

NATION 5
POLITICAL STORM ERUPTS AFTER 5 KILLED
DURING BENGAL POLL, INCLUDING...**MONEY 6**
INDIA NEEDS TO GROW FASTER TO MAKE
UP FOR CONTRACTION DURING COVID-19

HYDERABAD, SUNDAY APRIL 11, 2021; PAGES 10+16 ₹5

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ALL-CIVILIAN
SPACEFLIGHT
CREW READY
WITH
TICKETS...

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FAST & FURIOUS

Covid 2.0 is spreading 5 times faster in Telangana state

Daily caseload may touch 10,000, cases are increasing
at an average rate of 222 per day since April 1NAVEENA GHANATE
HYDERABAD

Telangana State reported 181 cases of coronavirus on March 9. In just a month, i.e. as of April 9, the number of daily cases touched 2,909. This represents a five-fold

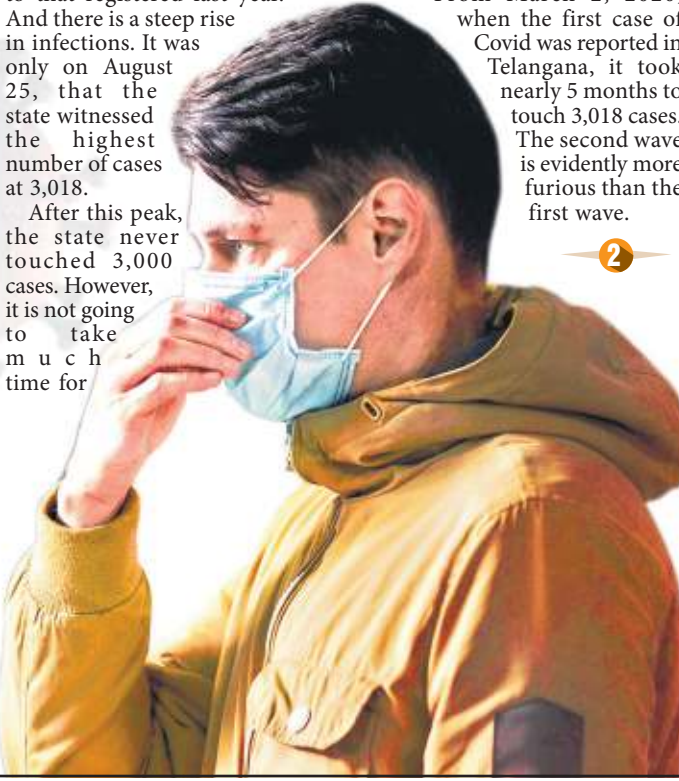
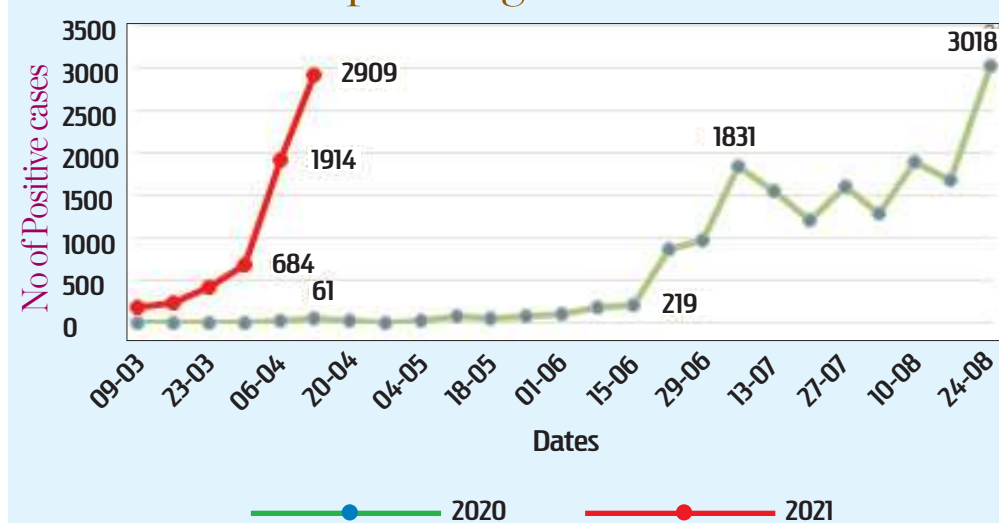
increase in the intensity of the Coronavirus infection, compared to that registered last year.

And there is a steep rise in infections. It was only on August 25, that the state witnessed the highest number of cases at 3,018.

After this peak, the state never touched 3,000 cases. However, it is not going to take much time for

the caseload to eventually cross that of the first wave peak. From March 2, 2020, when the first case of Covid was reported in Telangana, it took nearly 5 months to touch 3,018 cases. The second wave is evidently more furious than the first wave.

Coronavirus is spreading 5x faster in second wave

**BENGAL POLLS**

Four killed as CISF open fire after attacked

PNS ■ KOLKATA

In the first major outbreak of violence during West Bengal Assembly elections, five persons were killed, including four in a firing by CISF personnel, while five candidates were attacked during the fourth phase of polling in 44 seats on Saturday.

Four people were killed as central forces opened fire allegedly after coming under attack from locals, who 'attempted to snatch their rifles', in West Bengal's Cooch Behar district, police said.

The Election Commission ordered stopping the voting exercise at polling station number 126 of the Sitalkuchi constituency



where the incident happened when polling was underway.

Identical 'car' symbols; tension to TRS again

K VENKATESHWARLU
HYDERABAD

It appears as if the Telangana Rashtra Samiti can never avoid tension over symbols clashing with its 'car' symbol at the hustings. At least three symbols - those of tractor, chapathi maker and road roller - look almost similar to its car symbol and hence may negatively impact its prospects in the upcoming Nagarjuna Sagar by-elections.

The party is under the impression that it had lost the Dubbak by-

elections to BJP mainly because of symbols that were similar to the pink party's car symbol. Now, even in the Nagarjuna Sagar polls symbols almost identical to that of car have been allotted to independents, giving TRS leaders sleepless nights.

The Election Commission is using two EVMs as there are 48 contestants in the fray. In the first EVM itself, the symbols identical to that of 'car' are those tractor, chapathi maker and road roller.

Telangana has vax for 3 days, seeks 30L doses from Centre

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a letter addressed to Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan, Telangana Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar on Saturday requested the Centre for allotment of 30 lakh doses of vaccine to Telangana for the coming 15 days as the present stocks of 5.66 lakh doses would last for three days maximum.

Somesh Kumar said since the Covid-19 vaccine has been ramped up in the State and owing to concerted efforts, the number of vaccinations given in the state in one day on Friday crossed 1.15 lakh doses. It would be enhanced to over two lakh doses per day in the coming days. Hence, the state requires 30 lakh doses for the next 15 days, the



Chief Secretary added.

Over 16.08 lakh people in the state have received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine while over 2.90 lakh got their second shot also as of April 9. The state has 17,791 active cases and over 1.11 lakh samples were tested on Friday.

Over 16.08 lakh people in the state have received their first dose of Covid vaccine while over 2.90 lakh got their second shot also as of April 9

Cumulatively, over 1.08 crore samples have been tested. The samples tested per million population was over 2.92 lakh, the bulletin said. The case fatality rate in the state was 0.54 per cent, while it was 1.3 per cent at the national level.

The recovery rate in Telangana was 93.96 per cent, while it was 90.8 per cent in the country.

Cops fight shy of checks against drunken driving

Team up with bars, pubs, wine shops instead!

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

After a long, corona-induced gap, police checks for drunken driving have resumed on Hyderabad roads, compounding the problems of cops who have always had a tough time taming tipsy drivers and answering those stopped on mere suspicion of drunken driving. So, it appears, the police have reconciled themselves to a better alternative: team up with bars, pubs and wine shops to put down drunken driving!

Given certain unseemly incidents of clashes and confrontation between cops and tipsy drivers reported in the past, the larger question is: Are the police officials really interested in conducting the breathalyzer tests in Hyderabad? Or, are they scared of tipplers, considering the ones who have previously given a tough



time to officials conducting drunk and drive checks?

Recently, a drunken man gave tense moments to traffic cops as he threatened to jump off a flyover.



INSURANCE SCAM ED raids Nayani son-in-law house

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Enforcement Directorate authorities started conducting raids at various places in the twin cities on Saturday in connection with the 'ESI scam'. The raids have been going on since morning at 10 places across the city.

The authorities searched the houses of Srinivas Reddy, son-in-law of late former minister Nayani Narasimha Reddy, Mukunda Reddy, former principal secretary of Nayani Narasimha Reddy, and the other accused, including Devika Rani.

Three held for online fraud

PNS ■ MEDCHAL-MALKAJGIRI

Sleuths of the Rachakonda Cybercrime wing on Saturday arrested three persons in Bengaluru for committing online frauds and cheating people via fake apps, after having created and registered fake companies.

The police acted on the basis of a complaint lodged by a resident of Hayathnagar on February 24.

The complainant received a WhatsApp message from a Hong



Kong number giving information about an investment and online trading app 'Winbiz'. The complainant, a woman, was told that

the app would help her make huge profits. She was asked to download the app.

Later, she was added to a WhatsApp group by 'Strategy Team' with group admin mobile numbers, which were found to be from Hong Kong. On February 25, she recharged for an amount of Rs 20,000 in the Winbiz app and showed interest to participate in trading up to Rs 30,000.

Centre has mismanaged Covid, vaccine supply: Sonia

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi accused the Centre on Saturday of "mismanaging" the COVID situation and creating a vaccine shortage in the country by exporting it, as she called for cancelling all public gatherings and poll rallies in view of the rising number of coronavirus cases.

Addressing a virtual meeting with the chief ministers of the Congress-ruled states and ministers of the party in states where it is in power in alliance with others, she said the priority should be to test, track and vaccinate.

Eatala seeks pvt medical colleges' cooperation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Health Minister Eatala Rajender has said that the state government will provide required equipment and drugs free of cost to private medical colleges and urged them to treat Covid-19 patients, especially the poor, on humanitarian grounds, without troubling them for bills. He asked private medical colleges to provide beds for treatment of Covid patients and cooperate with the government.

The Minister held a meeting with managements of private medical colleges here on Saturday to discuss



treatment of Covid patients, bed charges in private medical college hospitals,



IMF, World Bank urged to ensure timely delivery of vax

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TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Magha & Shukla Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi : Amavasya: Full Night

Nakshatram: Uttara Bhadrapada: 08:57 am

Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)

Rahukalam: 04:55 pm - 06:27 pm

Yamagandam: 12:17 pm - 01:49 pm

Varjyam: 10:13 pm - 11:59 pm

Gulika: 03:22 pm - 04:55 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritkalam: NIL

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:52 am - 12:41 pm

HYDERABAD

WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny

Temp: 38/22

Humidity: 32%

Sunrise: 06:08 am

Sunset: 06:29 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated April 4, 2021 5:00 PM

OBTUSE ANGLE



Take Covid vaccine jab, get biryani free

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Even as vaccination against Coronavirus is on at full swing across the country, there are still some who are reluctant to take the jab despite the dramatic spike in the number of people getting infected daily. Efforts are being made by doctors, leaders and influencers to convince such people to get vaccinated and help in arresting the spread of the virus.

Doing their bit, some hotels, restaurants and bars are offering schemes like 'beer and biryani free' to those who have got themselves vaccinated. These eateries see such



offers as win-win; not only they are promoting their business, they are also doing some social service. Recently, a company from Andhra Pradesh has

come up with an offer 'Biryani Free' for those who have been vaccinated.

As part of the vaccination drive, the company - 'Hello Kitchen' has

announced that it would provide free biryani to those who have been vaccinated any time between April 11 to April 14.

The free biryani offer would be available at the company's Vizianagaram and Kakinada branches, according to the announcement made on social media. However, conditions apply—the biryani is offered free only if the receipt shows that the vaccine has been taken. Also, the offer stands for the first 100 people. While not all hopefuls may get the free biryani, the eatery has got what it wanted—some positive publicity.

HC backs Govt over curb on Vakeel Saab movie ticket price

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Saturday refused to accept the argument put forth by the distributors of the Pawan Kalyan starrer 'Vakeel Saab' on the ticket price hike. A division bench of the High Court amended the order issued by the single bench restricting the ticket hike and allowed it till Saturday only.

Will Jagan place curbs on Chiru’s film *Acharya* too?

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
■ VIJAYAWADA

Will Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy apply the same yardstick to Megastar Chiranjeevi’s film *Acharya* that is slated to be released in May as the ones he had applied to Vakeel Saab.

The AP Government has denied permission to screen benefit shows and hike the ticket prices, and this has led to allegations that this was done since Pawan Kalyan is at loggerheads with Jagan politically.

What is in store for Acharya has stirred up a lot of interest among political circles.

It is pertinent to note that Chiranjeevi has been praising Jaganmohan Reddy’s policies from the beginning, while Pawan Kalyan is among the Chief Minister’s harshest critics.

In fact, Pawan Kalyan has even termed some of the YSRCP MLAs as ‘goons’.

In this backdrop, the YSRCP government denied permission to screen benefit shows of Vakeel Saab and sell the film tickets at a higher price. The producers of the film moved the AP High Court to get an order in their favour. However, Joint Collectors threatened to cancel theatre licenses if they

were found to be selling tickets at prices higher than that fixed by the government.

YSRCP’s ‘vindictive’ attitude towards Pawan Kalyan’s film was condemned by all political outfits. In fact, TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu has accused the YSRCP government of deriving sadistic pleasure by placing curbs on Vakeel Saab taking advantage of his power.

The BJP government at the Centre has condemned the restrictions placed on the film.

BJP AP unit in-charge Sunil Deodhar went to the film theatre screening Vakeel Saab in Tirupati on Saturday and raised a hue and cry over the curbs on the film.

YSRCP rebel MP Raghu Ramakrishnam Raju has raised the point whether the YSRCP government would place the same restrictions on Chiranjeevi’s film? Acharya is set to hit screens on May 13 and has succeeded in generating a lot of expectations among the audience.

The fact is that Jagan has no rivalry with Chiranjeevi.

Moreover, Chiranjeevi has close ties with Jagan right from the beginning. Earlier, his family went to Vijayawada in a special flight to have lunch with the CM. Later, Chiranjeevi supported the three-capital

formula of Jagan. More recently, Chiranjeevi thanked Jagan for having waived the dues from various theatres.

During the lockdown, led by Chiranjeevi, some bigwigs of Tollywood industry including Nagarjuna, some actors and producers called on Jagan.

As far as film industry matters are concerned, right from the beginning Nagarjuna and Chiranjeevi have been maintaining cordial relations with the CM.

In fact, the Telugu states have been taking positive steps with regard to Chiranjeevi’s films. Most importantly, the government of Telangana has close ties with film heroes and producers. The bigwigs of the film industry have good contacts with Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao, Minister KT Rama Rao, Minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav and MP Santosh.

The film industry bigwigs have been attending all activities arranged by MP Santosh. KCR has been giving top priority to Chiranjeevi family right from the beginning. KCR facilitates increasing ticket fare and conducting benefit shows.

On polling day for the Telangana Legislative Council, Pawan Kalyan declared his support to TRS MLC candidate Vani Devi. Therefore, there

were no curbs placed on his Vakeel Saab in Telangana. Similarly, there will be no curbs on Chiranjeevi’s films in Andhra.

A YSRCP MLA said that Jagan is angry with Pawan Kalyan but not with his elder brother Chiranjeevi. Hence, there will be no problems from the government for Acharya.

But, it is not easy to fathom what is going across the mind of Jagan. Therefore, there would be no surprise if he placed curbs on Chiranjeevi’s films because of the current criticism. Several Kapu MLAs and leaders of YSRCP say that because of curbs on Vakeel Saab they are not able to pacify the irate youth brigades of Kapus especially in East and West Godvri, Krishna and Guntur districts. They say that the Kapus in these districts are treating them as their arch rivals. Unable to digest the governmental restrictions on Pawan Kalyan’s film, the Kapu youth have been exerting pressure on MLAs and leaders of the community, they said.

he have no alternative except following the diktat of the party. But at the same time they are not in a position to sever ties with Kapus in their constituencies, they said adding that they are in a dilemma.

HC backs Govt over curb on...

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Subsequently from Sunday, the ticket price shall be as per the state government norms and no hike shall be allowed. However, for tickets sold online, the price hike shall be till Sunday.

It may be noted that the High Court had earlier stayed the orders of the Government restricting special shows and ticket price hikes for the movie.

In an unprecedented move, a midnight GO on ticket prices was issued by the Government. The next day, the High Court allowed the theatres to continue the sale of tickets with hiked prices for the weekend and said that the next hearing would be on Monday.

BP Acharya appointed as advisor of NARF BR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has appointed BP Acharya Retired Special Chief Secretary and director general of Dr Marri Channa Reddy Human Resource Development Institute of Telangana as the advisor for their important national project National Animal Resource Facility for Bio medical Research (NARF BR), coming up on 100 acres in Genome valley near Shamirpet. This is in recognition of his efforts to create the world class life sciences cluster in Genome valley and his contribution to the sector. This project with an investment of Rs 300 crore will cater to the pharma and biopharma / vaccine industry in the country for pre clinical animal trials.

Run campaigns to increase cultivation of red gram, cotton, oilseed: Niranjan

ML MELLY MAITREYI
■ HYDERABAD

Agriculture department should consistently give a message to the farming community through the Agriculture officers to bring down the extent of paddy cultivation and opt for crops with demand in the market, said Agriculture Minister S Niranjan Reddy.

Addressing a virtual meeting with Agriculture officers of all districts, department officials and seed company representatives from his camp office at Minister’s Quarters here on Saturday, Niranjan Reddy said that the Chief Minister instructed that the message to reduce paddy cultivation should be conveyed in every meeting at the field level to bring awareness among the farmers.

Instead of cultivating paddy which has become surplus in the country, farmers should be

encouraged to opt for red gram, cotton and oilseeds cultivation.

A target should be set to cultivate red gram in 20 lakh acres and cotton in 75 lakh acres in the ensuing monsoon season. A district-wise survey be undertaken on cotton cultivation and an action plan should be submitted to the government, he said.

Steps should be taken to ensure that the seed companies make oil seeds available to the farmers easily.

He instructed the officers to ensure that 170 lakh packets of cotton seeds through 57 cotton seed companies were kept ready in time. A vigil should be kept for fake cotton seed companies.

Similarly, for red gram cultivation in 20 lakh acres, 80,000 quintals of red gram seed should be kept ready through State and National seed development agencies, agricultural

university, and other private companies.

For the first time quality seeds with QR code and seed traceability features were being provided to farmers in time. Overall 22 lakh quintals of seeds for cultivation of various crops in 90 lakh acres would be procured and the seeds would be made available at the district level by May 15, he said.

The Minister said task force teams would be deployed and those indulging in irregularities would be booked under the PD Act, he said.

The area under cultivation was increasing every year due to pro-agriculture policies of the government, free power supply, Rythu Bandhu investment assistance, Rythu Bhima and irrigation facilities. However, farmers should be educated to cultivate crops which have demand in the national and international markets.

FAST & FURIOUS

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The next four weeks have been marked as critical, and if the infection spreads at this rate, the number of cases will easily cross 10,000 per day.

If even the rate of increase witnessed in April every day sustains for next four weeks, the state could be reporting close to 10,000 cases per day. The cases have been increasing at an average rate of 222 per day since April 1, calculated based on data provided in a health bulletin.

The spike in cases can also be attributed to the higher testing levels in the second wave, compared to those in the first wave. The state, for the first time on Friday, conducted 1 lakh tests - something which never happened last year. Health Minister Eatala Rajender said on Saturday, "Even though cases are increasing faster than previous year and the spread is increasing, infection severity has reduced. The fatality rate is less. The Government will work 24/7 to control the

spread and any eventuality".

The Minister added that, given the experience over the past one year, results due to wearing masks would be better than imposing lockdown to control the spread of coronavirus. He advised people not to go to gatherings in the name of pilgrimage, public address, and functions. He urged that every house should turn into Ayurvedic hospital like last year and people should take healthy food, apart from following Covid norms.

Identical ‘car’ symbols; tension to TRS again

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It may be recalled that the winner in the Dubbak by-elections, M Raghunandan Rao, had secured 63,352 votes (38.47 per cent) and TRS candidate S Sujatha got 62,273 votes (37.82 per cent) and the difference between the two candidates was only 0.65 per cent. TRS party working president KT Ramarao then conceded defeat, but said the result was an alarm bell for the party and its leaders. The Election in-charge Minister T Harish Rao took complete responsibility for the party’s

defeat. However, some TRS party leaders alleged that some of the TRS voters had mistakenly voted for an independent candidate whose election symbol was identical to the TRS’ car symbol. While an independent was allotted a ‘chapati maker’ symbol, many alleged that the symbol on the EVM machine was similar to that of the car on the EVM. So, TRS local leaders in Dubbaka constituency alleged that TRS votes in some mandals went to the independent due to confusion. One independent candidate, Bandaru Nagaraju, secured 3,570 votes. Those

votes became controversial as some TRS leaders claimed those votes as their votes. Nagaraju had got 3,510 votes through EVM and another 60 votes through postal votes. Whereas all other independent candidates had got single-digit votes in postal votes and a few votes through EVMs.

TRS leaders claimed that those votes of independent Nagaraju originally belonged to the TRS. As the majority of BJP was just 1,118 votes, TRS local leaders claimed that the party lost due to the allotment of symbols that look almost identical.

Centre has mismanaged Covid,vaccine ...

Continued on Page 1

She was reviewing the efforts by the states ruled by the Congress to tackle the second wave of the coronavirus infection after the country saw a record 1,45,384 fresh COVID-19 cases and 794 deaths on Saturday.

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, his Punjab counterpart Amarinder Singh and Chhattisgarh counterpart Bhupesh Baghel were among those who participated in the meeting.

Rahul Gandhi called for putting money in the hands of the poor.

While Singh pointed out that Punjab’s vaccination stock

will last for five more days, Baghel said Chhattisgarh will run out of the vaccine stock in three days. Gehlot said the Centre should not see the states ruled by other parties as adversaries.

The Congress chief also reviewed the efforts to fight COVID-19, including the availability of vaccines, access to medicines and ventilators, chief spokesperson of the party Randeep Surjewala said.

"The (Narendra) Modi government has mismanaged the COVID situation. It has exported the vaccines and allowed a shortage to be created in India," the Congress chief said at the meeting.

She said all public gatherings and poll rallies should be cancelled as the number of

COVID-19 cases is on the rise. "Mass gatherings for elections and religious events have accelerated COVID for which all of us are responsible to some extent. We need to accept this responsibility and keep the interest of the nation above our own," Sonia Gandhi said.

Rahul Gandhi expressed concern over the second wave of COVID-19 hitting the country.

He urged the government to look at new mutations, which are the source of the second wave, and called for joining hands and energies, instead of complacency and premature victories.

He also pointed towards a direct connection between the spread of the infection and

nutrition and livelihood. He said the virus attacks the poorest and disadvantaged the hardest, as he reiterated his demand for a "basic income support" by the government.

Surjewala said the Punjab chief minister has pointed out a vaccine shortage.

"He candidly points out that the Central government has given no assurance of numbers and supply," he wrote on Twitter.

Surjewala also said Gehlot has pointed out that the shortage of the vaccines is a reality that cannot be wished away.

"Pointing to the spurt in infections, he states that the Centre must take States on board as stakeholders and not as adversaries," he said.

Eatala seeks pvt medical...

Continued on Page 1

allotment of staff, and collection of bills. The state government is now reconciled to treating Covid patients in private medical colleges as the number of cases has been increasing in Telangana by the day. Eatala said that he had asked the government to provide drugs and oxygen to private medical colleges. The government had accepted the request, he added.

There are 24 private medical colleges, each with 750 beds. Previously each private medical college had allotted 100 beds for Covid treatment, the managements said, recalling how they had treated patients free of cost.

The Minister said that the

government would give Covid vaccine free of cost to people and asked private colleges to charge money from patients only for some tests and promised them to provide all other essentials.

Later, speaking to media, Eatala said that the number of cases in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, AP and Karnataka had increased. Under its impact, the number of cases in Telangana was also on the rise. However, quoting medical experts as saying, he maintained that the severity of virus was less in spite of the spike in number of cases.

Eatala said that the managements of private medical colleges and super speciality hospitals had been urged to keep

some beds ready for Covid patients. He exhorted people to remain on the alert and advised them not to travel unless it is absolutely necessary. Answering a question, the Minister ruled out imposing lockdown again. Normal life should continue and people should learn to live with the virus, he felt.

He said that vaccines and treatment facilities for Covid were available in all districts. Doctors were treating Covid patients without wearing PPE kits as they had come out of the pandemic scare.

The health of Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar was normal and he remained asymptomatic, he said. Covid had been spreading rapidly albeit with severity, he said.



TAKING STOCK

IT Minister KT Rama Rao on Saturday visited the soon to be unveiled building of T Hub, which will be one of the largest tech incubators in the world when finished. "T Hub will further consolidate Hyderabad's position the innovation ecosystem," KT Rama Rao tweeted.

Three held for online fraud...

Continued on Page 1

On the insistence of the fraudsters, she 'invested' up to Rs 20,00,000 in Winbiz through several transactions between February 24 and March 15. Later, she observed that Rs 54,39,310 was shown virtually in her WinBiz account. However, when she tried to withdraw the amount, she found to her dismay that options for withdrawal and credentials were blocked.

On investigation, the police team went to Bengaluru and arrested Ashok Kumar Arumugam, Kanchi Sanjeev Kumar, Asim Akhtar at Hanuvel Consultant India Private Limited and seized 24 stamps of fake registered companies, 22 mobiles, 14 bank accounts, 15 fake companies' ROC certificates.

During the course of the investigation, several bank accounts were identified and with the help of the respective bank authorities, Rs 3.5 crore was frozen.

Under the direct supervision of Mahesh M Bhagwat, Commissioner of Police, Rachakonda, with the guidance of Yadagiri, DCP (Crime), D Srinivas, DCP OSD (crime), S Harinath, Assistant Commissioner of Police, the case was investigated by Inspector KV Vijay Kumar of cybercrime and the accused were apprehended.

Cops not keen to resume drunken drive checks

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It all began when the man, who was driving under the influence of alcohol, was stopped by traffic cops as part of their drive against drunk driving. Infuriated since the police did not allow him to drive his vehicle, he went to the edge of the under-construction Hyderabad-Bangalore flyover and threatened to jump off the flyover if he was not given back his vehicle. With great difficulty, the police could take him into custody and bring the situation under control.

There have been several other instances of Hyderabad police officials facing nasty encounters with those stopped for breathalyzer tests. At least 36 such incidents have been reported in the last three years, including those which involved attacks on cops by tipsy drivers. An uncooperative car driver clashed with cops Kukatpally recently, forcing the police to lodge a complaint with the Kukatpally Police Station.

The drunken driver even tried to run over Assistant Sub-inspector Mahipal Reddy with his vehicle, causing him grievous injuries. The ASI later succumbed to his injuries. The

incident put the police on the back foot.

The Cyberabad police officials on Thursday held a meeting with the representatives of managements of all bars, restaurants, pubs, malls, wine shops, function halls and hotels. Police officials said that the meeting was held to contain the number of road accidents taking place, with drunken driving being the main reason for the mishaps.

Given this meeting, apparently intended to give additional responsibility to the managements of bars, wines hops and pubs, are the police officials trying to reduce their burden of conducting breathalyzer tests?

Police officials find the drunk and drive checks as a burden with tipplers not yielding to the police authorities easily when traffic police personnel approach them for breathalyzer test. Instead, they are instead giving trouble to the police.

These trouble mongers are not blowing air properly into the breathalyzer as a result the meter is not able to show correct reading. Tipplers are supposed to blow air for 15 seconds; otherwise, the authorities

have to conduct blood alcohol test. To conduct one blood alcohol test, it would require at least 20 minutes.

While some tipplers driving vehicles abuse police in unprintable language, others refuse to give sample for the blood alcohol testing. Still others call up elected people's representatives and superior officers to complain of 'police harassment'. Therefore, the police officials are worried over conducting drive against drunken driving.

Senior police authorities have been warning drivers of stern action against them if they do not cooperate with the police when caught for drunken driving.

A police personnel of Shamshabad Traffic Police Station at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA), on condition of anonymity, poured out their tales of woes during the drive which includes abuses from drivers. He also said that the drivers had been lodging complaints against the police with officers and political representatives, ignoring their sincerity in discharging duty.

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Illegal sand mining continues

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Manipulations continue to surface in illegal mining of sand from rivers and streams in the name of government schemes and other needs. Even though Telangana State Mineral Development Corporation (TSMDC) stated that the excavations were being carried out in accordance with the regulations, but the illegal sand mining is done at the sand resources, which are under the supervision of TSMDC and the district administration only.

The district administration gave permission for sand mining in primary, secondary and tertiary category resources for local construction needs. But the sand mining works do not follow any government protocols and officials aren't careful about smuggling. In many places, the people's representatives are engaged in sand smuggling. The staff of government departments does not seem to notice. In particular, there are allegations that some lower-ranking police personnel and revenue officials are behind the illegal trade. There have also been complaints that



some members of the public are also involved in the illegal trade.

TSMDC is extracting sand through category four, five quarries and selling it through 'Sand Sale Management and Monitoring System'.

Even though the portal allows online payments and issuance of permits, some staff members at stock points and

weighbridge are introducing flaws in the system. Project officers at the stock points are hiring private individuals to carry out collections.

Most of the monitoring CCTV cameras at stock points in many places are not working. Illegal operatives are collecting up to Rs2, 000 for filling more sand than the permitted load and up to Rs 1,500

for quick arrival of a serial number of the vehicle.

Indeed most of the sand reaches of all categories are under the influence of public representatives or their benefactors. Some private construction companies are looting sand in the name of tribal cooperative societies.

Moreover, the provision prohibiting the use of machinery

in the reaches allotted to tribal societies is also not enforced.

The lack of an adequate number of TSMDC official weighbridges have been a boon to the intruders. Many cases have already been registered in Mulugu, Mahadevpur, Kataram and Ghanpur Police stations for incidents involving lorries with the same number plate and transportation through fake way bills.

Even though Officials say the excavations are being carried out in accordance with the geo coordinates, but the government supervision on the sand reaches is still not good. There have also been incidents of attacks on some persons who went into the sand reaches in some cases. There are allegations that illegal sand traders in the joint Mahabubnagar district have hit and killed people with vehicles, especially those who obstructed them from carrying out the illegal trade.

Finally, the lack of coordination among the mining, revenue, police and transport authorities has come in handy for the illegal operators.

TS reports about 3K Covid cases

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

New infection numbers rose to 2,909 from 2,478 cases on Friday. The fresh cases have further pushed the state's cumulative tally to 3,24,091.

During the last 24 hours, six deaths were reported from the state, taking the death toll to 1,752. According to the health bulletin issued by the Director of Public Health and Family Welfare, the fatality rate stands at 0.54 percent as compared to the national average of 1.31 percent.

Meanwhile, the number of active cases rose to 17,791 from Friday's tally of 15,472. These numbers include 11,495 persons who are in home/institutional quarantine.

The last 24 hours also saw 584 people recover from the pandemic, taking the cumulative recoveries to 3,04,548. The recovery rate has improved nominally to 94.63 from Friday's 93.86 percent - even as the national average slipped from 91.2 to 90.8 percent.

Greater Hyderabad reported the highest infected numbers with 487 cases while its



bordering districts also continue to witness a surge. MedchalMalkajgiri and Ranga redy districts reported 289 and 225 cases, respectively.

Nizamabad district bordering Maharashtra remains the third-worst affected district with 202 new cases. Nirmal registered 131 new cases followed by Jagtial 121, Sangareddy 117, Kamareddy 102, Mahaboobnagar 93, Karimnagar 92, Nalgonda 89, Warangal Urban 86, Siddipet 82, Warangal Urban 86,

Mancherial 77 and Adilabad 70.

For the second consecutive time since the pandemic broke out, the authorities conducted over one lakh tests in a single day. Of the overall 1,11,726 tests conducted during last 24 hours, 99,478 samples were tested in government laboratories and 12,248 in private labs. With this the number of tests conducted in the state has risen to 1,08, 73,665. Samples tested per million population rose to 2,92, 145.

CITY LIGHTS

Narayana has yet again proved to be the leader

Narayana School students have once again reigned with extraordinary results in IOQM 2021 Olympiad. Most number of selections from South India are from Narayana. With 12 selections (57.14%) from just Telangana region, this achievement is another feather in our crown. Another 3 selections from Andhra Pradesh, 2 from Karnataka, and 1 from Tamil Nadu from the South region. The IOQM exam is organised by the Mathematics Teachers' Association (India) - MTA(I) with support from the Indian Association of Physics Teachers (IAPT) and by the HBCSE on behalf of the NBHM of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), Government of India. DrSindhura Narayana, Managing Director of Narayana Group, said that the result once again emphatically proved that the education system at Narayana is exceptional. The superior integrated curriculum and superlative academic planning is the reason why Narayana students are coming out in flying colours in all the exams, she said. DrSindhur reminded that Narayana students have topped almost all of the National and International Olympiads in 2021. She informed that Narayana students are given a strong foundation in Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Astronomy along with Computer Sciences and General Aptitude. The Executive Director of Narayana Group PuneethKothapa congratulated the students on their success and thanked the teachers and parents. He expressed his confidence that the students of Narayana would continue their winning streak in future also.

Anxiety, depression could be linked to Parkinson's disease

Parkinson's disease is a progressive nervous system disorder that affects movement of human body. Symptoms start gradually, sometimes starting with a barely noticeable tremor in just one hand. Tremors are common, but the disorder also commonly causes stiffness and slowing of movement. April 11th is commemorated as World Parkinson's Day, and on the occasion, it is important we develop more understanding about the ailment. While, proper diagnosis of Parkinson's disease is difficult, particularly in the early stages, it may take years before the ailment is accurately diagnosed. The fact that symptoms and progression of symptoms varies between individuals adds to the complexity of diagnosing Parkinson's disease. Elaborating on the symptoms, Dr. Abhinay M Huchche, Consultant Neuro-Physician said, "Though Parkinson's disease causes slowing of overall body movements, mental health issues are quite common in such patients. Not infrequently, the disease manifests with mental disorders rather than physical slowing. These mental disorders have a greater impact on the overall quality of life than the physical disability. Depression is the commonest mental disorder, along with feeling sad, reduced interest on surroundings, phobia of socializing, among Parkinson's disease victims."



Only vaccinated persons are allowed inside GHMC offices

In view of the rising Covid cases in the city, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) has banned the entry of visitors and media persons in the GHMC zonal offices and its main building at Khairatabad. However, those who have received the Covid vaccine and those who have recovered from Covid and are holding recovery certificates will be allowed inside the office from April 10. As per the instructions given by the Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao, all the workers and officials of the GHMC must get vaccinated against Covid. GHMC Commissioner DS Lokesh Kumar issued orders that all the staff and officials get Covid vaccination before April 15. Commissioner during a video call passed on the orders to all the zonal commissioners and asked them to organize for the vaccination drive in GHMC offices, or hospitals, or urban health centers. Details of those who have been vaccinated should be sent to the head office and updated on the Covid portal, he said. The GHMC has close to 30,000 frontline staff, and all of them should arrive vaccinated from April 15, the Commissioner said.



First four-storyed structure in Hyderabad gets a facelift

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A heritage structure that was almost demolished in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh has got a fresh lease of life, thanks to the revival and renovation projects being taken up by the current administration.

The building, which is celebrating not just a fresh coat of paint but an extended lifespan itself, is the Bachelors' Quarters near the MoazzamJahi Market, constructed by Mir Osman Ali Khan, the Seventh Nizam, in the early 1940s.

According to Municipal Administration and Urban Development Principal Secretary Arvind Kumar, the 39 tenants of the heritage structure, which was one of the

tallest buildings of that time with Ulemas climbing it to sight the new moon, had come forward to restore it. The restoration took about Rs.1 crore, with Arvind Kumar lauding the people's involvement.

'Bachelor quarters (as it's known), built by 7th Nizam in 1940s, restored by 39 tenants costing about a crore. Ulemas used to sight moon from top of this building... This is what people's involvement can do..." (sic) he tweeted, also tagging MA & UD Minister KT Rama Rao in the tweet.

The building, according to reports, was constructed for youngsters from financially backward families and those from villages outside

Hyderabad who came to the city pursuing education in the Osmania University or the City College. The Andhra Pradesh Housing Board had reportedly converted into a commercial property and around 2007-2008, had plans to demolish the structure citing its dilapidated condition.

The structure, said to be the first reinforced cement concrete four-storyed structure in the city, also saw legal tangles, with the Housing Board and the Wakf Board also claiming ownership for the building, which has witnessed connoisseurs of Urdu language and poetry gathering on its premises for meetings and cultural events in its heydays.

Three teenaged sisters missing in Hyderabad

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Three teenaged sisters have been reported missing from their home in Vanasthali puram locality of the city, since Friday.

According to police officials of the Vanasthalipuram police station, the three missing girls aged 17, 15, and 14 years, live with their parents in Pragatinagar area of Vanasthalipuram.

On Friday evening, the girls allegedly entered into an argument with their mother over some trivial matter. On waking up on Saturday morning, the parents noticed that their daughters are missing. When their attempts to locate the three girls failed, the parents approached the police.

Family members fear that the girls may have been kidnapped by someone in the locality.

The police have registered a complaint and are checking video footage of CCTV cameras used for monitoring the area.

Age-old stepwell in heart of Hyd cries for attention

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Even at a time when the Telangana government is going all out with various initiatives to protect Hyderabad's heritage and turn several of its historic monuments into popular tourist spots, there is one baoli in the heart of the city that is falling apart.

The stepwell inside the age-old Saidanima's tomb, located at one end of Tank Bund, paints a sad picture with no visible effort made to restore the historic stepwell.

The Maqbara or grave of the lady Sufi saint has a huge enclosure area, most of which has also been reportedly encroached upon by locals who run businesses inside.

The baoli has not just been unused from years, but that it is in dire need of repairs. The staircase of the stepwell itself has been damaged to such an extent that one cannot even go down inside to look at the edifice. On the face of it, it seems as if the shops inside the tomb complex (selling wood) have been burning waste and wooden materials inside the



baoli itself.

Except for the main tomb area, the rest of the complex has clearly fallen prey to encroachments, as is the case of many historical Waqf properties in Hyderabad and Telangana. Syed Meraj Ahmed, a descendant of Saida-bi-Ma Sahiba, known famously as Saidanima, said that the Dargah complex has been in a very bad state from over a decade.

However, in some respite, Principal Secretary of Municipal Administration and Urban DevelopmentArvind Kumartweeted last month that he would look into the restoration of the baoli. Kumar was responding to Mera's tweet after the latter posted about the baoli's pathetic condition.

TS translating Phule's ideas into action: KCR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana government's policies, programmes and schemes to strengthen the rural economy and ensure economic progress of the weaker sections in the society have become model for the entire country.

This success of Telangana was entirely due to the inspiration taken from visionaries like Mahatma Jyothi Rao Phule, said Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao.

Paying rich tributes to philosopher, visionary and social reformer Mahatma JyotiraoPhule on the eve of his 195th birth anniversary on Saturday, KCR said the action programme implemented by Mahatma Phule to eradicate caste discrimination and upliftment of Dalit Bahujan and Women was of the highest order.

Recalling the services rendered by JyothiraoPhule, the Chief Minister said the Telangana government had taken inspiration from Mahatma Phule's philosophy that socio-economic prosperity could be achieved only through education and equality, irrespective of the caste or gender and the government was striving to implement the same.

The six-and half-year-old Telangana has been following self-governance process as advocated by eminent personalities like Phule.

The welfare schemes being implemented by the State government at a cost of about Rs 45,000 crore annually were helping in the upliftment of the backward SC, ST, BC and Minority women, he said said Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao.



2 held for illegal transportation of cattle in Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The police have registered a case against two persons and taken them into custody for illegally transporting cattle into the city on Friday night.

On a tip off, the police along with the local cow protection committee members, stopped a truck carrying the cattle. On checking, the police found that the cattle was being transported into the city and took the driver and another person into custody. A case was registered against them and the cattle was shifted to a cattle shed.

Head mufti of Jamia Nizamia passes away

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The 'namaz-e-janaza' (last prayers) of Maulana Mufti Mohammed Azeemuddin Quadri, head mufti of the Jamia Nizamia seminary here, who passed away after a brief illness on Friday, were held here on Saturday.

The prayers were held after Zohar (afternoon) prayers at the mosque in Jamia Nizamia seminary and led by Mufti Khaleel Ahmed, rector, Jamia Nizamia.

Mufti Mohammed Azeemuddin Quadri, who

was 84, is survived by his wife, four sons and three daughters. He was associated with the Jamia Nizamia for several years in different capacities.

He was also associated with the Hyderabad-based Daeratul Maarif, an institution that acquires, edits and prints rare Arabic manuscripts.

The body was later taken to the Dargah Sujjahuddin Quadri at Edi Bazar in Yakutpura where it was laid to rest. Several eminent personalities attended the funeral.

2 house burglars held, booty worth Rs 26L recovered

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Malkajgiri CCS police apprehended two house burglars and recovered 48.5 tulas gold ornaments, 53.4 silver ornaments and Rs 1.55 lakh cash all worth Rs 26 lakh on Thursday. The accused were identified as Roshan, Chetan, both residents of Jawahar Nagar. The complainant Veera Reddy along with his wife locked their house and went to Nacharam on 16 March and returned to home same day only to find that door lock was broken and house was looted.

Day temperatures in city rise again on Sat

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

After a brief respite from the heat with light showers on Friday, Hyderabad is back to being hot on Saturday. As of 1 pm, Telangana State Planning Development Society's (TSPDS) automatic weather stations across the city saw temperatures between 33 degree Celsius and 36 degree Celsius.

The highest recorded temperature so far today was at Red Hills Play Ground, Nampally, with 36 degree Celsius. The heat seems to have put a damper on the

weekend excitement, as evidenced by relatively empty roads. In contrast to the weather expected after rains today, TSPDS forecasts dry weather for the next three days, with maximum temperatures hovering around 35 degree Celsius, while the minimum temperature is expected to be in the 21 to 23 degree Celsius range.

The highest maximum temperature recorded on Friday was 38.7 degree Celsius and lowest minimum temperature recorded was 22.9 degree Celsius.

Fate of Congress, TDP similar in Telugu States

SNCN ACHARYULU
■ HYDERABAD

When the redoubtable NT Rama Rao launched the Telugu Desam Party in 1982 to take on the Congress in Andhra Pradesh, it is doubtful that he would have foreseen how similar the fates of the two parties would be in the then undivided state.

For the first time in their respective histories, both the Congress and TDP are floundering and struggling to survive their bleakest period yet. In fact, the situation is so dire that while the TDP has no representation in the Telangana Legislative Assembly and Council, the Congress has none in both the Houses in AP.

After bifurcation, Congress fielded candidates in Andhra Pradesh in both the 2014 and



2019 elections and did not win a single seat. In the Legislative Council too, the Congress has no representation, for the first time in its history.

Interestingly in Telangana, the TDP is facing a similar situation. In the 2018 Assembly elections, the party won two seats. Recently, the two MLAs merged in the ruling TRS Legislature Party. With this, the TDP lost its representa-



tion in the Telangana Assembly. The party has no representation in the Legislative Council too.

One might say that the situation is worse for the Congress than the TDP since, in 2018, the party won 19 seats in Telangana but has at present only five members in the Assembly. While TPCC president N Uttam Kumar Reddy resigned as MLA after winning

the Lok Sabha seat, the remaining Congress MLAs have merged into TRS Legislature Party. CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka was recognised as the leader of the Opposition but has lost the position after 12 Congress Members jumped ship to the TRS.

TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu too is likely to lose the position in AP as more and more TDP MLAs appear to be on the verge of deserting the ship. The TDP had won 23 seats in the 2019 Assembly polls and till now, four of its MLAs have distanced themselves and are indirectly behaving like YSRCP members.

If one goes by the happenings on the ground, resurgence by either party in the near future in these two states does not appear to be a possibility.

‘No growth in Sagar under TRS rule’

K VENKATESHWARLU
■ HYDERABAD

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy alleged that the important projects in the Nagarjunasagar constituency are going on at a snail's pace. He blamed the Congress and TRS for the backwardness of the Nagarjunasagar constituency and called upon the people to teach a lesson to the Congress and TRS in the elections.

He said that Congress candidate K Jana Reddy did zero to the development of the Nagarjunasagar constituency and the TRS, too, walked in the path of Congress regarding the development of the constituency. He said that the Telangana people want a change, therefore, they voted for the BJP in the Dubbak bypoll.

He released a video song 'Anthyodayam' and released the party's manifesto for the Nagarjunasagar by-election on Saturday, along with Dubbak MLA M Raghunandan Rao, at Haliya. He exhorted the people to teach a lesson to the Congress and TRS in the by-



Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy having lunch at the house of a tribal in the Nagarjunasagar Assembly constituency on Saturday

- Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy urged the people to seal the deal for a change in Sagar by ensuring the victory of BJP candidate
- He said that they will set up an industrial corridor and a special road will be laid from the Regional Ring Road to Nagarjunasagar if the people of the constituency ensure the victory of the BJP candidate

elections. Alleging that the TRS had failed to release funds to the development of Thandas, he said that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao had not implemented the assurances given in the last

elections. He urged the people to seal the deal for a change in Sagar by ensuring the victory of BJP candidate. He said that they will set up an industrial corridor and a special road will be

laid from the Regional Ring Road to Nagarjunasagar if the people of the constituency ensure the victory of the BJP candidate.

He said that they released a manifesto for the coming two years. The BJP will develop the Sagar constituency in 'Sab Ka Sath Sab Ka Vikas' manner. It will set up Kendriya Vidyalay, and provide revenue division status to the Haliya municipality. The BJP would also develop the International Buddha Centre, he said.

The BJP will implement adequate reservations to tribals, he said and assured that the BJP will complete the national highways connecting Nagarjunasagar as early as possible if the people ensured the victory of BJP candidate Dr Ravi Naik.

Raghunandan Rao alleged that both Congress and BJP are deceiving the people with fake assurances. Jana Reddy did nothing to the constituency, he said alleging both the TRS and Congress are two sides of the same coin. Later, they had lunch at the house of a tribal at Pangani Kunta Thanda in Haliya mandal.

SHORT TAKES

Govt rendered injustice to Nalgonda dist: Cong MP



HYDERABAD: Congress MP Komatireddy Venkat Reddy alleged that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao has the habit of passing time telling lies every day and he is using the money looted in projects in Nagarjunasagar by-elections. While participating in an election campaign in Marlagadda Gudem, Pulimamidi and other villages in Anumula mandal of Nagarjunasagar Assembly constituency on Saturday, he said that the Chief Minister is not taking any steps to fill the two lakh vacant posts and asked the people to teach a befitting lesson to him in the Sagar bypoll. He reiterated that Jana Reddy worked as the Minister for 20 years, but never indulged in corrupt practices. He wondered that the corrupt MLAs and an MLA, who was involved in the drug case, have been criticising K Jana Reddy. He alleged that the TRS government did nothing to the Nagarjunasagar constituency. He remembered that Jana Reddy had brought drinking and irrigation water to the Sagar constituency. The TRS government is rendering injustice to the Nalgonda district by not completing the pending works of Srisailem tunnel works, which were completed 70 per cent already by the then Congress government, spending Rs 1,300 crore.

1,933 cases disposed at Lok Adalat



MEDCHAL-MALKAJGIRI: The National Lok Adalat was organised on Saturday by the Principal District Sessions Judge Ranga Reddy and the District and Sessions Judge Nalgonda following a directive from the High Court of Telangana and Legal Service Authority. In all, 1,933 cases

compromised in the limits of Rachakonda Commissionerate. Commissioner of Police Rachakonda Mahesh M Bhagwat monitored the conduct of National Lok Adalat and motivated the CDOs, IOs and SHOs of Commissionerate for maximum disposal. CP Rachakonda and Additional CP G Sudheer Babu appreciated the DCPs, ACPs, SHOs, CDOs and CCRB staff of Rachakonda for their efforts in getting 1,933 compoundable cases disposed of in Lok Adalat

One CCTV camera is equivalent to 100 cops: MLA



PATANCHERU: The municipalities where public safety and protection were accorded importance are developing rapidly, disclosed Patancheru MLA Gudem Mahipal Reddy. He inaugurated 32 community surveillance cameras

worth Rs 10 lakhs on Saturday in Eedulanaguiapalli and Velimela wards under Telapur municipality limits. Addressing a gathering on the occasion, he said that he was happy to set up CCTV cameras in every ward under Telapur municipality. He said each surveillance camera is equivalent to hundred police officers and plays a crucial role in solving the cases. He further stated the crime rate was gradually decreasing with the installation of CCTV cameras in villages, colonies, municipalities and GHMC limits. Municipal chairperson Lalitha Soma Reddy, DSP Bheem reddy, vice-chairman Ramulu Goud, CI R Amireddy, councillors, local leaders, officers and others participated in the inauguration.

Revanth dares Minister for a debate on Sagar development

HYDERABAD : TPCC working president and Malkajgiri MP A Revanth Reddy alleged that the TRS is spending Rs 200 crore to win the Nagarjunasagar bypoll. He alleged that the liquor has been flowing in the constituency like water. He lamented that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao was trying to win the by-election by keeping the people in an inebriated condition. He challenged Minister for Energy G Jagdeesh Reddy and MLC Palla Rajeshwar Reddy that he is ready to prove that there is no development took place in the State in the TRS rule. Speaking to the media at Pulicharla village in Peddura mandal on Saturday as part of his campaign, Revanth Reddy alleged that KCR had come to Nagarjunasagar before the Election Commission issued notification. "I came to know that KCR is coming again to the constituency. KCR didn't visit the Dubbak constituency even a single time, however, I don't know why KCR is visiting for the second time," he wondered. He pointed out that KCR didn't follow the tradition of making the kin of from the bereaved family as an MLA not even a single time. KCR allocated a ticket to Bhagat assuming that sympathy will work in the favour of Bhagat after taking the names of Gutha Sukhender Reddy and MC Koti Reddy into consideration. He questioned KCR to tell as to why the latter had failed to accept the challenge of K Jana Reddy to stay away from participating in the campaign if KCR did development in Nagarjunasagar. Revanth Reddy said that the Congress MPs did a lot for the formation of a separate State and reminded that Jana Reddy left the opportunity of becoming the Chief Minister of the united Andhra Pradesh.

TS parties deride Sharmila's 'Rajanna Rajyam' talk

ML MELLY MAITREYI
■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Rashtra Samithi leaders, having chosen to quietly watch for nearly two months the contours of the regional party taking shape in Telangana under the watch of YS Sharmila, daughter of former combined AP chief minister late YS Rajasekhar Reddy, on Friday sat up and took notice of her 'Sankalpa Sabha' at Khammam. This is because Sharmila directly targeted TRS and party supremo and Chief Minister K.Chandrasekhar Rao in her address, going to the extent of stating that 'feudal rule' was back in Telangana, which was formed on the plank of self-respect.

Cementing Sharmila's diatribe, her mother YS Vijayamma, who endorsed her daughter's wish to bring back 'Rajanna Rajyam' in Telangana, thanked the people of Telangana for being solidly behind the Congress leader Rajasekhar Reddy when he launched his padayatra 18 years ago, thus helping him end the Telugu Desam rule and usher in a slew of welfare schemes for the benefit of farmers, poor, students and women groups. They expressed their gratitude to Telangana people for showing

same affection to the family of late YSR.

Dismissing Y.S. Sharmila's claim that farmers, students, unemployed youth, poor and women groups had been 'suffering' in Telangana and 'yearning' for the 'golden era' posited under YSR rule, TRS leaders said her comments were 'ridiculous' and 'far from truth'. The TRS government's welfare programmes reached every needy section of society and the results were there for everyone to see, they said.

People of Telangana could not be hoodwinked by meetings organized with 'paid outsiders', said a TRS Minister. Jana Sena leader Pawan Kalyan had drawn even bigger crowds in Telangana; yet, when it came to elections, people chose only TRS. Dismissing 'Rajanna Rajyam' concept, he said YSR was not an independent politician but a loyal Congress leader who had implemented party's policies with the approval of party.

However, Sharmila's bold, self-driven initiative is being watched with interest by political observers, considering that, barring actor Vijayashanti, women have rarely taken the initiative to launch a political party in the State on their own. Vijayashanti had launched



'Thalli Telangana Party' in 2009 only to merge it with TRS ostensibly for the common goal of achieving separate Telangana State. She later parted ways with TRS, cut up with party leadership's style of functioning, to join national parties, alternating between BJP and Congress. At present, she is again with the BJP. Both Vijayamma and Sharmila sought to give an impression that Sharmila was on her own as Telangana needed an opposition party on a sound footing that can question the ruling party on behalf of people.

Sharmila said time had come for Telangana people to decide whether they needed a political party that can fearlessly question the ruling party.

The Congress party was functioning like a company that supplied MLAs to TRS, while BJP had been trying to provoke people in the name of religion.

"Did BJP give Turmeric Board, Coach factory to Telangana?" asked Sharmila, who described herself as the bonafide Telangana citizen.

More people died of shock in Telangana when Rajasekhar Reddy died in a copter crash and that reflected YSR's bonding with Telangana people. YSR was one leader who loved everyone equally, irrespective of the region from which a person hailed, Vijayamma said to buttress her point that her late husband had great affection for Telangana people.

"Sharmila inherited her father's courage and commitment and she was raised like a son by her father," said Vijayamma seeking the blessings of people for her daughter.

Meanwhile, Legislative Council Chairman Gutta Sukhender Reddy said that new political parties were entering the State to "rob Telangana people again". People were well

aware during whose tenure factional fights ruled the roost in the region and water from irrigation projects and funds of Telangana were diverted to Andhra.

The exploitation of Telangana continued till 2014 under the rule of Congress leaders. Some inimical forces were trying to disrupt the stable government, while some other forces were fomenting trouble in the name of caste and religion, Sukhender Reddy said. The allegations that TRS leaders were behaving like feudal lords were baseless, he mentioned.

Congress leader V.Hanaumantha Rao, while disapproving of Sharmila's decision to launch a party in Telangana, said she should make her efforts in Andhra. He found fault with the police officials for giving permission to Sharmila's public meeting in spite of the mounting Covid-19 cases. The same officials had denied permission to others to hold even small meetings, he mentioned.

BJP leader NVSS Prabhakar refuted Sharmila's criticism of BJP and said 'Rajanna Rajyam' was synonymous with "looting and amassing ill-gotten money". It was the time when 'Jalayagnam' was converted into 'Dhana yagnam', he alleged.

31 eve-teasers nabbed by SHE-Teams

PNS ■ MEDCHAL/ MALKAJGIRI

Rachakonda SHE-Teams registered 36 cases against eve-teasers in the past six weeks and apprehended 31 respondent eve-teasers, out of them, 27 majors and four minors. In all, 36 cases were filed against them.

The respondent eve-teasers attended the counselling session conducted by Rachakonda SHE-Teams at the Commissioner's camp office in LB Nagar, along with their family members, and professional counsellors from Bhumika Women's Collective, an NGO, conducted counselling for them. Children in conflict with the law will also be counselled by psychiatrist Dr Vasavi to bring a change in their behaviour.

In addition to that within in six weeks 31 eve-teasers were caught by Rachakonda SHE-Teams in decoy operations and through WhatsApp complaints from different areas of Rachakonda while they are teasing girls at metro train/junctions/bustops/working places and colleges under the limits of the Rachakonda area.

Cong submits memo to EC official

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Congress leaders met General Observer Sajjan Singh R Chowhan and brought to his notice electoral malpractices of Union and State Ministers, ruling party MPs, MLAs in the Nagarjunasagar by-elections. The party requested the Election Commission to take action to prevent the free flow of money and liquor by the TRS to ensure free and fair elections.

TPCC chief and Nalgonda MP N Uttam Kumar Reddy and former MLA Maheshwar Reddy, former MLC Ramulu Naik and others submitted a memorandum to him in this regard on Saturday.

Speaking to the media, Uttam alleged that the local police were cooperating with the ruling party.

He alleged that he told the General Observer that the Election Commission has been failing in conducting the elections in a free and fair manner.

AFTERMATH OF ENCOUNTER IN CHHATTISGARH

High alert sounded in Agency

SUNKARI SAMPATH RAO
■ MULUGU

High alert was sounded in the Agency areas by the police in the wake of an exchange of fire between the Maoists and security forces in the Junagadh forest area in Chhattisgarh.

As a precautionary measure, Mulugu and Bhadradi police conducted vehicle inspections in Wajedu, Venkatapuram, Charla and Dummugudem mandals.

In the Bijapur encounter, 22 jawans were killed in a Maoist attack while police claimed that 12 Maoists were killed in the incident.

Police in the Agency areas issued a high alert with intelligence agencies warning that Maoists may enter the Telangana region as the airstrikes have been intensified in Dandakaranya after the encounter. The Telangana police are sifting through the forests for a Maoist stronghold while surveillance has been strengthened at the boat docks in the Godavari basin.

Police have been carrying out 'Operation Prahar' for the past

- The Telangana police are sifting through the forests for a Maoist stronghold while surveillance has been strengthened at the boat docks in the Godavari basin.
- Police have been carrying out 'Operation Prahar' for the past few months in Abujmad of Dandakaranya to flush out the Maoists

few months in Abujmad of Dandakaranya to flush out the Maoists. Thousands of policemen infiltrated into the forest, which was a bastion for the Maoists, and intensified operations. Intelligence sources have warned that the Maoists are likely to enter Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, which have borders with Chhattisgarh, hence, police cordoned off the area.

In this backdrop, Telangana DGP Mahender Reddy has discussed the issue of peace and security with the joint Khammam and Warangal district police officers.

A high alert was declared as a precautionary measure. Police in all areas were advised to be vigilant. Police are conducting regular vehicle inspections in

Wajedu, Venkatapuram, Charla and Dummugudem zones on the Chhattisgarh border.

Air raids were carried out in suspected areas. A surveillance system has been set up in the Godavari basin. A war-like situation was prevailing in Chhattisgarh after the Bijapur encounter. Tribals are caught between a devil and deep sea with the presence of police and Maoists. Mulugu Superintendent of Police Sangramsingh G Patil has alerted the Greyhounds, CRPF and Cobra parties to keep round-the-clock surveillance on the Mulug district border areas and adjoining districts of Chhattisgarh to curb infiltration of Maoists into Mulug and Dandakaranya. It's learnt that the SP has deployed forces in Maoist-infested areas.



306 paddy purchase centres to be set up in Peddapalli dist

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLI

Minister for Welfare Koppula Eshwar said that 306 centres would be set up to procure Rabi paddy whose yield will be around 4.25 lakh tonnes. He said that there is an unprecedented paddy yield in the district compared to the earlier yield.

Taking part in a paddy procurement awareness programme for the Rabi season held here on Saturday, he said that the government lifts paddy from farmers right from the village level in view of the pandemic situation.

The government would procure till the last paddy grain in the district, he said

asking officials to get tough in ensuring the quality of paddy to be lifted. He wanted the farmers to dry paddy in their drying yards and bring paddy with 17 per cent or less moisture content. The empty grain content should not exceed one per cent while the dust and stones in the paddy should be less than one per cent. The discoloured paddy content should be less than five per cent of the total paddy, he said.

He asked officials and local people's representatives to explain to the farmers how to conform to quality standards, decrease the moisture content in paddy and use of paddy cleaners to shed empty grains and so on.

Ugadi fete begins at Srisailem shrine

PNS ■ NAGAR KURNOOL

The three-day Telugu New Year festivities began at Srisailem temple from Saturday amidst rituals to deities Goddess Bhramaramba and Lord Mallikarjuna Swamy.

On account of festivities, several devotees travel to Srisailem from Karnataka and Maharashtra. Therefore, the temple authorities advised the devotees not to stay long at Srisailem in view of the Covid-



19 scare.

At least five-lakh turn out of devotees is expected for the Ugadi festivities.

The devotees reaching here by foot submit their offerings -- saris, tamarind, mangal sutras, flowers -- to the deities

carrying them on their shoulders.

Devotees from Karnataka observe rituals like walking on fire and piercing parts of their body, including the tongue, with sharp weapons. Daily abhishekams are conducted to deities besides Rudra homam, Chandi homam. The devotees from other States take part in special pujas and procession of deities to be held on Sunday before they return to their places.

Political storm erupts after 5 killed during Bengal poll, including 4 in CISF firing

PNS ■ KOLKATA/COOCH BEHAR

A political firestorm raged on Saturday after five persons were killed, including four in firing by CISF personnel, while five candidates were attacked during the fourth phase of polling in 44 seats in West Bengal.

An estimated 76.16 per cent of 1.15 crore voters exercised their franchise till 5 pm, an official said.

Four people were killed as central forces opened fire allegedly after coming under attack from locals, who attempted to snatch their rifles, in West Bengal's Cooch Behar district, police said.

West Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh had come under attack in Sitalkuchi area earlier this week.

Amid the incidents of violence, the EC has directed the Union Home Ministry to deploy 71 additional companies of Central Armed Police forces (CAPFs) in the state for conducting the remaining four phases of



polls.

Till now, 1,000 companies were earmarked for holding the elections in the state which has 294 assembly seats.

Condoling the deaths in Cooch Behar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi requested the Election Commission to take stern action against those responsible for the incident and blamed the ruling TMC for perpetrating violence during the polls.

He also accused Chief

Minister Mamata Banerjee of instigating people against the central forces, sensing defeat.

"What happened in Cooch Behar is unfortunate and sad. I extend my condolences to the bereaved families and urge the Election Commission to take stern action against those responsible. Mamata Didi and her TMC goons have become jittery because of groundswell of support for BJP," Modi told an election rally in North Bengal's

Siliguri.

The Chief Minister, who rushed to North Bengal and will meet the bereaved families, demanded the resignation of Home Minister Amit Shah and a reply from him on firing by the central forces which led to the death of people standing in the queue to vote.

Asserting that she had apprehended such an incident all along, Banerjee said, "After killing so many people, they

(Election Commission) are saying the firing was in self-defence. They should feel ashamed."

"This is a lie...The central forces opened fire on people standing in the line for voting, killing 4 in Sitalkuchi. I had been apprehending the forces would act in such a manner for long. As the BJP knows it has lost the people's mandate, they are conspiring to kill people," she said at a rally in North 24 Parganas district.

The Chief Minister said a CID probe will be instituted into the incident.

Meanwhile, a TMC candidate and four BJP nominees were attacked in various constituencies across the state.

At Dinhat in North Bengal, TMC candidate Udayan Guha was attacked by alleged BJP activists.

He received injuries when a scuffle broke out with the saffron camp over allegations that it was not allowing the TMCs polling agents inside booths, a charge denied by the BJP.

EC fiat to political parties on Coronavirus guidelines

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid rising coronavirus cases, the Election Commission has flagged instances of star campaigners and political leaders campaigning without masks, and warned it will not hesitate to ban rallies if COVID guidelines issued by it last year are breached.

In a letter to leaders of all recognised political parties on Friday, the poll panel said, "It is widely known that in the recent weeks, COVID cases are being reported in larger numbers. However, instances of election meetings/campaigns have come to the notice of the commission, where norms of social distancing, wearing of masks have been flouted in disregard to the commission's guidelines."

The letter pointed out instances of star campaigners and political leaders or candidates not observing COVID-19 protocols, "including non-wearing of masks themselves at stage or while campaigning".



"By doing so, the political parties and candidates are exposing themselves as well as the public attending such election meetings to the grave danger of the infection," the letter said.

In cases of breach, the Election Commission (EC) said it will "not hesitate in banning public meetings, rallies of defaulting candidates, star campaigners or political leaders without any further reference".

On Thursday, the Delhi High Court had sought responses from the commis-

sion and the central government on the use of masks during poll campaigns.

While the three-phase election in Assam and the single-phase polls in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry are over, the fourth leg of the eight-phase West Bengal assembly election is being held on Saturday.

The poll panel said it has taken "serious view of the laxity" in following norms, particularly not wearing masks and not maintaining social distancing by political leaders on the dais or stage.



2 Russians held for performing stunts at sea link

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Two Russian nationals were arrested for allegedly performing stunts at the Bandra-Worli Sea Link here, police said on Saturday.

The incident took place on Wednesday evening and the Russian nationals were identified as Maksim Shcherbakov (24) and Vasili Kolesnikov (30), an official said.

The duo had reached the sea link in a taxi from Bandra. After walking for some distance on the bridge,

Maksim started climbing the puller of the sea link by holding the high-strength galvanised steel pipes, he said.

His colleague remained on the bridge to click Maksim's pictures and videos, he said. "Some onlookers informed the sea link's management staff about their stunts, following which the police were alerted," the official added. Police rushed to the spot and apprehended the duo, Anil Koli, senior inspector of Worli police station, said.

No question of post-poll tie-up with Mamata: Cong

PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury ruled out the possibility of extending support to the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC or seeking her support in case the high-octane assembly elections throw up a fractured mandate.

Accusing the chief minister of trying to communalise the elections, Chowdhury said that the TMC and the BJP might join hands if both the parties fall short of the requisite numbers to form the government.

"BJP and communal politics have found a foothold in West Bengal because of Mamata Banerjee. There is no question of supporting the TMC in a post-poll scenario if it falls short of a majority."

"Similarly, there are zero chances of the Congress-Left-ISK Sanjukta Morcha or United Front alliance seeking her support to form the government. There is no possibility of any post-poll tie-up with the TMC," Chowdhury told PTI in an interview.



When asked whether the Congress and Left's refusal to extend support to the TMC will help the BJP, the two-time state Congress chief said, "In such a scenario, you will see the TMC and the BJP joining hands to form the government."

"Just like old wine tastes better, old friends are also trustworthy. The TMC and the BJP, who were earlier alliance partners, will join hands. They are like two sides of a coin," he said.

Chowdhury, however, mocked Banerjee for "surrendering" before Congress president Sonia Gandhi through

her letter seeking the support of all the opposition parties.

"Mamata Banerjee had deliberately destroyed the Congress in West Bengal in the last 10 years despite the grand old party helping her come to power. Now see the irony, she has become so nervous that she surrendered before the same Congress, which she tried to finish off politically," he said.

The TMC had joined hands with the Congress to oust the Left Front from power in 2011. However, the alliance fell apart after coming to power. "The Congress leadership is well aware of the political character of the TMC."

Punjab has vax for just 5 days

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab's COVID-19 vaccine stock will last another five days, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said on Saturday as he urged the Centre to share the schedule of supply of the vaccines.

The state has been inoculating 85,000-90,000 beneficiaries in a day, and at this rate, Punjab's current stock of 5.7 lakh vaccine doses will run out in five days, he said.

Pinning hopes on fresh batches of vaccines from the Centre, Singh stressed that if Punjab was able to meet its target of administering two lakh shots a day, then its current supplies will last only three days.

In an official statement here, he said he wrote to the prime minister and the Union health minister to give confirmed supply schedules for the next quarter.

Controversy over Prashant Kishore's clubhouse chat leak

PNS ■ KOLKATA

A controversy erupted on Saturday amid the polling for 44 assembly seats in West Bengal, with the BJP releasing an audio clip where Trinamool Congress' election strategist Prashant Kishore is purportedly heard saying Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "as popular as" Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in the state.

Sharing excerpts of Kishore's chat with some journalists, BJP's IT cell chief Amit Malviya claimed that "TMC's election was just thrown away!" Kishore dared the BJP to



release the full record of the chat on Clubhouse, a social media platform, and claimed that the saffron camp would not get more than 100 assembly seats in the ongoing elections.

In the purported audio clip, which the PTI could not inde-

pently verify, Kishore is heard, saying "Modi is hugely popular in Bengal, and there is no doubt about it. He is equally popular like Mamata Banerjee".

"Modi is hugely popular in Bengal, and there is no doubt about it. There is a cult around him across the country."

There is anti-incumbency against TMC, polarisation is a reality, SC votes is (are) a factor plus BJP's election machinery, says Mamata Banerjee's strategist in an open chat," Malviya said on Twitter after releasing the audio clips.

Modi condoles deaths in Cooch Behar, blames TMC for violence

PNS ■ SILIGURI

Condoling the death of five people in Cooch Behar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Saturday requested the Election Commission to take stern action against those responsible and blamed the ruling TMC for perpetrating violence during the polls.

He also accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of instigating people against the central forces.

EC orders repolling in four Assam booths

PNS ■ GUWATHI

The Election Commission of India on Saturday ordered repolling in four polling booths of Assam.

Repolling will be held at the polling stations in Ratabari, Sonai and Haflong constituencies on April 20, the ECI said in a letter addressed to the Chief Electoral Officer, Assam.

"The Commission declares void, the votes cast at these polling stations on April 1," it said.

All the three constituencies went to polls in the second phase of Assam assembly elections on April 1. The ECI order said, repolling will be held at Ratabari (SC) constituency's polling station

number 149 at Indira M V School, after an electronic voting machine (EVM) was found in a car belonging to the wife of a BJP candidate.

A magisterial probe was ordered by Karimganj district Deputy Commissioner and Returning Officer to enquire as to why a polling team in Assam carried a polled EVM in a vehicle owned by the wife of BJP candidate and sitting MLA Krishnendu Paul.

In an auxiliary polling station at 107(A)-Khotthir LP School under Haflong assembly constituency, 171 votes were cast even though 90 people were eligible to exercise their franchise.

Night curfew in K'taka from Apr 10

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The 11-day 'corona curfew' will come into effect in some districts of Karnataka, including the state capital, from Saturday night to contain the spread of coronavirus and only essential services, patients and passengers would be allowed to ply.

The state government had announced night curfew between 10 pm and 5 am every day from April 10 to 20 in Bengaluru, Mysuru, Mangaluru, Kalaburagi, Bidar, Tumakuru, Udupi-Manipal cities.

This apart, the curfew will be in place in other prominent towns and district headquarters, the government said.

The police have made elaborate arrangements to ensure-



compliance of the rules at night.

In Bengaluru, Police Commissioner Kamal Pant told reporters that vehicles providing essential services, patients and their relatives will be allowed to travel at night.

Besides, home delivery, e-commerce and the transportation of essential goods such as vegetables and food commodities for sale in the morning will be allowed in the night.

Ryots block KMP Expressway in Haryana

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Intensifying their stir against the Centre's three contentious agriculture laws, farmers on Saturday blocked the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal expressway in Haryana.

They, however, said emergency vehicles such as ambulances will be allowed to ply. The call for a 24-hour blockade was given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of farmer unions spearheading the agitation.

The blockade started at 8 am and will last 24 hours till Sunday morning.

The 136-km Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) expressway is also known as the Western Peripheral Expressway.

Farmers, including women, carried flags of their organisations and raised slogans against the government. They squatted on the expressway



while slamming the central government for not repealing the farm laws.

Farmers in Sonipat and Jhajjar districts parked their tractor-trailers and other vehicles in the middle of the stretch.

In Nuh, some protesters were detained near the Rewasan toll plaza by the Haryana Police after they tried to block the road.

Several commuters faced inconvenience because of the

KMP Expressway blockade and cited that they were unaware of the farmers' call for the protest.

Farmers, however, said they had given their call for blockade beforehand. Because of the road blockade, long queues of vehicles, especially commercial four-wheelers, were seen.

Farmer leader Harinder Singh Lakhwala said the blockade will remain for 24 hours. The Haryana Police had

issued a traffic advisory, asking travellers to avoid the KMP Expressway for commuting.

Haryana Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Navdeep Singh Virk on Friday had said elaborate arrangements had been put in place to maintain peace and order and prevent any kind of violence.

Proper traffic diversions had been planned in Sonipat, Jhajjar, Panipat, Rohtak, Palwal, Faridabad, Gurgaon and Nuh, Virk said.

Passengers coming from the Chandigarh/Ambala side on the National Highway-44 may go towards Ghaziabad and Noida via Karnal to Shamli and from Panipat to Sanauli.

Vehicles going towards Gurgaon and Jaipur can take the National Highway-71A from Panipat and travel via Gohana, Rohtak, Jhajjar and Rewari.

INDIA CORNER

India has finalised air bubble pact with Sri Lanka: Ministry



India has established a bilateral air bubble arrangement with Sri Lanka for operation of special international passenger flights between the two countries, the Civil Aviation Ministry said on Saturday. With this, India now has such pacts with 28

countries, including Afghanistan, Bahrain, Canada, France, Germany, Iraq, Japan, the Maldives, Nigeria, Qatar, the UAE, the UK and the USA. Under an air bubble pact between two countries, special international passenger flights can be operated by their airlines into each other's territories under restrictive conditions. "India has finalized an air bubble agreement with Sri Lanka, making it the 6th such arrangement in SAARC region and the 28th in total," the Civil Aviation Ministry said on Twitter. "All the eligible passengers will be able to travel between the 2 countries in the near future," it noted.

Lockdownn in Maha: Streets, markets wear deserted look



The weekend lockdown imposed across Maharashtra to bring under control the COVID-19 surge, has elicited a positive response from people so far with the streets and markets in most parts of the

state, including Mumbai, Pune, Aurangabad and Nagpur, wearing a deserted look, officials said on Saturday. However, at some locations in the state, including some market areas in Mumbai, people were seen flouting social distancing and other norms by gathering at one place in largenumbers. The first weekend lockdown in the state began at 8 pm on Friday and it will continue till 7 am on Monday.

Desist from exploiting Covid situation: HC to IMA members



The Madhya Pradesh High Court has asked the members of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) and MP Nursing Home Association to desist from "exploiting" the coronavirus situation by overcharging the affected persons in the wake of the second

wave of the pandemic. A division bench comprising Chief Justice Mohammad Rafiq and Justice Sanjay Divvedi said this in its order passed on Wednesday. "In the time of the current crisis faced by the country following the second wave of COVID-19, their (associations') members should desist from exploiting the situation by overcharging the affected persons," the court said. It directed the secretary of state public health and family welfare department to give wide publicity to the rates fixed by the government for RT-PCR test, rapid antigen test and chest CT/HRCT scan of COVID-19 suspects/patients, deputy advocate general Swapnil Ganguly said.

Formulate vaccine allotment criteria, Tope tells Centre



Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope has urged the Centre to formulate criteria for allotment of COVID-19 vaccines by taking into consideration factors like population and number of active coronavirus

cases of a particular state. He alleged that many states, which are smaller than Maharashtra in terms of population and the number of patients, have received more doses. Talking to reporters, Tope said that out of the latest dispatch of 3.5 crore doses by the Centre, Maharashtra received 7 lakh and the Centre added another 10 lakh "after much persuasion". "The criteria should be decided in terms of the size of the population and the number of active cases," he said, adding that many smaller states with less population and number of active cases had got more doses than Maharashtra. He said that Maharashtra, with a population of over 12 crore, accounts for 60 per cent of the total number of active cases in the country.

India needs to grow faster to make up for contraction during COVID-19

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

India, which is projected to grow at an impressive rate of 12.5 per cent this year, needs to grow at a much faster pace to make up for the unprecedented contraction of eight per cent that it clocked during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, according to a senior IMF official.

The International Monetary Fund Deputy Chief Economist, Petya Koeva Brooks, in an interview to PTI on Friday also made a strong case for an additional economic stimulus to address the impact of the pandemic on the country's economy. "When it comes to India there was a major collapse of output last fiscal year and the number as you mentioned is eight."

"So, we are very glad to see the strong rebound this year with projected growth of 12.5 for fiscal year 21-22 and we are seeing also high frequency indicators including PMI (Purchasing Managers' Index), and trade and more mobility indicators which give us a sense that there is continued recovery in the first quarter of



this year," she said.

That said, there are some recent emergencies of the new variants in the localised lockdowns that are seen as one of the threats to this recovery, Brooks noted.

"On the recovery itself, when it comes to level in terms of the level of output, we are expecting that level to return to the pre-crisis one from 2019 to this fiscal year. That is what we have in our projections."

"However, if you look at a concept of scarring, which just

compares what the level of output would have been hadn't there not been a crisis in 2020, which is the measure which we are using. Then at and compare where our current growth trajectory is for India that gap is much larger," Brooks said.

The gap, she said, which is eight per cent of GDP is significantly larger than what it is for the world as a whole.

"For the world as a whole it's about three (per cent), which is another way of saying that even though in the near term

we have this real rebound, there's still scope in the coming years to see higher growth which would reduce and hopefully, eliminate that scarring, which we are currently expecting," the top IMF official said in response to a question.

"If we were to just think about the level of output that it was prior to being a pandemic then that catch happens this year, which is not surprising also given the very high level of the underlying high level of growth which India has. But

again, if we compare it to the path of what it would have been without the pandemic then we are getting too many larger gaps there," she said.

Noting that the Indian government took several steps to address the COVID-19 crisis, Brooks said, "We have seen policy responses, which have been coordinated and in several areas. We have seen that the fiscal support, the monetary easing as well as the liquidity and regulatory measures that were taken."

What makes sense is to maintain the focus on having that coordinated policy response because this is what's going to prevent the long-term damage to the economy. Providing that support to small and medium-sized firms as well as vulnerable houses would be particularly important, she said.

Brooks said the IMF very much welcomes the measures that were announced by India during its budget. It is particularly supportive of maintaining the accommodative fiscal stance and also emphasising expenditures on health and infrastructure.

IMF, World Bank urged to ensure timely delivery of vax

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Asserting that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt for years, a joint ministerial committee of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank has urged the two global financial bodies to ensure timely delivery of safe and effective vaccines across all countries.

"Timely delivery of safe and effective vaccines across all countries is critical to ending the pandemic, especially as new variants emerge. Developing countries need to strengthen their readiness for vaccination campaigns and develop coordinated strategies to reach vulnerable populations," the Development Committee said in a communique after the Spring Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank here on Friday.

The panel noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented public health, economic and social crisis, threatening the lives and livelihoods of millions.

The economic shock is increasing poverty, worsening inequalities and reversing development gains. As the global economy begins a gradual recovery, uncertainty sur-



rounds near- and medium-term prospects, it said.

According to Johns Hopkins University, the coronavirus has so far infected 134,545,099 people and claimed 2,914,590 lives globally.

"We call for sustained, differentiated, and targeted financial and technical support for an adequate policy response, strong coordination across bilateral and multilateral organisations, and further support to the private sector."

We urge the World Bank Group (WBG) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in line with their respective mandates, to work closely together and with other partners to contain the impacts of the pandemic," the communique said. The committee called for redoubling the efforts

to support manufacturing capacity for vaccines and the pandemic-related medical supplies in developing countries.

"The pandemic has triggered far-reaching consequences, and we must strengthen global preparedness for future pandemics, and at the same time make progress in building robust health systems with universal coverage," it said.

As poorer countries face the crisis with increased resource constraints, limited fiscal space, and rising public debt levels, more of them, including small states, are vulnerable to financial stress, it said, noting that the rapid initial response under the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) has provided much-needed liquidity for IDA countries.



Shriram Properties files draft papers with Sebi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bengaluru-based Shriram Properties has filed a draft document with market regulator Sebi to raise up to Rs 800 crore through an initial public offer (IPO).

According to sources, Shriram Properties filed the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) on Friday.

As per DRHP, the company proposes to raise up to Rs 800 crore through IPO. Out of the total IPO size, it plans to raise Rs 250 crore through fresh issue of equity shares and Rs 550 crore through offer for sale.

Shriram Properties has proposed partial exits to its four existing investors -- TPG Capital, Tata Capital, Walton Street Capital and Starwood Capital -- which hold around 58 per cent stake in the company.

In offer for sale, each of the selling shareholders will be entitled to their respective portion of the proceeds from the offer for sale in proportion of the shares offered by them.

The company will not receive any proceeds from the offer for sale.

Shriram Properties proposes to utilise the net proceeds from the fresh issue towards repayment and/ or pre-payment of debt and general corporate purposes.

Sources had earlier said that the company expects to get Sebi nod next month and thereafter it will hit the capital market with the proposed IPO.

The company has a major presence in South India. It has completed various real estate projects and many projects are under construction.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indian real estate sector has witnessed two successful public issues of the Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT).

Mindspace Business Parks REIT, owned by K Raheja, was listed in August last year after raising Rs 4,500 crore, while global investment firm Brookfield's REIT public issue worth Rs 3,800 crore got listed in February this year.

India's largest realty firm Macrotech Developers, erstwhile Lodha Developers, is raising up to Rs 2,500 crore through IPO, which closed on Friday.

Alibaba fined USD 2.8 billion on competition charge in China

PNS ■ BEIJING

Alibaba Group, the world's biggest e-commerce company, was fined 18.3 billion yuan (USD 2.8 billion) by Chinese regulators on Saturday for anti-competitive tactics, as the ruling Communist Party tightens control over fast-growing tech industries.

Party leaders worry about the dominance of China's biggest internet companies including Alibaba at a time when the industry is expanding into finance, health services and other sensitive areas. The party says anti-monopoly enforcement, especially in tech industries, is a priority this year. Alibaba was fined for "abusing its dominant position" to limit competition by retailers that



use its platforms and hindering the "free circulation" of goods, the State Administration for Market Regulation announced. It said the fine was equal to 4 per cent of its total 2019 sales of 455.712 billion yuan (USD 69.5 billion). The move is a new setback for

Alibaba and its billionaire founder, Jack Ma, following a November decision by regulators to suspend the stock market debut of Ant Group, a finance platform spun off from the e-commerce giant. It would have been the world's biggest initial public stock offering last year.

Petrol pumps closed in Rajasthan

PNS ■ JAIPUR

People faced difficulty across the state due to a one-day strike called by Rajasthan Petroleum Dealers Association of fuel stations on Saturday with the demand of a rollback in VAT on fuel in the state.

Around 7,000 petrol pumps remained closed in the state due to the strike.

However, fuel pumps that are company owned and company operated were open for the public.

Association president Suneet Bagai said diesel and petrol sales remained closed on the day.

Ranchi-based start-up Puresh Daily raises Rs 1.2 cr seed fund

■ MUMBAI

Jharkhand-based dairy start-up Puresh Daily on Saturday said it has raised Rs 1.2 crore seed funds from Dhianu Das of Alfa ventures and Agility Venture Partners that will be utilised for business development, technology and brand building.

"We're charged with the investors' confidence, as they oversubscribed our start-up during this seed round. With these funds, we will expand our product base to at least 10 more tier-II cities, to 20,000 subscribers and partner with different entrepreneurs," Puresh Daily founder Manish Piyush said in a statement.

Orange production in second spell drops 60 pc in Rajasthan

PNS ■ KOTA (RAJASTHAN)

Adverse climatic conditions and insufficient rainfall last year in the Jhalawar district have adversely affected orange production, which has dropped by about 60 per cent this year in the second spell of flowering.

Over the years, oranges from Jhalawar have come to be recognised better in taste than the variety of orange grown in Maharashtra's Nagpur, famous for production of oranges.

Orange is produced in over 40,000 hectare of land in Dug, Bhawanimandi and Pedawa Jhalrapatan areas of the Jhalawar district, fetching yield in lakhs of metric tons from the second spell of flowering of fruit, P K Gupta, joint director of horticulture department, Jhalawar, said.

He, however, added that the



adverse climatic conditions last year in the district restricted the orange production to only 40 per cent, noting 60 per cent drop.

Last year, the orange cultivation was estimated to have yielded 3,28,000-3,30,000 tonnes of the fruit in its second spell of flowering that takes place in July-August. But, this year, only 1,31,000 tonnes of the fruit in the second spell was

produced causing huge loss to the cultivators, he said.

The flowering on orange tree takes place thrice in a year -- in April, August, December, which the farmers usually memorise as 4/8/12. However, the farmers in Jhalawar prefer to the production of the fruit of second spell of flowering that they locally call 'Mrig Bahar' and the fruit 'Narangi', Gupta said.

HarperCollins India presents NOISE

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

HarperCollins India is delighted to announce the publication of the book NOISE. Most individuals show noise neglect. Leading to unfairness, inefficiency, and reduced productivity, it pervades everything from medicine, law, public health and food safety to forensic science, bail verdicts, child protection, performance reviews and personnel selection. If one wants better, more accurate outcomes for the things that matter, everybody must recognize and reduce noise. It will save money, improve public safety and health, increase fairness, and prevent avoidable errors.

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completes a trilogy that started with Thinking, Fast and Slow and Nudge. Together, they highlight what all leaders need to know to improve their own decisions, and more importantly, to improve deci-

sions throughout their organizations' - Max H. Bazerman, author of Better, Not Perfect

'In Noise, the authors brilliantly apply their unique and novel insights into the flaws in human judgment to every sphere of human endeavour... a masterful achievement and a landmark in the field of psychology.' - Philip E. Tetlock, co-author of Superforecasting

'The influence of Noise should be seismic, as it explores a fundamental yet grossly underestimated peril of human judgment. Deepening its must-read status, it provides accessible methods for reducing the decisional menace.' - Robert Cialdini, author of Influence and Pre-Suasion

'After reading Kahneman, one's thinking about oneself—and one's thinking about thinking—is permanently altered.' - Samantha Power.



76K applying for internships every day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The recruitment and training platform, Internshala has brought out a new report regarding the increasing awareness of internships amongst the students of India. The key highlight of the report is that 76,000 students applied to internships every day in the past year. The reason behind this is that internships have become an integral part of a college student's career journey in India, irrespective of their educational background or level of education - undergrad, postgrad, or doctoral.

Every year, the number of students registering for internships is increasing. Even

in 2020 when the whole nation was facing the challenges posed by the pandemic, there was a 35% rise in the number of students seeking internships. The students understand the value of internships in building their career and exploring their options. Therefore, they took up the challenge of adapting to the circumstances during the testing times of COVID-19 and as a result, 76% of the students applied to virtual internship opportunities.

Another important learning from the report was that of all the students who were able to grab fresher jobs in the past year, 65% of students had one or more internship experience listed in their resume.

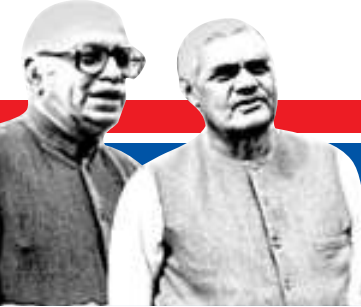
Bajaj announces special cashback offers on LED TVs



This cricket season, those looking to get a stadium like feel from the comfort of their home can purchase the latest LED TVs on No Cost EMI starting Rs. 999 from the Bajaj Finserv EMI Store. The EMI Store is also offering customers benefits up to Rs. 4,500 on purchase of LED TV. This offer is valid on smart TVs from all major brands such as LG, Samsung, Sony, and Panasonic. Whether it is a 32-inch LED TV or a 4K Ultra HD LED TV, customers can choose from a wide range of options on the EMI Store and avail benefits worth up to Rs. 4,500. Customers buying an LED TV from the Bajaj Finserv EMI Store are entitled to a cashback worth up to Rs. 1,500. Additionally, they will also get mobile recharge vouchers worth up to Rs. 1,500 and electricity bill vouchers worth up to Rs. 1,500*.

the pioneer agenda

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Just play

Augmented Reality toys are the new entrants in the market justifying extra play time on ground of contributing to child learning.

I'm afraid of everything. But maybe when you're afraid of everything, it sort of seems like you're scared of nothing
— Natalie Portman



THE BEAUTIFUL GOA GLITCH

Street artist and co-founder St+art India, Hanif Kureshi, Bombay Sapphire's Stir Creativity, Serendipity Arts Foundation and the Corporation of the City of Panaji join hands to paint Goa's dry waste sorting stations and turn them into works of art. NAVNEET MENDIRATTA speaks to the artist

You just cannot miss the beautiful mural painted in colours of Goa as you drive past the busy road in Dona Paula, Panjim, Goa. It's an unusual canvas. Painted in bright hues, mostly blue, this work of public art is painted on Goa's dry waste sorting stations, making for an attractive selfie point.

Called Goa Glitch, this mural is a joint initiative of Bombay Sapphire's Stir Creativity, Serendipity Arts Foundation, the Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP) and St+art India co-founder Hanif Kureshi. The idea being to tap into the imaginative spirit of those passing by. The mural features geometric visuals in beautiful hues of the Bombay Sapphire blue, representing the spirit of adventure and the openness of Goa, and bringing to life the endless coastlines, and the expansive blue skies of the city.

"The mural is about exploiting the colours of Goa, like a glitch," says Kureshi in a candid conversation post the unveiling of the mural. "I visualised it as glitching of the colours of Goan skies — in summer, monsoon, winter; morning, afternoon and noon... Different shades of blue that could also be interpreted as colours of water, more specifically the ocean. It's like the glitch of both skies and the ocean and that's why Goa Glitch," he says.

Kureshi has been working with Serendipity Arts for the last four years or since it started. In the first edition, Kureshi participated as an artist and then from the next edition onwards he worked as a curator, where he brought in St+art India and put together street art editions in Panjim. Bombay Sapphire's Stir Creativity platform aims to revive and enable creative self-expression amongst the audience. For over three decades, the



brand has collaborated with designers, artists, architects, and individuals from outside the creative industry to create artworks that reawaken creative potential.

"Each mural has a story. It's interesting when you work on the street, you find that there are so many stories that are waiting to be told. As for this, I am kind of familiar with Panjim's landscape and whenever a new structure comes up, we look at it as a possible canvas," he shares. This, or shall we say, these canvasses have been particularly interesting. "Not many are aware that these new structures are actually dry waste sorting stations. This is where CCP segregates the waste of dry kind such as paper, plastic, sharp objects, glass, steel and metal. These sheds play a very important role in the whole recycling scheme of things. Our idea was to bring attention to the process and promote recycling. We wanted to give it a new life and make it not look like a dustbin. And we thought what better than art to get the conversation started," he says, speaking of the collaboration.

Considering Dona Paula is one of the busiest public areas in Goa, the mural highlights the artist's message on the importance of sustainability and recycling very effectively. In India, Goa is one of the cities that recycles 80% of their waste with a strong model created for waste management and sustainability. In addition to stirring creativity among the community, the collaboration builds awareness for environmental sustainability and encourages people to be more conscious of their actions, he shares. Besides this shed, Kureshi is collaborating to paint at least three more in a year.

An alumni of Baroda School of Art, Kureshi started painting on streets in 2008. He began with Graffiti and gradually moved on to the world of street art which he says, he finds "more free". "The difference between Graffiti and Street Art, you could say, is the sense of style. While Graffiti can be

NOT MANY ARE AWARE THAT THESE NEW STRUCTURES ARE ACTUALLY DRY WASTE SORTING STATIONS. THIS IS WHERE CCP SEGREGATES THE WASTE OF DRY KIND SUCH AS PAPER, PLASTIC, SHARP OBJECTS, GLASS, STEEL AND METAL. THESE SHEDS PLAY A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE WHOLE RECYCLING SCHEME OF THINGS. OUR IDEA WAS TO BRING ATTENTION TO THE PROCESS AND PROMOTE RECYCLING

likened to vandalism, Street Art is more positively thought out and refined. So, yes, you could say that I sought an expression that is more positive and would provoke people to think," he shares.

From getting German street artist, Hendrick ECB to paint the 150 ft mural of Mahatma Gandhi at the Police Headquarters in New Delhi, as part of the St+Art Delhi street art festival in January 2014 to commemorate the martyrdom of the Father of the Nation, to putting together Street Art festival in Shahpur Jat and Hauz Khas in Delhi, the entire process evoked the idea on gentrification in the city. "The awareness regarding the street art grew as we moved towards Lodhi Colony and worked with the government properties. However, working at a central location like Lodhi Colony, we realised that there is no room for gentrification there. We have been doing similar work in Chennai and Mumbai," he shares.

While Kureshi shares that the response and reception to street art has grown in the past decade, the element of planning in the urban-scape continues to elude in the country. "There's no urban planning element to street art as of now. And that's why, I feel, it becomes more important for art to cover up for all that is not planned," he avers. Delhi's Lodhi Colony perhaps is a case in point but then there is a catch. "Maybe at some point, Lodhi Colony will be demolished and there would be high rises instead. But I still feel the art that found place there would leave a lasting impact. I think about the children growing up in Lodhi Colony and their imagination and what they would like think about art and perhaps, choosing art as a career option," he says.

On the subject of Street Art versus vandalism, Kureshi has a take: "There is a thin line between vandalism and street art. Personally, when I set out to do graffiti, I could have gone on to become a rebel. More so in principle, as there is a school that produces rebels and is more of a breeding ground where you adopt a bottom down approach. Street art, on the other hand, takes a top down approach where you get on the ground with more voices on the street to inspire more people to express themselves. You can be vocal about issues with the same amount of rights which any other company has in terms of putting in money and making an ad and putting on the face. If carried out properly, with

requisite permissions, even the people start owning street art. That's when the real change takes place."

This is also not the first time that Kureshi has lent his creativity to a cause. Kureshi has recently partnered with Art For Change, a virtual art challenge and exhibition, as one of the jury members. The initiative aims to change the narrative by turning the focus away from the victim and putting the spotlight on the perpetrator. Organised by Gordon Thomas Honeywell-GA & Ogilvy India in partnership with UN Women India, Girl Up (UN Foundation), reputed academic institutions like National Institute of Fashion Technology, Delhi (NIFT) and Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Pune (SIMB), this initiative seeks to unleash the power of creativity to transform the way our society deals with survivors of rape & sexual violence, shifting the accountability from the survivor to the perpetrator.

"Art for Change is a project all about violence against women, which includes domestic abuse. It is about inviting ideas about how we can change the situation so the project moves people to act instead of being mute spectators," he says.

Besides Delhi, Kureshi has been working a lot in Chennai. "We did a district called Kannagi Art District. I find cities in south India to be much more welcoming than the cities in north India. The art culture is there and people understand and respect the art as well as the artist," he shares.

Similarly, Kureshi-led St+art has worked on creating Mahim Art district in Mumbai; Ukkadam Art District in Coimbatore and Maqtha Art District in Hyderabad. "Different cities have different styles. So in Maqtha, which is predominantly a Muslim district, we try not to paint portraits. The focus is to be more abstract in that space, trying to be more sensitive to the surrounds. It is also about encouraging people to own the art and the space," he shares.

Ask him about the dream city to paint, Kureshi says: "We are okay with the metros that we are painting. There really is no dream city as such in our mind. The idea, however, is to go to cities where people are excited and reach out to the grassroots of India. For that is where the real artist would love to leave their mark.

JUST PLAY

Augmented Reality toys are the new entrants in the market justifying extra play time on ground of contributing to child learning. MUSBA HASHMI speaks with experts to tell you more

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, only a few would have believed in it. However, the current education world has turned more into a playground for the kids, where they frolic with toys while learning on the way. The latest entrant to enhance the learning process is the much-talked about AR technology, which is revolutionising the way education is perceived.

Dolls and guns are slowly be relegated to the kids' cupboards. Gone are the days when kids used to run away at the mere mention of study time. Now, parents are engaging children with meaningful play hours where they get educated without them even realising it. Educational toys is the biggest category in the toy industry and is also the fastest growing among all other categories. Here comes the new kid on the bloc — AR toys. With the arrival of smart AR-toys, the world has become your child's oyster. They can make playtime productive, learn through stories, and travel the world without actually leaving home. With the increasing number of kids, parents, and educators alike who use AR-toys regularly, one thing's clear. AR-powered learning toys are the next big thing in education, and by the looks of it, they're here to stay.

The pandemic has also led the majority of parents (62%) to see that devices and technology can be used as educational tools, as per the Morning Consult, a market research company. "The reasons for the rise of AR toys are manifold. Children in their formative years are bubbling with energy and enthusiasm. Sadly, their short attention span is no secret. They lose interest in games as quickly as they gain it. While traditional games might be exciting for a few days, they might not be able to hold the children's attention for long," says Vivek Goyal, Co-Founder & CEO PlayShifu. It is no mean feat that PlayShifu toys are currently bringing joy to children across 35 countries.

When engaging the kids at home, it's essential to introduce them to toys that yield a different experience each time. Predictable games often lose their sheen quickly, leaving the children disinterested. Going gaga over the latest fad, and the fact that these toys have helped in enhancing her daughter's concentration, Gurugram's Kusum, mother of four-year-old Nia, says, "The normal toys got boring after a while as most of them needed my assistance too and some of them were closed-end toys. Most striking change has been in her concentration span since these toys are interactive, interesting, and lead to questions and exploration."

A lot more parents are picking up educational toys, now more than ever. They are investing in products that offer learning opportunities for their children. But, these investments are fruitful only when the children themselves find the toy exciting enough. "Our primary focus is to achieve that balance and create phygital experiences that are both fun and educational. Our games thrive on creative storytelling, animated characters and innovative interactions that make learning a delight. There's no greater joy than to see a child learning while playing — and not being able to tell the difference," adds Goyal.

HOW THESE TOYS WORK

The link between the real (or physical) and the digital (or virtual) world, augmented reality is an interactive experience that blends both worlds. In gaming, AR bridges the gap between the physical toy and the smartphone or tablet. For instance, some games need you to use your smartphone to scan a real-world object to move ahead in the story. If the real-world object is a flashcard of a tiger, the smartphone presents interactive image, video or a 3D figure of the animal on the screen. In some games, the goal might be to find hidden objects by scanning your actual surroundings with your smartphone.

"The prospect of bringing an object to life is fascinating and exciting. If the topic at hand is how animals live in their natural habitat, AR can teach it through 3D models. Younger children can listen to the sounds the animal makes and understand its eating habits, all through stories and simple games. Meanwhile, older children can learn about the food chain and complex ecosystems, through interactive and informative games,"

UNLIKE VIDEO GAMES AND APPS, AR TOYS HELP MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT WITH TACTILE PLAY. HOWEVER, OVER DEPENDENCE CAN AFFECT THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS IN CHILDREN. PROLONGED EXPOSURE TO A SCREEN MAY IMPACT THEIR CONCENTRATION LEVELS AND MAKE THEM WITHDRAW — PRAKRITI PODDAR, GLOBAL HEAD FOR MENTAL HEALTH, ROUND GLASS



informs Goyal.

AR makes it possible to explore multiple avenues of learning and present various pieces of information in a visual, easy-to-understand manner. Where a regular map tells you about countries and capitals, an AR-powered globe takes learning to a whole new level. It not only teaches geography, but also introduces you to various cultures, cuisines, monuments, and animals-all at the touch of a button. By marrying tactical play and digital storytelling, AR toys bring together the best of both worlds. Various digital elements like audio, video, images, and 3D content, merge with physical components of the toy, thereby making learning a unique and inclusive process. The AR technology also helps the child interact with the world around them and creates two-way interactivity, where the child feels like they have control over what they're learning.

Moreover, AR creates a system of instant feedback that motivates the child to learn more and be more accurate. Most AR toys provide a progress report or graph, which is a personalised evaluation of your child's learning curve and

progress. This report can be monitored and tracked from time-to-time.

A GROWING INDUSTRY

Tech-enabled toys are on the rise worldwide. In the US alone, tech-enabled toy segment grew by 36 per cent when the overall toy industry was almost stagnant. This segment in India is growing even more. In the coming years, we see this growth trend continuing.

There are a handful of companies working in this industry. "Consumers in this segment do not buy the tech for the wow factor, but for the lasting impact and use case. Sooner or later, every company in this industry will create meaningful experiences that have a more significant objective, built on a base of AR/VR technology," says Goyal.

BANE OR BOON

Since kids are fond of play-based learning and augmented reality toys help to enhance life-skills in children. These AR toys and games help improve their digital aptitude as well as their cognitive skills. They have been at the forefront of combining education and entertainment

for kids. Various research also says that creative thinking in the brain develops majorly during the early ages of the kids' lives. Kids draw, tell stories, sing, dance, and write without any specific training because a child's brain is free to learn and imagine things rather than being logical about it.

"It's still not the same as that of self learning but is probably the next best thing and definitely better than passively watching TV screens and tablets and mobiles. Augmented reality toys improve the child's imagination power as they get to draw, paint, write and tell stories the way they want. Moreover, these toys are kid-friendly and safe to operate as they don't have any live wires or sharp ends," says Dr Rohit Arora, Head of Neonatology & Pediatric, Miracles MedClinic, Gurugram. He says that for an early age tech-savvy kids, AR toys provide something extra to boost their brain development. "Interactive AR toys can help them understand information at their comfort level and retain it for long. These toys are engaging, experimental and immersive from a child's perspective," adds Dr Arora.

However, experts warns that AR games can have a harmful impact on kids' eyesight. There is a threat of drifting away from reality as they might not get in-person interaction as much. These toys can be addictive for kids, and they can create confusion in young minds.

"Unlike video games and apps, AR toys aid in motor skill development with tactile play. However, being too dependent on AR toys can affect the development of social skills in young children. Disproportionate exposure to screens can affect their concentration levels and can make them withdrawn," says Prakriti Poddar, Global Head for Mental Health at Round Glass, Managing Trustee Poddar Foundation.

Assessing the impact of screen time on the emotional health of children, the World Health Organisation recommends no screen time for babies under two and no more than one hour of screen time a day for those aged two to four. "Excessive screen time can reduce the child's capability to rely on themselves, especially in times of crisis or strain, and reduce concentration, focus, and the feeling of empathy," she adds.

WONDER KITS FOR YOUR TINY TOTS

From teaching art to coding, brands are ready to walk an extra mile and teach children in the most engaging way possible. The AR toys are set to become a game changer in the industry, if not more. Here are a few options that one can choose from:

KANO

Appropriate for kids aged six and older, the Kano PC kit is no less than a personal laptop for kids. The DIY tablet is the ideal destination

for learning art, science along with coding. Consisting of hardware components, the kid needs to fit the parts to create a functional Windows 10 tablet that comes with a MicroSD card slot and detachable keyboard. Once completed, the kid can share their projects with the Kano community on Kano World online.

LITTLEBITS

It provides you the experience of an e-

classroom. Its coding kit is its signature product and is ideal for kids from Class III to Class VIII who wish to step into the coding arena at an early age. The Steam+ kit extends curriculum-aligned material while engaging the kids in an analytical thinking process. It offers activities, innovations for maker spaces, libraries, camps, clubs, etc.

WONDER WORKSHOP

The platform aims to build future innovators



and is an innovative product for kids aged six and above. The platform showcases the in-app puzzle library, standard-based lessons along with robotic challenges. Their application, Wonder for Dash & Dot Robots extends learning about robotics in a fun way. It is a coding tool that enables the kid to play and explore robotics all by themselves and offers 300 plus challenges that teach kids about robotics programming and building. With the help of this kids can create their own

machinery, feed in their desired mechanisms and play the challenges.

OSMO

The brand offers electronic toys that are compatible with iPad or Amazon Fire tablets. The kit consists of numbers, shapes, coding instructions, puzzles, drawing, business aptitude and likewise learning features that allows the kid to explore various fields and learn independently.



Next stop, Space

ALL-CIVILIAN SPACEFLIGHT CREW READY WITH TICKETS, TRAINING

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Several hundred people have already booked their tickets and begun training for a spectacular voyage: a few minutes, or perhaps days, in the weightlessness of space.

The mainly wealthy first-time space travellers are getting ready to take part in one of several private missions which are preparing to launch.

The era of space tourism is on the horizon 60 years after Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first person in space.

Two companies, Virgin Galactic and Blue Origin, are building spacecraft capable of sending private clients on suborbital flights to the edge of space lasting several minutes.

Glenn King is the director of spaceflight training at the National Aerospace Training and Research Center, a private company based in Pennsylvania which has already trained nearly 400 future Virgin Galactic passengers for their trips.

"The oldest person I trained was 88 years old," King told AFP.

The training program lasts two days -- a morning of classroom instruction and tests in a centrifuge.

This involves putting the trainee in a single-seat cockpit at the end of a 25-foot-long (eight-meter-long) arm and spinning them around to simulate gravitational force, or G force.

A medical team is on hand at all times.

NASA's training for shuttle crew members lasted two years but the duration has been drastically reduced by the commercial space indus-

try because of the "numbers of people that want to get up in space," King said.

"We can't take two years to train these people," he said. "We've got to get this down to a matter of days to get these people up."

"These people aren't crews, just strictly passengers," he noted.

"For a passenger, there isn't a lot of work for you to do other than just relax, endure the G forces of launch or reentry."

"And then once you're orbital, enjoy the view out the window."

King said the pass rate for the training course has been "99.9 percent."

The cost ranges from several thousand dollars to as

much as \$10,000 if special care or medical monitoring is needed.

The single biggest barrier to "spaceflight for all" remains the price tag.

Some 600 people have booked flights on Virgin Galactic, the company owned by British billionaire Richard Branson, and thousands more are on a waiting list. The cost per flight? \$200,000 to \$250,000.

Virgin Galactic hopes to take its first private astronaut on a suborbital flight in early 2022, with eventual plans for 400 trips a year.

Blue Origin, owned by Amazon's Jeff Bezos, has not yet published prices or a calendar.



Elon Musk shares video of monkey playing games with its mind

Elon Musk's latest tweet showing a monkey playing a game using his mind has triggered a plethora of reactions on social media.

Taking to the microblogging website, the Tesla CEO retweeted a post by Neuralink along with a caption that read, "Monkey plays Pong with his mind." He explained, "A monkey is literally playing a video game telepathically using a brain chip!"

Originally shared by Neuralink, the 3.27-minute clip features Pager, a nine-year-old Macaque using a joystick to play a game on the computer screen. However, moments later when the joystick is disconnected,

the monkey is able to continue playing the game using its mind.

Musk's start-up is developing a fully-implanted, wireless, count brain-machine interface (BMI) that would enable people with paralysis to directly use their neural activity to operate various devices with ease. The monkey in the video was implanted with a Neuralink weeks before the experiment was conducted.

In the experiment, the monkey is not only playing the game with its mind, but is also able to adapt to it when the difficulty level is increased. The clip concludes with the monkey being rewarded with a banana.



6.0-magnitude earthquake strikes off Indonesia coast: US agency

A 6.0-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Indonesia's Java island Saturday, the United States Geological Survey said, but no tsunami warning was issued.

The quake hit at a depth of 82 kilometres (50 miles), about 45 kilometres southwest of Malang city in East Java. There were no immediate reports of casualties, but the tremor shook Malang, a city of several million people.

"It was pretty strong and went for a long time," resident Ida Magfiroh told AFP.

"Everything was swaying." Indonesia experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where tectonic plates collide. In 2018, a 7.5-magnitude quake and a subsequent tsunami in Palu on Sulawesi island left more than 4,300 people dead or missing.



RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat tests positive for Covid, hospitalised

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat has tested positive for coronavirus, the organisation tweeted on its official handle.

Bhagwat, 70, has been showing common symptoms of coronavirus infection, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) tweeted. "He is currently having common symptoms of COVID-19 and has been admitted to Kingsway Hospital in Nagpur, is undergoing general check-up and caution," the RSS tweeted.

Prashant Kishor Clubhouse chat on Bengal elections goes viral As 44 seats in West Bengal went to polls Saturday, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee's poll strategist Prashant Kishor found himself in controversy after statements he purportedly made during a public chat on Clubhouse, a social media platform, went viral. Reacting to the leaked audio clips, where he can be heard saying that the Trinamool's internal survey shows BJP will be elected in Bengal this year, Kishor said, "I am glad BJP is taking my chat more seriously than words of their own leaders! They should show courage and share the full chat instead of getting excited with selective use of parts of it."

He had \$20 Billion, then lost it all in two days



Before he lost it all -- \$20 billion -- Bill Hwang was the greatest trader you'd never heard of. Starting in 2013, he parlayed more than \$200 million left over from his shuttered hedge fund into a mind-boggling fortune by betting on stocks. Had he folded his hand in early March and cashed in, Hwang, 57, would have stood out among the world's billionaires. There are richer men and women, of course, but their money is mostly tied up in businesses, real estate, complex investments, sports teams, and artwork. Hwang's \$20 billion net worth was almost as liquid as a government stimulus check. And

then, in two short days, it was gone.

The sudden implosion of Hwang's Archegos Capital Management in late March is one of the most spectacular failures in modern financial history: No individual has lost so much money so quickly. At its peak, Hwang's wealth briefly eclipsed \$30 billion. It's also a peculiar one. Unlike the Wall Street stars and Nobel laureates who ran Long-Term Capital Management, which famously blew up in 1998, Hwang was largely unknown outside a small circle: fellow churchgoers and former hedge fund colleagues, as well as a handful of bankers.



Madhya Pradesh Minister performs 'puja' at airport to ward off Covid

The worrying surge in coronavirus cases seems to have forced politicians to seek divine intervention to ward off the threat posed by the deadly disease. For instance, Usha Thakur, the Minister for Tourism and Culture in Madhya Pradesh, was seen leading a prayer meet - though without a face mask - in Indore.

The minister was seen performing 'puja' before the statue of Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar at the Indore airport. The MLA from Indore's Mhow seat - who was seen



clapping and singing before the deity - was joined by Airport Director Aryama Sanyas and other staff members at the ceremony.

Ms Thakur has often been seen without a

face mask in public, critics say. During assembly session when she was asked why she is not wearing a mask, Ms Thakur had told NDTV that she doesn't need to wear a mask as she performs 'havan' (ritual burning) every day and recites the Hanuman Chalisa.

Ms Thakur has previously claimed that 'havan' of a cow dung cake can keep a house sanitised for 12 hours.

Last year, a video of Union Minister Ramdas Athawale chanting "Go corona, go corona" at a prayer meet had gone viral on social media.