

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | TUESDAY 6 | APRIL 2021

WEATHER



Max: 35°C
Min: 24°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Panguni 24
Tithi: Navami
Star: Thiruvonam
Rahukalam:
3.00 pm to 4.30 pm
Yamagandam:
9.00 am to 10.30 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.55 am
Lunar: 12.18 pm
Asar: 3.39 pm
Maghrib: 6.21 pm
Isha: 7.32 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.21 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.16 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 2.05 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 2.56 PM

CORONA COUNT

| CASES | DEATHS |
|-------------|----------|
| (+88,042) | (+391) |
| 1,25,87,891 | 1,65,523 |

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+3,672)
TN: 9,03,479 12,789

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

13,22,11,006

DEATHS
28,69,484

COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

March third warmest in 121 years: IMD

New Delhi: March was third warmest in 121 years in terms of monthly average maximum temperature, the India Meteorological Department on Monday said. The IMD, in its review for the month, said the observed monthly average maximum, minimum and mean temperature for the country as a whole during March this year are 32.65 degrees Celsius, 19.95 degrees Celsius and 26.30 degrees Celsius, respectively.

52K cops, drones, for Kerala polls tomorrow

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala heads for a single-phase assembly elections on Tuesday under the security of 59,292 police personnel and 140 companies of central forces. Kerala Police chief Loknath Behra had on Saturday said that all security arrangements have been finalised for the smooth conduct of the assembly polls with a total of 59,292 police personnel and a drone system to detect crowds and obstruction of voters in the hinterlands on polling day. Behra had said that the entire state will be divided into special security zones.

COUNTER POINT



Don't worry, we will go for shopping at the beginning of the week!

STATE | 2

Health secy rules out lockdown after polls



G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D SEKAR / DC
CHENNAI, APR 5

The 'silent day' ahead of the election was marked by a buzz about possible cancellation of polls in constituencies of top DMK honchos, including president MK Stalin, even as cash distribution went on unabated across the State despite the authorities continued with their crackdown that led to a slew of seizures.

Messages on the Election Commission of India mulling over countermanding elections in the constituencies of Kolathur, Chepauk-Thiruvellikeni, Trichi West, Thiruvannamalai and Katpadi made their rounds in social media after the AIADMK approached the Chief Electoral Officer, Satyabrata Sahoo, with complaints of poll violations. Stalin's rival candidate belonging to the AIADMK, Adi Rajaram, alleged that the DMK was not following any election norms in Kolathur constituency.

He also said that DMK men were attacking AIADMK cadre in their election offices and that the police were turning a blind eye to it.

AIADMK's Advocate Wing Joint Secretary, R M Babu Murugavel, lodged a series of complaints that were handed over to the CEO along with Minister D Jayakumar accusing the DMK of paying money to voters in Thiruvannamalai, where E V Velu is the DMK candidate, Trichi West (K N Nehru) and Katpadi (Duraimurugan).

In another complaint, he alleged that Sun New tele-

TOTAL VOTERS

6.28 cr

CANDIDATES IN THE FRAY

3,998

NEW VOTERS AGED 18-19 IN THIS POLL

8.98L

- Voting hours:** 7 am to 7 pm
- Thermal screening of voters will be on at every booth**
- Number of voters per booth reduced to 1,000 voters this election**

vision channel was telecasting 'banned videos, clippings, footage' and demanded the Election Commission to stop the telecast.

Speaking to the media after handing over the complaints, Jayakumar demanded the cancellation of elections in Kolathur, Chepauk-Thiruvellikeni, Trichi West, Thiruvannamalai and Katpadi.

Alleging that the DMK was known for its cash for vote practices, Jayakumar said the party had perfected the art of money distribution through the 'Thirumangalam formula' and had been also accused of the same crime subsequently leading to cancellation of elections.

Another video that went viral during the day showed DMK's Trichi satrap K N Nehru arguing with a party cadre on money distribution. ■ P2

BATTLE ON

CM Edappadi Palaniswami leads the AIADMK+ alliance in seeking a third successive term for AIADMK with challenger MK Stalin aiming to oust the rulers with the DMK+ alliance that he leads into poll battle today



Cash-for-votes was a major talking point ahead of the polls though Tamil Nadu has gained a lot of notoriety for this with both major Dravidian parties known to encourage the buying of votes



In 2016, AIADMK had won 136 seats and DMK+ 98 seats but the polling percentage was much closer with AIADMK getting 40.88 per cent of votes polled and DMK+ 39.85 per cent. The parties were then led by J. Jayalalithaa and M. Karunanidhi. Both leaders are now no more.

EC seizes ₹482 crore poll bribe materials

A ARUL PALANI
DC, CHENNAI, APRIL 5

The Election Commission seized precious metals, alcohol, cash and other items worth Rs 428 crore before the elections in Tamil Nadu.

Revealing details of seizures, Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo, said that they included cash of Rs 91.56 lakh in Ranipet district, Rs 1.23 crore in Thousand lights constituency, Chennai and Rs 1.15 crore at Veerapandi, Salem, ₹1.06 crore in Vellore district; ₹98 lakh in Coimbatore,

₹1.13 crore in Saidapet and ₹65 lakh in Virudhunagar Assembly Constituency.

"The last 72 hours are extremely sensitive from an expenditure standpoint. Towards this, round the clock surveillance along with CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) teams has been taken up," he added.

Special teams detected suspicious transactions of Rs 5 lakh in from an account of a woman in Coimbatore, which amount has been distributed to a number of voters through G-Pay. The officials have ordered a probe, sources said.



SASIKALA NAME MISSING IN VOTERS LIST

Chennai, April 5: A complaint made to the CEO was about the removal of the names of former Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa's close aide V K Sasikala and her sister-in-law Ilavarasi from the voters list. Their lawyer Raja Senthur Pandian wanted the CEO to ensure that their voting right was restored, enabling them to exercise their franchise on Tuesday.

Sasikala and Ilavarasi had been residents of Veda Nilayam, the house of Jayalalithaa in Poes Garden. They were away doing their sentence in Bengaluru jail during the past four years and during which time Veda Nilayam was taken over by the government and converted into a memorial. So, the authorities are said to have taken away their names from the list.

Election authorities say that Sasikala and Ilavarasi should have applied for inclusion of their names in the voters list from their new address in Habibulalh Road.

SPORT | 5

Ponting reveals Prithvi's batting habit in last IPL



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CBI to probe HC; Maha HM quits

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, APRIL 5

Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh resigned on Monday following the Bombay High Court's orders to conduct the CBI inquiry into the corruption allegations levelled against him by former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh.

NCP chief Sharad Pawar's trusted aide Dilip Walse Patil, who was a labour and excise minister in the state cabinet, has taken over as the new home minister after chief minister Uddhav Thackeray accepted Mr Deshmukh's resignation.

"I don't have the moral right to continue in office after the court order. I have decided to quit. Kindly relieve me from my post," said Mr Deshmukh in his resignation letter.

The HC earlier had directed the CBI to conduct a preliminary probe within 15 days into allegations of corruption and malpractices made by Mr Singh against Mr Deshmukh. Once the preliminary inquiry is complete, the director of CBI can decide on the future course of action and whether or not to register an FIR in the case.

"There can be no independent probe into allegations of extortion if it is handed to the Mumbai Police, which is headed by the home minister. This was an extraordinary and unprecedented case that warranted an independent inquiry," the HC said.

Following the HC orders, Mr Pawar held an urgent meeting of the



Dilip Walse Patil is new Maha home minister

Mumbai, April 5: Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Monday forwarded Home Minister Anil Deshmukh's resignation to Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari and informed him that Dilip Walse Patil will now be taking charge of the state Home department. Dilip Walse Patil is currently Maharashtra's minister for labour and excise.

The Maharashtra government also decided that the Excise Ministry will be given to Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, who is already in charge of the State Finance Ministry.

party's senior leaders to discuss the issue. The ramifications of the court directives on the MVA government were discussed in the meeting. It felt that the possibility of the home minister being called for questioning by the CBI during its probe would be embarrassing for the NCP and the government, the party sources said.

NCP chief spokesperson and minority affairs minister Nawab Malik said,

BENGAL CAMPAIGN

Low turnout haunts BJP

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, APRIL 5

At a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and union home minister Amit Shah are frantically repeating their claims of Bharatiya Janata party coming to power with more than 200 seats in the ongoing Assembly Election in West Bengal, low turnout at poll campaign rallies continues to haunt their forecasts and plague their party as Monday witnessed the cancellation of BJP president JP Nadda's two major campaign rallies in Hooghly apparently due to poor crowd.

The ominous sign, that has been casting a shadow on the saffron party's prospects for quite some time, resurfaced only a day before the state goes to the third phase of polls with 31 seats on Tuesday. Mr Nadda, who reached Kolkata on Sunday night, was scheduled to address

one public rally each in Shreerampore and Chinsurah of the district apart from a roadshow in South Kolkata in between the two. Though his first rally was supposed to start from 11.30 am at Shreerampore Stadium for four BJP candidates, it however appeared to have failed in attracting the party workers and local residents in large numbers even after an hour.

Helpless, BJP (Shreerampore Organization District) president Shyamal Basu announced that Mr Nadda's message, either an audio clip or a video, would be played at the venue. This however went in vain. Later state BJP general secretary Sayantan Basu informed that Mr Nadda would come to address the rally. But the venue turned empty as the handful crowd, confused by two different statements from two leaders, left.

Dassault paid 1 million euro bribe to Indian in Rafale deal: Report

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

In a fresh controversy over Rs 59,000 crore Rafale fighter jets deal, French investigative newsportal Mediapart has claimed that its manufacturer Dassault Aviation agreed to pay one million euros to a middleman who is now under investigation in India in connection with another defence deal. In 2016, India

had agreed to buy 36 Rafales for Indian Air Force in a deal worth ₹ 59,000 crore.

Mediapart said that the French anti-corruption agency Agence Française Anti-corruption (AFA) discovered this separate arrangement during a routine audit of Dassault. The AFA nonetheless decided not to alert the prosecution authorities over the payment.

The report said that as AFA inspectors combed through Dassault accounts in 2017, they raised an eyebrow when they came across an item expenditure costing 508,925 euros entered under the heading "gifts to clients". It said that this amount of money seemed disproportionate in relation to all the other entries under the same heading. "The sum is indeed huge for a gift.

Though French law does not set out precise limits, legal precedents suggest that giving a watch or an expensive meal costing several hundred euros can be enough to constitute corruption," the Mediapart report said.

It said that Dassault supplied AFA with proforma invoice, which was supplied by an Indian company called Defsys Solutions. This invoice which related

to 50 per cent of the total order (1,017,850) was for the manufacture of 50 replica of the Rafale with price of each model 20,000 euros.

AFA asked Dassault why it ordered an Indian company to make replica of its aircraft at 20,000 euros per piece. AFA enquire whether these replicas supposed to be the size of a car really ever made. Dassault was unable to provide single document or photo-

graph showing that these models existed and were delivered, said the news report.

The news report said that inspectors suspected that this was a bogus purchase designed to hide a hidden financial transaction.

On reports that some of these models have been put out in India including at IAF chief's residence, Yann Philippin the journalist who wrote the story said

that besides huge price of these models what is strange that Dassault refused to confirm if they were the same models manufactured by Defsys. "Dassault refused to confirm to me that these are the same models. Are they same model that were ordered to this Indian company? We don't know. What is strange is that if there was no problem and that was just an Indian manu-

facturing models Dassault should have spoken to us and told us everything is clear. We ordered these models they are to be given to institutions in India to celebrate Rafale deal. They could have explained to us. They said no comments. There seems to be some kind of embarrassment regarding these plane models at Dassault Headquarters," he told a news channel.

OTHER STORIES

3K special buses for election

Chennai: In a press release on Monday, the transport department has announced the operation of special buses for the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections to be held on Tuesday (April 6). The release said that 13,000 special buses served 5,29,000 passengers between April 1 till 20:00 hours of Monday (April 5), and so far, 59,250 passengers have made their reservations. Of the routine 2,225 buses, 1,850 buses ran as regular services, and 650 as special buses.

Uber to offer free rides for elderly, diff-abled voters

Chennai: On Election Day, Uber is going to make it easy for the elderly and persons with disabilities to travel from their homes to polling stations and back home up to 5 km with 100 per cent discount of up to Rs 200. The Election Commission has arranged free transportation in collaboration with Uber for voters above the age of 80 years and Persons with Disabilities for the April 6 Assembly election. The rider can book the ride through Uber app on mobile phones. The service is available in Chennai, Tiruchy and Coimbatore.

Below poverty line kazhagam to vote for DMK

Tiruchy, April 5: The All-India below poverty line people Munnetra Kazhagam will support the DMK-led secular front in the assembly election. Announcing this at a press conference at Tiruchy on Sunday, kazhagam's founder-president Robert Christy and former Tiruchirappalli mayor Emile Richard said they have conveyed the decision to the DMK through its principal secretary K.N. Nehru along with a 7-point charter of demands for the uplift of people below the poverty line.



A polling booth getting ready at Tambaram on Monday.

— DC

Health secy rules out lockdown after polls

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 5

Ruling out the possibility of the state coming under lockdown immediately after polling for the Assembly election was completed on Tuesday, health secretary J. Radhakrishnan debunked all rumours to that effect.

However, he expressed concern over the rise of new Coronavirus cases in the State and said that a campaign would be launched on April 7 to promote vaccination.

Speaking to the media after a review meeting at the DMS complex, he said that everyone aged about 45 years should take the vaccine, which was safe.

Efforts will also be made to stop and discourage all non-essential activities in view of the surge in new cases, he said pointing out that about 3,500 new infections are being reported daily

Only 15,000 persons were taking the vaccine daily, he said.

Efforts would also be made to stop and discourage all non-essential activities in view of the surge in new cases, he said pointing out that about 3,500 new infections were being reported daily.

The government was geared up to tackle the situation and micro plans had already been made, he said, adding that testing, tracking, isolating and

treating of infected persons was being done aggressively to prevent the spread.

There were 925 containment zones in the state and they were being monitored closely. House to house visits would be made to conduct tests in the containment zones and Covid care centres would be started in all districts, he said.

There were 1,800 coronavirus infected persons admitted to hospitals now, while there are 4,300 beds available, he said.

Radhakrishnan said that in many other parts to the country the spread was very high and Maharashtra was reporting 57,000 cases a day now.

₹428cr cash, precious metals seized: CEO

A. ARUL PALANI | DC CHENNAI, APRIL 5

The special teams have detected suspicious transactions of ₹5 lakh from a Coimbatore woman's account to a number of voters through G-Pay. The officials have ordered a probe into the transactions.

Meanwhile, hours before the state goes to the poll, the teams have seized unaccounted cash of ₹35 lakh from a premise in Vedia Rasapalayam, Pallipalayam, near Coimbatore, on Monday. The patrolling has been



strengthened during night and early morning.

Chief electoral officer Satyabrata Sahoo said the Election Commission seized precious metals, alcohol, cash and other items worth ₹428 crore. This include ₹91.56 lakh in cash in Ranipet district, ₹1.23 crore in Thousand

Lights constituency, Chennai, ₹1.15 crore at Veerapandi, Salem, ₹1.06 crore in Vellore district; ₹98 lakh in Coimbatore; ₹1.13 crore in Saidapet, Chennai and ₹65 lakh in Virudhunagar constituency.

"The last 72 hours are extremely sensitive from the expenditure stand point. Round the clock surveillance along with Central armed police forces has been taken up," he said.

The EC has deputed nearly 150 general observers and over 118 expenditure observers.

About 105 expenditure sensitive constituencies have been identified and extra efforts were taken.

The expenditure observer team caught red-handed many party functionaries in many places across the state with cash up to ₹2 lakh along with booth-wise voters list. In many incidents, soon after noticing the team, the party functionaries escaped from the place. For the first time, the EC directed the police to register cases against candidates and their supporters for allegedly diverting cash to the people for vote.

Woman cop in flying squad dies in mishap

K. SENTHIL NATHAN | DC VELLORE, APRIL 5

A woman cop deputed for election duty died in a road accident on Monday morning here, as she was accompanying the poll flying squad which was returning to Vellore after a vehicle inspection near K.V. Kuppam, in K.V. Kuppam assembly constituency, near Vellore.

Sources said, as the squad was crossing the BDO office, one of its tyres burst and the vehicle was unexpectedly hit by a speeding lorry from the rear, in which the woman constable Malathi (40), hailing from Vellore Viruthampattu area, died on the spot. Collector Shanmugasundaram and an officer rushed to the spot and held investigations. A videographer who was also injured in the accident, was admitted to the Gudiyatham government hospital.

Malathi, who was killed in the accident, was attached to the Vellore North police station.

K.V. Kuppam Inspector Muralitharan registered a case and sent Malathi's body for autopsy. Malathi is survived by husband Senthil Velan (an ex-service man) and two children Niranjana Devi and Tarun.

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Rumours on election cancellation do rounds

Turn P1

While the cadre wants payment to voters to be increased to Rs 500 from the present Rs 200 and Nehru abusing him and telling him that Rs 200 was enough. Based on the video, police filed a case under three sections.

At Kuppathamottur in Katpadi constituency, a DMK cadre, Gopi was arrested with Rs 56,000 when he was allegedly dis-

tributing cash to voters. Apart from the money, he also had pamphlets seeking votes for Duraimurugan with him. So police included Durimurugan also in the case as a second accused.

Other seizures made were in Vallam in Thanjavur, where an AIADMK man was caught with Rs 1.50 lakh cash, in Srivaikuntram where a Congress workers was

found with Rs 2.5 lakh cash and in Thanthondimalai in Karur Rs 2.72 lakh cash was seized from an AIADMK man.

In Srivilliputhur complaints of tokens being distributed on behalf of the AIADMK for voters to buy groceries and other articles from certain shops was received by the authorities who had started an investigation into it.

Off-centre Was it Rajnath or Amit Shah?

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami hit an electrifying campaign at Coonoor here last Thursday to seek votes for NDA candidates contesting in Coonoor and Ooty assembly constituencies. He was fluent in his address, listing out various achievements of his government

and also government schemes implemented in Coonoor and Ooty, over the past five years.

While he was speaking on the issue related to including the Badaga community in the ST list, he said that his government had already recommended that to the Centre, and said "When Amit Shah visited the hills on Wednesday, he would give an assurance about this." Again, when he touched subjects related to fixing floor price for green tea leaf and improving the tourism infrastructure in Ooty into global standards, the Chief minister again said Amit Shah already gave assurance on these, when he campaigned in Ooty," triggering a murmur from the audience. It looked as if the chief minister was a bit



confused between Rajnath Singh and Amit Shah, as only Rajnath Singh visited the hills for campaigning, and not Amit Shah.

—B. Ravichandran

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A cyclist wearing an umbrella hat to beat the heat in Madurai.

— K. Manikandan

Lockdown, not Covid, worries them

While people are gearing up to cast their vote on Tuesday, they are keeping their fingers crossed over the looming threat of lockdown. As coronavirus cases are spiralling out of control, rumours that lockdown will be imposed again in Tamil Nadu after the April 6 election have begun doing

the rounds. A WhatsApp forward announcing lockdown and restrictions imposed in the state went viral followed by another message saying it was a April fools' day prank. Despite authorities urging the public not to believe baseless rumours, the lockdown threat outweighs coronavirus fear.

— B. Vijayalakshmi

CRIME

BEAT

Three injured as lorry with rice bags topples

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 5

Three persons were reportedly injured after when a rice-laden lorry toppled on Bengaluru-Chennai National highway near Sriperumbudur here on Sunday evening.

The incident took place when the lorry was near Rajiv Gandhi Memorial in Sriperumbudur. The driver lost control of the vehicle after one of its tyre burst, the sources said.

Eyewitnesses said the lorry toppled on one-side due to heavy weight on the Bengaluru-Chennai national highways. Soon after the vehicle toppled, ropes that were tied around the rice bags snapped and the bags fell on the road. Three persons, including the truck driver were injured in the accident. Based on the alert, Sriperumbudur police rushed to the spot. They have sent the injured to the Sriperumbudur government hospital for treatment. Police said, due to this traffic was affected on the highway for a while.

Gold worth ₹11.83 lakh seized at Chennai airport

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 5

The customs officers at the Chennai airport seized gold worth ₹11.83 lakh.

In a statement issued here, the commissioner of customs, Chennai International airport said Sahubar Ali (32) and Mohamed Jabir (24) both of Ramanathapuram, who arrived from Dubai by Air India flight AI906 were intercepted at exit on suspicion of carrying gold. On their personal search, three gold bundles were recovered from rectum, one from Sahubar Ali and two from Jabir. On extraction 253 grams of gold valued at ₹11.83 lakh was recovered and seized under customs Act, the statement added. Further investigation is under progress.

Sand smuggler detained under Goondas Act

DC CORRESPONDENT PUDUKKOTTAI, APRIL 5

Pudukkottai collector B. Uma Maheswari has ordered the detention of notorious illegal sand smuggler K. Ramachandran of Arinjanapatti village under the Goondas act, following which he was arrested by

the Karaiyur police along with a lorry load of sand.

As per the recommendation of L. Balaji Saravanan, Superintendent of Police, Pudukkottai the collector passed the detention order and the accused was lodged in the central prison, Tiruchy.

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On extraction 253 grams of gold valued at ₹11.83 lakh was recovered and seized under customs Act, the statement added. Further investigation is under progress.

DMK seeks Gov sanction for action in multi-crore Koyambedu land scam

A. ARUL PALANI | DC CHENNAI, APRIL 5

The DMK has submitted a representation to Governor Banwarilal Purohit to give sanction to take action against Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palanisami, Deputy CM O. Panneerselvam, revenue minister R.B. Udhayakumar and officials for diverting a multi-crore prime property in Koyambedu for a paltry sum to a real estate giant shortly before the election model code of conduct came into force.

DMK organising secretary and MP R.S. Bharathi also requested the director, Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption, Chennai to register a complaint and conduct a probe relating to criminal conspiracy, corrup-

nd MP R.S. Bharathi also requested the director, Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption, Chennai to register a complaint and conduct a probe relating to criminal conspiracy, corruption and land grabbing

tion and land grabbing.

He alleged that the government diverted 10.5 acres of land at Koyambedu to M/s Bashyam Constructions Private Limited, Chennai for a meagre Rs 12,500 per sq. ft.

The GO Ms. No. 234, Revenue and Disaster Management Department, Land Disposal Wing, Government of Tamil Nadu

was passed in a hurry on February 8, 2021 before the Model Code of Conduct came into force on February 26. There was no need for a government, which was in its last few days in office, to pass such a GO, alienating a prime property, in the heart of Koyambedu. The timing shows that the GO was made so that the beneficiaries can get the land alienated before a new government comes in.

The GO states that the alienation was done so that M/s Bashyam Constructions can get CMDA approval / planning permission for its project. This is a gross violation of Revenue Standing Order 24, which prohibits alienation of prime government lands to a builder for developing real estate for private gain. Thus, it is prima facie a violation of

law. The legal opinion obtained for clearing the alienation is untenable and appears to be obtained under pressure.

It was justified in the GO that the company would bring in an investment of Rs. 1,575 crore and generate 7,500 jobs, which is a spurious claim. The company has been widely advertising the project over the said lands as a residential complex, under the name 'Crown Residences', comprising 2,078 units on its website <https://www.bashyam-group.com/crown-residence>. The price quoted for a 4-bed room flat measuring 2,557 sq ft with 25% UDS is Rs 11,000 per sq. ft. Therefore, the alienation of government land is only to benefit the private company, which is selling the flats as a real

estate business.

Bharathi suspected huge kickbacks are involved in the transaction. "I understand that O. Panneerselvam and his sons are associated with M/s Vijayanth Developers Pvt. Ltd, a real estate company, in which his three children are directors. I believe M/s Vijayanth Developers Pvt. Ltd is linked with Bashyam for this project.

"Apart from this, the prime property has been alienated for Rs 12,500 per sq.ft. for 10.5 acres of government land, which is much lower than the prevalent market rate, which is Rs. 25,000 per sq.ft., causing a massive loss of more than Rs 500 crore to the exchequer in this land deal and huge kickbacks have been paid to them", Bharathi alleged.

All set for polls in Thanjavur dt

G. SRINIVASAN | DC THANJAVUR, APRIL 5

As a prelude to the massive democratic exercise of voting in Thanjavur district, polling materials, EVMs with control and ballot units and VVPATs have reached polling booths in all the eight assembly segments. All staff on poll duty have been given necessary orders about their polling booths where they have to work.

The Collector, who is also district election officer M. Govinda Rao, said 204 zonal teams have taken up the responsibility of carrying the EVMs and polling materials to the respective booths. There are 2,850 polling booths in the district, the collector said.

"With the pandemic around, 15 types of Corona prevention materials have been sent to booths. They include sanitisers, gloves, thermal scanners etc. The polling time is between 7 am

VVPATs have reached polling booths in all the eight assembly segments. All staff on poll duty have been given necessary orders about their polling booths where they have to work

and 7 pm. Corona infected persons should come with (personal protection) PP kits, and can vote between 6 pm and 7 pm."

Mock polling in the presence of political party representatives will begin 90 minutes before polling begins, and hence, EVMs and staff will be ready by 7 am, the collector added. The eight assembly constituencies in Thanjavur district are Thanjavur, Orathanadu, Pattukottai, Peravurani, Thiruvaiyaru, Papanasam, Kumbakonam and Thiruvaidaimaruthur.

| MANUFACTURE AND SUPPLY OF TRACK FITTINGS |
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| E-Procurement of Tender Notice No.1 TRACK/02 of 2021. "E-Procurement System" are invited by Chief Engineer/TP, Maligaon for the following works; SN.1: Tender No:Track-E-02012021: Brief Description : (i) 1m Long Fish 60 kg Plate, T-5916, Quantity: 2460 Nos. (ii) 1m Long Fish 52 kg Plate, T-5915, Quantity: 2450 Nos. (iii) Fish Plate 60 kg, T-1898 (24") Quantity: 350 Nos. Tender Value: ₹1,94,36,810/- SN.2: Tender No:Track-E-02022021: Brief Description : (i) Joggled Fish Plate with Clamp, 52 Kg T-5551, Quantity: 2000 Sets. (ii) Joggled Fish Plate 52 Kg T-5848, Quantity: 2000 Sets. (iii) Joggle Fish Plate 60 Kg with clamp, T-4016-17, Quantity: 2500 Sets. Tender Value: ₹3,57,76,500/- SN.3: Tender No:Track-E-02032021: Brief Description : Elasticmeric pad 340×245×25×30, Quantity: 1150 Nos. Tender Value: ₹22,49,400/- SN.4: Tender No:Track-E-02042021: Brief Description : (i) Insulated stretcher bar 60 kg 1 in 12 T-3649-56, Quantity: 90 Sets. (ii) Insulated stretcher bar 52 kg T-4764-71, Quantity: 290 Sets. Tender Value: ₹40,46,260/- SN.5: Tender No:Track-E-02052021: Brief Description : (i) Fittings for Br. app Sleeper T-4089-97, Quantity: 1300 Sets. (ii) Fittings for SC Sleeper 60 kg, T-5155-64, Quantity: 230 Sets. Tender Value: ₹65,71,880/- SN.6: Tender No:Track-E-02062021: Brief Description : (i) Hook bolt 22×400, Quantity: 2000 Nos. (ii) Fish Bolt (i) 11501, Quantity: 32700 Nos. (iii) Crossing bolt/Fish bolt (ii) 11513, Quantity: 4100 Nos. (iv) M.S. Clip 5157-58, Quantity: 3000 Sets. (v) Plate screw T/3911, Quantity: 2750 Nos. Tender Value: ₹52,51,600/- SN.7: Tender No:Track-E-02072021: Brief Description : Double coil spring washer T/1878, Quantity: 21400 Nos. Tender Value: ₹3,63,800/- All the above tenders will be closed at 11:00 hrs. on 29-04-2021 and opening at 11:00 hrs. on 29-04-2021. The complete information along with the tender document of above E-Procurement Tender is available in website www.nips.gov.in . |
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SHORT TAKES

COURT REJECTS KANGANA'S PLEA AGAINST AKHTAR

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, APRIL 5

A Mumbai sessions court on Monday dismissed an application filed by Kangana Ranaut challenging the proceedings initiated against her by a magistrate court in connection with a defamation complaint lodged by veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar.

Ranaut had filed the revision application seeking to quash the process issued against her by the Metropolitan Magistrate on the basis of a complaint filed by Akhtar. Her plea was heard and decided by the Sessions court situated at Dindoshi. She had said the procedure under section 200 of the CrPC, which requires the complainant as well as witnesses to be examined on oath, before the issuance of process, was not followed.

Akhtar opposed Ranaut's plea through Advocate Jay Bh-aradwaj. He had argued that by issuing summons, Ranaut was given a fair chance to respond to the complaint.

CBI DIRECTOR: SC ASKS CENTRE TO CONVENE MEET

New Delhi, April 5: The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Centre to consider convening before May 2 the meeting of a high-powered committee consisting of the Prime Minister and others for appointment of CBI director observing that in-charge arrangements for the post cannot go on.

A bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Vineet Saran was informed by the Centre that meeting of the committee — consisting of the Prime Minister, leader of the single largest opposition party and the Chief Justice of India or any judge of the apex court nominated by the CJI — will be convened after May 2.

LDF hopes to return, UDF confident of win

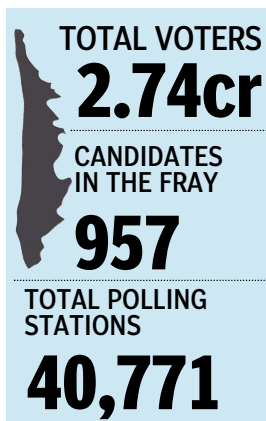
BJP eyes significant percentage of minority votes in polls

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 5

After witnessing a hectic month-long campaign, Kerala's 2.74 crore voters will vote on Tuesday to elect their representatives for the 140 Assembly constituencies.

Notwithstanding the Covid safety protocols, the principal political parties carried out a high-voltage campaign. All top leaders led their respective front's campaign for the high stake electoral battle.

The ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) hopes to create history by retaining power, which has never happened since the 1970s, — the LDF and the Congress-led United Democratic Front have won alternate elections since then. The LDF campaign was led by Chief Minister Pinrayi Vijayan, who was bestowed the title 'Captain'. Though prominent Left leaders including CPM general secretary



- Polling booths: 1.12 lakh
- Polling starts at 7 am and concludes at 7 pm
- Polling in nine constituencies which face Maoist threat, will end at 6 pm

Sitaram Yechury, Prakash Karat, Brinda Karat and D. Raja campaigned extensively, the focus was on Vijayan who by all means

was the "super star" campaigner for the LDF.

It claimed that during the last five years the Vijayan government had ensured corruption-free governance, people-friendly administration, social welfare measures, speedy implementation of development projects and fought effectively against the Covid pandemic and Nipah virus and had dealt stoutly with back-to-back floods.

In the outgoing Assembly the LDF had 91 members, and Left leaders claim that this time they would do even better.

The UDF which lagged behind during the first phase of campaigning picked up significantly with the arrival of party leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi on the poll scene. The election meetings and road shows of the two leaders galvanised the Congress workers across the state whose morale was down because of the back-to-

back surveys predicting LDF victory.

With Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi campaigning aggressively, people are keenly watching which way the minority votes would shift this time. In 2016, a significant section of minorities especially Muslims had voted in favour of the LDF which came to power. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the minorities supported the Congress-led UDF which won 19 of the 20 seats.

The minority swing in favour of UDF happened mainly because of Rahul Gandhi's decision to contest from Wayanad.

The LDF says the minorities are aware of the ground reality and who has taken an unwavering position against politics of hatred and communal divide. The BJP says the party would attract a significant percentage of minority votes because of the Modi government's policies.

Will win Bengal 'on one leg', Delhi on 'two legs': Mamata

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, APRIL 5

Describing herself as a Royal Bengal tigress, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday bragged about her capability to come to power in the state again "on one leg" and in Delhi on "two legs."

Addressing a Trinamul Congress rally in Chinsurah of Hooghly, Mamata Banerjee, while sitting in a wheelchair with her injured left leg, said, "The BJP thought since they left me injured, I would not be able to go out again. But I fight back like a Royal Bengal tiger. On one leg, I will win Bengal. No Gujarati will be allowed to rule Bengal. In future, I will win Delhi on two legs."

The TMC supremo also teased the party over the low turnout at its rallies in an oblique reference to the cancellation of two

● **THE TMC** supremo also teased the BJP over the low turnout at its rallies in an oblique reference to the cancellation of two public meetings of BJP J.P. Nadda in the district during the day.

public meetings of BJP J.P. Nadda in the district during the day. "Their rallies do not attract crowd. The grounds remain empty. That is why they distribute money of few hundreds to the public to get their votes," she alleged.

Undeterred by the Election Commission's warning to her over her allegations of electoral malpractices in Nandigram, the Trinamul Congress supremo opined that the ongoing Assembly elections could have been completed in four phases instead of the lengthy eight rounds, due to the second wave of

Covid-19 pandemic.

She also challenged the BJP to contest the remaining six rounds of polls rather than fleeing due to dearth of candidates.

Lashing out at BJP candidates Babul Supriyo and Locket Chatterjee, who are also Lok Sabha MPs, the CM accused them of having links to Rose Valley chit fund scam but alleged that they were spared from facing cases since they joined the BJP. She also argued that the tickets to them exposed the want of candidates in the saffron party.

"It was Babul who first talked in favour of Rose Valley while Chatterjee was the 'locket' of Saradha," the Chief Minister claimed. Countering her, Locket Chatterjee later said, "She has become abnormal in fear of her defeat. Her allegations are rubbish. Let her prove her claims first."

JAYA: DIDI 'LONE WOMAN FIGHTER'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, APRIL 5



Jaya Bachchan

Actor and Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan on Monday hailed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as the lone female fighter, moving forward while braving her injuries, for democracy against the BJP. She also reminded the saffron party that no one had succeeded by intimidating "Bengalis", referring to its continuous attacks on the Trinamul Congress supremo during the Assembly poll campaign.

At the Trinamul Bhavan, the SP Rajya Sabha member said, "I have love and respect for Mamataji for being a single woman fighting against all atrocities. She is head broken, leg broken but they have not been

able to break her heart and brain and her determination to move ahead and make Bengal one of the best in the world. Mamata is fighting and struggling as a single lady to preserve democratic rights of every individual of Bengal. It is my belief that she completes what she wants to do. There

will be more development if Mamata becomes the CM again here. I am sure about it."

In a veiled warning to the BJP, she observed, "Bengalis have always done what they felt in their heart. No one became successful by intimidating the Bengalis always. No one can be too now. There are many things which I think of. But I always follow my heart. I am a Bengali. I want to say: Do not hijack my religion, democracy and democratic rights from me. Never. When I say 'me', I represent all."

Praising West Bengal as "the safest state for women in the country" she also castigated the BJP saying, "Those who spew venom against Mamataji, I tell them: Shame, Shame."

Maha: Panic grips guest workers amid stern curbs

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

Mumbai recorded 9,857 new cases on Sunday, prompting the state government to announce additional curbs. The state has announced containment measures that include imposing prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC. All beaches and outdoor activities will remain out of bounds, while malls and shops will remain closed.

Their staff will have to get vaccinated during this shutdown period.

Mumbai's Siddhivinayak Temple will be closed from Monday evening onwards till further orders for "darshan" and the regular aarti and puja can be seen by devotees through webcasts. Similarly, the Saibaba temple in Shirdi in the state will also remain shut from Monday midnight.

Guest workers were seen making a beeline at various railway terminuses in Mumbai to leave the city even before strict restrictions imposed by the Maharashtra government came into force from 8 pm

on Monday.

Guest workers were spotted at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) and Lokmanya Tilak Terminus (LTT) waiting to board a train to their hometown in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal.

Meanwhile, Delhi on Monday had 3,458 new cases while Karnataka reported 5,279 cases, of which 3,728 cases were from Bengaluru Urban alone. Kerala, with 2,357 daily cases on Monday, saw a fall in its spike while new cases have started

coming from Bihar while Tamil Nadu had 3,672 by Sunday night.

The Delhi government has announced that one-third of all vaccination centres in all Delhi government hospitals will operate 24 hours from Tuesday.

However, the Centre has asked Delhi to keep a watch on the beneficiaries, saying it has found cases of some people under 45 and healthcare and frontline workers being vaccinated in private centres despite a restriction on them.

WORLD

MURDER OF PAK JUDGE: 5 NABBED

Peshawar, April 5: Five suspects were arrested on Monday in connection with the murder of an anti-terrorism court judge and his family members in north-west Pakistan, police said.

Anti-terrorism court judge Aftab Afridi and three members of his family, including wife, daughter-in-law and a two-year-old grandson, were shot dead after unidentified gunmen attacked their vehicle while they were travelling from

the Swat Valley to Islamabad on Sunday.

Two security guards who were part of the judge's convoy were also injured in the shootout.

A joint operation team carried out an operation in Peshawar and Khyber and apprehended five suspects and impounded two vehicles, District Police Officer (DPO) Swabi Muhammad Shuaib told the media here on Monday.

— PTI

BIZ BUZZ

SMI Special

GRT Jewellers wins Jewellery Retail Brand of the Year Award.

GRT Jewellers was awarded 'JEWELLERY RETAIL BRAND OF THE YEAR', at The Economic Times - ET Excellence Awards Tamil Nadu, a recognition that a jewellery retail brand would look forward to. The award show saw an eclectic panel of distinguished and well renowned personalities from the industry. The Managing Director, Mr. G.R. 'Ananth' Ananthapadmanabhan was then conferred the award by Bollywood actor Sonu Sood in a grand ceremony. Mr. G.R. 'Ananth' Ananthapadmanabhan, Managing Director of GRT Jewellers on receiving the award said, "We, at GRT Jewellers, are grateful for being recognized as the 'JEWELLERY RETAIL BRAND OF THE YEAR' by ET Excellence Awards Tamil Nadu. As much as we focus on offering the latest and best in terms of design, we're equally focused on making jewellery more accessible. We would also like to thank the customers who trust us beyond measure to provide and care for their jewellery needs." Managing Director of GRT Jewellers, Mr. G.R. Radhakrishnan, said, "We thank our customers, our employees and our well-wishers. This wouldn't have been possible without them. This award will encourage us to continue to create innovative designs that will continue to push the boundaries. I would also like to thank the organizers for recognizing our efforts."

Mr.M.Murali, received Kalaimamani Award from Tamil Nadu Government.

Felicitations was given by various Cultural, Spiritual, Literary, Fine Art organisations & Association in Chennai was held recently at Bhavan's Rajaji Vidyashram, Kilpauk, Chennai.



Mr. SP Muthuraman, Film Director, Mr.A.Ramadas Rao, Past President, Chennai Hotel Associations, Mr. Nalli Kuppusswami Chetti, Partner Nalli Silks, Mr.R.Sundar, Secretary, Hamsadhwani, Hon'ble Justice Mr. B.Rajendran, Former Judge, Madras High Court, Mr.M.Murali, MD, Sri Krishna Sweets, Mr.K.N.Ramaswamy, Director, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chennai Kendra, Mr.N.Ravi, Chairman, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chennai Kendra, Mr.Mohan Parasaran, Former Solicitor General of India & Sudha Raghunathan, Carnatic Vocalist.

Rollout of twice weekly rapid Covid tests for all in England

Will help track asymptomatic cases of deadly pandemic, says UK govt

London, April 5: Everyone in England will be able to access free, regular, rapid Coronavirus testing from later this week to track asymptomatic Covid-19 cases, the UK government announced on Monday.

As a step forward to start lifting lockdown restrictions for all businesses, shops and restaurants, anyone will be able to access the free, rapid lateral flow tests for themselves and their families to use twice a week starting this Friday. It is hoped the data will help scientists track and trace any new variants of Coronavirus more effectively because more people getting a test will increase the ability to identify and control mutations of the deadly virus.

Massive efforts have been made by the British public to stop the spread of the virus. As we continue to make good progress on our vaccine programme and with our roadmap to cautiously easing restrictions underway, regular rapid testing is even more important to make sure those efforts are not wasted, said UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

That's why we're now rolling out free rapid tests to everyone across England helping us to stop outbreaks in their tracks, so we can get back to seeing the people we love and doing the things we enjoy,

London, April 5: Britain will on Monday set out plans to restart international travel, using a "traffic-light" system as the country cautiously emerges from lockdown.

The UK has set a tentative date of May 17 to relaunch foreign travel, currently banned except for a handful of permitted reasons. This has created massive pent-up demand for summer holidays abroad. Travel destinations will be ranked green, amber or red according to virus risk. Downing Street said late Saturday, with the government to provide more details on Monday.

"We are doing everything we can to enable the

reopening of our country... as safely as possible," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said. The government said the new system "will help ensure the UK's vaccine progress isn't jeopardised and provide clear guidance for travellers". People heading to low-risk "green" countries will simply take a virus test before and after they travel, the government said. But those going to amber or red countries will have to self-isolate or quarantine afterwards.

Health minister Edward Argar said as cases surge on the European continent, Britain would have to be "very careful" as it con-

sidered further restrictions. "One of the things we don't want to see — and just as the vaccination programme is working so well — is getting new variants or risking new variants getting imported into this country," he said.

Currently people arriving in the UK from abroad are required to self-isolate for 10 days. British nationals who arrive from a banned "red list" of high-risk countries face costly quarantine in government-approved hotels.

The government urged people not to book summer holidays, saying it was "too early to predict" which would be the green-listed countries.

— AFP

public health, and I know they will do their bit by getting tested regularly in the months ahead, he said. According to official estimates, one in three people with Covid-19 do not experience any symptoms and may be spreading the virus unwittingly. Rapid testing detects cases quickly, meaning positive cases can isolate immediately. Since rapid testing was

introduced, over 120,000 positive cases that would not have been found otherwise have already been identified by lateral flow tests which involve a swab kit for the nose or throat.

The DHSC says that making rapid tests available to everyone, more cases will be detected. — PTI

FRENCH MINS HAD DINED AT SECRET EATERIES

Paris, April 5: French authorities are investigating accusations that government ministers and others dined in secret restaurants in violation of pandemic restrictions.

The Paris prosecutor's office said an investigation was opened Sunday into possible charges of endangerment and undeclared labour, and to identify the organisers and participants of the alleged gatherings. A document that aired on French network M6 over the weekend included an unidentified man saying that he had eaten in two or three clandestine restaurants with a certain number of ministers. Government members quickly denied knowledge of such wrongdoing.

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to deal with the rising number of patients, it said. Bangladesh has registered 7,087 fresh Covid-19 cases, taking the tally to 637,364, in the last 24 hours until Sunday which is the highest number of infections since the start of the pandemic, the *United News of Bangladesh* reported.

— PTI

GRAFT TRIAL: BIBI LASHES OUT AT PROSECUTORS

Jerusalem, April 5: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has lashed out at prosecutors in his corruption trial, accusing them of trying to oust him.

In a nationally televised statement, Netanyahu said the case against him is threatening to undermine the will of the country's voters. "This is what a coup attempt looks like," he said. Netanyahu spoke shortly after his corruption trial resumed and with the country's president holding post-election consultations on choosing the next prime minister designate.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's corruption trial resumed Monday, with a key witness painting a picture of an image-obsessed Israeli leader forcing a prominent news site to flatter his family and smear his opponents. The testimony came as Netanyahu's chances of securing another term in office following last month's parliamentary elections appeared to be dwindling in high-stakes political talks hosted by the country's figurehead president just a few miles (kilometres) away.

Taken together, the court testimony and political consultations pointed to an increasingly uphill struggle for Netanyahu as he fights for his political life. In a post-election ritual, President Reuven Rivlin was consulting with the various parties elected to parliament before choosing a candidate to form a new government. With a majority of lawmakers opposed to giving Netanyahu another term, Rivlin could give the task to a different candidate, possibly as soon as Monday night.

— AP

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DECCAN Chronicle

6 APRIL 2021

Govt must rework its entire Naxal strategy

In yet another massive ambush in South Bastar, just a couple of kilometres away from their camp and on the edge of the Bijapur forest, the entrenched Maoists took a big toll of the security forces, chiefly the CRPF, in broad daylight on Saturday. It was only the following day that the enormity of the tragedy, that should make us ask serious questions, was revealed. It was found as many as 23 uniformed personnel were killed, as many as 33 were injured, and one was missing.

The questions are pressing because this was not a routine tragedy in which an IED blows up a truck ferrying troops. In this particular case, the forces were out to launch an attack on the Naxalites, presumably fully prepared; they were the hunters. And yet, they were ambushed not 2 km from their base, if early reports are anything to go by. They were chased down a hill with automatic weapons raising bullets on them. Then they ran into what looked like deserted village houses. The insurgent cadres were waiting. More were killed in gruesome ways.

Union home minister Amit Shah quite rightly cut short his election visit in Assam and rushed back to take stock. It does look like deep-going failures of an all-round variety. And yet, even before the post-mortem is complete, the CRPF's director-general is announcing prematurely that there was no intelligence failure. He does not substantiate the assertion, which appears shallow. The forces try to draw comfort from other wholly unsubstantiated assertions when they speak of high numbers of Maoists killed.

It is self-evident that our forces did not expect to be surrounded and chased down a slope and then end up facing murderous Naxalite cadres when they attempt to seek shelter in seemingly empty houses. Should this have happened reportedly 2 km from base camp if the intelligence was good when the soldiers set out to track and capture/kill?

Sad events like these have been occurring for the past 15 years or more. Under various names and fanciful acronyms, plans are drawn up to deal with the armed Maoist cadre. But our soldiers are dying. The data for the last decade is 175 uniformed men dead. The Maoist movement, however, is nowhere near dead.

What happened on Saturday was a part of a proper plan to launch an attack on the Maoists before they go on the rampage in the pre-monsoon summer season. It was meant to be a pre-emptive action. It ends up like little boys playing soldier with their toys and the nation must mourn.

If dealing with armed guerrillas well-entrenched among the people requires a military approach as well as plans to win hearts and minds, then it seems evident that the Indian State has floundered on both counts. Year after year, Bastar in Chhattisgarh becomes the killing field of valiant men who appear short on training, supportive intelligence and possibly also morale, though the last is not clear. It is important to return to the drawing board, call in the specialists, look at the causes of repeated military failures, revamp the development and population-centric paradigm, and jettison smooth talking police officers who do not lead well. The careful training of the state police is much needed, as was done in Jammu and Kashmir where the police now excels in counter-insurgency operations. The local police are the real intelligence gatherers.

Coming soon: Covid passports

It has been more than a year since members of the human race, threatened by a microorganism, have been covering the most distinguishable part of their bodies, the face, with a mask and getting along with life. The new normal, forced by the Covid-19 pandemic, has several other elements that range from an unprecedented part of the workforce opting to "work from home" to a strict "no" to unbridled social dos to avoiding physical contact, even in the form of shaking hands with others.

"Quarantine", a word which rarely appeared in the media, has become as common as "weather". Application of a chemical on the hands immediately after touching an unfamiliar surface has almost become a part of human behaviour. Millions have experienced life in the confines of the four walls of a room for months on end. Travel has been reduced to a necessary evil. It's against this background that British PM Boris Johnson has added "Covid passports" for mass events and a "traffic lights system" for foreign travel to the new normal's defining elements. These are parts of the measures he has suggested to stem the spiralling number of daily Covid-19 cases in his country.

Covid passports, or rather a Covid-status certification system, would record if a person has natural immunity after having the infection, has been vaccinated, or tested negative for Covid-19 recently. It would be a deciding factor if one were to be allowed entry into sports events, nightclubs and theatres when they reopen. The "traffic light" system will rate overseas destinations based on a range of parameters such as proportion of a country's population which has been vaccinated, rates of infection, emerging new variants and access to reliable scientific data and genomic sequencing. Travellers from "green" countries won't be required to isolate while those from "amber" or "red" will have to self-isolate. It looks like humankind will have started living a different life before the virus departs.

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Bengaluru: 5th Floor, BMTC Commercial Complex, 80 Ft. Road, Koramangala, Bangalore-560095. Ph: 08043460500; Fax: 080-22960551/52/55
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Nellore: Survey No. 527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348581/ 82, Telefax (0861) 2348580
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Kochi: No. 3-B, 3rd Floor, DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloor-Kadavanthara Road, Ernakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408
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Subhani



Hydro, rail projects in Tibet a threat to India

Claude Arpi

Recent developments not far from the India-China border in Arunachal Pradesh are worrying. On March 29, Dave Petley, pro vice-chancellor (research and innovation) at the University of Sheffield in Britain noted on his blog: "I received an email from Göran Ekstrom of Columbia University making a small group of us aware that he had detected, using seismic instruments, a probable large-scale landslide in the vicinity of the Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet... an idea of the mass (in this case about 100 million tonnes — a very large one indeed)."

Whether it was triggered by an earthquake in this highly seismic area, is still not clear; it could also be due to torrential rain. Mr Petley further explained: "Either way, at Yarlung Tsangpo it is clear that a large amount of rock and ice have detached from the east side of the tributary valley, moving westwards and then to the south. Once again this has formed a catastrophic channelised flow that has travelled down the channel to deposit a large volume in the main channel."

The Yarlung Tsangpo, which becomes the Siang on entering Arunachal Pradesh and later the Brahmaputra in Assam (and the Meghna in Bangladesh) is one of the most eco-sensitive regions of the planet.

In a communiqué released during the sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) in early March in Beijing, the Communist Party of China reiterated that according to the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035, adopted by China's top legislature: "The construction of key projects, such as the Sichuan-Tibet Railway

and hydropower development on the Yarlung Tsangpo River, will be promoted."

It practically means that a giga hydropower plant (HPP) will be constructed at India's gates, on the Yarlung Tsangpo river.

The Chinese media also reported that Che Dalha, chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region, urged the authorities to accelerate the project and to immediately undertake all the comprehensive planning and necessary environmental impact assessments. Will the Chinese "scientists" take into account the presence of tens of thousands of trucks and GCBs moving earth around and changing the shape of the mountains and the rivers north of the Indian borders? Probably not.

It appears to be a matter of the Emperor wanting to show the world that he can construct a HPP of thrice the capacity of the Three Gorges Dam, with little consideration for the environment.

The new plan, submitted to the NPC for approval, provided "the green light for the dams to be built on the lower reaches of Yarlung Tsangpo river".

Later adopted by the Chinese legislature, it called for "a hydropower base on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo river, along with clean energy bases in the upper and lower reaches of Jinsha river", known as the Upper Yangtze in Sichuan province.

On the occasion of the Chinese New Year, President Xi Jinping called the Communist Party "a gigantic vessel that navigates China's stable and long-term development" and stated: "Upholding the principle of putting people first and remaining true to our founding mission, we can break the waves to reach the destination of realising the

great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."

Like any Emperor, Xi Jinping needs to think big. The Seventh Tibet Work Forum (TWF), a large meeting which decides the fate of Tibet for the years to come (to which Tibetans are rarely invited), was held in Beijing on August 28-29, 2020. It was a crucial event not only as it concerns the fate of the Roof of the World, but for the Indian border too.

Some massive projects were announced soon after; first, the Pai-Metok (Pai-Mo) Highway linking Nyingchi to Metok, north of Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, which should open in July 2021. After the completion of the highway, the length of the road from Nyingchi City to Metok County will be shortened from 346 km to 180 km and the driving time will be shortened from 11 hours to 4.5 hours. Though only 67 km long, in strategic terms the highway will be a game changer and greatly accelerate the developments of new model villages, and therefore relocation of populations on the border. But, more important, it will pave the way for a mega HPP.

In December 2020, *Global Times* had announced Beijing's plan to build a cascade of mega dams on the Yarlung Tsangpo.

The Metok County government confirmed that the project would be built north of the Indian border, while *Global Times* added: "The head of Power Construction Corp of China (POWERCHINA) suggested the planned hydropower station — which is expected to have three times as much generating capacity as the world-leading Three Gorges power station — aims to maintain water resources and domestic

security." A series of nine hydropower plants in cascade will definitely threaten life across the whole of India's Northeast region. The area soon became "restricted" by the Chinese authorities. A notice from the Metok Border Management Brigade announced that from March 1, the Chinese authorities began "to check border pass, ID cards and other documents of people entering and exiting Metok".

Metok is the last small, but strategic town located near the Great Bend of the Yarlung Tsangpo, north of the McMahon Line.

Though there is no proof that the mudslides on March 22 were directly linked to the dam project, the fact remains that the entire area is environmentally extremely fragile. And that's not all; already in 2016, *China Daily* reported the construction of a 1,629-km Sichuan-Tibet railway. It has now entered a crucial phase. The railway will be connecting Chengdu in Sichuan to Lhasa; the new rail line will shorten the travel time to less than 15 hours.

The Lhasa-Nyingchi section is scheduled to be opened in July.

All this will have incalculable strategic implications for India as the train will pass near the Indian border where the hydropower plant is located.

These two projects (HPP on the Yarlung Tsangpo and the Sichuan Railway) are directly affecting India's security.

For India's frontiers, China's "dual-use" (civil and military) infrastructure development will take place on a much larger and faster scale than today; a great tragedy in the making.

How will the mandarins of South Block react?

They will probably try to keep the information under the carpet for as long as possible. But if they wait too long, it may be too late. Remember the Aksai Chin road in the 1950s.

The writer is based in South India for the past 42 years. He writes on India, China, Tibet and Indo-French relations.

LETTERS

CONSIDER PROHIBITION

The detailed manifesto put out recently by the DMK for the 2021 Assembly election does not seem to make any mention about implementing prohibition in Tamil Nadu. On the other hand, their alliance partner Congress seems to say in its manifesto that it has plans for introducing prohibition in the state. In recent times, the Congress party, with much fewer seats than the major partner DMK, has not shared power when the DMK alliance had ruled previously. Assuming that the same arrangement continues in case the DMK alliance wins this time, it is questionable as to how the Congress would fulfil its promise on prohibition without the full cooperation and backing of the DMK. Whichever party wins should immediately take steps to implement prohibition at least in stages.

A. Mohan, Chennai

NEED QUICK ACTION

It is shocking to know that India has recorded the biggest spike with one lakh new cases on April 4. Though our governments, both states and Central, have taken protective norms to arrest the spike, it seems the people continue to violate these norms and have become a cause for the increase in cases. So is the case with political leaders who allow the public to hear their speeches during their election meetings and where none of them, including the leaders, follows the Covid norms. The government should be strict in punishing these leaders who encourage the spread of the virus. Of late, we come across reports of the virus catching up with cinema stars too.

N. V. Krishnan, Chennai

A.G. Noorani



America sinking to a new low in crass diplomacy

The United States struck a poor low in the conduct of diplomatic relations recently. One had thought that President Joe Biden would break with his predecessor Donald Trump's crudeness. Its senior officials met senior officials of China last month in Alaska, on American soil. The talks were supposed to break the ice in their relations. Tradition requires extra civility for such openings. The US delegates began with uncalled for uncivility to China's top diplomats. The latter gave back as good as they got.

Since George H.W. Bush, America's Presidents have revelled in calling the heads of other states names; from Iraq's Saddam Hussein to the leaders of North Korea, Iran and others.

If this exercise was designed to promote America's interests, the gains would be visible.

Diplomacy is a blend of words and actions. When Anthony Eden, otherwise a highly cultured man, called Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser names, the astute ones predicted he had forsaken diplomacy

and was sold on war. But the boorish language of recent American vintage doesn't presage war. It is intended to browbeat in the game of negotiation.

Sparta's leaders' response to the verbosity of a mission from the island of Samoa is a classic of its kind: "We have forgotten the beginning of your harangue; we paid no heed to the middle of it; and nothing has given us pleasure in it except the end."

Romans housed ambassadors in rat-infested buildings. China was barely civil to foreigners. In modern times, Nikita Krushchev flouted all the norms of civility. While on a visit to Beijing in 1959, he shouted at Marshal Chen Yi: "Don't try and spit at me. There isn't enough spit in your mouth for that." As the Sino-Soviet Cold War became fierce, the Soviet foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, lamented that even in the worst days of the Cold War, Western spokesmen never used the language that the erstwhile friends (China) did. Gromyko himself could be very rude. He told Pakistan's diplomats during the crisis in East Pakistan in

1971: "Note I did not use the word 'please'."

There was a time when the British set high standards of civility and wit in diplomacy. Prime Minister George Canning once told the House of Commons on April 30, 1829: "But be the language of good sense or good taste in this House what it may, clear I am that, in diplomatic correspondence, no minister would be justified in risking the friendship of foreign countries, and the peace of his own, by coarse reproach and galling invective; and that even while we are pleading for the independence of nations, it is expedient to respect the independence of those with whom we plead."

"We differ widely from our continental allies on one great principle, it is true: nor do we, nor ought we to disguise that difference; nor to omit any occasion of practically upholding our own opinion. But every consideration, whether of policy or of justice, combines with the recollection of the counsels which we have shared, and of the deeds which we have achieved in concert and companionship, to induce us to argue

our differences of opinion, however freely, with temper; and to enforce them, however firmly, without insult."

British diplomats were noted for understatement. But as Harold Wilson noted in his classic *Diplomacy*: "In extreme cases, moreover, the habit of diplomatic ambiguity, or of diplomatic understatement, leads to actual misunderstanding. I remember before the war reading a dispatch from some consul general in which he informed the Foreign Office that one of the vice consuls under his charge 'does not, I much regret to report, take the care of his health which his medical advisers would recommend'. The poor man was, in fact, in the last stages of delirium tremens."

Dr Paul Schmidt, Hitler's interpreter, mentions Neville Henderson's final interview with Ribbentrop before the war. "I can tell you, Herr Henderson," Ribbentrop remarked, "That the position is damned serious." Henderson shouted, "You have just said 'damned'."

"Ribbentrop's breath was taken away. One of the 'cowardly' diplomats, an ambassador, and an arrogant Englishman at that, had dared to reprimand him as he might a schoolboy. Ribbentrop jumped up from his chair. 'What did you say?' he roared. 'Henderson too had risen to his feet. Both men glared at each other. According to diplomatic convention, I too should have risen; but to be frank I did not quite know how an interpreter should behave when speakers passed from words to deeds — and I really feared they might do so now. I therefore remained quietly seated and pretended to be writing in my notebook."

Wit is one of the diplomat's prized possessions. The Spanish ambassador told Britain's foreign secretary: "Even Spanish liberals in exile support Spain's case on Gibraltar." Michael Walker, an Oxford don retorted, "I regret to say that Her Majesty's Government cannot boast of any British liberals in exile who support its case on Gibraltar."

By arrangement with Dawn

SHORT TAKES

Indonesia Masters, Russian Open off

New Delhi: Two Super 100 badminton tournaments - the Russian Open 2021 and Indonesia Masters - have been cancelled due to Covid-19 related restrictions, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) said on Monday.

"The ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and complications left local organisers no choice but to cancel the tournaments," a BWF statement read.

"The respective decisions of the National Badminton Federation of Russia and Badminton Indonesia were made in consultation and agreement with the BWF," it added.

The Russian Open was scheduled in Vladivostok from July 20-25 and Indonesia Masters from October 5-10. The Canada Open, supposed to be held in June, has also been cancelled.

Another Super 100 event, the Hyderabad Open, is scheduled from August 24-29 but with the fluid Covid-19 situation in India, it remains to be seen if it will take place or not. — *PTI*

Marseille maul lowly Dijon 2-0

Paris: Marseille condemned bottom side Dijon to an 11th defeat in a row but coach Jorge Sampaoli said there was lots of room for improvement following Sunday's 2-0 victory in Ligue 1. Leonardo Balerdi powered in a header at a corner in first-half stoppage time and Alvaro Gonzalez nodded in a second from another Dimitri Payet cross on 79 minutes.

Marseille climbed to within a point of fifth-placed Lens, who drew 1-1 with title hopefuls Lyon on Saturday. Dijon have just 15 points after two wins in 31 games and are destined for the second division, lying 14 points adrift of the relegation play-off spot.

Lille moved three points clear of Paris Saint-Germain at the top following a 1-0 win at the Parc des Princes on Saturday, in which Neymar was sent off just before the end.

Monaco are a point back of PSG after routing Metz 4-0. — *AFP*

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Kings battle ready

Rechristened Punjab look to make a case in coming IPL

New Delhi, April 5: With a new name and a stronger squad, Punjab Kings will be hoping for a change of fortunes this season after spending big money on addressing their death bowling concerns and beefing up a not-so-inspiring middle-order.

Here is a look at the team that will open its campaign on April 12 against RR in Mumbai.

STRENGTHS

Punjab Kings have one of the strongest batting line-ups this season. They have a dangerous opening pairing in skipper K. L. Rahul and the ever-reliable Mayank Agarwal.

Universe Boss Chris Gayle is expected to start from game one this time. Include flamboyant Nich-olas Pooran to the mix and the top four seems sorted.

They have also roped in the world's number one T20 batsman Dawid Malan, seen as Gayle's back-up. Jhye Richardson and Riley Meredith alongside Mohammad Shami and England's Chris Jordan, the quartet makes for a formidable fast bowling unit.

WEAKNESSES

Punjab Kings' biggest weakness is the lack of quality spinners. They released off-spinner K. Gowtham, who ended up becoming the most expensive buy ever at the latest auction.

The likes of Murugan Ashwin and young Ravi Bhishnoi will be expected to deliver.

But with no internationally successful players in the spin department, it remains the weakest link.

OPPORTUNITIES

Punjab Kings are yet to win an IPL title. With most of their bases covered on paper, they seem like strong contenders this year. This season is the perfect opportunity for Rahul and his men to get their hands on their maiden title, having charted out a three-year plan under his leadership and coach Anil Kumble's guidance.

THREATS

Shami, who fractured his wrist in Australia last year, has not played cricket in four months. With the national team's workload management to be kept in mind in a busy year, it remains to be seen if he plays all league games. He had a memorable run last year with 20 wickets and the team's success will depend a lot on him. — *PTI*



Mayank Agarwal of Punjab Kings plays a shot during a practice session ahead of the upcoming edition of Indian Premier League. — *Punjab Kings*

DON'T LEGALISE BETTING, SAYS BCCI ACU CHIEF

New Delhi, April 5: The BCCI's new Anti-Corruption Unit chief Shabir Hussain Shekadam Khandawala doesn't want betting to be legalised in India as it "encourages" match-fixing and feels his biggest challenge will be stamping out "shady activities" from smaller leagues.

There is a school of thought that legalising betting will bring in massive revenues for the government. But Khandawala looks at it differently.

"Whether the government legalises betting or not that is a different matter but deep inside, I feel as a police officer that betting can lead to match fixing. The government, so far, has rightly not legalised betting," the 70-year-old said.

"Betting encourages match fixing. So there should not be any change on this, we can make the rules more strict. We will work on that. It is a matter of great prestige that cricket is largely free of corruption. Credit should go to BCCI for that," he added.

"Betting might be legal in some countries but the people who go into stadiums to watch the game and watch it on television they believe in this game and don't go to grounds thinking this game could be fixed. We need to protect their belief that game is free of all corruption," he further added. — *PTI*



Delhi Capitals' Prithvi Shaw (right) with coach Ricky Ponting in this file photo.

Ponting reveals Shaw's batting habit

Mumbai, April 5: Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting has revealed that Prithvi Shaw refused to bat in the nets when he hit a bad patch in the last IPL and hoped that the highly-rated Indian youngster has changed his training habits "for the better" ahead of the upcoming edition.

Ponting recalled how Shaw simply refused to pad up for nets when after scoring two fifties last season, he was hit by a slump.

"...he had an interesting theory on his batting last year — when he's not scoring runs, he won't bat, and when he is scoring runs, he

wants to keep batting all the time," Ponting said.

"He had four or five games where he made under 10 and I'm telling him, 'We have to go to the nets and work out (what's wrong)', and he looked me in the eye and said, 'No, I'm not batting today'. I couldn't really work that out. He might have changed. I know he's done a lot of work over the last few months, that theory that he had might have changed, and hopefully, it has, because if we can get the best out of him, he could be a superstar player", the former Aussie skipper added. — *PTI*

DEBATE OVER ZAMAN WEIRD RUN-OUT

London, April 5: Pakistan's Fakhar Zaman's contentious run-out in the second ODI against South Africa has sparked a debate on spirit of the game with Marylebone Cricket Club saying it was "up to the umpires to decide" if Quinton de Kock had attempted to mislead the batsman. In a stiff chase of 342, Zaman smashed 193 in a losing cause as he was run out in a controversial fashion involving South Africa wicketkeeper de Kock. Replays showed that de Kock had seemed to convince Zaman into believing that the throw was going to the non-striker's end. "Law 41.5.1 states: It is unfair for any fielder wilfully to attempt, by word or action, to distract, deceive or obstruct either batsman after the striker has received the ball," the MCC tweeted. — *PTI*

City

CLIPS

Madras Club 'A' bag 'C' zone title

Madras Club 'A' defeated Anna Nagar K Block 'A' 2-1 to bag the 'C' zone title in the Sanmar-TNTA Chennai city club league championship.

Results: Madras Club 'A' bt Anna Nagar K Block 'A' 2-1 (Vikram Seshasayee/George Alexander bt Vinodkumar Ramakrishnan/Thomas P. Joy 6-1, 6-3; Harishankar Balaji/Rithwik Rajasekar lost to J. Oges Theyjo/Kannan Manickam 6-4, 6-7 (4), 5-7; Rishabhdev Rajshekar Raman/Ramchander Sukumar bt Aman Jhavar/Deventher Ram 6-4, 6-1.)

Somanna shines

Somanna struck four goals in Indian Bank thrashed Chennai Hockey Association XI in the Shri N. P.V. Ramasamy Udayar Hockey Cup.

Results: Indian Bank 4 (Somanna 4) bt Chennai Hockey Association XI; Integral Coach Factory 3 (Surya Prakash, Alok Barla, Deepauk) bt SRM IST.

FINANCIAL
Chronicle
quick
BITES

INDICATORS

| | | % |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Sensex | 49159.32 | -1.74 |
| Nifty 50 | 14637.80 | -1.54 |
| S&P 500* | 4,077.02 | 1.42 |
| Dollar (₹) | 73.33 | -0.28 |
| Pound Sterling (₹) | 101.55 | -0.09 |
| Euro (₹) | 86.06 | 0.36 |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹) | 44,949*15 | 0.03 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)* | 61.40 | -5.33 |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield | 6.123 | 0.00 |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 1.727 | 0.007 |

* As of 8:30 PM IST

SBI hikes home loan rate by 25 bps to 6.95%

State Bank of India has revised its home loan rate to 6.95 per cent from April 1. With this, the rate of 6.70 per cent, offered for a limited period, ended on March 31. During this period, the bank offered home loans at 6.70 per cent for loans up to Rs 75 lakh and 6.75 per cent for loans up to Rs 5 crore. As per information posted on its website.

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■ Sensex dips 870 pts as sentiments sour Covid second wave, lockdown hit stocks

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 5

The equity market plunged on Monday, as stricter lockdowns were imposed in Maharashtra even as the all-India daily Covid cases crossed one lakh.

The Sensex fell around 1450 points in early morning trade to the day's low of 48580.80 while all sectoral indices, barring IT and metals, witnessed profit taking. However, there was a partial recovery after 11 am and the Sensex finally closed 870 points, or 1.74 per cent, down at 49159.32.

The broader Nifty-50 Index fared better as it fell 1.54 per cent, or 229.55 points, to 14637.80.

Foreign portfolio investors sold equities worth Rs 931.66 crore while domestic institutional investors stayed cautious with net buying of Rs 75.48 crore.

Among the sectoral indices Banks, Financials, Realty, Media, Auto and FMCG fell the most.

"Severely adverse advance-decline ratio suggests broad nervousness in the markets. RBI's credit policy and Q4 earnings numbers create some added uncertainty for traders when Covid cases are on the rise. Indian markets have underperformed severely," said Deepak Jasani, head of retail research, HDFC Securities.

India's manufacturing activity has been hit in March after being on the slow road to improvement



SEBI'S FRAMEWORK TO CURB STOCK MARKET SPOOFING KICKS OFF

New Delhi, April 5: The new framework to curb instances of stock market spoofing kicked off on Monday, whereby serial offenders could face trading disablement of 15 minutes to two hours.

In spoofing, traders place a large number of buy or sell orders, with an intent to cancel before those orders can be executed. Market experts say excessive cancellations of large orders lead to manipulative increases or decrease in prices, which impacts retail

investors.

The exchanges have noted three activities—high order to trade ratio, high instances of order modifications and persistent deferred or lower order execution priority due to frequent modifications—that will be monitored to curb such practices.

The surveillance measure will be effective from April 5 and the first action on such traders will be on May 5 based on 20 trading days window. — *PTI*

over the previous few months due to the renewed escalation of the pandemic and subsequent restrictions played spoilsports for factory activity. "Initially concentrated in Maharashtra, new

cases are slowly dispersing to other states, which have seen some dip in mobility towards end-March. So far, though, economic impact remains minimal, said rating agency Crisil.

MACROTECH SEEKS TO RAISE ₹2,500 CRORE; IPO PRICED AT ₹483 TO ₹486

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 5

Mumbai-based realty firm Macrotech Developers, formerly known as Lodha Developers, announced a Rs 2,500-crore initial public offering (IPO) of shares in a price band of Rs 483 to Rs 486 per share of face value of Rs 10 each.

The long-expected IPO was postponed twice in the past, as the realty sector was facing several headwinds, and is now aiming to cash on the revival in the sector owing to lower home loan interest rates and fall in real estate prices.

The IPO opens on Wednesday and closes on Friday, April 9.

The IPO aims to raise money for payment of outstanding borrowings of the company, to acquire land or land development rights and to meet general corporate purposes.

Macrotech has 91 completed projects as of December 31, 2020, comprising affordable, mid-income, premium, luxury housing and retail space. It was incorporated on September 25, 1995.

Macrotech Developers is amongst largest real estate developers in India by residential sales during the period FY14-20, the company claims. It is developing some of the biggest real estate projects in Mumbai and Pune in terms of geographic area.

Byju's acquires Aakash for \$1 bn in cash-stock deal

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 5

Ed-tech startup Byju's has acquired Aakash Educational Services in a cash and stock deal valued close to \$1 billion.

The founders of Aakash—which provides test preparatory services—and investor Blackstone Group will hold a minority stake in Byju's and the promoter Aakash Chaudhry will continue to head the business.

"Our complementary strengths will enable us to build capabilities, create engaging and personalised learning programmes. The future of learning is hybrid and this union will bring together the best of offline and online learning, as we combine our expertise to create impactful experiences for students," said Byju Raveendran, founder, and CEO of Byju's.

The deal values Byju's around \$13 billion, the same as during the recently closed funding round. Byju's had recently raised \$460 million from a Series F funding round led by MC Global Edtech Investment Holdings. This is the second large acquisition by Byju's in recent times, the other one being the acquisition of WhiteHat Jr for \$300 million last year.

Before that Byju's had acquired TutorVista and EduRite, from Pearson in 2017, and Osmo in 2019.

Aakash has over 33 years of operational experience in the test preparatory industry and a student count of more than



MEESHO VALUED AT \$2.1 BILLION

SARITHA RAI
APRIL 5

Bengaluru-based social commerce startup Meesho Inc has raised \$300 million in new funding led by SoftBank Group Corp's Vision Fund 2, valuing the start-up at \$2.1 billion.

Existing investors like Prosus Ventures and Facebook also participated in the investment round, which adds a new member to a growing coterie of Indian unicorns. Meesho, which

operates an online sales platform for micro, small and medium businesses across India, will use the funds to "strengthen its talent pool."

Meesho serves over 13 million individual entrepreneurs in helping them start online businesses. The software developer has delivered orders from more than 100,000 registered suppliers to over 4,800 cities, pursuing a strategy of taking e-commerce to smaller cities and towns. — *Bloomberg*

250,000. It has 215 centres across the country and had started online operations a few years back.

In 2019, Blackstone had picked up a 37.5 per cent stake in Aakash for Rs 1,350 crore. Aakash maintained its revenues at Rs 1,200 crore in FY21 despite the pandemic impact.

Further, Byju's is in the final stages of acquiring Toppr, which operates in the K-12 space.

Byju's cited industry reports and said the test

preparation and after-school tutoring (high school) segment is estimated to be a \$7.8 billion opportunity in India and is expected to witness 55-60 per cent growth over the next four-five years.

Byju's said the company will look at opportunities that bring in new products and formats, market expansion and/or distribution opportunities.

Launched in 2015, Byju's has over 80 million students cumulatively learning from the app.

Your Vote Makes Your Future



They Vote under Influence



They Vote with Conscience

Where do you think you should be?

Remember that taking/giving bribe for Vote is an offence.

Don't succumb to buyers of Vote
Cast your Vote Fearlessly
without Inducement & Influence

If you see any such malpractice, immediately



Call on Voter Helpline or



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