to cope with it. It is not as if the unexpected happened. Global experience shows that a second wave — more vicious and infectious than the first — was to be expected. A responsible government, not lulled into complacency by its own propaganda of how well it had handled the pandemic, would have — beyond dramatic gestures — diligently prepared for it. The truth is that the government did not.

A key difference between the first and second waves is that now we have vaccines as a significant weapon to fight the onslaught of the virus. The government itself made much of the fact that India is the vaccine capital of the world. What then led to the deplorable condition that when we needed the vaccines the most, they were — and are — in short supply? The government squandered away the natural advantage India had by exporting or gifting millions of vaccines. It did not give the required monetary support in time to indigenous producers like the Serum Institute of India so that they could ramp up vaccine production, even when it had an earmarked budgetary allocation of Rs 30,000 crores to handle the pandemic. And, it unforgivably delayed the introduction of new vaccines like Sputnik and Johnson &

Johnson, by not speeding or abridging trials and approvals. Where imports were planned there are reports of major mess-ups leading to cancellations of major contracts. What we are now seeing is incoherent and improvised action when the crisis is upon us, rather than a planned anticipation that was the need of the hour.

Contrast this with what other governments like the UK and the USA have done. In America the government not only gave credit liberally to vaccine producers, but guaranteed them an assured buy-back at remunerative prices so that they could pay back the loans extended to them. The result is there to see. One-third of Americans are vaccinated, and the entire country will be vaccinated by the middle of the year. The UK, too, imported vaccines from every source that it could. We, on our part, gave away what we had, and did precious little to boost production at home for which we had the capacity.

There is a shortage, too, of oxygen, ventilators, testing kits and hospital beds. While it is true that the demand has gone up exponentially, a wise

It begs all rational thinking why the EC is not agreeing to club the balance three phases of the Bengal Assembly elections and hold them on one day. Mamata Banerjee endorses this proposal. Why doesn’t the PM do so, too?

Shri Krishna in the Bhagwad Gita tells Arjuna to do his duty irrespective of consequences. Our theory of dharma also includes a particular category — aapad dharma — which kicks in times of crisis or emergency...

government would have prepared for the demand in anticipation of the inevitable by increasing production and capacity prior to the second wave hitting us. There is little accountability in this bureaucratic muddling, and total opacity in how the money has been spent thus far in the PM Cares Fund.

The administrative listlessness of the government can be seen in its inability to take stern measures even in the face of the second wave. Why else would have permission have been given to the Kumbh Mela celebrations at Haridwar, where some 40 lakh sadhus and devotees took the plunge in the long-suffering Ganga? All norms of social distancing or masks were thrown to the wind, even as our netas smiled at the devotion of what they assume is their “vote-bank”. Hinduism certainly does not sanction this abdication from duty. Shri Krishna in the Bhagwad Gita tells Arjuna to do his duty irrespective of the consequences. Our theory of dharma also includes a particular category — aapad dharma — which kicks in times of crisis or emergency and allows individuals and leaders to take hard decisions for survival. The Modi government likes the label of a “decisive” government, but its actions are quite to the contrary.

The same lackadaisical approach holds true for the government’s defence of political rallies in the

ongoing state assembly elections. Both leaders and the crowds they want so desperately to get seem to believe that Covid does not exist. The Prime Minister lectures to the nation about “do gaz ki doori” and “mask hai zaroori”, but when it comes to electioneering all such advice is thrown out of the window. There is no point in saying that other political parties do the same. If you are in the hot seat you have to set the benchmark for Covid-appropriate behaviour and uphold it through your actions. It also begs all rational thinking why the Election Commission is not agreeing to club the balance three phases of the Bengal Assembly elections and hold them on one day. Mamata Banerjee endorses this proposal. Why doesn’t the PM do so, too? If he does, I am convinced — for obvious reasons — that the EC will agree.

The second Covid wave has vividly shown the glaring gulf between image and delivery of the Modi Sarkar. This is not politicking over a crisis. This column is written in anguish at a crises that could have been mitigated by better preparation and handling, and anger at the long list of omissions and commissions that account for TV screens exploding with visuals of grieving citizens whose loved ones have died for lack of oxygen or a hospital bed, or who have returned empty handed from vaccination centres. Our health workers deserve our enduring gratitude, but what can we make of a health minister who expostulates that states are indulging in cheap politics when they ask for vaccines which are verifiably in short supply? Beyond a point, bluster does not work. It is time to call a spade a spade.

The writer, an author and a former diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

MISSING LEADERSHIP

A nation needs a leader during a crisis. Unfortunately, India is missing one today. A layman can tell what is required to tide over the situation but those in power are unable to see beyond their nose. It does not need great intelligence to say that, without affecting the livelihood of the public, all types of congregation needs to be banned. But the question remains. Do we have leaders at the top who are concerned about the public, or just ordinary politicians?

Shashi Karan
Hyderabad

VACCINE SHORTAGE

It is surprising that the government had not foreseen the shortage of vaccines and oxygen and became clueless to control the surge in pandemic (PM takes stock of oxygen, vaccine output to be hiked, DC, April 17). The need of the hour is to increase the production of vaccine and oxygen on war footing and save lives.

G.V.N. Murthy
Hyderabad

We have a dense population and poor health care. Meetings, political rallies and canvassing will lead to exponential rise in cases. If elections continued, we must suffer a lot. The uncontrolled situation will force the government to declare an health emergency.

D Kishan Prasad Rao
Thimmapur, Karimnagar

I got Covishield vaccine on March 6 and the second dose was due on April 17. Now there is shortage of vaccine. I request hospital authorities and local political leaders, MLAs and MPs to help procure vaccines for people. It will be a great service to mankind at this juncture. Boasting in election rallies will not help the common man.

Sriraman Kulkarni
Hyderabad

The second Covid wave in 2021 appears to be more severe. Everyone should wear a mask and follow all protocols and be safe.

A. Venkatachary
Secunderabad

SCHOOL FEES

Even during Covid-19 time, corporate schools are collecting excess fees. So many people have lost their jobs and are leading a miserable life. Even though parents raised their voice on this issue, there is no response. The government must look into the matter and take necessary action against these corporate schools.

Saroja Kankipati
Secunderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Bangla Desh becomes Republic

KUSHTIA (BANGLA DESH), APRIL 17

The Sovereign Democratic Republic of Bangla Desh came into formal existence today with a historic proclamation of independence by the new nation’s acting President, Syed Nazrul Islam.

The proclamation was read out by Mr. Islam for the President, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, at a simple and solemn ceremony under a mango grove at Baidyanathatala in Meherpur sub-division of Kushtia district.

known about its report.

The surprise victory notched up by the Tripura scion Pradyot Kishore Deb Barman’s fledgling party in the recent election to the Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, proved to be a major embarrassment for the Congress. Not only did the party finish fourth but Mr Barman who had been the Tripura Congress president left following differences with the party’s Northeast in-charge Luizinho Faleiro. Apparently, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had got in touch with Mr Barman last year when he was in the US and asked him to rejoin the Congress. Mr Barman was willing to do so but was unable to get in touch with Rahul Gandhi as he had changed his phone number on his return from America and his staff was not very helpful in organising a meeting with the Nehru-Gandhi scion. Mr Barman then decided to float his own party.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



Modi’s ‘Didi’ jibe offends women; what AAP shares with Owaisi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s war cry “Didi O Didi, Arrey Didi” (referring to Mamata Banerjee) at all public rallies in poll-bound West Bengal has predictably angered the Trinamul Congress, more so as it has become a source of inspiration for eve-teasers. Roadside Romeos have apparently been mimicking the Prime Minister, using the same catcall, when they see women on the streets of Kolkata. Many of them have even been arrested by the police on charges of harassment. Five women have filed an FIR at the Amherst Street police station while the Bengal Citizens Forum has lodged a strong protest, saying the catcalls were a penal offence. The Forum also took out a protest march and submitted a complaint to the Election Commission, which is still pending. Women leaders belonging to the TMC have also slammed the Prime Minister, saying this was not just an insult to an elected chief minister but to all women.

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was personally reluctant to impose a lockdown but he was liter-

ally pushed into doing so by his bureaucrats who did some plain speaking to him about the need for drastic measures given the alarming spike in Covid-19 cases in the state. Though Mr Chouhan did go by the advice of his officers, informal instructions were conveyed to the lower rung bureaucracy that the lockdown need not be implemented strictly and that people moving out should not be penalised. And the Damoh constituency where a bypoll was held last week, was deliberately exempted from adhering to the lockdown to allow political parties to organise their election rallies. They were helped in this effort by the local election commission officials who went to town with the slogan, “Corona se nahi darenge, maidan hum zaroor karenge”, urging voters to come out in large numbers on polling day. Incidentally, while Mr Chouhan was battling the alarming rise in infections, his health minister Narottam Mishra was busy overseeing the Assembly poll in West Bengal. Mr Mishra reached his home state a few days before the bye-election in Damoh which happens to

be his stronghold.

Delhi chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal has a lot in common with AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi. Either it is deliberate or inadvertent, but the leaders end up helping the Bharatiya Janata Party by entering an electoral fray resulting in the weakening of the Congress. Mr Owaisi did so in Bihar and Mr Kejriwal in the Gujarat local elections. In fact, there is talk that the two parties even receive covert funding from the BJP. Currently, AAP is focusing on expanding its footprint in Uttarakhand. To that extent, it has initiated a vigorous recruitment drive and is positioning itself as a credible alternative in the hill state. Interestingly, Mr Kejriwal is concentrating on the Kumaon region, which is where the Congress has strong roots, and not on Garhwal which is known to be the BJP’s fiefdom. Given the anti-incumbency against the BJP in Uttarakhand, the Congress has a chance of coming back to power here. But Mr Kejriwal could well

end up playing spoilsport, much to the BJP’s delight.

There appears to be no end to the raging battle in the upper echelons of the prestigious India International Centre even four years after eminent jurist Soli Sorabjee was forced to step down as the Centre’s president though he retains his position as life trustee on the IIC board. Mr Sorabjee’s tenure was cut short in 2017 following a spate of allegations of financial impropriety and bungling in the admission of members. A fresh attempt was made recently at the IIC annual general meeting to debar Mr Sorabjee and Justice Srikrishna from holding any office. It is not clear why this matter was raised after four years. The resolution was, however, not approved as several members pointed out that such a drastic action could not be taken in the absence of the two trustees and without giving them an opportunity to have their say. It must be mentioned that an enquiry committee was set up to probe the charges against Mr Sorabjee but little is

IN BRIEF

ARMY POSTPONES
COMMANDERS
CONFERENCEDC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 17

Indian Army has postponed its crucial Commanders Conference and cancelled retiring officers conference in April due to rising Covid-19 cases.

Indian Army's bi-annual Commanders Conference, which is attended by its top commanders from all over the country, was scheduled to be held from April 26, has been postponed. The Conference which was to be chaired by Chief of Army Staff Gen MM Naravane would have discussed emerging situation at the line of actual control (LAC) with China in Ladakh and the continued friction at other points in the sector.

It would have also discussed the strategy for summer at LAC with troops from both sides expected to move to forward positions. The ceasefire with Pakistan at Line of Control was also likely to be discussed during the meeting.

Indian Army's apex leadership was expected to discuss issues pertaining to organisational restructuring, logistics, administration and human resource management.

Last year also Indian Army had postponed its Army Commanders' Conference in April and later on it was held in May. This time also the conference could be held in May.

Meanwhile, Army has also cancelled its retiring officers conference in April due to rising Covid-19 cases.

Amid drug shortage, Remdesivir stolen from MP govt hospital

17 boxes containing 853 Remdesivir vials go missing; police suspect insider's job

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, APR 17

With the cry for Remdesivir getting louder across Madhya Pradesh, unidentified miscreants on Saturday broke into the storeroom of a government hospital here and decamped with boxes containing the life saving drug, leaving the administration as well as police shell-shocked.

The incident came to light when the medical officers of the hospital found the iron gate of the storeroom of the government-run Hamidia hospital here cut open and some boxes containing vials of Remdesivir missing in the morning.

"The matter was immediately reported to the police", hospital superintendent I D Chourasia said.

Preliminary investigation suggested that it might be an "insider's" job. "It has been found that 17 boxes containing 853 Remdesivir vials were missing. But, no other drugs stored in the store-room were touched by the thieves. This gives rise to suspicion that the theft was committed with mischievous intention", a senior police officer said.



A medic collects samples for Covid-19 tests at KSRTC bus stand, as Coronavirus cases surge in Bengaluru. - PTI

Joona Akhara ends
its participation
in Kumbh Mela

Dehradun, Apr 17: The Joona Akhara, one of the largest sects of seers in the country, announced the end of its participation in the Kumbh Mela on Saturday, hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal that participation in the ongoing gathering in Haridwar be kept symbolic in view of the surge in coronavirus cases.

The people of India and their survival is our first priority. In view of the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, we have duly immersed all the deities invoked on the occasion of Kumbh.

This is the formal immersion-conclusion of Kumbh on behalf of Joona Akhara, Swami Avadheshanand Giri, the mahamandaleshwar of the Joona Akhara, said in a tweet in Hindi.

An enclosed note signed by Giri, Joona Akhara

patron Hari Giri and secretaries Mahant Mohan Bharti and Mahant Mahesh Puri said the decision to immerse the Kumbh deities had been taken in public interest after consultations with seers of the Akhara.

"Immersing the deities, we also pray to all 'teertha and siddhapeeth' and declare the immersion of Haridwar Kumbh Mela, 2021," it said.

The country on Saturday recorded a frightening single-day spike in Covid cases with over 2.34 lakh fresh infections, crossing the two lakh-mark for the third straight day, as demands for increased supply of oxygen cylinders, vaccine doses and Remdesivir were raised by 11 states and Union Territories, including Delhi, where the pandemic situation was described as "worrisome" by the chief minister.

5 killed as fire
breaks out in
Covid hospitalDC CORRESPONDENT
RAIPUR, APR 17

A major fire broke out in a private Covid hospital here, killing five patients. While one Covid-19 patient succumbed to burn injuries, four others died due to disruption of oxygen supply caused due to the mishap, officials said. The fire broke out due to a short circuit, preliminary police investigation suggested.

Eyewitness accounts said smoke filled the two storied Rajdhani hospital in Pachpadi Naka in Raipur city when the fire broke out, causing suffocation to the Covid-19 patients.

The fire soon engulfed different wards of the hospital forcing the

patients to run helter skelter. Several patients suffered burn injuries as they tried to escape the fire. Relatives of the patients were seen breaking the glass windows to enter the wards to rescue the patients.

Many patients were brought outside the hospital and administered oxygen. Later, all the patients were shifted to different hospitals in the city. Around 30 Covid-19 patients were undergoing treatment in the hospital when the incident took place. This was the first fire incident in a Covid hospital in Chhattisgarh.

"The fire broke out at around 4.30 pm," special superintendent of police of Raipur district Ajey Yadav said.

Colleagues, leaders
mourn TN actor
Vivekh's deathANUPAMA SUBRAMAN-
IAN | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 17

The untimely death of popular actor and social activist Vivekh at the age of 59 on Saturday after he suffered a massive heart attack left the Tamil film fraternity and fans in deep grief.

Vivekh breathed his last at 4.35 am. He was cremated with police honours.

The actor, a Padma Shri recipient and who has acted in over 200 films with top Tamil heroes, is known for his work on social issues and the environmental protection front. He actively campaigned and involved himself in planting saplings and afforestation.

He also collaborated with the government in disseminating significant social awareness messages to the public on TV including the latest on preventing coronavirus spread.

It was heart-wrenching to note that his tweets, which he had posted to console Abdul Kalam's death, going viral. The post of Vivekh, which is in Tamil, roughly translates as, "A simple, selfless and clean life too will end someday. However, many die away! But only

few will live on even after death".

An admirer of late president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, he was actively engaged in planting one crore tree saplings through his Green Kalam initiative.

Prime Minister Modi, Chief Minister K. Palaniswami, DMK president M. K. Stalin, actor Rajinikanth, Makkal Needhi Maiam leader Kamal Haasan were among those who expressed shock and grief over his death and conveyed their condolences to the bereaved.

On Friday morning, an unconscious Vivekh was brought to the SIMS hospital in Chennai.

He reportedly suffered a cardiac arrest due to a 100 per cent blockage in the heart vessel.

The hospital said in a statement that the actor was revived and underwent an emergency coronary angiogram followed by angioplasty.

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IN BRIEF

Natanz attack suspect named

Tehran, April 17: (AP) Iran state television has named a suspect in the attack that damaged centrifuges at its Natanz nuclear site and says he fled the country. The report Saturday named the suspect as Reza Karimi. It showed a passport-style photograph of a man it identified as Karimi. The report also aired what appeared to be an Interpol "red notice" seeking his arrest. The arrest notice was not immediately accessible on Interpol's public-facing database.

Raul Castro steps down

Havana, April 17: Raul Castro said he is stepping down as Cuban Communist Party leader, leaving without a Castro guiding affairs for the first time in more than six decades and handing control to a younger generation. The 89-year-old Castro made the announcement in a speech Friday at the opening of the eighth congress of the ruling party, the only one allowed on the island. The reins will now pass to 60-year-old Miguel Diaz-Canel, who has already served as Cuba's president since 2018.

Russia detains Ukrainian consul

Moscow, April 17: Russia detained a Ukrainian diplomat for allegedly receiving classified information from a database of the country's main security agency.

The Federal Security Service, or FSB, said Saturday that Alexander Sosonyuk, Ukraine's consul in St Petersburg, was taken into custody on Friday during a meeting with a Russian in which he received "information of a classified nature contained in the databases of law enforcement agencies and the FSB".

5 workers killed by B'desh police

Dhaka, April 17: At least five people working at a under construction coal power plant being built by a Chinese firm in Chittagong were killed and 20 others injured in a clash with the police following a protest by the workers over wage and allowances, Bangladesh media reports said on Saturday.

The incident happened when the protesting workers of the plant clashed with the police, prompting them to open fire in which five workers were killed, the *Dhaka Tribune* reported.

PHILIP LAID TO REST IN ROYAL SERVICE

London, April 17: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II led a small group of senior royals at the ceremonial funeral of her husband and consort Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, at Windsor Castle on Saturday.

The funeral incorporated hymns and readings chosen by the late royal himself and focussed on the "unwavering loyalty" of the longest-serving consort in British history to his wife, the monarch, and service to Britain and the Commonwealth.

The ceremony, which began at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle with a national minute's silence at 1500 local time on Saturday, was a religious one though without any sermons, as planned by the Duke — who passed away aged 99 last week on Friday.

"The Order of Service for the funeral was agreed with the Duke of Edinburgh during his lifetime, and reflects the Duke's military affiliations, and personal elements of His Royal Highness' life," Buckingham Palace said in a statement.

Worldwide Covid death toll tops a staggering 3 million

True number is higher because of possible government concealment

Rio de Janeiro, April 17: The global death toll from the Coronavirus topped a staggering 3 million people Saturday amid repeated setbacks in the worldwide vaccination campaign and a deepening crisis in places such as Brazil, India and France.

The number of lives lost, as compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is about equal to the population of Kyiv, Ukraine; Caracas, Venezuela; or metropolitan Lisbon, Portugal. It is bigger than Chicago (2.7 million) and equivalent to Philadelphia and Dallas combined. And the true number is believed to be significantly higher because of possible government concealment or the many cases overlooked in the early stages of the outbreak that began 16 months ago in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019.

Around the world, the trajectory of the virus and the race to bring it under control vary widely from country to country.

Even as the US and Britain see their vaccination drives hit their stride and they begin to contemplate life after the pandemic, other places both rich and poor — France and India among them — are lagging behind in putting shots in arms and have imposed new lockdowns and other restrictions as cases soar.

Worldwide, deaths are running at over 12,000 per day on average and new cases at more than 700,000 a day. The US toll alone is over 560,000, accounting for more than 1 in 6 of the world's Covid-19 deaths, by far the highest reported by any country. The US is followed by Brazil, Mexico, India and Britain.

This month, the US recommended a pause in the use of Johnson & Johnson's Covid-19 vaccine while authorities investigate extremely rare but dangerous blood clots.



People take part in a protest in the central Puerta del Sol to protect the national health service during and after the pandemic, in Madrid, on Saturday. — AP

USTR discusses TRIPS waiver proposal for vax

Washington, April 17: US Trade Representative Katherine Tai, in a virtual meeting with GAVI's CEO Dr. Seth Berkley, discussed, among other things, the proposed waiver of certain provisions of the WTO's agreement on intellectual property rules for the manufacture of coronavirus vaccines.

In the virtual meeting with Berkley on Friday, Tai discussed increasing vaccine production, global health issues and the proposed waiver of certain provisions of the

World Trade Organisation Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) for Covid-19 pandemic, the USTR said in a statement.

The TRIPS Agreement is a minimum standards agreement, which allows members to provide more extensive protection of intellectual property if they so wish.

Tai expressed her appreciation for the important role GAVI has played in securing and distributing vaccines for developing countries through COVAX

and other initiatives, it said. Tai highlighted her commitment to using trade policy to save lives in the pandemic and ensure that the United States, and the world, are better prepared in the future.

She also welcomed Berkley's views on how to accelerate the rollout and distribution of vaccines to developing countries, the USTR said. The virtual meeting comes ahead of a May 5 meeting of the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) General Council.

PIO SCIENTIST IDENTIFIES GENES THAT FIGHT VIRUS

Washington, April 17: US researchers led by an Indian-origin scientist have identified a set of human genes that fight SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes Covid-19, a study that could help in understanding the factors that affect disease severity and suggesting possible therapeutic options.

The study by scientists at Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute in San Diego, California, was published in the journal *Molecular Cell*. The genes in question are related to interferons, the body's frontline virus fighters.

We wanted to gain a better understanding of the cellular response to SARS-CoV-2, including what drives a strong or weak response to infection, says Sumit K. Chanda, professor and director of the Immunity and Pathogenesis Programme at Sanford Burnham Prebys.

— PTI

Italy health chief stays off from scam

Rome, April 17: The head of Italy's national health institute distanced himself Friday from a scandal over a spiked World Health Organisation report into Italy's coronavirus response, saying he had no means to interfere with the UN agency and had never censored even inconvenient information from the public.

Dr Silvio Brusaferro was drawn into the scandal after a leaked document from Bergamo prosecutors last

week revealed transcripts of WhatsApp chats between Brusaferro and a WHO official, Dr. Ranieri Guerra, who is under investigation for having allegedly made false claims to prosecutors about the report.

The report, published in May last year as a guide to help countries prepare for Covid-19, sparked a nerve because it revealed that the Italian government hadn't updated its pandemic preparedness plan since 2006.

— AP

\$1.7B US network to track virus variants

Washington, April 17: The US is setting up a \$1.7 billion national network to identify and track worrisome Coronavirus mutations whose spread could trigger another pandemic wave, the Biden administration announced Friday.

White House officials unveiled a strategy that features three components: A major funding boost for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state health departments to ramp up Coronavirus gene-mapping; the creation of six centres of

excellence partnerships with universities to conduct research and develop technologies for gene-based surveillance of pathogens, and building a data system to better share and analyse information on emerging disease threats, so knowledge can be turned into action. Even as we accelerate our efforts to get shots into arms, more dangerous variants are growing, causing increases in cases in people without immunity, White House Coronavirus adviser Andy Slavitt said.

— AP

FedEx shooting: Police ID killer

Indianapolis, April 17: Police scoured a Fedex facility in Indianapolis and searched the suspected gunman's home Friday looking for a motive for the latest mass shooting to rock the United States, as family members of the eight victims spent agonising hours awaiting word on their loved ones.

The shooter was identified as 19-year-old Brandon Scott Hole of Indiana, two law enforcement offi-

cials briefed on the matter informed *The Associated Press*.

The investigators searched a home in Indianapolis associated with Hole and seized evidence, including desktop computers and other electronic media, the officials said.

The officials could not discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

— AP

23K prisoners let off in Myanmar

Yangon, April 17: Myanmar's junta on Saturday announced it pardoned and released more than 23,000 prisoners to mark the traditional Thingyan New Year holiday, but it wasn't immediately clear if they included pro-democracy activists who were detained in the wake of the military's seizure of power in Feb.

The releases were announced on state

broadcaster *MRTV*, which said that junta chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing had pardoned 23,047 prisoners, including 137 foreigners who will be deported from Myanmar. He also reduced sentences for others.

The move comes as daily protests against the Feb. 1 ouster of the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi continue.

— AP

Afghanistan: US may up troops before recall

Washington, April 17: The US will likely increase its troop presence in Afghanistan temporarily over the coming weeks and months in order to fulfill President Joe Biden's order to safely withdraw all forces from the country by Sep. 11, the Pentagon said Friday.

Pentagon chief spokesman John Kirby declined to provide specifics and said details are still being worked out.

But he said it's logical to assume that you may need some logistics help, maybe some engineering help, you may have to add some force protection capabilities again temporarily just to make sure that the drawdown goes in a safe, orderly and effective way. Biden announced Wednesday that the US would pull all of its more than 2,500 troops out of Afghanistan by Sep. 11 the 20th anniversary of the al-Qaida terror attack on the US that had triggered the US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

NATO announced it would follow the same timetable for withdrawing more than 7,000 allied forces. The president's decision defies a May 1 withdrawal deadline that was agreed to by the Trump

administration as part of a peace agreement with the Taliban. Instead, Biden said that the US withdrawal would begin on May 1.

Speaking at a Pentagon press conference on Friday, Kirby had few details on the pace and timing of the drawdown. He said it was not clear how many troops would be out of the country by May 1 as a signal to the Taliban that the US was abiding by its new plan to begin leaving.

The Taliban has warned that it will retaliate if the US does not abide by the Trump administration's agreement. And those threats are a key concern for the Pentagon as it tries to safely move troops and likely millions of dollars in equipment out of the country.

Biden, Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and others have made it clear that the US is keenly aware of the Taliban threats, and that any attacks on US or allied personnel or facilities would face strong US reaction.

Kirby also said it's not clear if any US contractors will remain in the country. He said that the goal is to get all Defence Department personnel out.

— AP

Refugee cap to be lifted in May

Washington, April 17: Facing swift blowback from allies and aid groups, the White House said President Joe Biden plans to lift his predecessor's historically low cap on refugees by next month, after initially moving only to expand the eligibility criteria for resettlements.

In an emergency determination signed by Biden earlier Friday, he stated the admission of up to 15,000 refugees set by former President Donald Trump this year "remains justified by humanitarian concerns and is otherwise in the national interest." But if the cap is reached before the end of the current budget year

and the emergency refugee situation persists, then a presidential determination may be issued to raise the ceiling.

That set off a deluge of criticism from top allies on Capitol Hill such as the second-ranking Senate Democrat, Dick Durbin of Illinois, who called that initial limit "unacceptable." White House press secretary Jen Psaki said later that Biden is expected to increase the refugee cap by May 15, though she didn't say by how much.

Biden has been consulting with his advisers to determine what number of refugees could realistically be admitted to the US between now and Oct. 1.

— AP

300 mn-yr-old shark gets formal name

Santa Fe (US), April 17: The 300-million-year-old shark's teeth were the first sign that it might be a distinct species.

The ancient chompers looked less like the spear-like rows of teeth of related species. They were squatter and shorter, less than an inch long, around 2 centimetres.

"Great for grasping and crushing prey rather than piercing prey," said discoverer John-Paul Hodnett, who was a graduate student when he unearthed the first fossils of the shark at a dig

east of Albuquerque in 2013. This week, Hodnett and a slew of other researchers published their findings in a bulletin of the New Mexico Museum of Natural History & Science identifying the shark as a separate species.

He named the 6.7-foot (2 metre) monster *Dracopristis hoffmanorum*, or Hoffman's Dragon Shark, in honour of the New Mexico family that owns the land in the Manzano Mountains where the fossils were found. Hodnett says the area is rife with fossils and

easy to access because of a quarry and other commercial digging operations. The name also harkens to the dragon-like jawline and 2.5-foot (0.75-metre) fin spines that inspired the discoverer's initial nickname, "Godzilla Shark."

The formal naming announcement followed seven years of excavation, preservation and study. The 12 rows of teeth on the shark's lower jaw, for example, were still obscured by layers of sediment after excavation.

Hodnett only saw them by

using an angled light technique that illuminates objects below.

Hodnett is now the paleontologist and programme coordinator for the Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission's Dinosaur Park in Laurel, Maryland. His fellow researchers come from the New Mexico museum, as well as St. Joseph's University in Pennsylvania, Northern Arizona University, and Idaho State University.

The recovered fossil skeleton is considered the most

complete of its evolutionary branch — ctenacanth — that split from modern sharks and rays around 390 million years ago and went extinct around 60 million years later. Back then, eastern New Mexico was covered by a seaway that extended deep into North America.

Hodnett and his colleagues believe that Hoffman's dragon shark most likely lived in the shallows along the coast, stalking prey like crustaceans, fish and other sharks.

— AP



OUR CRITIC'S RATING ▶ Outstanding ★★★★★ | Great ★★★★ | Good ★★★ | Okay ★★ | Poor ★ | Truly Terrible TT

Watch it for Ghaywan and Konkona

Ajeeb Daastaans

CAST: Fatima Sana Shaikh, Jaideep Ahlawat, Armaan Ralhan, Nushratt Bharuccha, Abhishek Banerjee, Konkana Sen Sharma, Aditi Rao Hydari, Shefali Shah, Manav Kaul

DIRECTOR: Shashank Khaitan, Raj Mehta, Neeraj Ghaywan, Kayoze Irani

RATING: ★★★★★
Releases on Netflix

SUPARNA SHARMA

Ajeeb Daastaans, from Karan Johar's little OTT production baby, Dharmatic Entertainment, tells four stories of people impaled in a life they don't want but can't get out of because of their caste, class, family compulsions or lack of choices. They are all similarly unhappy, seething and searching for something better.

As is the track-record of all Bollywood anthologies, Ajeeb Daastaans diligently follows the template. It has four twisted stories of which two are middling, one is good and one truly fabulous.

All the four films by four different directors are bristling with atmosphere and are marked by powerful performances by actors who are cast in compelling roles and placed in a dramatic situation that draws us in immediately. But three of the four are filmy, drawing a lot from their Bollywood predecessors, and only one seems to be informed by life. They are nice, but feel like stories we have seen or heard before. All except Geeli Pucchi.

Directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, Geeli Pucchi, that Ghaywan has written with Sumit Saxena, strips down the capricious innocence of caste privilege to its hard-wired mendacity. It also has a powerful and unsettling performance by Konkona Sen Sharma. If it weren't for this film, Ajeeb Daastaans would have been interesting but meh.

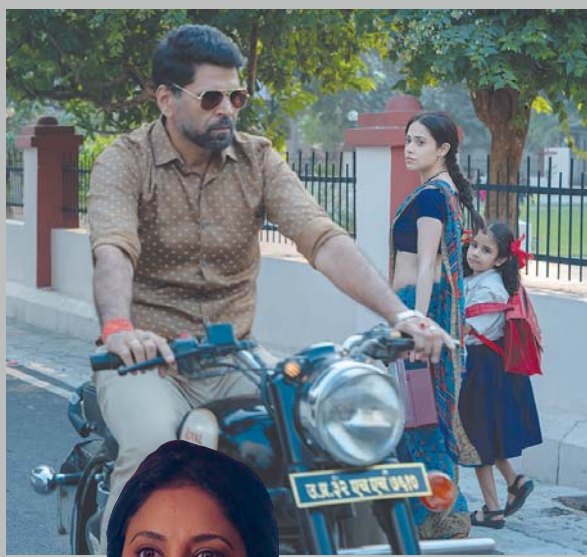
Geeli Pucchi, the title itself dripping with some afternoon obscenity, levitates Ajeeb Daastaans to a higher level.

It tells the story of Bharti (Konkana Sen Sharma), a factory worker, who wants a desk job and has all the qualifications for it. But she is a dalit and carries her anger and hunger for more in her slightly protruding jaw and her body that is at once thrust forward and withdrawn.

Bharti's curly hair is girly but the clothes she wears when she steps out into the world are manly. They are not a statement about her sexuality but an expression of the power she feels she has. Like the strip of cloth she wraps around her wrist to handle heavy equipment, Bharti's clothes too say that she's ready to take on anyone, anytime, anywhere.

But the power that Bharti thinks she has drains out of her body when she sees pretty Priya Sharma (Aditi Rao Hydari), so fragile and dove-eyed, take up the job she so wants. Bharti is at once repulsed by and drawn to the power that comes in a petite size of feminine fragility.

"Ajeeb-ajeeb log hote hain aur bad-boo bhi aati hai," Priya says in a friendly banter to Bharti, inviting her to share her tiffin at her desk and not on the factory floor, thinking Bharti is one of her. Bharti's reaction to Priya's casually racist remarks, prejudices is not visible on her face, but her body registers it as



a hole in her armour.

And then one day, when Bharti suddenly senses that she has some power, she doesn't flinch using it as a gentle but sharp whip that's gripped tightly by her rage.

The film's last shot is so fabulous that I want to watch it again and again on a loop.

Ajeeb Daastaans, which explores women's desire through all its stories and lets them come up for air for a bit before pulling them down again, begins with Majnu, a story about a husband wife trapped in a loveless marriage.

Directed by Shashank Khaitan, it's set in a large mansion in a Hindi-speaking, gun-wielding world where Babloo Bhaiyya (Jaideep Ahlawat) rules. He is married off to Lepakshi (Fatima Sana Shaikh) for financial and political reasons but on the wedding night itself he tells her that he won't be able to love her but expects her to keep khandaan ki izzat.

Lepakshi's frustration coils

around her everyday and she grabs every opportunity to humiliate Babloo and get some jollies for herself.

The threat of violence looms when Babloo Bhaiyya is around, even when Raj (Armaan Ralhan), the dashing, educated son of the driver, arrives to fan all sorts of desires.

Despite a pair of fried testicles, a cutesy twist that revisits masculinity, and the film's predictable end, Majnu is blessed by excellent acting by all, including Raj's angry mother. It also has a lovely song — Bagiya mein bhanwara...

Khilauna, directed by Raj Mehta, is a complex story about grey characters that is revealed through a police investigation. But what they are investigating is shared with us later, in a dark, gory, stunning moment.

Meenal (Nushratt Bharuccha) is a young, sexy maid who dotes on her little sister Binny (Inayat Verma). Sushil (Abhishek Banerjee) the istri-walla loves Meenal and Binni but has no power and bristles everytime injustice accosts him. Meenal has a clear worldview — she knows what her place is in

this world organised by caste and class. She knows she has no power except guile and the fact that she is very attractive. She uses both to curry small favours.

Smiling and winking at little Binni as she plays on the emotions of women she works for, bitching out one, pandering to the new officer in town, her circumstances and routine exploitation have brought a hard coldness to her heart that she unknowingly passes on to Binni. And when Binni acts on her own desires and feelings of jealousy, it leaves even Meenal stunned.

The film, also written by Sumit Saxena, is carried by Nushratt Bharuccha's charming but inevitable duplicity.

Ankahi, directed by Kayoze Irani, is the last film in the anthology and tells the story of Natasha (Shefali Shah), a mother who can't cope with husband's disinterest in their daughter who is losing her hearing. And then, a man walks into her life, all sparkles, warmth and sunshine. Though Ankahi is lit by lovely performances by Shefali Shah and Manav Kaul, it felt dull and cliched.

In a special league of dreary, bad films

The Big Bull

CAST: Abhishek Bachchan, Ileana D'Cruz, Sohum Shah, Nikita Dutta, Saurabh Shukla, Samir Soni, Mahesh Manjrekar, Ram Kapoor

DIRECTOR: Kookie Gulati

RATING: ★
Streaming on Disney + Hotstar

SUPARNA SHARMA

Bollywood is a star-driven film industry. What that means and often results in are films like The Big Bull where just the fact that a big star has been engaged is enough, all else be damned. "All else" includes writing — story, screenplay and dialogue, direction, production design, background score.

Star-driven enterprises serve a very significant purpose. Inept writers, directors, production houses remain gainfully engaged by riding on the power of a star.

Abhishek Bachchan is a star who can act. He has just been beset by too many bad choices after a few good ones initially. This time round, however, he signed up with a director and writer who are in a special league of their own when it comes to being bad.

Bollywood has a large, prospering league of bad which ranges from films that are bad in unique, new ways — where it's obvious that some thought, effort went into making it — to woeful, listless films which are bad in ways that many other previous

films have been bad.

The first kind of films can be fun-bad, while the other is dreary.

To illustrate, Ram Gopal Varma's Daud would fall in the fun-bad category, and Department in mournfully bad. Director Vijay Krishna Acharya's Tashan is in the first category, but his Thugs of Hindostan is in the I'd-rather-die-than-watch-this category.

The Big Bull is a pool of mournful stupidity. A life-sucking bad film. The sort that leaves you in need of a cold shower and cold beer to wash it all away.

Leading this turgid enterprise is Kookie Gulati the director. He was set off on this listless path by a story and screenplay that he co-wrote with Arjun Dhawan.

Mr Kookie had earlier directed an atrocity called Prince (2010) that still feels like a fresh scar on my brain. Now I have two scars courtesy Mr Kookie.

Based loosely and irresponsibly on the life and crimes of Harshad Mehra, The Big Bull opens with reporter Meera Rao (played by Ileana D'Cruz) and based on Sucheta Dalal) talking about Hemant Shah (Abhishek Bachchan) to a hall full of millennial MBA students.

Cut to flashback in a chawl where Hemant, in full-sleeve printed shirts, used to live with his brother Viren (Sohum Shah), mother (Supriya Pathak) and angst about not being rich. That feeling was made worse by the father of the girl next door he liked, Priya (Nikita Dutta). Her



daddy wanted a well-settled son-in-law.

We are told two things about Hemant. Three, actually.

1. That Hemant had "the world's best bhai aur dost". We meet the bhai, but see the dost fleetingly.

2. Hemant keeps saying, "Mujhe dheere chalna aata hain hai" — and yet the film he is in is an excruciatingly slow crawl.

3. Hemant doesn't drink, but only till he can afford the best daru. Later in life, he drinks.

With these character traits, Mr Kookie & Co. try to stitch together a chronology of the rise and fall of the stock broker, but they remain vague on details and are often incoherent, as if a terrible arts student was suddenly asked to sit for an economics exam.

The film, neither clear nor real-

ly interested in what actually happened, tells us Harshad Mehta's story in the sort of sketchy way that the arts student would try to fill up the answer-sheet — with gibberish, throwing in some "economics sounding" words at random.

Hemant wants to become a stock broker and for this he gets a bank receipt in an underhand manner and starts playing the stock market. The amount of the bank receipts increases, and so does Hemant's game.

He then manipulates the price of a company's share price and uses union leader Rana Sawant (Mahesh Manjrekar) to tip him off about which auto plant will be shut so that he can make more money in shares.

This is insider trading and Mannu Malpani (Saurabh

Shukla), chairman of SEBI, doesn't like it. But he can't do much.

The film conveys all this through dull generalities. To show that Hemant was a master manipulator and the king of the share market, it makes him stand, arms akimbo, staring and smiling at the trading floor often. To show that he is always planning his next move, Hemant has to keep tapping his fingers.

In between there is romance with Priya, which means that several songs arrive at frustratingly predictable moments.

Soon Hemant gets very rich, pays Rs 26 cr income tax and the CBI and I-T guys get after him.

Hemant suspects that it is one of his employees and so he invites them all to his house and then asks them to take off their clothes and jump into his pool.

Half-naked office employees covering their man-boobs as Hemant stares down at them with a sulky pout is, perhaps, when the film hits the high note of absurdity. Kookie & Co seem incapable of taking facts and then turning them into a screenplay. If they were capable of doing that they would have just binge-watched Hansal Mehta's Scam 1992. They probably did watch it and decided it was all too much and that they'd rather go with a bullshit story and hero's pointless bluster.

Abhishek Bachchan's twitter handle is @juniorbachchan and so there is no getting away from the comparison. But, he has a personality that is entirely his own.

Chota Bachchan is all goodness, warmth and decency. So much so that when he tries to be evil or creepy, he has to ham it.

The film gives Abhishek a shitty start — a pouty, pretentious pose in a nightgown — that seals his character's fate and tells us that we should not expect acting, just posturing.

The film is also confused between its love for Abhishek and the story it wants to tell. While The Big Bull wants to show Abhishek as a good guy, a "dreamer" who helped many people make money, the story of Hemant — a manipulator of people and money who had little regard for rules — keeps peeing on its party. So the film can only muster the courage to make its star sit with a manspread and thrust his stomach out to convey indecency and greed. Sometimes it also makes him laugh out loud, without any reason or explanation. Usually, even in bad films, there are actors who can act. No such luck here.

Sohum Shah is a decent actor but he has been given nothing here except to be the voice of nagging worry.

Supriya Pathak has spent so much time in the world of Tarak Mehta Ka Ulta Chashma and Khichdi that she now seems incapable of doing anything else. Ileana D'Cruz has mastered the art of speaking without letting her lips move. Despite that she is not bad. It says a lot about a film and its actors if Ms D'Cruz is the one redeeming thing that comes to mind.

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