

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VIJAYAWADA | SATURDAY | 3 APRIL 2021



WEATHER

Max: 42.0°C
Min: 26.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
42/26 °C

WORLD | 6

Iran nuke talks in Vienna next week

SPORTS | 8

Covid +ve Tendulkar is hospitalised

TABLOID

Thick jungles Tollywood's new canvas

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ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Bahula Saptami
till 4.13 am (Sunday)
Star: Moola till 2.39 am
(Sunday)
Variyam: 1.07 am to 2.39 am
(Sunday)
Durmuhurtam: 6.12 am to
7.50 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HJRI CALENDAR
Sha'ban 20,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.40 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.15 pm
Maghrib: 6.25 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.59 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.20 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 00.18 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 12.38 PM

COUNTER POINT



Bad news, sir! Your name is missing from the NRC list!

IN BRIEF

Maha warns of healthcare shortage

Mumbai: Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Friday said the state may face a shortage of healthcare infrastructure soon if the present "alarming situation" on coronavirus cases continued. Addressing people of the state, Thackeray said stricter curbs will be imposed in one or two days. "Some people are getting infected after vaccination because they stop wearing masks," he said.

New monsoon forecast strategy

New Delhi: A new forecasting strategy was planned for monsoon this year, Secretary in the Ministry of Earth Sciences M. Rajeev said. "Reviewed preparations for monsoon forecasts. Will release a new forecasting strategy next few days planned this year with new products. Watch @Indiametdept for announcement," the secretary tweeted.

Stones pelted at Tikait's car

Jaipur: Some people threw stones at a cavalcade of farmer leader Rakesh Tikait damaging his car's rear windshield when he was going to address a rally in Rajasthan's Alwar district on Friday, police said. Tikait was not in his car when the stones were pelted at his cavalcade, Bhiwadi Superintendent of Police Ram Murti Joshi said.

Thermal plants get emission deadline

New Delhi: The environment ministry has amended rules allowing thermal power plants within 10 kilometres of the National Capital Region (NCR) and in cities with more than 10 lakh population to comply with new emission norms by the end of 2022, according to official notification. A task force will be constituted by the Central Pollution Control Board to "categorise thermal power plants (TPPs) in three categories on the basis of their location", the ministry said.

Passion of Christ



A man enacts the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in front of Christian devotees on Good Friday, in Guwahati, on Friday. — PTI

Boycotting polls may boomerang on TD

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, APRIL 2

The badly bruised Telugu Desam leaving the electoral battlefield midway, boycotting the zilla parishad and mandal parishad elections slated for April 8 may do more harm than good to the party. Despite the boycott, TD candidates will remain in the fray as they have already filed nominations and the deadline for withdrawal was over by the time the polls were put off last March. Now, the ballot papers with their names and party symbol will be used on April 8.

The immediate adverse impact of the boycott decision could be the party's contestants, flag-bearers of the party at ground level and regularly bear the brunt of the opponents ire, feeling let down. There will be migration of the party cadre and vote to others, predominantly the Jana Sena-BJP combine, which is waiting in the wings to become the alternative political force in the state. Besides, the cadre working hard for

NEHRU RESIGNS AS VP TO PROTEST POLL BOYCOTT

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, APRIL 2

Senior Telugu Desam leader Jyothula Venkata Appa Rao 'Nehru' resigned as party state vice-president post to protest the decision of party president N. Chandrababu Naidu that the TD would boycott the ZPTC and MPCTC elections. Such a move would demoralise the cadre, many of whom had filed their nominations.

■ Page 2: Nehru to remain in Telugu Desam

the party for the Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll will get demoralised further.

TD president N. Chandrababu Naidu tried his best to assert that he is not running away fearing the YSR Congress but only wanted to educate people on what

he described as Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's "rule of oppression".

The decision, according to party insiders, was a fall-out of the second-rung leaders' reluctance to fund or campaign for the party candidates in the wake of the drubbing in the recently-held gram panchayat and municipal polls.

Sources said though Naidu was initially averse to the idea, he was left with no option but to announce withdrawal from the contest. Some former ministers repeatedly highlighting the arrests and inquiring about the facilities in jails with the arrested leaders in the meeting held by Naidu was a reflection of their fear, a senior leader pointed out.

"The party was let down by the second-rung leaders who enjoyed the fruits of power as ministers and MLAs and are now afraid of facing the ruling party," said a party sympathiser who actively voices TD views on social media.

■ Page 2: TD celebrated victory too: Ambati

Poll code enforced: SEC

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 2

AP State Election Commissioner Nilam Sawhney said that the election code has come into force in the state and asked political parties to cooperate with the commission for the smooth conduct of the mandal and zilla parishad territorial committee polls. The SEC said that a special call centre has been started in the SEC office to receive complaints.

The SEC called a meeting with leaders of political parties but the Telugu

Desam, BJP and Jana Sena boycotted it to protest against the alleged arbitrary decision of commission to conduct the elections and announcing the schedule without considering objections. Sawhney said that there is no reason to halt the elections and the polls would be held as per the old notification.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, the SEC said that the list of candidates had already been compiled. She asked all political parties to follow Covid-19 protocols during the election campaign.

The government, in view of the ongoing Coronavirus vaccination programme, had sought completion of the election process and collected the opinions of political parties at the meeting.

She said that the election process had been resumed from where it was stopped and stated that there is no court order restricting the release of the election schedule. Delaying of elections would impact the vaccination programme.

■ Page 2: SEC didn't consider our plea: Pawan

FIERY | SITUATION

With April setting in, May yet to come, forest authorities expect more fires

Forest fires going on unabated in AP

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 2

Forest fires in Andhra Pradesh are continuing to rage, while already burning to ashes 6,896 hectares of forest cover, mostly in Rayalaseema and neighbouring coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh.

This year, the state witnessed fire at 12,047 points starting from November, 2020 and they are continuing for four months even as March 2021 has come to an end. However, the fire fight undertaken had reduced

the number of locations where fire is raging to 4,476.

Fires are continuing to rage in reserve forests of divisions including Anantapur, Atmakur, Markapur, Giddalur, Kadapa, Nandyala, Proddatur, Rajampet and other areas.

Significantly, the number forest fires reported this year is very high, given that from November 2019 to May 2020, which is the season when most fires get ignited, AP registered only 9,800 instances of fire. Foresters say heavy rainfall witnessing a lot of

HEATWAVE INTENSIFIES IN AP DIST

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 2

Heatwave conditions prevailed in Guntur and Prakasam districts and some isolated pockets of Chittoor district on Friday. Severe heatwave conditions are predicted for these two districts on Saturday and Sunday.

growth in forests with many grasses growing tall. However, with these grass-

es drying up from November last year onwards and temperatures rising steadily,

they have started catching fire for various reasons, including manmade with half-burnt beedis and cigarette butts being left by shepherds who enter the reserve forest areas for grazing their cattle.

Some villagers who get into the forests to gather honey, also light fires using dry grass to drive away bees from their honeycombs. However, once their work is done, they do not bother about dousing the fire in its entirety.

Fires are also caused naturally when two objects, including branches, rub

against each other due to summer winds. In March alone, Kadapa forest division registered the highest number of 1,224 fires, followed by Markapur 895, Anantapur 893 and Rajampet 750. With April already setting in and May yet to come, forest authorities are expecting more forest fires in forest areas of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and other districts.

■ Page 2: Official orders close watch over satellite

CID registers FIR against B'luru firm for med scam

Company 'siphoned off' crores of rupees from AP exchequer

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 2

The Criminal Investigation Department has finally registered a case against TBS Telematic and Bio Medical Services India Limited, a Bengaluru-based medical equipment company which allegedly siphoned off crores of rupees from the state exchequer in a health project.

The CID which dragged its feet for almost two years had to act on Thursday evening following serious observations made by the Andhra Pradesh High Court during the hearing of a contempt of court case filed by complainant Indukuri Venkata Rama Raju in the

● ACCORDING TO the FIR issued by the CID, the cost of each ventilator was escalated to ₹11 lakh against the original price of ₹7.3 lakh resulting in loss of ₹17 crore on purchase of 159 ventilators

morning. Even after the state government accorded permission to the CID to book a case against the private company on February 1, the CID did not act till Thursday.

What makes the development more curious is that the CID was permitted by the state government to book a case only against the private company though complainant Rama Raju and the Anti

Corruption Bureau had established beyond doubt the connivance of senior bureaucrats with the private company.

Deccan Chronicle had reported about then Chief Secretary L.V. Subrahmanyam seeking the government's permission to book cases against officers responsible for the fraud along with the private company as per the directions of the AP High Court and ACB. He also mentioned that Poonam Malakondaiah was special chief secretary of the health department and Gopinath was vice-chairman and managing director of AP Medical Infrastructure Development Corporation when the financial irregu-

larities took place.

The health department also admitted irregularities while cancelling the agreement with TBS Telematic and cited reasons like price escalation, raising bills for non-existent equipment, raising invoices for equipment which are in "beyond economic repair" and "warranty" categories.

According to the First Information Report issued by the CID, the cost of each ventilator was escalated to ₹11 lakh against the original price of ₹7.3 lakh resulting in loss of ₹17 crore on purchase of 159 ventilators. The cost of each glucometer was shown as ₹5.08 lakh against the actual price of ₹840.

PEOPLE BRAVE HEATWAVE TO TAKE COVID JAB

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 2

A substantial number of people aged above 45 went in for Covid-19 jabs on the first day of their turn, braving heatwave conditions in several parts of the state.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launched the Covid-19 vaccination programme for this segment by undergoing the vaccination himself at a ward secretariat in Bharatpeta in Guntur district. He gave a call to the people, especially the aged above 45 years, to take the jab in order to remain safe.

There was some delay in the commencement of the vaccination that was scheduled from 9am to 5pm. The delay was due to the inauguration by some local VIPs at the ward/village secretariat. It soon gained speed.

■ Page 3: Officials extend time for jab due to heat

SHAH: WILL WIN 50 OF 60 SEATS IN WEST BENGAL

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, APRIL 2

Continuing his trick to demoralise West Bengal's ruling Trinamul Congress and garner votes for the BJP with his exit poll-style assessment, Union home minister Amit Shah on Friday put more than 50 seats including Nandigram out of 60, which went to the first two phases of the Assembly Election in the state, in the saffron party's winning tally.

He made the startling claim at two back-to-back BJP rallies in North Bengal where he set a target before his party of bagging another 50 seats. At Sitalkuchi in Coochbehar Mr Shah said, "All have seen the first two phases of polls. What happened there? Kamal Khila Hai (Lotus has bloomed). Mark my words, The BJP has already won more than 50 out of 60 seats."

At Kalchini in Alipurduar he added, "Two phases of polls covering 60 seats were held. Among these, Lotus is going to bloom in 50 seats for the BJP. I have come to North Bengal because here 50 seats out of 60 will not be enough. BJP needs 50 out of 50 here."

SHORT TAKES

ORGANISATIONS
TAKE OUT RALLY
AGAINST NIADC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 2

Representatives of various mass organisations took out a rally in Visakhapatnam on Friday in protest against the NIA raids and arrests of the mass leaders and the advocates fighting their detentions. They demanded the immediate release of the arrested persons and withdraw the cases filed under UAPA in various police stations. The rally was taken out from the LIC Building till Gandhi statue near RTC Complex.

The state secretary of POW M. Lakshmi said the NIA was making arrests in the name of threat to internal security of the country. The motive behind the arrest was to gag the rights activists and mass organisations leaders from raising their voice against the privatisation of public sector undertakings in the country.

Convener of Mahila Chetana K. Padma said Modi was reminding the Hitler's regime that killed millions of people. She alleged that it was undemocratic to arrest lawyers and mass leaders.

Some leaders of the Left parties and few journalists also took part in the rally.

Sources said the NIA were making efforts to take custody of three women activists presently in central jail as undertrial prisoners. They are Annapurba of Pragatisheela Karmika Samakhya, Amaraveerula Bandhumitrula Sangham state chairman Rajeswari and another woman activist Anjamma.

Another source added that the NIA officials were interrogating human rights activists VS Krishna and T. Srirama Murthy and advocates KS Chalam and Balakrishna Patnaik.



V. Hanumantha Rao, right.

VH JOINS VSP
STIR, SAYS MODI
LIES FOR POWERDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 2

Telangana Congress Committee general secretary and former MP V. Hanumantha Rao said Narendra Modi, who rode to power by telling lies to the people, has no right to take a decision on privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

Hanumantha Rao was the chief guest at the relay hunger strike organised by the Joint Action Committee of Steel Plant and PSU Parirakshana Committee at Gandhi statue near RTC Complex in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

Addressing the gathering, Hanumantha Rao said Narendra Modi promised people that he would bring back all the black money from the Swiss banks and create two crore jobs every year. He also swore at Tirupati that he would sanction special category status to Andhra Pradesh after coming to power.

"These are lies that he told the people to annex the power," Hanumantha Rao told the participants at the hunger camp.

TD boycotting local polls
fearing defeat: Ambati

Ruling party claims people of AP have lost faith in Desam

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 2

YSR Congress MLA and party spokesperson Ambati Rambabu accused Telugu Desam of making an excuse of boycotting MPTC and ZPTC elections fearing a massive defeat if it contests these polls. Addressing a press conference here, he suspected that TD may even repeat this decision by boycotting by-election from Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency fearing another humiliating defeat.

Rambabu criticised TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu for deciding to boycott ZPTC and MPTC polls. He advised TDP cadre to look for an alternative as their party is a sinking ship. The spokesperson recalled that in 2019 assembly elections and recent panchayat and municipal elections, people have clearly indicated that they have lost faith in Telugu Desam and that party will soon disappear from the state. In this context, the MLA underlined that if TD chief has any faith in parliamentary system, his party ought to have contested the ZPTC and MPTC elections.

TD OBJECTS TO
SEC DECISION ON
PARISHAD POLLSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 2

TD leader and former minister K. S. Jawahar on Friday raised objection to state election commissioner (SEC) Nilam Sawhney issuing a notification announcing the schedule for mandal and zilla parishad elections. He felt the decision on polls is hasty, taken without consulting all political parties in the state.

It is obvious that the new SEC is all eager to please Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, the TD leader remarked. "Instead of holding consultations as per constitutional requirements, SEC is acting like an assistant to the Chief Minister," Jawahar observed.

The former minister wondered how the ZPTC, MPTC elections could be held in just a day when they should have been held in five phases.

The TD leader wondered why Nilam Sawhney released the notification on the very first day of taking charge as new SEC of the state.

AP situation similar to N. Korea: Naidu

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 2

The Telugu Desam on Friday announced boycott of the MPTC and ZPTC elections in Andhra Pradesh. Addressing a press conference here, TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu said there would be no chance of a fair and free election and hence the boycott.

Naidu alleged that state election commissioner Nilam Sawhney was a rubber stamp supporting all the decisions of the YSR Congress government.



State Election Commissioner Neelam Sawhney addresses the media on the ZPTC and MPTC elections in Vijayawada on Friday.

— DC

Cadre disappointed
by abrupt boycottDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 2

A decision taken by the Telugu Desam high-command to boycott the ZPTC and MPTC elections has upset the party cadre in the two Godavari districts.

The decision came at a time when TD cadre along with Jana Sena was getting ready to jointly fight the elections.

The TD and Jana Sena have worked together in Panchayat and municipal elections and won some panchayat and municipal wards in east and west Godavari districts. Now, they were aiming to give a tough fight to the YSRC and win some seats.

They were already meeting people and campaign-

ing when TD chief Chandrababu Naidu made the sudden decision to boycott the coming polls. They said Naidu shattered their hopes of a win.

Upset over Naidu's decision, TD state vice president Jyothula Venkata Appa Rao (Nehru), former MLA of Jaggaipet, has resigned from the party post. He apologised to the party cadre at a meeting in the constituency. He said the party decision was unfortunate, but would abide by the party's decision.

According to a TD leader in Kakinada, many TD leaders felt the same. Now, Jana Sena candidates are also in a dilemma as to whether the TD cadre will support them or go over to the ruling party.

NEHRU TO REMAIN IN TELUGU DESAM

FROM PAGE 1

"If the party boycotts the elections at this stage, it would cause great harm to the party and the cadre," Nehru said while clarifying that though he had quit his post he would stay in the Telugu Desam.

He said that he would continue as the TD Jaggaipet Assembly constituency incharge, and would guard the party cadre in the constituency. For the past month, rumours were circulating that Nehru may quit the TD again.

On the foundation day of the party four days back, Rajamahendravaram Rural MLA Gorantla Burchaiha Chowdary had stressed the need for bringing major changes



in Telugu Desam to face the YSRC and give importance to the youth. He had said that the party was in the clutches of four or five leaders who were not in touch with the public. He said that there was a need for Junior NTR, the film actor, to participate in party activities.

It is said that there is resentment among the TD cadres that the decision of boycotting the elections was announced by state party president K. Atchannaidu and not Chandrababu Naidu.

"We will approach courts against the way the SEC is conducting the MPTC/ZPTC elections against established norms."

Naidu expressed confidence that his party's decision to boycott the parishad polls would have a positive impact on voters in the Tirupati parliamentary by-election. He said Sawhney's predecessor Ramesh Kumar had written to the Union home secretary saying too many violations took place in the elections and that the YSRC leaders created

chaos during the nominations and polling process.

"The new SEC did not take these issues into consideration before announcing the poll notification," he said.

The TD leader said, for the first time in over 39 years, the party has taken a tough decision like a boycott of the ZPTC and MPTC elections.

"This is because we have lack of trust in the SEC and we oppose the unilateral decisions it took in the past two days."

He objected to SEC action of releasing the

SEC DIDN'T
CONSIDER OUR
PLEA: PAWAN

FROM PAGE 1

BJP state president Somu Veerajulu said that the party had boycotted the SEC meeting as it had been called after the election schedule had been notified, and termed the action undemocratic. Jana Sena chief K. Pawan Kalyan said the party had filed a petition in the High Court but the SEC without considering it had released the election schedule, which was severely objectionable.

CPI state secretary K. Ramakrishna objected to the issue of the notification when the court was hearing the matter, and boycotted the meeting. Congress senior leader Sk Mastan Vali said that the sought a fresh notification and to conduct all-party meeting afterwards.

The YSRC, interestingly, had not attended the meeting called by SEC Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar before the gram panchayat and municipal elections, but attended the one called by Sawhney. YSRC state secretary Lella Appi Reddy said that Opposition parties are trying to avoid elections. He objected to the boycotting of the SEC meeting as an act of flinching from the battlefield. He said that they sought SEC to take measures for the free and fair polls.

TD CELEBRATED
VICTORY TOO,
SAYS AMBATI

FROM PAGE 1

"We should not forget that the party, even in the worst-ever performance, polled 32 per cent in municipalities and 40-45 per cent in some of the corporations," he added. The TD president citing the YSR Congress' coercion and absence of rule of law as reasons for the boycott also did not go down well in political circles. "The TD officially announced that they won 40 per cent gram panchayats held on non-party basis and burst crackers at party headquarters. This contradicts the theory of coercion," said YSR Congress spokesman and MLA Ambati Rambabu.

poll notification "without consulting the all political parties".

Naidu said the Supreme Court has laid down clear guidelines as regards SEC taking the opinion of various parties in the state before issuing such poll notifications. "The SEC violated the directives," Naidu alleged.

Naidu said the TD has lost all faith in the SEC. "She did not even followed the court direction that the model code should be re-imposed four weeks before the notified date of polling.

requisite fire fighting equipment.

However, we advise villagers living in and around forests not to be reckless by throwing burning beedis and cigarettes in forests," Sharma added.

The Nandyal DFO pointed out that as Nallamala forest is over a rocky terrain, it witnesses only ground fires regularly from December to



YSRC candidate Dr M. Gurumoorthy along with party leaders and workers campaigning in Korlagunta in Tirupati on Friday.

—DC

YSRC eyes hattrick win in
Tirupati LS byelectionDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 2

The ruling YSR Congress is working hard to ensure a thumping majority for its candidate in the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection.

Buoyed by the success for the party in the Gram Panchayat and municipal elections, the ruling party is confident that it will retain the Tirupati seat and thereby achieve a hat-trick.

As part of its poll strategy, the party has deployed seven state ministers, one for each of the seven Assembly constituencies under the LS segment. They were: Perni Nani (Tirupati); Gautam Reddy (Srikalahasti); Kodali Nani (Satyavedu); K. Kanababu (Sullurpeta); Ballineni Srinivasa Reddy (Venkatagiri); Adimulapu Suresh (Sarvepalli) and Anil Kumar (Gudur).

Besides, the party has positioned one legislator

for each mandal and two legislators for each Assembly segment.

Under the guidance of minister Peddiredy Ramachandra Reddy and TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy, who were given overall responsibilities, all these ministers and local and other segment MLAs are intensively campaigning for party candidate Dr M. Gurumoorthy.

As per YSRC sources, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has instructed the in-charges and leaders to work hard and ensure the result created such a huge impact that the whole country would stand up and take note. Jagan told the leaders to ensure that the polling should cross 85 per cent mark.

This would ensure the party candidate's victory margin would be more than four to five lakh votes.

There are about 16.5

lakh voters. In the 2019 LS elections, around 13.2 lakh people voted. The YSRC had secured 7.22 lakh votes and the TD 4.94 lakh. Around 25,781 votes were polled for NOTA, while the Congress and the BJP secured 24,039 and 16,125 votes.

With 80 per cent polling registered in the 2019 election, the YSRC has a majority of 2.28 lakh votes.

Meanwhile, the YSRC candidate along with deputy CM K. Narayana Swamy, ministers Peddiredy Ramachandra Reddy, Perni Nani, whip K. Srinivas and MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy campaigned in the streets here on Friday. Stating that development is the prime agenda of the Jagan-led govern-

ment, they sought support from the public to continue the welfare schemes and appealed to them to cast their vote for the YSRC candidate.

TTD identifies 49
RET plant species
in SeshachalamDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 2

In an effort to save the rich biodiversity of Seshachalam forests, the forest wing of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has identified 49 rare, endangered and threatened (RET) plant species in its forest areas.

The TTD agency is working towards documenting hundreds of species using the geo-tagging technology – first-of-its kind in the region – to ensure their survival and maintenance.

The newly identified RET plant species include ficus drupacea thunb, shorea talura, schrebera swietenoides, shorea thumbaggia, boswellia ovalifoliolata and cycas beddomei. The cycas beddomei is one of the six critically endangered species in the world. There are eight such endangered species in the Seshachalam forest area that comes under the TTD.

The Seshachalam biosphere is rich in plant diversity, it having thousands of plants. Some of them are recognized and classified as RET plant species depending on their survival threat status. Of the total 82,500 hectares of the region's forests, TTD controls 3025 hectares in the immediate vicinity of the Tirumala temple.

The TTD is involved in raising plantations in its area to ensure protection of wildlife. However, some of these species that grow and multiply naturally in the forest area are rapidly disappearing, and this is largely outside the radar of public attention.

Against this backdrop, the TTD forest wing has started exploring, identifying and documenting all the species under its forest limits.

"Since plants are a critical part of the ecosystem, we decided to dedicate our efforts to study the species, including the old and rare ones that are heading for extinction. We have formed a five-

member team and initiated a project eight months ago to study the rare, endemic and most-threatened species in the TTD forests," TTD DFO Chandra Sekhar told *Deccan Chronicle*.

For this study, the TTD DFO who initiated the project has formed a five-member team comprising T. Thulasiaiah, B. Chenga Reddy, M. Lokesh, B. Mani and R. Masthan. The team has identified and geo-tagged 994 plant species, of which 49 are RET.

They were explored, identified and documented, as their small population size has become a major concern. The TTD forest wing also initiated a scientific conservation programme for recovering the RET species.

"Urgent measures were needed to restore the endangered species. We initiated a species recovery process through which the decline of a threatened species could be arrested or reversed," Chandra Sekhar said.

"The process starts with identifying the species, assessing their natural distribution styles and studying their population status. This apart, work on conservation, propagation, plantation, protection, research and awareness would be done. With this, a gradual increase in the population size as also habitat restoration and captive breeding or population stabilisation can be achieved," he explained.

Meanwhile, the major work done by the TTD forest wing is geo-tagging of all identified plant species. The five-member team with the help of a technical team did a grid methodological survey, inspected each and every species and marked their geographic coordinates. Then their photos were captured and uploaded to the database that has the map of the forest like Google Maps.

"A GIS-based mapping of the forest is under way. The exact locations of the plant species will be mapped.

FOREST | FIRE

Forest being deciduous, litter catches fire naturally or through human intervention

Nallamala forests witness frequent fires

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, APRIL 2

Nallamala forests are witnessing frequent fires, almost on a daily basis. On Thursday alone, 30 fire incidents had been recorded by forest officials in Nandyal, Kurnool and Proddatur regions of Kurnool circle. Kadapa division reported 40 fires.

Nandyal DFO Sambangi Venkatesh said since Nallamala is a deciduous forest, lot of litter piles up overnight, which gets burnt either naturally or through

FROM PAGE 1

Principal chief conservator of forests N. Prateep Kumar has ordered close watch over satellite imageries to locate fires, so that forest personnel could rush to the

human intervention. He said forest fires are being closely monitored to contain them quickly.

Forest stretches in

● VILLAGERS LIVING in and around forests not to be reckless by throwing burning beedis in forests.

areas and stop the fire from spreading further.

Nallamala near Pacharla and Giddalur fringe have been regularly witnessing forest fires in the past one week. People residing close

to forest lines are apprehensive about damage to their properties, as fires during night times are a risky affair.

AP Fire Monitoring Cell nodal officer M. Ravi Sankar Sharma said, "We are witnessing more number of forest fires this season compared to last year for varied reasons. Our personnel have been given all

requisite fire fighting equipment.

However, we advise villagers living in and around forests not to be reckless by throwing burning beedis and cigarettes in forests," Sharma added.

The Nandyal DFO pointed out that as Nallamala forest is over a rocky terrain, it witnesses only ground fires regularly from December to

SHORT TAKES

EDITOR'S CLARIFICATION

It was brought to our notice that a decades-old annual tradition of playing a good old-fashioned prank with our readers for fun on a universally acknowledged day of humour has been misconstrued. Several leaders and activists of the Telugu Desam have sought an acknowledgment of their consternation and grievance arising out of their "sense of hurt". *Deccan Chronicle* neither had nor will ever have any desire to deliberately hurt anyone's feelings, including of those who do not share our sense of humour. We genuinely regret if any hurt has been caused to the followers of the party.

TTD GETS 62 ACRES LAND IN J&K FOR TEMPLE

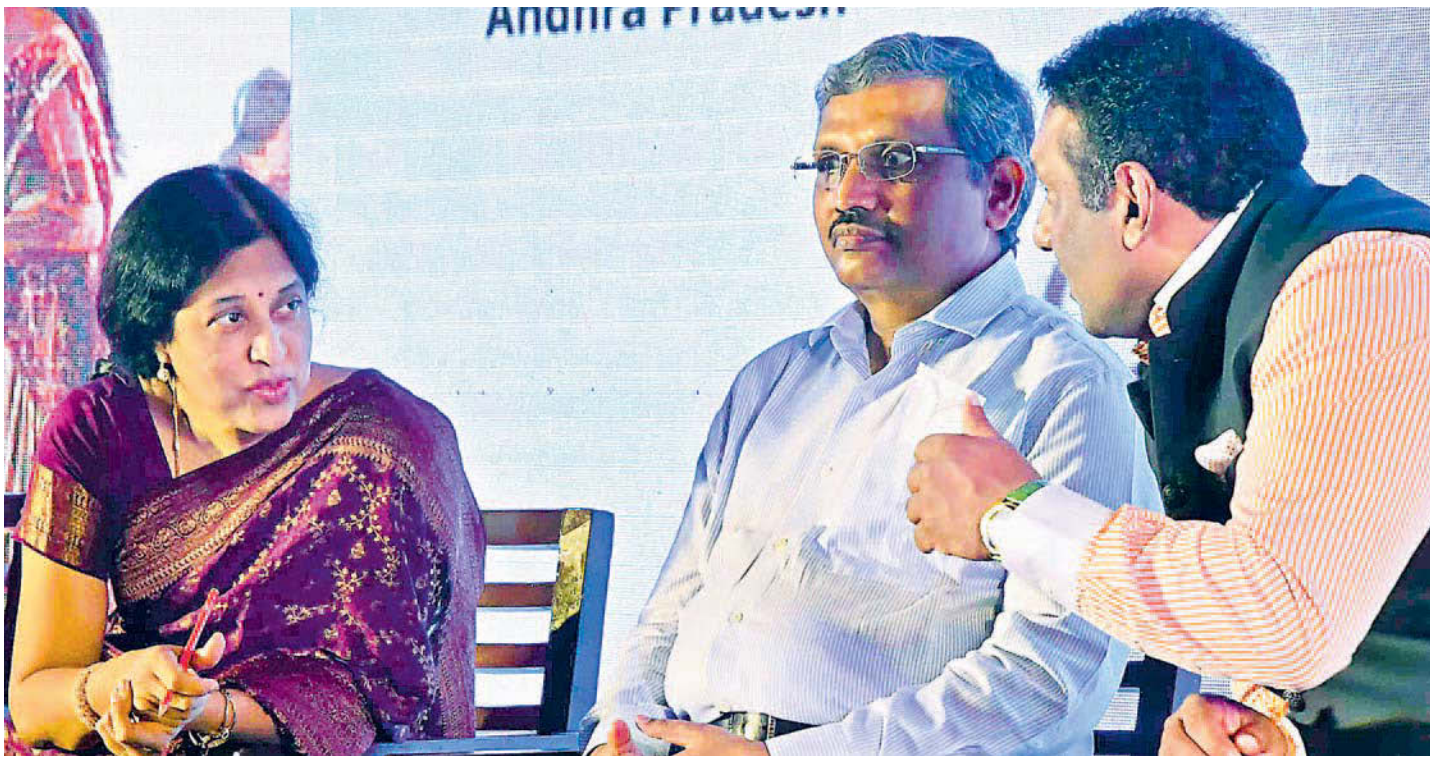
DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, APRIL 2

The Jammu and Kashmir government has agreed to allot 496 kanals and 17 marlas (62 acres) of land to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) for building a temple and allied infrastructures in Jammu.

The official sources said that the Union Territory's administrative council (AC) which met in Jammu on Thursday under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, approved the proposal submitted by the TTD. The temple complex to be raised on the allotted land will also have a pilgrim amenities enclosure, Vedapatasala, Spiritual and meditation centre, administrative office, residential quarters and parking facility.

The land is being allotted to the TTD on lease basis for a period of 40 years, the sources said. The temple campus will in future also have medical and educational facilities.

"TTD, a board established by the government under the TTD Act, 1932 is a charitable organisation of international repute with a proven track record of activities in the spiritual, cultural, social and educational sphere," a statement issued by the J&K government said.



Minister Mekapati Gowtham Reddy interacts with special chief secretary (municipal department) Y. Sri Lakshmi, left, at the meeting with IT company CEOs in Vijayawada on Friday. Special chief secretary to higher education Satish Chandra looks on. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Vizag will turn IT destination

Investments expected for setting up of 52 units

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 2

IT minister Mekapati Gautam Reddy, has said the CXO conference organised here is aimed at boosting the cause of expansion of the IT industry in Andhra Pradesh.

Addressing the conference here on Friday, he said chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy would take the state's IT sector forward with several novel ideas. Many schemes have been introduced in the field of education and other sectors.

The minister said the government is transforming Visakhapatnam into a major IT destination. Investments are expected for setting up of 52 units linked to artificial intelligence, robotics and genetics sectors.

- The state government is going to build three concept cities on an areas of 2,000 acres by 2024

cial intelligence, robotics and genetics sectors.

He recalled Jagan saying during his recent Padayatra that he was aware of the problems of the people in various segments.

Many schemes have been introduced in the field of education, like the Vidya Kanuka scheme and the schemes for quality education and medical care for all.

"We are working for agricultural development and creating quality human resources. The government has taken care of the MSME indus-

tries during the bleak Covid season. With the help of the chief minister, we have created employment opportunities for small traders," he said.

Gautam Reddy said the government was offering schemes directly to the beneficiaries.

"We are using technology in government management and focusing on providing IT infrastructure. The government is going to build three concept cities on an areas of 2,000 acres by 2024, with internet facility to every village through Fibernet. Digital library and digital broadband will cover every village. Creating some 90,000 IT work stations is our target and this would be achieved by year 2024 in AP," he said.

Officials extend time for jab due to heat

FROM PAGE 1

Health authorities said that at some ward secretariats, 400 to 600 persons took the jab on the first day. However, due to prevalence of the heat wave conditions, some registered persons avoided reporting themselves for the jab. Officials, therefore, extended the time to administer the vaccine beyond 5 pm to ensure vaccinating the maximum of all those listed for the day.

However, in case the number of targeted beneficiaries is more than what could be handled, officials advised them to come in the next day.

Visakhapatnam district medical and health officer Dr P.S. Suryanarayana said, "As we had already carried out trial run for the Covid-19 jab at select ward/village secretariats and also done

extensive publicity, we got a good number of people for the jabs."

As the ward/village volunteers were preoccupied with distribution of pension on April 1, there was some trouble in mobilising the targeted beneficiaries for the vaccination in some parts of the state. Guntur district medical and health officer Dr Yasmin said, "The number of people turned up for the Covid-19 vaccine was encouraging."

Meanwhile, officials said the jabs will be done on public holidays too so as to expedite the vaccination programme.

Health director Dr T. Geetha Prasadini said, "Based on preliminary reports received from districts, a good number of people aged above 45 took the jabs especially at ward/village secretariats and also at Covid vaccination centres."

State registers record 1,288 new infections

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 2

New Coronavirus infections in Andhra Pradesh are increasing by the day, with as many as 1,288 new infections reported during past 24 hours ending Friday morning. In addition, there have been five new deaths, taking the total Covid-19 death toll to 7,225 while total infections have reached 9,04,548.

The total number of active Coronavirus cases has reached 8,815, while 610 patients have been discharged after recovery in the past 24 hours.

Total recoveries in the state stand at 8,88,508.

As many as 31,116 new samples have been tested, with the number of total samples examined reaching 1,51,46,104.

One each new Corona death has been reported from in Anantapur, Chittoor, Guntur, Prakasam and Visakhapatnam districts.

Guntur district reported the highest single-day 311 new Covid cases on Friday,

- There have been five new deaths, taking the total Covid-19 death toll to 7,225 while total infections have reached 9,04,548

- East Godavari district tops the state with total of 1,25,389 Coronavirus cases, followed by West Godavari

followed by Chittoor 225, Visakhapatnam 191, Krishna 164, Nellore 118, Prakasam 62, Srikakulam 54, Kurnool 52, Vizianagaram 31, Anantapur 26, East Godavari 26, Kadapa 21 and West Godavari seven new infections.

East Godavari district tops the state with total of 1,25,389 Coronavirus cases, followed by West Godavari 94,555, Chittoor 90,311, Guntur 78,412, Anantapur 68,509, Nellore 63,279, Prakasam 62,680, Kurnool 61,691, Visakhapatnam 62,076, Kadapa 55,902, Krishna 50,659, Srikakulam 46,796 and Vizianagaram the least of 41,394 Covid-19 cases.

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CHANGE OF NAME

I, No.13927153 Ex Hav Y Jagannadha Rao state that my wife name entered in my Army records as **JAYA LAKSHMI**. Her correct name as per civil documents is **YERRAMSETTY JAYA LAKSHMI**. Here onwards She will be called as **YERRAMSETTY JAYA LAKSHMI** for all practical purpose.

Name Change

I, Chagantiipati Bhadrarao, S/o late Pothuraju, R/o D.No:24-1-41, Donepudi vari Street, Bavajipet, Vijayawada, Krishna Dt, AP, India, changed my name as Chagantiipati Veerabhadrarao, for all future purposes and same has been intimated to the Public.

ప్రకటన

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Kadapa RIMS guards not paid for 10 months

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, APRIL 2

Security personnel guarding the Kadapa General Hospital are virtually starving. Salaries for them are a pittance; less than 10 thousand rupees per month. Yet, the payment for several months is pending and they're all in serious financial trouble.

Some 91 security personnel working in Kadapa RIMS have not been paid for the last 10 months. Though they brought this to the attention of the authorities and leaders, the payment is not forthcoming.

The security guards in RIMS perform various odd duties at various departments. They act as a bridge between doctors and nurses, and are also available to patients and physicians. During the Coronavirus spread, they served as frontline warriors.

Security guards say their superiors are not bothered as to how much trouble they are facing without salaries. Most security guards work on a salary of ₹8,200 per month. As many as 91 security guards are working in three shifts.

It was on August 15, 2014 that 36 security guards were sent to RIMS by the Saikrishna security agency. On completion of the agency tender in 2016, another agency, Jai Balaji, won the tender.

Following this, as many as 91 security guards were taken to various departments. The individual who took subcontract from Jai Balaji agency says he treated the security guards as his own family members. Even when he got the money late from the agency, he made it a point to pay these guards money.

- Some 91 security personnel working in Kadapa RIMS have not been paid for the last 10 months. Though they brought this to the attention of the authorities and leaders, the payment is not forthcoming.
- Security guards say their superiors are not bothered

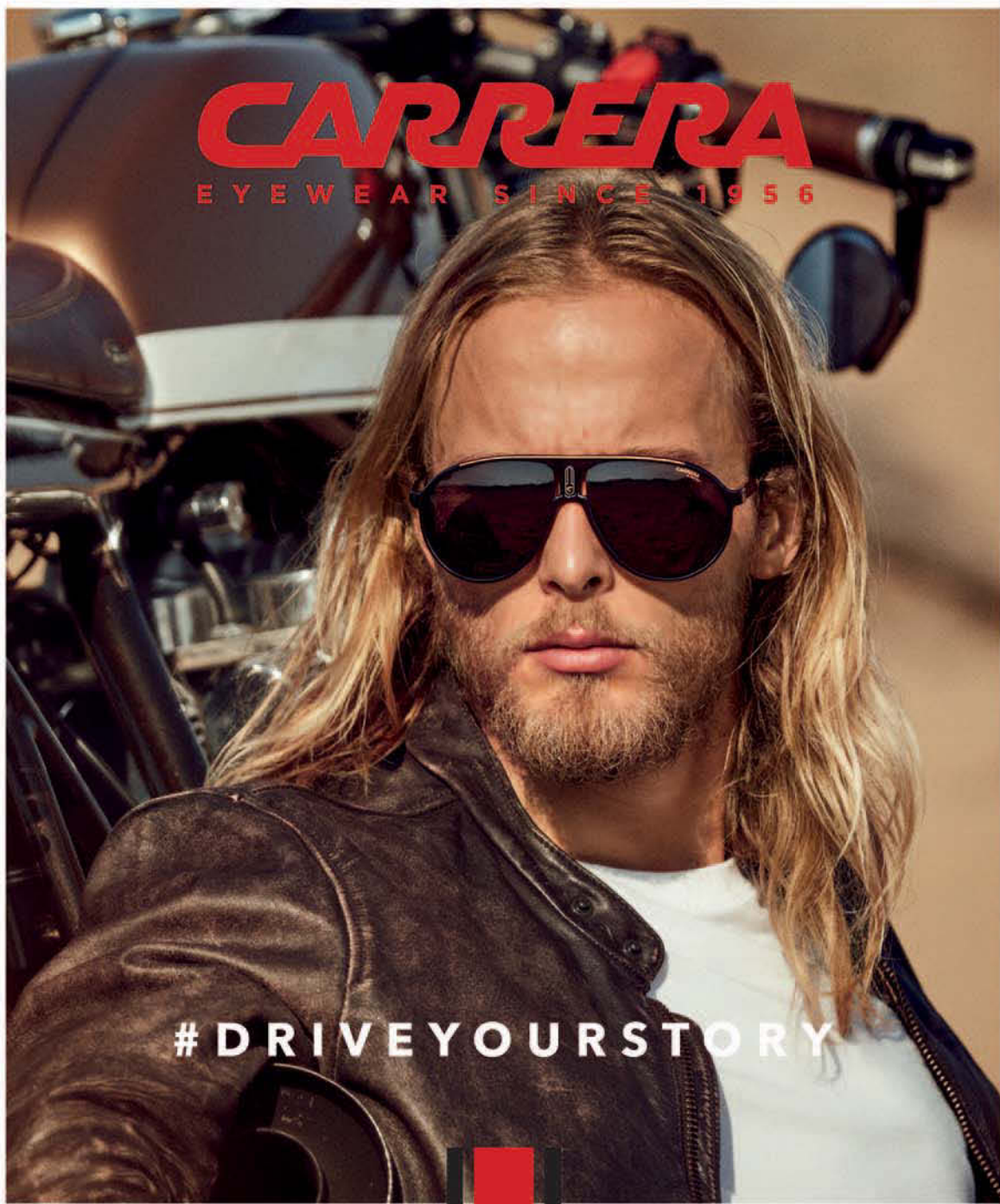
The outsourcing agency tender expired in June 2020. Trouble began for the security personnel ever since.

The guards report to the hospital superintendent. This responsibility was later transferred to the Mission for Elimination of Poverty in Municipal Areas (MEPMA).

Under the auspices of MEPMA, the Eastern Urban Women's Federation in Kadapa was entrusted with the task of management of these security guards. Their salaries were paid from December 2019 to May 2020. RIMS has not been paying salaries to security guards since June 2020.

Security guard Marasa Hari Krishna told the *Deccan Chronicle* that he had complained to all the superiors but no one cared. He said they had also reported their problem to the district collector and the RIMS superintendent. He was in tears, saying his superiors were threatening to drive him out if he made any fuss.

RIMS resident medical officer (RMO) Nallagundla Kondaiah told *Deccan Chronicle* that till March 15, 2021, the salary files of security personnel were sent to the government. The bills were pending in the treasury and the salaries would be credited to their accounts once the funds were released from there.



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DECCAN Chronicle

3 APRIL 2021

South India is different: Hopes rest on Left, DMK

Situated as they are in the peninsula, the southernmost states of India — Tamil Nadu and Kerala — go to the polls on Tuesday (April 6) to face another litmus test of their political insularity that has been instrumental in keeping national parties out or largely marginalised their roles in alliances dominated by powerful regional forces. While the Congress, facing an existential threat, is hoping to be a force to be reckoned with in Kerala while leading the LDF against the UDF, the BJP is piggybacking on the remnants of Jayalalithaa's AIADMK with the hope of gaining a foothold in the deep south.

The smaller Union territory of Puducherry, till recently ruled by Congress before it was displaced by defections engineered from the national capital, might still be the exception to the formidable image of a southern bulwark against the national ruling party since BJP has aligned with N. Ranganasamy's AINRC and AIADMK.

Puducherry, till recently ruled by Congress, might still be the exception to the formidable image of a southern bulwark against the national ruling party since BJP has aligned with N. Ranganasamy's AINRC and AIADMK

The other Dravidian major DMK has similarly reduced the seats for the Congress in its alliance of Tamil forces aiming to recapture Fort St George. An assertion of a Tamil identity might see red over the income tax raids, conducted mostly against the Opposition parties and suggesting the misuse of central agencies in a battle for votes. A preference to place M.K. Stalin, who had stayed in his father M. Karunanidhi's shadow for decades on end, on the seat of power seemed well-indicated in popularity polls till A. Raja's indiscretion changed things somewhat.

A campaign that was running smoothly enough on promises to keep the State out of NEET, fight CAA imposition as it is symbolic of a law being thrust by the Union against people's wishes and such issues may have been marginally affected by Mr Raja's references to the CM's late mother. The CM milked it for sympathy dramatically as any seasoned politician would. The larger theme of this being another prestige fight between two Dravidian majors who have given Tamil Nadu a unique outlier status in national politics was still dominant.

The Congress' fight to stay relevant in the South might hinge on a good performance from DMK+ as the prospects of the LDF benefiting from Kerala historically plumping for the alternative in five-year cycles may be denied by the impressive record of CM Pinarayi Vijayan who has steered the government with a focus on the people's welfare. The fickle nature of voters' behaviour at the EVM notwithstanding, it does appear the South India is ready to show once again that it is a different world.

Right honour, wrong timing

There is no doubt that actor Rajinikanth deserves the Dadasaheb Phalke award for his rich repertoire of celluloid marvels. He is one actor in India whose fan following is so phenomenal that even now he is an artiste much sought after in the industry. Besides, his has been a spectacular journey of 45 years in filmdom. Starting as an anti-hero, he moved up the ladder step by step to touch the pinnacle of stardom with absolute grace.

Yet if the award gave rise to some doubts, it was in the timing of the announcement. And in no way can one blame Rajinikanth for the scepticism that descended on the state. The time chosen by the BJP government to announce a momentous decision like this was monumentally flawed. You do not proclaim an admiration for an artiste's greatness out of the blue when the state is in the throes of a bitterly fought election. And that when the superstar had distanced himself from the humdrum of the same election quite consciously. So many saw a crass political motive behind the BJP government's apparent recognition of Rajinikanth's cinematic talents and contribution.

Was it all aimed at influencing the voters of Tamil Nadu, particularly those who love Rajinikanth and his films, in favour of the ruling dispensation? Did the poor crowds that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other upcountry BJP honchos drew during their campaign prompt the ruling party at the Centre to come up with an idea as brilliant as handing over a prestigious award lying in their kitty to Rajinikanth? Or did it suddenly dawn on them that there is an actor in Tamil hinterland waiting to be honoured? Whatever it was, people in Tamil Nadu congratulated their superstar from the depth of their hearts before moving on to vote for the party and leader of their own choice.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

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Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



Signs of hope in UK's Batley, as teacher triggers extremist calls

"All things vile and murderous Bacteria great and small Sent to plague and burden us, The Lord God made them all.

The Covid 19 Virus The mutant RNA Sent to kill or mire us The Lord God at his play?"

— From The Waist Band by Bachchoo

Living in Britain all these decades, I hadn't heard of the West Yorkshire town of Batley. It's now very much in the news and in the public eye because in its grammar school a teacher brought cartoons of the Prophet Muhammed, first published in the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, and displayed them to his pupils in a lesson about free speech. Without referring to Google or an atlas, I can confidently say that Batley sounds to me what one may call a mill-and-mosque town.

This definition arises from the fact that after the Second World War, the textile mills of the north of England suffered a shortage of indigenous labour and imported immigrants, in

very large number from Mirpur in "Pakistani" Kashmir and from what later became Bangladesh, to man the night shifts and settle in these towns. Thence the mosques and religion in these communities as a central, motivating and governing dimension.

Then came the government of "Iron Lady" Margaret Thatcher, which, in its thrust towards capitalistic globalisation, allowed international competition to shut down the British textile industry and devastate the coal mining sector. Bradford, Huddersfield and of course Batley suffered mass unemployment. But despite that disastrous setback four decades ago, this week's news about the protests outside the school have made public two facts which I find curious, if not encouraging.

But first, gentle reader, the story as it happened. A teacher in his late twenties, teaching religious studies to the 690 pupils of the school, warned a class that he was going to pose a moral question. He would show them a cartoon which some people would certainly find offensive. He would then tell them that because of that cartoon several people associated with the drawing of it and publishing it in a French magazine were murdered. The question

the pupils had to address was the moral rights and wrongs, the religious taboo on drawing pictures of the Prophet and the contrasting morality of murdering people who had perpetrated the cartoon.

This teacher was aware of the fact that Batley, just outside Bradford, had witnessed large-scale protests and book burnings in support of the Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie's book The Satanic Verses. Some of the 13- and 14-year-old pupils told their parents about the lesson. An irate Muslim parent expressed his objections on the phone to the teacher. Soon there was a demonstration of 50 or so people outside the school.

The headmaster immediately suspended the teacher involved. Reports said the teacher felt threatened, apologised for showing the cartoon and went into hiding to avoid being confronted or even killed.

One of the leaders of the protests, a "preacher" named Mohammed Amin Pandor, called for the dismissal of the teacher from the school and the profession. This gentleman, Pandor, is a publicity seeker. He is a graduate engineer from Dewsbury and recently issued a fatwa against the Covid-19 vaccine. He said there

were "uncertain substances in the vaccines" and that "Allah has given a definite remedy for safety from every form of harm and disease". He urged his followers to shun the vaccine and recite a certain prayer three times. In 2017, Pandor accused Ephraim Mervis, the UK's chief rabbi, of telling Jews that it was permissible to turn Christians and Muslims into sex slaves! This year he was forced to apologise to Mervis for that offensive falsehood.

Pandor has made it known in television interviews that he opposes gay marriage and even demands that the popular TV programme Strictly Come Dancing be banned. He signed a letter to the newspapers attacking an article by a Muslim police commander which was headlined "We must reclaim Islam from the extremists" and declared himself in favour of this extremism.

While the protesters insist that they will continue to picket the school until the offending teacher is permanently dismissed and even barred from the profession, over 60,000 signatures have been collected in Batley for his immediate reinstatement.

I have no way of knowing who these signatories are, their location

or their religion. Are they all non-Muslims? Or are some of them Muslims who want to reclaim Islam from the extremists?

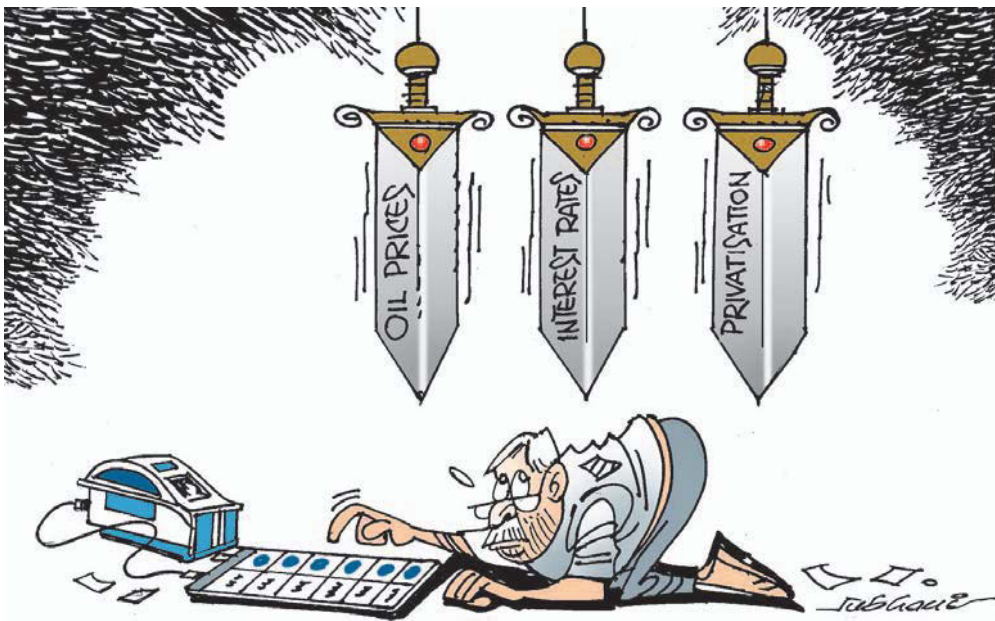
The encouraging, if curious, fact is that of the 690 pupils of Batley Grammar, 420 or so of them are "of ethnic origin". This means that the children and mostly grandchildren of the original, mostly Muslim, immigrants to Batley and Bradford have achieved the academic qualifications to gain competitive entry into this grammar school, that was founded in 1612. It implies that they are on their way to university and are guaranteed status in Britain's meritocracy.

Now 600 of the school's pupils have signed a petition in support of reinstating the offending teacher. Even if all the "non-ethnic or non-Muslim" third of the school's pupils have all signed, it still means that 330 of the "ethnic" pupils, certainly at least 300 of them from Muslim households, have taken a "liberal" attitude to the incident and the supposed offence.

Can we conclude that this generation of Batley Muslims are moving away from the extremism that their parents or grandparents clung to?

Pandor Saheb, the tide of tolerance threatens.

Subhani



Will Didi's 'dadagiri' or BJP's 'dhanda' win Bong hearts?



Shobhaa De

As I key this in on April Fool's Day, I find I have completely run out of jokes! Even those crude Covid ones. There's nothing "hahaha ... HOHOHO" out there, and even our smartest, wittiest stand-up comics are struggling to come up with quips that make us laugh about the absurdity of it all. Black humour? I'll take it! Black, purple or polka dotted — who cares? I'm up for a giggle — I mean, watching the West Bengal polls, would have been amusing had it not been this ugly. I am sick to death of Didi's *dadagiri* — and the shabby tactics adopted by the BJP to counter her! At the moment Didi is winning the Big Bully race! This is a bit too rich, given that Amit Shah is India's biggest Dada... but cracking West Bengal is not all that easy, *Amitbhai*. Analysts can trot out all the numbers, charts and graphs at their disposal. Foreign observers of Indian origin can roll into the various districts to get a feel of what they believe is the ground level reality. Most of these experts are wealthy, well-meaning public intellectuals doing their job and filing detailed reports that nobody understands. But West Bengal operates with a logic all its own that defies standard deconstruction. Only one thing can be said with a level of certainty — Bongs are for Bongs. Simple!

For a true blue Bengali, it is only other 100 per cent Bengalis who make the cut — everybody else falls into the "outsiders" classification. Being born Bengali is the biggest binder — no matter where the Bengali lives. Even those Bengalis who have been away

from West Bengal most of their adult lives, identify passionately and exclusively with the Bengalis of their home state. They live Bong. Eat Bong. Think Bong.

At the moment, opinions on the outcome of the polls vastly vary, depending on which Bengali television channel is being watched. It is commonly agreed that the "elite" English channels are not giving the polls in West Bengal sufficient importance. Meaning, they are stupid enough to believe there is life beyond Bengal, and actually flash world news. The Suez Canal crisis over Hooghly hooliganism... It goes without saying, Bengalis do not watch Hindi channels, since Hindi is as good as a foreign language. This makes it a little difficult for those not blessed by Ma Kali to be born to Bengali parents (please understand — both parents have to be Bengali... we do not accept a concept called "half Bengali"!)

As the Next Gen figured ages ago, these old stodgy families who go on and on about 'class' — may have their comical version of 'class', but no money! They're broke! Most of them ran out of dosh two generations ago.

When Didi needs funds, she doesn't waste a moment on these fine people — she goes straight to those who have the requisite lolly — the Marwaris of Kolkata. They are a pretty canny lot, and far from 'emotional'...

perity, rice and fish for life, sandesh on a daily basis — it still won't impress the Bong voter. Had all these basics mattered, West Bengal would not be where it is today — in such a monumental mess.

One has to understand the emotional quotient of the Bengali to figure out why self-punishment seems to hold such an appeal! There is no such creature as an "unemotional" Bengali! Anything can trigger off a dramatic and exaggerated outburst. Mamata Banerjee is the queen of histrionics — she knows exactly which buttons to press and when. Her timing is unbeatable and when she throws one of her infamous, mother of all public fits — wow! Playing to the galleries comes naturally to Didi — she revels in high decibel acts during which she attacks opponents using offensive, crass street language — the kind lapped up by her loyal constituency. Didi cares a flying eff for what the *bhadralok* intellectuals make of her low-level barbs. They can sniff and snort derisively for all she cares — she knows those lofty men and women are not her core supporters. She probably consoles herself at such rare moments of self-doubt, with the thought that they could not be Amit Shah/BJP fans either! Which may be about right!

The club "*kaalture*" in Kolkata is unique and specific — the members are mainly antiquated boxwallahs desperately hanging on to vestiges of the Raj, while sipping gimlets on the well-tend-

ed lawns. They have zero idea about the "other" reality. Till the shoe pinches, of course. So far, their pedicured toes have been spared. The reason being simple — these relics really don't matter to any political party! For all their inflated egos and self-importance, even Didi knows she doesn't need to court this lot.

Besides, as the Next Gen figured ages ago, these old stodgy families who go on and on about "class" — may have their comical version of "class", but no money! They're broke! Most of them ran out of dosh two generations ago. When Didi needs funds, she doesn't waste a moment on these fine people — she goes straight to those who have the requisite lolly — the Marwaris of Kolkata. They are a pretty canny lot, and far from "emotional", not being fully Bong-Bong. They are willing to play footsie with whichever *netra* can further their business interests. They had no problems getting into bed with the Commies — and flourishing. So it will be in this election as well. God knows what Amit Shah has promised the fat cats. This is how it works in Gujaland — and perhaps traditional Bongs don't quite get it. *Maar-peeet*, murders and threats, playing the communal card — all this is so passe. Didi can appease, appease, appease all she wants and say *namaz* in public five times a day to win over a large and influential Muslim votebank. But it is really the clandestine money deals, that have already been brokered (according to those who claim to be in the know!), which will be the significant game changers in this bloody battle. It's all about "bijness" and "dhanda" — something the *bhadralok* Bong-Bongs have still to master. Till the results in May — just keep watching the *khela*!

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

RAJINIKANT AWARD

Rajini is eligible and deserves the prestigious award, but the timing of its announcement on the eve of Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu hints at plans to use Rajini and his charisma to gain votes. Even MGR was bestowed with Bharat Ratna in 1988 and Bhupen Hazarika In 2019, posthumously, to gain political mileage. As a rule, no award must be bestowed prior to elections.

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

ACTORS LIFESTYLE

The so called super stars live a very audacious life with the money from cinegoers. They spend lavishly and never bother about the poor fans (*Flamboyant stars, DC, April 2*). Nobody comes to their rescue. The kind gestures of Sonu Sood, Aamir Khan, Salman Khan, etc are indelible. They helped the poor during crisis and relieved the suffering humanity to some extent. If these stars contribute we will have a healthy and happy society.

Dr Syed Sarmad
Kurnool

SCRAP PROPERTY TAX

The state is trying rob the rich and feed the poor with new property tax according to which tax would be collected based on property value. This was highlighted by the TD candidates during the recently concluded Urban body elections. But the electorate ignored it even though TD activists quoted all the three GOs (196 197 and 198). I have been criticising YSRC for distributing cash freely to various sections by raising loans. And now the rich and all those families not eligible will feel the pinch. This is just the beginning.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

PM vows job-oriented productive schemes

NEW DELHI, April. 2 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said in the Lok Sabha today that employment creation would be the first priority of her Government. All resources will be channelised to further investment activity in the public sector.

SHORT TAKES

GIRL RETURNING HOME GANGRAPED, ENDS LIFE

Meerut, April 2: A class 10 student committed suicide after she was allegedly abducted and gang-raped while on her way back from a tuition class, police said on Friday.

The girl belonging to a village under the Sardhana Kotwali area consumed poison after returning home on Thursday evening, said police adding she died in the hospital during the treatment.

Meerut's rural superintendent of police Keshav Kumar said four youths were involved in abducting and raping the girl and the police, on the basis of a suicide note left by the girl, have arrested two of the accused and have launched a manhunt to nab two others.

In her suicide note, the girl had named four men, including Lakhn and Vikas from a neighbouring village, besides two others.

Lakhn and Vikas have been arrested while the police are on the lookout for two others, the SP said.

After returning home, she narrated her woes to her parents and consumed some poisonous substance sometime later, prompting her parents to rush her to the SSD Global Hospital in Modipuram, where she died during the treatment.

NIA DETAINS 'MYSTERY WOMAN' SEEN WITH WAZE

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, APRIL 2

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has detained a "mystery woman" who was seen in the CCTV camera of a five-star hotel with Mumbai Police officer Sachin Waze.

The 'mystery woman' angle had emerged in the case on March 25, when CCTV footage of a five-star hotel showed her closely trailing Waze out of the hotel, where he had stayed for at least five days in mid-February.

Waze allegedly entered the hotel in an Innova on February 16 and left on February 20 in a Land Cruiser — both vehicles were later seized by NIA.

The agency was looking for this woman since the time the investigators saw her in CCTV footage. Finally, on Thursday night the NIA traced her location and accosted her at the Mumbai Airport and detained her. Later, a team searched her house in Thane district and was questioning her.

Initial investigation indicated that the woman was allegedly engaged in converting black money into white. According to the NIA, the woman was using currency note counting machines, one of which was found in one of the two Mercedes Benz cars used by Waze. The car was seized last month.

The NIA has claimed that Waze was running an alleged extortion racket from the room in the Nariman Point five-star hotel.

The agency has also claimed that Waze was helping a businessman to resolve some dispute and this person in turn booked the room in this hotel for Waze for 100 days at a cost of ₹12 lakh.

Waze used to check into it using a forged Aadhaar card and the fictitious name Sushant Sadashiv Khamkar. The probe also showed that Waze was operating out of room number 1964 of the hotel.

The booking was done through a travel agent by the businessman and Waze had stayed there in February while reporting for duty at the Crime Branch.

EVM transported in a private car of BJP candidate's wife, stirs violence

EC suspends four polling personnel in Ratabari (SC) for violating EVM transport protocol

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, APRIL 2

The Election Commission on Friday suspended four polling personnel in Ratabari (SC) Assembly constituency after they were found to have violated EVM transport protocol by taking a ride with a polled EVM in a private car, which they only later found belonged to a BJP candidate's wife.

Though the EVMs were found intact, the commission has decided to do a repoll at the polling booth concerned in Ratabari (SC) as precaution. The incident led to violence in Karimganj district.

The presiding officer has also been issued a show-cause notice for violation of the transport protocol and a report on the incident sought from the EC's special observer in Assam.

The polling party, after completion of polling on Thursday, was returning in a convoy escorted by an armed escort.

In all, 1,300 vehicles were returning on the national highway NH8. Combined with the inclement weather, this led to traffic congestion on the highway.

As the relevant polling party was approaching Nilam Bazaar, its vehicle broke down at about 9 pm. Due to the traffic congestion and the prevailing weather condition, the party became detached from the convoy.

The party alighted from the vehicle and called up sector officer Ajoy Sutradhar to apprise him of the snag. While the sector officer was arranging for an alternate vehicle, the polling party decided to arrange a vehicle on its own.

At about 9.20 pm, the polling party hailed a passing vehicle and boarded it along with the EVM and other things, without checking the ownership of the vehicle. As reported by the polling party, they moved towards Karimganj and as they reached Kanaishil at about 10 pm, they had to slow down in the traffic. At this point, they were surrounded by a group of about 50 people which started pelting stones at them.

Meanwhile, in an unrelated development, in what may be a major setback for the BJP, its chief campaigner and Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has been banned from campaigning for next 48-hours ahead of the third and final phase of Assembly elections, which are due on Tuesday.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K. Palaniswami during a public meeting as part of election campaign in support of their NDA alliance candidates ahead of Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, in Madurai on Friday.

DON'T NEED YOUR ADVICE, DIDI TELLS MODI

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, APRIL 2

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday dared Prime Minister Narendra Modi not to suggest her fighting from another seat in the ongoing Assembly election in the state. Exuding confidence once again of winning from Nandigram, the Trinamul Congress supremo also threatened to blacken his face while asking him to exercise his "control" on Union home minister Amit Shah alleging his provocation behind unrest.

"I do not belong to your party that you can control me and give a suggestion of fighting from another seat in the polls. When I have contested from Nandigram, I will indeed win there and blacken your face. I do not agree to work on your advice. I work on people's advice," Banerjee said at a TMC rally in Dinhat of Cooch-behar of North Bengal.

She was replying to Modi's jibe about whether she had plans to fight from another seat in fear of losing in Nandigram to her nemesis Shuvendu Adhikari of the BJP.

Modi slams LDF govt's stand on Sabarimala issue

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 2

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hit out at CPM-led LDF government in Kerala for what he called beating and harassing Ayyappa devotees during the Sabarimala agitation.

The Prime Minister, who began the last leg of his campaign for the forthcoming Assembly elections in Kerala, addressed a public meeting in Konni constituency.

Modi began his speech by chanting *Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa* a couple of times.

The Prime Minister said he was happy to be in the land blessed by Lord Ayyappa. "The devotees who come to the hill shrine observe 41 days of penance which makes this place more blessed. Ayyappa has taught us how to do good for all," he said. Modi attacked the LDF government accusing it of attempting to destroy the culture. "They carried out mischief against the devotees. Instead of welcoming them with flowers,

● **NARENDRA MODI** said that the ideology which had been rejected internationally would not be allowed to trample the country's culture.

the devotees were welcomed with lathis as if they were criminals. For decades the Left government is portraying Indian culture in poor light," he said.

The Prime Minister recollected Dr B R Ambedkar's statement that there was no role for Communism in a democracy. He said Ambedkar went on to say that "communism is like forest fire, it destroys itself and everything. But I tell you that the BJP will stand against trampling of culture." Modi said that the ideology which had been rejected internationally would not be allowed to trample the country's culture. He said the BJP would take steps to protect the Sabarimala tradition and customs.

Modi came down heavily on the ruling LDF and opposition UDF in Kerala stating that the people

were fed up with the two fronts and wanted BJP's development agenda. "People are telling the UDF and LDF enough is enough. Now they are seeking BJP and NDA's development agenda. They relate to our programmes and policies," he added.

He claimed that the entry of highly respected professionals like 'Metroman' E. Sreedharan was a game changer in Kerala politics. "A man who achieved so much over the years, who made India's progress faster yet preferred BJP as a means to serve society," he said.

Taking a dig at the Congress and CPM, he said the political picture in West Bengal was clear to everyone. "Election after election, the Congress and left are getting closer. The logical step after such closeness is a full merger of Congress and the Left. They can call the new party CCP (Comrade Congress Party)," he said.

He said the LDF government had failed to show any forward looking programmes to solve the problems of people.

DMK FRONT IS A DYNASTY CLUB, SAYS MODI

DC CORRESPONDENT KANYAKUMARI, APRIL 2

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday accused the opposition in the state of reducing itself to a dynasty club when the NDA alliance in the state is focusing on development.

The government at the Centre was working for the welfare of Indians irrespective of their caste and creed, Modi said.

Speaking at an election meeting at Agastheeswaram in Kanyakumari district on Friday, Modi said senior leaders who worked shoulder to shoulder with Kalaingar M. Karunanidhi now feel suffocated because of the presence of the 'newly-minted crown prince'.

"The same is the case with Congress leaders," Modi said referring to the increased role DMK president M.K. Stalin's son Udhayanidhi Stalin plays in the party. "The mood of the people however is against political nepotism and entitlement," the Prime Minister claimed.

Modi accused the Congress-DMK alliance of catering to the welfare of the children and grandchildren of their leaders "while the NDA has been focusing on development and people's welfare".

Kanyakumari being a coastal district which hosts one-third of Tamil Nadu's fishermen population, the Prime Minister enlisted the schemes being implemented under the Pradhan Mantri Maysya Sambada Yojana. Stating that his government is committed to implementing port-led growth by enhancing cargo handling capacity of the existing ports and creating new ones, Modi said Central government has been implementing schemes to create new fishing harbours and road connectivity between the fishing harbours to the market to enhance income of fishermen.

Referring to the ₹10,900 crore worth production linked incentive (PLI) scheme recently cleared by the Union government to boost Indian brands of food, the Prime Minister hoped that the fishing industry and fish processing units were to gain a lot by this scheme.

MEA: HOPE CHINA WILL WORK ON FULL DISENGAGEMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

India on Friday said there was a consensus with China that the "two sides should now quickly resolve the remaining issues along the (Line of Actual Control) LAC in Eastern Ladakh following the recent disengagement in the Pangong-Tso Lake area, adding that it "hopes that the Chinese side will work with us to ensure that disengagement in the remaining areas is completed at the earliest" since a "prolongation of the situation is in neither side's interest".

MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi on Friday said, "As you are well aware, after the disengagement in Pangong Lake area, we have had the 10th round of Senior Commanders meeting, a telecon between external affairs minister S. Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart and a working mechanism for consultation & coordination on India-China border affairs (WMCC) interaction on March 12. The disengagement in Pangong Lake area was a significant step forward and it has provided a good basis for resolution of other remaining issues along the LAC in Western Sector. At both the Senior Commanders meeting and the WMCC, the two sides had detailed exchange of views on the remaining issues. The two sides continue to remain in touch through military and diplomatic channels."

He added, "As EAM had pointed out to Chinese foreign minister, a prolongation of the situation is in neither side's interest. We therefore hope that the Chinese side will work with us to ensure that disengagement in the remaining areas is completed at the earliest."

INDIA CONDEMNS USE OF VIOLENCE IN MYANMAR

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

In its strongest statement yet on the situation in Myanmar, India on Friday said it "condemns any use of violence", stands for the "rule of law" and "restoration of democracy" there, even as it "urged the release of political prisoners" by the ruling military junta there which had seized power in a coup two months ago.

India said it was engaged in an effort to play a "balanced and constructive role" in response to the current situation in the north-eastern neighbour country.

On the Indian Defence Attache in Myanmar recently attending an armed forces function of the ruling Military Junta, New Delhi said Indian diplomats "continue to discharge their regular diplomatic responsibilities" and that "nothing more should be read into this attending of event by our defence attaché".

CASES | SPIKE Delhi rules out possibility of lockdown; MP imposes partial lockdown in 4 districts

Lockdown option not ruled out: Uddhav

DC CORRESPONDENTS NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba on Friday held a meeting with chief secretaries, director general police and health secretaries of all states and Union Territories, with focus on 11 states/UTs that have been reporting very high rise in daily cases and mortality because of Covid-19 in the last two weeks.

In the last 24 hours, 88,641 fresh cases of Coronavirus were reported which was highest single day spike in the last six months. There were also 711 new deaths in a day which was the highest this year so far.

As per Union health ministry, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Punjab, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Delhi, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh are reporting huge surge in daily cases and account for 84.61 per cent of the new cases.

Expressing concern over the situation, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said that the possibility of a lockdown in the state cannot be ruled out. Already curbs have been put in place in Pune where curfew has been imposed from 6 pm to 6 am for a week during which restaurants, bars and shopping malls will be closed. Thackeray said the state government has

increased testing to 2.5 lakh per day. The number of beds in hospitals too has been increased. The Chief Minister said the Covid-19 virus has mutated and become dangerous now, hence, people cannot let the guard down. He mentioned that huge crowd is being noticed in wedding and other functions. Mumbai recorded 8,648 cases and 20 deaths in a single day spike. "I cannot rule out imposing a lockdown if the current Covid-19 situation prevails. People have become complacent. We are in a catch-22 situation — should we look at economy or health? If this condition continues, I have told you

already that in 15 days we will exhaust our infrastructure. In the next couple of days, I will give out strict restrictions guidelines. But I want to also tell you that I will be speaking to many more people. I want a solution about how to break this chain. I don't want lockdown but what's the solution?" Thackeray said.

On the other hand, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said there was no possibility of a lockdown in the national capital. Addressing a digital press conference on the rising Coronavirus cases, the Chief Minister said that the Delhi government is not planning any lockdown in

the wake of the fourth wave of Corona in the national capital. If there is a need for a lockdown in the future, a decision will be taken after consultation, he said. However, the fourth wave of Coronavirus in Delhi is less serious than the previous ones as there are fewer number of deaths and hospitalisations this time, CM Kejriwal added.

Meanwhile, the Madhya Pradesh government on Friday imposed partial lockdown in four districts in the state amid surge in Covid-19 cases. Lockdown has been imposed in urban areas in the districts of Ratlam, Chhindwara, Betul and Khargone. The lockdown

will be in force in the urban areas in these districts from 10 pm on Friday till six am on April 5.

Similarly, Chhattisgarh government on Friday declared total lockdown in Durg district for nine days from April 6 in the wake of surge in Covid cases in the district. The district has reported 996 positive cases in the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi who was scheduled to campaign in Assam throughout the day on Friday had to cancel her public meetings at the last moment after her husband Robert Vadra tested positive for Covid-19.

2 militants killed in encounter in J&K

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 2

In less than 24 hours, two of the four militants involved in Thursday's attack at a BJP activist's home here and their accomplice were killed in a gunfight that took place in J&K's southern Pulwama district early Friday, the officials claimed.

At least, 11 civilians including a woman were injured in clashes with the security forces near the encounter site, the witnesses and hospital sources said. The security forces in their final assault against the militants detonated an IED to blow up the house in which they had

been holed up.

Inspector General of Police (Kashmir range), Vijay Kumar, said that prompt investigations launched into the attack on the house of BJP activist Anwar Khan in Srinagar's Nowgam area in which one policeman Rameez Raja was killed led to the arrest of a couple of persons who had provided logistic support to the assailants.

During the interrogation, the accused identified the place where the two of the four militants involved in the attack were hiding. It was a private house located in Ghat Mohalla of Kakapora area in Pulwama.

SHORT TAKES

COURT ORDERS TO HALT 'SATAN SHOE' SALES

New York: The makers of the "Satan Shoe", a collaboration with rapper Lil Nas X, have been ordered to stop selling them after Nike filed a lawsuit, according to court documents.

The sportswear giant sued MSCHF Product Studio after they released 666 pairs of black Nike Air Max 97s customized to feature a bronze pentagram, a Bible verse referring to Satan's fall, and a drop of human blood mixed with red ink in the midsole.

DOCS COMPLETE HEART SURGERY DURING HOSP FIRE

Moscow: A team of doctors successfully completed open heart surgery inside a Russian hospital that caught fire on Friday as firefighters battled the flames from the outside, regional emergency services said.

The wooden roofed building in the far eastern city of Blagoveshchensk caught fire and 60 patients were evacuated as it filled with smoke.

But a team of eight doctors performing the operation on the ground floor carried on.

"We had to save this person and we did everything," Valentin Filatov, head of the cardio surgery unit, said in an interview with state television.

JIHADIST SUSPECT BLOWS UP SELF, CHILD IN TUNISIA

Tunis: A suspected foreign jihadist blew herself and her little girl up with an explosives belt as security forces closed in in mountains of central Tunisia, the interior ministry said on Friday.

It said the child she was carrying died on the spot and another small girl was wounded Thursday as the woman detonated the belt in the remote Mount Selloum area of Kasserine near the Algerian border, a known jihadist hide-out. It said the woman's husband was also killed in the operation.

National guard and army units the same day "eliminated" Hamdi Dhoubi, a senior member of the outlawed Jund al-Khalifa, which is linked to the Islamic State (IS) group, in Mount Mghila, also in Kasserine, the ministry said in a statement.

PARAMEDIC SAYS FLOYD 'DECEASED' WHEN HE ARRIVED

Minneapolis: A paramedic testified that George Floyd was already dead when he arrived at the scene and Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who is being tried for murder, still had his knee on the neck of the 46-year-old Black man.

"When I showed up he was deceased and I dropped him off at the hospital and he was still in cardiac arrest," paramedic Derek Smith said on the fourth day of Chauvin's trial on murder and manslaughter charges.

Chauvin, 45, was captured on video kneeling on the neck of a handcuffed Floyd for more than nine minutes during Floyd's May 25, 2020 arrest for passing a counterfeit \$20 bill.

The video of Chauvin, who is white, restraining Floyd went viral and sparked protests against racial injustice and police brutality around the world. Prosecutors are seeking to prove that Chauvin's actions led to Floyd's death while the ex-officer's attorney claims that he died due to illegal drug use and underlying medical conditions.

Holy week



Archbishop of Paris Michel Aupetit carries the holy cross at the Way of the Cross ceremony during the Good Friday as part of the Holy Week celebrations, from the Sacre Coeur Basilica in Paris on Friday. — AFP

Russia massing troops: Ukraine

Kiev, April 2: President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Moscow of building up troops on Ukraine's border and his top ministers discussed the escalating security situation with Western allies.

He spoke after Ukrainian and US officials this week reported Russian troop movement in annexed Crimea and on the Russian-Ukrainian border, near territories controlled by Moscow-backed separatists.

"Muscle-flexing in the form of military exercises and possible provocations along the border are traditional Russian games," Zelensky said in a statement.

He accused Moscow of seeking to create "a threatening atmosphere" as Kiev hopes to resume a ceasefire brokered last year. This week, Moscow and Kiev blamed each other for a rise in violence between government forces and Kremlin-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, which

has undermined the ceasefire.

Zelensky said 20 Ukrainian servicemen had been killed and 57 wounded since the start of the year. The military announced Thursday that a Ukrainian soldier was wounded in an attack it blamed on separatists.

On Thursday, US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin called his Ukrainian counterpart Andriy Taran, the Ukrainian ministry said, adding that Washington said it would "not leave

Ukraine alone in the event of escalating Russian aggression".

And Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba discussed the "aggravation by the Russian Federation of the security situation" on the front-line with his Canadian counterpart Marc Garneau.

Ukraine's military intelligence accused Russia of preparing to "expand its military presence" in separatist-controlled eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions. — AFP

MYANMAR CUTS INTERNET AMID PROTESTS

Yangon, April 2: Myanmar's wireless broadband internet services were shut down on Friday by order of the military, local providers said, as protesters continued to defy the threat of lethal violence to oppose the junta's takeover.

A directive from the Ministry of Transport and Communications on Thursday instructed that "all wireless broadband data services be temporarily suspended until further notice," according to a statement posted online by local provider Ooredoo. After weeks of overnight cut-offs of internet access, the military on Friday shut all links apart from those using fiber optic cable, which was working at drastically reduced speeds.

Access to mobile networks and all wireless — the less costly options used by most people in the developing country — was blocked. The Norwegian telecoms company Telenor, one of the biggest carriers in Myanmar, confirmed it could no longer offer wireless services. It was offering fiber optic service of up to 40 megabits per second in its packages as of Friday, well below high-speed access, which is a minimum of 100 Mbps. — AP

● **ACCESS TO mobile networks and all wireless — the less costly options used by most people in the developing country — was blocked.**



Rescue workers at the site where a train derailed inside a tunnel in the mountains of Hualien, eastern Taiwan on Friday. — AFP

51 killed as train derails inside a tunnel in Taiwan

Hualien, Taiwan, April 2: At least 51 people were killed in Taiwan on Friday when a packed train collided with a vehicle on the tracks and then derailed inside a tunnel, in the island's worst railway accident in decades.

Officials said the devastating collision was caused by a railway maintenance vehicle which slipped down an embankment above the tracks near the eastern coastal city of Hualien.

"(The driver) was suspected of not pulling the parking brake tight enough so the vehicle slid 20 meters... onto the train line," Feng Hui-

sheng, deputy director of Taiwan Railways Authority, told reporters.

Local media images from the scene showed the back of a yellow flatbed truck on its side next to the train just a few metres from the tunnel entrance.

The eight-carriage train was packed with some 480 people heading down the east coast for the annual Tomb Sweeping Festival, a four-day public holiday.

The Taiwan Railways Agency said 146 passengers were sent to hospital in addition to the 51 confirmed dead.

A French national was

among those killed while two Japanese and one Macau resident were injured. One unnamed female survivor told TVBS news channel of trapped passengers — some crying out for help, others unconscious.

"There were many people pressed under the seats and others on top of those seats too," she said.

President Tsai Ing-wen visited an emergency response centre in the capital Taipei, and said investigators would get to the bottom of how such a deadly crash could have occurred. — AFP

Iran nuke talks in Vienna next week

US welcomes Iran meeting, says ready for 'mutual steps' to return to a nuclear deal

Brussels, April 2: The United States and Iran said on Friday that they would start indirect talks with other major world powers next week to try to get both countries back into an accord limiting Iran's nuclear programme, nearly three years after former President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the deal.

State Department spokesperson Ned Price called the resumption of negotiations, scheduled for Tuesday in Austria, "a healthy step forward." But Price added, "These remain early days, and we don't anticipate an immediate breakthrough as there will be difficult discussions ahead."

Trump pulled the United States out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, and President Joe Biden has said rejoining the agreement is a priority for his administration.

The Biden administration and Iran have differed on any conditions for that to happen, including the timing of the lifting of US sanctions against Iran, and the stalemate on those points had threatened to pose a major foreign policy setback for the new Biden administration.

Agreement on the start of multiparty talks — being held to get Iran and the United States over their differences on conditions for returning to the 2015 nuclear deal — came after

- Trump pulled the United States out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, and President Joe Biden has said rejoining the agreement is a priority for his administration.
- Agreement on the start of multiparty talks — being held to get Iran and the United States over their differences on conditions for returning to the 2015 nuclear deal
- In a tweet, Zarif said the aim of the Vienna session would be "rapidly finalise sanction-lifting & nuclear measures for choreographed removal of all sanctions, Iran ceasing remedial measures."

participants in the accord, including Iran. "The primary issues that will be discussed are the nuclear steps that Iran would need to take in order to return to compliance with the terms of the JCPOA, and the sanctions relief steps that the United States would need to take in order to return to compliance as well," Price said.

The United States, like Iran, said it did not anticipate direct talks between the US and Iran now. Price said the United States remains open to that idea, however. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif immediately stressed that no meeting was planned between officials from Iran and the US.

In a tweet, Zarif said the aim of the Vienna session would be "rapidly finalise sanction-lifting & nuclear measures for choreographed removal of all sanctions, followed by Iran ceasing remedial measures."

Iranian state television quoted Abbas Araghchi, Iran's nuclear negotiator at the virtual meeting, as saying during Friday's discussions meeting that any "return by the US to the nuclear deal does not require any negotiation and the path is quite clear." "The US can return to the deal and stop breaching the law in the same way it withdrew from the deal and imposed illegal sanctions on Iran," Araghchi was quoted as saying. — AFP

talks Thursday brokered by other governments that have remained in the accord, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Price said next week's talks will be structured around working groups that the European Union was forming with the remaining

S.America intensifies virus curbs

Santiago, April 2: South American nations severely tightened Coronavirus travel curbs including shutting their borders with Brazil, where infections are spiralling, as the WHO slammed Europe's "unacceptably slow" vaccine rollout.

Many European Union nations are reeling from dramatic spikes in cases that have forced the reimposition of unpopular restrictions, including in Belgium where police used water cannon to disperse thousands who had gathered in violation of Covid-19 rules.

Spikes in South America have reached alarming lev-

els, fuelled by a more contagious variant first detected in Brazil, as Chile closed all borders, Bolivia sealed its frontier with Brazil, and Peru went into a lockdown over Easter.

"We are in a very critical moment of the pandemic," Chilean government spokesman Jaime Bellolio said on Thursday, as the nation announced a border closure starting Monday. Intensive care units in Chile are close to capacity, and authorities are trying to speed up vaccinations in a bid to stem the spread of Covid-19.

Neighboring Peru started a four-day national lock-

down for the Easter weekend as it recorded its highest number of new cases since the start of the pandemic.

The country has a ban in place on all flights from Brazil, Britain and South Africa until April 15 to try and keep out the variants first detected there. Ecuador's president also announced fresh curbs against an outbreak he described as a "public calamity".

Brazil is the epicentre of the Coronavirus wave sweeping South America, reporting a staggering 66,500 Covid-19 deaths in March alone. — AFP

TECH | GENIUS

Han tested his self-driving car on the roads of Seoul in 1993

S. Korea's prof's car never took to road

Yongin, South Korea, April 2: Decades before the race to build a self-driving car became a multi-billion-dollar contest between tech giants such as Tesla and Google, a South Korean professor built an autonomous vehicle and test-drove it across the country — only for his research to be consigned to the scrapheap.

Han Min-hong, now 79, successfully tested his self-driving car on the roads of Seoul in 1993 — a decade before Elon Musk even founded Tesla.

Two years later, it drove

300 kilometres (185 miles) from the capital to the southern port of Busan, on the most heavily-travelled expressway in South Korea.

Footage from the period shows the car barreling down a highway, with no one behind the wheel. A 386-chip-powered desktop computer, complete with monitor and keyboard, is placed on the passenger seat. Han is sitting in the back, waving at the camera.

"It felt extraordinary," said the affable inventor. "The workload was very



Retired South Korean professor Han Min-hong posing next to his 21-year-old self-driving car in front of his office in Yongin, south of Seoul. — AFP

heavy," but he and his team "had an enormous passion as it was something others hadn't done yet, something that hadn't come out in the world yet".

At the time, South Korea was more focused on heavy industry, such as steel and shipbuilding, with the

average Korean not yet familiar with cellphones.

The country was yet to become the tech powerhouse it is today, and was still pursuing imitation rather than innovation. On one occasion, Han was told: "Why develop a new technology when you can always pay for it?" Han's projects were seen as dangerous.

He was once asked how much he was paying for his life insurance, he said, and whether his wife was aware of "these crazy activities of yours?" — AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,029.83	1.05
Nifty 50	14,867.40	1.20
S&P 500*	4,019.87	1.18
Dollar (₹)	73.11	0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.03	-0.26
Euro (₹)	85.99	-0.25
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,701,▲881	1.97
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.00	2.01
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.177	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.679	-0.067

* As of 8:30 PM/Thursday

IndiGo launches door-to-door baggage service

IndiGo said it has launched a door-to-door baggage transfer service in Delhi and Hyderabad in which customer luggage gets securely picked and transported from the first to the last destination. The airline said it will later launch the facility called '6EBagport', in partnership with CarterPorter, in Mumbai and Bengaluru. The facility includes a service insurance of Rs 5,000 per baggage item for the contents and container.

Suzuki Motor Gujarat's 3rd plant starts production



Suzuki Motor Gujarat Pvt Ltd (SMG), a 100 per cent subsidiary of Japan's Suzuki Motor Corporation, has commenced production from third unit at its Ahmedabad-based manufacturing facility. SMG has started production from April 2021, Maruti Suzuki India said in a filing. With production starting at the Plant C, which has an annual production ability of 2.5 lakh units, the total ability of SMG will be 7.5 lakh units, it added.

Construction of highways at record 37 km/day

Union minister Nitin Gadkari has said the pace of highways construction has touched a record 37 km per day in 2020-21. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has constructed 13,394 km of highways in 2020-21. Gadkari said these "achievements are unprecedented and have no parallel in any other country in the world". He said over the past seven years, the length of NH has gone up by 50 per cent.

ANG Lifesciences India acquires Mansa Print

ANG Lifesciences India Ltd said it has acquired Mansa Print & Publishers Ltd, which has undergone corporate insolvency resolution plan, as part of its strategic backward integration. Located at Baddi in HP, Mansa is engaged in printing and packaging business covering packaging products like cartons, corrugated boxes and aluminium foil. "The packaging cost in formulation segment is almost 15-20 per cent of the cost," it said.



Q4 imports jump 159% to 321 tonne Gold imports hit record in March

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 2

Gold imports in March touched a record 160 tonnes, surging 471 per cent compared to the same month last year. Imports in the March quarter were up by 159 per cent, as demand for the metal went up with the correction in prices.

Lower gold prices saw increased stocking up as well as retail buying, leading to imports going up to 160 tonnes last month, a Reuters report said. Value-wise, March imports grew multi-fold to \$8.4 billion from \$1.23 billion a year ago.

Even during pre-pandemic times, usual monthly imports range between 60 and 80 tonnes. According to Somasundaram PR., managing director, World Gold Council India, imports closer to 160 tonnes were recorded in 2016. "These are gross export numbers. We will have to see how much of this goes for export purposes and how



much of it is done," he said.

According to him, price correction from the all-time high levels in August and stability in prices for some time helped gold buying. Gold prices have dropped more than 15 per cent from their highs. Further, stocking up for Akshaya Tritiya has been happening at the jeweller level. Investment demand has been already high during the March quarter.

The March quarter too saw a record import of 321 tonne, which was 159 per cent higher than 124 tonnes imported in the same quarter last year.

Gold imports were 72 per cent higher in volume and 154 per cent in value during January and imports were 124 per cent up in value terms in February as well.

In February, the government had slashed import duty on gold to 10.75 per cent from 12.5 per cent. This also supported gold buying. Gold was trading at a premium in March, indicating higher demand in the market.

However, post Akshaya Tritiya, the demand in the retail market is likely to be lower and this could bring down the imports in April.

MURTHY'S CATAMARAN IN TALKS TO INVEST IN UDAAN

New Delhi, April 2: Catamaran Ventures, the private investment firm of Infosys' co-founder N. R. Narayana Murthy, is in talks to invest in B2B e-commerce platform Udaan, sources said.

Catamaran is looking at investing about Rs 80-100

crore in Udaan, and the transaction will be made through a secondary route by purchasing employees' stocks, the sources close to the development said.

In January, Udaan raised \$280 million (about Rs 2,048 crore) in funding from investors, including

Lightspeed Venture Partners, Tencent, DST Global, GGV Capital, Altimeter Capital, Octahedron Capital and Moonstone Capital. The company, which has raised \$1.15 billion in total till date, was valued at over \$3 billion post transaction.

— PTI

W. Bengal has highest share of small savings schemes

New Delhi, April 2: West Bengal, which is in the midst of a high-pitched assembly election, has the highest collection of about Rs 90,000 crore in small savings schemes, accounting for about 15 per cent of the total corpus.

It is followed by Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in terms of population, with gross collection of Rs 69,660.70 crore out of the Rs 5.96 lakh crore garnered during 2017-18 (last updated), as per data collated by the National Savings Institute under the finance ministry.

The government on Thursday revoked a steep interest rate cut on small savings schemes announced the previous night.

While the government routinely announces interest rates for small savings schemes at the end of every quarter, Wednesday's decision to cut interest rates by up to 1.1 per cent across various small savings schemes, including Public Provident Fund (PPF) and National Savings Certificate (NSC), had



come a day before the second phase of polling in West Bengal and Assam.

As per the National Savings Institute data, West Bengal has been leader in collections, with around 12-15 per cent share of the total in the last few years.

Other poll-bound states like Assam garnered Rs 9,446.37 crore, Kerala Rs 14,763.01 crore, Puducherry Rs 1,082.40 crore and Tamil Nadu Rs 28,598.18 crore during 2017-18.

Voting for the five assembly elections commenced on March 27, with Assam going to polls first and West Bengal concluding the poll season with its eighth phase of voting on

April 29. Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry will be held in a single phase on April 6. Opposition leaders have expressed apprehension that the rate cut would be imposed once the assembly elections are over.

Taking a dig at finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman after she announced that the government will withdraw orders to cut interest rate on small savings schemes, the Congress on Thursday said one can imagine the functioning of the economy when such a duly approved order affecting crores of people can be issued by an "oversight".

Senior Congress leader P. Chidambaram said when inflation is at about 6 per cent and expected to rise, the BJP government is offering interest rates below 6 per cent, hitting the savers and the middle class below the belt.

The Trinamool Congress also mocked the Centre. Derek O'Brien and Mahua Moitra called it an April's Fool joke.

— PTI

K-POP AGENCY TO BUY JUSTIN BIEBER'S AGENCY FOR \$1 BN

SHINHYE KANG & HEESU LEE APRIL 2

The Korean company that launched K-pop sensation BTS is buying for \$1.05 billion a star-studded US media group behind the careers of global stars Justin Bieber and Ariana Grande.

Big Hit Entertainment, which is changing its name to Hybe, is investing 1.07 trillion won (\$950 million) into its US unit to acquire Ithaca Holdings LLC, parent company of Atlas Music Publishing. Atlas also owns the rights to music by Brandi Carlile, Andrea Bocelli and the back catalogue of rock group Van Halen. Big Hit will pay a total of \$1.05 billion to shareholders and bondholders to purchase Ithaca, according to

a regulatory filing in Seoul.

The acquisition of Ithaca, headed by US record executive Scooter Braun, would be the first major foray into the US market for Big Hit. Braun, currently Ithaca's chief executive officer, will join the board of Hybe, and Ithaca artists will participate in the capital increase of Hybe to further strengthen the ties between the two companies.

The company helped popularise K-pop, adding to the rising global visibility of Korean entertainment such as films like "Parasite," the winner of this year's Academy Award for best picture.

BTS's "Dynamite" topped the Billboard's Hot 100 in 2020, the first Asian act to be No. 1.

— Bloomberg

Oil price: Govt escalates stand-off with Saudi

NIDHI VERMA NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

Indian state refiners are planning to cut oil imports from Saudi Arabia by about a quarter in May, in an escalating stand-off with Riyadh following Opec's decision to ignore calls from New Delhi to help the global economy with higher supply.

Two sources familiar with the discussions said the move was part of the government's drive to cut dependence on crude from the Middle East.

Indian Oil Corp, Bharat Petroleum Corp, Hindustan Petroleum Corp and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd are preparing to lift about 10.8 million barrels in May, the sources said on condition of anonymity.

State refiners, which control about 60 per cent of India's 5 million barrels per day (bpd) refining capacity, together import an average 14.7-14.8 million barrels of Saudi oil in a month, the sources said.

India imports more than 80 per cent of its oil needs and relies heavily on the Middle East.

Indian refiners could not cut April oil imports from Saudi Arabia as nominations were placed before the Opec+ decision in early March, the sources said, adding that plans for May were preliminary and final May nominations would be known in early April.

— Reuters

MFs turn equity buyers after nine-month gap

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 2



After nine months of profit-taking, mutual funds have turned net investors in the equity market in March.

Mutual funds were net buyers of equities by Rs 2,476.45 crore last month, according to data from the Securities and Exchange Board of India.

This trend reversal augurs well for the equity market, now largely supported by foreign portfolio investors and other domestic institutions like insurance, pension funds and banks.

MFs were net sellers by a humble amount of Rs 501.50 crore in equities in June 2020, but as redemptions from equity-oriented funds picked up pace from the second half of the year over the sharp market rally, they began

to offload equity assets worth above Rs 9,000 crore every month from July onwards.

Barring September (-Rs 4,134.37 crore), redemptions began to rise month by month—October (-Rs 14,491 crore), November (-Rs 30,760.07 crore) and December (-Rs 26,427.83 crore)—as market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50 began to make new highs almost every day.

But redemptions eased from January onwards to -Rs 13,031.78 crore in January and -Rs 16,306.03

crore in February, as inflows started in select mutual fund schemes.

On the fixed income side May 2020 (Rs 10,689 crore) onwards, mutual funds are investing in debt instruments, as investors, after booking profit in equity mutual funds, seemed to have reinvested the money in safer debt mutual funds.

From June onwards Mutual funds were investing upwards of Rs 20,000 crore in debt instruments—June (Rs 41,364.71 crore), July (Rs 31,897.85 crore), August (Rs 25,780.28 crore), September (Rs 17,004.97 crore), October (Rs 31,975.11 crore), November (Rs 20,349.35 crore), December (Rs 23,368.42 crore).

Debt investments by MFs moderated in January (Rs 11,831.74 crore) and February (Rs 8161.78 crore).

E-way bills touch new high in March

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 2

Around 7.12 crore e-way bills were issued in March, the highest monthly generation since its introduction in 2018.

The monthly issuance of 7.12 crore was 75 per cent higher than 4.06 crore issued in the same month last year and 11.5 per cent higher than 6.38 crore in February 2021. On March 24, 2021 alone, 27.86 lakh e-way bills were generated, which was the highest in a day in the last three years.

E-way bills had seen their lowest generation in May 2020 at 2.51 lakh. Even in April, only 84.53 lakh bills were issued. However, by June e-way bills had moved up above one crore.

Data on movement of goods on National Highways, as indicated by the FASTag and E-way bill volumes, recovered to pre-pandemic levels in September 2020. Since then, the bills have remained higher than the year-ago months.

In 2020-21, a total of 61.7

crore of bills were generated, which had come closer to 62.9 crore in FY20 despite the pandemic impact. A total of 180.34 crore e-way bills have been generated in the last three years.

E-way bills have to be generated for the movement of goods of value more than Rs 50,000, from one place to another, including multiple states. The E-way bill has helped in reducing the transport time in movement of the goods. It was launched on April 1, 2018.

ITR forms notified; option to choose new tax regime

New Delhi, April 2: The Income Tax Department has notified forms for filing I-T returns for the 2020-21 fiscal.

"Keeping in view the ongoing crisis due to Covid pandemic and to facilitate the taxpayers, no significant change has been made to the ITR Forms in comparison to the last year's ITR Forms.

"Only the bare minimum changes necessitated due to amendments in the Income-tax Act, 1961 have been made," the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said in a statement on Thursday.

The Income Tax returns (ITR) forms ask taxpayers if they are opting for a new tax regime.

"There is no change in the manner of filing of ITR Forms as compared to last year," the CBDT said.

The ITR-1 Form, however, specifies that it cannot be used by an individual for whom income tax is deferred on ESOPs. Also, taxpayers will now have to mention quarterly dividend income, for the purpose of claiming relief on payment of advance tax.

ITR Form 1 (Sahaj) and

Under the new tax regime, income up to ₹2.5 lakh is exempt from tax. Those earning between ₹2.5 lakh and ₹5 lakh will pay 5 per cent tax

ITR Form 4 (Sugam) are simpler Forms that cater to a large number of small and medium taxpayers.

Sahaj can be filed by an individual having income up to Rs 50 lakh and who receives income from salary and one house property/ other sources (interest, etc.)

Similarly, Sugam can be filed by individuals, Hindu Undivided Families and firms (other than Limited Liability Partnerships having a total income up to Rs 50 lakh and income from business and profession computed under presumptive taxation.

Individuals and HUFs not having income from business or profession (and not eligible for filing Sahaj) can file ITR-2, while those having income from business or profession can file ITR Form 3.

Persons other than indi-

vidual, HUF and companies i.e. partnerships, LLP etc, can file ITR Form 5.

Companies can file ITR Form 6. Trusts, political parties, charitable institutions etc. claiming exempt income under the Act can file ITR-7.

For the 2020-21 fiscal, the government had given taxpayers the option to choose a new tax regime under section 115BAC of the I-T Act. The new I-T slabs will be for individuals not availing or foregoing certain specified deductions or exemptions while computing total income for tax purpose.

Under this, annual income up to Rs 2.5 lakh is exempt from tax. Those individuals earning between Rs 2.5 lakh and Rs 5 lakh will pay 5 per cent tax. Income between Rs 5 lakh and 7.5 lakh will be taxed at 10 per cent, while those between Rs 7.5 and 10 lakh at 15 per cent.

Those earning between Rs 10 and 12.5 lakh will pay tax at the rate of 20 per cent, while those between Rs 12.5 and Rs 15 lakh will pay at the rate of 25 per cent. Income above Rs 15 lakh will be taxed at 30 per cent.

— PTI

No plans to exit India biz: Franklin Templeton



New Delhi, April 2: Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund on Friday said its commitment to India remains 'steadfast' and the fund house has no plans to exit its operations in the country.

This comes following media reports suggesting intervention by the fund house's US-headquartered parent seeking the diplomatic route for a "just and fair" hearing by market regulator Sebi in the investigation pertaining to six wound-up debt schemes.

The reports said Franklin Templeton had threatened to exit India if it was not given a fair hearing.

In a letter to investors, Franklin Templeton Asset Management (India) Pvt Ltd president Sanjay Sapre said, "we have no plans to exit our India business. Any speculation suggesting otherwise, or any rumours around sale of business in India are incorrect and simply that-rumours".

He reiterated that Franklin Templeton's commitment to India remains steadfast.

The fund house had closed six of its debt funds in April 2020, citing redemption pressures and lack of liquidity in the bond markets.

These schemes together had an estimated amount of over Rs 25,000 crore assets under management. In a statement, the fund house on Friday said its six shut schemes have received Rs 15,776 crore from maturities, prepayments and coupon payments since closing down in April 2020.

"The six schemes have received total cash flows of Rs 15,776 crore till March 31, 2021 from maturities, coupons and prepayments since winding up," the fund house.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES



G. Sai Karteek Reddy poses with his trophies in Hyderabad on Friday.

Double delight for Karteek

Hyderabad: G. Sai Karteek Reddy made it a grand double by adding the men's singles title to his doubles trophy won on Thursday at the All India National Ranking Tennis tournament held at Lake View Tennis Academy in Hyderabad. The Telangana player defeated proved too good for Dheeraj Kodancha in the final, defeating his opponent from Tamil Nadu in straight sets at 6-2, 6-2. Earlier in the semifinals, Karteek hemmed in Hevanth 6-1, 6-3. In the quarterfinals, Karteek got past Sivadeep Kosaraju with a 7-5, 6-4 scoreline.

The Hyderabad player was stretched in the second round though, and had to come back from behind before overcoming Vineet M 6-7, 6-1, 6-0. The first round against Ajinkya Nanasaheb of Maharashtra was relatively easy as the 6-3, 6-2 suggests.



M. Manogyna



T. Sri Pranav

Manogyna and Pranav champs

Hyderabad: T. Sri Pranav and M. Manogyna emerged boys and girls winners respectively at the AITA Championship Series Under 16 tournament at Sania Murtuzaguda, Hyderabad, on Friday.

In the boys final, Pranav prevailed over Chris Hamilton Ross 6-4, 2-6, 6-1 while Manogyna defeated Rithika Kakarlamudi 7-6 (7-4), 6-2 in the girls title round.



Nikhil Saridena (left) receives the World Autism Awareness Tennis Tournament winner's trophy from chief guest G. V. Krishna as Sports Village CEO Mohammad Shamsuddin (right) looks on at Noor Tennis Academy in Hyderabad. Nikhil beat Bhavani Kedia 6-4, 7-6 (10-8) in the final.

Rahul, Aditya in joint lead

Hyderabad: Rahul Srivathsav and Aditya Varun Gampa are in joint lead with five points each after the fifth round of the Telangana State Senior Fide Rated Chess Championship being organised by Telangana State Chess Association at Lal Bahadur Stadium here. Following them are Shaati Majumder, Shanmukha Pulli, Rajashekar B, Sushanth Kamabathula, Khire Ishan, Krishna Karthik N, Kheerthi Ganta and Raghav Srivathsav with 4.5 points each. **Fifth round (selected results):** Aravind PVS (4) lost to Rahul Srivathsav (5), Aditya Varun Gampa (5) bt Sarath Chandra (4), Khire Ishan (4.5) drew with Shanmukha Pulli (4.5), Shaati Majumder (4.5) drew with Rajashekar B (4.5), Dhruva Thota (3.5) lost to Raghav Srivathsav (4.5), Teerthala Abhinav (3.5) lost to Keerthi Ganta (4.5).

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Chelsea vs West Brom from 5 pm; Leicester City vs Manchester City from 10 pm; Arsenal vs Liverpool from 12.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1, Star Sports Select 1

Italian League: Torino vs Juventus from 9.30 pm on Sony Ten 2

KNIGHTS GEAR UP

KKR desperate to turn fortunes post tough transition

Kolkata, April 2: Two-time IPL champions Kolkata Knight Riders will be striving for consistency in their bid to recreate old magic which has been lost during a difficult phase of rebuilding after Gautam Gambhir's departure.

Be it the opening combination, middle-order or finding a finisher, KKR struggled for stability in the last edition in the UAE, while a change of captaincy at the halfway stage did not help them either.

Here's a SWOT analysis of the side that will take on Sunrisers Hyderabad in their season-opener in Chennai on April 11.

STRENGTHS

In Eoin Morgan, his first stint as full-time KKR captain, the Purple Brigade have got one of the most astute brains of the white-ball format.

The English World Cup-winning skipper was one of the brightspots for the team in 2020.

KKR have made some smart additions to their squad in the mini-auction, apart from retaining their core of the side — 17 players — despite a disappointing season.

By bringing back Shakib-Al-Hasan and Ben Cutting, they have got the much-needed back-ups for the Windies duo of Narine and Russell, who failed to fire last season.

KKR will also be buoyed by the smash-hit international debut of Prasad Krishna, who took 4/54 in the first ODI against England in the recently-concluded series. This would also mean KKR would have a settled pace attack spearheaded by Pat Cummins with Lockie Ferguson as back-up.

WEAKNESSES

Once their strength, KKR of late has struggled in the spin department. Kuldeep Yadav is a shadow of his past and returned with just one wicket in



Dinesh Karthik of Kolkata Knight Riders plays a shot during a net practice session on Thursday ahead of the upcoming edition of Indian Premier League. — Twitter

five matches, of which he was not given the ball in one. One of the architects of their twin triumphs in 2012 and 2014 under Gambhir, Sunil Narine is also floundering. It was another mystery spinner, Varun Chakravarthy a Tamil Naud architect-turned-cricketer who took up the responsibility in Narine's absence but his fitness has come under the scanner time and again as it remains to be

seen how he shapes up for the IPL.

OPPORTUNITIES

Having decided to step away from being captain to "focus on his batting", Dinesh Karthik too will look to make amends in 2021. Then there are the seasoned duo of Shakib-Al-Hasan and Harbhajan Singh who too will look to make most of the limited opportunities that come their way on slow tracks on offer in Delhi and

Chennai. KKR have two interesting uncapped new signings in Venkatesh Iyer and Vaibhav Arora, who too will look to grab opportunities.

THREATS

KKR would need good start from opener Shubman Gill to give better starts this year in the Powerplay overs. Gill consumed a lot of deliveries upfront in most games which did create pressure on middle-order. — PTI

SHREYAS TO BE OPERATED ON THURSDAY

Mumbai, April 2: India batsman Shreyas Iyer is set to undergo a surgery on April 8 for his shoulder injury which had ruled him out of the last two ODIs against England and the IPL.

The 26-year old Iyer had suffered the injury during the first ODI against England in Pune on March 23 when he dived on a drive hit by Jonny Bairstow off pacer Shardul Thakur. "Shreyas will get operated on April 8 for his shoulder injury," a source said. Iyer is likely to be out of action for a minimum of four months. He had signed up with Lancashire but now is unlikely to play for the English county side in their one-day tournament starting on July 23. — PTI

Sachin hospitalised as a precautionary measure

Mumbai, April 2: Former India captain and batting icon Sachin Tendulkar has been hospitalised as a precautionary measure, six days after he tested positive for Covid-19.

The 47-year-old took to Twitter to announce the development on Friday. "Thank you for your wishes and prayers. As a matter of abundant precaution under medical advice, I have been hospitalised. I hope to be back home in a few days. Take care and stay safe everyone," Tendulkar wrote. Tendulkar had tested positive for the dreaded infection on March 27 and was in home isolation ever since. "He is doing fine and has been admitted for normal (course of) treatment," a source close to Tendulkar



Thank you for your wishes and prayers. As a matter of abundant precaution under medical advice, I have been hospitalised. I hope to be back home in a few days. Take care and stay safe everyone. — SACHIN TENDULKAR cricket legend

said. The batting great, who was part of India's historic World Cup win in 2011, also wished his teammates on the 10th anniversary of the victory.

"Wishing all Indians & my teammates on the 10th anniversary of our World Cup win," he tweeted.

Besides Tendulkar, former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan, his elder

brother Yusuf and S Badrinath — all of whom had recently participated at the Road Safety World Series Challenge — have so far announced that they have tested positive for Covid-19.

Tendulkar had led the Indian team to victory in the veteran's tournament in Raipur where crowds were allowed inside the stadiums. — PTI

Turning the tide



State Sports Minister V. Srinivas Goud (centre) and Sports Authority of Telangana State chairman Allipuram Venkateshwar Reddy (left) congratulate swimmer Goli Shyamala, the first Telugu woman to swim the Palk Strait between India and Sri Lanka.

Babar belts ton as Pakistan win

Centurion (South Africa), April 2: A century by Babar Azam set up a three-wicket, last-ball win for Pakistan in the first One-Day International against South Africa at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Friday.

The Pakistan captain hit a stroke-filled 103 off 104 balls but his dismissal started a collapse in which fast bowler Anrich Nortje took four wickets in four overs.

Rassie van der Dussen hit 123 not out, his maiden international century.

But South Africa's total of 273 for 6 did not seem enough as Babar and Imam-ul-Haq (70) put on 177 for Pakistan's second wicket, taking them to within 88 runs of victory with 18.2 overs left before Babar was caught behind off Nortje.

● **Babar Azam hit a stroke-filled 103 to lead his side to a three-wicket win in the first ODI against South Africa.**

Four wickets fell for 17 runs. Mohammad Rizwan and Shadab Khan steadied the innings in a partnership of 53 but both were dismissed in the closing overs before Faheem Ashraf hit the winning run off the final ball. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

■ South Africa 273 for 6 in 50 overs (Rassie van der Dussen 123 not out, D. Miller 50) lost to Pakistan 274 for 7 in 50 overs (Babar Azam 103, Imam-ul-Haq 70, Mohammad Rizwan 40, Anrich Nortje 4/51).

Barty on a roll, in Miami final

Miami, April 2: World No.1 Ashleigh Barty bucked the upset trend at the Miami Open on Thursday, rolling into the women's final as men's second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas was toppled by Hurbert Hurkacz.

Australia's Barty fired 27 winners in a 6-3, 6-3 victory over fifth-seeded Ukrainian Elina Svitolina to return to the title match of a tournament she won when it was last held in 2019.

Barty will face Canada's Bianca Andreescu, who reached her first final since winning the 2019 US Open title by beating Greece's Maria Sakkari in three sets, 7-6 (9/7), 3-6, 7-6 (7/4).

Barty has gone from strength to strength since saving a match point in her opening victory over Slovakian qualifier Kristina Kucova.

"Every single match I felt like I've done something a little bit better, and that's all you can ask," said Barty.

But Greece's Tsitsipas was left trying to explain a "self-explosion" after he squandered a commanding lead in a 2-6, 6-3, 6-4 quarterfinal loss to 26th seed Hurkacz of Poland — the

latest in a string of upsets that saw men's top seed Daniil Medvedev and No. 3 Alexander Zverev bow out along with women's No. 2 Naomi Osaka.

Tsitsipas admitted it was a crushing outcome in a tournament where the absences of superstars Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer and his own recent solid form seemed to offer him a chance to shine.

Tsitsipas exited the tournament after a tense encounter that saw the 22-year-old Greek given a time violation after the second set for taking too long to change his shirt and headband.

The World No.5 was also reportedly involved in a tense exchange with officials before the match after refusing to share a golf cart with Hurkacz used to ferry players to the court.

There was no sign that incident had unsettled Tsitsipas early on, however, as he dominated a one-sided first set to win 6-2.

Tsitsipas then quickly broke Hurkacz at the start of the second on the way to a 2-0 lead. But just when it appeared the match was heading for a brisk conclusion, Hurkacz finally found his range. — AFP

Windies set 377 for SL on Day 5

North Sound (Antigua and Barbuda), April 2: In an almost exact reversal of roles from the first Test, Sri Lanka will go into the final day of the second and final Test having been set a challenging target of 377 after the West Indies declared their second innings at 280 for four on the fourth day on Thursday.

A week earlier the Caribbean side batted through the last day at the same venue to ensure a draw after being set 375 to win. Now it will be the visitors heading to the final morning at 29 without loss after the opening pair of Lahiru Thirimanne and captain Dimuth Karunaratne navigated nine overs to the close.

For the second time in four years Kraigg Brathwaite missed out on

the rare feat of centuries in both innings of a Test when he was dismissed for 85 as the West Indies skipper was again the fulcrum of his team's second innings effort.

Having occupied the crease for eight-and-a-half hours Brathwaite was more energetic second time around with his team looking to set a declaration.

Nevertheless his five hours at the crease in which he faced 196 balls and struck only four boundaries was again typical of his phlegmatic manner. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

Day 4, stumps: West Indies 354 & 280/4 decl in 72.4 overs (K. Brathwaite 85, J. Holder 71 not out, S. Akmal 2/62) vs Sri Lanka 258 in 107 overs (P. Nissanka 51, K. Roach 3/58).

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