

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

VIJAYAWADA, SUNDAY APRIL 11, 2021; PAGES 10-16 ₹5

sunday pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

**ALL-CIVILIAN
SPACEFLIGHT
CREW READY
WITH TICKETS...****10****RULING BJP, ALLY SUFFER SHOCK DEFEAT
IN TRIPURA TRIBAL COUNCIL POLLS**

The BJP on Saturday suffered a massive defeat in tribal council polls in Tripura, where the party rules in alliance with the IPFT (Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura). The crucial Tripura Autonomous District Council polls were swept by a new outfit - TIPRA (The Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance) - that won 18 of 28 seats. The BJP and its ally won just nine, with the other seat going to an independent. The Left Front, which won the earlier election, and the Congress failed to win any seats. TIPRA is headed by Tripura royal Pradyot Manikya Deb Burman, who resigned as chief of the Congress' state unit in September.

**AMIT SHAH RESPONSIBLE, SAYS MAMATA
BANERJEE ON BENGAL POLL VIOLENCE**

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday blamed Union Home Minister Amit Shah for the violence in Sitalkuchi in West Bengal's Cooch Behar district where voting had to be called off after clashes left four people dead. "Amit Shah is completely responsible for today's incident and he himself is the conspirator. I don't blame central forces because they work under Home Minister's order. We will demand his resignation," she said, calling the deaths "murder by central forces". Mamata will visit the area on Sunday while the TMC plans black-badge protests across the state.

**PUNJAB, RAJASTHAN JOIN MAHA IN
RED-FLAGGING LOW VAX STOCKS**

Punjab and Rajasthan have warned the centre of fast-depleting coronavirus vaccine stocks, even as a deadly second wave of infections - over 1.45 lakh were reported in 24 hours this morning - threatens to overrun the country and its already-creaking medical infrastructure. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said his state had only five days of vaccines left - three if it reached its target of two lakh shots per day - and called on the centre to rush the next batch. Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and warned of an even worse condition, with vaccine stocks set to run out in 48 hours or less, and urged the Centre to send 30 lakh doses immediately.

**CENTRE HAS MISMANAGED COVID,
SUPPLY OF VACCINE, CHARGES SONIA**

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 cases. Addressing a virtual meeting with the CMs of the States ruled by the Congress or its allies, she said the priority should be to test, track and vaccinate. She reviewed the efforts by states ruled by the Congress to tackle the second wave of Covid after India saw a record 1,45,384 cases and 794 deaths.



Jagan is 'Super Boss' over AIS officers as PAR rules tweaked

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

In a move that allows Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy to wield power over All India Service (AIS) officers working in Andhra Pradesh, the State government on Saturday tweaked certain service rules related to the annual Performance Appraisal Reports (PARs). These confidential PARs are considered very important in the career of AIS officers like IAS, IPS and IFS. As per the amendments, the Chief Minister would be the final authority over accepting these PARs.

Hitherto, these confidential reports were finally accepted by the Chief Secretary. However, the reviewing authority of these annual PARs has been vested with the Chief Secretary and reporting authority - their respective depart-



ment heads in the case of mid-level and junior officers remained the same.

The amendments, in a way, clip clipping the powers of the Chief Secretary. Transfers, postings and even central deputations of the AIS

officers are based on these annual confidential appraisal reports which will now be at the Chief Minister's discretion.

Incidentally, Andhra Pradesh is not the first state to tweak annual PARs rules. The practice is followed

in states like Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar where PARs of AIS officers finally go to the respective Chief Ministers for final stamp.

Under rule 5 of the "All India Services (Performance Appraisal Report) Rules, 2007" a Performance Appraisal Report assessing the performance, character, conduct and qualities of every member of the service shall be written for each financial year or as may be specified by the government.

The Jaganmohan Reddy government had reviewed the existing channel for writing of annual PARs and decided to revise the rules in order to ensure uniformity and control of the executive over the administration for effective public service delivery.

2

Bengal polls: 4 killed as CISF opens fire

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.

"According to preliminary reports, four persons were killed as CISF personnel opened fire after coming under attack in a village. A scuffle took place, and locals gheraoed them and attempted to

snatch their rifles, following which the central forces opened fire. Further details are awaited," a police official said.

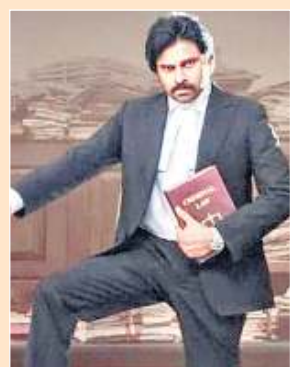
The EC has sought a detailed report on the incident.

According to official sources, the preliminary report submitted by the EC's special police observer Vivek Dubey said a huge mob of around 350-400 people had gheraoed the central forces, following which they fired in "self-defence".

The incident led to violence in the area where bombs were hurled, prompting central forces to baton-charge to bring the situation under control.

In another incident, an 18-year-old voter, Ananda Barman, was gunned down outside booth number 85 at Pathantuli, also in Sitalkuchi, after clashes broke out between activists of the ruling TMC and the BJP.

Meanwhile, a political storm erupted over the incident.

**Curbs on 'Vakeel Saab'
may boomerang on
YSRCP in Tirupati****2****IMF, World Bank
urged to ensure
timely delivery
of vax****6****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)
Amritakalam: NIL
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:52 am - 12:41 pm

**VIJAYAWADA
WEATHER**

Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 40/27
Humidity: 50%
Sunrise: 06:08 am
Sunset: 06:29 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated April 4, 2021 5:00 PM

OBTUSE ANGLE

ABV alleges forgery, seeks CBI probe against senior IPS officers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Suspended senior IPS officer and former state intelligence chief AB Venkateswara Rao on Saturday wrote to Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, urging him to order a CBI probe into alleged for-

gery and tampering of certain documents by senior IPS officials and also action against them.

Venkateswara Rao, also called ABV, urged the Chief Secretary to take action against the most powerful bureaucrat in the CMO, Praveen Prakash and also former

Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney, alleging that they had issued illegal and arbitrary orders by misguiding the disciplinary authority and the government due to their negligence and dereliction of duty.

2

Class X exam duration extended

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

To reduce strain on students taking the Class X exam in June this year, the Director of School Education has asked the education department to increase the duration of the examinations. The decision aims at making students comfortable while taking the exams.

Considering the request, the school department has increased

the duration of the examination for all subjects.

Earlier, the government had decided to limit the SSC Class X exams to six papers instead of 11, considering the closure of classes due to Covid-19 pandemic.

The SSC examinations will be conducted from 9.30 am.

According to the new timing, the duration of the examination will be 3 hour and 15 minutes for 1st

Language, 2nd Language, 3rd Language, Mathematics and Social Studies.

It will be 2 hours and 45 minutes for Physical Science and Biological Science, 1 hour 45 minutes for 1st Science, 1 hour 45 minutes for 1st Language Paper-II (Composite Course), 3 hours and 15 minutes for OSSC Main Language Subjects (Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian) Paper-1 and Paper- 2 and 2 hours for SSC Vocational course.

Covid spike forces Jagan to call off Tirupati tour

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In the wake of a spike in Covid-19 cases, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has cancelled his Tirupati by-poll campaign scheduled for April 14.

With this, focus has now shifted towards the roadshows to be addressed by TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu, his son Nara Lokesh and also the scheduled campaign by BJP national president JP Nadda and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan on April 14.

With Jagan having stayed away from campaigning for the just-concluded urban and rural local body polls, all eyes were on his Tirupati campaign where he was scheduled to address a massive public meeting. Arrangements were also in full swing as it was supposed to be the first such political public meeting that Jagan would address after taking over as Chief Minister.

In a letter addressing the voters of Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency, Jagan on Saturday said he cancelled his tour as Covid-19 cases were on the rise.

The infection has been spreading rapidly and according to the recent health bulletin, AP reported 2,765 new cases in the last 24 hours with a positivity rate of 8.67 percent which is higher than the national rate, which is 5.87 percent.

Tirupati Parliament constituency, spread across Chittoor and Nellore districts, recorded a big spike in the past few days. Of the 2,765 positive cases, 496 cases were registered in Chittoor and 292 cases in Nellore districts.

2

A nurse administers Covid-19 vaccine while speaking over the phone in Vizianagaram's Parvathipuram. With the picture going viral on social media, the district health officials served a show-cause notice on the nurse.

CM writes to Modi to provide 25 lakh doses of vaccine

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to supply 25 lakh Covid-19 vaccine doses.

Pointing out that there is an urgent need of another 25 lakh doses for the state, Jagan said that if this is made available before April 11, "Tika Utsav" can be celebrated under your able leadership in the state in a grand manner".

In his letter dated April 9, Jagan said that "Your kind call for 'Tika Utsav' from April 11 to April 14 is a much-needed step to give the required push to different sections of the society to come forward for vaccination. We have planned to take this opportunity and participate on a large scale. The Utsav shall be taken up in one village and one ward under the jurisdiction of every Primary Health Centre (PHC)".

2

Take 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.

2

HC backs Govt over curb on Vakeel Saab 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. 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.

The Government then filed a House Motion petition challenging the High Court's decision

Govt tweaks ...

Continued from Page 1

“This is nothing but making the Chief Minister the ultimate boss not just in executive but also in the state administration,” said a senior Government officer.

He added: “We never know if he will make any changes to these annual PARs that come to him for the finalisation based on the inputs he gets from different sources. Now, without the Chief Minister’s nod, no transfer of IAS officers can be made nor can their promotions be decided.”

Effectively, postings, placements, central deputation and seniority of AIS officers would be decided only by the Chief Minister. “Until now, Chief Minister’s nod was needed unofficially for such postings, transfers and central deputation. With the new amended rules that power now solely rests with the Chief Minister,” said the senior officer.

Curbs on ‘Vakeel Saab’ may boomerang on YSRCP

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
■ TIRUPATI

Reversing their earlier stand, Balijas appear to have decided to vote for the BJP, because of what they believe is a ‘raw deal’ to Pawan Kalyan’s latest film ‘Vakeel Saab’.

This change of heart is being attributed to the state government acting tough with ‘Vakeel Saab’ and refusing to allow its producers to hike the ticket price and number of benefit shows.

Balijas, who outnumber Kapus, feel that the latter have been cornering benefits they have a right to. It was this perception that had made them resolve to cast their vote for NOTA if no Jana Sena candidate was fielded in Tirupati by-poll.



Since Pawan Kalyan is a Kapu and he is backing the BJP in the by-poll, the Balijas had decided to vote against the BJP.

Now, they are openly advocating members of the community to vote for the BJP.

Objecting to the government’s refusal to hike the ticket price and number of bene-

fit shows, the producers obtained a court order in their favour.

However, the administration ruled that hiking of ticket price would not be allowed, angering the Kapus in AP, where politics are linked with caste.

The Kapus who sail with the

Jana Sena are not able to digest the restriction. At many places, they came out on the streets to raise their voice against the government’s ‘vindictive’ attitude.

Till Friday, Balijas had not been in favour of voting for the BJP since a Kapu was backing the party.

Balijanadu convenor and TTD Board former member OV Ramana confirmed the U-turn by Balijas, saying that this would not have been the case had the government not placed curbs on Vakeel Saab benefit shows.

However, he emphasised that he would still remain committed to his statement that the BJP would not win because of the electoral campaign taken up by Pawan Kalyan.

ABV alleges forgery, seeks CBI probe against senior...

Continued from Page 1

He also compared his case with the famous espionage case of scientist Nambi Narayanan.

ABV has been facing charges of intent to procure certain equipment flouting norms and rules. Upon a Supreme Court order, the state government had appointed a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) to probe into the charges framed against him and the inquiry was completed recently.

“The ACB registered a case on March 18 and conducted searches of my residences in Vijayawada and Hyderabad the next morning. They seized one laptop and one desktop containing the notes and questionnaires I prepared for the Inquiry.

They also seized some documents which I kept ready for filing with the Inquiring Authority as defence documents. In spite of all this, while placing the developments on record with the Inquiring Authority, I participated in the inquiry which was held continuously from March 22 till April 4,” ABV said in his letter to the CS.

He added that during the inquiry, going through the



documents filed by the prosecution and certain other documents already on record by virtue of their having been filed by the State in Central Administrative Tribunal, High Court of Andhra Pradesh and Supreme Court of India, he came to notice the forgery, fraud, witness tampering and evidence tampering that was indulged by certain police officers and police organisations involved in conducting various enquiries and inquiries.

He said the officers involved in these crimes include the DGP (HoPF), ADG CID, DG, ACB and officers of the Intelligence Department and several others.

“I request that the matter be entrusted to the CBI for thorough investigation on the same lines as the case of burning of

chariot at Antarvedi was entrusted to the CBI. Since the officers involved are senior officers holding important posts, I request the Government to consider whether their continuance in the same posts would be an impediment to a fair and timely investigation. I submit that I am ready with all the evidence pertaining to the above contentions,” he said.

“My case has several similarities with the Nambi Narayanan case that occurred in 1994,” he added.

ABV had also enclosed the documents that he said were forged and the documents that were created and were tampered. “I’m also enclosing a simple analysis of the planted evidence to show how blatantly it was planted,” he said.

Covid spike forces Jagan to call off Tirupati tour

Continued from Page 1

Of the 11 fatalities due to Covid, four were from Chittoor and Nellore districts, Jagan said in the letter.

“As the public meeting will attract huge crowds, keeping in view the health and well being of the people and the danger from the increasing cases, as a responsible Chief Minister and leader, the scheduled April 14 meeting stands cancelled,” the Chief Minister said and appealed to the voters to give a mandate with increased margin and help party candidate Dr Gurumoorthy victorious.

The Chief Minister had earlier written to every family in the constituency explaining how they were being benefited by the welfare schemes being implemented by the government and urged them to vote for the fan symbol.

CM writes to Modi to provide 25 lakh doses of vaccine

Continued from Page 1

Jagan wrote: “My state has a system of volunteers where a dedicated volunteer takes care of the needs of 50 families. Volunteers would be roped in to mobilise eligible persons. We cover 1,145 villages and 259 wards every day. If four days, 4,580 villages and 1,036 urban wards shall be covered to ensure all persons above 45 are vaccinated.”

The Chief Minister continued: “We have drawn out an action plan to cover six lakh people including four lakh in rural and two lakh in urban areas per day totalling 24 lakh people in four days of the Tika Utsav. Currently, my state has only two lakh doses and another two lakh doses are expected to be received today.

There is an urgent need for another 25 lakh doses which if made available before April 11, the Tika Utsav can be grandly celebrated under your able leadership”.

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 fatal-

ity 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.

Twitter account hacked, Mekapati...

Continued from Page 1

While requesting readers and followers to ignore the mischievous messages posted on his account and tendering apologies for the inconvenience, Goutham Reddy stated that a complaint was being lodged with the police.

The IT minister is active on Twitter and would post major development in his departments using this social media account.

Many netizens were shocked to know that even the IT minister’s twitter account was hacked into.

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.

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

PNS ■ 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 recent-

Jagan has sent assassins after me, alleges rebel MP Raju

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

After complaining to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that he faced a risk of death from Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, YSRCP rebel MP Raghuram Krishnan Raju has now sought to do more damage to the YSRCP chief.

Stating that Jagan would be responsible if anything happens to him, Raju said that a team from Kadapa reached Hyderabad in an Innova car on Saturday to assassinate him and that he was aware where this gang of assassins was hidden up.

In a video call from his residence in Hyderabad, Raju took the opportunity to level more allegations against the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. He alleged that Jagan had held a videoconference with Sivakumar Reddy, Govardhan Reddy, Shiva and M Krishna and he (Raju) has come to know that the plan to attack

him was discussed.

The rebel MP had written to the Prime Minister on April 7, claiming that his life was in danger from Jagan and reminded that he was given security in Delhi on April 9.

He had also asked the Central agencies not to delay taking action as he claimed to be aware of people working for Jagan. He said he had already provided details of those he faced a risk from.

During his video call on Saturday, Raju said that the Prime Minister and Home Minister knew all about Jagan and hence they had agreed to extend a security cover for him.

“I am seriously warning Jagan to refrain from carrying out his ‘insane’ designs and criminal thoughts,” the rebel MP said.

He said that Jagan’s bail would be revoked and he should wait till Friday. “Once his bail is revoked, I will definitely go to the High Court

after that. It’s a wonder that the CBI court granted bail to Jagan and the same court is asking for a bail order. Also, the CBI lawyer’s objection to it raises another suspicion,” Raju said.

He claimed to know who the CBI officials spoke to and who they were in contact with. “I know their every move. I also know who Jagan spoke to today. Instead of going mad, it would be better for him to prepare for court on Friday,” Raju said.

The rebel MP also alleged that a YSRCP MP was in contact with CBI officials who had registered a bank fraud case against him and offering something to them (the investigators). “I have informed the CBI higher officials about this,” Raju said.

He also condemned the restrictions on Pawan Kalyan’s movie ‘Vakeel Saab’. “Are there separate rules for a Reddy and Kapu actors? In any case, what is the caste of film artistes?” he asked.

Take vaccine jab...

Continued from Page 1

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.



SUPREME VISIT



Chief Justice of India designate N.V. Ramana along with his wife offer prayers at Tiruchanur Padmavathi temple on Saturday. Justice Ramana was received by temple deputy EO Jhansi Rani and temple Peshkar Prabhakar Reddy at the main entrance.



Paddy cultivation up by 124% in Rabi

AP farmers take up paddy cultivation in 21.75 lakh acres

C PRADEEP KUMAR
■ VIJAYAWADA

During the current Rabi season, paddy is cultivated in about 21.75 lakh acres across 13 districts in the state. The total acreage is 124 per cent more than the normal cultivation and about 10 per cent more than previous year's cultivation. The farmers are expecting a good yield and are likely to harvest their crops by the end of April. They are making all arrangements for harvesting their crops.

The farmers showed interest in cultivating paddy across the state with 21.75 lakh acres that was more the seasonal normal cultivation of 17.59 lakh acres with 124 percent excess.

Nellore district tops the list in highest paddy cultivation with acreage of 5.36 lakh acres, while Visakhapatnam accounts for the least with 1.19 lakh acres

West Godavari with 4.54 lakh acres and East Godavari with 4.08 lakh acres, follow Nellore district in highest paddy cultivation.

Farmers in Krishna district cultivated paddy in 1.75 lakh acres which was far above the



seasonal cultivation of 0.72 lakh acres with 242 per cent increase, while Guntur accounts for 204 per cent increase in paddy cultivation with acreage of 0.91 lakh acres against the normal acreage of 0.44 lakh acres.

The farmers in Srikakulam also cultivated paddy in 0.27 lakh acres against the normal cultivation of 0.11 lakh acres with 237 per cent hike.

Agriculture marketing secretary Y Madhusudhan Reddy said that farmers have taken up

paddy cultivation during the Rabi season due to excess rainfall during the rainy season and increased groundwater table. All the reservoirs are full to the brim and there is ample water for cultivation.

AP state Agriculture Mission vice-president MVS Nagireddy said that more farmers opted for paddy cultivation during Rabi as the water supply improved due to excess rainfall received in the rainy season and the uninterrupted power being supplied to the agricul-

ture sector during day time for nine hours.

He further said that farmers in the state cultivate paddy, bajra, maize, ragi, korra, samma, red gram, bengal gram, black gram and green gram. Paddy cultivation is taken up in a large area in the state during the Rabi season more than that of normal season cultivation.

A farmer from Vuyyuru town, M Jeevan Rao, said that the yield is good and that the harvesting has started a few

More farmers opted for paddy cultivation during Rabi as the water supply improved due to excess rainfall and the uninterrupted power being supplied to the agriculture sector during day time for nine hours, says MVS Nagireddy

days ago.

The demand for agriculture labour is more due to rise in mercury levels and increase in Covid positive cases. If mechanised harvesting is opted, there should be a huge extent of harvesting that will be done in a few hours which is cost effective. Moreover, the grass cannot be used as fodder for cattle, he added.

‘Authoritarian’ Jagan destroying Constitutional values: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday alleged that Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy was destroying the Constitutional values.

Stating that Justice Alladi Kuppuswamy of Puduru village in Sullurupeta, participated in the drafting of the Indian Constitution of India with Ambedkar, he said that each and everyone, right from Prime Minister to village-level leader should abide by the Constitution.

Naidu participated in a road show in Sullurupeta for the third day as part of campaign for Tirupati by-election.

A rally starting from Bapuji Street passed through the Panduranga Swamy Temple, NVR Theatre, GNT Road, RTC Bus Stand and concluded at Bus Stand Centre. Meanwhile, he also visited Panduranga Swamy Temple during the rally.

“This is the place where Alladi Kuupuswamy dreamed of a democratic state, but their dreams have been spoiled by Jagan with his misrule according to Rajareddy Rajyngam,” he bemoaned.

Naidu said: “I am happy that the Covid vaccine is being



made in the Biotech Park in Visakhapatnam which I founded. Why is Jagan hiding in Tadepalli residence since he said corona can be cured by using bleaching powder and Paracetamol?”

Criticizing Jagan's welfare scheme, TDP Supremo said: “The amount which is giving under Ammavodi scheme is being taken off by Nana buddi (Dad's liquor bottle). Jagan Reddy opened liquor shops during pandemic corona and insulted teachers by assigning them duties near the shops.”

Referring police misconduct during the local body elections, he said: “The police are unable to commit irregularities in the Tirupati by-election as they committed in local bodies as the by-poll is

being held under the supervision of Central Election Commission.”

Talking about Jagan's rule, he said that Jagan Reddy is ruling with political vendetta. “Stopping the screening of Pawan Kalyan's new movie is the best example of Jagan's misrule. Jagan's own party MP Raghuram Krishna Raju also has no protection under the Jagan regime,” he added.

“Vivekananda Reddy is like Lakshmana to the former Chief Minister late YS Rajasekhara Reddy. Why Jagan is not showing interest to catch the killers of his uncle. Sakshi first telecasted that Vivekananda Reddy died of a heart attack. Later, it claimed that he was axed to death. Jagan is protecting the killers of his uncle,” he said.

Christians hail SC order on religious conversions

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Christian leaders in Andhra Pradesh have welcomed the judgment of the Supreme Court that adults are free to choose their faith, terming the petition of Bharatiya Janata Party leader and lawyer Aswini Upadhyay seeking strict central law to check religious conversion as ‘harmful’.

The Supreme Court on Friday observed that adults are free to choose their faith.

A bench headed by Justice Rohinton F Nariman expressed strong displeasure at the petition filed by Bharatiya Janata Party leader and lawyer Aswini Upadhyay, warning



him of a monetary penalty if he chose to press the petition.

Reacting to the judgment of the Supreme Court, Oliver Rayi, Chairman of the Andhra Pradesh Christian Leaders

Forum said that the constitutional values of India were upheld by the apex court and that attempts of such fundamentalists to polarise the country must be dealt with firmly.

“There was never a case of allurements or forced conversion in Christianity and it was only a figment of imagination by vested groups to show Christians in bad light,” he thundered, adding that they were against such acts of conversion.

The forum also demanded that the anti-conversion bills in the eight states and these Religious bills must be termed unconstitutional.

Reshuffle AP Waqf Board to protect its invaluable properties, demands Jamat

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Muslim minority leaders of AP State Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat (Sunni) on Saturday demanded that the people belonging to the Jamat be appointed to the nominated posts in Waqf Board and sought protection of Waqf properties.

Addressing a press meet here on Saturday, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat leader and Sufi mentor Altaf Ali Raza Baba and other leaders lamented over the encroachment of Waqf lands. They objected to the appointment of persons belonging to other faiths other

Altaf Ali Raza Baba deplored that some people belonging to other faiths of non-Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat entered into Waqf Board and were involved in illegal activities including selling of Waqf lands.

than Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat to the nominated posts of Waqf Board and appealed to Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy to appoint Jamat's people to Waqf Board.

Sufi mentor Altaf Ali Raza Baba said that according to the Gazette of Waqf Board, 1962, majority of the assets of

Waqf Board belongs to Sunni Muslims, while a few belong to Shia Muslims.

He mentioned that Sunni and Shia kings donated thousands of acres of lands in the name of Allah for Dargahs, Peer Panjas, Deevidis and other places of worship. He further mentioned that the

government in the year 1958 conducted a survey of Waqf lands and established Waqf Board in the year 1962 for the protection of holy lands.

Altaf Ali Raza Baba said that there are no rights to anybody to sell or purchase Waqf lands and that these lands should be donated only for Muslim religious and charitable purposes.

He deplored that some people belonging to other faiths of non-Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamat entered into Waqf Board and were involved in illegal activities including selling of Waqf lands.



VIT-AP inks pact with CSIR-IICT

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The School of Advanced Sciences, VIT-AP University, and CSIR-IICT signed a MoU at IICT, Hyderabad, on Saturday.

On the occasion, Dr SV Kota Reddy, vice-chancellor, VIT, said that the collaboration will help faculty and students to get an opportunity to conduct research in advanced thrust areas in science and technology. This collaboration can bring forth project proposals in areas of mutual interest of faculty and students can be submitted to various agencies / industries for funding.

The expertise and technical support that the collaboration brings would lead into con-

ducting Faculty Development Programmes (FDPs), National, International Conferences / Seminars / Symposiums / Workshops etc.

Dr S Chandrasekhar, Director CSIR-IICT, said that signing an MoU will encourage more young men and women to take part in research as we guide/ jointly guide the M Sc and Ph D students for their project / dissertation / internship/ CO-OP/ Senior Design Project and others. This pact will assist us to conduct societal relevant scientific programmes jointly.

Dr CLV Sivakumar, Registrar, VIT-AP University, Dr NV Satyanarayana Chief Scientist, IICT, attended the meeting.

Traffic diversions on April 12 for CM’s programme

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada police issued traffic diversions in Vijayawada in view of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's programme on April 12.

The Chief Minister would participate in awards presentation programme to volunteers at Poranki on the outskirts of Vijayawada. Hence, the police imposed traffic diversions.

Vijayawada police commissioner Battina Srinivasulu said that traffic restrictions have been imposed in the city on Monday in view of presentation of Seva Mitra awards to volunteers on April 12 from 10 am to 12 noon at Poranki.

The City police commissioner said that all heavy vehicles coming from Machilipatnam and Gudivada to Vijayawada would be diverted from Kankipadu to Punadipadu, Uppulur and Kesarapalli to Vijayawada. He said that APSRTC buses towards Gudivada and Machilipatnam would be diverted from Benz circle to Ramavarappadu Ring, Enikepadu, Kesarapalli, Uppalur and Kankipadu.

Srinivasulu said that no vehi-



Heavy vehicles coming from Machilipatnam and Gudivada to Vijayawada would be diverted from Kankipadu to Punadipadu, Uppulur and Kesarapalli to Vijayawada. APSRTC buses towards Gudivada and Machilipatnam would be diverted from Benz circle to Ramavarappadu Ring, Enikepadu, Kesarapalli, Uppalur and Kankipadu.

cle would be allowed towards Poranki from 10 am to 12.30 noon from Nidamanuru and Enikepadu and only vehicles having permission for the programme would be allowed to go to Poranki.

He said that parking facility for MPs, MLAs and ministers is

provided on the western side of Murali Resorts at Poranki. He stated that parking for officials is set up at the East side of Murali Resorts and parking facility for volunteers' vehicles and buses will be provided in the Chaitanya and Narayana Colleges playgrounds.

TDP lodges complaint against Jagan for ‘insulting Dalits’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP politburo member Varla Ramaiah, along with other TDP leaders, lodged a complaint in Mangalagiri police station on Saturday Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy and adviser to government (public affairs) and YSRCP general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy. Ramaiah said that Dr Gurumurthy is the YSRCP nominee for Tirupati by-election and he belongs to the Dalit community.

Covid threat looms over Naidu’s campaign

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The TDP campaign in support of party nominee Panabaka Lakshmi for Tirupati by-poll has been in full swing for the past one.

TDP chief and leader of the Opposition Chandrababu Naidu participated in door-to-door campaign and public meetings both in the Nellore and Chittoor districts on Saturday. All the key leaders and senior cadre of the party were present along with their party chief in the campaign.

Meanwhile, the corona has created tension among TDP cadre as some party MLAs tested positive for Coronavirus. Addanki MLA Gottipati



Ravikumar, TDP women president Vangalapudi Anita and MLC Sandhya Rani have been tested positive for the deadly virus.

TDP leaders, who are infected with Coronavirus, are leav-

ing the campaign and heading straight to Hyderabad from Tirupati.

Similarly, TDP chief Chandrababu appears to be worried as Vangalapudi Anita and MLC Sandhya Rani were

infected with Coronavirus

They had darshan of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala, along with Chandrababu Naidu, on Thursday. Anita and Sandhya Rani were tested positive for the deadly virus the very next day.

Even other leaders who came in contact with Anita and Sandhya Rani are preparing to undergo tests.

Meanwhile, confusion prevails among cadre over TDP public meeting slated for on April 14 in Tirupati due to rise in Covid positive cases.

The Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy too has cancelled his Tirupati public meeting in view of rising Covid cases.

Tirupati municipal RI lands in ACB net

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Anti Corruption Bureau officials on Saturday arrested SM Rafi, a Revenue Inspector working in Tirupati Municipal Corporation, Chittoor district for accepting bribe.

Acting on the complaint filed by one T Narasimha Reddy, hailing from Sripuram colony in Tirupati,

The ACB officials laid a trap and caught the SM Rafi red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 9,000 from the complainant, near Municipal office at Sai Ganesh Textiles & Readymades, Tilak Road, Tirupati.

In the complaint, Narasimha Reddy stated that SM Rafi has demanded a bribe of Rs 9,000 for forwarding to the higher authorities his application seeking title transfer in municipal records.

Police seize over Rs 3.05 crore cash in AP

PNS ■ KURNOOL

Police seized more than Rs 3.05 crore in cash while it is being transported in a private bus on the outskirts of the city on Saturday.

Acting on a tip off, the police conducted checking of vehicles. They found that a person, BA Chandrasekhar, was carrying two trolley bags containing Rs 3,05,35,500 cash without any relevant documents.

On questioning, Chandrasekhar told the police that he was taking the money from Hyderabad to Bangalore and the cash belonged to a private college.

Police registered a case under Section 102 CrPC and arrested him.

Man, daughter found dead in suspicious conditions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a tragic incident, a man and his daughter committed suicide by hanging themselves in Srinagar Colony in Vijayawada on Saturday.

The deceased were identified as J Ravi, 40, and his 10-year-old daughter Geeta Sahasra. They left a suicide note stating that they were taking the extreme step upset with the illness of Bharani, Ravi's wife, and further appealed to donate the organs to his wife.

Surprisingly, hands and legs



of the deceased were tied and mouth plastered raising suspicion over the death whether it was a suicide or a murder.

Ravi was working as a software engineer and left the job during lockdown. He came to know that Bharani was suffer-

ing from Kidney related disease for quite some time. Ravi suffered severe mental stress after knowing about his wife's illness and the death of his grandmother recently. Unable to cope with the financial problems, he must have taken the extreme step, according to the neighbours.

The neighbours in the colony noticed that the duo committed suicide by hanging themselves and informed the local police.

On receiving the information, Satyanarayanapuram police reached the spot and examined the dead bodies.

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 representation 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.

Vontimitta gears up for Srirama Navami

PNS ■ KADAPA

The Sri Ramanavami Brahmotsavam would begin in Vontimitta village in Kadapa District from April 21. Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Executive Officer Jawahar Reddy along with the District Collector Harikiran inspected the arrangements at the Kalyanotsavam venue in Vontimitta on Saturday. They visited Lord Sri Kodandarama Swami temple and performed special pujas. The temple priests offered them celestial blessings amid chanting of hymns by Vedic pundits.

Talking to media persons, TTD EO Jawahar Reddy said that the Vontimitta Sri Kodandarama Swamy Kalyanotsavam was organized for the last five years. The Brahmotsavams, which would begin on April 21 this year with Sri Ramanavami, would conclude with Swamivari Kalyanotsavam on April 26.

In the wake of the Covid outbreak, the Tirumala Tirupati



Temple administration, in coordination with the state government, was taking precautionary measures for the Kalyanotsavam this year in accordance with the provisions of the Covid protocol. Arrangements were also made for the devotees to maintain a physical distance of six feet.

Only about 5,000 devotees were being allowed to attend the celestial wedding. Entry passes for kalyanotsavam would be issued to the devotees individually through the special counters to be set up at Kadapa,

Proddatur, Rajampet, and Rayachoti, he added.

Hence, he appealed to the devotees to cooperate with the government and TTD to successfully organize the Swamivari Kalyanam in a healthy environment.

District SP KKN Anburajan, JC M Gautami, P Dharmachandra Reddy, Rajampet legislators, TTD members Meda Mallikarjuna Reddy, Kadapa and Rajampet sub-collectors Prithviraj and Ketan Garg, TTD JEO Sada Bhargavi, TTD CVSV Gopith

Jitti, TTD Chief Engineer Ramesh Reddy and TTD engineering officials, district officials and others were present.

Later, at a meeting held with officials at the Pilgrim Amenities Center, District Collector C Harikiran said that in the wake of the rapid spread of the Covid second wave, steps were being taken to make the Kalyanotsavam a glorious affair in compliance with the Covid regulations. He said Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy could not attend Kodandaramaswamy Kalyanotsavam in 2019 due to Covid regulations and lockdown.

Jaganmohan Reddy was attending the temple for the first time after he was sworn in as Chief Minister. During the Brahmotsavams, the district administration would coordinate with the TTD officials regarding sanitation, traffic regulation, electricity and drinking water and take steps to ensure that the devotees do not face any difficulties, he added.

‘Lokesh’s challenge made CM Jagan to take ‘U’ turn’

PNS ■ NELLORE

Krishna District Gannavaram constituency TDP in-charge and legislator Bachchula Arjunudu has alleged that the state the chief minister has taken ‘U’ turn from the challenge thrown by Telugu Desam Party national general secretary Nara Lokesh. While conducting a door-to-door campaign at Podalakuru in Sarvepalli constituency of Nellore district on Sunday for the victory of TDP candidate Panabaka Lakshmi in the Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election, Arjunudu lashed out at Jagan saying that he was afraid of Nara Lokesh’s challenge that he should swear in front of the temple of Sri Venkateswara Swamy in Tirumala that he has no



role in the murder case of YS Vivekananda Reddy on April 14. To avoid the swearing, Jagan has cancelled his campaign in Tirupati on April 14, Arjunudu added.

The MLA said all the people of the state wanted a change in the state administration as commodity prices were skyrocketing in the state, police anarchy reached its peak and people had vexed with how the government acted in the recent

local body elections.

Arjunudu was accompanied by TDP president Jasthi Venkateshwara Rao, chief secretary Bodipati Ravi, Nimmakuri Madhu, Dandu Subrahmanyaram and Telugu youth from Gannavaram. Earlier, Arjunudu met Sarvepalli constituency in-charge, former minister Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy and discussed the campaign.

YCP leader terms Chandrababu as mad Babu

PNS ■ NELLORE

Terming TDP leader N Chandrababu Naidu as a ‘mad Babu’, YSR Congress party district president and Sarvepalli MLA Kakani Govardhan Reddy has said that his public meeting held at Podalakuru under the leadership of ‘Bakka Reddy’ was an utter flop as there was a thin crowd.

Addressing an election rally on Saturday, Govardhan Reddy said both ‘Pitchi Babu’ and ‘Bakka Reddy’ have failed to explain to people what they did for people as the Chief Minister and Minister. He held election rallies for the victory of party candidate Dr Gurumurthy in Surayapalem, Viruvuoru, Mahamada Puram, Prabhagiriapatnam, Ulavarpalli and Ammaripalem villages Sarvepalli Constituency. He said welfare programmes introduced by the Chief Minister in the state would help YSR Congress party candidate Gurumurthy to win the elections with a thumping majority.



Nadda, PK to share dais in Naidupeta: Nadendla Manohar

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national president JP Nadda and Janasena president Pawan Kalyan will address a public meeting at Naidurupeta in Nellore district on April 12 as part of the Tirupati Parliamentary by-poll campaign, Nadendla Manohar, chairman of Janasena Party Political Affairs Committee has said.

He said that a public meeting would be organized at Naidupeta covering Sarvepalli, Gudur, Sullurupeta and Venkatagiri in Nellore dis-

trict as it would be suitable for the people of these four constituencies.

He called upon the Janasena soldiers to participate in huge numbers and make the public meeting a grand success as it was attended by the presidents of both the parties. Manohar, who was in Naidupet to oversee the meeting arrangements, addressed the media on Saturday. On this occasion, he said that anarchy continues in the state. The economic condition of the state has gone to the abyss. He criticized the use of loans by showing alcohol sales.

‘One rupee teacher’ wins hearts of villagers

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
■ AVANIGADDA

A government teacher launched a crusade to admit as many students as possible in the school where she is working. Teacher J Padmavathi approached the parents and promised to deposit Re 1 per day into their bank account if they sent their kids to school. As promised, she started depositing Re 1 daily and the strength of the school got increased manifold. Padmavathi’s success story became popular and she is affectionately called ‘One rupee teacher’ by the villagers. Padmavathi, who is working in Bandalai Cheruvu Government School in Avanigadda mandal of Krishna district, is paving the



way for the education of poor students and their golden future.

As she came up with a good idea to increase the number of students in the school, Padmavathi opened a

Recurring Deposit (RD) account in the name of the child and at the rate of Rs. 30 was expected to be deposited in a month per child.

The parents were informed about it and asked to enrol

their children in school. With confidence in the teacher, the mothers came forward to enrol their children in the school. Now the six have become about 45 pupils. She spends about 30 per cent of her salary on the future of the students.

In addition to depositing money in savings accounts, the children are provided with books and pens when needed. Thus, educating the students as well as giving lessons on small savings has paved a golden path for their higher future.

The parents and fellow teachers are appreciating the idea of drawing students to the school. Aiming to serve the poor as much as possible, Padmavathi said she would like to continue to serve the elderly people after her retirement.



2,760 people fined for not wearing mask in Prakasam

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The Prakasam District police have conducted a special drive against those who neglect to wear masks as part of the control of the coronavirus outbreak and a total of 2,760 cases were registered against those who did not wear masks across the district and a compound fine of Rs.2,60,230 was imposed.

The police under the auspices of the District SP Siddharth Kaushal organized awareness programmes and launched special drives throughout the district on Saturday to motivate the people in view of the second wave of the coronavirus. As part of the Covid control measures, the SP conducted a special drive at Mangamuru Junction in Ongole against those who were negligent in wearing masks and made people aware of the corona pandemic. Similarly, police officers fined those who drove vehicles without wearing masks. The SP handed over flowers to the masked motorists and thanked them for following Covid norms. On this occasion, the SP himself provided masks to the motorists who drove vehicles without wearing a mask.

The SP said special drives were being conducted in all police station limits across the district against those who don’t wear masks, cases would be registered and fines would be imposed.

Ongole DSP KVVNV Prasad, Traffic DSP Ongole N Surendra, SB-1 Inspector V Suryanarayana, Command Control Inspector R Rambabu, Ongole Taluka CI Rama Krishna Reddy, Ongole One Town CI Ch Sitaramaiah, town SIs and other staff participated in the drive against corona.

Pvt hospitals asked to take up Covid treatment

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The notified private hospitals were ordered to make full-fledged preparations to ensure Covid treatment keeping in view the increasing cases of the corona, District Collector Pola Bhaskar has said.

Speaking at a special meeting with the officials concerned and managements of private hospitals here on Saturday, the Collector suggested the private hospitals should make arrangements to treat the Covid patients. Reviewing the Covid situation in the district, Bhaskar said it was time for the health officials to provide basic amenities in the hospitals to deal with the situation.

District task force committee chairman TS Chetan said they were asked to engage field-level health workers to increase corona tests and ensure home isolation for corona positive cases.

The private hospitals were given directions to provide immediate treatment to those in need of treatment for Covid.

All set for Tika Utsav in E Godavari

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The official machinery was fixing targets to ward volunteers as part of the Tika Utsav in East Godavari district. An order has been issued to take steps to vaccinate 100 volunteers, who crossed the age of 45 years of age, per day.

Since the corona erupted a second time, the district authorities were planning to take up mass vaccination. As many as 6,349 health care workers had been given the first dose and the second dose for 7994 since January 16. As many as 23,948 frontline workers were deployed for the first dose, while 22,377 workers for the second dose. The government has taken steps to ensure that all the key players in Covid control were vaccinated.

Arrangements have been made for the distribution of the vaccine under the supervision of the Medical Officer on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays in four village secretariats under each PHC along with 236 vaccination centres operating in the district under the third phase of vaccination. There were 4,48,648 people above the age of 60 and 2,05,478 people aged between 45 and 60 with co-morbid diseases in the district.



Hence, the vaccination drive was launched with a target of 6,54,126. The drive has been conducted in advance, especially in villages where cases were being registered in the hotspots.

Currently, a total of 873 active cases were reported in the district. A 50-meter containment zone was being implemented in areas where there were positive cases identified. These zones were formed in 117 places. While positive cases were registered in 42 mandals of the district, most of the cases were reported in Kakinada and Rajahmundry urban and rural zones.

District Collector Muralidhar Reddy directed the authorities to intensify the ongoing vaccination program along with testing, contact tracing and isolation measures because of the rising number of Covid positive

cases in the district.

Under this context, a special ambulance has been set up in each division for Covid cases and has reopened Covid special units at Kakinada GGH, Rajahmundry District Hospital and Amalapuram KIMS Hospital, the Collector said.

A total of 738 beds and 156 ICU beds were made available in the district for the treatment of Covid patients. The vaccination Utsav would be organized from April 11 to 14 as per the directions of the Central Government. As part of this, arrangements have been made to make it mandatory for everyone above the age of 45 to be vaccinated. Earlier, two types of vaccines were available in the district, Covishield and Covaxin. As of now, Covaxin would be used for the special drive.

Chintaluru Nookambika Jathara begins today



BV SAMBASIVA RAO
■ KAKINADA

The stage is set for the annual month-long Jathara of Goddess Nookambika also called Nookalamma at Chintaluru village in Alamoora mandal of Kothapeta Assembly constituency in East Godavari district, which was beginning on Sunday. Devotees from both Godavari district through the temple for worshipping the Goddess as they believe that the Goddess Nookalamma will bless the childless couple, good yield of crops and bring peace and prosperity. The Tirtha festival will be held traditionally and it is the largest mass festival in the State which attracts around 5 lakh devotees during the month-long fest.

The Nookambika temple has a history of more than a century and the Goddess was born in Chintaluru village. As per the local legend, the Goddess herself ordered the construction of the temple. According to the Revenue

records, the goddess appeared to a devotee in the dream and placed her idol in a cradle made of banana fibre. She wanted to build a temple where the idol would fall when it was swinging. The temple was built where the idol had fallen with the financial assistance from the then Maharaja of Pithapuram.

Ever since then, daily rituals were being performed for Ammavaru. Chintaluru became the initial name of the village Karanam. Then onwards, Ammavaru had been called the adapaduchu (sister) of Chintaluru family. It was said that until 1962, the cradle milk tree extended to the north. In the afternoon of Phalguna Sudhha Vidiya, the devotees will take out possession with the butta garaga in the surrounding villages for fifteen days in the name of village service. On the night of the full moon day, the new flower bouquet will be decorated with moduga flowers.

Devotees from both the states offer prayers at the tem-

ple for the month-long Tirtha mahotsav from April 11 to May 11 to plant trees. The Ammavari Tirtha mahotsavam has been celebrated in a grand manner over an area of seven acres. Tirtham has held on the new moon day.

Tributes will be paid to Modugapula Garaga at the home of Poornachandra Prabhakara Rao of Chintaluru in the village. The first day will be celebrated at Chintaluru Venkata Neelachalam’s residence. Temple administrator AGB Ramalinga Bhaskar said that several cultural events would be organized. However, in the wake of the corona lockdown last year, the fair was completely stopped.

He said that from now on, sterilization, bleaching, spraying and cleaning the surroundings and queue lines would be carried out in the temple as well as in the precincts of the temple. He appealed to the devotees to wear a mask, keep a physical distance and return immediately after worshipping the Goddess.

Red sanders seized, six held

PNS ■ KADAPA

The Kadapa police have arrested six persons in connection with the smuggling of red sanders and seized 20 logs from them.

Briefing the media about the incident here on Saturday, Kadapa District Superintendent of Police KKN Amburajan said that six persons including two forest protection watchers were taken into custody while smuggling the red sanders.

The SP said that the accused were caught at Botu Middapalli bridge in Pullampeta mandal of Kadapa district on Saturday morning and the red sander logs weighing about 599 kg, a car and an auto were seized from them.

Two scythes were also recovered from their possession. When the police personnel tried to apprehend the smugglers, they tried to attack them with scythes, sticks and hurled stones.

However, the police team



managed to overpower them and arrested them.

The accused were identified as Prabhakar, Viswanatha Reddy, Subrahmanyam,

Harikrishna, Giribabu and Ravi.

The SP appreciated all the police personnel who exhibited courage.

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 2024, 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.

In NOISE, Daniel Kahneman, Cass Sunstein and Olivier Sibony explain this little-known phenomenon, why it happens so frequently, and

explain how to counter it. Their findings are as fascinating as they are alarming.

Packed with new ideas, and drawing on the same kind of intelligent, insightful research that made Thinking, Fast and Slow and Nudge groundbreaking New York Times best-sellers, NOISE explains how and why humans are so susceptible to failure in judgment - and what one can do about it.

Pre-order now: <https://www.amazon.in/Noise-Daniel-Kahneman>

/dp/0008309000/
Praise For NOISE
'Noise may be the most important book I've read in more than a decade. A genuinely new idea so exceedingly important you will immediately put it into practice. A masterpiece.' - Angela Duckworth, author of Grit
'Noise 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.

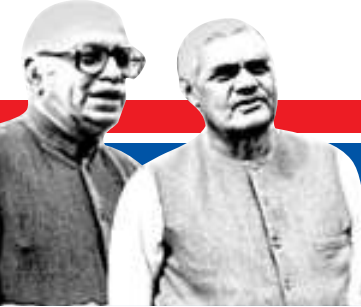
Bajaj announces special cashback offers on LED TVs



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

FROM THE INSIDE



A rare Jugalbandi

A book that provides the political account of Vajpayee & Advani, and steers through the major events of right-wing politics

7



9

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 warn 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.