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WINDOWS
Sophia's artworks are displayed at Hanson Robotics studio in Hong Kong on March 29. Sophia is a robot of many talents -- she speaks, jokes, sings and even makes art. In March, she caused a stir in the art world when a digital work she created as part of a collaboration was sold at an auction for \$688,888 in the form of a non-fungible token

India's vaccine endeavour truly a 'Vaccineyaan'

NEW DELHI: India's vaccine endeavour in fighting the novel coronavirus can truly be termed 'vaccineyaan' because it is going all over the world, Department of Biotechnology Secretary Renu Swarup said on Saturday. She said India has had its revolutions in the areas of space and atomic energy where it gained excellence, and similarly its vaccine endeavour is a revolution in the biotechnology sector, she stressed. "This is definitely a moment where it's the scientific revolution that we can bring in. It exhibits the scientific revolution. We have had the space revolution. We have had our strengths in atomic energy. This is truly the science, the biotechnology, that revolution which has come out. We can surely call it our vaccine moment of the year or the Vaccineyaan or whatever you may call it," she told a science news portal. The DBT has played a key role in the vaccine rollout by taking key measures like developing infrastructure for clinical trials and giving the necessary help to vaccine manufacturers. She said the endeavour is not just limited to vaccines but it shows the overall science and technology strength.

Bangladesh to impose 7-day nationwide lockdown

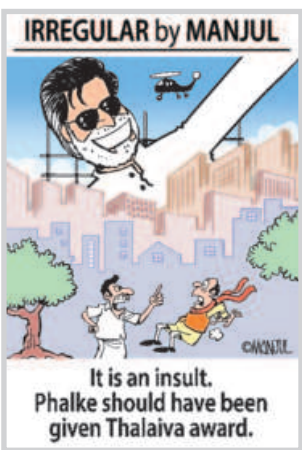
DHAKA: The Bangladesh government on Saturday decided to impose a week-long nationwide lockdown from Monday as COVID-19 cases and deaths surged across the country. Road Transport Minister Obaidul Quader made the announcement at a media briefing in Dhaka on Saturday as the country recorded 58 coronavirus deaths and 5,683 new cases overnight, third highest in terms of both fatality and infection since the pandemic broke out in March last year. "The government is going to enforce a nationwide lockdown from Monday initially for a week as the spread of coronavirus increases," Quader, also the general secretary of the ruling Awami League, said.

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It is an insult. Phalke should have been given Thalaiva award.



CoronaviRUSH

India records 89,129 fresh cases

Also registers 714 deaths, highest in 6 months

NEW DELHI: INDIA on Saturday recorded 89,129 new Covid-19 cases in a day, the highest daily rise in around six-and-half-months, taking the nationwide tally of infections to over 1.23 crore, according to the Union Health Ministry data on Saturday. The death toll also increased to 1,64,110 with 714 more fatalities in a day, also the highest since October 21. The jump in cases reported on Saturday was the highest since September 20 last year when 92,605 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours. Corresponding to the rapid surge in cases, the number of active cases too have registered a steady increase for the 24th day in a row with the tally reaching 6,58,909, which is 5.32 per cent of the total infections. The recovery rate has further dropped to 93.36 per cent, the data stated. The active caseload was the lowest at 1,35,926 on February 12 and comprised

8 States witness steep rise

Account for 81.42% of single-day infections

NEW DELHI: EIGHT states witnessed a steep rise in daily new Covid-19 cases and accounted for 81.42 per cent of the infections reported on Saturday, the Union Health Ministry said. These eight states are Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh. India's tally of Covid-19 active caseload also increased to 6,58,909 and now comprises 5.32 per cent of the total infections. In a day, there has been a net rise of 44,213 active cases. Ten districts -- Pune, Mumbai, Nagpur, Thane, Nashik, Bengaluru Urban, Aurangabad, Delhi, Ahmednagar and Nanded -- account for 50 per cent of the total active caseload of the country. Maharashtra has shown a nine-fold jump, the maximum increase in the number of active cases in the last two months. In percentage terms, Punjab has reported the maximum increase in active cases.

Covid 2nd wave may peak by mid-April

NEW DELHI: Scientists have predicted using a mathematical model that the ongoing second-wave of Covid-19 pandemic across the country could peak by mid-April, following which the infections may see a steep decline by the end of May. During the first wave of Covid infections across India, the mathematical approach, named SUTRA, predicted that the initial surge of infections in August would peak by September and lower in February 2021.

crore mark was breached on December 19 last year. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), 24,69,59,192 samples have been tested for Covid-19 up to April 2 with 10,46,605 of them being tested on Friday.

Italy enters strict 3-day lockdown over Easter

ROME: Italy has entered a three-day strict nationwide lockdown to deter Easter travel and help prevent new surges of the coronavirus. Even though the Health Ministry says the rate of infections is coming down, all regions were placed into the strictest "red zone" lockdown through Monday as a precaution. The lockdown, announced last month, means restrictions on personal movement, with limited travel and visits to relatives. Non-essential shops are closed and restaurants and bars are only open for take-out. Police set up road checks to ensure people were staying close to home. Extra patrols were ordered up to break up large gatherings in squares and parks, which over Easter weekend are usually packed with picnic goers. Italy, where the European outbreak began, has recorded 3.6 million cases and more than 110,000 deaths from the coronavirus, more deaths than any other European country but Britain.



5 jawans killed in C'garh encounter

3 Naxals also gunned down

RAIPUR: AT least five jawans were killed and 20 injured in a fierce encounter between security forces and Naxals in the Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh on Saturday. The forces also gunned down three Naxals, including a woman operative, and recovered a rifle. Sources say the Naxals fired upon a joint party of the CRPF and the DRG, following which the encounter started in the Silger forest of Bijapur's Tarem. The joint party comprised of nearly 400 personnel of the STF, DRG, CRPF and COBRA that were out for an anti-Naxal operation. "The personnel belonging to the CRPF's elite unit CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action), the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and the Special Task Force (STF) were involved in the operation," Chhattisgarh Director General of Police DM Awasthi said. Nine ambulances have been rushed to the encounter site in Tarem, Bijapur and two MI-17 helicopters have already reached the spot to provide help. On March 23, five DRG personnel were killed when Naxals blew up a bus carrying security personnel with an IED in Narayanpur district. Earlier this week, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) arrested three Naxals for planting explosives to target security forces in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district.

₹26.50 lakh withdrawn from Waze's joint a/c after arrest: NIA

MUMBAI: The NIA has found that an amount of Rs 26.50 lakh was withdrawn from the joint bank account of Sachin Waze and his aide on March 18, five days after the Mumbai police officer was arrested for his alleged role in planting an explosives-laden SUV outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani's home on February 25, the court was told on Saturday. Without naming Waze's accomplice, the National Investigation Agency said certain "incriminating material" was also taken out by someone from the joint locker of Waze and his aide, who is a suspect in the case, from a bank located in Versova area in Mumbai. The special court extended the custody of Waze till April 7 after the investigating agency told the court that it had recovered "incriminating material" including laptops, DVRs (Digital Video Recorders), a CPU etc, in a damaged condition, during the probe and they need to be examined.

NGT DIRECTS DELHI CS TO RESOLVE SDMC-DJB DISPUTE

PURNA SINGH NEW DELHI: THE National Green Tribunal has directed the Delhi chief secretary to resolve the dispute between South Delhi Municipal Corporation and the Delhi Jal Board over supply of water through tankers. A been headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel said the issue can be better resolved at the higher level in the administration, considering all practical considerations, including availability of funds and need for conserving scarce resource of drinking water. "Accordingly, we dispose of the application by directing the Chief Secretary, Delhi to look into the matter and take appropriate decision in the matter, following due process of law," the bench said. The tribunal's direction came on a plea filed by South Delhi Municipal Corporation contending that the Corporation is maintaining 6822 parks. It was having borewells for irrigation of the parks which have been sealed as per order of the tribunal. Continued on Page 4

Maha promotes all students in Class I-VIII

MUMBAI: In a significant move, the Maharashtra government has decided to promote all students studying in Class I to Class VIII without any exams to the next level, School Education Minister Varsha Gaikwad announced here on Saturday. "In view of the ongoing situation due to Covid-19, all state board students across Maharashtra state from Class 1st to Class 8th will be promoted to the next class without any examinations," Gaikwad said.

Back in India... 4 astronauts to stay on busy training schedule

BENGALURU: THE four Indian astronauts returned to India last month after completing their training in Russia and will undergo different kinds of training here, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief K Sivan said. "They had landed in India on March 28. The four astronauts will undergo space mission specific training in India," Sivan said. The four Indian astronauts were training since February 2020 at the Gagrin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GTC) belonging to Glavkosmos which is a subsidiary of Russian space corporation Roscosmos. According to Sivan, the four astronauts will continue to train till they board the Indian space module. The Rs 10,000 crore Indian human space flight mission is called Gaganyaan. Queried about the training regime here, Sivan said: "The astronauts will have their physical fitness training that includes swimming, jogging. They will also have academic/theoretical classes as they have to understand the rocket, and the human space module." "They will also be trained on simulators. The Gaganyaan module navigation terminals will be simulated. The astronauts will be trained on various parameters that will be displayed on the terminals," he added. The astronauts will later work on the Gaganyaan module as if they are flying. "These apart, the astronauts will be trained on survival techniques so that they can survive in the sea as their landing module will land on the sea waters," Sivan said. Continued on Page 4

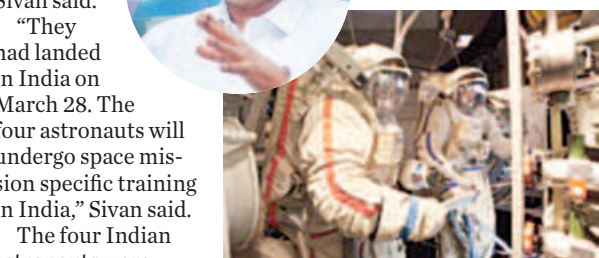
Home where no cow is turned away

PURNA SINGH NEW DELHI: FRIEDERIKE Irina Bruning, a 63-year-old German woman, who is popularly known as Sudevi Mataji, has been a pioneer and a source of inspiration for all those people who wish to serve animals. Her focus is on caring for cows that are not cared for by society: The sick, injured and handicapped cows that -- despite being so dear to the Lord -- are homeless and deeply suffering. Everyday people bring cows to her door, and she never turns them away. She had left no stone unturned to look after the cows which have been abandoned, or sick or have been left behind on the street loitering around. She has showcased the world that empathy needs no boundary, gender or language. Being a German citizen she came to India and started "Radha Surabhi Gaushala Niketan" in 1996 for stray cows. The Gaushala is spread across 3,300 sqyd. Currently, there are 90 workers and 1,800 sick cows which are being nursed. Continued on Page 4



Straight from Mataji's heart

What are the most common issues you've faced in doing charity? The biggest issue is people lack the feeling of genuine 'Seva Bhav.' Most of the people are out for earning profit and not to do seva - but trying to do seva on a greater scale without others joining in is like swimming against the stream - very tiring. What system have you created to take care of these animals after you? Who will take care of my cows and calves after me I don't know. But I am sure Thakurji will provide the right person just as God has provided me with everything else.



GHMC goes back on tax rebate promise

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

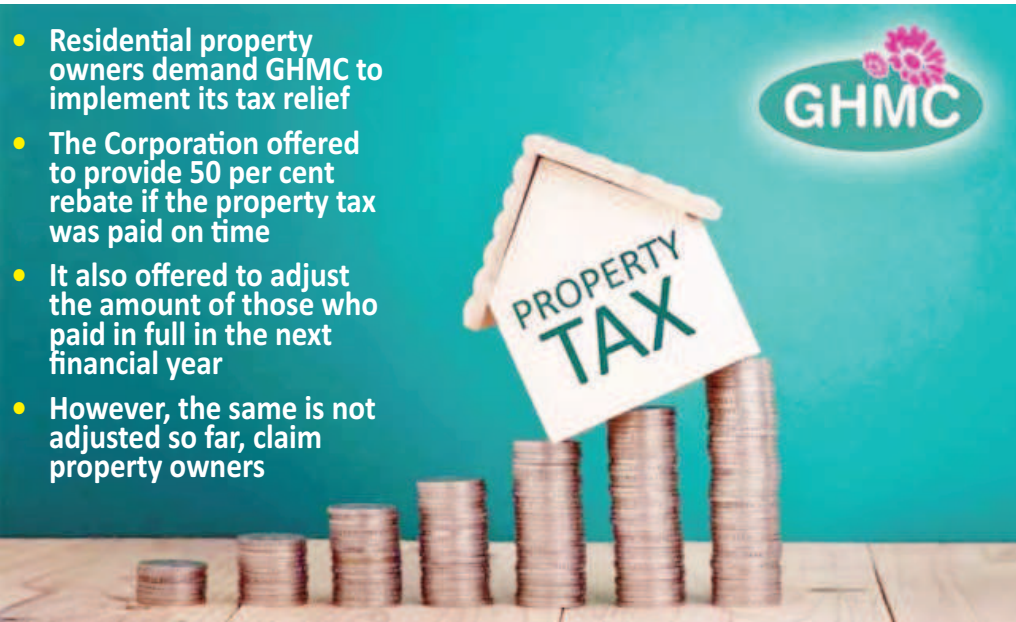
SEVERAL property owners in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) area are unable to avail the tax rebate offered by the municipal corporation as the civic body failed to keep its promise.

According to BT Srinivasan, General Secretary, United Federation of Residents Welfare Association (UFERWAS), the residential property owners in GHMC limits have been given 50 per cent tax rebate in the month of November against annual property tax of up to Rs 15,000 for the financial year 2020-21.

He said that the GHMC assured that if the owners in residential category already paid the full tax, 50 per cent of relief would be adjusted in the next financial year. However, the same was not adjusted as on date.

Srinivasan said that as a result when the residential property owners wanted to pay their property taxes for the current year, "they were shocked to see that the tax demand for the current year was showing up in full with-

- Residential property owners demand GHMC to implement its tax relief
- The Corporation offered to provide 50 per cent rebate if the property tax was paid on time
- It also offered to adjust the amount of those who paid in full in the next financial year
- However, the same is not adjusted so far, claim property owners



out making any adjustment of the 50 per cent relief as promised."

He said the residential property owners have paid the full amount of property tax in the month of April, for the financial year 2020-21 under early bird scheme. Later, in the November, the GHMC had announced 50 per cent relief in the

property tax. Following this, the UFERWAS sought a clarification from the officials of the civic body. In turn, "We were assured that the 50 per cent relief would be adjusted in the next financial year for all those who have paid the full amount of property tax," he added. But, to the dismay of the residents,

now they have been asked to pay the property tax in full for the current financial year without making any adjustment as assured. Against this backdrop, the UFERWAS has wrote a letter to the GHMC commissioner DS Lokesh Kumar to take necessary action on the issue.



Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao presenting a memento to Union Civil Aviation Secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola during his visit to the State at Pragati Bhavan in Hyderabad on Saturday

KCR requests Centre to speed up sanctioning of airstrips

THESE AIRSTRIPS TO COME AT SIX PLACES IN THE STATE

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao has requested the Civil Aviation Ministry to expedite the process of sanctioning airstrips in Telangana State.

Union Civil Aviation Secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola met the Chief Minister at Pragati Bhavan on Saturday evening.

The meeting between the Chief Minister and the central official assumed significance following the Telangana government's decision to set up airstrips in six places - Mamunur in Warangal district, Basant Nagar in Peddapalli district, Adilabad district headquarters, Palvoncha in Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district, Jakranpalli in Nizamabad district and at Devarakadra in

Mahabubnagar district.

During the meeting, the CM has requested the Civil Aviation Secretary to take steps to expedite sanction of airstrips. Earlier, the State government has already appealed to the Centre in this regard. Pradeep Singh assured Rao that the matter would be taken up and would work for speedy sanction of airstrips.

Call centre set up for corona-related queries

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

MINISTER Eatala Rajender said a call centre was being set up again to help people provide instructions and information about home isolation. He also said that isolation centres in the entire district would be set up again. The helpline number would be announced shortly.

Liquid oxygen and other essential amenities would also be made available in all centres without a shortfall.

The Health Minister said that all the hospitals which provided corona treatment in the past would provide Covid-19 treatment again. He conducted a review meeting with officials on the rise of coronavirus cases in the State and took decisions.

Alerting people about the rapid spread of corona cases, the Minister suggested of getting out of home only if it was too important and appealed to avoid coming out if not necessary. Speaking on the corona situation in the State, Eatala said that corona cases have



- Helpline numbers to be announced shortly
- Health Minister Eatala Rajender conducts review meeting with officials on the rise of coronavirus cases in the State

also been increasing in rural areas. The virus is at a peak in neighbouring States Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and people should be vigilant, the Health Minister said. Elaborating about vaccination, Eatala said frontline warriors, other health workers and people aged 60 and above 45 with comorbidities were already vaccinated. Currently, citizens above 45 years of age are being vaccinated, he added.

Facelift for 29 ULBs in RR, Medchal-Malkajgiri on the anvil

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

THE 29 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), including municipalities and municipal corporations, in the Rangareddy and Medchal-Malkajgiri districts will soon have many infrastructure and development works so as to provide basic amenities.

Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar on Saturday held a teleconference with the concerned heads of the departments on integrated development of municipalities and corporations in Rangareddy and Medchal-Malkajgiri districts from BRKR Bhavan. The Chief Secretary asked the officials to prepare the status of municipalities on infrastructure and amenities like drinking water, sewage, roads, dumping yards, integrated vegetable and meat markets, situation of power in terms of transformers, sub-stations, police stations etc.

The Chief Secretary directed all the heads of the departments



Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar conducting a teleconference with the municipal officials in Hyderabad on Saturday

- Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar asks the officials to prepare the status of municipalities on infrastructure and amenities
- Says special focus should be laid on developing infrastructure like roads, drinking water, drainage, markets, Basthi Dawakhana etc
- Cyberabad and Rachakonda police commissioners asked to prepare action plan for establishment of new police stations in the said ULBs
- Chief Minister along with Ministers, MPs, MLAs, MLCs of the area will review the plans and give final nod

to prepare requirements keeping in view of future growth in all the 29 ULBs falling in the

said districts. He said that special focus should be laid on developing infrastructure like

Mailardevpally murder: Six accused arrested

HANS NEWS SERVICE
MAILARDEVALLY

SIX accused persons involved in the murder of a man under Mailardevpally police station on Thursday were arrested by the Cyberabad police on Saturday. The accused were identified as Yaseen Khan, Md Adnan, Abdul Ali, Md Mahboob, Md Saddam and Md Shoab, all residents of Vattapally.

According to DCP Prakash Reddy, the victim Asad Khan, earlier in 2018 murdered Amjad Ali Khan, father of accused Yaseen Khan. Since 2018, Yaseen Khan nurturing grudge against Asad Khan was planning to eliminate him. As part of his plan, Yaseen Khan and five of his aides on March 31 tried to kill Asad Khan. But, due to too much public, they failed to execute their plan. However, on April 1, all the accused attacked Asad Khan with sickles and killed him brutally. Asad Khan was killed in broad daylight when he was returning to his home in Tee-galakunta. DIG Rajendar Goud, SP Nadem Hussain, inspector K Narasimha cracked the case under the supervision of Rajendranagar DCP.



Rajendranagar DCP Prakash Reddy addressing the media in Hyderabad on Saturday

TRS govt pushed jobless into depression: Congress

HYDERABAD

CONGRESS leader and former minister Mohammed Ali Shabbir has accused Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao of ruining the lives of lakhs of jobless youth in the State.

Addressing a public meeting in Thummadam village of Nidamanoor mandal as part of campaign for Nagarjunasagar Assembly by-poll on Saturday, Shabbir Ali speaking about the suicide by unemployed youth Sunil Naik, he said that the wrong policies of the TRS government have pushed jobless youth into depression with some resorting to even extreme steps.

He said Telangana became a reality due to the sacrifices made by the youth and students. Congress president and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi granted statehood for Telangana as she wanted to stop the youth from taking their own lives. Sonia Gandhi wanted the youth to have a good future, jobs and control over all the resources of Telangana. However, he said, Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao

has encroached upon all the resources of Telangana and started treating the State as his personal 'jagir' (feudom). Stating that K Chandrashekar Rao had appointed his 40 relatives including son, daughter, son-in-law, and nephew in various posts, he referred to them as 'Ali Baba, Chalis Chor'.

Shabbir Ali recalled the crucial role played by Jana Reddy in the formation of Telangana. "Jana Reddy was offered the post of Chief Minister in undivided Andhra Pradesh. He not only refused the offer, but pressurised the Congress-led UPA government to grant statehood for Telangana. Meanwhile, he ensured that the Telangana agitation does not slow down. He was instrumental in the formation of the Joint Action Committee and kept it non-political so as to involve all sections of the society in statehood agitation. Without Jana Reddy's role, we cannot imagine JAC or even the formation of Telangana," he said.

He appealed to the people to ensure the victory of Jana Reddy in the by-election with a majority of not less than 50,000 votes.

Cops unearth Maoist arms dump

HANS NEWS SERVICE
MULUGU

THE Police on Saturday unearthed a huge dump of ammunition and explosives in an agriculture field at Mansingh Thanda.

Speaking to the media, Mulugu ASP P Sai Chaitanya said that they have found a bucket stored about 1.5 meters deep. He said that some papers found in the bucket suggest that the CPI-Maoist Telangana State Committee has conspired to establish anti-government committees in the villages again to assert its existence, overthrow the democratically



Mulugu ASP P Sai Chaitanya speaking to media in Mulugu on Saturday

TSICET schedule released

HANS NEWS SERVICE
WARANGAL

THE Kakatiya University (KU) has been entrusted with the responsibility of conducting Telangana State Integrated Common Entrance Test (TSICET) by the Telangana State Council for Higher Education (TSCHE) for the TSICET-2021 for admission into MBA and MCA courses.

Prof K Raji Reddy, convenor of TSICET - 2021 and KU Controller of Examinations Mahender Reddy released the schedule here on Saturday. Prof K Raji Reddy said the university is taking all measures to conduct the examination in online mode. About 60 test centres in 14 regional centres have been identified to conduct the examination on August 19 and 20 in three sessions. The submission and registration of application forms begin from April 7. The last date for submission and registration of online applications is June 15. The fee is Rs 450 for SC/ST and differently abled candidates, and Rs 650 for others. The preliminary key would be released on August 27. August 31 is the last date for submission of objections on the key. The entrance test results would be announced on September 17.

elected bodies with the armed revolution, collapse the government and bring in a new democratic revolutionary system. He said that the Maoists stored explosives targeting the police, security forces and people's representatives and with an intention to destroy public property. The police found .312- Bullets, two detonators and documents relating to CPI Maoist party in the dump. SI Mulugu, Bomb Disposal team, two VROs, and a photographer participated in the raid.

ASP Chennuri Rupesh, DSP K Devender Reddy, SB Rehman and Mulugu SI Harikrishna were among others present.

Private edn institutions seek govt aid

THE OWNERS OF PRIVATE EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS SUBMIT A PLEA TO LOCAL MLA

HANS NEWS SERVICE
SHADNAGAR

THE owners of the private educational institutions in Shadnagar constituency submitted a plea to Shadnagar MLA Anjaiah Yadav on Saturday at the call of Telangana Recognized Schools Management Association (TRSMA), which is heading towards a 14-day protest.

Speaking on the occasion, the owners of private educational institutions said that the life of 3.5 lakh private teachers across Telangana is in jeopardy with government not taking any decision with regard to reopening of schools due to ongoing corona pandemic. Similarly, the survival of private educational institutions has become questionable as parents are not paying fee.

They said of the 12,000 schools across Telangana, 900 schools were closed due to the pandemic. The institution owners are struggling in many ways as they have to pay building rents, property taxes and power bills. These private schools have been providing livelihood to many for a long time and had given many students a better future, they added. They later demanded that the government should grant Rs 6,000 per month to private teachers as well as some special facilities to protect the private educational institutions.

Private education institutions owners Rajendra Prasad, Ramana Reddy, Vamsi Krishna, Rafat Sultana, Bhim Shankar, Rajan, Rizwan and others were present.



Yogi calls for Mamata’s ouster

FALTA/ KULTULI/ULUBERIA (WB)

Calling upon people to oust the Mamata Banerjee government, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Saturday that the BJP, if voted to power in Bengal, will ensure security for all women and create job opportunities for the youth. Adityanath, who addressed two rallies during the day, also said that those who had tried to stop Durga puja and Saraswati puja will be put behind bars, if the saffron party forms government in Bengal.

“You had given 50 years to the Congress, 30 years to the communists and 10 years to the Trinamool Congress, I urge you to give five years to the BJP... We will change the face of West Bengal. “The BJP will stop all tortures perpetrated on the women of West Bengal. It will ensure that youths get employment opportunities,” the Uttar Pradesh CM said at a public meeting in Falta area of South-24 Parganas district.

Says BJP will ensure women’s safety



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during an election campaign in support of BJP candidate from North Howrah constituency Umesh Rai, in Howrah on Saturday

Raising anti-TMC slogans such as “Doo Maaye (May), Didi gaaye”, (May 2, Didi gone), the senior BJP leader also said that his party will guarantee ration for everyone, provide pension to the old, houses to the poor, while also

making sure that the people of the state get to avail the benefits doled out under PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi and Ayushman Bharat health scheme.

Adityanath further said that properties of goons, who

threaten people to have their way, will be confiscated, and they would be made to beg on the streets. “In the past, the situation was somewhat similar in UP. Now where are those people (goons)? None will be able to find a single one of them,” he said.

Speaking at another rally in Kultuli, the UP CM, listing the benefits available to the people of his state, sought to know why government employees in West Bengal were not getting salaries in accordance with the Seventh Pay Commission. “Why hasn’t Didi implemented central schemes here? It’s for her that the people of Bengal have been deprived of the doles offered by the central government. What has Didi done for the people of the state other than pursuing appeasement politics? The TMC supremo has just one agenda promoting her nephew Abhishek Banerjee,” he alleged.

Locals had queued up on both sides of the road and watched the procession, which inched its way through the narrow streets amid chants of ‘Jai Shri Ram’.

Shah describes Rahul as “tourist politician” at poll rally in Wayanad

MEENANGADI (KER)

TAKING a dig at the Congress, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said Rahul Gandhi is a “tourist politician” who had represented Amethi for 15 years in Parliament, before shifting to Wayanad in Kerala. He alleged for the Congress and the Gandhi family, people are just a vote bank and government a money bank.

Shah also ridiculed the left and Congress for their poll pact in West Bengal and said the Communists and Congress need to merge and form a new party which can be called ‘Comrade Congress Party’. Launching his attack on Gandhi who was in neighbouring Kozhikode district for campaigning earlier in the day, Shah said: “This Wayanad is a also the constituency of Rahul baba. He was representing Amethi for 15 years. Nothing changed there. Now he has come here.” “I have never seen a tourist politician like Rahul baba. Sometimes, he will be in Amethi, sometimes in Wayanad. He is here as a tourist and don’t expect any



development from his side,” the union minister said. The UPA government was ruling for ten years. The people voted them to power for development. Instead they engaged in corruption and scams worth Rs 12 lakh crore, Shah alleged, adding “for the Congress and the Gandhi family, people are just a vote bank and government is a money bank.”

Shah, who arrived here from neighbouring Tamil Nadu, was addressing party workers at

Meenangadi in Wayanad campaigning for the BJP-NDA candidate C K Janu, a tribal leader who is contesting from Sultan Bathery. If BJP candidates are voted, Wayanad will be made the most developed district in the country, he said. Attacking the LDF and UDF, Shah said development has taken a back seat in Kerala since the last two decades. The state was once a favourite destination of tourists in the country, besides also being the most literate. (PTI)



‘Swarnim Vijay Mashaal’ reaches J&K

JAMMU

THE ‘Swarnim Vijay Varsh’ Mashaal, as part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of India’s victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war, reached Basoli military station near Lakhnau -- the gateway to Jammu and Kashmir -- on Saturday, a defence spokesman said. The Mashaal was received by Brigadier Manoj Kharkwal in the presence of other dignitaries at Basoli where major decisive battles were fought and won by India during the 1971 operations, the spokesman said.

Last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi lit the ‘Swarnim Vijay Varsh Mashaal’ (golden victory year torch) from the eternal flame of the national war memorial in Delhi on December 16 -- the day India celebrates as Vijay Diwas to commemorate its victory over Pakistan during the 1971 war that led to the creation of Bangladesh.

The spokesman said the Mashaal will remain in the folds of the Arsenal brigade till Apr 7 during which a number of events has been planned at various venues to mark the occasion. He said some of these include felicitation of war heroes and ‘veer naries’, cultural programmes by students of K V Lakhnau and A P S Janglot, various school level competitions and participation by NCC cadets. (PTI)

Panel submits report in SC in ISRO espionage case

NEW DELHI

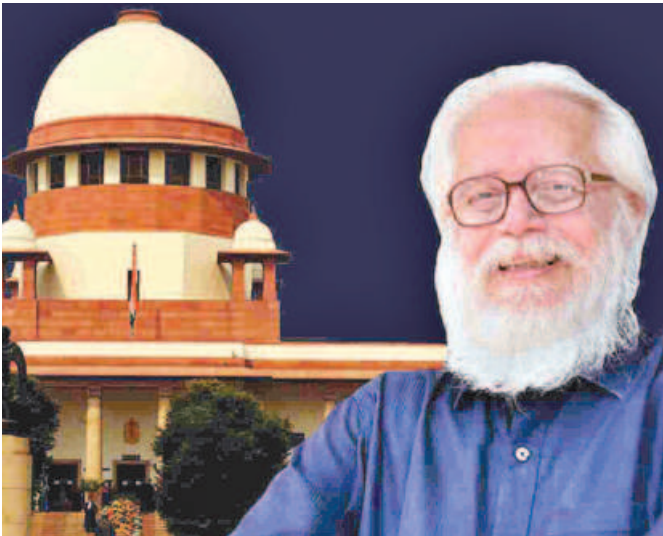
Retired Supreme Court judge Justice D K Jain headed panel, formed in Septmber 2018 by the top court to probe the role of Kerala police officers in wrongful arrest of ISRO scientist Nambi Narayanan in a 1994 espionage case, has submitted its report in a sealed cover. However, a source confirmed that the findings of the report are not known yet.

79-year-old Narayanan waged a legal battle against the Kerala police officers who accused him of being a Pakistan spy in 1994. Besides appointing the panel, the top court had directed the Kerala government to pay Rs 50 lakh compensation for causing immense humiliation to Narayanan.

In 2018, a bench of the then Chief Justice Dipak Misra, Justice A.M. Khanwilkar and Justice D.Y. Chandrachud decided to appoint a committee under Jain and asked the Centre and the Kerala government to name one person each to the committee under Jain. While the Centre appointed a top official -- D.K. Prasad, the Pinarayi Vijayan government appointed former Additional Chief Secretary V.S. Senthil.

The ISRO spy case surfaced in 1994 when Narayanan was arrested on charges of espionage along with another senior official of ISRO, two Maldivian women and a businessman.

The CBI had held that the then top police officials in Ker-



ala were responsible for Narayanan’s illegal arrest. The panel examined the circumstances leading to Narayanan’s arrest. It was alleged that confidential documents on India’s space program was allegedly transferred to foreign countries.

Incidentally this case took place when the factional feud in the Congress party between the K. Karunakaran and the A.K. Antony factions led by Oommen Chandy was at its zenith. Karunakaran had to quit the office in 1995 after it was found out that he was shielding his close aide and senior police officer Raman Srivastava, who later became the state police chief and after retirement became the advisor to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

Narayanan had maintained

that Kerala police fabricated the case and the technology he was accused to have stolen and sold in 1994 case did not even exist at that time.

Narayanan moved the top court challenging Kerala High Court judgement. In its verdict, the apex court had said, “We think that obtaining factual scenario calls for constitution of a committee to find out ways and means to take appropriate steps against the erring officials.”

The top court said the “entire prosecution” initiated by the state police was malicious, which caused tremendous harassment and immeasurable anguish to Narayanan. The top court noted that fundamental right of life and personal liberty of Narayanan was “gravely affected”.

College terminates jailed professor G N Saibaba’s service

Wife to move court

NEW DELHI

Delhi University’s Ram Lal Anand College has terminated the service of assistant professor G N Saibaba, who is currently serving life term in Nagpur Central Prison for alleged Maoist links. According to a memorandum received by Saibaba’s wife Vasantha on Thursday, his services have been terminated with immediate effect from the afternoon of March 31. “The services of G N Saibaba, assistant professor, Ram Lal Anand College are terminated with immediate effect from the afternoon of March 31, 2021. Three months’ salary has been paid in his savings bank account,” said the memorandum undersigned by college principal Rakesh Kumar Gupta. Gupta could not be reached for a comment even after several attempts.



Saibaba, an assistant professor of English, was suspended after his arrest by the Maharashtra Police in 2014. His wife and daughters were receiving half of his salary since the arrest. Terming the latest development a “witch hunt”, Saibaba’s wife alleged that it was a “violation of employee’s rights” and she would take the matter to court.

Vagabond throws stones at temple in Delhi; arrested

NEW DELHI

HOLDING a grudge against God for giving him a life of vagabond, a 28-year-old man allegedly threw stones and bricks at a temple in west Delhi’s Punjabi Bagh on Saturday, police said. The man identified as Vicky Mal has been arrested, they said.

Ranjeet Pathak, the priest at Vaishno Mata Mandir, found that two statues of Lord Shiva, which were kept in an open area of the temple, were broken Saturday morning. Stones and brick pieces were also found lying inside the temple premises, police said.

During investigation, police analysed CCTV footage and found that Mal, who worked as

a ragpicker, was behind the incident. The accused used to work with his father before the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

His father later went back to Motihari in Bihar. Mal started holding grudge against God for giving him the life of a vagabond, a police officer said.

An FIR was registered against the accused under IPC sections 295A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs) and 457 (lurking house-trespass or house-breaking by night in order to commit offence punishable with imprisonment), he said, adding that further investigation is underway. (PTI)

Police commissioner bats for courses to sharpen officers’ skills

NEW DELHI

DELHI Police Commissioner S N Shrivastava on Saturday stressed on capsule courses for officers to sharpen their investigative skills and to keep them updated with the latest legal and scientific developments. During a video conference with officers, the commissioner also reviewed the actions taken to implement COVID-19 guidelines, officials

said. He also took stock of the law and order situation in the national capital during the meeting, they said.

The commissioner emphasised conducting capsule courses for station house and investigating officers to sharpen their investigative skills and keep them abreast of latest legal and scientific aspects of investigation, police said. Mittal said that appraisal of action plan vis-



a-vis targets for each police station was also discussed. The ongoing process of listing criminals and the strategy to keep a vigil on them were reviewed along with the action plan to keep a tab on jailed criminals and those out on bail, he said.

Shrivastava asked officers to keep an eye on criminals whose bail or parole periods are nearing a close, Mittal said. The commissioner also examined the

status of complaints in the Integrated Complaints Management System and asked officers to ensure speedy disposal. The status of usage of e-beat book was also reviewed, he said the action taken to check noise pollution in pursuance of directions of the National Green Tribunal was discussed and Shrivastava directed for strict implementation of norms, police said. (PTI)

Hefazat leader warns minorities in B’desh

SUMI KHAN
DHAKA

NUR Hossain Noorani, leader of the Hefazat-e-Islam militant outfit in Bangladesh, warned that if the country’s minority communities conspire against Islam, “we’ll catch them like a baby rat”.

Noorani, also the President of Khatme Nabuwat Andolan, another radical force, made the threat while addressing a Hefazat protest rally in Munsirhat area of Munshiganj Sadar on Friday afternoon. From now on, we will have our own intelligence wing,” he said. “If the minorities of the country, the Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, conspire against Islam, we’ll catch them like a baby rat.” He also threatened Chhatra



League leader Apan Das, nephew of Munshiganj-3 constituency MP Mrinal Kanti Das, who took out an anti-Hefazat procession in Munshiganj. “Apan Das, the nephew of Mrinal Kanti Das, I challenge him he goes too far, he will not be allowed to enter Munshiganj,” Noorani said. Munshiganj District Regional Board of Education Assistant Director Hossain Mohammad Ishaqi and Hefazat-e-Islam Sadar Upazila President Siddiqueur Rahman also spoke at the protest rally. (IANS)

Deadly breach could delay decisions about Capitol fencing

WASHINGTON

THE deadly breach of the Capitol’s perimeter could delay the gradual reopening of the building’s grounds to the public just as lawmakers were eyeing a return to more normal security measures following the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Capitol Police officer William “Billy” Evans, an 18-year veteran of the force, was killed Friday when a man rammed his car into a barrier outside the Senate side of the building. The driver, identified as 25-year-old Noah Green, was shot and killed after he got out of his car and lunged at police with a knife.

Their deaths came less than two weeks after the Capitol Police removed an outer fence that had cut off a wide swath of the area to cars and pedestrians, in an effort to secure the com-

plex after thousands of then-President Donald Trump’s supporters had marched on the building Jan. 6, as Congress was certifying Joe Biden’s election victory.

About 800 of those loyalists broke inside the Capitol, and siege lead to the deaths of five people, including a Capitol Police officer. Police have left an inner fencing perimeter intact. The tall, dark fencing — parts of it covered in razor wire until recently — had blocked major arteries that cross the city and was a stark symbol of the fear many in the Capitol felt after the violent mob laid siege two months ago. Lawmakers said the seat of American democracy was meant to be open to the people, even if there was always going to be a threat. But after Friday’s attack, lawmakers said they needed to proceed with caution. (AP)



Washington authorities investigate the scene after a man rammed a car into two officers at the barricade on Capitol Hill in Washington on Friday

Exercise begins for Jagananna Smart Towns



Ongole Mayor Gangada Sujatha

- Municipal Administration and Urban Development Ministry issues GO No 130 asking municipal commissioners to conduct a survey to determine the demand and preferences of people
- The govt decides to develop well-planned layouts with a proposed plot size of 200 and 240 sq yards

NAARESH NANDAM
ONGOLE

THE state government is planning to layout, develop and sell plots of area 200 and 240 square yards near towns to middle-income group families under the name Jagananna Smart Towns. Following the orders of the municipal administration and urban development and its minister, the Director of Town and Country Planning (DTCP) directed the commissioners of urban local bodies to conduct the demand survey to decide the size and features of the smart town in each town and city. The ward volunteers are already receiving the consent forms from the interested people.

In GO RT No 130, issued on March 23, the government

noted that middle-class people are purchasing plots at unauthorised layouts resulting in legal disputes, traffic problems and lack of lung space, physical and social infrastructure, etc.,. In order to promote planned and integrated developments of various towns by providing the basic infrastructure and to safeguard the interests of the public, ensuring the availability of clear title, the government has decided to develop well-planned layouts with a proposed plot size of 200 and 240 square yards, the GO says.

The government also formed district and state-level committees with joint collector and commissioner and director of municipal administration as chairpersons respectively, with officials concerned, and ordered them to submit proposals for approval.

The government advised them to select the MIG (Middle-Income Group) layout sites at locations that have demand for house sites, having employment opportunities, ensuring source for potable water, having schools, transportation and medical facilities at reasonable range, and within 3 km from the developed area in the municipality and 5 km from municipal corporation.

Following the guidelines, the Ongole Municipal Corporation, for example, identified locations for Jagananna Smart Town at Koppolu, Mukthinthalapadu and Mangamur Donka Road and asked the public to give their preference.

Ongole Municipal Corporation mayor Gangada Sujatha said that the scheme will be helpful to the middle-class families to own a residential plot at an affordable price. She said that Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy keeps his promises and will provide the best infrastructure to the Smart Towns and develops them. She said that following the response from the public, a favourable decision will be taken after discussing with the officials and more details will be announced about the layout accordingly.

New sarpanches assume offices

- Special officers' rule which has been going on since Aug '2018 comes to an end
- Oath-taking ceremonies organised in simple manner owing to model code
- Gram panchayats focus mainly on infrastructure facilities and development of village, the new secretariat and volunteer systems take care of implementation of welfare schemes under Navaratnalu



Nanna gram panchayat sarpanch K Sarala assumes office in the village on Saturday

under the special officers' rule since August 2018 after the expiry of the term of incumbents. State Election Commission (SEC) which issued notification for polls early last year, had to postpone the process due to rising Covid pandemic. Finally, elections were conducted to more than 13,000 panchayats in February, 2021 in four pages.

In Nunna village near here, YSRCP-supported candidate K Sarala was elected as sarpanch and took the charge amidst jubilation of party leaders and other ward members. She said that she would try to fulfil the aspirations of the people and would try to de-

velop the Nunna panchayat. Village panchayat secretary G V T Ramana and other staff accorded a warm welcome to new sarpanch.

Village panchayats help strengthening the democracy at the grassroot level as people can directly contact to the elected representatives to seek redressal of their problems. The sarpanches can also meet the people's representatives like MLAs, MPs, ministers to take local issues to the notice of the government to get funds for the development of villages. With the setting up village secretariats after YSRCP came to power, the

functions and duties have been clearly divided between the gram panchayats and village secretariats to avert the confusion among the staff of two departments and villagers.

Panchayat secretary acts as executive officer of the gram panchayat and shall function as a link officer between gram panchayats and the village secretariats. The state government inaugurated 15,004 secretariats in the state as an extension arm of the state government for implementation of various government schemes and services.

The secretariats are functioning in over 13,000 villages and 120 urban local bodies. With over 1.34 lakh village/ward secretariat functionaries and 2.26 lakh volunteers engaged in this new set up, the department of village and ward secretariats is monitoring the delivery of over 543 services to the citizens.

On the other hand, the gram panchayats mainly focus on the infrastructure facilities and needs of the people in villages. The village panchayat offices chiefly focus on supply of drinking water, maintenance of sanitation, laying of roads, streetlights and other facilities to the people. While the village secretariat staff take care of implementation of Navaratnalu (welfare schemes).

HANS NEWS SERVICE
VIJAYAWADA

PUTTING an end to the special officers' rule in gram panchayats in the state, newly-elected village sarpanches and ward members who won in elections held in February took the oath and assumed office amidst celebrations by party workers and the family members on Saturday. Oath-taking was conducted without fanfare in view of Model Code of Conduct in force for ZPTC and MPCTC elections.

The gram panchayats had been

Naidu's poll boycott move faces resistance in party



- Senior leaders like Jyothula Nehru, Ashok Gajapathi and Bandaru Satyanarayana Murthy voice displeasure over the decision
- In politburo meet too, Yanamala reportedly opposed the proposal saying it will demoralise the cadres
- Sources say party workers in districts like West and East Godavari and north coastal AP are very keen to fight to polls

AMARAVATI

THE TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu's decision to boycott the coming elections to the mandal parishad and zilla parishad territorial constituencies in the state seems to have irked a section of the TDP rank and file and some senior leaders have voiced their protest.

In private, some party leaders lament that the boycott decision was by far the "biggest political blunder" committed by Chandrababu Naidu, sources close to them said. Even at the TDP politburo meeting, where the boycott decision was taken on Friday, veteran leaders like Yanamala Ramakrishnudu were

said to have advised against it as it would leave the party cadres demoralised. Ultimately, though, Naidu announced that the TDP was boycotting the April 8 elections to the MPCTCs and ZPTCs as they became "totally undemocratic." He said the TDP could not become a party to "undemocratic" acts and has hence taken a "tough decision" under inevitable circumstances to protest the State Election Commissioner's actions.

Protesting party chief's decision, senior leader Jyothula Nehru resigned from the TDP vice-president's post, saying he was pained over it, while former Union minister P Ashok Gajapathi Raju found fault with the decision.

"The high command's decision is not final. We will decide on whether or not to contest the local bodies polls based on the local conditions," Gajapathi Raju told reporters in his native Vizianagaram. In neighbouring Visakhapatnam district, senior leader Bandaru Satyanarayana Murthy too was unhappy with the boycott decision and said the party cadre was not ready to accept it. He announced that they would remain in the contest irrespective of the result.

TDP sources here said party workers in districts like West

and East Godavari and north coastal Andhra were very keen on fighting the MPCTC and ZPTC elections.

In the four Rayalaseema districts of Anantapur, Chittoor, Kurnool and Kadapa, where the TDP failed miserably in the recent elections to the gram panchayats and urban local bodies, the rank and file is said to be content with Chandrababu's decision to boycott the MPCTC and ZPTC polls.

Similar was the mood in Prakasam and Nellore districts as well while the leadership

in Guntur and Krishna districts, considered the party's strongholds, maintained a stoic silence.

The party's official stand notwithstanding, the TDP will still technically remain in the contest as its candidates names are printed in the ballots because the poll process got stalled in March last year after the final list of contestants was published.

Interestingly, the TDP has already won 100 MPCTC seats unopposed last year, though it had no such luck in the ZPTCs.

Boycott decision discussed thoroughly, asserts Butchaiah

HANS NEWS SERVICE
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM

TDP'S decision to boycott MPCTC and ZPTC elections was taken after in-depth discussions in politburo meeting, said TDP politburo member and Rajamahendravaram rural MLA Gorantla Butchaiah Choudary. Speaking to The Hans India here on Saturday, the veteran TDP leader said the drastic decision was taken because of prevailing circumstances and lack of confidence in State Election Commission (SEC) and its attitude.

Though the boycott is painful to some leaders and cadres, yet it is inevitable, he said adding different opinion of some leaders in this regard were their own. Earlier, the party issued B forms to some contestants for the polls and they may contest or not, he said.

He wondered how can SEC Nilam Sawheny announce election dates within hours of taking charge and not even convening an all-party meeting to get their opinions prior to the announce-



- Claims it is taken after in-depth discussion in TDP politburo
- Says those issued B forms earlier for ZPTC and MPCTC polls can contest if they wish to do so
- Opines that alliance with Jana Sena will not brighten chances of BJP as people are not believing it

ment of dates. "SEC set aside apex court's direction to have at least four weeks of time for elections and also a case is pending in High Court," he pointed out.

Butchaiah Choudary opined that radical changes were needed in the party and after completion of Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll, the party high command would take stock of the situation and take a suitable decision to strengthen the party from grassroot level.

He further said there was a need to bring the leaders of all castes and communities into the party to dispel the existing wrong notion that the party was confined to one caste and strengthen the party.

Responding to a question, he said film star NTR Jr is now busy in doing movies and he can only decide about his role in the party. Moreover, he said, the party also needs young and new blood.

The TDP MLA said BJP alliance with Jana Sena will not shore up the fortunes of the saffron party as people do not believe it because of its failure to fulfil its promises like Special Category Status, railway zone at Visakhapatnam, funds to Polavaram project and now attempt to privatise Visakha steel plant.

Vijayasai makes merry of TDP poll boycott

AMARAVATI

FOLLOWING TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu's announcement on boycotting MPCTC and ZPTC elections, senior YSRCP leader and Rajya Sabha MP V Vijayasai Reddy on Saturday questioned if people boycotted Naidu.

"Did Chandrababu boycott the polls or AP people boycotted Chandrababu? Are local bodies scaring Chandrababu or Lokesh's body language scaring Chandrababu?" said the MP in a sarcastic tone on his Twitter handle.

Alluding to TDP, he gave some pointers claiming that they generally precede the shutting down of a political party.

He claimed that there will be a series of defeats, depriving cadres' faith in party leadership, including party activists staying away from party programmes.

"Scarcity of candidates to contest elections. Party leadership shows some insignificant reasons to stay away from polls. Game over," claimed the Rajya Sabha member.

He claimed that Naidu's current situation is akin to a businessman suffering losses and setting his wares for disposal at a steep discount of 90 per cent but when nobody comes forward to buy, Reddy claimed that businessman gives away his wares for free.

The MP alleged that TDP leaders claimed that they won 40 per cent panchayats in the rural local bodies polls but why they were shying away from contesting in the MPCTC and ZPTC polls.

Earlier, Vijayasai took a potshot at the BJP and its local ally Jana Sena for their statements on chief ministerial candidate in the next Assembly polls in 2024.

"The election is taking place for Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll and is it



- YSRCP MP questions whether Naidu is boycotting the ZPTC and MPCTC polls or the voters boycotted the Oppn party
- Says the TDP is showing all the signs of the political party that is winding up
- Recently, he also made fun of BJP and Jana Sena for their statements on making actor-turned politician Pawan Kalyan as CM in 2024

not baiting to say that so and so will be the CM? The offering party does not even have a single seat and the party taking it does not have proper presence... A person who could not even become an MLA is eager to ascend the CM's seat," mocked Reddy.

He was referring to Somu Veerajulu for making the declaration and Jana Sena party cadres for proactively reacting to that statement.

It is not new to see Pawan Kalyan as a CM candidate as he himself declared to be so in the 2019 polls, pitting himself against Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy and N Chandrababu Naidu. He resorted to this adventure within five years of launching his party while his brother Chiranjeevi did a similar act back in 2009 after he projected himself as the CM candidate in less than one year of launching the Praja Rajyam Party in 2008, which he merged into the Congress within four years to enjoy plum posts.

Meanwhile, it took nearly 10 years for Jagan Mohan Reddy to ascend to the CM seat.

Back in India... 4 astronauts to stay on busy training schedule

Continued from P1

While the astronauts will be trained in Bengaluru and the survival techniques in Cochin, ISRO will carry out the engineering work related to Gaganyaan. Glavkosmos had earlier said the four Indian astronauts were trained in abnormal descent module landing - in wooded and marshy areas in winter; on water surface, and in the steppe in summer. "In June 2020, all Indian astronauts-elect passed training in short-term weightlessness mode aboard the IL-76MDK special laboratory aircraft, and in July, they were trained to lift aboard a helicopter while evacuating from the descent module land-

ing point," Glavkosmos had said. The Indian fighter pilots were also trained in a centrifuge and in a hyperbaric chamber to prepare their organisms for sustaining spaceflight factors, such as G-force, hypoxia and pressure drops.

The regular courses comprise medical and physical training, learning Russian (as one of the main international languages of communication in space), and studying the configuration, structure and systems of the Soyuz crewed spacecraft, Glavkosmos had said.

Sivan said the Indian space agency is targeting the first unmanned space flight in December 2021.

NGT directs Delhi CS to resolve SDMC-DJB dispute

Continued from P1

The plea stated that the DJB must ensure supply of treated water with adequate pressure and wherever piped supply is not available, to supply such water by tankers. "The DJB is in the process of providing pipe network from STP to the parks. But till such pipelines are laid, there is need for

tankers for supply of water to 5357 parks. Hiring of tankers is the responsibility of the Jal Board and not of the Municipal Corporation," the plea said.

It referred to a letter written by the Member Secretary, Delhi Pollution Control Committee which has directed the Jal Board to hire tankers.

Responsibility of water supply and

maintenance of sewage is the statutory responsibility of the Jal Board under the Jal Board Act, 1998, SDMC said in its plea.

The NGT had earlier directed the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) to ensure supply of treated water with adequate pressure in public parks and to stop groundwater extraction for gardening.

17 St Stephen's students on trip to Himachal test Covid positive

Continued from P1

The dean of residence-cum-college chaplain and mass steward (security officer), both of whom have tested positive for the coronavirus, had taken a group of students, including hostellers, of the Delhi college for an educational trip to Dalhousie in Himachal Pradesh in the last week of March. "The inner perimeter of the college is out of bounds for all, unless specific clearance is given by the principal on a case by case basis. The outer perimeter of the college may be accessed by those with relevant and regular work after due process at the security counter," the notice read. "Faculty who are scheduled to come to college may defer their coming till a notification informs them of an improvement in the condition," it read.

Home where no cow is turned away

Continued from P1

The Government of India has honoured her with Padma Shri recognising her devotion and empathy for cows which have been considered sacred animals of Hindus. Looking after the cows needs funding and that was the biggest challenge she faced. No government agencies had come forward with their helping hand. The only source of funds was by the rent she receives from her native property in Berlin. But now things are changing and people are coming up to fund her noble cause. Recently, she got a funding of Rs 1 crore from Anil Reddy, owner of Donatekart. Mataji said Donatekart provided an excellent opportunity for people who would like to help a worthy cause but don't have the time to research many different places themselves and fear they might be cheated out of their money.

Delhi reports over 3,500 Covid cases for 2nd straight day

Continued from P1

The positivity rate also mounted to 4.48 per cent from 4.1 per cent a day before.

The recovery rate is 96.47 per cent, whereas the death rate is 1.65 per cent. Recovery rate is the percentage of samples that test positive for disease out of the total samples tested.

At present, there are 12,647 active coronavirus cases in Delhi. The number of cumulative cases on Saturday stood at 6,72,381. Over 6.48 lakh patients have recovered from the virus. This includes 2,904 patients who have been discharged in the last 24 hours. Besides this, the Covid-19 bulletin said 6,569 patients are in home isolation. A total of 79,617 tests, including 57,296 RT-PCR tests and 22,321 rapid antigen tests, were conducted in the past 24 hours, the bulletin said. Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said Delhi is currently reeling under the "fourth wave" of Covid-19 but the government is not planning to impose a lockdown for now.

Speaking about the prevailing Covid-19 situation in Delhi, Kejriwal said the city has seen a surge in daily cases in recent weeks.

Gender parity: Yawning gap persists in India

DR SANTOSH KUMAR
MOHAPATRA

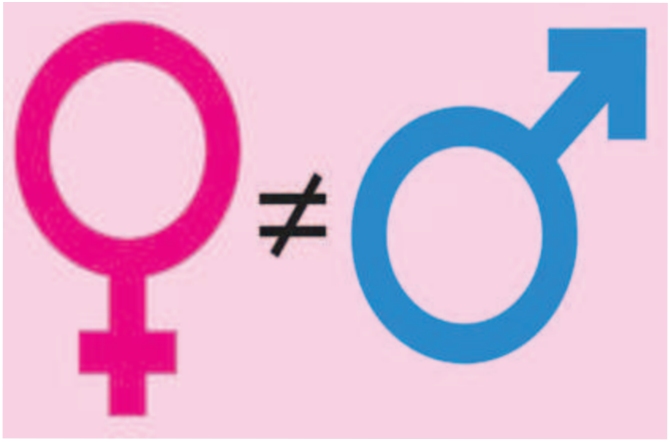
The Covid-19 pandemic is escalating the vicious circle of inequality and exacerbating existing gender inequality which is reflected in rise in gender gap worldwide. The WEF's Gender Gap Index ranks countries according to calculated gender gap between women and men in four key pillars—economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health and survival. It measures women's disadvantage compared to men, and is not a measure of equality of the gender gap.

According to World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021, impact of the Covid-19 pandemic continues to be felt and the global gender gap has increased by a generation from 99.5 years in previous edition to 135.6 years in 2021 report. It means as per 2020 report, given the earlier trend, gender gap was expected to be closed in 99.5 years, but as per 2021 report, it will require 135.6 years or another 36 years more as compared to previous year to close gender gap.

What is disconcerting news is that India, home to 65 crore women, has seen widening of its gender gap with higher magnitude. India had closed gender gap almost 66.8 per cent one year ago. But this has plunged to 62.5 per cent in 2021 report showing widening of gender gap from 33.2 per cent to 37.5 per cent

India has slipped 28 places to rank 140th among 156 countries in Global Gender Gap Report 2021. The country had ranked 112th among 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2019-2020 down from 108th position in previous edition (2018). India's latest position is 42 notches lower than its reading in 2006 when the WEF started measuring the gender gap.

The gender gap is 4.3 percentage points larger than recorded in the previous editions, which ex-



plains why India has fallen by mammoth margin in the ranking. Some other countries have seen slippages too, but India's slippage is farce worse than many other countries.

Most of the decline occurred on the political empowerment subindex, where India regressed 13.5 percentage points, with gender gap closed to date of 27.6 per cent. The main change is the significant decline in the number of women ministers (from 23.1 per cent in 2019 to 9.1 per cent in 2021). In addition, the share of women in parliament remains stagnant at 14.4 per cent and the share of the last 50 years in which a woman has been head of state is 15.5 per cent.

The decline also took place on the economic participation and opportunity sub-index, albeit to a lesser extent. India's gender gap on this dimension widened by 3 per cent this year, leading to a only 32.6 per cent gap being closed till date. Among the drivers of this deterioration is a decline in women's labour force participation rate, which fell from 24.8 per cent to 22.3 per cent. In addition, the share of women in professional and technical roles declined further to 29.2 per cent. The share of women in senior and managerial positions also remains low: only 14.6 per cent of these positions are held by women and there are only 8.9 per cent firms with female top managers.

The WEF pointed to a study by the UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) showing that women were more likely to lose their jobs in the crisis, in part because they are disproportionately represented in sectors directly disrupted by lockdowns. Indian women are worst sufferer too. Further, the estimated earned income of women in India is only one-fifth of men's, which puts the country among the bottom 10 globally on this indicator. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the income of an average woman is below 16 per cent of that of an average man, while in India it is 20.7 per cent.

Discrimination against women is also reflected in the health and survival sub-index statistics. However, 93.7 per cent of this gap closed to date. But existing wide gaps in sex ratio at birth are due to the high incidence of gender-based sex-selective practices. According to the report, more than one in four women has faced intimate violence in her lifetime.

In case of the educational attainment sub-index, 96.2 per cent of gender gap has been closed with parity achieved in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Yet, gender gaps persist in terms of literacy: one third of women are illiterate (34.2 per cent) compared to 17.6 per cent of men.

This is a poor reflection of a country that boasts of highest GDP growth and dreams to be a

super power. However, India's colossal decline in gender parity is not a matter of surprise. It cannot be ascribed to only pandemic only. Women have been the biggest casualties not just of the impact of the Covid-19-induced recession but due to various factors such gender violence, treating women as second-class citizens, patriarchal mindset of people, preference for male child.

World Economic Forum, quantifying the gap on a regular basis matters because improving gender parity has a fundamental bearing on how much economies and societies thrive. Fostering and developing female talent has the potential to accelerate the growth, competitiveness and future-readiness of economies and businesses worldwide.

Equality isn't just a number: it's a socio-economic need. Women make up one half of the world's talent. If they're prevented from contributing on a public platform, economies won't grow and thrive as they should

According to WEF managing director Saadia Zahidi, if we want a dynamic future economy, it is vital for women to be represented in the jobs of tomorrow. And as for ways to rebuild, Zahidi points to measures including greater investment from governments in the care economy, and businesses embedding gender parity and diversity into hiring and planning practices, especially when it comes to the roles of the future.

However, the government needs to give everyone a fair shot at prosperity. It needs to expand access to basic public services such as health care (including vaccination) and education and strengthen redistributive policies as privatization of education, health and essential services affect women more. Political and economic empowerment of women is need of hour.

(The author is an Odisha-based columnist/economist and social thinker)

FM needs to be more considerate

FM's recent move to downsize interest rate applicable on small saving schemes, citing reasons to bring it at par with the other interest rates such as home loan, car loan and business loans makes sense but lacks common sense. Though it was withdrawn within 12 hours of announcement because seemingly HM and PM reprimanded her for giving a potential damaging tool at the hands of opposition on the eve of Nandigram poll. Strategic sense prevailed and she announced roll back. But for how long is the question?

But during the whole process two major things emerged. One, there was lot of planning behind it to announce it on the first day of new financial year and it was certainly not some April fool's joke and secondly it showed that PM's office had no inclination of this. This also bared open FM's devious plans to make lives of senior citizens more difficult in case they happened to have survived Corona Catastrophe.

Such a massive downsize of rates was aimed to force senior citizens who hold quite a sizeable amount in fixed deposits and other such saving instruments. If a bank offered now 6.5 percent for senior citizens maximum rate of interest in FD's, FM shrewdly brought down PPF rate of interest from 7.1% to 6.4%, to make it less attractive in an 46 year low rate, to force them to wind up their PPF account. FM played the guitar for the markets but it turned out to be dirge song for senior citizens which is normally played out during funerals.

What was most surprising that FM didn't think or blink to lower rate of interest for Senior Citizens Saving Scheme which were introduced to help senior citizens to earn a decent rate of interest, to safeguard them from vagaries of unstable markets. There was fix tenure and fixed rate of interest for maximum of 15 Lacs. What was the sense of changing it. Do FM feels that Senior citizens no more require it as they may have been perished in Corona pandemic?

— Ashok Goswami, Mumbai

PAST AND PRESENT

A day with kindergarten graduates



SANDHYA VASUDEV

“What do you wish to become when you grow up”, I asked Sanketh, a child of five years some months. Pat came the immediate and confident reply that bowled me over. “I will become HM (Head Master)”, said the new UKG graduate. The kid was looking exuberant with his red coloured gown and cape, holding the scroll and souvenir in hand.

Welcome to the world of kindergarten graduates! A few decades ago graduation ceremonies were for, well, graduates who had completed their three years of college, after plus two. But times have changed and such ceremonies are for the nursery and kindergarten students too!

Recently I had the rare opportunity to accompany my daughter to one such graduation ceremony wherein she was the chief guest. The D-day dawned and we reached the venue a good half hour early and the function in fact started a half hour late, and that made our arrival a whole hour before time.

But it was well spent in intuitive discussions with the experienced and articulate principal and vice principal, as also some of the special invitees. As we were ushered towards the venue we were in for a pleasant surprise, the stupendous decorations worthy of an adult graduation day. As others took their seats, the chief guest was led in by none other than the dignified principal followed by the committee members and other faculty members.

The chief guest, herself a child at heart, later told me that she felt immense joy striding the red carpet towards the scores of waiting graduates sitting patiently on tiny chairs near the dais. As I write, words fail to describe the splendour of the young students decked up in red gowns and capes. Each one looked excited, yet sat with dignity and patience, belying their tender age. Hats off to

them indeed!

The welcome speech got off followed by various events in a sequential manner. Three to four UKG students had been prepped for speeches and each one of them rendered it with great aplomb, nodding their heads and gesticulating with their tiny hands, giving the impression that they thoroughly understood the meaning underlying the words being spoken. It was delightful indeed - the applause was deafening and cameras went clicking!

The chief guest's speech was unusually enthralling as it was unconventional and appealing. My daughter seemed to forget herself as she addressed the audience in front of her - the parents and staff - and behind her, the cute graduates! She gave her piece of advice to both sections and the children seemed strong in their convictions when they said “Yes!” to her suggestions.

She later recited a nursery rhyme, “London Bridge...” which they excitedly repeated, and she followed it up by singing William Wordsworth's lovely poem, “The Daffodils”, which mesmerised everyone. The tiny tots sportingly emulated her by singing and swaying their arms to and fro above their heads.

The purpose of the gathering was the denouement, and the chief guest along with her scientist husband and this writer were requested to hand over the scroll and memento to each one of the smiling graduates. They were moments of extreme happiness to both the givers and receivers. The photo shoot followed with the tots being prompted to throw away their capes high in the air when the camera clicked. It was a magical sight!

The chief guest and her companions were treated with such warmth and shown such wonderful hospitality that they felt blessed to have graced such a unique occasion. The swaying daffodils in the form of the tiny tots remain forever in my inner eye!

Cine power still fuels politics in south India

This refers to “Political parties field actors, TV stars in Kerala” (THI April 3). Tamil Nadu is the provenance land of film personalities turned politicians right from Annadurai, Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran and Jayalalitha who proved their political roles very triumphantly. But it is not so in respect of other movie stalwarts such as Sivaji Ganesan, Vijayakant and a few more. Now Kamal Hassan who founded a new party, is fast moving with his artistic skills to impress the voters. Clairvoyant Rajinikanth wisely discarded his decision to launch the political party. Now both DMK and AIADMK do not have noted tinsel stars



behind them. If AIADMK loses, they have to repent later for uninviting Sasikala.

In combined Andhra Pradesh, film actors Jaggaiah, Jamuna, Sarada, Krishna had a small stint as legislators decades

ago. After experiencing high success rate of N.T. Rama Rao, a few well renowned actors such as Chiranjeevi, Vijayashanthi started new parties but were miserably flopped at political box office. Knowing

fully well the variance of voting behaviour, power star Pawan Kalyan, who pathetically lost in two places in 2019 assembly elections, is still in the uncertain field with lot of perseverance and hope. Bollywood also successfully represented in parliament. Anything may happen in politics and cricket is a proven theory.

Kerala is also no exception. Some of its acting fraternity are in the fray from different parties. They should know that their victory may not only be dependent on their twinkling screen faces but also the political party that fielded them.

— N Ramalakshmi, Secunderabad

INDIAN CRICKET AWASH WITH TALENT

V NAGENDRA KUMAR

Ever since the start of Indian tour of Australia down under in the year 2020 we have been witnessing young players making their debuts. Some players made international appearances when seniors were injured and some others when seniors performance was not up to the mark. All these players made a mark on International cricket like duck to the water and gave excellent performance, when the opportunities were bestowed upon them.

Shubman Gill

Shubman Gill scores of 45,35 and 91 in Australia paved the way for solid starts at the beginning of Indian innings. One of the great aspects of his batting is he never spends too much time to settle at the crease and his shots are a treat to watch.



Mohammed Siraj

Mohammed Siraj came in place of injured Mohammed Shami and immediately struck to line and length and moved the ball both ways to trouble the Aussie batsmen. He bagged good number of wickets including a fiver against Kangaroos. He spearheaded Indian



bowling attack successfully with two match experience in the absence of injury ridden senior players. He was with the Indian team in Australia even when his father expired in India.

Shardul Thakur

Shardul Thakur's produced a memorable in innings of clean hitting with a score of 67 and also bagged a total of 7 wickets in Brisbane Test. He Along with Washington Sundar produced a decent partnership that was instrumental in coming nearer to Australian first innings total. Shardul Thakur has made it a habit of claiming pair of wickets in the middle or end of the innings recently



T Natarajan

T. Natarajan, who came as a net bowler but ended up in becoming first Indian cricketer to make his International debut in all the three formats in the same tour. Nattu, is fondly called his team mates, is a yorker specialist in limited overs cricket. He gave decent performance in Aussie tour in all three formats.



Washington Sundar

Washington sundar, was primarily re-

tained as a net bowler in Australia. Sundar, who came in place of injured Aswin scored 62 and 22, bagged a total of 4 wickets in Brisbane test. Against England he scored 85 not out in the first innings of Chennai first Test and 96 not out in fourth Test at Ahmedabad.



Axar Patel

Axar Patel along with Ravichandran Aswin spun a web against England batsmen, to clinch the Test series. He claimed four fivers in his international debut series. English batsmen faced difficulties in reading his bowling and had a memorable debut series against Three Lions.



Ishan Kishan

With spectacular IPL performances behind him, Ishan Kishan made his International debut in second T-20 match against England and produced a quick-fire 56 and along with captain virat Kohli produced a good partnership that paved way for an Indian victory.



Surya Kumar Yadav

Surya Kumar Yadav popularly known as SKY had to wait for considerable period to have an appearance in International cricket, even though he had a memorable innings at IPL. When finally door opened for him in fourth ODI, he grabbed the opportunity with both hands with scores of 57 & 32 in fourth and fifth T-20 matches against England.



Krunal Pandya

Krunal Pandya, the elder brother of Hardik Pandya, made his International debut in the first ODI at Pune, with good performances in Vijay Hazare tournament. He produced sparkling innings of 58 and his whirlwind knock in just 22 balls is the fastest fifty by a debutant in International cricket.



Prasidh Krishna

Prasidh Krishna bagged four wickets in his first match and became the first Indian player to capture four wickets on debut. He got appreciation for his terrific yorker that



This Raj farmer makes a mark through crop engineering

REGARDED as the ‘Saunf King’ of Sirohi, Ishaq Ali, a farmer ‘scientist’ in Rajasthan, has earned many laurels for innovating in the field of fennel farming and has left one and all surprised by producing over 25 tonnes on 15 acres of land, thereby making a decent earning of around Rs 30 lakh annually.

In fact, he launched a new variety of fennel called ‘Abu Fennel 440’ while bringing up techniques of water conservation.

It took him around 15 years to develop this variety that has produced an almost double yield (30 quintals per hectare), with better and distinct scent and shine and requires 55 per cent less water. Further, it is also resistant to most diseases that afflict the crop.

Ishaq Ali hails from an agricultural family and was keen to work in fields with his father and grandfather after completing his class 12 examination. “I wanted to try something different when my family was involved in the cultivation of commercial crops like cotton, mustard, and wheat,” he said.

It was in 2005 when Ishaq embarked upon the cultivation of fennel with newer techniques.

He says, “Around 50 years back, a few farmers in the Sirohi district of Rajasthan grew fennel in very small quantities. However, they had to go back to traditional crops after failing in their initiatives. This was because they used the technique of direct sowing and lacked information on any value addition to the production and distribution of fennel. I knew that fennel is a crop that had great de-



Ishaq Ali hails from an agricultural family and was keen to work in fields with his father and grandfather after completing his class 12 examination. It took him around 15 years to develop this variety that has produced an almost double yield (30 quintals per hectare), with better and distinct scent and shine and requires 55 per cent less water. Further, it is also resistant to most diseases that afflict the crop

mand in the export markets and I wanted to work towards tapping into that.”

“He spent time researching practices like changing the seed quality and paid attention to sowing and irrigation. The new technology checked the pest problem which increased the per acre production of fennel,” he said.

Also, in traditional method of fennel cultivation, the gap between the beds ranged from 2 to 3 feet. However, we started following a gap of almost 7 feet between every bed which almost doubled the yield,” he said with pride.

Although he was ridiculed for trying these new techniques, it was only when he started seeing better yields that people around him took note.

In 2007, we gave up on traditional farming and started working on fennel cultivation in our fields; presently, there are around 50 people who work on the fields every day.

“We knew the seed is the most important tool while farming and, hence picked the good ones out,” looking at their probability of being high-yielding seeds.

Moreover, Ishaq also set up a

fennel nursery to experiment with various kinds of the crops.

At that time, water concerns were there but techniques like drip irrigation and water sprinklers were not there and, hence we had to look for other techniques of water conservation. In an attempt to conserve water, the gap between each bed was further increased which further reduced pest infestation to a large extent.

At that time we were learning by trial and error. Soon we realised that fennel requires irrigation during the first sowing period, then at an interval of eight days and then on the 33rd day. This needs to be followed by irrigation at an interval of 12 to 15 days.

Ishaq says that even the agricultural research centres give a yield of about 22 quintals per hectare whereas the seeds being used by him give a yield of almost 33 quintals per hectare. “The seeds we use have greater immunity to fight pests,” he said.

Further he changed the earlier set tradition of sun-drying the fennel and created a dry-shade area where the fennel is now dried. “We created this structure using bamboo and grass and ensured that the area got just enough sunlight,” he said. This process helped retain its green colour and protected it from unnecessary moisture creeping in as well. While investing Rs 7 lakh each year, Ishaq was able to make close to Rs 30 lakh turnover each year and sold around 23 tonnes of fennel annually.

His children aim at expanding the business and take the produce directly to customers, he says. (GANS)



England done and dusted, now the IPL

YAJURVINDRA SINGH

THE Indian cricket team has done magnificently well with their resounding win over England in all formats of the game. The Test series was important since a convincing series win was required for India to qualify for the World Test Championship final against New Zealand in June.

India, having lost the first Test match, came back forcefully to win the series. To win both the T20 and the ODI series after that against the strong England limited-overs side was a remarkable feat.

The heroes involved in this success were the young Indian brigade. The most destructive and devastating of all was Rishabh Pant. The wicketkeeper-batsman, having done an incredible task of taking India to one of their most enthralling wins against Australia, proved to be England’s nemesis.

His batting controlled the middle-order and in both the Test and the limited overs series, the English bowlers were clobbered by him.

One marvelled at how Pant left them in complete disarray and were amazed with his 360 degrees stroke-play along with his gang-buster approach. He was similar to a Bollywood film hero, who took on a gang of villains by the swash-buckling swing of his bat and acrobatic body and leg movements to dispatch the English bowlers to all corners of the field.

The bio-secure bubble may have been boring and frustrating for the cricketers, but it proved to be blessing in disguise for Indian cricket. The selected squad of players needed the Indian side to have additional bowlers and batsmen accompanying them because of the restrictions imposed due to the virus. Many of the aspiring India ‘A’ players were therefore made a part of the Indian cricket squad. This turned out to be beneficial for India, as players who were there to assist the main squad were also in line to replace an injured player or ones who had lost form.

This was rarely the case earlier as immediate replacement was a difficult alternative, especially on the eve of a match. The success stories of Shubman Gill, Washing-

ton Sundar, Rishabh Pant, Mohammed Siraj, Axar Patel, Shardul Thakur, T. Natrajan, Suryakumar Yadav, Ishan Kishan, Prasidh Krishna and Krunal Pandya are a result of the situation that the Covid-19 pandemic caused.

These Indian cricketers have proved that India is now blessed with a talented pool of cricketers who, on a given day, are ready to rub shoulders with the best. The BCCI needs to be congratulated for creating this structure. The India ‘A’ and India U19’s frequent visits to play overseas and most importantly the Indian Premier League (IPL) has been the prime reason for this success.

The healthy competition that has arisen between the established, senior cricketers and the young, aspiring ones has made Indian cricketers tougher, more positive and confident. Playing with and against the best in the IPL and in matches abroad has negated that element of doubt of whether one is ready for the big stage

eter himself, has on numerous occasions also emphasised this. Looking back at the way India defeated Australia and England, they do look like a formidable unit. They now need to showcase their superiority by defeating New Zealand in the final in England. India will then be truly recognised as the “champion of champions”.

The BCCI, in the meanwhile, will conduct the most colourful and popular T20 league, the IPL. At the end of the year, India will be hosting the T20 World Cup. This, therefore, makes IPL a very important tournament not only for foreign International cricketers but also for Indian cricketers. The IPL will be important for India’s established cricketers to cement their place in the Indian side and for the aspiring ones to claim a spot.

The foreign players and the support staff will use this opportunity to get acclimatised to the conditions. Their input will be crucial for their national teams in the planning, preparation and strategising for the T20 World Cup.

The 2021 IPL will also provide much-needed entertainment to the fans in these times of Covid-19 pandemic. For millions of viewers saddled with curfews and lockdowns, cricket will be the April showers which one is looking forward to.

(Yajurvindra Singh is a former Test cricketer. Views expressed are personal)

KEEPING IN SYNC



Artists perform during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public rally ahead of third phase of Assam Assembly Elections 2021 in Baksa district on Saturday

Spotlight on Edappadi where CM has kept AIADMK flag flying high

J SIVAPRASANNA KUMAR

DMK has fielded a relatively less experienced T Sampathkumar, facing an uphill task in taking on the AIADMK Joint coordinator, for the April 6 Tamil Nadu Assembly polls.

Palaniswami’s image dominates the party’s campaign for the polls and he is also shouldering the responsibility of campaigning for allies BJP and PMK. He is seeking a fresh mandate from Edappadi assembly constituency, about 55 km from here, for the seventh time.

He had won from this constituency four times during the elections held in 1989, 1991, 2011 and 2016 assembly polls, but lost twice in the 1996 and 2006 polls to the PMK.

Also, he won the 1998 Lok Sabha election from Tiruchengodu constituency.

His master stroke in charting a road map to success for the AIADMK, which he held intact, post Jayalalithaa, from the day he assumed office as chief minister in February 2017, was to retain the Vanniyar-dominated PMK as an ally and announcing 10.5 per cent quota for the community.

This is expected to work in his favour in his home turf and the Vanniyar dominated belt as well.

Agriculture is the mainstay in this constituency, which accounts for a sizeable population of weavers and palm workers.

Vanniyars, Scheduled Castes, Nadars and Chettiars too form the assorted population in this assembly constituency in Salem district.

“He will win hands down for a hat-trick, mainly because there is no anti-

He may not be as charismatic as his party leaders, the late M G Ramachandran and J Jayalalithaa, but the simplicity and ability to connect with people make Chief Minister K Palaniswami, seeking another term from his Edapadi constituency, a down to earth person

incumbency in his constituency as being portrayed by the opposition DMK.

Secondly, he did not neglect the constituency. He ensured development in Edappadi constituency as he has done in other parts of Tamil Nadu,” PMK leader N Annadurai, who had contested against Palaniswami in the 2016 assembly election, told PTI.

Annadurai, who had put up an intense fight in the 2016 assembly election, secured 56,681 votes, but lost to Palaniswami who obtained 98,703 votes to win for the second consecutive time from Edappadi.

In the 2011 polls, Palaniswami trounced PMKs Karthe M and won an impressive 1,04,586 votes. Karthe polled 69,848 votes. The DMK had won only in the 1971 elections and is now making a desperate attempt to stage a comeback.

Since he became the chief minister, the constituency he represents became prominent and Edappadi is the cynosure of all eyes now with the AIADMK combine having high expectations of the CM’s victory.

“He improved the infrastructure and also was instrumental in augmenting the water resources for drinking needs and agriculture requirement. EPS annan (elder brother) will win and set a



record,” claims Murugan, one among numerous AIADMK secretaries actively involved in campaigning for the CM.

“Development of the constituency and Tamil Nadu, as well, has been his top priority,” Murugan told PTI.

He firmly believes that the chief minister will win easily and that the remain-

ing candidates will lose their deposits.

DMK candidate T Sampathkumar, facing an uphill task in taking on Palaniswami, claims the problem of unemployment still needs to be addressed in the constituency.

He has assured setting up of an industrial estate, a textile park and an agro

park, if he wins.

“Our party has fielded a strong candidate in Edappadi hailing from the dominant Vanniyar community. He has a favourable chance to win,” asserts K Selvaraj, a DMK local leader campaigning for Sampathkumar.

The Tamil Nadu governments an-

nouncement on 10.5 per cent reservation for Vanniyars has been announced only with an eye on the assembly election and this may not work for the ruling party, he claims.

“There is no chance for the Vanniyars to vote for the DMK in this election. I would rate it 1,000 per cent chance for both Palaniswami and his AIADMK to register a landslide victory in this election as the entire Vanniyar community will vote for the AIADMK,” asserts Annadurai.

He claims his community members will never vote for DMK.

“The battle lines have clearly been drawn between development, represented by the AIADMK, and destabilising forces of the DMK. Not only in Edappadi constituency, but also in the rest of Tamil Nadu, there is no anti-incumbency wave as the DMK is falsely depicting,” he said.

The PMK, Annadurai emphasises, feels that the chief ministers announcement of 10.5 per cent reservation for Vanniyars will have a huge impact on his victory.

Palaniswami, who will turn 67 on May 12, about 10 days after the poll results, is also banking on his governments performance during the pandemic times, natural calamities and in fetching global investment into Tamil Nadu, besides the party’s Two Leaves to get him back in office.

Shri Ratna of Naam Tamilar Katchi, Thasapparaj D of Makkal Needhi Maiam and Pookadai Sekar N of Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam are also in fray in this constituency, with an electorate strength of 2,84,378.

GMR unveils Innovex biz platform



HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

GMR group has launched a new business platform 'GMR Innovex' to drive future initiatives and growth. The platform will focus on innovations across both digital and non-digital domains to deliver improved efficiency, better customer experience and higher value to all stakeholders.

GMR Innovex will operate on an 'Open Innovation' model, acting as an 'Innovation Exchange' to partner with startups, corporates, innovation platforms, research institutions and academia to bring innovative ideas and solutions to life and help to nurture and sustain a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. A dedicated new facility for innovation has also been established at the Hyderabad airport campus.

"During Covid times, the aviation sector was hit hard but has emerged stronger. Several new technologies took shape during this period and were all aimed at making the industry robust. GMR Innovex will become an excellent hub to train talent for various specialised jobs across the aviation industry," said Pradeep Singh Kharola, Secretary, Ministry of Aviation, India.

"We are glad that GMR innovation is stationed in our State. With its strategic presence around the globe and being in one of the key sectors, the innovation hub is going to make a difference," said Somesh Kumar, Chief Secretary, Telangana.

GMR Innovex also announced innovation-focused partnerships with multiple new partners including Airbus, Swedish Institute, T - Hub, IIT-Hyderabad, ICRISAT, and Schulich Business school of York University, Toronto, Canada.

PENSION PRODUCTS KEY FOR A BETTER RETIREMENT LIFE

Females' higher life expectancy signifies that women should also invest in pension plans

KUMUD DAS

YOU have taken over as IAI President recently. Kindly tell me about your agenda.

As you rightly said that I have taken over as the President very recently. You must be knowing that Institute of Actuaries of India (IAI) is 75 years old. Just last year we have celebrated the 75th yearsof establishment. We at the institute are taking lots of initiatives to increase the number of members, increase the number of Fellows but without compromising on any quality of education of actuaries. So, we must maintain a balance between the number of actuaries to increase, and at the same time, the quality should not be compromised upon. To achieve this, the institute is providing coaching and counselling support to our students so that they can qualify as Fellows. IAI is also working on increasing awareness about actuarial science.

What is your view of IFRS17 implementation in the country?

We have shared our comments with the accounting standard board on the Exposure draft of Amendments to Ind AS 117. We have requested them for delay of at least one year so that the insurers have adequate time for the implementation. IAI is committed to supporting insurers in the implementation of IFRS17. IAI had created the Advisory group on IFRS 17 to work on this. The group already has conducted seminars/webinars to discuss on the practical issues in the implementation of IFRS17 in India.

IRDAI Chairman wants insurers to come up with superannuation products in view of the increasing longevity. What do say about it?

Yes, about superannuation products, very rightly agree with what IRDAI chairman has men-



Subhendu Kumar Bal

tioned. The retirement savings gap is huge. Few years ago, a report of World Economic Forum stated that India's retirement savings gap is expected to touch \$85 trillion by 2050.

If you look at it from the Indian context, our average life expectancy has increased over the years. And this poses a significant risk of individuals outliving their savings. As we grow older, expenses on account of health and day-to-day living generally increase. It is essential to have some savings that can help enjoy life post retirement. Superannuation products would help individuals in better planning their retirement.

Other developed countries have the social security and still they have the pension products and these products are very popular. But in Indian context if you look at it, people prefer liquidity more than the need to save for the future. Hence, there is a need to create an awareness for saving through superannuation products.

Women have a longer lifespan as compared to their male coun-

In Indian context if you look at it, people prefer liquidity more than the need to save for the future.

"Hence, there is a need to create an awareness for saving through superannuation products," says Subhendu Kumar Bal, President, Institute of Actuaries of India and Chief Actuary and Chief Risk Officer, SBI Life Insurance Company in an exclusive interview with Bizz Buzz.

terparts.

Yes, you are right. Females have higher life expectancy than male. And this signifies that women should also invest in pension plans.

But insurers are providing the cover for 100 years or something, will it be useful here?

There are two types of products, one is the life insurance product and the other is pension product. Let us understand the difference between these two products.

The life insurance product basically covers the death of the life assured. As you know, when life assured dies, his/her nominee receives the benefits. So, when someone takes cover for hundred years, if he/she dies during any time within 100 years, then the family money receives the money.

Let us think the other way around, suppose if someone survives longer than expected, then what will happen. Someone retiring at age 60 or so and suppose he/she survives till hundred years of age, i.e., from 60-100 years, the person has no income, other than

some investment interest if any, but at least the pension / annuity products can meet these needs by providing regular annuity payments.

Can't the insurance companies offer the pension product?

They can, in fact lots of insurance companies offer pension products. The general feedback is that most of the customers are not aware about the longevity risk. As we insure ourselves from mortality risk by buying term assurance products, we should also invest in pension / annuity products to insure ourselves from longevity risk. Pension products are generally of longer policy term, so we need to incentivise people more for putting their money in the pension products for longer duration. So, I believe, there is need to increase the awareness of longevity risk and the need for pension products.

Can you tell me about the index-based products?

In Index linked products, the benefits are generally linked to an Index. This helps in making the

benefit structure more transparent so that customers can understand the benefits easily. As the benefits are linked to index, this helps insurers to price these products more realistically.

So, the index linked product can make a good balance between the customer to get the good value, and for the insurance companies to better price the products. I think the insurance regulator created a committee to recommend these types of products. I feel that this will augur well for the industry.

There is a talk that all the insurance products are likely to get costlier by 10-15 per cent from April onwards, so I wanted to understand from you what is the scenario like?

The term pricing has been aggressive, and these were cheaper than the term premiums available in many of the developed countries.

This has nothing to do with the Covid-19 impact, as far as the current year is concerned, even if the Covid-19 has impacted the industry a little, the price of the term insurance products was expected to be increased due to the experience of it being not favourable for most of the companies.

So, you rightly said that premiums may have to be increased based on the target market and the level of initial pricing assumption. If a company priced it higher initially, keeping in mind the sustainable premium, then the increase in premium may be say 10 per cent or 5 per cent or zero per cent. While if some companies' premium was lower initially due to some reasons and if experience has not been favourable, then they may increase the price by 20 per cent or more but overall basis average would be around 10 per cent to 15 per cent may be for the industry; you may be right.

Thomson bets on India's home appliances mkt

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

THOMSON India, a home appliance company, has launched its first ever air-coolers in desert and window categories. The company also launched the semi-automatic washing machine of 7 kg variant.

The company plans to capture India's growing home appliance market, pegged to grow at \$1,534 million (nearly ₹11,256 crore). The brand also targets to capture 15 per cent of India's online home appliance market in next two years.

The air coolers will be available in three models - CPD70, CPD90 in desert variant and CPW50 in window variant. The brand features smart cool technology, superior air cooling with Honeycomb pad, overflow outlet and water level indicator, multiple modes for fan speed, cooling and swing control.

The semi-automatic washing machine developed with French technology, which comes with a heavy-duty motor, is tested under extreme conditions. With the new range of air-coolers and washing machines, the India brand licensee of Thomson, Super Plastronics, continues its momentum with 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and remains committed to move towards self-reliance.

"Thomson is now investing big in appliances; I feel India needs a premium affordable brand in appliances. Online air cooler market will be 30 per cent this year, we want to be the number one online air cooler brand in the next three years. We will be launching multiple models in the next two years, according to different regions," said Avneet Singh Marwah, CEO, Super Plastronics.

The products will be exclusively available on e-commerce site Filpkart with a starting price of Rs 5,999.

Self-awareness is the key to manage risks in life



Viiveck Verma

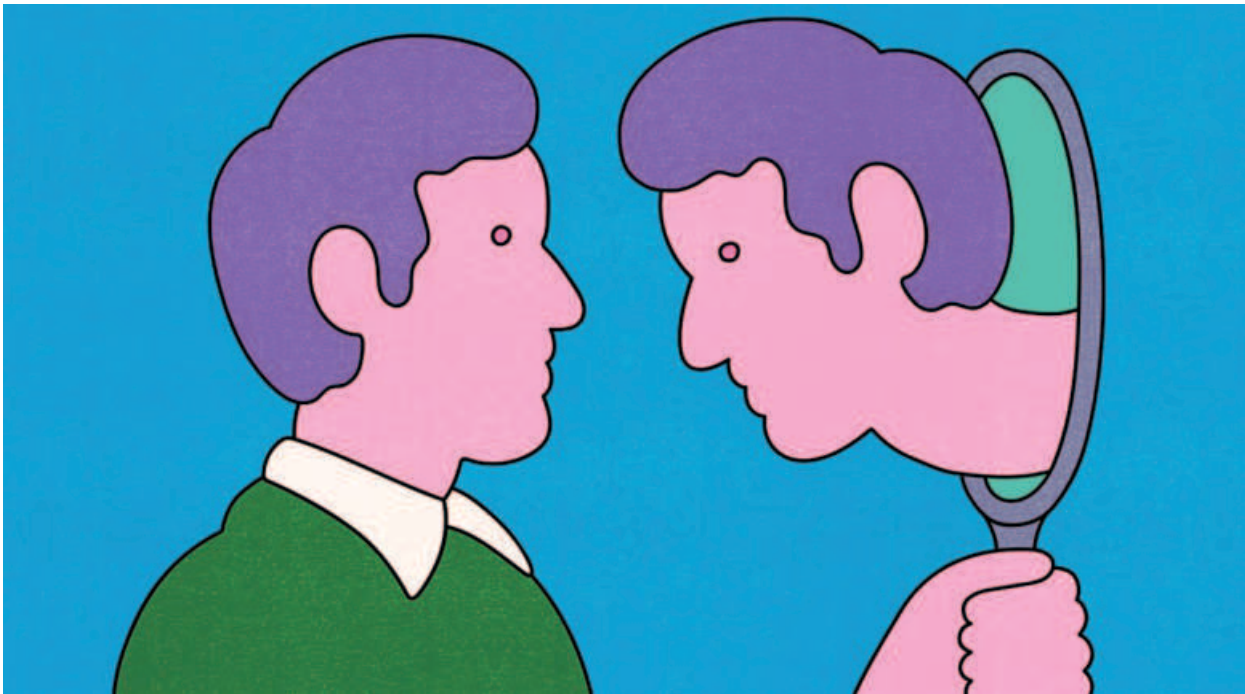
"No one ever ascended a mountain without risk."

-Liane Moriarty

FAILURE is a much-denounced word in the times we live in. There is an insistence to not lose what we hold and fail at things in an intimidating world which takes twists and turns at every possibility. This often pushes us to hold on to the things we have and preserve them, instead of creatively reconstructing our realities. Such an approach, however, yields fewer rewards and a great degree of passivity. To be risk-averse often translates to a culture of fear, less action and no innovation. We can disregard significant opportunities and possibilities of learning in a conservative state of inactivity, where we futilely attempt to secure ourselves from the unpredictable nature of the world we inhabit and the lives we lead.

One may deem not being a risk-taker to be a prudent choice to make. It can be argued that if I have the choice to conform and keep things in place for myself, not risking things might be a good idea. However, if we ponder what is wrong with a brand of prudence like this, the answer is not difficult to find. Long-term, or permanent security against the ebbs and flows of life is a myth. Any safety in life has to be consistently maintained through new sets of actions in unforeseen circumstances. If an illusory comfort zone keeps us at bay, every action we take is contained and the potential we hold is unsparingly suffocated. The spheres we inhabit seldom give us chances to fulfil our most cherished and intimate dreams, and

Keeping the possibility of failure in mind, it would be a reasonable question to ask how to take risks



A most certain place to begin is to accept not just the possibility but the inevitability of failing, at some level, at some point. Risks have to be taken with cons being taken as seriously as the pros and with success and failure being considered as probable

they can certainly not be realised through limited, fearful action.

Risking it, furthermore, is not necessarily risking it all. Risks do not have to be equated with mindless action or rash behaviour and can be calculated. Looking at the pros and cons of an act in the most rudimentary of ways can reveal whether the risk is worth taking and if the rewards outweigh the troubles to be encountered. Risking, most fundamentally is linked to activity and action and like involves responsibility. Accordingly, risks can be managed with sound judgement and self-awareness even as we take them. The important thing is to not stay away from acting in the first place.

History bristles with stories of successful risk-takers.

As Inc.com reports Oprah Winfrey, who has created a multimedia brand legacy and launched multiple philanthropic organisations during the course of her career, with a net worth of \$3 billion risked her financial security in the mid 1980s to host her own television show. The Oprah Winfrey Show went on to become the highest rated program of its kind in history. Closer home, as CNBC-TV18 notes, Wow! Momos began humbly with a kitchen, two cooks and a table in Jadavpur and with some success, encountered struggles of its own with unremarkable sales in some locations. However, resilience and a belief in action and execution, the startup today is an exemplary success story. Keeping the possibility of

failure in mind, it would be a reasonable question to ask how to take risks. A most certain place to begin is to accept not just the possibility but the inevitability of failing, at some level, at some point. Risks have to be taken with cons being taken as seriously as the pros and with success and failure being considered as probable. The key lies in not getting bogged down by any grand or micro failures which come in the path of executing a risky endeavour. Simultaneously, it is important to keep evaluating the enterprise and know when to abandon it and start afresh with new things. Failing is a certain window to substantial learning and when we start anew, we meet new risks with better preparedness.

The other necessity is to methodically and objectively assess the risk. Ideas are important but the execution in the real world is almost more crucial in the larger scheme of things. As we embrace potential harm that comes with an endeavour, we must be aware of the harvests we can reap. Some risks are worth taking and some are not and getting to the effort of risking it must not lack purpose or order.

In any case, reliance on action is necessary. I'm for innovation or creating things of consequence through unprecedented creativity, this requires doing risky, new things. Dreams are seldom realised in comfort zones, the revolutionary comes out of the courage to embrace risk. To quote Alice Bag, "Safe is prudent, safe is comfortable but progress is propelled by those who are willing to risk it all." It is important to refuse operating from a place of fear and courageously base our worth and satisfaction of acting. To win, to achieve, to leave our footprints, we need to risk it!

QUIZ NO.
167

HANS BIZ QUIZ

"April & Evolution of Computers"

- On 4 April 1994, Marc Andreessen and Jim Clark created the NCSA Mosaic web browser that led to the Internet boom of the 1990s. Mosaic was developed at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA), University of Illinois. The NCSA Mosaic web browser was a precursor to which of the below web browsers?
a) Lynx 2.0
b) Netscape Navigator
c) Internet Explorer 1
d) Opera 2.0
- On 2 April 1980, Microsoft announced its first hardware product that allowed programs running under the CP/M operating system, Microsoft BASIC, WordStar word processor application, and also to run on the 6502-based Apple II after a few modifications. The product brought half of Microsoft's total revenue. Identify the product that was discontinued in 1986?
a) Microsoft Mac Enhancer
b) Microsoft PCjr Booster
c) Z-80 SoftCard
d) Microsoft InPort Card
- This person was only the second IBM employee hired with a Ph.D. He was involved in the development of the IBM-7030 (STRETCH) and the IBM-1710. He also formed the Applied Science Department, responsible for introducing Fortran, the IBM-701, 650, and 704. Identify the Computer Pioneer who took birth on 5 April 1911?
a) Alan Mathison Turing
b) John Warner Backus
c) Alan Jay Perlis
d) Cuthbert Corwin Hurd
- On 4 April 1975, when the world used calculators and typewriters, Gates and Allen founded Microsoft, a company that makes computer software. When did Microsoft Corporation release Windows 3.1, an operating system that provided IBM and IBM-compatible PCs with a graphical user interface?
a) 9 April 1993
b) 6 April 1992
c) 3 April 1990
d) 2 April 1989
- 57 years ago, on 7 April 1964, IBM Announces "System 360" Computer Family. IBM System/360 changed the IT industry forever, and it transformed how much of the world's work gets done even today. Which of the below Models were manufactured under IBM System/360?
a) Model 20, Model 25, Model 40, Model 65
b) Model 22, Model 44, Model 67, Model 91
c) Model 30, Model 50, Model 75, Model 85
d) Model 135, Model 145, Model 155, Model 165
- The development of Java begins in earnest on this day; Sun Microsystems' Java development team moves to work in secret on its "Oak" development project. Which day was it?
a) 10 April 1993
b) 8 April 1991
c) 2 April 1988
d) 1 April 1985
- The agreement was signed between the University of Pennsylvania's Moore School of Electrical Engineering and the US Army on 9 April 1943 to build which of the below?
a) Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer (ENIAC)
b) Universal Automatic Computer (UNIVAC)
c) Electronic Delay Storage Automatic Calculator (EDSAC)
d) All of the above
- German computer designer and pioneering computer scientist Konrad Zuse files for a patent for the automatic execution of calculations on 11 April 1936. Which of the below becomes Germany's first computer developed by Zuse?
a) Z-1
b) Hs 293 and Hs 294
c) KZ-1
d) Z11
- The programming language that provided the basis for work in artificial intelligence development was unveiled on 16 April 1959 by John McCarthy.
a) Autocode
b) Prolog
c) LISP
d) COMTRAN
- Which Tech company had become the first to use a megabit chip, a memory chip capable of storing one million bits of information, on 18 April 1986?
a) Apple Inc
b) IBM Corporation
c) Hewlett-Packard
d) Dell Technologies



The Hans Biz Quiz has been compiled by **Sunil Dhavala**, CEO, The Third Umpire Media. He had held senior management roles at Bertelsmann, NGC, Fox Broadcasting, Star TV and others. He is an alumnus of Indian Institute of Foreign Trade

KEY

1B 2C 3D 4B 5D 6B 7A 8B 9C 10B

Indian Premier League

HYDERABAD KEPT
AS STANDBY VENUE

10 Wankhede ground staff, 6 event managers test Covid positive

MUMBAI

THE BCCI remains hopeful of conducting the scheduled IPL matches in Mumbai from April 10-25 despite a massive surge in COVID-19 cases in the city and 10 members of the Wankhede Stadium staff testing positive for the deadly virus. Indore and Hyderabad have been kept as stand by venues for the IPL in case the COVID situation spirals out of control.

Mumbai is scheduled to host 10 games of the cash-rich league. With in excess of 47,000 cases on Friday, Maharashtra is looking at a potential situation of mini-lockdown.

Of equal concern to the organisers is the number of groundstaff at the Wankhede going up from 8 to 10 between Friday evening and Saturday morning. If that wasn't enough, around six members of the event management team have also tested positive for COVID-19 and have been sent to isolation.

"Yes, it was 8 positive cases yesterday as far as ground-staff are concerned. Today two more positive cases have emerged and all 10 have been sent back home and are isolated."

"We are bringing fresh ground-staff from the Mumbai CA ground in Kandivali for preparations. Also 6 to 7 event management staff hired by BCCI have also tested positive," a senior Mumbai CA official told PTI.

When a senior BCCI office-bearer was asked about the situation, he admitted that BCCI is indeed concerned. "Look, even if there is a lockdown, the teams are in bio-bubble and also it's a closed-door event. So we are still confident that IPL games in Mumbai will be held as per schedule with Delhi Capitals playing Chennai Super Kings on April 10 on the second day of the tournament."

"But Hyderabad and Indore are there on stand by in case the situation goes out of hand," the office bearer told PTI on Saturday. As of now, none of the teams currently in Mumbai -- Delhi Capitals, Mumbai Indians, Rajasthan Royals, Punjab Kings -- have access to Wankhede.

"Delhi Capitals ad Punjab Kings for example are taking turns to train at the Brabourne Stadium and Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) ground. KKR is training in Navi Mumbai at the DY Patil before they leave for Chennai," the official informed.

It is expected that BCCI's medical unit will enhance the testing rate due to the surge of cases in the state. The event management and operations of IPL till last year, was handled by the IMG but from this year, the board is handling the event on its own.

"We have enough back-up staff to handle as we had factored in that the situation in Mumbai is grim at the

Warner, Williamson arrive,
undergo quarantine

CHENNAI

SUNRISERS Hyderabad's foreign recruits David Warner and Kane Williamson have landed in Chennai and are undergoing a week-long quarantine, the franchise's website confirmed on Saturday.

Australia opener Warner and New Zealand captain Williamson were shown speaking on twitter, confirming they are undergoing quarantine.

"Hey Orange army (referring to SRH fans), I am looking to get out of quarantine in about six or seven days. And guess what, I am Orange or nothing," Warner was shown addressing SRH fans in a video posted by the franchise on Saturday.

A few hours before that, Williamson

was also seen addressing the SRH fans. "Hey there, Orange army. Just landed. Looking forward to getting out of quarantine in seven days' time and I am Orange or nothing," Williamson said.

SunRisers, who qualified for the play-offs last season in UAE, play their first match of the Indian Premier League 2021 at the MA Chidambaram Stadium on April 11. They also have the services of England's hard-hitting opening batsman Jonny Bairstow.

Ace pace bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar too has returned to the set-up for this season after recovering from his injury that saw him miss the latter half of IPL. The right-arm pace bowler played a lead role in India's limited-overs series win over England recently. (IANS)



moment. But yes, we are closely monitoring the situation," the official added.

The report added that none of the franchises have been spoken to by the board about a possible change in venue.

The IPL 2021 will be held across six venues. While the first phase of the matches will be held in Chennai and Mumbai, the bandwagon moves to Ahmedabad and Delhi for the second phase. The last phase of the league games will be held in Bengaluru and Kolkata.

The play-offs and the final are scheduled to be held in Ahmedabad towards the end of May.

The matches will be played behind closed doors with no public allowed at the venues. The IPL 2020 was held in the UAE due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the board has decided to host it in India this year.

India are also scheduled to host the T20 World Cup later this year. (PTI)

Axar tests Covid +ve

MUMBAI

LEFT-arm spinner Axar Patel, who was one of the stars in the Indian team's Test series win over England, has tested positive for Covid-19, the Delhi Capitals franchise confirmed on Saturday.

The bowler has been put in isolation. "Delhi Capitals all-rounder Axar Patel has tested positive for Covid-19. He had checked into the team hotel in Mumbai on March 28, 2021, with a negative report. His report from the second COVID test came positive," said a statement from the Delhi Capitals franchise.

"He is currently in isolation at a designated medical care facility. The Delhi Capitals medical team is in constant touch with Axar and ensuring his safety and well-being. We wish him a speedy recovery," the statement added.

Patel had taken 27 wickets in three Tests against England recently. (IANS)

Indian para shuttlers
assured of a rich haul
in Dubai event

DUBAI

INDIAN Para shuttlers are in for a rich haul in the season-opening 3rd Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum Dubai Para Badminton International 2021, ensuring themselves of 17 medals at the Shabab Al Ahli Club on Saturday.

Leading shuttlers Pramod Bhagat, Manoj Sarkar (MS SL3 category), Sukant Kadam and Nitesh Kumar (MS SL4), Krishna Nagar (MS SH6), Manasi Joshi and Parul Parmar (WS SL3) all made it to the last-four stage in their respective categories, and barring Bhagat, all of them have ensured two medals each in their respective categories.

The spotlight was firmly on Bhagat, young Palak Kohli (WS SU5) and Prem Kumar Ale (MS WH1) who have ensured themselves of three medals each after having made it to the singles, doubles and mixed doubles

semi-finals in their respective categories.

Bhagat, who is the defending world champion, defeated former Indonesian great Ukun Rukaendi 21-16, 21-13 in the men's singles SL 3 match in just 44 minutes and will take on Malaysian Muhammad Huzairi Abdul Malek in the semi-finals.

In men's doubles, the top-seeded pair of Bhagat and Manoj Sarkar (SL3-SL4 category) will take on Mohammad Arwaz Ansari and Deep Ranjan Bisoyee in the semi-finals.

In mixed doubles SL3-SU5 category, the Bhagat-Palak Kohli combination overcome a stiff challenge from compatriots Chirag Baretha and Mandeep Kaur 21-10, 21-17 and will take on the French pair of Lucas Mazur and Faustine Noel to book a place in the final.

A beaming Bhagat said: "I am eyeing three gold medals here, though it looks a little tough in the mixed doubles event with

strong teams waiting on the road to final.

However, I will give my best efforts to start the season on a strong note," said Bhagat.

Sukant Kadam just needed 22 minutes to crush Malaysian Muhammad Norhilmie Mohd Zainudin 21-17, 21-8 to enter the men's singles SL4 semi-final stage. The 27-year-old from Maharashtra along with Nitesh also progressed to the men's doubles SL3-SL4 event. "I am looking to play the finals in both the events but for now I am focusing on the next match only. I was expecting Freddy (Setiawan) in the semi-finals but Marcel Adam played really well. Looking forward to play against him in the semis," said Kadam.

A total of 127 players from 29 countries, including hosts United Arab Emirates, are competing in the BWF Para Badminton tournament after more than a year because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Djokovic
pulls out of
Madrid Open

MADRID

TENNIS ace and world No. 1 Novak Djokovic will not be competing in this year's edition of the Madrid Open, according to reports in Serbian media.

It was expected that the Serb, fresh from his Australian Open triumph in February, would compete in the clay-court Masters 1000 event, which was called off last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

But the winner of 18 Grand Slam titles, only two behind the joint record holders Switzerland's Roger Federer and Spain's Rafael Nadal with 20 Slam titles each, has decided to skip the tournament from May 2-9 where he is the defending champion.

The 33-year-old has won the Madrid Open title thrice with the last triumph coming in 2019 where he defeated Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final.

Tokyo-bound Gnanasekaran fights
lockdown to shine in Europe

NEW DELHI

TO prepare for the Tokyo Olympics starting July 23, Indias ace table tennis player Sathiyar Gnanasekaran is competing in the 10-day long Polish Superliga that started on Friday.

The 28-year-old Gnanasekaran is representing Jaroslaw, the city that is hosting the Polish Superliga. He reached Poland on Friday and will return on April 14.

According to Gnanasekaran, since several competitions are either being cancelled or postponed due to coronavirus, participating in the

Polish league will keep him match fit.

"It is a tough competition. So I wanted to compete to get the benefit of match practice in times of pandemic," he told IANS.

In the quarter-finals, the Indian player won a crucial singles game to help his team beat Bydgoszcz team 3-1 and enter the last-four stage of the competition. The semi-finals will be played on April 7. Last month, the Chennai-based national champion had made the cut for Olympics men's singles event during the Asian qualification tournament held in Doha.

Jakarta Asian Games bronze-medallist Sharath Kamal became the second Indian to book a berth for the Olympics in the men's singles event.

"It was a tough quarter-final. The semis could be more challenging. Hope my team enters the final," Gnanasekaran told IANS over phone from Jaroslaw.

Due to the new wave of coronavirus in Europe, there is a lockdown in several cities in Poland too.

"We are staying in a bio-bubble. We are not allowed to venture outside the hotel or the stadium. All the shops and restaurants are shut. The local government has allowed players from outside to compete because it's a professional league. I'm just focusing on the tournament," he added.

