

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | 6 APRIL 2021

WEATHER



Max: 39.0°C
Min: 25.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
39/25 °C

WORLD | 5

UK rolls out rapid Cov tests twice a week

SPORTS | 8

RCB player Padikkal catches Covid

TABLOID

'It was mutual learning'



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ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Bahula Dasami till 2.10 am (Wednesday)
Star: Shravanam till 2.35 am (Wednesday)
Varjyam: 6.10 am to 7.48 am
Durmuhurtam: 8.37 am to 9.26 am; 11.07 pm to 11.54 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
HILARI CALENDAR
Sha'ban 23, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.40 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.15 pm
Maghrib: 6.25 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.58 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.21 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 2.09 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 2.32 PM

COUNTER POINT



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

IN BRIEF

SC for panel meet on CBI director

New Delhi: The Supreme Court 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. The Centre had informed the SC the panel will meet after May 2.

IAF firefighting in U'khand forests

Dehradun: IAF helicopters on Monday began firefighting operations in Uttarakhand, conducting several sorties over the burning forests in Garhwal region of the state to spray water over the raging flames and extinguish them. An helicopter with a bucket carrying around 3,500 litres of water from Tehri lake was deployed to douse the forest fire.

Tikait plans stir in Gujarat

Ahmedabad: Bhartiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait on Monday threatened to start a farmers' tractor agitation in Gujarat after Delhi, and said time has come to gherao the state capital Gandhinagar and also break barricades if needed. Talking to reporters outside the Sabarmati Ashram here, Tikait claimed farmers in Gujarat were unhappy. Hundreds of farmers have been camping at Delhi's borders since November last year against the Centre's 3 farm laws.

Bengal, Bihar feel tremors in Sikkim

Gangtok/Kolkata: An earthquake of 5.4 magnitude hit Sikkim on Monday night, an official of the National Centre for Seismology (NCS) said. Tremors were also felt in parts of West Bengal and Bihar, he said. The quake occurred at 8.49 pm at a depth of 10 km near the India-Bhutan border. Tremors were felt in Gangtok and other parts of the Himalayan state, he said. People got frightened and rushed out of their houses but no loss of life or property has been reported so far in Sikkim.

Remembering Jagjivan Ram



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy pays tributes to portrait of Babu Jagjivan Ram at the camp office on the occasion of 114th birth anniversary celebrations on Monday. Minister P. Viswaroop (second from right), and MLA Meruga Nagarjuna (right) are also seen.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

TD cadre ignore Naidu's boycott call, to campaign

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 5

Even though party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu has given a call to boycott ZPTC and MPCT elections, the 'disillusioned' Telugu Desam cadre is actively participating at the ground-level supporting one candidate or the other.

TD not being in the fray may benefit YSRC and dash the hopes of Jana Sena candidates, who are garnering the support of TD in many places. The local TD leaders say that if they avoid the elections at this juncture, the party cadre may be scattered and many head to YSRC. However, if the TD is in the contest, and though its candidates may lose, the cadre will be working for the party with vigour.

Meanwhile, former legislators Assembly segment in-charges are not objecting when some cadre wish

TD CANDIDATES JOIN YSRC FOR POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 5

In a setback to the Opposition Telugu Desam and shot in the arm to the ruling YSR Congress, a TD candidate for the ZPTC seat from Bala-yapalli in Nellore district, Ravi Devika Chowdary, joined the YSRC on Monday.

In addition to Devika, TD nominees Maddur

to contest the elections. In fact, they are advising them to spend money only if their winning chances are bright. Some former MLAs have gone to Tirupati for the Lok Sabha bypoll campaign.

"After Naidu announced the boycott decision, some cadre members abandoned the campaign but in some villages, the cadre and candidates did not

Saidamma from the Balayapalli MPCT seat and Chandramouli from Vengambapuram MPCT migrated to the ruling party.

It effectively meant they had dropped out of the elections. All three of them had been with TD since more than three decades.

■ Page 2: Venkatagiri MLA facilitated switch

agree with the decision and are keen on contesting," said Undi constituency social media convenor Yashoda Krishnaiah.

He said that in his native village Aredukaligotla, the party cadre is aggressively campaigning to ensure wins of TD candidates.

■ Page 2: Cadre united in contesting elections

Maha home minister resigns

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.



Anil Deshmukh

"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 party's

DASSAULT PAID 1M EUROS FOR RAFALE DEAL, SAYS PORTAL

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

In a fresh controversy over the ₹59,000-crore Rafale fighter jet deal, French investigative news portal 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 the Indian Air Force in a deal worth ₹59,000 crores. Mediapart said the French anti-corruption agency Agence Française Anticorruption (AFA) discovered this separate arrangement during a routine audit of Dassault. The AFA decided not to alert the prosecution authorities on the payment. The report said 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 this amount of money seemed disproportionate in relation to all other entries.

"The sum is huge for a gift. Though French law does not set out limits, legal precedents suggest that giving a watch or an expensive meal costing several hundred euros can be enough to constitute graft," the report said. It said Dassault supplied AFA with proforma invoice, that was supplied by an Indian firm Detsys Solutions. This invoice, that related to 50 per cent of total order (1,017,850 euros), was for making 50 replicas of the Rafale with the price of each model 20,000 euros. Dassault was unable to provide single document or photograph showing that these models existed and were delivered, said the news report.

Adani fully owns Krishnapatnam

₹2,800 cr spent to buy Vishwa Samudra stake

New Delhi, April 5: Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) on Monday said it has acquired 25 per cent stake of Vishwa Samudra Holdings in Krishnapatnam Port for ₹2,800 crore.

This will result in APSEZ increasing its stake from 75 per cent to 100 per cent in Krishnapatnam Port. The port, located on the east coast of India in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh, is an all-weather, deep water port has multi-cargo facility with a current capacity of 64 million tonne per annum (MTPA). "APSEZ, the flagship transportation arm of the diversified Adani Group, is announcing the acquisition of the residual 25 per cent stake in Adani Krishnapatnam Port," (Krishnapatnam Port) for ₹2,800 crore," the company said in a statement. With a waterfront of 20 km and 6,800 acres of land, Krishnapatnam Port

has a master plan capacity of 300 MTPA and a 50-year concession, it said.

"Together with the 75 per cent ownership acquired in October 2020, the acquisition implies an enterprise value of ₹13,675 crore implying an EV/FY21 EBITDA multiple of 10.3x," the company said. The port is expected to have volumes of 38 MT, revenues of ₹1,840 crore and EBITDA of ₹1,325 crore in FY21, it said.

Karan Adani, chief executive officer and whole time director of APSEZ said, "The consolidation of our ownership in Krishnapatnam Port reinforces APSEZ's stride towards 500 MMT by 2025 and achieving our broader strategy of cargo parity between west and east coasts of India." He said the port is on track to handle double the traffic by 2025 and will deliver high growth through a multi-product and cargo

enhancement strategy while enhancing return on capital employed. "We are confident that we will be able to double throughput and triple EBITDA at Krishnapatnam Port by 2025. We are committed to making Krishnapatnam Port the gateway port for South Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. With its large industrial land backed with the port we will transform Krishnapatnam into a manufacturing and industrial hub," Adani added.

APSEZ is the largest port operator in India with 12 strategically located ports and terminals — Mundra, Dahej, Tuna and Hazira in Gujarat, Dhamra in Odisha, Mormugao in Goa, Visakhapatnam and Krishnapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, Dighi in Maharashtra and Kattupalli and Ennore in Chennai. These represent 24 per cent of India's total port capacity. — PTT

Kerala, Tamil Nadu set to elect new Assemblies today

DC CORRESPONDENTS
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/
CHENNAI, APRIL 5

After four-month-long campaigning, over six crore voters in Tamil Nadu and around 2.7 crore electorate in Kerala would vote to elect new governments in their respective states on Tuesday.

Cash distribution in Tamil Nadu went on unabated across the state despite the authorities continued with their crackdown that led to a slew of seizures. The Election Commission seized precious metals, alcohol, cash and other items worth ₹428 crore.

This would be the first time in several decades that Tamil election did not have towering leaders like M. Karunanidhi and J. Jayalalitha.

In Kerala, which alternates power between left-leaning LDF and the centrist UDF, the ruling alliance led by the CPI-M expects break this norm, while the BJP seeks to emerge as the third political force in the state.

Assam, meanwhile, would vote in 40 assembly constituencies that are going to polls in the last of the three phases on Tuesday to decide the fate of 337 candidates, including senior minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, his five cabinet colleagues and BJP state unit president Ranjeet Kumar Dass.



Polling parties travel on a buffalo cart for the election duty in a remote area, on the eve of the final phase of Assembly polls, Kamrup (Rural) district in Assam on Monday.

— PTT

A BOOTH WITH 90 VOTERS IN ASSAM POLLED 181 VOTES, OFFICIALS FIRED

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, APRIL 5

In what has raised the suspicion of bogus polling, the Election Commission has found that 171 votes were cast at a booth where only 90 people were eligible to exercise their franchise in Halfong Assembly constituency of Dima Hasao district on April 1.

Soon after the irregularity came to notice, the district election officer suspended five poll officials of the booth, set up at 107(A) Khotlir LP School, and proposed a repoll.

Halfong had recorded 74 per cent polling. It is an auxiliary polling station of the main voting centre at Mouldam LP School.

An official said, "The head of that interior village refused to accept the official voter list and brought a list of his own. Then, the people of the village voted according to that list."

However, the official order for reelection at the booth, an auxiliary polling station of the main voting centre at Mouldam LP School, is yet to be issued by the poll panel.

COVID | CONTROL Officials to focus on highly populated urban areas

Beneficiaries coaxed for jab

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 5

Ward and village volunteers are visiting houses of targeted beneficiaries aged above 45 years to persuade the reluctant ones to take the Covid-19 vaccine.

Given the steady rise in the number of Coronavirus infections across the state, the state government directed health authorities to concentrate on highly populated urban areas and villages. It recently extended vaccination centres to ward and village secretariats to be within the reach of people. With the inclusion of peo-

● **DAILY TARGET** of 500 people set in each ward secretariat and 300 at each village secretariat with vaccinations from 9 am to 5 pm

ple aged above 45 years, health authorities identified the beneficiaries at all levels. They fixed a daily target of 500 people in each ward secretariat and nearly 300 at each village secretariat. The vaccination schedule will be from 9 am to 5 pm with a possible extension by an hour if the need arises. Volunteers and ASHA workers campaign in the targeted

areas a day the vaccine date. However, some beneficiaries are failing to turn up for varied reasons. At this juncture, the volunteers and ASHA workers list out those who have missed out and by afternoon visit their houses and persuade them to take the vaccine. Those who refuse to take the jab cite reasons that include fear of side effects like fever and body pains, blood pressure and blood sugar and further health complications, instances of death of some people after vaccination.

■ Page 3: 90% beneficiaries targeted for vaccine

PM TO MEET Cms AS CASES SURGE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

With India's new Covid-19 cases crossing one lakh in a single day on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has again called for a meeting with Chief Ministers of states and Lieutenant-Governors of Union territories on Thursday to review the situation.

■ Report on Page 4

IN BRIEF

VIJAYAMMA: NAIDU TRYING TO TARNISH YSR FAMILY IMAGE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 5

Y.S. Vijayalakshmi Rajasekhara Reddy slammed a section of the media for their misinformation campaign against her family.

In an open letter released here on Monday, Vijayamma stated that after the death of her husband, their family was being targeted by Telugu Desam and media houses that support it and the Jana Sena for varied reasons.

Referring to the YSRC's landslide victory under the leadership of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in the recent gram panchayat and municipal polls, she said that Telugu Desam president N. Chandrababu Naidu's decision to stay away from the upcoming MPTC and ZPTC elections was because of lack of public support. This frustration is making them tarnish the image of the YSR family.

She said that though the attack on the then leader of the Opposition Jagan Mohan Reddy occurred in October 2018 and the murder of Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy in March 2019 during the regime of Chandrababu Naidu, Jagan Reddy was being blamed even as the investigation in both cases has been taken up by Central agencies.

She ruled out any differences among family members in the context of her daughter Sharmila floating a political party in Telangana as she wanted to serve people there and castigated a section of the media for trying to project it as a dispute between her son and daughter.



● **Y.S. Vijayalakshmi Rajasekhara Reddy ruled out any differences among family members in the context of her daughter Sharmila floating a political party in Telangana as she wanted to serve people there**

QUESTION BJP ABOUT AP ISSUES, PAWAN TOLD

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 5

Agriculture minister Kurasa-lanna Kannababu told Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan to stop criticising Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and instead question Bharatiya Janata Party about the Special Category Status and other funds that have to be released by the Centre.

Speaking to reporters here on Monday, he said that rather than frequently mentioning faction politics, Pawan Kalyan would do well if he pays attention to the development of Rayalaseema.

The minister said that opposition parties, including Telugu Desam and Jana Sena, should question the Union Government about the exorbitant hike in petrol and diesel charges. He said that when N Chandrababu Naidu was the chief minister, many idols of deities were destroyed and the subsequent curse brought him down in 2019. He said that YSRC would win Tirupati Lok Sabha elections with an overwhelming majority.

YANAMALA SEEKS WHITE PAPER ON STATE FINANCES

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 5

Senior TD leader Yanamala Ramakrishnudu demanded a white paper on the finances of Andhra Pradesh.

In a statement issued here on Monday, the leader of the Opposition in the AP Legislative Council slammed the state government for the deteriorating financial situation which was so enormous that they were able to pay salaries in time.

He said that the state had the dubious distinction of taking loans to the tune of ₹79,191.58 crore loans by February for the 2020-21 fiscal. He pointed out that the state had additional revenue of ₹29,109.30 crore when compared to last year and had received a huge amount in the form of Covid assistance and donations, it still took ₹73,812 crore in just three months of 2021.

Bypoll candidates relying on door-to-door campaign

Political temperature warms up with visits of senior leaders for campaigns

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 5

With hardly 10 days left for the byelection, candidates are having a busy schedule with the door-to-door campaigning in the Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency. The political temperature is on the rise here with visit of senior political leaders from various parties.

Considered a stronghold of the YSRC with two back-to-back wins in 2014 and 2019, the ruling party is confident of winning the seat with a record majority. However, candidates of other political parties like the BJP, TD and Congress are also trying hard to impress the voters. The BJP has taken the bypoll seriously as it hopes to make inroads in Andhra Pradesh. The saffron party has deputed a host of state and central leaders like Sunil Deodhar MP, G.V.L. Narasimha Rao and Somu Veeraj to spend time in the temple city to win votes for its candidate.

BJP leaders are camping in the city for a few months now. Party candidate K. Ratna Prabha joined them recently and met all sections of people. Their daily routine involves meeting various sections of the people, visiting constituencies and even breaking bread with some key leaders to rev up the mood in favour of the party.

It appears that the BJP central leaders have brought in their political strategies such as play of religious politics to the byelection scene. Political experts see this as an old trick that may not work in AP. It was already proven in the recently concluded local body elections that the spate of attacks on temples and religious institutions, allegedly stage-managed by Jagan's political rivals, did not hamper the YSRC's winning chances in the state.

"Telugu people will not get swayed by religious politics. They are making unwarranted references to the Christian faith to embarrass CM Jagan and his government and accused him of using his official position as a propaganda tool for missionary activities. But the AP people didn't get carried away. They gave us a clear mandate even in the municipal polls," a senior leader of YSRC commented.

The saffron party leaders are, however, saying that their cadre was charged up with their ally and star campaigner and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan conducting a road show here. The BJP won this seat in 1999 when N. Venkataswamy contested on its ticket.

Taking this bypoll very seriously, the TD has chosen a new strategy to campaign in the byelection. Party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu is learnt to have advised that his party's senior leaders and candidate Panabaka Lakshmi, a six-time MP and former Union minister, must visit each house at least 10 times before the campaign deadline and explain various issues. Two days ago, Naidu's son Nara Lokesh also joined the TD leaders in Tirupati and he has been extensively campaigning in the constituency.

On the other hand, Congress candidate Chintamohan, who is also a six-time MP and former



Venkatagiri legislator Anam Ramanarayana Reddy addresses the crowd while YSRC nominee for Tirupati LS seat Dr M. Gurumurthy greets the people during an election campaign in Venkatagiri constituency on Monday.

— DC

CM approves resumption of SS link canal works

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, APRIL 5

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy gave his approval for resumption of works pertaining to Somasila-Swarnamukhi link canal so as to put an end to irrigation ordeals faced by farmers in Rapur.

This was stated by minister for Energy Balineni Srinivasa Reddy while addressing an election campaign, 'YSR Congress Sankharavam', at Rapur in Venkatagiri constituency on Monday.

Reminding that the project proposed by Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy was pending for many years, he said it is going to be a reality now following the consent given of Jagan Mohan Reddy.

He called upon the people to ensure a thumping majority for YSR Congress nominee for Tirupati Lok Sabha seat, Dr Gurumoorthy.

Speaking on the occasion, Panchayat Raj minister P. Ramachandra Reddy said that many ZPTC, MPTC and sarpanch candidates in Rapur mandal have been elected unanimously because of people's faith in Jagan Mohan Reddy's administration. He claimed that poor people benefited in a big way

● With two back-to-back wins in 2014 and 2019, the ruling party is confident of winning the seat with a record majority

Union minister, started his election campaign in Chittoor and Nellore districts much before the byelection schedule was announced. Taking on his rivals in his style, the senior politician is trying to propagate that only the Congress can offer good governance in the country. Meanwhile, the ruling party hopes to repeat the success by highlighting its achievements.

YSRC chief Jagan had chosen a new face in Dr Maddila Gurumurthy, a 36-year-old physiotherapist, who hails from a non-political family of Mala (dalit) caste.

The ruling party believes the "Jagan wave" prompted by his welfare schemes will help them have a thumping majority. Local MLAs have taken the responsibility for conducting door-to-door campaigns.

Addressing media later during his campaign at

TD cadre united in contesting elections

from page 1

He said that he had convened a meeting and had sought their feelings. The cadre unanimously said that they would participate in the elections.

In some mandals like Mummidivaram in East Godavari, the cadre and candidates stayed away to honour the boycott deci-

sion of their leader. Meanwhile, Jana Sena candidates are approaching TD leaders and cadre for their support while local TD leaders are assessing the political equations. If YSRC candidates have winning chances, the TD leaders are supporting them indirectly to reap future benefits.

through various programmes of the government and the volunteer system has been bridging the gap between the government and the people. TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy said that TTD would extend its cooperation for developing Penusila Narasimha Swamy temple in Rapur mandal.

He added that TTD officials have been asked to prepare an action plan after conducting a survey on the amenities.

Kamalapuram MLA P. Ravindranath Reddy said Gurumurthy was a close associate of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan

Venkatagiri MLA facilitated switch

from page 1

They switched over at the instance of Venkatagiri legislator Anam Ramanarayana Reddy.

They announced that they are not going to be in the contest anymore though their names will be on the ballot paper and they would cast their votes to the YSRC nominees.

TTD chairman Y. V. Subba Reddy, Deputy CM Narayana Swamy, ministers Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy and Balineni Srinivasa Reddy, apart from Ramanarayana Reddy felicitated the new entrants at Balayapalli on Monday. TD sources say this is quite likely to prompt many other TD candidates into following suit.

Addressing media later during his campaign at

sion of their leader.

Meanwhile, Jana Sena candidates are approaching TD leaders and cadre for their support while local TD leaders are assessing the political equations. If YSRC candidates have winning chances, the TD leaders are supporting them indirectly to reap future benefits.

Mohan Reddy and learnt about the difficulties faced by people during Jagan Mohan Reddy's padayatra.

Venkatagiri MLA Anam Ramanarayana Reddy said the previous government had canceled SS Canal works that had taken-off during Rajasekhara Reddy's regime with a ₹400-crore outlay in 2006. Now, there would be no water problems for irrigation purposes, he said.

Deputy chief minister K. Narayana Swamy, Gurumoorthy, legislator K. Govardhan Reddy, former MLA S.P.V. Naidu and party leader N. Ramkumar were present on the occasion.

Saidapuram, the ruling party legislator said TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu has murdered his own party with his decision of boycotting ZPTC, MPTC polls. He accused Naidu of compromising on principles of NTR, who founded TD to protect the pride of Telugu people.

Stressing that no other political party across the globe has committed such a mistake of boycotting elections after being in fray, Ramanarayana Reddy said "Naidu has proved the proverb that there are no murders in politics, except suicides."

The Venkatagiri legislator appealed to all YSR Congress cadres to console their TD counterparts and invite them to join YSRC party's welfare activities in Andhra Pradesh.

April 8 is declared local holiday

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 5

With the State Election Commission (SEC) set to conduct MPTC/ZPTC elections on April 8, the state government authorised district collectors to declare a local holiday on polling day for all government offices, local bodies and other government institutions located in areas of polling.

The district collectors were asked to declare holiday on April 7 and 8 for all public buildings, educational institutional buildings and other buildings that are to be used for conducting polls.

April 8 will be declared holiday for public and private undertakings and firms to facilitate their employees to exercise their franchise.

It authorised district collectors to declare holiday on April 8 in areas notified for polling under Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881 and also authorised them to declare paid holiday to the employees and workers working in shops and establishments located in polling areas under the Andhra Pradesh Shops and Establishments Act, 1988.

All liquor shops within polling areas will remain closed during the period of 48 hours prior to the hour fixed for conclusion of polling.

The state government also issued an order stating that no government employee shall canvass or otherwise interfere or use his influence in an election to Parliament, or any house of state legislature or any local authority or body.

The order said that it is the duty of government servants to be scrupulously impartial in the discharge of their duties in connection with elections.

SEC: APPLY INK ON VOTER'S LEFT HAND LITTLE FINGER

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 5

The State Election Commission issued a direction to apply indelible ink on voter's left hand little finger in the ensuing MPTC/ZPTC elections on April 8 in the state.

The SEC in a statement issued here on Monday said that as the elections to gram panchayats were completed on February 21, 2021, the indelible ink was applied on voter's left hand forefinger at the time of polling and added that as the indelible ink stain would remain on the skin part and also might be visible on nail for five to seven days, it took a decision to apply indelible ink on left hand little finger.

The SEC directed the collectors and district election authorities to issue necessary directions to all returning officers, presiding officers and other polling officers to follow the rule.

Poll observer: Ensure free and fair polling

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 5

Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection observer Dinesh Kumar Giridhar Lal and Chittoor collector M. Harinarayana directed officials to make elaborate arrangements for the polling to be held in a free and transparent manner on April 17.

Both the election officials on Monday inspected the model polling station at the SV Campus school and the strong rooms and counting stations set up at the SV Arts College premises in Tirupati. After the inspection,

they held a review meeting with the officials of district administration and police from Nellore and Chittoor district at the RDO's office.

Dinesh Kumar directed the officials to make poll arrangements in strict adherence to Covid-19 protocols issued by the union ministry of home affairs.

He cautioned them to implement compulsory face mask and social distancing procedures at all the polling stations set up across the constituency.

Officials briefed him the arrangements being made to the poll observer.



TD national general-secretary N. Lokesh takes a selfie with public and party supporters during his campaign in Tirupati on Monday in support of TD nominee Panabaka Lakshmi for the Tirupati LS byelection. — DC

Lokesh: Choose TD's 'fighting candiadate'

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, APRIL 5

Telugu Desam general secretary Nara Lokesh asked voters of the Tirupati parliamentary constituency to choose a "fighting" MP rather than a "servant robot" of AP Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in the byelection scheduled on April 17.

He made these comments on Monday evening while addressing a public meeting near the municipal office in Tirupati, where he also campaigned, taking up a door-to-door padayatra and a road show in support of Panabaka Lakshmi, the TD nominee contesting the bypoll.

Terming this byelection as a battle between the CM's 28 robots — referring to the 22 Lok Sabha and six Rajya Sabha members of the YSRC — and the Telugu Desam "fighters", ostensibly the TD MPs, Lokesh gave a call to the voters not to send another robot to the Lok Sabha but vote for the TD candidate who would fight for their cause.

"Jagan has perfectly programmed his 28 robots, which can take a perfect dive to the feet of Modi whenever they see him. Whatever the law the Centre introduces, these robots will push the 'yes' button without fail, as programmed by Jagan. These robots never questioned the Centre about the delay in executing the projects and developments in Tirupati," he said adding that the YSRC MPs "had no shame" to go and campaign in Puducherry where the BJP had promised special union territory status.

Lokesh asked the Tirupati voters why they should support the YSRC when it did not carry out a single development work in the temple town. Works of the national institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) were



TD nominee for Tirupati LS bypoll Panabaka Lakshmi donnes the role of a vegetable vendor during her election campaign at Venkatagiri segment on Monday.

halted under the Jagan Mohan Reddy regime, he alleged while maintaining that if TD candidate Lakshmi was elected, she would "fight like a lioness in Parliament" for the development projects in Tirupati.

He accused the CM of having no respect for Dalits and claimed that atrocities, exploitation and mafia has become rampant. "There was no justice for Dalits like Dr Sudhakar, who was harassed and branded a madman just for asking for a face mask. Even Deputy CM K. Narayana Swamy was insulted by minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy on a couple of occasions, but the CM did not say a word against him. Jagan is least bothered about Dalits, but only cares about his own wealth creation," the TD leader alleged.

Lokesh also alleged that the ruling party leaders had looted resources of the state and did not even spare the Srivari laddus, which they put up for commercial sale and distributed in the recent panchayat raj elections. He said the prices of essentials had gone up under Jagan Mohan Reddy's misrule, and sand had become dearer for the people. He flayed the CM for bringing in cheap liquor brands with names like Special Status and Gold Medal, which after drinking public were falling ill.

PUDUCHERRY | POLLS Officials said Covid-19 patients can avail their voting rights from 6 pm to 7 pm

37,811 voters to exercise franchise in Yanam today

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 5

The Yanam, the UT enclave to Puducherry, Assembly elections will be held from 7 am to 7 pm on Tuesday.

Of the total 37,811 voters, 18,288 are men and 19,523 women. Officials arranged 60 polling stations with 27 of them especially for Covid-19 cases. They also identified 16 sensitive areas and STPP Junior College has been chosen as the model polling station.

● An independent candidate G. Srinivasa Ashok is giving a tough fight to Rangaswamy. RTI activist and Sunkara Swamy Naidu Foundation founder S. Karthik is contesting on the BSP ticket.

Officials said that Covid-19 patients can avail their voting rights from 6 pm to 7 pm. They said that one BLO, six polling personnel, two personnel for conducting Covid test and one NSS volunteer have been deployed for each polling station.

Returning officer Aman Sharma said that drinking water, sanitizers and other

facilities are being arranged in every polling station.

Overall 16 candidates are in the fray, including NR Congress president and former chief minister N. Rangaswamy is contesting from Yanam. Former legislator Malladi Krishna Rao is supporting him. The NR Congress and BJP have a pre-poll arrangement.

An independent candi-

date G. Srinivasa Ashok is giving a tough fight to Rangaswamy. RTI activist and Sunkara Swamy Naidu Foundation founder S. Karthik is contesting on the BSP ticket.

Yanam circle inspector Arvi Selvam said nearly 700 personnel, including four companies of central forces and 195 personnel in Yanam, have been deployed. They will be led by Superintendent of Police Raja Shankar Vallabh and Senior Superintendent of Police Rahul Alwal.

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, APRIL 5

Pemmadi Durga Prasad, an independent candidate from the Yanam Assembly segment of Puducherry was found in an unconscious state near Achampeta centre in Kakinada. A missing case was registered on him on April 1. The Puducherry elections are scheduled on Tuesday.

● Durga Prasad later told reporters that some persons, probably from Kanakalpet, covered his face with a mask and kidnapped him in a car.

Some persons found him unconscious and rushed him to the Government General Hospital here.

Later, he told reporters that some persons, probably from Kanakalpet, covered his face with a mask

and kidnapped him in a car. He has given different versions about his kidnapping incident. He said that followers of N.R. Congress and also of Independent candidate Ashok had approached and pressurised him to support them.

However, Arvi Selvam said that Durga Prasad had recovered and investigation will be taken up on the conclusion of elections.

SHORT TAKES

ACB finds lapses in Durga temple

Vijayawada: Anti-Corruption Bureau found a series of financial irregularities in the goddess Kanaka Durga temple in Vijayawada. The ACB sleuths carried out an inquiry from Feb. 18 to 20 and submitted a report to the state government. In its report, it mentioned that the temple executive officer M.V. Suresh Babu resorted to a series of lapses including payment of bills for various works despite audit objections. The report further mentioned that the payments made were against the guidelines issued by the directorate of state audit and tenders called for sanitary works were against the norms of Central Vigilance Commission.

90% BENEFICIARIES TARGETED FOR VACCINE

FROM PAGE 1

A ward volunteer said, "We are even explaining about our personal experiences and also inform them that if they fail to get the jab being given free of charge, they will become vulnerable to getting infected with the virus. Some people are giving up their inhibitions after personal persuasion and are coming for the jab."

Health director Dr T. Geetha Prasadini said, "As we have targetted to administer Covid vaccine at least for 90 per cent of beneficiaries, we are sending volunteers and ASHA workers to visit the houses of those who fail to turn up and convince them about the need to take the jab."

58TH NATIONAL MARITIME DAY

Visakhapatnam: Visakhapatnam Port Trust on Monday observed the 58th National Maritime Day with the theme of this year "Sustainable Shipping - beyond COVID-19".



SOUTH CENTRAL RAILWAY
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E-Tender Notice No. GNT/SG/36/213, Dated 31.03.2021

The undersigned invites e-tenders for the works mentioned below up to 11.00 hrs of 23.04.2021.

ID.No. 213 Name of the work: S&T works in connection with TTRR work (TWS-29sets) over Guntur division, GNT-KCC section-11 sets (MAG-11A, 12B, 19B, 20A, 20B, 11B; NBR-25B, 24B, 17B, 16B; NGNT-10B); GNT-NDKD-3 sets (NLDP-30B, 40A; BMKD-13B); GNT-NDL-15 sets (GNT-39B; SYM-17B, 18B, 23B, 24B; CEM-13B, 7B; POC-7B; GJJ-8B, 7B, 14B; MRK-7B, 13B; TLU-13B; CBM-7B, 14B; GID-14B; NDPL-7B, 13B; VJA-20B. Approx. cost (₹): 86,14,289/- EMD (₹): 0.00/- Cost of Tender Document (₹): 0.00/-

Last date for online submission of E-bids is 23.04.2021 up to 11.00 hrs. For detailed information login to our website at www.ireps.gov.in.

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People pay rich tributes to jawan martyred in ambush

Jawan Routh Jagadish planned shopping for marriage from today

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 5

Paramilitary jawan Routh Jagadish, killed in an encounter with Maoists in Bijapur forests of Chhattisgarh on Saturday, had fixed his marriage for May 22 and planned for shopping this Tuesday.

The untimely death of the local youth shocked the entire town after the news broke out.

Hundreds of people came out in rallies and raised slogans praising his supreme sacrifice.

His garlanded portraits were seen all over the town.

On Monday evening, a bike rally was taken out from the central town to his home in Gajularega, on the city outskirts, paying tributes to the jawan.

Friends of Jagadish said his parents Ramanamma and Simhachalam were

Jagan announces ex gratia to kin of two martyred jawans

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 5

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has announced an ex gratia of ₹30 lakh each to the families of martyred soldiers in Bijapur encounter with the Maoists in Chhattisgarh.

The CM offered his heartfelt condolences to the family members of slain soldiers Routh Jagadeesh

and Shikamuri Murali Krishna of Guntur and prayed that they get the due to his nature of duties.

"He called me four days ago and said he would be arriving today and start shopping for wedding clothes etc from Tuesday.

● The CM offered his heartfelt condolences to the family members of slain soldiers Routh Jagadeesh and Shikamuri Murali Krishna and prayed that they get the

Visakhapatnam and Shikamuri Murali Krishna of Guntur and prayed that they get the

due to his nature of duties.

"He called me four days ago and said he would be arriving today and start shopping for wedding clothes etc from Tuesday.

strength to overcome the loss.

Jagadeesh hailed from Gajularega of Vizianagaram district and Murali Krishna from Sattenapalli in Guntur district.

AP Governor B. S. N. Harichandan condoled the death of two jawans and prayed for peace to the martyrs. He offered condolences to the members of the bereaved families.

That was the last call we got. His superiors broke the news of his death," Jagadish's father Simhachalam said. Jagadish studied in a



People wait for their turn at the Covid bus for testing due to spike in Covid cases in Andhra Pradesh, at Vijayawada Railway station premises on Monday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

State reports 1,326 Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 5

Andhra Pradesh has been registering over 1,000 fresh cases of Coronavirus per day for the last six days causing concern to the health authorities over rapid spread of the virus mainly due to laxity in following Covid-19 appropriate behaviour.

On Monday too, 1,326 fresh cases of Coronavirus were reported with five deaths.

The state health authorities reported that out of 30,678 samples tested, 1,326 persons were found infected with confirmed Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,52,39,114 samples tested, 9,09,002 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,91,048 were recovered in the course of treatment while 10,710 persons are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus infections, Chittoor topped the state with 282 followed by 271 in Guntur, 222 in Visakhapatnam, 171 in Nellore, 138 in Krishna, 54 in Prakasam, 52 in Srikakulam, 50 in Kurnool, 31 in Kadapa, 29 in East Godavari, 23 in Anantapur, two in Vizianagaram and one in West Godavari.

Among Coronavirus cumulative active cases, Chittoor found to be the worst hit at 1,985 followed

People urged to get Covid-19 tests

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, APRIL 5

Expressing concern over increase in the number of Covid positive cases during last few days, joint collector N. Prabhakar Reddy appealed to the people to go for medical check-up if they notice any symptoms related to Covid-19.

He told them to take treatment at the Government General Hospital and Narayana General Hospital as they have been authorised to treat Covid patients.

While addressing media persons here on Monday, the joint collector has urged the aged people starting from 45-year-old to take the vaccine without fail at the authorised vaccination centres

by 1,629 in Visakhapatnam, 1,511 in Guntur, 1,423 in Krishna, 924 in Nellore, 737 in East Godavari, 627 in Prakasam, 446 in Kurnool, 444 in Srikakulam, 324 in Kadapa, 308 in Anantapur, 200 in Vizianagaram and 152 in West Godavari.

Among daily cases of death of Coronavirus infected patients, out of five, two in Krishna and

including Primary Health Centres, Government hospitals, Urban Health Centres.

Maintaining that the symptoms now have not been similar to the cases reported last year, he said severe lung infections and breathing issues others are not noticed now.

Mr Prabhakar Reddy has attributed the four deaths in a span of three days to self-medication and rushing to the hospital at the eleventh hour.

"We observed that some infected persons are using medicines on their own confining to the households ignoring the need for treatment under the supervision of the doctors. It is because of such people the positive cases are touching the 100 mark," he said.

one each in Anantapur, Chittoor and Guntur were reported, raising the death toll to 7,244.

The state health authorities discharged 911 Coronavirus infected patients after recovery in the last 24 hours.

AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,85,377 samples per one million population and registered positive rate at 5.96.

KADAPA HAS FIVE-POINT PLAN ON COVID SURGE

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, APRIL 5

Kadapa administration is gearing up to implement a five-point action plan for preventing spread of Coronavirus in the district. These are testing, tracing, vaccination, masking, and social distancing.

Relevant ward volunteers and medical assistants have been entrusted the task of identifying and vaccinating everyone over the age of 45-60 years within the ward secretariats.

These government staff will raise awareness about the second wave of equally dangerous Covid-19 pandemic among public, so that all virus-controlling rules are followed. These decisions were taken at the district's Covid Task Force Committee meeting chaired by deputy Chief Minister Amjad Basha on Monday at the Kadapa Municipal Corporation (KMC) office.

The deputy Chief Minister asked secretariat staff to work in coordination with the corporation and police personnel to make people aware of myths about Coronavirus vaccination.

CM pays tributes to Jagjivan Ram

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 5

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy paid rich tributes to the freedom fighter and crusader of social justice Babu Jagjivan Ram to mark his birth anniversary.

The CM garlanded the portrait of Jagjivan Ram at a programme held at his Camp Office and recalled his contribution in the Indian freedom struggle.

Ministers Mekathoti Sucharitha, Pinepe Viswaroop, Adimulapu Suresh, government

adviser Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy and several others were present.

In a related development organised at YSR Congress party office, government adviser Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy recalled how the great personalities like Dalit icon Dr B.R. Ambedkar and outstanding Parliamentarian Babu Jagjivan Ram vowed to fight poverty beyond caste and said that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy initiating a series of reforms in all sectors drawing inspiration from such persons.

Trade unions launch signature campaign

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 5

The leaders of Visakh Utku Parirakshana Committee launched a signature campaign at the Gandhi statue near RTC Complex in Visakhapatnam against the privatisation of the Steel Plant. The leaders aimed at collecting 10 lakh signatures.

Former Andhra University vice chancellor and the present vice chancellor of Centurion University Prof. G.S.N. Raju launched the campaign by putting his signature.

Addressing a gathering Prof. Raju said public sector undertakings were built with the lands given by the farmers and taxes paid by the people.

The factories grew due to the hard work of the workers and the staff members who toiled day and night.

"No government has the right to privatise the public sector undertakings and the BJP leaders should withdraw the proposal to privatise the

Visakhapatnam steel plant," Prof. Raju said.

Appreciating the signature campaign and intensity of the agitation, Prof. Raju said all people should join the movement to protect the pride of Telugu people. Earlier, he garlanded the portraits of Babu Jagjivan Ram.

Literary critic and political analyst Telakapalle Ravi, who inaugurated the fourth day of the relay hunger strike at the same venue, said Atmanirbhar meant protecting the public sector undertakings and not privatising them.

"The employees of the steel plant not only showed their commitment in the agitation but also showed their skills by achieving record profits for the steel plant. This should be a big lesson for the Modi government," Ravi said.

State president of IFTU P. Prasad said dedicated agitations and peaceful strikes have delayed or pushed back the privatisation of public sector undertakings.

RINL staff resolve for merger of PSUs

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 5

The Steel Executives Federation of India (SEFI) passed a resolution for strategic merger of steel PSUs in the council meeting held at New Delhi on Sunday.

A release in Visakhapatnam on Monday said the council meeting was attended by the representatives of officers association of SAIL, Steel Executives Association, Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, officers association of NINL, NMDC Steel Officers Association, who unanimously passed this resolution.

The resolution said a single Maha Steel Unit be formed by merging steel plants of Steel Authority of India Limited and its subsidiary units with Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited, and its subsidiary company, Neelachal Ispat Nigam Limited, NMDC (both steel plant and mining sector) and Mecon under the ministry of Steel.

This mega steel merger is also in line with the recommendations of Parliament Committee for PSUs submitted in the month of March 2013 to expand steel capacities.

This shall greatly help

'YSRC CONSPIRING WITH BJP TO PRIVATISE RINL'

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 5

The TD leaders alleged that the ruling party is conspiring with BJP to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

Senior leaders and workers held a meeting in the party office in Visakhapatnam on Monday to discuss the privatisation issue and the role played by the ruling YSRC.

to realise the targets of National Steel policy of 300 MTPA Steel capacity by 2030-31. Each steel unit has its strengths and weaknesses but merging them into a single unit would help them to synergize their strengths and turn the weaknesses into opportunities and overall benefits to the nation. Steel being an essential component in the growth rate and contributes heavily to the GDP of our country, it should be kept under the strategic sector of the nation, the release said.

on smugglers of red sanders.

Kadapa district forest officer Ravindra Dhama, speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, said there is no shortage of funds as far as water supply to wild animals is considered. "Under the direction of Conservator of Forests, we are taking various steps to quench the thirst of wild animals. We will continue these measures until the rainy season starts," Ravindra underlined.

Covid defaulters



A policeman captures the traffic offenders who did not wear face masks on the beach road in Visakhapatnam.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

ANIMAL CARE

Artificial water ponds have been set up at various places

Special water facilities for wild animals

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, APRIL 5

Forest authorities have started taking measures to quench the thirst of wildlife following summer severity increasing in Sheshachalam, Lankamalla and Nallamala forests.

Artificial water ponds have already been set up at various places, where boreholes could be located. Over 200 saucer pits are also being set up in various places to fill them

up with transported water. There are also previous year's 150 saucer pits, some of which are being repaired to ensure drinking water supply to wild animals.

Lankamalla, Nallamala and Sheshachalam reserve forests shelter thousands of wild animal species. Forest personnel are ensuring that saucer pits are filled in at least every alternate day. The department has also hired separate staff whose job is to fill these water saucers.

● Forest personnel are ensuring that saucer pits are filled in at least every alternate day.

● The department has also hired separate staff whose job is to fill these water saucers.

Almost seven tractor tankers have been specially allotted for these works. In addition, in a longer-term plan, the department has constructed 12 check dams, 13 mini-percolation

tanks, and 4,500 metres of continuous contour trenches at various places in the forests. Funds are being allotted for the purpose under National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), Project Tiger and Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats. Solar power pump sets have been arranged at forest base camps to operate borewell motors and supply water to the nearby pits. Incidentally, there are 17 base camps that keep vigil

SHORT TAKES

COMPLETELY
BASELESS: BJP ON
RAFALE CHARGES

New Delhi, April 5: The BJP on Monday dismissed as “completely baseless” the allegations of corruption in the Rafale deal, stressing that the Supreme Court had rejected a demand for a probe in the purchase of the fighter aircraft and the CAG also found nothing wrong.

Responding to a question about the Congress' attack on the Modi government over the bribe allegations, senior BJP leader and Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said at a press conference that the opposition party made it a big issue in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls but lost badly. He said the allegations of corruption were “completely baseless” and suggested that a report in the French media about the alleged financial irregularity in the deal may be due to “corporate rivalry” in that country.

Noting that the Congress had raised the issue earlier too, he said the Supreme Court rejected the demand for a probe and the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) also found nothing wrong in the fighter aircraft deal.

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 Bhargava. 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.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner NGO Common Cause which has sought direction for appointment of a regular CBI director, claimed before the bench that the Centre is delaying the meeting of the committee as it wants to bypass the present CJI S.A. Bobde who is retiring on April 23.

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 them. The LDF campaign was led by Chief Minister Pinrayi Vijayan, who was bestowed the title 'Captain'. Though prominent Left leaders including CPM general secretary

TOTAL VOTERS
2.74cr
CANDIDATES
IN THE FRAY
957
TOTAL POLLING
STATIONS
40,771

- 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.

EC SEIZES GOLD,
ALCOHOL IN TN
APART FROM
₹428 CR CASH

A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 5

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

Revealing details of seizures, Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo, said that they included cash of ₹91.56 lakh in Ranipet district, ₹1.23 crore in Thousand lights constituency, Chennai and ₹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 ₹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.

Meanwhile, hours before the state goes to the poll, the teams seized unaccounted cash of ₹35 lakh from premises in Vedia Rasapalayam, Pallipalayam, near Coimbatore on Monday.

The EC has deputed nearly 150 General Observers and over 118 Expenditure Observers to monitor the model code of conduct, including cash-for-votes transactions. About 105 expenditure sensitive constituencies have been identified.



Polling officials check EVMs and other necessary inputs required for the TN Assembly elections, at a distribution centre in Chennai on Monday. — PTI

Amid cancellation rumours,
stage set for polling in TN

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR
& D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, APRIL 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 M.K. 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, Trichy 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

TOTAL VOTERS
6.28 cr
CANDIDATES
IN THE FRAY
3,998
88,937
Total polling stations
1,29,165
ballot units
4,17,521
polling personnel
on duty
10,813
vulnerable polling
stations

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



Polling officials carry Electronic Voting Machines and other materials as they leave for polling stations from a distribution centre on the eve of the third and final phase of Assam Assembly elections in Guwahati on Monday. — PTI

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.”

NADDA CANCELS
2 RALLIES DUE
TO THIN CROWD
IN BENGAL

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, APRIL 5

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

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.

Nadda, who reached Kolkata on Sunday night, was scheduled to address a public rally each in Shreerampore and Chinsurah apart from a roadshow in South Kolkata in between. Though his first rally was supposed to start from 11.30 am at Shreerampore Stadium for four BJP candidates, it appeared to have failed in attracting the party workers and local residents in large numbers even after an hour.

Helpless, Shyamal Basu, BJP (Shreerampore) organisation district president announced that Nadda's message, either an audio clip or a video, would be played at the venue. This too did not happen. Later, state BJP general secretary Sayantan Basu informed that Nadda would come to address the rally. The venue emptied out, as the small crowd that had gathered there got confused by the different statements and left.

Later in the afternoon, the BJP chief led a roadshow from Tollygunge Tram Depot to Garia More in Kolkata for party candidates Babul Supriyo at Tollygunge and Payel Sarkar at Behala East.



Jaya Bachchan

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.”

COVID | SCARE

Delhi govt announces one-third of all vaccination centres will operate 24 hours from Tuesday

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



Passengers gather at the Lokmanya Tilak Terminus to board the outstation trains in Mumbai on Monday. — PTI

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 restric-

tions 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.

In a letter to Delhi's principal secretary (health), the Union health ministry pointed out that there were serious lapses in the registration of beneficiaries by Vimhans (Vidyaasagar Institute of Mental Health, Neuro and Allied Sciences) operating as a private Covid vaccination centre.

STUDENTS CREATE RUCKUS IN SASARAM
OF BIHAR AMID ANTI-COVID-19 DRIVE

NAYEAR AZAD | DC
PATNA, APRIL 5

Amid rising corona cases mob of students attacked administrative officials and the police for implementing state government directives to shut down private coaching centres in Sasaram Bihar which falls in Rohtas district.

According to reports around eight students were taken into custody following the violent agitation. Sources from Sasaram said that the incident occurred on Monday after the state government decided to shut

down educational institutions due to the rising number of corona cases in the state.

Students allege that the government has been enforcing corona guidelines on educational institutions but does not take action against those who have been holding political rallies and other gatherings.

The officials however feel that few coaching institute owners could be behind the violent attack on the administration and the police who had gone to enforce the corona guidelines.

SHORT TAKES

INMATES STAGE UPRISING AT ST. LOUIS JAIL

St. Louis (US), April 5: Inmates broke windows, set a fire and threw debris to the ground late Sunday at a St. Louis jail that has been plagued by uprisings in recent months.

The riot broke out Sunday night around 9 p.m. at the City Justice Center, news outlets reported. Inmates were seen tossing objects out of broken windows and setting a fire. Firefighters used a hose to douse the flames. Law enforcement responded to bring the jail under control.

IRAN SAYS IT HAS HELD SPIES FOR ISRAEL

Tehran, April 5: Iranian authorities arrested several people on charges of spying for Israel and other nations, state TV announced Monday.

An unnamed Intelligence Ministry official in the country's eastern Azerbaijan province was quoted by state TV as saying that security forces had detained a group of people suspected of spying for Israel and other unspecified countries. The brief report did not provide further details on the nationalities of the suspects.

27 DEAD IN B'DESH RIVER COLLISION

Dhaka, April 5: At least 27 people died after a small launch carrying over 100 passengers capsized after colliding with a cargo vessel in Bangladesh's Shitalakkhya river, officials said on Monday.

The incident took place on Sunday evening at Narayanganj district, about 16 km south-east of Dhaka.

While five bodies were recovered on Sunday, rescuers retrieved 22 bodies on Monday as a salvage vessel pulled out the launch with the help of a huge crane around midday, rescue officials said.

MALAYSIA EX-PM APPEALS JAIL SENTENCE

Putrajaya (Malaysia), April 5: A Malaysian court Monday began hearing an appeal by ex-Prime Minister Najib Razak to overturn his conviction and 12-year jail sentence linked to the massive looting of the 1MDB state investment fund that brought down his government in 2018.

The appeal came more than eight months after a high court found the former PM guilty of abuse of power, criminal breach of trust and money laundering, making him the first Malaysian leader to be convicted.

US SHUTS GUANTANAMO PRISON UNIT

Washington, April 5: A once-secret unit within the Guantanamo Bay detention centre that had fallen into disrepair has been closed and the prisoners moved to another facility on the American base in Cuba, the US military said Sunday.

The prisoners at Camp 7 were transferred to a facility adjacent to where the other detainees on the base are held as part of what US Southern Command said in a statement was an effort to "increase operational efficiency and effectiveness."

Miami-based Southern Command did not say how many prisoners were moved. Officials have previously said about 14 men were held in Camp 7.

INDONESIA. EAST TIMOR FLOODS: 113 KILLED

Lembata, Indonesia, April 5: Tropical cyclone Seroja pounded Indonesia and East Timor Monday after torrential rains triggered floods and landslides that have killed at least 113 people and left dozens more missing.

Packing heavy winds and rain, the storm heaped more misery on the Southeast Asian nations after Sunday's disaster turned small communities into wastelands of mud, uprooted trees and forced thousands of people into shelters.

Downpours are expected over the next day as the storm triggers offshore waves as high as six metres.

The cyclone hampered efforts to reach trapped survivors.

Jordan prince remains defiant

Beirut, April 5: Jordan's Prince Hamzah says he has been threatened by the country's security agencies but does not plan to follow their unacceptable orders that he remain confined at home and cut off from public communication, according to a new voice recording released Monday.

The recording, which circulated online, indicates that tensions are running high between Jordan's King Abdullah II and his half-brother Hamzah, a former crown prince. The United States quickly sided with Abdullah, a close Western ally in a volatile region.

Jordanian authorities said on Sunday they had foiled a malicious plot by Hamzah to destabilise the kingdom with foreign support. Hamzah has denied being part of any plot and says he is being targeted for speaking out against corruption and poor governance.

The army chief of staff came to me and issued threats in the name of heads of security agencies, Hamzah says in the recording. I recorded his comments and distributed them to my acquaintances abroad as well as my family in case something happens. "I don't want to escalate now, but of course I will not abide when he tells me you are not allowed to go out, tweet or connect with people and you are only allowed to

see family members,' he said. "When an army chief of staff says that, this is something that I think is unacceptable.

An individual close to the prince confirmed the authenticity of the recording, speaking on condition of anonymity because of security concerns. The individual said the recording is a few days old and was made after the army chief threatened the prince.

Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said Sunday that the prince had recorded conversations and passed them to foreign sources.

Safadi did not provide specifics on the alleged plot or say what other countries were purported to have been involved.

But he said that some 14 to 16 associates of Hamzah had been arrested, in addition to Bassem Awadallah, a former Cabinet minister and one-time head of the royal court, and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, a member of the royal family.

The US and Arab governments' quick siding with Abdullah reflected the country's strategic importance. Domestically, Prince Hamzah's unprecedented criticism of the ruling class without naming the king could lend support to growing complaints about poor governance and human rights abuses in Jordan.

— AP

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

FORMER ALLY NOMINATES SELF TO BE NEXT PM

Jerusalem, April 5: A former right-wing ally of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has recommended himself as the next prime minister, deepening Israel's political deadlock. Naftali Bennett's Yamina party nominated him to form the next government in consultations with Israel's president on Monday.

Yamina had been in a position to serve as a kingmaker between the two major blocs of supporters and opponents of Netanyahu. But instead, it declined to take sides. Yamina has just seven seats in parliament, making it a long shot to be able to form a governing coalition. Bennett is hoping he can become a consensus candidate who can bridge the deep divides between the rival factions.

— AP

different candidate, possibly as soon as Monday night. The consultations "make it more difficult for the president to give the mandate to Netanyahu," said Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute.

He said it was "very clear that Netanyahu is not close" to assembling a majority in the 120-seat Knesset. Netanyahu has been charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate cases.

— AP

WTC | COLLAPSE

Virtual visitors can have look, physical display at some point 9/11 Museum acquires prayer bench

New York, April 5: A prayer bench used by the Rev. Mychal Judge, a Fire Department chaplain killed in the collapse of the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001, was driven to the New York area on Sunday to join the collection of the September 11 Memorial and Museum, museum officials said.

The bench formerly belonged to Judge's twin sister, Dympnia Jessich, and spent the last five years at an Episcopal monastery in

Rising Sun, Maryland, according to Sister Teresa Irene, a Carmelite nun there. Its path to the Sept. 11 museum has been circuitous. Judge, a Franciscan who was praying in the lobby of the trade center's north tower when he was crushed by debris from the falling south tower, used to visit Jessich at her home in Berlin, Maryland, Sister Teresa Irene said.

The prayer bench was kept in a bedroom Judge used, and its leather is worn from the imprint of

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, he said.

Rapid testing has so far been available to those most at risk and people who need to leave home for work, including frontline National Health Service (NHS) workers, care home staff and residents, and schoolchildren and their families. Now rapid testing will be offered to everyone, with people encouraged to take regular tests.

The vaccine programme has been a shot in the arm for the whole country, but reclaiming our lost freedoms and getting back to normal hinges on us all getting tested regularly, said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

The British public have shown over the last year that they quickly adapt and always do what it is right in the interest of 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.

— PTI

Cases go over 100 in Chinese city

Beijing, April 5: Covid-19 cases in the southwestern Chinese city of Ruili bordering on Myanmar have now topped 100.

That comes as authorities have launched an aggressive campaign to vaccinate all 300,000 residents of the city, whose outbreak is something of an anomaly in a country that has all but eliminated local transmission of the virus.

The National Health Commission reported an additional 20 cases on Monday, five of them in which the persons showed no symptoms. The cases were detected during city-wide



Berlin's famed tourist magnet Checkpoint Charlie memorial site is pictured in Berlin on Monday in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

— AFP

Britain set to announce new global travel rules

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-lit countries.

— AFP

B'desh imposes 7-day lockdown

Dhaka, April 5: Bangladesh on Monday clamped a week-long nationwide lockdown, suspending public transport and shutting markets to combat the surge in Coronavirus cases in the country, amidst demonstrations by small business owners against the move.

According to a government circular issued on Sunday, the directives will remain in effect from 6am of April 5 till 12 midnight of April 11, the *Dhaka Tribune* reported.

People have been asked not to move out from their homes from 6 pm to 6 am, the report said.

The decision was taken in light of the current situation in the country where the rate of infections and deaths have increased in recent weeks. The government has said that they are increasing the number of Covid-19-designated hospitals and ICU beds to deal with the rising number of patients, it said. Bangladesh has reg-

istered 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. Besides, the deaths due to Coronavirus rose to 9,266 with 53 news fatalities during this period. The mortality rate fell to 1.45 on Sunday from Saturday's 1.46 per cent.

All public transport services (roads, river, railway and domestic flights) were suspended and only emergency services remained operational.

However, all government/non-government/autonomous offices, courts and private offices will be able to facilitate the commute of their employees to work using their own transport on a limited scale. Thousands of people left Dhaka on Sunday fearing getting trapped during the lockdown. Most of the people who left were unemployed or in poverty. — 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 documentary 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.

— AP

GREECE: STORES OPEN AMID VIRUS SURGE

Athens, April 5: Retail stores across most of Greece were allowed to reopen Monday despite an ongoing surge in Covid-19 infections, as the country battled to emerge from deep recession.

Stores in greater Athens opened for pick-up services only but remain closed in Greece's second- and third-largest cities, Thessaloniki and Patras, due to fears of a more serious spike in infections. Lockdown measures have been in force since early Nov., although shops opened briefly around the Christmas holiday season.

The prolonged closures piled pressure on the economy. Greek economic output shrank by 8.2% in 2020 while the national debt as a percentage of gross domestic product shot over 200%. About 16% of the country's residents have received at least one dose of the vaccine. — AP

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 northwest 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 travel-

ling 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

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.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax : 040-27805256
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234
Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208
Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904
Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433
Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580
Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325
Coimbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph : 0422 2231255
 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08

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 Ekström 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 mega 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

Nine hydropower plants in cascade will definitely threaten life across India's Northeast region. The area soon became "restricted" by the Chinese authorities.

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

VSP PRIVATISATION

The burning issue of privatisation of VSP should find a place in the GVMC agenda. It may be suitably included. TD MP Ram Mohan Naidu presented the case in the Lok Sabha excellently. It is understood the government wants to sell the healthy and robust steel plant to help a private party. This should be stopped and the VSP must be saved.

K.L. Rao
Visakhapatnam

GOVT AND TEMPLES

I.Y.R. Krishna Rao, former IAS officer and chairman of the BJP state political affairs committee was right in alleging that the state government had been trading services of Lord Venkateswara in the name of Sri Vani trust (*State government trading service of Lord, says IVR, DC, April 5*). His other charges against the AP government on suppression of Hindu religion and encouraging other religion were also right. Praising PM Narendra Modi who spoiled the development of AP in many ways is wrong. The future of BJP in AP will be zero as it hardly bothered about the people.

Panchakarla.Govardhana Rao
Krishna district

HOLDING IPL

The points discussed in the article about IPL are pertinent (*IPL franchises need to be wary of players' bubble fatigue, DC, April 5*). The challenge of organising the sport in pandemic even with bio-secure bubble is becoming a daunting task. The BCCI must make certain that the bubble is safe.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Create more jobs: Giri

HYDERABAD, APRIL. 5
The need for taking "urgent and effective steps on a war-footing with the primary aim of generating mass employment, combined with rapid economic growth", was stressed by Mr. V.V. Giri, President today.

Delivering his address at the sixth annual convocation of the Andhra Pradesh Agricultural University at Rajendranagar here. Mr. Giri said that a labour-intensive technology to absorb the entire man-power surplus through all channels of development was called for.

"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 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

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 were not 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'."

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

NHAI files for InvIT; plans to raise ₹5,100 cr

The National Highways Authority of India filed draft papers with the Sebi for float-ing an Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) through which it seeks to raise Rs 5,100 crore. The NHAI plans to mop up total of Rs 5,100 crore through fresh issue, as per the draft papers. In December 2019, the Cabinet had given nod to the NHAI to set up an InvIT and monetise national highway projects.

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, compared to teaser rate, the new rate is 25 basis points higher at 6.95 per cent.

Manufacturing PMI at 55.4 pts in March

India's manufacturing sector activities fell to a seven-month low in March as demand was constrained by the escalation of the Covid-19 pandemic. The seasonally adjusted IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 57.5 in February to 55.4 in March. "Production, new orders and input buying expanded at softer rates," said Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at IHS Markit.

Cadila seeks nod to use hepatitis drug for Covid

Zydus Cadila said it has sought the DCGI approval for additional indication of its hepatitis drug Pegylated Interferon Alpha-2b for treating Covid-19. Phase-III clinical trials with the drug, which the company sells under the brand name 'Pegi-Hep', has shown promising results in treating Covid-19. The interim results indicate the drug, when administered early on, could help patients recover faster and avoid complications.



■ 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. Beofre 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.

RBI redistributes portfolios of deputy governors

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, APRIL 5

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday reshuffled the portfolios of the deputy governors following the retirement of deputy governor B.P. Kanungo on April 2.

Kanungo used to handle the most number of portfolios, including currency management, external investments and operations, department of government and bank accounts, information technology, payments and settlements, forex, internal debt management and right to information.

These portfolios have been reassigned to the remaining three deputy governors—Mahesh Kumar Jain, Michael Patra and Rajeshwar Rao, who has been recently appointed.

According to the RBI statement, Jain will handle co-ordination, Central Security Cell, Consumer Education and Protection Department, Department of Information Technology, Department of

MPC STARTS DELIBERATIONS

Mumbai, April 5: RBI governor Shaktikanta Das-headed rate-setting panel, Monetary Policy Committee, has started its three-day deliberation on the next monetary policy on Monday amid sudden surge in Covid-19 cases and the government's recent mandate asking the central bank to keep retail inflation around 4 per cent. The RBI will announce the resolution of the MPC on Wednesday. —PTI

Supervision, Financial Inclusion and Development Department, HR Management Department, Premises Department, Rajbhasha Department, Right to Information Division and Secretary's Department.

Deputy governor Patra will handle Corporate Strategy and Budget Department, Department

of Economic and Policy Research, Department of External Investments & Operations, Department of Government and Bank Accounts, Department of Statistics and Information Management, Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation, Financial Markets Operations Department, Financial Markets Regulation Department, Financial Stability Unit, International Department and Monetary Policy Department.

Rao has been assigned Corporate Strategy and Budget Department, Department of Economic and Policy Research, Department of External Investments & Operations, Department of Government and Bank Accounts, Department of Statistics and Information Management, DICGC, Financial Markets Operations Department, Financial Markets Regulation Department, Financial Stability Unit, International Department and Monetary Policy Department.

SANGEETHA G
with agency inputs
CHENNAI, APRIL 5

The government has promulgated an ordinance amending the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code to provide pre-packaged insolvency resolution process for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in distress.

In view of the pandemic, the government had increased the minimum amount of default for initiation of corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) to Rs 1 crore. It had also suspended filing of applications for initiation of CIRP over defaults arising for one year beginning March 25, 2020.

Since this relaxation had ended on March 24, 2021, the government has promulgated the ordinance to provide for a pre-packaged insolvency resolution process.

According to the ordinance, the pre-packaged insolvency resolution process shall be completed within a period of 120 days. Government may specify the minimum amount of default of high-



er value, which shall not be more than Rs 1 crore, for matters relating to the pre-packaged insolvency resolution process. Not less than 66 per cent vote of the committee of creditors is needed to approve the resolution.

The ordinance said, "It is considered necessary to urgently address the specific requirements of micro, small and medium enterprises relating to the resolution of their insolvency, due to the unique nature of their businesses and simpler corporate structures."

It said the pre-packaged insolvency resolution process will be an expedient to provide an efficient alternative insolvency res-

olution process for corporate persons classified as micro, small and medium enterprises under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, ensuring quicker, cost-effective and value maximising outcomes for all the stakeholders, in a manner which is least disruptive to the continuity of their businesses and which preserves jobs.

Soumitra Majumdar, partner at J Sagar Associates, said the IBC Amendment Ordinance 2021, makes available the pre-packaged route to genuine and viable cases, to ensure least business disruption.

"While modelled on debtor-in-possession approach, it vests significant consent rights to the financial creditors, such that the mechanism cannot be misused by errant promoters."

"Further, adopting the plan evaluation process akin to Swiss Challenge, it retains competitive tension such that promoters propose plans with least impairment to rights and claims of creditors," Majumdar said.

US MOVES WTO, SAYS CONCERNED ABOUT INDIA'S GM-FREE CERTIFICATE NORM



SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 5

The United States has raised concerns at the WTO about India making GM-free certificates mandatory for agricultural products and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) specifications for compounded feeds for cattle. It has also asked for the scientific justification for India's decisions.

Last week, the US raised serious concerns about India mandating "non-GM (genetically modified) origin and GM free certificates" for certain agricultural imports into India. This was notified on September 2, 2020 and was proposed to be effective from March 1, 2021.

The United States had requested India to withdraw the order. If India is unwilling to withdraw the order, the United States had further requested to delay implementation till January 2022 to allow for further technical engagement between the FSSAI and trade partners to develop less burdensome alternatives that could meet the order's stated food safety goals.

In February 2021, the FSSAI had clarified that it will have 1 per cent tolerance for presence of GE in imported food consignments. The US has asked India to provide the scientific justification for establishing the tolerance at this level and provide relevant risk assessments or international standards on which this tolerance is based.

Further, the US is also concerned about India's directive on implementing the BIS specifications for compounded feeds for cattle.

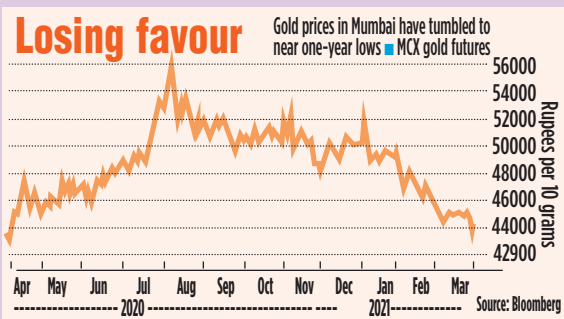
FADING | GLITTER Muthoot holds 146 tonne gold, more than Singapore's reserves

Gold lenders cut tenure, watch collateral

SUVASHREE GHOSH & SWANSY AFONSO
APRIL 5

Indian firms that lend against gold are cutting tenures and seeking more collateral to protect against the plunge in prices of the precious metal.

Market leader Muthoot Finance Ltd has been offering discounts on interest rates and other incentives to borrowers who chose to repay monthly or more frequently. Rival Muthoot Mini Financiers Ltd is mostly lending for 90 days now versus 270 previously, and most large firms are disbursing amounts well below regulatory limits, which was 75 per cent of



the metal's value for shadow lenders and 90 per cent for traditional banks through March 31.

Gold loans had boomed over the past year as small businesses tried to revive themselves from lockdowns by pledging family jewellery that's a staple of almost all Indian house-

holds. Muthoot Finance, for instance, saw such lending increase 25 per cent over the period and the company holds 146 tonnes of gold, higher than the official reserves of Singapore and Sweden.

"People are sentimental about their jewellery," said George Muthoot Alexan-

der, managing director at Muthoot Finance. "They will never want to default despite a fall in gold prices as they intend to get back their pledged ornaments."

Gold posted its first quarterly drop in more than two years amid improving expectations for the global economy and fading demand from exchange-traded funds. The metal has fallen about 10 per cent in 2021 as investors trade their havens for assets that will benefit from the economic recovery.

The biggest concern though is a fresh wave of infections in India could scuttle business plans and force even the most diligent repayers to default. "We are reviewing our

portfolio and mark-to-market levels daily to see if further steps are needed," said Mathew Muthootu, MD of Muthootu Mini Financiers.

India's market for gold lending will expand by at least 34 per cent to Rs 4.6 lakh crore (\$61 billion) in the two years to March 2022, according to KPMG. The segment's bad-loan ratio is about 1 per cent compared with 7.5 per cent for the banking sector.

World Gold Council India MD P. R. Somasundaram said, "People are keen to take loans because every business is coming back and small businesses do depend on gold loans for quick access to capital." —Bloomberg

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

Honda's Pol lands a spot in top 15

Doha: There were flashes of what's set to come from a strong and consistent Pol Espargaro, matching the pace of the leaders throughout the race as Bradl recovered from a difficult start with an aggressive ride through the field. For the second time in two weeks, the MotoGP World Championship lined up on the grid in Qatar. What followed was the closest top 15 in MotoGP history, just 8.928 seconds splitting the leading 15 as fans around the world were treated to a spectacular race. Fighting with those around him, Espargaro worked to hold his position but dropped back on the sixth lap after a mistake. Rallying, Espargaro moved back past Morbidelli midway through the race as he matched the pace of the podium contenders. Crossing the line in 13th, Espargaro was looking for more this Sunday but once again showed there is huge potential inside himself and the RC213V. After multiple weeks riding in Qatar, Espargaro is looking forward to trying the Honda on a new circuit.

Morris heroics lay Lakers low

Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Clippers didn't have to lean heavily on their superstar duo against the defending NBA champions on Sunday, getting help from their supporting cast in a 104-86 rout of the short-handed Los Angeles Lakers. The Clippers got a game-high 22 points from Marcus Morris while all-stars Kawhi Leonard and Paul George finished with 19 and 16 points respectively at Staples Centre arena. Luke Kennard tallied 15 points and guard Rajon Rondo made his Clippers' debut. — AFP

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Champions League Quarterfinals (first legs): Real Madrid vs Liverpool from 12.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2; Manchester City vs Dortmund from 12.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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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 Nicholas 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

DEBATE OVER FAKHAR 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 a spectacular 193 in a losing cause as the batsman 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 willfully to attempt, by word or action, to distract, deceive or obstruct either batsman after the striker has received the ball," the MCC tweeted.

In another, the MCC wrote, "The Law is clear, with the offence being an ATTEMPT to deceive, rather than the batsman actually being deceived. It's up to the umpires to decide if there was such an attempt. If so, then it's Not out, 5 Penalty runs + the 2 they ran, and batsmen choose who faces next ball." — PTI



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

RCB's Devdutt catches Covid

New Delhi, April 5: Royal Challengers Bangalore's young batsman Devdutt Padikkal is quarantining at his home since returning positive for Covid-19 during a test conducted on March 22, his IPL franchise said on Sunday.

The 14th edition of the lucrative league starts in Mumbai on April 9 with RCB taking on defending champions Mumbai Indians.

"Devidutt Padikkal tested positive for Covid-19 on 22nd March 2021. He has been in mandatory quarantine at his residence in Bengaluru since then. Devdutt will be fit to join



RCB Medical team is in touch with Devdutt ensuring his safety and well-being. He is feeling well and we can't wait to have him join the squad for IPL2021.

— ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE after Devdutt Padikkal tested Covid-19 positive

the RCB bio-bubble once his RT-PCR tests are negative, as per IPL protocol," RCB said in a statement.

The franchise, which has never won the tournament, posted the state-

ment on its Twitter handle.

"RCB Medical team is in touch with Devdutt ensuring his safety and well-being. He is feeling well and we can't wait to have

DON'T LEGALISE BETTING, SAYS BCCI ACU CHIEF

New Delhi, April 5: The BCCI's new Anti-Corruption Unit chief Shabir Hussein Shekhadam 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

him join the squad for IPL2021," the franchise wrote in another tweet.

The 20-year-old Padikkal was RCB's highest scorer last season with 473 runs from 15 matches.

He has also been in tremendous form in the domestic circuit. He is only the second uncapped player in IPL's history to score more than 400 runs in debut season.

On Saturday, Delhi Capitals and India all-rounder Axar Patel had tested positive for the highly contagious Coronavirus and is set to miss the team's opener on April 10 due to quarantine protocols. — PTI

FIRST WOMAN COMMENTATOR CHANDRA DEAD

BIPIN DANI

India's first woman cricket commentator, Chandra Nayudu, passed away in Indore on Sunday. She was 88.

Chandra was the daughter of Col C. K. Nayudu, India's first Test captain, and lived at Manormaganj, close to the Holkar Stadium in Indore, where her father scored tons of runs.

In 1995, Chandra had written a book titled, *CK Nayudu: A Daughter Remembers*.

Chandra, a professor in English at the Government Girls College in Indore, first commented in the MCC vs Bombay game in the 1976-77 season.

Renowned cricket commentator Sushil Doshi said from Indore: "Chandra was a very good Hindi commentator. She was an English teacher but had equal command over our national language."

"Like her father, she wanted to be the first to do something. She inherited some of her father's traits. Chandra was a very brave and courageous lady. She would never accept defeat easily in her life," said Doshi who considered Chandra as his elder sister.

Polish Hubert is Miami champion

Miami, April 5: Poland's Hubert Hurkacz defeated Italian teenager Jannik Sinner in straight sets to win the Miami Open and claim the first ATP Masters title of his career on Sunday.

The 26th-seeded Hurkacz, who had eliminated four higher-ranked players en route to the final, held his nerve at Miami's Hard Rock Stadium to win 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 in 1hr 43min.

It was a deserved victory for the 24-year-old from Wroclaw, who claimed his second title of the season as Sinner's challenge unravelled with a series of unforced errors.

"It feels unreal, so happy that I was able to play a good match today," Hurkacz said.

"Jannik is an amazing competitor. I'm so proud of myself that I was able to beat him," he added.

Hurkacz, whose win earned him a message of congratulations from Polish President Andrzej Duda, said he hoped the tournament win would be a launchpad for more victories.

"It gives me extra motivation and extra belief in

myself, that I've won a really big title," he said.

Sinner had started slowly, being broken with his first service game to quickly find himself trailing 3-0 in the opening set.

However the talented 19-year-old grew in confidence as the set progressed, working Hurkacz around the court with some pinpoint forehands into the corners.

The Italian broke back in the fifth game and then held to make it 3-3, before another break of Hurkacz's serve gave him a 6-5 lead and the chance to serve for the set.

Sinner appeared to tighten on serve, though, and another unforced error, sending a backhand long, allowed Hurkacz to break back at 6-6 and force the tie break.

Hurkacz quickly raced into a 6/2 lead in the decider and although Sinner clawed it back to 6/4, another missed forehand handed Hurkacz the first set.

Hurkacz carried that momentum into the second set, sprinting into a 4-0 lead with a double break.

— AFP



Hubert Hurkacz of Poland poses with the winner's trophy after defeating Yannik Sinner of Italy in the final of the Miami Open in Miami Gardens, Florida, on Sunday. — AP

Man Utd bounce back; Spurs held

London, April 5: Manchester United came from behind to beat Brighton 2-1 on Sunday to cut Manchester City's lead at the top of the Premier League to 14 points, while Tottenham's top-four challenge suffered a setback as Joe Willock's late strike rescued a 2-2 draw for lowly Newcastle.

Not for the first time this season, United needed a second-half fightback after a dismal first 45 minutes to take all three points thanks to goals from Marcus Rashford and Mason Greenwood.

Danny Welbeck deservedly opened the scoring for the Seagulls against his old club before Lewis Dunk hit the crossbar for the visitors.

However, Brighton also repeated the story of their season as they failed to make the most of their dominance before the break.

Rashford slotted home an equaliser on 62 minutes from Bruno Fernandes's pass to reward United's marked improvement.

Fernandes was involved again for the winner as his cross was volleyed back

across goal by Paul Pogba and into the path of Greenwood to head home just his second league goal of the season.

Meanwhile, Spurs were left to rue letting another lead slip away at St. James' Park. Jose Mourinho's side were just five minutes away from moving into fourth place thanks to Harry Kane's first-half double. Joelinton had put Newcastle ahead and Steve Bruce's men were rewarded for a much-improved performance when on-loan Arsenal midfielder Willock smashed in off the underside of the bar five minutes from time. — AFP

SEVILLA RIDE ON ACUNA GOAL TO JOLT ATLETICO

Madrid, April 5: Atletico Madrid stumbled again in La Liga on Sunday as they were beaten 1-0 by Sevilla, giving Barcelona the chance to move to within a point of the top of the table on Monday.

Marcos Acuna headed in the winner for Sevilla at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan, with Atletico's grip on first place loosening even further and their in-form rivals primed to take advantage.

Real Madrid are only three points behind after they beat Eibar on Saturday and Barcelona will reduce their deficit from four points to one if they can win on Monday at home to Real Valladolid.

Meanwhile, Valencia stopped playing at Cdiz on Sunday and walked off the field before halftime after defender Mouctar Diakhaby said he was insulted by Cdiz defender Juan Cala. — Agencies