

IN BRIEF

30 contestants in fray for bypoll

Vijayawada: Thirty contestants are in fray for the Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll scheduled to be held on April 17. The office of the Chief Electoral Officer issued a statement saying that the nominations of four contestants including Seelam Tirupaiah (TD), Prasada Annapurna (YSRC), Srikanth Puli (All India Forward Bloc) and Kunadoddi Eemian (Independent), were rejected after scrutiny on March 31. Some of the prominent nominees in the fray include, Chinta Mohan (INC), Nellore Yadagiri (CPM), Panabaka Lakshmi (TD), Maddila Gurumurthy (YSRC) and K. Ratna Prabha (BJP).

LOKESH DEMANDS CM MOUNT PRESSURE FOR SCS

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 1

TD MLC Nara Lokesh demanded the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to start mounting pressure on the Union Government for the Special Category Status in fulfillment of the AP Reorganisation promises. He asked how the AP special status could become a closed chapter when the special union territory status was being promised to Puducherry in the latest BJP election manifesto. Lokesh advised Jagan Mohan Reddy to stop his double-game and start making genuine efforts to ensure justice to the people of the state. He recalled that at the time of 2019 election, Reddy had vowed to bend the necks of the Centre in order to bring the rightful special status to the state. The TD leader asserted that the Chief Minister should realise the fact that he would not be able to continue his secret journey with the BJP in AP any longer.

MODEL CODE COMES INTO FORCE DURING POLLS

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Accordingly, polling will be held wherever necessary on April 8 from 7am to 5pm and a re-poll can be held on April 9 from 7am to 5pm. Counting will be on April 10 from 8am and the results will be declared after the counting. With the issue of notification, the model code of conduct has come into force with immediate effect in rural areas of the state. It will remain in force till the end of the election process. Election will not be held to any MPTC/ZPTC where a court stay is in force or it is not feasible due to administrative/legal impediments. Election will not be held in case of territorial consciences, where death of a contesting candidate occurred. A notification on this will be issued separately. A notification had been issued on March 7 last year for conduct of elections to MPTCs and ZPTCs in the state and the process was completed up to the stage of publication of the final list of contesting candidates on March 14 last. Subsequently, the SEC stopped the election process for six weeks due to the Covid-19 restrictions since March 15 last year. Subsequently, the SEC conducted polls to gram panchayats in four phases from Feb 9, to 21 this year, as also to municipal corporations, municipalities and nagar panchayats and completed these on March 18. New SEC, Nilam Sawhney, after assuming charge on Thursday for a period of five years, met Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan and briefed him about the preparations for conduct of polls to the MPTCs/ZPTCs. She held a meeting with chief secretary Aditya Nath Das and senior officials and took stock of the situation. Later, the state government informed the SEC about its preparedness for resumption of elections to MPTCs/ZPTCs and pleaded for early resumption of the election process. Accordingly, the state election commissioner held a video conference with collectors, superintendents/commissioners of police and chief executive officers of Zilla Praja Parishads and reviewed their preparedness for the suspended elections. Later, the SEC issued the notification to resume the election process from where it was stopped last year.

Opposition applies strategies to outwit YSRC in byelection

TD divides every constituency into clusters consisting of 20,000 to 25,000 voters each

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC NELLORE, APRIL 1

TD leaders have been toiling away to beat the ruling party in the prestigious bye-election to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat on April 7. As part of the election strategy, the TD has divided every constituency into clusters consisting of 20,000 to 25,000 voters each. An incharge and four observers apart from a senior leader to oversee the election campaign have been posted for every 25 polling stations.

This is in addition to teams deputed by well-known psephologist Robin Sharma to every segment for studying the situation at the ground level over the past month. They have been giving feedback to the party on the effectiveness of the campaign and suggesting the needed change in approach.

While appreciating party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu for fielding a popular figure like former Union minister Panabaka Lakshmi, party loyalists have been appealing to the leaders to take urgent steps to motivate cadres.

According to a TD leader, the major grouse of the local leaders and cadres has been the non-availability of the constituency incharges who have been consciously avoiding their constituency.

This has become a major advantage to YSRC to poach the constituency leaders. “Whether it’s the stick or the carrot, the strategy has paid off with many villages having no TD presence,” a party leader said.

Reminding that the party is known for a strong cadre base at the grass-roots level, he expressed surprise over lack of serious efforts from the leadership to save the rocking boat.

The most common complaint from the loyalists is that most of the leaders have been confined to social media and have neglected the sentiments and needs of the cadres.

Stressing that TD nominee Lakshmi is a strong candidate compared to the nominees of other parties, party loyalists said that failures of YSRC government can be converted to the advantage of TD if urgent steps are taken to address the resentment and frustration among party cadres.

● An incharge and four observers apart from a senior leader to oversee the election campaign have been posted for every 25 polling stations by TD.



TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy, YSRC nominee for Tirupati Lok Sabha seat Dr M. Gurumurthy, Deputy CM Narayana Swamy, ministers Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy and Adimulapu Suresh and Sarvepalli legislator Kakani Govardhan Reddy conduct an election campaign at Sarvepalli segment on Thursday.

Ministers ask voters to support Murthy

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, APRIL 1

Ministers and senior leaders of the YSRC called upon the electorate to back party nominee Dr M. Gurumurthy in the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat by-election to endorse their confidence once again in Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Addressing a large gathering during the launch of the election campaign, after worshipping at the Sri Bhagawan Venkaiah Swamy temple at Golgadmudi in Sarepalli Assembly constituency, Deputy Chief Minister K. Narayana Swamy said that the Chief Minister had been paying special attention to develop every constituency as his own Assembly segment. He said Jagan Mohan Reddy had brought about innovation in the education system through unique reforms.

Taking a dig at the TD state president K. Atchannaidu for his utterances against the YSRC, Narayana Swamy alleged that the Telugu Desam had contributed nothing to the state after bifurcation and had failed to bail the state out of difficulties. He expressed the confidence that the party would win by a five lakh vote margin.

In his address, panchayat raj minister P. Ramachandra Reddy claimed that the YSRC had fulfilled 90 per cent of its poll promises within 18 months.

He said the focus of the country would be on the Tirupati by-election if the voters give Dr Gurumurthy a five lakh vote

● K. Narayana Swamy said that the Chief Minister had been paying special attention to develop every constituency as his own Assembly segment. He said CM had brought about innovation in the education system through unique reforms.

majority. Speaking on the occasion, TTD Chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy said the Chief Minister had been doling out benefits through welfare programmes irrespective of caste and religion. Development is being seen in all the sector and Jagan Mohan Reddy is being considered a successful Chief Minister, he said.

While lauding the CM for nominating a “commoner” like Dr Gurumurthy, Sarvepalli legislator Kakani Govardhan Reddy reminded that other parties fielded well-known persons. He also said the YSRC government had developed the Sarvepalli constituency with ₹320 crore for roads and drains within 18 months of coming to power. He appealed to the voters to rally behind the YSRC nominee and ensure an unprecedented majority. He also asked the party cadre to work hard for the success of the LS nominee.

Dr Gurumurthy said the Chief Minister had been striving hard in the state to benefit all sections of the people. Development is the only agenda of the CM while expressing his gratitude for selecting him as a candidate for the prestigious seat.

TELUGU DESAM LAUNCHES ‘SAVE TIRUPATI’ WEBSITE

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, APRIL 1

Seeking to save Tirupati from the alleged all-round degradation, the Telugu Desam’s digital wing on Thursday brought a new website titled – ‘Save Tirupati’ – and launched a mobile number to receive and react to the complaints from the public.

Speaking to media after the launch of new website — www.savetirupati.com at the party’s office on Thursday, Tirupati Ex-MLA M. Sugunamma said the objective of the new website is to highlight the atrocities committed by the ruling party on the people of pilgrim city. She also appealed to show their support to the TD, giving a missed call to +91 8099975975.

TD state president K. Atchannaidu, in a release, stated that the new website will break the silence and give voice to the Assembly constituency-wise issues concerning common people. He called upon the public to join them in the campaign of “Vinipiddam Tirupati Gonthu”.

TD state general-secretary Chintakayala Vijay said, “In an unprecedented way of conducting governmental affairs, voices that raise concerns, and issues that deserve debates, are being silenced by the high-handed rule of the YSRC leaders. In this political crisis, it became a moral imperative for the TD to continue its fight to voice the sufferings of affected people.”

“More than 40 false cases on Dalits and women have been registered across Tirupati since the YSRC government came to power. Besides, we are also witnessing continuous attacks on temples, appointing immoral people and employing non-Hindu personnel to manage TTD affairs, increasing accommodation costs for pilgrims at Tirumala, giving leeway to unofficial conversions, and treating Tirumala as a money-making machine”, he alleged.

508 AGED PEOPLE, 234 DISABLED APPLY FOR POSTAL BALLOT

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, APRIL 1

Taking advantage of the Election Commission’s directions to provide postal ballot facility to persons above 80-year-old and physically challenged, as many as 508 voters who are above 80-year-old applied for postal ballots.

In addition to this, 234 disabled persons also sought the provision to exercise their franchise during by-poll to Tirupati LS seat.

The ballot papers will be delivered at the doorstep of the voters and they will be collected by the officials after issuing a receipt to the voter.

A videographer, a micro-observer, and a police constable will also accompany the officials to ensure transparency in the exercise.

SEC to meet parties today

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The TD alleged illegalities when YSRC won 2,217 MPTCs unanimously. TD expected an anti-incumbency wave but to its surprise, YSRC swept both elections. Fearing more illegalities under the new SEC regime, it is planning to boycott the MPTC and ZPTC elections, sources said.

On Thursday, TD politburo member Varla Ramaiah wrote to Sawhney seeking fresh notification for MPTC and ZPTC elections. He stated that YSRC resorted to illegalities through forceful unanimous verdicts in 24 per cent posts in MPTCs and 19 per cent in ZPTCs. He recalled that

her predecessor had written a letter to the Union Home Secretary about the sheer violation of norms through forcible unanimous process in MPTC and ZPTC elections. He alleged that the police had also danced to the tunes of the government.

The SEC is convening a meeting of all political parties on Friday to discuss the MPTC and ZPTC elections.

TD AP president K. Atchannaidu said that they would reiterate their demand for fresh notification and explain the reasons. He said that they had not decided on boycotting the MPTC and ZPTC elections and would take a decision after the meeting with the SEC.

SCRAP NEW PROPERTY TAX COLLECTION SYSTEM, SAYS APUCF

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 1

Welcoming the circular issued by the municipal department to collect taxes for the year 2021-22 in the old tax format, Andhra Pradesh Urban Civil Federation (APUCF) convenor Ch. Babu Rao demanded the state government to cancel GO No. 198 under which tax would be collected on the basis of property value under the new system.

Babu Rao said that those who pay property tax before April 30 would get a 5 per cent discount. He said that the amend-

ments to the law and the GO 198 issued by the government to calculate the tax component based on property value should be cancelled. He stated that furthermore GOs 196 and 197 pertaining to increase in drinking water and drainage charges every year are unchanged. He expressed fear that with no action taken on the GOs they can be brought to force any time.

He appealed to all the newly-elected members of the municipal councils to pass resolutions seeking abolition of these GOs and send them to the government.

Mamata dials Guv for rescue

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From the spot, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee dialled Governor Jagdeep Dhankar, telling him the situation was a failure of the Election Commission.

“Anything might happen at any moment. There is total breakdown of law and order,” wheel-chair-bound Banerjee said, adding that she feared for her life. She was escorted out by the security forces, who managed to bring the situation under control after long-drawn negotiations with the villagers.

Soon after, the Governor tweeted, “Issues flagged @MamataOfficial a while ago on phone have been imparted (sic) to the concerned”.

Despite this Nandigram recorded voter turnout of over 81 per cent till 5 pm. Though sporadic incidents of violence and allegations of vote fraud marked the second phase of West Bengal Assembly polls, a large voter turnout of more than 80 per cent was recorded. Bankura recorded the highest turnout at 82.92 per cent, followed by Purba Medinipur at 81.23, South 24 Parganas at 79.65 per cent, Paschim Medinipur at 78 per cent.

The Election Commission has sought a report from the East Midnapore district administration on Banerjee’s presence at the booth for a long time and her allegations of electoral malpractices.

Violence erupted across the high-profile constituency as the polling

got underway in the morning. At Satengabari, TMC activists pelted stones on the convoy of Ms Banerjee’s nemesis, Suwendu Adhikari of the BJP, and shouted “Go Back”. Bombs were hurled at Sonachura and Kalicharanpur.

In Bhetukiya a BJP worker, Uday Dube (48), was found hanging in his residence. His party accused the TMC of driving him to commit suicide.

Allegations also surfaced against the BJP of not allowing TMC agents at voting booths, rigging and booth capturing at many polling centres.

Banerjee, who was keeping a tab on the polling from her temporary address at Rayapara in Nandigram, came out in the afternoon. She visited booth (No. 7) at Boyal Moktab Primary School at around 1.15 pm after getting complaints from her party of booth capturing and rampant rigging by the BJP in the absence of Central paramilitary forces.

The TMC chief was taunted by BJP workers with “Jai Shree Ram” slogan and her party workers, shouting “*Khela Hobe*”, clashed with them. Sitting in her wheelchair inside the booth, a helpless CM was seen calling up Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar to complain as the fight between BJP and TMC workers escalated despite prohibitory orders. Stones were hurled and abuses traded, prompting the administration to rush a police contingent to the spot.

Prabha will become Union minister if elected: Kanna

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, APRIL 1

While appealing to the electorate to vote for their nominee K. Ratna Prabha for the Tirupati LS seat, former BJP state president Kanna Lakshminarayana hinted that she is likely to become Union minister if elected.

Addressing the media at the BJP office in Nellore on Thursday, he said that Ratna Prabha has rich experience in public service being an

IAS officer while expressing confidence in her victory.

He alleged that both the ruling party and the main Opposition do politics only during elections and switch over to business thereafter.

He demanded to know the contribution of TD and YSRC for Tirupati while pointing to Central government sanctions pertaining to six-lane highway between Naidupeta and Tirupati, flyover in Tirupati, and

development of Tirupati Railway Station and Airport.

He claimed credit for the Centre for setting up IIT in Tirupati, SEZs in Menakauru and Sri City apart from Obulapuram — Krishnapatnam railway line.

BJP district unit president Gundlapalli Bharat Kumar, state vice-presidents K. Vijayalakshmi and P. Surendra Reddy and Mukku Radhakrishna were present, among others.

SAFETY | FIRST

CM asks newly-elected civic chiefs to work with transparency in urban areas

Sanitation, water, housing a priority, says Jagan

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 1

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has told the newly elected civic chiefs to work with transparency and said the positioning has increased their responsibility as they are now civil servants.

Addressing an orientation-programme for the newly elected mayors, deputy mayors, chairpersons, and vice-chairpersons here on Thursday, the chief minister advised

them to focus on developing their respective municipalities and corporations.

While congratulating the newly elected civic chiefs, he advised them to avoid discrimination and corruption, reminding that are representatives for 30 per cent of the population. “Like never before in the country, the state government has ensured social justice by giving 67 civic posts to SC, ST, BC and minorities and appointing 52 women as mayors,

deputy mayors, chairpersons and vice-chairpersons, he said.

The CM said providing sanitation, drinking water and housing for the people in urban areas is the top priority of the government and stressed that safe drinking water has to be made available to every household. Works related to the water distribution network are in progress in 53 municipalities.

He urged the newly elected personnel to pay special attention to keeping the

state clean and ensure maintaining sanitation in urban areas.

The Chief Minister said a special sanitation drive will be rolled out in July, wherein the government has procured 8,000 automatic trucks, allocating two trucks for each ward for door-to-door garbage collection. He emphasized on providing housing for the middle class at affordable pricing alongside the housing scheme for the poor.

He said the government

shall acquire 100 to 150 acres of land to provide house sites to the middle-class at affordable prices with clean titles on a non-profit basis. Also, all the layouts should have CC roads, footpaths, underground drainage, parks, open-air gym, walking tracks, electricity lines, greenery, smart bus stops, as in Jagananna layouts.

The CM said focusing on development of these colonies will put the state in the forefront. Ignoring these would turn

them into the large slums. Jagan also advised the elected representatives to give their valuable suggestions in improvising the village and ward secretariat system in order to help people more efficiently. “The government had spent one lakh crore rupees towards welfare schemes in a span of 22-months with zero corruption and zero discrimination. All the government schools and hospitals are being revamped with better

infrastructure under Nadu-Nedu initiative, RBKs were set up at the village level to help farmers,” he said.

Deputy chief minister Dharmana Krishnadas, ministers Botsa Satyanarayana, Perti Venkatramaiah (Nani), Velampally Srinivas, higher officials of the municipal administration department, local leaders, mayors, deputy mayors, chairpersons, and vice-chairpersons of civic bodies were present.

SHORT TAKES

Sub-registrar of Kavali suspended

Nellore: Authorities of Registration department suspended the sub-registrar of Kavali, Vijaya Rani, for corruption and serious irregularities in registering some lands listed in the prohibited records.

GOV. TELLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW RULES ON GOOD FRIDAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 1

Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan said that Christian brethren all over the world observe Good Friday in memory of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

In a statement issued on Thursday, the Governor said that Jesus Christ showed great love for the entire humanity and made the ultimate sacrifice for their well-being and added that such sacrifice would be remembered with solemn hymns and prayers of thanksgiving.

The Governor appealed to the people to follow Covid-19 guidelines by wearing a mask and maintaining social distance.

STATE RECORDS 1,271 NEW COVID CASES, 3 DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 1

Andhra Pradesh continues to witness a surge of fresh cases of Covid-19 as 1,271 cases have been reported with three deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported here on Thursday that out of 31,809 samples tested, 1,271 persons were infected with the Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,51,14,98 samples tested so far in the state, 9,03,260 persons were infected with the virus and of them, 8,87,898 were recovered and discharged from the hospitals while 8,142 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Chittoor found to be the worst hit with 285 followed by 279 in Guntur, 189 in Visakhapatnam, 161 in Krishna, 63 each in Kadapa and Prakasam, 61 in Anantapur, 52 in Kurnool, 43 in Nellore, 27 in East Godavari, 21 in Srikakulam, 15 in Vizianagaram and 12 in West Godavari.

Chittoor district again took the lead in registering the highest number of cumulative active cases at 1,537.

ARMY JAWAN LAID TO REST WITH HONOURS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL APRIL 1

An Army Jawan was laid to rest in Banaganapalle on Thursday. He belonged to Madras Regiment (27) and was working in Fazilka in Punjab.

The district collector, G. Veera Pandian, along with SP K. Fakeerappa participated in last rites of Army Jawan Dalal Shafi (30), who died in Panjab while he was discharging duties at Unit 27 Madras Indian Army on March 30. The last rites conducted at his native Banaganapalle town as per protocol. His dead body arrived in Banaganapalle on Wednesday night by military officials. On Thursday, the body was buried in the village burial ground after paying rich tributes. An emotional and tearful farewell was given to Jawan Shafi in the village during the procession of his last rites performed with full military and state honours.

NATIONAL FLAG IS A SYMBOL OF PATRIOTISM: PCC

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, APRIL 1:

PCC working president Dr N. Tulasi Reddy said the National Flag is a symbol of national dignity and patriotism. Congress leaders celebrated the centenary of the National Flat at an event held in Vempalle Kadapa district. "It is said that the white colour in the middle of the Tricolour was initially a spinning wheel and this was later replaced with the Ashoka Chakra," the PCC working president said. Tulasi Reddy said it was a matter of pride for all Telugus that Telugu artist Pingali Venkayya designed the unique flag. Congress leaders saluted the flag on the occasion.

RINL MAKES RECORD TURNOVER OF ₹18,000 CRORE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 1

Amid the privatisation threat, RINL, the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, achieved a record turnover of ₹18,000 crore during the last financial year. This is the second highest turnover since inception of the steel plant.

Chairman and Managing Director of RINL P.K. Rath said the company made an impressive growth of 13 per cent and the sales volumes reached 4.45 million tonnes, with a growth of 4 per cent. RINL registered a net profit of about ₹740 crore in the last four months.

In March alone, the company achieved a sales turnover of ₹3,300 crore and sales volume of 7,11,000 for the first time in the history of the company. This sales turnover is a whopping 42 per cent more than the previous best of ₹2,329 crore in March 2019.

Addressing senior officers in a virtual meeting on Thursday, Rath highlighted the overall improvement in the performance of the company which achieved best ever production figures exceeding capacity of 6.3 MTPA (Million Tonnes Per Annum) expansion.

"During the year, we achieved export sales of 1.3 Million Tonne, which is 261 per cent higher than the previous year. In addition to this, 35 out of total 57 Ocean export contracts were finalised with 100 per cent advance payment terms. Having established such a good market for exports, there should not be any looking back," the CMD told the officials.

He said the RINL spent around ₹10 crore during the year under CSR which includes ₹5 crore to PM Cares fund for Covid 19.

Rath also announced that the Forged Wheel Plant in Raebareli is expected to start production from the first week of April.

WOMAN, 75, GETS FRESH LEASE OF LIFE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 1

A 75-year-old woman was given a fresh lease of life and discharged three days after undergoing a rare surgery.

Eminent cardiac surgeon Dr. Gunturu Varun performed mitral valve replacement surgery on Lakshmi Devi, who underwent balloon mitral valve surgery 20 years ago and was suffering from heart problems. She went to various hospitals but doctors, given the age-factor, did not dare to perform heart surgery. After knowing about the keyhole surgery, she with her husband Seshadri Rao consulted Dr. Varun who successfully performed mitral valve replacement through keyhole surgery.

Dr Varun said they had successfully performed the rarest 'mitral valve replacement surgery' on Lakshmi Devi.

He said that the woman was advised to undergo mitral valve replacement surgery.

Dr. Varun said that however, due to her age, the case turned high-risk.

ILLEGAL | BIZ

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC
KURNOOL, APRIL 1

Kurnool has become a transit point for gold and silver smugglers, as seen from a series of seizure of contraband in the recent past.

Gold traders in Adoni, Nandyal and the Rayalaseema districts are using couriers to transport gold from South African countries and Dubai to dealers.

The state is losing revenue as zero business is also one of the reasons



A medical staff administers Covid vaccine to an old woman in an autorickshaw who was unable to move out, at a PHC centre at Chinna Waltair Junction in Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

— DC

Left condemns NIA raids, arrests

Govt trying to weaken VSP stir: Leaders

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 1

The Left parties, including CPI and CPM, strongly condemned the NIA raids and arrests of activists and lawyers in the Telugu states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

A committee fighting against the UAPA repeal, members of mass organisations and Left leaders held a meeting in CPI office in Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

The state joint secretary of CPI J.V. Satyanarayana Murthy demanded immediate release of activists and lawyers

and stated that NIA raids were terrorising the people and civil rights activists in the two states only to prevent them from taking part in the steel plant agitation.

"Carrying our raids and arresting people without the consent of the state governments is against the spirit of the federal system," Lokanadham said. He said the first UAPA case was registered in Munchingput and the lawyers who have been fighting against the case were being targeted, he said.

Stree Shakti convenor Lalita said the government has imposed undeclared curfew in both the states. She said the main mission of the government was to scuttle the steel plant stir.

Strongly condemning the raids, district secre-

tary of CPI J.V. Satyanarayana Murthy demanded immediate release of activists and lawyers and stated that NIA raids were terrorising the people and civil rights activists in the two states only to prevent them from taking part in the steel plant agitation.

Lokanadham said the government was trying to weaken the agitation against the steel plant privatisation by resorting to the arrests of mass leaders.

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M. Lakshmi of POW,

Mahila Chetana convenor K. Padma, advocate K. Padma and IFTU leader Y. Kondiah were present in the meeting.

In Kadapa, CPI district secretary Gujjula Eswaraiah called it a vicious act of NIA. He said it was a conspiracy by the governments to stifle public movements and questioning voices. He said it was undemocratic to conduct searches in homes to prosecute unrelated cases. He said the central government was conspiring to murder constitutional rights and democracy by making false allegations against all those who spoke on behalf of the people against the government's policies. NIA searched homes of faculty, lawyers, writers and artists.

On the arrest of Varalakshmi, a native of Proddatur in Kadapa district and former secretary of the Revolutionary Writers' Association (VIRASAM), he said she was teaching in the college and writing occasionally but the NIA took her into custody.

He said it was time for democrats and intellectuals to speak out against such heinous acts.

SEB launches Operation Savera to curb drug menace

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 1

The State Enforcement Bureau (SEB) has formed task force teams at the state and district levels under 'Operation Savera' to end the drug menace. SEB state commissioner Vineet Brijlal said that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had sought stern action against drug peddlers and to free AP from the drug menace.

A press meet at Guntur on Thursday, Brijlal said the task forces had been formed following the following the directions of the CM to bring about awareness against drugs.

Brijlal said a pilot project of Operation Savera had been started in Krishna and Guntur districts under which awareness programmes were conducted over the past week. Joint task forces led by the SEB commissioner, range DIGs and district SPs and district task forces conducted programmes and a meeting was held

to discuss the measures initiated to curb the drug menace. He said that intensive checks were conducted in Ibrahimpatnam, Ganavaram, Krishnalanka, Satyanarayanapuram and Patamata in Krishna district and Guntur, Sattenapalli, Piduguralla, Vinukonda, Narasaraopeta, Repalle and Tenali of Guntur district.

Brijlal said that 44 persons were arrested in 22 cases and 59.70 kg ganja was seized in Guntur district. In Krishna district, 12 persons were arrested in 10 cases and 19 kgs of ganja were

4.2 KG GANJA SEIZED, THREE WOMEN AMONG THE 5 ARRESTED

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, APRIL 1

Police arrested five people, including three women, for smuggling ganja at Dorala Gorilu area under Kadapa Two Town police station. Kadapa in-charge DSP

to discuss the measures initiated to curb the drug menace.

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Ravikumar told reporters that Kadapa urban police inspector Mohammed Ali and SI Jeevan Reddy had led the operation. They recovered 4.2 kg of ganja from them. A case has been filed against all of them.

He warned drug peddlers of stern action and appealed to the people to give information about drugs at the following numbers: SEB state control room 9491030853 and 0866-2843131; Tollfree number 18004254868; Guntur district control room 9490619395; Vijayawada city control room 8332900100 and Machilipatnam control room number 9182990136.

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NODAL AGENCY TO OFFER SKILL TRAINING TO STUDENTS OF GOVT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, APRIL 1

Industries and IT minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy has directed the AP State Skill Development Corporation to join with Girijan and Social Welfare departments to establish a nodal agency under their umbrella to offer skill training to residential schools students.

During a review on 'Naipunya Vikasam' programme being implemented by APSSDC in Vijayaw-

ada on Thursday, the minister elicited information on the implementation of training programmes on English, life skills, IT and computational thinking.

He underlined the need for impact study pertaining to Naipunya Vikasam. Goutham Reddy gave some key suggestions to the principal secretary of APSSDC, Jayalakshmi, and told her to depute an officer from each department to the nodal agency to supervise the training programmes.

HEATWAVE CONTINUES TO SWEEP COAST

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, APRIL 1

Heatwave conditions continued in the coastal Andhra Pradesh with the temperature 6° Celsius above normal in some places on Thursday. The IMD said the conditions would continue till Sunday, when thunderstorms were expected to lash the coast under the influence of a trough over north coastal Andhra Pradesh.

The report said the heatwave persisted in isolated pockets of Krishna, Guntur and Prakasam district and in some places in East and West Godavari district.

On Friday, Chittoor district might experience isolated pockets of heatwave conditions in some isolated places.

Thunderstorms and gusty winds and lightning are expected in north coastal Andhra Pradesh and Yanam from Saturday to Monday due to the trough.

State Disaster Relief Fund commissioner K. Kannababu in a release from Amaravati said that 207 mandals will experience heatwave and severe heatwave conditions in 148 mandals on Friday. Of these, 33 mandals would be in Guntur, 24 in Krishna, 18 each in West Godavari and Vizianagaram, 16 in East Godavari, 15 in Visakhapatnam and 10 in Srikakulam.

He alerted the district administrations, which are likely to experience the severe weather conditions, to prepare relief measures.

The highest temperature was recorded in Tirupati with 43°C, 4.6 degrees above the normal for this time of the year, Amaravati and Nellore 42.6°C, Vijayawada 42.8°C, 5.8°C above normal, Kavali 6.1°C above normal at 41.4°C, Ongole 42.3°C at 6.7°C above normal, Visakhapatnam was comfortable at 32°C.

Meanwhile, the low pressure area over the south Andaman Sea persisted along with an associated cyclonic circulation. It is likely to become more marked over central Andaman Sea during the next 12 hours and si likely to concentrate into a depression during subsequent 24 hours. It is likely to move north-eastwards towards the Myanmar coast.

The north-south trough from Jharkhand to north Coastal Andhra Pradesh has become less marked.

● STATE DISASTER Relief Fund commissioner K. Kannababu alerted district administrations to prepare relief measures.

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DECCAN Chronicle

2 APRIL 2021

Small savings U-turn: Bad economics, bizarre optics

It is a bizarre moment for policy. Since Assembly elections are on in many states, evidently the fear of electoral backlash has forced an about turn by the Centre in something like 12 hours flat. On Wednesday night, the government announced substantial cuts in interest rates for small savings, meaning instruments such as PPF, post office savings, bank fixed deposits, Kisan Vikas Patras, and Senior Citizen Savings Scheme which ordinary people use to save their lifelong earnings. On Friday morning, the announcement was reversed in a tweet by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Small savings, or common people's savings, are critical. They constitute as much as 60 per cent of all savings in the economy. The savings rate in the country was already touching a 15-year low, with household savings (small savings) declining steadily on account of shrinking interest rates, especially since early 2020. If the savings rate is low, investments will be inadequate. As a result of low investment funds available within the country, India has had to take recourse to external borrowings. So, that's how important small savings are.

The ordinary people, rather than the better off citizens, were being asked to shoulder the burden of government borrowings which for the financial year 2021-22 is slated to be ₹12.06 trillion

The core inflation rate in India was six per cent in January. The proposed cuts in interest rate for small savings would have brought the real value of most of these savings into negative territory. So, why was the finance minister unmindful of the daily needs of ordinary Indians when it is well known that millions of people depend on the interest earnings from their savings to meet their everyday needs?

This is not just bad poll-time optics, hurting the lower end of society is deplorable political economy. During the year-long pandemic, and for three years before that (as a consequence of demonetisation), it is the poor, the middle classes, and small and medium businesses that really suffered in terms of job losses and output losses. They have struggled to survive. In contrast, the richest Indians — especially big industry — have made handsome gains. And yet, the government's policy on interest rates, which is done quarterly, singled out small savings for punishment.

A probable reason is that the government may have calculated that if the interest rates are pushed down, it can borrow on better terms to meet its needs. Which means the ordinary people, rather than the better off citizens, were being asked to shoulder the burden of government borrowings which for the financial year 2021-22 is slated to be 12.06 trillion rupees. In effect, the section of the population which is already teetering on the brink was expected to surrender more to finance the government's plans, as compared to the big boys.

The plan was jettisoned overnight, but even at the prevailing rates of interest for small savings, the ordinary householder is eking out a hard living. Is the present finance minister responsible for the poor woman's misery, or is it that the policy set responsible for accelerating poverty pre-dates her assuming charge of finance? Policymaking is highly centralised in the present set-up. Whether it is finance or foreign affairs or defence, or matters concerning home, agriculture or industry, it is widely thought that decisions are made on high. That is where answers ought to be sought for the goof-up. On account of elections, the panic button was pressed at the last minute. But what happens in the next quarter will be keenly watched.

K'taka: 'Lotus' probe welcome

The Karnataka high court has allowed an inquiry into the "Operation Lotus" controversy that surfaced before the Janata Dal-Congress government of H.D. Kumaraswamy was brought down in July 2019 through defections. This is a setback for the BJP as well as its Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa who was charged with engineering the collapse of the government through various inducements, including an offer of money reportedly made in a telephone call with the son of a JD(S) legislator.

The judge John Michael D'Cunha, known to take a tough stand on corruption in politics as evidenced in his sensational 2014 ruling to convict J. Jayalalithaa of graft and fine her ₹100 crore, has based his judgment on the allegations and the contents of the complaint being so serious as to not allow a court to empower itself to quash the complaint and FIR. It is a different matter that the agencies that will be tasked with running the probe would be controlled by the powers that be. The highest degree of morality would be sustained only if Mr Yediyurappa were to step down for the pendency of the probe but such ideals have been thrown by the way-side long ago in Indian politics.

In a sensational audio clip that became public at the time, a conversation between Mr Yediyurappa and Sharanagouda Patil, son of JD(S) MLA Naganagouda Patil, had revealed an offer of ₹10 crore as well as a ministerial berth if he could get his father to switch sides. Mr Yediyurappa had, of course, dismissed it as a conspiracy hatched by the then chief minister to entrap him.

Facile explanations should cut no ice with probe agencies provided they run a thorough investigation to get to the bottom of the affair and establish that compelling offers had indeed been made for legislators to switch loyalties. The fact that a probe has been ordered itself brings into focus the widely held view that the ruling party at the Centre had been playing toppling games through which non-BJP governments were targeted and brought down, as in Madhya Pradesh and Puducherry, but proved unsuccessful in Rajasthan.

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Subhani



BJP has a different take... On history, science, cows!



Karan Thapar

As I See It

My office keeps a track of some of the outlandish things said by leaders of the BJP. I am not sure how it started, and I doubt if we follow other parties equally assiduously. But the BJP collection, if I can use that term, is quite a hoard. It includes the offensive and the ludicrous, it ranges from the Prime Minister to the least known MLA, and it covers subjects as varied as religion, mythology, history, couture, cuisine, practically everything to do with cows and, of course, sex. On a slow day it can be quite fun to browse.

Well, that's what I did over the recent holidays and I noticed a few intriguing patterns. Perhaps the most striking is that the BJP has a very poor grasp of history. For instance, Tirath Singh Rawat, the new chief minister of Uttarakhand, believes "America enslaved India for 200 years". His counterpart in Tripura, Bipul Kumar Deb, is convinced that Rabindranath Tagore returned his Nobel Prize to protest against the British. But what really surprised me is the number of times the Prime Minister is confused by the past.

Alexander's army, he once said, conquered the entire world but was defeated by the Biharis. On another occasion he relocated Taxila to somewhere not far from Patna. On a third, he said when he thinks of the Gupta dynasty, he remembers Chandragupta. Of course, at the time he was wooing the voters of Bihar so perhaps this was intended as flattery.

But what do you make of this? In 2018 he claimed Kabir, Guru Nanak and Baba Gorakhnath "sat

together and discussed spirituality". It's an interesting idea but as impossible as the claim Jesus and Muhammad had a fireside chat or as inaccurate as the belief Buddha and Zarathustra were buddies.

However, my favourite is a bloomer about the man many consider the Prime Minister's party's revered founder. This is what Mr Modi told a gathering in Gujarat in 2013: "Syama Prasad Mookerjee was a revolutionary. He died in 1930 in London." I would call that a three-in-one. Mookerjee was not a revolutionary. He was a member of Jawaharlal Nehru's first Cabinet. Before that he was president of the Hindu Mahasabha. Earlier, he was a lawyer and academic. He didn't die in 1930 but 1953. It wasn't in London but in a jail in Jammu and Kashmir. And, of course, he founded the Bharatiya Jan Sangh.

A second theme in the file is the BJP's questioning of science alongside its conviction that most modern achievements actually occurred centuries or even millennia earlier. When he was junior minister for human resources development — which, incidentally, includes education — Satyapal Singh said Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution was "scientifically wrong". Since no one had seen "an ape turning into a man", he said, that was proof dear Charles had got things mixed up. Our textbooks, he concluded, need to be changed.

And not surprisingly, long is the list of BJP leaders who believe some of the greatest modern achievements actually existed in the times of the Mahabharata. Tripura's Bipul Deb claims the Internet and satellite communications were known to the Kauravas

and Pandavas. Bengal's Jagdeep Dhanekar insists that Arjun's arrows had nuclear power. UP's Dinesh Sharma maintains journalism started to cover the battle at Kurukshetra. Not just that, there were live telecasts too. And he adds: "Your Google has started now but our Google started long time back".

Much the same sort of claim is made about genetic science, plastic surgery and test-tube babies. In 2014, in a speech at the inauguration of the Reliance Hospital in Mumbai, the Prime Minister said the fact Karan was born from Kunti's ear is proof that genetic science was known at the time. He added the fact Ganesh has an elephant head is proof there were plastic surgeons in those days. No doubt inspired by his leader, Dinesh Sharma has more recently proclaimed Sita was a test-tube baby!

Less surprising but also far more frequent is evidence of the BJP's incredible faith in the Indian cow and its many products. Suman Haripriya, a member of the Assam Assembly, believes "gau-mutra" and "gobar" can cure Coronavirus. Sadhvi Pragya believes it's already cured her cancer. Meanwhile, for those who have blood pressure problems, she strongly recommends a good rub of a cow's back.

If, however, wealth rather than health is your concern Dilip Ghosh, the BJP's Bengal chief, insists that cow's milk contains gold. "There's a *nari* (blood vessel) that helps pro-

duce gold with the help of sunlight", he has declared. So rather than drink a glass of the stuff, you ought to sift it.

Michael Lobo, a BJP minister in Goa, says that cows in Calangute have recently changed their character and now "only eat non-vegetarian food". I wonder if earlier they were fond of beef? Uttarakhand's former chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat had once proclaimed that cows exhale oxygen. So what do they breathe?

Our file reflects these days BJP leaders have become specialists in haute couture. They've taken to advising women what to wear. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat has firmly ruled out ripped jeans. He doesn't approve of bare knees. "If this kind of woman goes out in society to meet people and solve their problems, what kind of message are we giving to society and to our kids?", he asks. So clearly, he's not in favour of a plunging décolletage.

Dilip Ghosh, his colleague in Bengal, who perhaps hopes to replace Mamata Banerjee as chief minister, is more avant-garde. He's suggested Ms Banerjee should wear Bermudas. "If she has to keep her leg out then why wear a sari", he asks. "She could wear a pair of Bermudas instead. So that it can be seen clearly".

Of course, the thickest part of the file is what BJP leaders have to say about Muslims, their religion Islam and the fact that they would be better off in Pakistan. Termites feature in this part fairly substantially. So does the size of their families. But there's nothing imaginative or fanciful about this portion. Just offensive and horribly wrong.

Now I don't know how other parties compare with the BJP. My office hasn't kept a track of their statements. My producer, Arvind Kumar, tells me this is something he intends to do. But will it be as much fun? Or is this one respect in which the BJP is truly special?

The writer is a television commentator

LETTERS

TD'S FUTURE

In its 40th year, the TD needs a dynamic leader to take it forward to win the 2024 polls after a series of setbacks (*TD merges with BJP, Naidu finalises deal, DC, April 1*). Naidu has his task cut out. If not, the prank news might come true in coming days.

Sajid Farooq
Kurnool

Though it was an April 1 prank, the TD supremo has actually been exploring this option ever since he got a decent drubbing in the 2019 Assembly polls. His emissary MPs are working overtime but in vain in this regard and Naidu's silence on Modi/BJP points towards this. Probably the BJP sensed the issue and got alert. Otherwise, the AP unit of BJP would have by now been a pocket burrow of erstwhile TD, with Naidu at the helm.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

INTEREST RATES

The possibility of negative vote in the elections may have prompted the FM to roll back the interest rate cut for small savings.

P. Ramakrishna
Rajahmundry

INHS KALYANI TRAFFIC

The Traffic Police Commissioner of Visakhapatnam must reduce the congestion near INHS Kalyani Sriharipuram. The jams near HPCL main gate to Coast Guard main gate from 8 am to 10 am is creating a lot of trouble. Large trucks parked near HPCL main gate is an hindrance. Auto drivers taking U-turn between INHS Kalyani and HPCL main gate take passengers near HPCL main gate and Nausena Bagh creating a bottleneck. RTC buses stop near main gate of HPCL reducing the chance of any movement of vehicle.

Chetan Shankar
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

E. Pak towns in flames: bitter fighting on

CALCUTTA, April. 1

Several East Pakistani towns were burning after heavy bombardment by Pakistani Air Forces planes as part of what appeared to be an all-out armed forces offensive against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's forces today.

The Pakistani Army and Air Force launched a fresh offensive against Bangla Desh Liberation Forces over wide areas.

Vincenzo de Luca



Linking Italian, Indian cultures, past & present, in Covid times

This year marks a very special one as we celebrate the Festival of Italian Culture in India which is held in parallel with the Indian Cultural Festival in Italy. The initiative was promoted at the last bilateral digital summit held on November 6, 2020 between the two Prime Ministers and it was also acknowledged by the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, as one of the pillars of the bilateral cooperation between Italy and India. In his message to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the occasion of Republic Day, Mr Mattarella said: "The Festival of Italian Culture in India and Indian Culture in Italy will take place in 2021. These events will facilitate the reciprocal comprehension and the closeness among our people."

We inaugurated the festival in January and had the honour to host the minister of external affairs, S. Jaishankar, for the first in-person event since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The festival is a unique opportunity to further strengthen the historical cultural relations between the two countries

and to share the new dynamics of exchanges between the protagonists of the Italian and Indian culture and creative industries.

The cultural exchanges between the two countries date back to ancient history. Not only can ties between European and Indian cultures be traced back to 700 BC, there are also testimonies of linguistic influences in the sixteenth century. In the last century, Giuseppe Tucci and Luigi Tessitori contributed to the knowledge of Indian culture and artistic tradition in Italy by collecting scientific studies and artistic testimonies still preserved in Italy. Thanks to these experiences, Italy boasts the most important tradition of Indology studies in the world outside India. In the last 50 years, exchanges in the cinematic field have flourished with the production of docu-films by Pierpaolo Pasolini and Roberto Rossellini and awards at the Venice Film Festival to Satyajit Ray and Mira Nair. We recently hosted the screening of Rossellini's and Pasolini's masterpieces during a three-night open-air "Notti Stellate, Italian Cinema under the Sky",

where unedited images from their travels throughout India in the late 1950s and 1960s are a testament of life in those days.

Cultural ties between Italy and India are not only rooted in the past, but they are very much driven by innovation, creativity and contemporary cultural contamination.

To celebrate the Festival of Italian Culture in India, together with the Embassy of India in Rome, we crafted a rich agenda of events in various fields — cinema, music, literature, visual arts, fashion and design. This year Italy celebrates the 700th anniversary of the death of the most important figure of the Italian culture — the father of Italian language and its most famous poet, Dante Alighieri. We are commemorating him in many of our cultural activities — from theatre to literature, exhibitions and musical performances. In February, I moderated a panel with two eminent professors from Rome and Trento University in which we analysed the figure of Dante Alighieri and how contemporary it is masterpiece *The Divine Comedy* is today.

We are also working on a very special project on Italian Indology and Sanskrit studies. Together with the University of Rome La Sapienza, we are putting together a collection of publications by the most prominent Italian Indologists. The project is composed of four volumes — the first one will be a collection on Italian studies on Indian History, Economy, Society; the second volume focuses on culture and literature; the third is the English translation of the biography of Giuseppe Tucci; the fourth will be entirely dedicated to Indian contemporary art.

Our events are a constant dialogue between innovation and tradition. We are focusing on our traditions but also on our dynamic and contemporary cultural drive. We are also attaching great importance in forging partnerships with our Indian counterparts and are thus working on strengthening cooperation among museums, developing projects on the protection of our cultural heritage, enhancing collaboration among artists, musicians and our creative industries.

Promoting culture in the midst of a

pandemic is not easy. As with all the cultural institutions around the world, we also had to reinvent ourselves taking full advantage of the digital tools we familiarised with, without giving up on the possibility of nurturing our Indian friends with limited outdoor events carried out in full observation of health safety protocols. It is thanks to the digital tools that we have been able to connect Italy and India even more. The availability of digital performances through the channels of the Embassy of Italy in New Delhi, the consulates in Mumbai and Kolkata and the Italian Cultural Institutes of New Delhi and Mumbai, along with the innovative platforms launched by the Italian foreign ministry have been quite successful. The promotion of arts, music, culture knows no limits.

Numerous more events still lie ahead, and I am sure the "Festival of Italian Culture in India" will further consolidate the relations between Italy and India, two culture superpowers.

The writer is the Italian ambassador to India

SHORT TAKES

JAWAN BEGINS KASHMIR TO KANYAKUMARI RUN

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, APRIL 1

An Army corporal on Thursday began a walk from Kashmir to Kanyakumari with a resolve to set a Guinness World Record.

Naik N.A. Velu P. of the Army's 60 Para Field Hospital who was sent off from the headquarters of the Chinara or 15 Corps headquarters here by his colleagues on the journey covering a distance of approximately 4,300 kilometres within 50 days is an "ultra-marathoner who is attempting a Guinness book of world record, defence spokesman Lt. Colonel Emron Musavi said.

He was flagged off from 92 Base Hospital at Srinagar with a heart-warming gathering of enthusiasts.

ODISHA SIZZLES UNDER SEVERE HEAT WAVE

DC CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 1

Bhubaneswar which on Wednesday recorded the country's maximum temperature of 44.2 degrees Celsius, continued to sizzle under intense heat wave on Thursday. The city, according to local meteorological office sources, recorded 39.8 degrees Celsius temperature.

While Angul and Talcher recorded the highest 42.7 degrees Celsius temperature, mercury hovered over 40 degrees Celsius in at least 13 other cities.

Stating that the heat wave conditions would continue till next 24 hours, the weather department cautioned people not to venture out under the scorching sun.

Like Wednesday, normal life was severely affected on Thursday after mercury began to shoot up after 8 am.

Soon after, the local Met office posted a tweet warning people to avoid direct heat exposure till 4 pm. The Regional Meteorological Centre forecasted that there would be a fall in temperature in the state from Friday.

TIGRESS FOUND DEAD IN MP RESERVE FOREST

DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, APRIL 1

A female tiger died in Bandhavgarh reserve forest core zone which was struck by a wildfire a couple of days ago, forest officers said on Thursday. Carcass of the 13-year-old tigress was found in Rahania forest beat area under Magadhi range in the reserve late on Tuesday night, field director of Bandhavgarh tiger reserve Vincent Rahim said.

Post-mortem of the body was done on Wednesday by the veterinary doctor of the range Nitin Gupta in the presence of representatives of National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and senior officers of the state forest department including Rahim.

The post-mortem report, made public late on Wednesday night, suggested that the big cat may have succumbed to injuries caused by a fierce fight with another tiger, a senior forest officer told this newspaper.

"Prima facie it appears the tigress had suffered grievous wounds due to a tussle with a male tiger during their mating. The big cat had injury marks on her shoulder and neck. She may have succumbed to her injuries", Rahim said.

Odisha infant dies as doc gives injection after 'Google search'

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 1

A couple hailing from Odisha's Nabarangpur on Thursday alleged that their six-month-old infant son suffering from pneumonia died after he was administered an injection which was prescribed by the doctor after a 'Google search' at Dabugam Health Centre.

The local medical officer, however, denied the allegation and said proper injection was given to the infant. According to the reports, Prasant Bisoyee of Badaolama village in Nabarangpur district on



People queue up to vote on Thursday during the second phase of Assembly elections in East Medinipur district of West Bengal. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Cong, AIUDF aim to make big gains in Assam 2nd phase

Assam records 73% polling in 39 Assembly constituencies in phase-II

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, APRIL 1

In the second phase of polling, Assam on Thursday recorded more than 73 per cent polling in 39 Assembly seats spread across six different regions of the state. The Nowgong seat recorded the highest turnout of 83.10 per cent.

The six regions which went to polls on Thursday included Southern Assam's Barak Valley with 15 seats, Central Assam's 12 seats, Hill districts' five seats, Bodoland Territorial Council's four seats, Kamrup rural's two seats and one seat of lower Assam.

The political battles are also different in each of these regions. The biggest chunk of seats in the second phase are in the Barak Valley, in southern Assam. Bengali speaking voters are in a majority in this region, which has a sizable number of migrants, both — Hindus and Muslims. The BJP has traditionally been stronger among Bengali Hindus.

This region also has a sizable number of Muslim population — 60 per cent in Hailakandi district, 56 per cent in Karimganj district and 37 per cent in Cachar district. The Barak Valley Muslims are also Bengali speaking. In the 2016 Assembly polls, the BJP had won eight out of 15 seats, the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) four and the Congress three.

This time, however, the equations have changed with the Congress and AIUDF joining hands. In 2016, out of the eight seats BJP won, four were due to a vote split between the Congress and AIUDF. This time the two parties have come together therefore, the alliance is hoping its chances of inflicting heavy losses on the BJP in this region.

Three seats each in Darrang, Morigaon, Nagaon and Hojai districts also voted in the second phase of polling on Thursday. Five seats in Nagaon have already voted along with Upper Assam in the first phase of polling.

Assam polls battle between 'jhooth' & 'vikas', says Modi

DC CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI, APRIL 1

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday came down heavily on Opposition Congress and said that the ongoing Assam Assembly election has become a "battle" between the Congress-AIUDF grand alliance of "maha jhooth" (great lie) and National Democratic Alliance of "maha vikas" (great development).

Addressing a public rally in Kokrajhar which is scheduled to go for polling in the third and final phase of polling on April 6, Modi said, "Football is very popular among youth here. In terms of football

people have yet again shown a Red Card to Congress and its Mahajot. People of Assam have trust in the NDA for the development, peace, security of the state. This is an election between the 'maha jhooth' of Mahajot (Congress-AIUDF grand alliance) and 'maha vikas' of the double engine government."

Asserting that the BJP is set for a grand victory in Phase-I polls, Modi said the NDA government is working for welfare of Assam with the mantra of 'sabka saath sabka vikas sabka vishwas'. "People of Assam have given blessings to NDA in 1st phase of polling. In the 1st phase, Assam has put a stamp on

grand victory of NDA," he said.

Referring to BJP government's developmental initiatives in the state, Modi said, "Medical college is being set up in Kokrajhar at a rapid pace. A package of ₹1,500 crore has also been provided for development. Bodoland University, Central Institute of Technology, Bodoland Bhanu and several other institutions are becoming the identity of this region."

He said, "From providing land pattas to over 3.25 lakh families, increasing rates of workers to making the life of women working in tea gardens, the NDA has tried to bring all-round development."

EC issues notice to BJP minister

DC CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI, APRIL 1

Amidst the charges of intimidating Opposition by ruling BJP minister in the name of NIA probe, a candidate from Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF), a partner of the Opposition Congress-led grand alliance, switched sides and joined the ruling BJP late on Wednesday night.

With less than a week to go for the third and final phase of Assembly polls, Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in a mid-night social media post announced, "Official candidate of BPF and so called Congress-led alliance from Tamulpur LAC (legislative Assembly constituency) Ram Das Basumatary met me a short while ago. He has expressed his desire to join BJP and retire from the election."

Earlier on Thursday Congress claimed that its Mahajot candidate from Tamulpur constituency is

missing and it asked the ruling BJP to answer about his whereabouts.

Congress leader Manish Tiwari who is camping in Guwahati told reporters, "Congress-led Mahajot candidate from Tamulpur constituency, Rangia Basumatary of BPF was made to disappear. It's the Assam government and BJP's responsibility to answer where he is. We demand from the Election Commission that a probe should be done in this matter."

However, soon after Rangia Khungur Basumatary, who is also known as Ram Das Basumatary appeared before the media to announce his retirement from the contest.

Meanwhile in a related development, the EC on Thursday issued a notice to Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for his alleged remark of misusing NIA against Congress candidate. The EC asked Sarma for submitting an explanation by April 2.



RAJA BANNED FROM CAMPAIGN FOR TWO DAYS

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, APRIL 1

Former union minister and DMK deputy general secretary, A. Raja, has been debarred from campaigning for '48 hours with immediate effect' by the Election Commission of India, which was not satisfied with his reply to a notice sent to him on a complaint by the AIADMK.

The ECI order on Thursday reprimanded Raja for violating the Model Code of Conduct and delisted him as DMK's star campaigner, besides advising him 'to be watchful and not to make intemperate, indecent, derogatory, obscene remarks and lower the dignity of women in future during election campaign.'

The AIADMK's complaint dated March 27, alleging that Raja had made a derogatory and scandalous speech during a campaign on March 26 at the Thousand Lights constituency, was forwarded by the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Tamil Nadu to the ECI.

Raja was asked to give his explanation after the ECI obtained a factual report from the CEO and on the basis of preliminary reports and transcripts of his speeches made at Keelapalur and Meensuruti.

The order said that Raja had described Stalin as a child of good relationship and good birth and Edappadi K. Palaniswami as a child of a bad relationship and a prematurely born child at Keelapalur.

Troops sent to stop Myanmar refugees' entry

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 1

Additional battalions of ITBP, SSB and Assam Rifle are being rushed to the India-Myanmar border as some refugees from Myanmar have been trying to enter India in wake of Army action against protestors there. Though so far Myanmar residents are not being allowed, Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) will discuss the issue in its meeting next week, sources said.

Security and intelligence agencies are closely monitoring the situation all along the India-Myanmar border as there is considerable tension in Myanmar as Army has launched a massive offensive against protestors in their country. This has forced people to flee from Myanmar and a lot of them have been trying to enter India.

But so far border guards have managed to stop any illegal entry into India and have contained the situation along the border. India shares almost a 1,500-km long border with Myanmar.

Following the tense situation in Myanmar it has been decided that additional central paramilitary forces like ITBP, SSB and Assam Rifle have

been rushed to the Myanmar border.

Sources said so far it has been decided that illegal migrants will not be allowed into India. However, as a humanitarian gesture, Indian security forces have been providing food, medicine and water to some residents of villages in Myanmar which are close to the border. However, they are not being permitted to cross over into India.

Top security sources said that the Cabinet Committee on Security, which is likely to meet sometime next week, will discuss the Myanmar situation in detail.

A decision could also be taken on the crucial issue on whether some refugees from Myanmar should be allowed inside India purely on a temporary basis till the time the situation normalises in Myanmar.

"So far government policy is clear that no illegal migration would be allowed from Myanmar. But maybe some relaxation could be given only on temporary and humanitarian basis to give shelter to some refugees. But the decision will have to be taken by the Cabinet Committee on Security," a senior home ministry official added.

COVID UPDATE

NEW VARIANT FOUND IN CHHATTISGARH

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, APRIL 1

New variant of Coronavirus, named N-440, has been found in Chhattisgarh indicating mutation of virus in the state, Chhattisgarh health minister T.S. Singhdeo said on Thursday.

According to him, the Centre has sent a report to the Chhattisgarh government recently confirming that the new variant of Coronavirus was found in five samples from the state.

However, doctors say a study was yet to be done as to how the new variant of the virus would exactly affect our immune system.

But, it has been found that the mutant was capable of weakening the immune system.

Singhdeo said no Coronavirus variants of Britain, South Africa and Brazil were so far detected in Chhattisgarh.

All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), Raipur, gathers samples in Chhattisgarh and sends them to the National Centre for Disease Control for tests.

The first positive case in Chhattisgarh was reported in Raipur on March 18, 2020.

Meanwhile, India on Thursday recorded 79,275 new cases and 461 deaths in the last 24 hours taking the nationwide tally of cases to 1,22,99,987.

FOUR MORE DIE IN J&K, 461 NEW CASES REPORTED

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, APRIL 1

The number of Coronavirus cases are increasing with each passing day in Jammu and Kashmir.

On Thursday, as many as 461 fresh cases of the virus were reported including 361 from the Valley and 100 from Jammu region of the Union Territory which is the highest daily rise this year.

Also, four more people died of the infection, raising the toll to 1,998. "The total number of Covid-19 positive cases in J&K has risen to 1,31,421. However, only 2,874 are active positive whereas 1,26,549 patients have recovered and 1,998 have died," an official spokesman said in Jammu.

Several areas in the Valley have been declared contaminated zones following residents in fairly large numbers contracted the virus.

Also, eight schools have been shut for three to seven days after the swab samples of more than 60 students and half a dozen teachers collected during a recent drive by the J&K Health Department turned positive for the virus.

The Jammu & Kashmir government had on Tuesday announced a slew of measures to contain Coronavirus in view of fresh surge in positive cases.

HOLY GATHERING It is for the 1st time in history that the event is held for just a month

Kumbh Mela begins in Haridwar

Haridwar, April 1: The Kumbh Mela formally began in Haridwar on Thursday with several restrictions imposed on devotees coming to attend the event amid rising cases of Covid-19 in various states including Uttarakhand.

Officials associated with organising the event, including Mela Officer Deepak Rawat, Mela IG Sanjay Gunjyal and Haridwar SSP Janmejay Khanduri, worshipped in temples along the banks of the Ganga to pray for a safe and unhindered Kumbh fair.

Checking on

Uttarakhand's borders with Uttar Pradesh at Narsan in Roorkee and Kashipur in Udham Singh Nagar district has been intensified to ensure that only people with a negative RT-PCR test report proceed for the Kumbh Mela.

"Besides registering on our portal, it is compulsory for devotees to bring a negative RT-PCR test report with them," Mela Officer Deepak Rawat said.

A negative RT-PCR test report not older than 72 hours before arrival has been made mandatory for devotees gathering for the

Kumbh by the Uttarakhand High Court.

In an order on Wednesday, the high court said a negative RT-PCR certification will be compulsory even in the case of devotees who have received the first dose of the Corona vaccine.

Devotees who have taken the anti-Covid vaccination will have to show their certificates and follow the anti-Covid guidelines like wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and frequently undertaking hand sanitisation in the Kumbh Kshetra.

The high court has also asked the health authori-

ties in Haridwar to ramp up testing from 5,000 per day to 50,000. Uttarakhand reported 293 positive Covid-19 cases on Wednesday with Dehradun and Haridwar districts accounting for a majority of them.

Dehradun reported 171 cases followed by Haridwar which reported 70, the Covid Control room in Dehradun said.

It is for the first time in the history of the grand religious congregation held on the banks of the Ganga in Haridwar once in 12 years that its duration has been curtailed to just one month due to the

pandemic.

In normal circumstances, Kumbh is held for nearly four months. Its last edition was held in Haridwar from January 14 to April 28 in 2010.

Between April 1 and 30, there will be three major bathing dates (shahi snan or royal baths) on April 12, 14 and 27.

Besides the shahi snan dates when people descend in droves on the banks of the Ganga in Haridwar for a holy bath, a heavy turnout of devotees is also expected on the occasion of Chaitra Pratipada on April 13 and Ram Navami on April 21.

—PTI

SHORT TAKES

PAK COURT LIFTS BAN ON TIKTOK

Peshawar, April 1: A Pakistani court on Thursday lifted its ban on popular Chinese video-sharing app TikTok and ordered the country's telecom-communication authority to make sure that "immoral content" is not uploaded on it.

The Peshawar High Court on March 11 had ordered a ban on the TikTok over alleged "obscene content", the second time in less than six months. The court on Thursday lifted the ban.

LONDON COP IN NEO-NAZI GROUP CONVICTED

London, April 1: A London jury has found a rookie police officer guilty of belonging to a banned neo-Nazi organisation, the first time a British police officer has been convicted of membership of an outlawed far-right group.

After 32 hours of deliberation, the jury at the city's Old Bailey court found Benjamin Hannam, 22, guilty Thursday of being a member of the extremist group National Action.

US SAYS ISRAEL 'OCCUPIES' WEST BANK

Washington, April 1: US President Joe Biden's administration said Wednesday that Israel's control of the West Bank is indeed "occupation," clarifying its stance after the release of a report that seemed to downplay the term, adopting language used by the former President Donald Trump's government.

The State Department's annual report on human rights "does use the term 'occupation' in the context of the current status of the West Bank," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

"This has been the long-standing position of previous administrations of both parties over the course of many decades," he said. But under the staunchly pro-Israel Trump, the annual human rights report renamed the section on "Israel and the Occupied Territories" as "Israel, West Bank and Gaza."

US court lets Rana file reply

Hearing of Tahawwur, declared fugitive by India, is scheduled April 12

Washington, April 1: A US court has acceded to the request of Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, who is sought for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, to file an additional reply against his extradition to India.

The in-person extradition hearing of 59-year-old Rana, who has been declared a fugitive by India, is scheduled for April 12.

The United States has supported India's request for his extradition to India. US District Court Judge in Los Angeles Jacqueline Chooljian, in his brief order on Wednesday, said: Rana shall file a sur-reply of no more than 20 pages by not later than April 5.

The government may, but is not required to file any surrebuttal to the sur-reply, which may not exceed 20 pages, by not later than April 12, the judge said.

In a separate order, the judge asked both Rana and the government representatives to confer and submit a status report within a week regarding the scheduling of the in-person extradition hearing, which is currently set for April 22.

Under the existing law, hearings in cases of extradition under treaty stipulation or convention shall be held on land, publicly, and in a room or office easily accessible to the public, the judge said.

However, an in-person hearing is not currently authorised due to the pandemic, the federal judge said. Nor is it clear to the Court on the current record, that Mr. Rana may waive an in-person extradition hearing and consent to proceed by video/telepho-

nic conference, even if he wished to do so, the judge said. As such, the judge ordered the two parties to confer and file a status report within a week.

Last week Rana, who is being sought in connection with his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, approached the court that it wanted to file an additional reply in opposition to the motion of the US government that supported his extradition to India. The US government quickly reached out to the court arguing that there was no need for Rana to file an additional motion.

On Wednesday, the court ruled in favour of Rana. Rana, a childhood friend of David Coleman Headley, was re-arrested on June 10 in Los Angeles on an extradition request by India for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which 166 people, including six Americans, were killed.

Pakistani-American Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist Headley was involved in plotting the 2008 Mumbai terror attack. He was made an approver in the case.

— PTI

Race review: Johnson's PoC adviser resigns

London, April 1: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's senior-most PoC adviser, Samuel Kasumu, has stepped down from his post as Special Adviser for Civil Society and Communities, it emerged on Thursday, a day after the release of a controversial government-appointed race review.

Kasumu's resignation will come in effect from May 1 and Downing Street has dismissed as completely inaccurate reports that it is linked to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) report, which had concluded that Britain was not a structurally racist nation even though overt racism remained a reality in the country. It has been claimed that Kasumu's exit was on the cards for some time due to tensions within Downing Street and is not directly linked to the much-criticised report.

"Mr Kasumu has played an incredibly valuable role during his time at No 10," a Downing Street spokesperson said. As he previously set out, he will be leaving government in May. Any suggestion that this decision has been made this week or that this is linked to the CRED report is completely inaccurate," he said.

Kasumu had previously handed in his resignation in February but went on to retract it. At the time, he had said he wanted to continue work he had been doing fighting misinformation on Covid-19 vaccines with Britain's PoC community, with "the view to leaving at the end of May". However, according to *The Politico*, Kasumu confirmed his decision to leave Downing Street on Tuesday morning, just as the findings of the CRED report were released. It comes as racial equality campaigners criticised the findings, and the Opposition Labour Party accused the government of downplaying institutional racism.

Labour's shadow equalities secretary Marsha de Cordova called the report "divisive", adding it was "no wonder" the government was "losing the expertise from their team".

— PTI

WHO blasts Europe's vax rollout

France latest to impose curbs to combat rising infections

Copenhagen, April 1: The WHO on Thursday slammed Europe's "unacceptably slow" vaccine rollout and warned of a "worrying" surge in cases, as France became the latest country to impose new restrictions to combat soaring coronavirus infections.

In a sign of the devastation the virus is still causing while the world races to roll out vaccines, Brazil reported the country's death toll had spiralled last month. Officials said more than 66,000 people had died of Covid-19 in Brazil in March — more than twice as many fatalities as the country's second-deadliest month of the pandemic, July 2020.

"Never in Brazilian history have we seen a single event kill so many people" in one month, said doctor Miguel Nicolelis, former pandemic response coordinator for Brazil's impoverished northeast.

With the southern hemisphere winter approaching and the virus spreading fast, Brazil is facing "a perfect storm", he said.

The surge in Brazil has overwhelmed hospitals and forced doctors to make agonising decisions over whom to give life-saving care — prioritising those most likely



A closed street cafe is seen in Eisenstadt, Austria, on Thursday, amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The Austrian capital Vienna and two neighbouring regions entered a temporary lockdown over the Easter holiday, to ease pressure on intensive care units as coronavirus cases surge.

— AFP

Organisation's director for Europe Hans Kluge said. "We must speed up the process by ramping up manufacturing, reducing barriers to administering vaccines, and using every single vial we have in stock," he added. The organisation said Europe's virus situation was "more worrying than we have seen in several months" and that slow rollouts were "prolonging the pandemic".

Five weeks ago, the number of weekly new cases in the region had dipped to under one million. But last week there were 1.6 million new cases in Europe, the WHO said.

In France alone, daily cases have doubled to around 40,000 and hospitals are overflowing in flashpoints such as Paris.

The surge forced President Emmanuel Macron to relent and reimpose nationwide restrictions he rejected in January.

— AFP

Myanmar civil war likely, warns UN ambassador

United Nations, April 1: The UN envoy on Myanmar implored the Security Council to take action in the Asian nation's escalating crisis, warning of the risk of civil war and an imminent "bloodbath" as the junta violently represses pro-democracy protests.

More than 520 people have died in daily demonstrations since the military overthrew elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, halting Myanmar's decade-old experiment in democracy.

"I appeal to this Council to consider all available tools to take collective action and do what is right, what the people of Myanmar deserve and prevent a multi-dimensional catastrophe," special envoy Christine Schraner

Burgener told the closed-door session, according to remarks obtained by AFP.

She said she remained open for dialogue with the junta but added: "If we wait only for when they are ready to talk, the ground situation will only worsen. A bloodbath is imminent."Barbara Woodward, the UN envoy from Britain, which requested the meeting, told reporters the Security Council was "united in its condemnation" and was discussing "a range of measures at our disposal."But China, considered Myanmar's main ally, ruled out sanctions.

"One-sided pressure and calling for sanctions or other coercive measures will only aggravate tension and confrontation and fur-

ther complicate the situation, which is by no means constructive," China's ambassador, Zhang Jun, said.

The session came after Suu Kyi's legal team earlier Wednesday said the ousted leader appeared to be in good health despite two months of detention.

Suu Kyi, 75, has not been seen in public since she was deposed but a member of her legal team, Min Min Soe, was summoned to a police station in the capital Naypyidaw for a video meeting with her.

Suu Kyi is facing a raft of criminal charges, and conviction could see her barred from office for life.

The coup and the junta's subsequent actions have triggered international condemnation.

— AFP

Navalny health raises concern

Moscow, April 1: Supporters of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny are raising deep concerns about his decision to launch a hunger strike, saying they fear more damage to his already-fragile health.

Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most prominent opponent, announced the hunger strike on Wednesday to demand proper medical treatment in prison. The 44-year-old is serving two-and-a-half years on old fraud charges in a penal colony east of Moscow. He was arrested when he returned to Russia in January from Germany, where he had spent months recovering

from poisoning he blames on the Kremlin.

Navalny says he is suffering in prison from severe back pain and numbness in his legs and has only been given painkillers.

His allies said his announcement of a hunger strike is no idle threat and they do not expect he will back down.

"Navalny has always taken such a step as a hunger strike extremely seriously," Ruslan Shaveddinov, a spokesman for him, said. "We are very concerned about his condition and that's why we are demanding immediate access to doctors."

— AFP



Biden allows Trump era H1-B rules to expire

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Suu Kyi is facing a raft of criminal charges, and conviction could see her barred from office for life.

The coup and the junta's subsequent actions have triggered international condemnation. Britain called for the emergency meeting after the military dramatically ramped up its use of lethal force against protesters. Myanmar's military Saturday launched the first air strikes.

— AFP



quick
BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	50,029.83 1.05
Nifty 50	14,867.40 1.20
S&P 500*	4,009.89 0.93
Dollar (₹)	73.11 0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.03 -0.26
Euro (₹)	85.99 -0.25
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,701,881 1.97
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.00 2.01
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.177 0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.679 -0.067

* As of 8:30 PM IST

No issues with
bulk messages,
asserts Trai

New Delhi: As bulk messages came into force, Trai asserted that no major disruptions were noticed for commercial messages and OTP generation in sectors such as banking, health-care and government services, and that issues were limited to "few" cases. Trai said reports from telecom indicated that "no major issues came to notice" and that "messages which are in accordance with regulations are getting delivered successfully".

Wipro to acquire
Oz's Ampion
for \$117 million

Wipro said it will acquire Ampion, an Australia-based provider of cyber security, DevOps and quality engineering services for \$117 million (about Rs 857 crore). The acquisition of Ampion is an important step for Wipro in this direction, and strengthens the commitment towards clients and stakeholders in Australia and New Zealand, Wipro said. The acquisition is expected to close in the June quarter.

Mastercard to put
\$100mn in Airtel
Africa's money biz

Airtel Africa on Thursday announced that Mastercard would invest \$100 million (about Rs 733 crore) in its wholly owned subsidiary Airtel Mobile Commerce BV (AMC). Mastercard would hold a minority stake in AMC on completion of the deal, with Airtel Africa continuing to hold the majority stake, an Airtel statement said. Sources said Mastercard would get about 3.75 per cent stake in the firm.

NSE reduces mkt
lot size for Nifty
50 derivatives

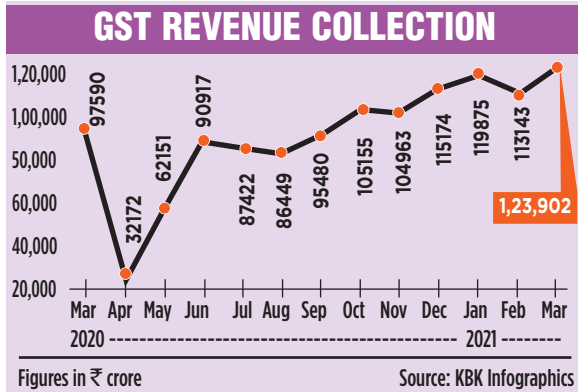
The NSE has slashed the market lot size for derivative contracts on Nifty 50, a move that will reduce the burden of excessive upfront margins for retail traders. The lot size has been reduced to 50 from the existing 75. The cut will reduce the margin requirements for futures trading by one-third, stockbroking firm Fyers CEO Tejas Khoday said. Currently, traders need about Rs 1,73,000 to trade one lot, he said.

Collection tops ₹1 L cr for 6th month in a row
GST mop-up hits record
₹1.23 lakh crore in March

**FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1**

In line with the trend of constant recovery in GST revenues over the past five months, the gross goods and services tax (GST) revenue collected in March 2021 stood at a record high of over Rs 1.23 lakh crore. The total revenues earned for the month are 27 per cent higher than the GST collected in the same month last year, according to finance ministry data released on Thursday.

"The gross GST revenue collected in the month of March 2021 is at a record of Rs 1,23,902 crore, of which CGST is Rs 22,973 crore, SGST is Rs 29,329 crore, IGST is Rs 62,842 crore



(including Rs 31,097 crore collected on import of goods) and Cess is Rs 8,757 crore (including Rs 935 crore collected on import of goods)," the ministry said.

The GST collections for March this year is the six consecutive month of revenue crossing Rs 1-lakh crore mark. The finance ministry said that a steep increasing trend over this

period is a clear indicator of a rapid economic recovery post-pandemic.

"The revenues from import of goods was at 70 per cent higher and the revenues from domestic transaction (including import of services) are 17 per cent higher than the revenues from these sources during the same month last year. The GST revenue witnessed growth rate of (-) 41 per cent, (-) 8 per cent, 8 per cent and 14 per cent in the first, second, third and fourth quarters of this financial year, respectively, as compared to the same period last year," it said.

The Centre has settled Rs 21,879 crore to CGST and Rs 17,230 crore to SGST.

Car sales rebound in March

**MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, APRIL 1**

Most carmakers in the country—such as Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Tata Motors, Kia Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Toyota Kirloskar Motors, Renault, Ford Motor, Honda Cars, MG Motor and Nissan Motor—on Thursday reported substantial year-on-year sales growth in March 2021 in comparison to the unusually low sales in March 2020 because of the lockdown.

These 11 of the 14 carmakers in India who control 99 per cent of India's domestic car market

clocked a 126 per cent jump in March sales to 3,15,946 units, up from 1,39,761 cars sold in March 2020 when the lockdown had begun to hit production.

Car sales have been improving in the last few months and March showed a substantial year-on-year growth.

Maruti Suzuki, which sells one car out of two bought in India, reported 91.76 per cent sales growth to 1,46,203 units last month compared to 76,240 units sold in March 2020.

Hyundai, the South Korean carmaker, clocked a 100 per cent rise in domestic sales during

March to 52,600 units as against 26,300 units sold in the same month last year.

Tata Motors, India's third biggest carmaker, recorded a 422 per cent increase at 29,654 units as compared to 5,676 units sold in March last year. This is the highest-ever sales in a month for the company in nine years. A total of 705 Nexon EVs were sold in March.

Korean brand Kia Motors logged a 123 per cent growth in volumes to 19,100 units against 8,583 units.

Sales at Mahindra & Mahindra, the SUV specialist, climbed 394 per cent to 16,700 units during the month against 3,383 units

sold in March last year.

Similarly, Toyota Kirloskar Motors posted a 114 per cent sales increase to 15,001 units as against 7,023 units, clocking the best monthly sales for it since 2013.

Sales at French car brand Renault also jumped 278 per cent at 12,356 units last month against 3,269 units sold in February last year.

Ford Motor India clocked 7,746 units sales in March, a growth of 120 per cent from 3,519 units.

Sales at Honda Cars India was up 92 per cent at 7,103 units versus 3,697 units. Its production in March was impacted due to a shortage of semiconductors.

Cathay, EFL Global
deliver vaccines
to South America

**FC BUREAU
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1**

The recent shipment of 1,00,000 Covid-19 vaccine doses that India delivered to Paraguay were sent from Hyderabad, aboard a Cathay Pacific cargo flight which carried the 10,000 vials of the vaccine. The shipment left from Hyderabad on March 26 on a cargo only passenger plane of Cathay Pacific.

The vaccines were stored between 2 and 8 degrees Celsius as mandated from the time of acceptance of the shipment to its delivery. According to the airlines, the shipment was first taken to Hong Kong, where it was transferred to a cargo freighter plane and then flown to Miami, USA, before the final leg of the journey to Paraguay in South America.

In a release, the airlines' regional general manager for South Asia, Middle East and Africa, Marck Sutch, said Cathay Pacific Cargo was happy to be able to support vaccine delivery during this crucial time. Our 'Vaccine Task Force' is well equipped to handle the shipments with utmost care."

Exports jump 58% to \$34 bn

**FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 1**

Exports increased by 58.23 per cent to \$34 billion in March on the back of healthy growth in key sectors like engineering, gems and jewellery and pharmaceuticals, provisional data from the commerce ministry showed.

Exports during April-March 2020-21, however, decreased by 7.4 per cent to



\$290.18 billion compared with \$313.36 billion in 2019-20. Imports during 2020-21 contracted by 18 per cent to \$388.92 billion compared with \$474.71 billion during 2019-20.

In March 2020, the

exports stood at \$21.49 billion, which was a decline of about 34 per cent over March 2019 due to the global slowdown.

"India's merchandise exports in March 2021 were \$34.0 billion as compared to \$21.49 billion in March 2020, an increase of 58.23 per cent," the ministry said in a statement.

It said that the "first time ever in a month" the exports crossed \$34 billion.

Salary income of Gulf
workers tax exempt: FM

New Delhi, April 1: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said salary income earned by non-resident Indians in the Gulf countries would continue to be exempt from tax in India.

Quoting a tweet of TMC MP Mahua Moitra, Sitharaman clarified that the Finance Act 2021 has not brought in any new or additional tax on Indian workers in Saudi/UAE/Oman/Qatar.

Earlier in the day, Moitra had tweeted a picture of an amendment in Finance Bill, 2021, saying the complicated words in the amendment is in reality a Special Gulf workers tax.

"FM going back on her words. Hardworking Indian workers in Saudi/UAE/Oman/Qatar to be taxed EXTRA," Moitra tweeted.

Sitharaman said the said amendment in the Finance Act, 2021, has

merely incorporated general definition of the term "liable to tax" in the Income Tax Act to provide clarity.

This amendment has not altered the taxability of salary income earned by non-resident Indian citizens in the Gulf countries. Their salary income earned in the Gulf countries would continue to be exempt in India, the Office of Finance Minister tweeted. —PTI

S&P 500 BREAKS ABOVE 4000-MARK
AS BULL MARKET BARRELS ON

**KATIE GREIFELD &
VILDANA HAJRIC
APRIL 1**

A revival in technology shares alongside budding optimism about the global recovery pushed the world's most important stock index past 4000 points for the first time.

The S&P 500 rallied as much as 0.7 per cent to a record as investors weighed President Joe Biden's newly unveiled \$2.25 trillion stimulus plan ahead of Friday's US employment report, which is expected to show the quickest pace of hiring in five months. While it took almost five years for the index to rise from the 2000 milestone to 3000 in July 2019, the latest

1000-point trip took about 21 months.

The S&P 500's recent climb has largely been built on a surge in energy and financial shares as the vaccine rollout picks up speed. That's pressured Treasury yields higher and boosted inflation expectations, sending cyclical stocks upward. However, a moderation in the bond sell-off's breakneck pace has breathed life back into tech stocks, the benchmark's biggest sector.

"The market at 4000 now is a much broader and better S&P 500 than it was at the peak of February 2020," said Arthur Hogan, chief market strategist at National Securities Corp. —Bloomberg

NIIF INVESTS ₹2,100 CR
IN MANIPAL HOSPITALS

**FC BUREAU
CHENNAI, APRIL 1**

The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund, an investment platform anchored by the Government of India, has invested Rs 2,100 crore in Bengaluru-based Manipal Hospitals. The investment through the NIIF Strategic Opportunities Fund is NIIF's first funding in the Indian healthcare sector.

Manipal operates 15 hospitals and the key focus is on tertiary and quaternary care. Last year, Manipal had acquired 100 per cent stake in Columbia Asia Hospitals for Rs 1,800 crore.

Demand for healthcare has been growing and this has been further accentuated in the backdrop of the pandemic.

TAFE'S MALLIKA
SRINIVASAN TO
SELECT PUBLIC
SECTOR HONCHOS

Mallika Srinivasan

New Delhi, April 1: Mallika Srinivasan, chairman and managing director of Tractors and Farm Equipment (Tafe) Limited, has been appointed as the chairperson of the Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB), an order issued by the personnel ministry on Thursday said.

This is the first time a private sector specialist has been appointed as the head of the PESB, responsible for appointment of top management posts in the Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), officials said.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Srinivasan as the chairperson of PESB for a period of three years from the date of assumption of charge, or until the attainment of the age of 65 years, it said.

Sailesh, a 1985-batch IAS officer, has been appointed as member, PESB. He is at present secretary, Department of Public Enterprises.

The PESB shall consist of one chairperson and three full-time members.

M. K. Gupta and Rear Admiral Shekhar Mital (ret'd) are its two serving members. —PTI

PE/VC funding
soars 85% in Q4

**SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, APRIL 1**

Private equity (PE) and venture capital (VC) investments in the March quarter was up 85 per cent against the pre-lockdown quarter of last year.

PE and VC firms invested over \$11.86 billion across 188 deals in the first three months of 2021—an increase of about 85 per cent compared to the same period in 2020, as per the data of Venture Intelligence. The pre-pandemic quarter of January-March 2020 had recorded PE/VC investments of \$6.5 billion across 238 deals.

The value of investments in the March quarter was also 58 per cent higher compared to the previous December quarter, which saw \$7.5 billion being invested across 231 deals. However, deal volumes were down by 21 per cent against the March quarter of last year and 19 per cent compared to the December quarter.

In the past few quarters, investments into Reliance Group entities have been pushing the aggregate funding to new

highs. In the June quarter, total investments had touched \$13.95 billion and in the September quarter it stood at \$11.87 billion. However in the March quarter, there were no investments into the group.

Piramal Enterprises winning the bankruptcy bid for Dewan Housing Finance for \$5.2 billion was the largest deal in the quarter. Some of the tech unicorns like Zomato and Byjus attracted \$500 million and \$460 million, respectively, in the quarter.

"The high level of fund flows during the last quarter, coming as they did without any investments into Reliance Industries Group companies, is very encouraging. It would be interesting to see how the investment figures in the coming quarters match up against the high bar set by RIL Group deals which had dominated the last three quarters of 2020," said Arun Natarajan, founder of Venture Intelligence.

Exits too were active in the March quarter, as there were eight successful domestic IPOs of PE-VC backed companies.

US MFG SECTOR
INDEX RACES
TO 37-YEAR
HIGH IN MARCH

**LUCIA MUTIKANI
APRIL 1**

A measure of US manufacturing activity soared to its highest level in more than 37 years in March, driven by strong growth in new orders, the clearest sign yet that a much anticipated economic boom was probably underway.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) said on Thursday its index of national factory activity jumped to a reading of 64.7 last month from 60.8 in February. That was the highest level since December 1983.

A reading above 50 indicates expansion in manufacturing, which accounts for 11.9 per cent of the US economy. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the index rising to 61.3 in March. The year-long pandemic has boosted demand for goods.

Economic growth is expected take off this year, juiced up by the White House's massive \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package and the reopening of nonessential businesses as more Americans are vaccinated against the coronavirus.

The relief package passed last month is sending additional \$1,400 checks to qualified households and extending the government safety net for the unemployed through September 6. Households have also accumulated about \$19 trillion in excess savings, which are expected to fuel pent-up demand.

President Joe Biden on Wednesday unveiled a plan to spend roughly \$2 trillion on infrastructure like roads and bridges over 10 years. —Reuters

Suez Canal crisis: Egypt may
seek \$1 bn in compensation

seek compensation from.

"This is the right of the country," Rabie said, adding that the incident hurt Egypt's reputation. "This country should get its due."

The 400-metre-long Ever Given ship ran aground on March 23 in the southern part of the canal and was freed on Monday.

Taiwan's Evergreen Marine Corp, the vessel's

charterer, said on Thursday it's not responsible for delays of any cargo it was transporting.

Evergreen's agreements with clients don't guarantee arrival time of cargoes, said president Eric Hsieh, in the company's first briefing since the blockage.

The ship and its cargo, which Rabie said were worth \$3.5 billion, is currently in the Great Bitter Lake, roughly halfway along the canal.

Rabie said they could be held in Egypt if the matter of compensation went to court. Such a scenario is unlikely, he said, because Egypt has a long relationship with the ship owner. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Female lifter fails
dope test, axed

New Delhi: A woman weightlifter, who was part of the ongoing national camp at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala, has been provisionally suspended after testing positive for banned substance. The weightlifter, a national record holder and who has participated in several international tournaments including the Commonwealth Championship where she won gold, was set to be a part of the Indian team for the Asian Championship to be held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan from April 16 to 25. "Yes, she has failed a dope test. The report came about 10-15 days back," a source in the Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWLF) confirmed. Taking a break from the national camp, the weightlifter went home in October last year when national coach Vijay Sharma and star lifter Mirabai Chanu had travelled to the United States. After she returned to the camp, her sample was collected by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) in November last. The weightlifter had allegedly consumed a supplement that contained the prohibited substance. — PTI

Ex-Olympian guilty
of drug smuggling

Brisbane: Former two-time Olympic silver medalist canoeist Nathan Baggeley and his younger brother have been found guilty of plotting to smuggle 200 million Australian dollars (\$150 million) worth of cocaine into Australia. The 45-year-old Baggeley and his 39-year-old brother Dru were charged with attempting to import 650 kilograms of cocaine in 2018. After about eight hours of deliberating, a Brisbane Supreme Court jury found both men guilty on Thursday. Nathan Baggeley won two canoeing silver medals at the 2004 Athens Olympics and also was a three-time world champion. But his career was tarnished with drug scandals testing positive for banned steroids in 2005 and also being jailed with Dru Baggeley 10 years later for his role in a drug manufacturing syndicate. The Baggeley brothers will be sentenced on a date yet to be decided by the court. — AP

Telangana draw
a blank in cycling

Hyderabad: Telangana failed to win even a single medal at the 72nd Senior, 49th National & 35th Sub-Junior National Track Cycling Championship that concluded at SATS Velodrome in Osmania University, Hyderabad, on Wednesday. It was a major embarrassment for the hosts, who had fielded 42 athletes, none of whom could make the podium in the 44 events that were part of the championships in which 552 players from 24 states participated. Officials presenting medals was the closest locals could get to the podiums. However, the meet saw 14 records being broken. Records fell in the Men's Elite Team Sprint (Manipur), Men's Elite Sprint ESOW (Andaman and Nicobar), Team Pursuit (SSCB), Individual Pursuit (Anil Manglawar from RSPB) and 1 km Time Trial (Amarjeet Singh, Punjab), Women's Elite Individual Pursuit (Swasti Singh), Team Pursuit (RSPB). The Junior Men broke four records while the Junior Women and Sub-Juniors Boys beat one record each.

20 players in lead
at Senior chess

Hyderabad: International Master Rahul Srivatsav is sharing the lead with 19 others after Round Three of the Telangana State Senior Fide Rated Chess Championship being organised by the Telangana State Chess Association at the Lal Bahadur Stadium here. Top seeds Bharat Kumar Reddy Poluri, Kheerthi Ganta, Krishna Karthik N, Sushanth Kamabathula, Karyasheel P, Rajsekhar B, Shaati Majumder, and Md Bashiq Imrose are among leaders who have three points each. **Third round (selected results):** Gudla Shanth Kumar (2) lost to Rahul Srivatsav (3), Bharat Kumar Reddy Poluri (3) bt Mahendar (2), Teerthala Abhinav (2.5) drew with Raghav Srivathsav (2.5), Aditya Varun Gampa (3) bt Surya Alakanti (2).

Live on TV

CRICKET

South Africa vs Pakistan: First ODI from 1.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

LIONS ON PROWL

After last year's low, there is lot to gain for CSK

Chennai, April 1: The return of Suresh Raina could boost the batting department but spin-reliant Chennai Super Kings will have to adapt to conditions which may assist pacers as they seek to improve upon their nightmarish show of last season. Three-time champions CSK had a flop show last season, avoiding the wooden spoon thanks to a few victories at the back-end of the league phase as they failed to make the play-offs for the first time in the tournament's history. CSK have oodles of experience, which will stand them in good stead in crucial situations. The inspirational leadership of Dhoni is another advantage for the team. The return of Raina will strengthen the batting unit which faltered far too often in last year's IPL in the UAE.

A batting line-up of Raina, along with Faf du Plessis, Dhoni, Ambati Rayudu, Ravindra Jadeja, Sam Curran, new recruit Moeen Ali and fast improving Ruturaj Gaikwad could prove a handful for rival bowling attacks and big scores could set the platform for the bowlers to do their job.

With the likes of Lungi Ngidi, Shardul Thakur, Curran, Deepak Chahar in the line-up, CSK have a decent bowling unit. A team comprising ageing stars proved CSK's undoing last season and they have stuck pretty much to the core squad. In the fast-paced world of T20s, senior stars could prove to be a handicap. — PTI



CSK skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Suresh Raina (left) share light moment in this photo.

— Twitter

Hazlewood pulls out of IPL

Melbourne, April 1: Australia and Chennai Super Kings fast bowler Josh Hazlewood has pulled out of the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League to take a small break from cricket and keep himself fresh for the Ashes and the T20 World Cup later this year. Hazlewood was to depart with other Australia's IPL-bound players and join CSK but decided to skip the cash-rich league,

which will start on April 9 and go on till May 30, and spend time at home for the next two months.

"It's been a long 10 months in bubbles and quarantine at different times, so I decided to have a rest from cricket and spend some time at home and in Australia in the next two months," Hazlewood was quoted as saying by *cricket.com.au*. "We've got a big winter ahead. The West Indies is

going to be a long tour, with Bangladesh (T20 tour) potentially thrown on the end of that. Then potentially the T20 World Cup leading into the Ashes, so it's a big 12 months.

"As it always is with Australia, and I want to give myself the best chance to be mentally and physically ready for that," he added.

He follows Josh Philippe (RCB) and Mitchell Marsh

(SRH) in withdrawing from the IPL, while some other Australians may consider opting out also, according to the report.

Hazlewood has been under restrictions from July last year before leaving for England with Australia's limited-overs team where he was in strict bio-secure lockdown before heading to the UAE for the IPL where again safety protocols were tight. — PTI

IPL WILL BE A
HUGE BENEFIT
TO US: STOKES

Mumbai, April 1: The increased participation of English players in the IPL, where there is constant pressure to perform, will benefit them during the T20 World Cup to be held in India later this year, reckons star all-rounder Ben Stokes.

This year, there are 14 England cricketers contracted to play IPL, Eoin Morgan, Jos Buttler, Stokes, Johnny Bairstow, Moeen Ali, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Sam Billings, Liam Livingstone and Dawid Malan.

"Yes — the percentage of English players in the IPL has probably grown in the last five or so years," Stokes told *Sky Sports*.

"Not only is that great for the individual but it is also great for the players involved in the England set-up; it gives them experience in the most high-profile competition in the world but not only that — you are under constant pressure to perform," he added.

"You've got billions of people watching you and you've got the pressure of the franchise on you."

"Being constantly exposed to that is a huge benefit to us as a team, especially with the T20 World Cup coming up at the end of the year in India; it's a great chance for the English guys to get more experience in these conditions," Stokes said. — PTI

Germans beaten
in Cup qualifier

Paris, April 1: Germany suffered a stunning 2-1 home loss to North Macedonia in World Cup qualifying on Wednesday, while defending champions France edged Bosnia and Herzegovina 1-0 and England beat a Poland side missing the injured Robert Lewandowski.

Napoli midfielder Eljif Elmas secured a famous victory for North Macedonia in Duisburg, scoring five minutes from time to give his country a second win from three Group 'J' matches.

Veteran striker Goran Pandev, 37, put the visitors in front just before half-time but Ilkay Gundogan levelled from the spot after Leroy Sane was fouled in the area. Timo Werner missed a glorious chance after coming off the bench, and Elmas condemned the four-time world champions to a first defeat in qualifying for the global showpiece since 2001 when he steered in a cut-back from Arijan Ademir.

GRIEZMANN STARS
FOR FRANCE

Antoine Griezmann scored the only goal of the game in Sarajevo as France recorded a second away win in four days over Bosnia following their 2-0

● **North Macedonia stunned four-time World Cup winners Germany 2-1, their first defeat in a World Cup qualifying match for 20 years.**

success in Kazakhstan at the weekend. After being held 1-1 at home by Ukraine in their opening game on the road to the 2022 finals in Qatar, France are now in a strong position at the top of Group 'D'.

Harry Maguire struck a late winner for England as the 2018 World Cup semifinalists overcame Poland 2-1 at Wembley. Harry Kane put England ahead with a first-half penalty after a foul on Raheem Sterling, but a mistake by John Stones allowed Poland to level through Jakub Moder.

WINS FOR SPAIN
AND ITALY

Goals from Dani Olmo, Ferran Torres and second-half substitute Gerard Moreno lifted Spain to a 3-1 victory over Kosovo and top of Group 'B'.

Italy defeated Lithuania 2-0 in Vilnius with Ciro Immobile adding a stoppage-time penalty for the Azzurri. — AFP



North Macedonia's Goran Pandev (right) is congratulated by his teammates after scoring his side's first goal against Germany during their World Cup 2022 qualifying match in Duisburg, Germany, on Wednesday. — AP

THE RESULTS

North Macedonia (Pandev 45+2, Elmas 85)	2	Italy (Stefano Sensi 48, Ciro Immobile 90+4-pen)	2
Germany (Gundogan 63-pen)	1	Lithuania	0
England (Kane 19-pen, Maguire 85)	2	France (Griezmann 60)	1
Poland (Moder 58)	1	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0
Spain (Olmo 34, Torres 36, Moreno 75)	3	Georgia (Khvicha Kvaratskhelia 78)	1
Kosovo (Halimi 70)	1	Greece (Kakabadze 76-og)	1

NAOMI SURRENDERS TO SAKKARI,
MEDVEDEV ALSO IS OUT OF MIAMI

Miami, April 1: Top-seeded Daniil Medvedev crashed out of the Miami Open Wednesday on a day of upsets that also saw Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka ousted from the quarterfinals.

Seventh-seeded Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut beat Medvedev 6-4, 6-2, for his third win in as many meetings with the Russian who was runner-up to Novak Djokovic at the Australian

Open and ascended to No. 2 in the world with his victory at Marseille in March.

Women's world No. 2 Naomi Osaka — seeded second behind Ashleigh Barty in the prestigious ATP Masters and WTA hardcourt tournament — had bowed out hours earlier, the Japanese star's 23-match winning streak coming to a crashing halt with a 0-6, 4-6 loss to Greece's Maria Sakkari. — AFP

Virat, AB arrive in Chennai

Chennai, April 1: India and Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Virat Kohli reached here on Thursday to join his IPL squad before which he will undergo a seven-day quarantine.

The team has already started its training camp on Tuesday for the upcoming season which begins on April 9. "Captain Virat Kohli has arrived in Chennai," RCB said, announcing Kohli's arrival in a tweet, along with a picture of their captain wearing a mask.

RCB face defending champions Mumbai Indians in the tournament opener on April 9 here.

Kohli, who has been with the RCB since the inception of the IPL in 2008, quit the bio-bubble in Pune on Monday after India's ODI series win against England.

He has been part of bio-secure bubbles since the end of January, ahead of the England series, and was part of each of the four Tests, five T20 Internationals and three ODIs.

Another key RCB player and South African star batsman A B de Villiers also joined the RCB bio-bubble on Thursday.

"The spaceship has landed! AB de Villiers has joined the RCB bubble in Chennai," the RCB tweeted.

The 37-year-old batting great has been a key player for the team since he joined the franchise in 2011.

Head coach Simon Katich also came out of quarantine, along with pacer Navdeep Saini as the RCB team underwent another practice session.

UMESH READY TO HIT
THE DECK FOR DC

Out of mandatory seven-day quarantine, India and Delhi Capitals fast bowler Umesh Yadav is ready to hit the deck as he returns to be with the familiar faces at his old franchise in the Indian Premier League, beginning on April 9.

The 33-year-old Yadav,

who started his IPL career with the Delhi franchise, returned to the side after being acquired for his base price of ₹1 crore in the auction in February.

"After being in quarantine for one week, it was great to step onto the ground and spend some time with the boys," Yadav said.

"I just want to do well whenever I have the ball in my hand. I will definitely give my best for my team and keep getting better everyday," he said in a DC release.

Yadav, who has picked up 119 wickets in 121 IPL matches, said he felt at home in the Delhi Capitals camp. — PTI

Karteek & Arnav
doubles champsDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

G. Sai Karteek Reddy of Telangana partnered Arnav Pathange of Karnataka to win the doubles title, beating the top two seeds along the way, at the All India National Ranking tennis tournament being held at Lakeview Tennis Academy in Hyderabad.

In the finals, Karteek and Arnav dished out their best game to topple top seeds Ishan Hussain and Irfan Hussain of Tamil Nadu in straight sets at 7-5, 6-3.

Both teams went toe-to-toe in the first set and slugged it out for points before Karteek & Arnav clinched it at 7-5. Buoyed by the lead, they turned up heat in the second to go full throttle before sealing it at 6-3 and with it, the title.

Earlier in the semifinals, Karteek & Arnav sailed past Kavin Masilamani & Hitesh of Tamil Nadu 6-2, 6-3.

In the quarterfinals, the winners saw off second seeds K. S. Dheeraj & Ribhav Kiran of Karnataka in straight sets, 6-2, 6-4.



G. Sai Karteek Reddy (left) of Telangana and Arnav Pathange of Karnataka pose with their trophies after winning the doubles title at the All India National Ranking tennis tournament being held at Lakeview Tennis Academy in Hyderabad.

Laxmi-Rithika best pair;
Hrishik-Dhiraj also winDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, APRIL 1

Laxmi Siri Dandu & Rithika Kakarlamudi and Hrishik Vavilapally & Dhiraj Reddy emerged winners of the girls and boys doubles events respectively at the AITA Championship Series Under 16 tournament at Sania Mirza Tennis Academy in Murtuzaguda, Hyderabad, on Thursday.

In the girls final, Laxmi &

Rithika defeated Yashasri & Sreemanya in straight sets 6-0, 6-1. Hrishik & Dhiraj were stretched by Nikhil D'Souza & P. Sandilya before clinching the boys title round with a 6-4, 3-6, 11-9 scoreline.

THE RESULTS

■ **Girls U-16 doubles final:** Laxmi Siri Dandu/ Rithika Kakarlamudi bt Yashasri P/ Sreemanya A 6-0, 6-1.

■ **Boys U-16 doubles final:** Hrishik Vavilapally/ Dhiraj

Reddy bt Nikhil D'Souza/ P. Sandilya 6-4, 3-6, 11-9. **Semifinals:** Harshik Vavilapally/ Dhiraj Reddy bt G. Yashwanth/ Trishant Reddy 6-2, 3-6, 10-5; Nikhil D'Souza/ P. Sandilya bt T. Sri Pranav/ Rohan Sriram 3-6, 6-1, 10-6.

■ **Boys U-16 singles semifinals:** Chris Hamilton bt Harsha Perla 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7-5); T. Sri Pranav bt P. Sandilya 6-4, 6-4.

■ **Girls U-16 semifinals:** Rithika Kakarlamudi bt G. Hansika 7-5, 6-2; M. Manogyna bt Pushti Laddha 6-4, 6-4.