

OPINION 6
NEPAL STARING AT
POLITICAL DISQUIET**MONEY 8**
SENSEX NOSEDIVES 1,708 PTS
AMID MASSIVE SELLOFF**SPORTS 11**
CAPTAIN
PUNJAB

VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY APRIL 13, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



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NTR'S NEXT,
A PAN-INDIA
FILM, WITH
KORATALA
Page 12**NO MEALS ON DOMESTIC FLIGHTS UNDER
2 HOURS TO CUT COVID RISK: CENTRE**

There will be no meals on domestic flights under two hours to minimise the risk of Covid infections, the Civil Aviation Ministry said on Monday. Battling a ferocious second wave of infections, India is undergoing its worst phase of the coronavirus and overtook Brazil on Monday for the second spot in the tally of nations with the highest cases. Issuing a set of new rules for flights, the ministry on Monday said, airlines can serve pre-packaged meals with disposable cutlery and plates on flights longer than two hours. "Crew shall wear a fresh set of gloves for every meal/beverage service... the servicing of in-flight meals to be staggered among the adjacent seats as far as possible," it said.

**RS 50,000 FINE AS SUPREME COURT
DISMISSES 'FRIVOLOUS' PETITION ON QURAN**

A petition asking for some verses to be removed from the Quran was dismissed today by the Supreme Court, which also fined the petitioner ₹ 50,000 for filing a "frivolous" request. Petitioner Sayed Wasim Rizvi, a former Uttar Pradesh Shia Waqf Board chairman, had called for removing 26 verses in the Quran that he said were not part of its original text. In the controversial petition, he said the verses violated the law of the land and were used as "justification" to attack non-believers and civilians. Are you seriously pressing the petition, a three judge-bench led by Rohinton Nariman questioned, calling it "absolutely frivolous".

**IIM-CALCUTTA'S SEES WORST COVID
OUTBREAK, 61 STUDENTS TEST +VE**

As many as 61 students at the prestigious Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Calcutta have tested positive for the coronavirus since April 2 and are currently in isolation on campus. Two buildings in which every single-occupancy room has an attached toilet have been earmarked for the students who started reporting symptoms since the end of March. Three doctors are in charge and the institute has tied up with top Kolkata hospitals for regular guidance on home care. More than 570 students have left the campus since the beginning of April. Some 335 are still on campus, including the 61 students in isolation.

**CRESCENT MOON NOT SIGHTED,
RAMZAN FROM WEDNESDAY**

The Central Ruiyat-e-Hilal Committee confirmed that the crescent moon was not sighted over Hyderabad and its surroundings on Monday, indicating that the Holy Month of Ramzan would start from Wednesday. Led by Maulana Qubool Pasha Shuttari, members of the committee scoured the cloud-covered sky from atop the Hussaini Building at Moazzam Jahi Market but to no avail. They then waited for news from the southern states. By about 7.30 pm, when it became clear that the crescent was not sighted anywhere across India, the committee confirmed that the first roza of Ramzan-2021 would start from Wednesday onwards.



'Vaccine Festival' fizzles out as state runs out of vax stock

SUMIT ONKA
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The much-touted 'Vaccine Festival' fizzled out on the second day in Andhra Pradesh after all the districts ran out of the vaccine. Almost every vaccination centre across the State was spotted hanging a 'no vaccine today' board on Monday.

The depleted vaccine stocks forced officials to postpone the campaign in all districts, and organise it on a low scale, mostly name-sake, at some place. At a few centres that had vaccine stock available, vaccination sessions were conducted and only a few hundred doses could be administered.

Officials expect a consignment to reach AP by Monday night.

In North Andhra, including Vizag, all Centres, barring some like the Chest Hospital, could not conduct vaccination sessions due to non-availability of the vaccine. Health officials said the vaccination process may resume smoothly from April 14, the day when the 'Tika Utsav' is scheduled to end. The situation is similar in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram that had no vaccine sessions.

Vizag district medical authorities could give vaccination to only 580 persons on Sunday and there was a limited vaccination session at Chest Hospital in Vizag city and all the centres remained shut.

Vizag DIO Jeevan Rani said that health department officials expected 52,000 doses to be administered daily from April 14.

At the New Government General Hospital in Vijayawada, there were 150 doses left and these were used. When contacted, a health department official monitoring the vaccination drive said there was no stock and they are expecting to receive some by Monday night or Tuesday morning.

On Sunday, 86,295 vaccines were administered in Andhra Pradesh, according to the Union government's vaccination tracker.



India surpasses Brazil, now has 2nd-highest number of cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has surpassed Brazil to record the second-highest number of Covid-19 cases at 1,35,27,717, as a record 1,68,912 new cases were reported in a day.

The active cases have surpassed the 12-lakh mark, while the death toll increased to 1,70,179 with 904 new fatalities in a day, the highest since October 18, 2020, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated at 8 am on Monday. The national Covid-19 recovery rate has fallen below 90 percent.

According to the Johns

Hopkins University (JHU) data, India has overtaken Brazil, which is now at the third spot in the Covid tally with 1,34,82,023 cases.

The US has the highest number of cases at 3,11,98,055 while globally 13,61,36,954 cases have been reported.

Registering a steady increase for the 33rd day in a row, the active cases have increased to 12,01,009 in India comprising 8.88 percent of the total infections, while the recovery rate has further dropped to 89.86 percent.

Panel recommends Sputnik V for use in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An expert panel of India's central drug authority has recommended granting approval to Russian Covid-19 vaccine Sputnik V for restricted emergency use with certain conditions, paving the way for a third vaccine to be available in the country, sources said on Monday.

The Subject Expert Committee (SEC) of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) on Monday deliberated upon the application of Dr Reddy's Laboratories seeking emergency use authorisation for Sputnik V.

"After detailed deliberation for grant of permission for restricted use in emergency situations subject

Health department projects daily count may cross 10K cases

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra Pradesh could report around 10,000 fresh Covid-19 cases per day, if one were to go by the projection released by the Health Department on Monday.

The total active cases on Monday were 23,115 and as per the projection, the number could be 1.48 lakh by April 25. It indicates that around 1.25 lakh cases could be recorded in the next 13 days, which makes it to around 10,000 cases per day.

The administration of all districts was directed to make necessary arrangements in order to ensure hospital beds with oxygen, non-oxygen beds and beds in Covid care centres to accommodate and manage the cases in the next two weeks.

While 81,000 cases could be managed with home isolation and the state may require 70,000 hospital beds by April 25. The state may also need around 7,000 beds with an oxygen facility.

As per the latest trend, 16 states, including AP, are displaying an upward trajectory in terms of daily new cases.

BENAMI TRANSACTIONS

SC: Inquiry against ex-judge not needed

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Monday ruled there was no need for inquiry into the conversation of former Andhra Pradesh High Court justice V Eswaraiah with a suspended district munsif magistrate on alleged benami transactions in Amaravati land scam case as he himself had admitted it.

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and RS Reddy said the Andhra Pradesh High Court has directed inquiry by former apex court judge Justice RV Raveendran into the transcript to find out the authenticity/genuineness of the conversation contained in the pen drive.

It said that since Eswaraiah has admitted on affidavit the conversation dated July 20, 2020, and has also filed the corrected transcript

of the English translation of the audio tape, which is admitted to him, it see no reason to continue the inquiry by Justice Raveendran as directed by the High Court by the impugned judgment.

"Authenticity and genuineness of the transcript having been admitted to the extent as contained in... we are of the view that the direction by the High Court calling for a report from Justice RV Raveendran need not be allowed to continue. We order accordingly," the bench said.

It said the High Court in its judgment has clearly observed that the Inquiry will not have any direct bearing on the issue involved in the main writ petition before it except to the extent of deciding the allegations made in the preliminary counter affidavit.

Mamata banned from campaigning for 24 hours

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Mamata Banerjee was on Monday banned from campaigning in Bengal for 24 hours over speeches that the Election Commission said violated the poll code.

She was accused of breaking the law with her comments on Muslim votes and for allegedly urging voters to revolt against central security forces.

Reacting to the ban, Banerjee announced a sit-in protest. "To protest against the undemocratic and unconstitutional decision of the Election Commission of India, I will sit on dharna tomorrow from 12 noon," she tweeted.

SENSEX NOSEDIVES
1,708 PTS AMID
MASSIVE SELLOFF

-8-

Telugu CMs: Pioneers of the 'WFH' culture

SNCN ACHARYULU
■ HYDERABAD

While the Secretariat is considered the heart of administration in any state, it appears that the heads of government in both the Telugu States do not believe so. Usually the Chief Minister, Ministers and Secretaries attend the Secretariat daily to perform their duties.

Whatever may be the reason, both K Chandrasekhar Rao of Telangana and YS Jaganmohan Reddy of AP have stopped coming to the Secretariat. KCR, his first

term as Chief Minister, attended the Secretariat regularly in the initial days but later stopped citing "Vasthu Dosham". He started working from his camp office.

In his second term, KCR has not yet attended Secretariat at all. Jagan is also following in the footsteps of his Telangana counterpart.

In the last two years, Jagan was seen working from the AP Secretariat hardly ten times. Like KCR, Jagan also prefers working from his camp office at Tadepalli.

Passenger vehicle sales dip to 6-year low

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The coronavirus pandemic has pushed India's passenger vehicle sales to their lowest in six years, annual data from an auto industry body showed on Monday, with the sector bracing for further fallout from a recent surge in cases.

India on Monday overtook Brazil to become the second-worst affected country globally, with daily Covid-19 infections soaring and fewer than 4 percent of its population of 1.4 billion people estimated to have been vaccinated.

The Indian auto sector was already facing a "deep structural slowdown" even before the pandemic and together this has pushed back sales by many years, Kenichi Ayukawa, president of the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), said.

"Recovery from here will require time and efforts, by all stakeholders," said Ayukawa, who is also MD of Maruti Suzuki, India's biggest carmaker by sales.

Passenger vehicle sales fell 2.24 percent in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2021 to 2.71 million,

with automakers such as Ford Motor and Volkswagen reporting falls of over 20 percent compared with an 8.5 percent drop for domestic rival Maruti, which sells one in every two cars in India, data from SIAM showed.

That was offset by higher sales from new entrants such as Kia Motors and SAIC Motor's British brand MG Motors, as well as local rival Tata Motors.

Sales of trucks, a barometer of economic activity, tumbled 21 percent to an 11-year low, while motorcycle and scooter sales fell 13

percent to their lowest level in seven years, the data showed.

The auto industry is working to maximise production and sales, but supply chain disruptions and the second wave of infections is making it hard to predict the future, Ayukawa said.

In some states like Maharashtra, home to the financial capital Mumbai and one of India's largest auto manufacturing hubs, the government has already imposed limitations like a night curfew.

Volunteers awarded for 'redefining governance'

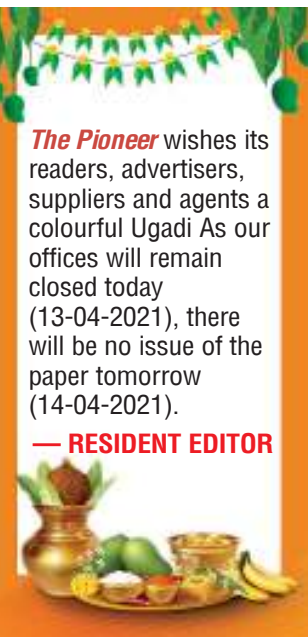
PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Affirming that the village and ward volunteer system has redefined governance, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Monday said this format has shown the world how effective the welfare delivery system could be with inclusiveness.

Formally launching the Visishta Puraskar Seva Award presentation ceremony here on the eve of Ugadi, the Chief Minister said the service orientation of the

volunteers was laudable and the awards will be an annual affair to felicitate those who have shown exemplary work.

The State Government gave away Rs 228.74 crore in the form of awards to a total of 2,22,990 village and (municipal) ward volunteers in recognition of their "selfless and immaculate services" to the people of the state. The awards would be handed to the volunteers from the day after Ugadi.



The Pioneer wishes its readers, advertisers, suppliers and agents a colourful Ugadi As our offices will remain closed today (13-04-2021), there will be no issue of the paper tomorrow (14-04-2021).

— RESIDENT EDITOR



People of Tirupati observe all, will back BJP in by-election

2



Fall in gold prices may not impact NBFCs asset quality

8

TODAY	
ALMANAC	
Month & Paksham:	
Chaitra & Shukla Paksha	
Panchangam	
Tithi :	Pratipada 10:16 am
Nakshatram:	Ashwini 02:19 am
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)	
Rahukalam:	03:22 pm – 04:55 pm
Yamagandam:	09:10 am – 10:43 am
Varjyam:	09:51 am – 11:38 am
	12:00 am – 02:57 am
Gulika:	12:16 pm – 01:49 pm
Good Time: (to start any important work)	
Anuritaakalam:	06:16 am – 08:03 am
Ahijit Muhurtham:	11:51 am – 12:41 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy
Temp: 38/
Humidity: 54%
Sunrise: 06:01 am
Sunset: 06:31 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated April 12, 2021 5:00 PM

Krishnapatnam eyes Rs 37.5K-cr investments

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

The Krishnapatnam industrial node being developed in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh as part of Central Government's Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC) is estimated to bring investment of Rs 37,500 crore.

As per the pre-feasibility report prepared by L&T Infrastructure Engineering Limited for the Krishnapatnam node, the total estimated manufacturing industry output in 20 years after the complete industrial plotted land is absorbed and all the industrial units commence production, is about Rs



1,31,300 crore.

The proposed industrial node is also likely to generate direct

employment of about 3.25 lakh which includes 1.26 lakh direct and 1.9 lakh indirect jobs.

The Government of India is developing the CBIC between Chennai, Bengaluru and Chitradurg across an overall length of about 560 km to achieve accelerated development and regional industry agglomeration in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Three industrial nodes are proposed along this corridor – Krishnapatnam Industrial Node in AP, Ponneri Industrial Node in Tamil Nadu, and Tumkur Industrial Node in Karnataka. A few months ago, the Union Cabinet gave its nod for development of Krishnapatnam node along with Tumkur.

People of Tirupati observe all, will back BJP in by-election

Prior to West Bengal poll results, the Trinamool Congress has conceded defeat to the BJP victory, if Prashant Kishor's statements to a section of journalists and advocates are any indication. However vehemently Kishor may deny, one thing is clear that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is immensely popular among the people of West Bengal.

His detractors have been portraying Modi as 'anti-farmer' and 'pro-rich' ever since he came to power, but the people have rejected this campaign. The Opposition, in spite of being rejected by the people, pursues its malicious campaign provoking minorities and farmers against the BJP.

The people have shown time and again that they are not gullible. The people have placed their irrevocable faith

in the BJP, which is seen as the only party that can extend pious, corruption-free government without taking recourse to vote bank politics and practising pseudo-secularism to safeguard the country's cultural and spiritual values.

The will also be seen in Andhra Pradesh. The days when people of Andhra compare the atrocities perpetrated over the past seven decades with the development witnessed under Modi rule during the past six years is not far away.

Rayalaseema region, of which Tirupati is a part, had never lagged behind in power as leaders from the region ruled AP 12 times. In fact, one person from each district in Rayalaseema has become the CM; some held the post twice.

Unfortunately, they never tried to drive away the back-

His detractors have been portraying Modi as 'anti-farmer' and 'pro-rich' ever since he came to power, but the people have rejected this campaign. The Opposition, in spite of being rejected by the people, pursues its malicious campaign provoking minorities and farmers against the BJP.

wardness of the region or end the unemployment there. They failed to bring major industries to the region. Of the seven backward districts, Anantapur, Kurnool and Kadapa belong to this region.

As soon as Modi came to power, he completed the 123-km-long Nandyal-Yerraguntla railway line, which has been shelved for over 26 years. Similarly, he took steps to lay new railway track between K a d a p a - B a n g a l u r u , Nadikudi-Srikalahasti, and O b u l a v a r i p a l l e - Venkatchalam and double

the Guntakal-Guntur and Gooty-Dharmavaram railway track.

He took steps to electrification of Guntakal-Bellary, K r i s h n a p a t n a m p - Venkatachalam railway track. This is besides implementing several infrastructure development projects worth crores.

Under Sagar Mala project, 21 out of the 83 railway projects have been allotted to AP, of which four to Rayalaseema region.

The people returned to the LS six times the present Congress contestant. What



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

did the Congress do to develop the constituency? MPs of both the Congress and YSRCP did nothing for the constituency.

The drainage system has not been improved in Tirupati. As a result, the people have been encountering mosquito menace. Dengue has claimed lives of hundreds, including children, in

this region. The temple city lacks proper drinking water facility in spite of lakhs of people visiting it daily.

Earlier, the BJP MP of Tirupati, Venkataswamy developed the region with his MPLADS funds. The people still remember this.

The NDA government set up several Central institutions in Tirupati including the IIT, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Institute of Tourism Management, Indian Culinary Institute, the National Institute of Ocean Technology.

The Centre declared Tirupati as a 'Smart City' and is implementing 62 projects worth Rs 2,000 crore. During Modi rule, Tirupati airport was elevated as an international airport. Industrial estates,

mega food projects, industrial corridors, expansion of National Highway and other infrastructure development projects are being implemented in the region.

The BJP has been working to develop the pilgrimage centre of Tirupati on a par with Modi's constituency Varanasi.

The local political outfits did not do anything to develop Tirupati. For them, the BJP is the main rival and hence they sling mud on it.

There is no greater innocence than targeting Modi, who vowed to achieve equal development of all regions and develop the backward regions, to derive political mileage.

They are not able to realise that the more they criticise Modi and the BJP, the greater would be the loss to them.

What is shocking is that the

CM inviting the head priest of the temple to his residence and make him praise him as Lord Vishnu.

Nobody will have any objection if the head priest, if he has such devotion for CM, invite the CM to his house and render ekanta seva. But the priest who works in a pious place like Tirumala praising a politician as Lord Vishnu has hurt the sentiments of millions of Hindus.

In this land where litterateur-saints like Annamayya were born, the comments of Ramana Deekshitulu are a clear indication of political deterioration of the situation. It may be remembered that Annamayya refused to praise the ruler of the day Saluva Narasingaraya with the same mouth that praises Lord Hari. That is why people see values like piety, transparency, quality and efficiency in the BJP.

TTD's claim on Hanuman's birthplace creates a buzz

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams claim that Tirumala Hills is the abode of Lord Hanuman and they would release an 'evidence' based book has created a stir in religious and archaeological circles as Hampi near Ballari is considered 'Kishkindha Kshetra' or monkey kingdom for ages.

The TTD had announced on Saturday that an 'evidence' based book to 'prove' that Lord Hanuman was 'born' on one of the seven sacred hills of Tirumala, home to the Sri Venkateswara Swamy shrine, would be released on April 13, on Ugadi, the Hindu new year.

While archaeology and history scholars have dismissed the TTD's claim, the Karnataka unit of Vishwa Hindu Parishad said that the TTD should take some more time and hold discussions with scholars and religious heads before arriving at any conclusion.

The historians were unanimous that Hampi or the area around the erstwhile capital of



Vijayanagara dynasty, is Kishkindha Kshetra.

Not only was Anjanadri at Hampi the birthplace of Anjaneya, prehistoric rock paintings found in the region show people with tails, they claimed.

"There are many cave paintings near Sangamkallu, Belakallu, where the human figures have tail like form.

"That is why it is being argued that 'Vaanaara' (meaning men seemingly monkeys) is one of the species of the human race with tails.

Possibly during the time of

Treta Yuga and Lord Rama, these were the people who appear to have helped him," Dr Raghavendra Rao Kulkarni, Professor and Head, department of Art History, Chitrakala Parishath, Bengaluru, told PTI.

He said Prof A Sundara, former chairman, department of ancient Indian History and epigraphy at Dharwad University, has identified a good number of paintings at nearby Ballari region, where the human figures in prehistoric paintings have a small protrusion on the rear side.

"There are more than 1,000

Hanuman sculptures in and around Hampi.

Why are only Hanuman sculptures there in the Hampi region and not in Tirumala?" Kulkarni asked.

He claimed Anegundi was the royal place of Angada, son of Vali and the prince of Kishkindha.

T M Keshava, retired superintending archaeologist of the Archaeological Survey of India, said he has identified all topographical regions of Kishkindha as mentioned in the Ramayana.

There is Pampa Sarovara, which is none other than the Tungabhadra river and hills like Malayavanta, Rishyamooka, Gandhamadana, Kishkindha, Matanga and Anjanadri in the region, Keshava said.

"Records, available evidence, present tradition, folklore at the available site show that the erstwhile Vijayanagara Empire, earlier Pampa Kshetra, has been identified as Kishkindha, with innumerable pieces of evidence like hundreds of Hanuman Temples in the taluk," he said.

Spread awareness, contain Covid spread, Governor tells Red Cross Society officials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan on Monday said there was an urgent need to spread awareness among people on Covid-appropriate behaviour like compulsory wearing mask, maintaining social distance and frequent handwashing etc. if the pandemic was to be brought under control.

Addressing Joint Collectors of all the 13 districts of the State, officials of Red Cross Society, AP State Branch and district branches through a webinar from Raj Bhavan on Monday, Harichandan referred to the five-fold strategy laid down by Prime Minister

Narendra Modi during his meeting with the Chief Ministers on April 8, on testing, tracing, treatment, Covid-appropriate behavior and vaccination. He said that the Red Cross volunteers with the help of district administration carry this awareness campaign forward in letter and spirit.

The Governor further said that in the context of the present challenging situation, the role of civil societies and Red Cross volunteers was very crucial to help contain the pandemic by publicising the

health protocols to be followed by the people.

He said an action plan should be prepared and a vigorous campaign has to be carried out by enrolling services of Youth Red Cross volunteers to work along with officials of the Health Department, health workers and the village/ward volunteers at cluster level.

Harichandan emphasised on the need to create awareness among people on not only wearing a mask but wearing it properly, which is another aspect that the public need to be aware of.

The Governor said IEC mate-

rial should be prepared and distributed among the general public and school children highlighting the importance of Covid-appropriate behaviour such as wearing a mask, maintaining social distance and frequent handwash. The Governor further said that proper Covid management and proactive testing are the key aspects to be implemented to curb the spread of the virus.

Joint Collectors of all 13 districts participated in the webinar and explained to the Governor the action plan prepared by them to launch awareness programmes with the help of Red Cross volunteers and other NGOs.



VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
GOLD	
₹ 47, 460 (10 gm)	
SILVER	
₹ 72, 100 (1kg)	
CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg	
Dressed/With Skin	₹184
Without Skin	₹210
Broiler at Farm	₹127
EGG RATES ₹/100	
HYDERABAD	421
VIJAYAWADA	393
VISAKHAPATNAM	505
RETAIL PRICE ₹4. 01	

Telugu CMs: Pioneers of 'WFH' ..

Continued from Page 1

In undivided Andhra Pradesh, all the Chief Ministers used to come to the Secretariat regularly – most days, they would be in their office at 10.30 am and return at around 6 pm to their official residence.

After bifurcation too, this trend continued with former AP Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu coming to the Secretariat regularly.

The Secretariat consists of various arms of the Government – each department is headed politically by a Minister and administratively by seasoned bureaucrats with the designation of a

Secretary.

Old-timers recall Jalagam Vengala Rao with fondness for his punctuality and work ethics, compared to other Chief Ministers. "People used to set time on their watches upon seeing Vengala Rao's convoy pass on its way to the Secretariat," they say.

"With the Telugu CMs turning their camp offices into their regular office, the Secretariat itself appears forlorn since the Ministers, Secretaries and other IAS officers are not seen. In fact, both KCR and Jagan had adopted the 'Work From Home' culture much before Covid-19 entered the country," they said.

Krishnapatnam eyes...

Continued from Page 1

Krishnapatnam Industrial Node will be developed in an area of about 12,315.9 acres in Nellore district, located 3.5 km from Krishnapatnam Port.

The Government of India formed Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation Limited (DMICDC), a special purpose company entrusted for the project development activities for the CBIC Project.

A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) "NICDIT Krishnapatna m Industrial City Development Limited" has been formed to jointly develop the project. The SPV partnership is between the National Industrial Corridor Development and Implementation Trust

(NICDIT) represented by DMICDC, and the State Government of Andhra Pradesh represented by Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation Limited (APIIC).

APIIC will develop the infrastructure required for the Krishnapatnam north industrial node project, whereas DMICDC will be acting like a knowledge partner to prepare the technical reports for project implementation.

"The first phase master planning of the node in an area of 2,134 acre has been finalised and we will call for tenders shortly to develop the necessary infrastructure," said a senior government official. Of the total area of 12,315.9 acres proposed for the Krishnapatnam Node,

5,285.4 acres –42.9 percent is proposed for industrial areas for various manufacturing industrial sectors.

The processing area includes a manufacturing zone for different manufacturing industries.

Apart from industrial areas, land allocation in the Krishnapatnam industrial node is proposed for infrastructure facilities such as 262.2 acres for logistics, 1,379.1 acres for residential, 90.3 ac. for commercial, 263.9 acres for social amenity, 115.9 acres for utility, 38.6 acres for transportation facility, 1681.2 acres for roads, 152.9 acres for existing settlement, 94.5 acres for village expansion, 1,589.1 acres for green areas and conservation , 653.4 acres for water body and 709.5 acres for aquaculture.

SC: Inquiry against ex-judge not needed

Continued from Page 1

The SC said the High Court had closed hearing on the preliminary objection regarding maintainability of the PIL on July 31, 2020 and when interlocutory applications were filed to reopen the writ petition, the question before it was only with regard to maintainability of the writ petition.

The court said, "We are of the view that the High Court ought not to have embarked on any other inquiry in the matter except to the maintainability of the PIL at the instance of the writ petitioner and the conversation dated July 20, 2020 filed before the

High Court as well as the enquiry report sought was only with the above purpose".

It said that "Now, English translation of the transcript of conversation dated July 20, 2020 having been admitted by the petitioner, which he himself has filed the court is of the view that in event, the High Court intends to refer to the transcript, if required, the same can be done only after an opportunity to Eswareiah".

The top court clarified that it has neither entered into the merits of the writ petition, nor is expressing any opinion on the maintainability of the PIL.

‘Vaccine Festival’ fizzles out as state ...

AP reports 3,263 cases, 11 deaths

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP reported 3,263 fresh cases of Coronavirus, 1,091 recoveries and 11 deaths in 24 hours ending 9 am on Monday.

Consequently, the total positives went up to 9,28,664, recoveries to 8,98,238 and toll to 7,311, a health department bulletin said. The state now has 23,115 active Covid-19 cases, it added.

Triggering panic ahead of the April 17 by-election to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat, Chittoor district continued to add a large number of fresh Covid-19 cases, with the temple-town itself accounting for a bulk of them. While 654 new cases were added in the district, Tirupati city alone registered 210.

Visakhapatnam district reported 454, Guntur 418 and Krishna 318 new cases in 24 hours. Srikakulam has also been seeing an alarming rise in the pandemic infection as 280 more tested positive in the district in a day.

From a meagre six in mid-February, the active Coronavirus cases in Srikakulam have now surged to 1,523.

Continued from Page 1

The state had plans to vaccinate six lakh people per day during the four-day special vaccine drive. However, the number of people vaccinated saw a drastic decrease on Monday.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had announced that the state would be vaccinating six lakh persons per day, during the four day Tika Utsav campaign called by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Chief Minister had also written to the Union government, requesting 25 lakh doses of Covid-19 vaccine, in this regard.

But with the Union government yet to respond to the state's request, the stocks have dropped very low. As a result, the Utsav had to be postponed till the arrival of fresh stocks.

India surpasses Brazil, now has ...

Continued from Page 1

Before the latest surge, the active caseload was at its highest at 10,17,754 on September 18, 2020.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,21,56,529, while the case fatality rate has further dropped to 1.26 percent, the data stated. India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16.

It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to the ICMR, 25,78,06,986 samples have

been tested up to April 11 with 11,80,136 samples being tested on Sunday.

The 904 new fatalities include 349 from Maharashtra, 122 from Chhattisgarh, 67 from Uttar Pradesh, 59 from Punjab, 54from Gujarat, 48 from Delhi, 40 from Karnataka, 24 from Madhya Pradesh, 22 from Tamil Nadu, 21 from Jharkhand, 16 each from Kerala and Haryana and 10 each from Rajasthan and West Bengal.

A total of 1,70,179 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 57,987 from Maharashtra, 12,908 from Tamil Nadu, 12,889 from Karnataka, 11,283 from Delhi, 10,400 from West Bengal, 9,152 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,507 from Punjab and 7,300 from Andhra Pradesh.

Panel recommends Sputnik V for use in India

Continued from Page 1

According to sources, around 10 crore doses of the vaccine (Sputnik) is likely to be imported for emergency use in the country in the next six months. The vaccine is indicated for active immunisation to prevent Covid-19 in individuals aged 18 years and above and is to be administered intramuscularly in two doses

of 0.5 ml each with an interval of 21 days. It has to be stored at -18°C. According to recommendations by the SEC, the firm has been asked to submit revised factsheets to CDSCO after incorporating the latest safety and efficacy data and other suggestions made during the meeting, another source said.

Besides, the firm should

submit the safety, efficacy and immunogenicity data from the ongoing clinical trials in India and Russia for review as and when available.

The firm also has to submit safety data including the data on AEFI and AESI with due analysis every 15 days for the first two months and monthly thereafter till the completion of the ongoing clinical trial.

Volunteers awarded for...

Continued from Page 1

Saluting volunteers for their service, more so during the pandemic, the CM said the affinity and rapport volunteers have developed with the members of the number of houses they were allotted have been working wonders.

He cited a few examples where a volunteer from Srikakulam has gone all the way to Vizag to deliver pension to an elderly lady who was hospitalised following an accident. The volunteer realised that the elderly lady needed money at that point of time

and extended service, Jagan said.

A volunteer from Prakasam went to Hyderabad to disburse pension to a woman who had undergone heart surgery, and in another similar case, a volunteer from Chittoor delivered pension to the beneficiary at a hospital in Bengaluru.

A volunteer in Vizianagaram rescued a nine-year girl from a fire mishap and hospitalised her paying the expenses from her pocket, Jagan said.

eva Mitra awards were awarded to 2, 18, 115 volunteers. The award includes a cash reward of Rs 10,000, cita-

tion, shawl and a badge.

Seva Ratna Award, which carries a cash prize of Rs 20,000, citation , medal and a shawl was given to 4, 000 persons. Seva Vajra was given to 875 persons. The award carries a cash prize of Rs 30, 000, medal, citation and a shawl.

The presentation of awards will continue at the Assembly constituency level, the CM said adding that he would attend one in North Andhra and the other in Rayalaseema region. Jagan asked volunteers to continue their good work and not to bother about the remarks and reports from detractors.

Passenger vehicle...

Continued from Page 1

Fears of a total lockdown, similar to the one in 2020, are worrying investors.

The Nifty auto index closed down 5.11 percent on Monday, while the broader market ended 3.5 percent lower. Tata Motors shares fell 10 percent while Mahindra & Mahindra and Maruti Suzuki both ended about 5 percent down.

Before the second wave, the auto sector had been seeing a recovery in sales.

Hospitality sector bears brunt of Covid, seeks govt support

VASIREDDY RAVICHANDRA
■ GUNTUR

Nearly 25,000 hotels in AP are mired in losses as the Covid pandemic dealt a body blow to the hospitality industry.

As the hotels are unable to register even 30 per cent occupancy, maintenance has become burden for hoteliers. Hoteliers operating hotels in rented buildings are unable to pay rent and electricity bills too. Approximately, there are over one lakh hotel rooms and guesthouses in the state.

The hotels have started operating recently after the first wave of Covid 19 and people were also coming to hotels slowly. However, the situation again worsened as Covid cases have been increasing for the past 15 days.

Managements of hotels are worried over continuing the businesses by suffering losses despite investing in crores of rupees.

According to sources, two hoteliers from Nagarampalem and Arundalpet in Guntur filed insolvency petitions (IP) unable to cope with financial difficulties. They were the top hoteliers in the city, but they suffered losses due to Covid-induced lockdown. One



As the hotels are unable to register even 30 per cent occupancy, maintenance has become burden for hoteliers. Hoteliers operating hotels in rented buildings are unable to pay even rent and electricity bills.

of them was hospitalised after he suffered heart stroke. It indicates the appalling situation of the hospitality industry.

Speaking to The Pioneer, AP Hotels' Association president Akella Venkata Ramana Murthy, Vizag, said that the hotels throughout the state are stuck in debts. He appealed to the governments to support the hotel

sector and explained that they were paying taxes in crores of rupees to the government in the form of GST, trade license, food license, property tax, labour license, professional tax and power bills.

He urged the government not to neglect the sector which employs one lakh people directly and another 5 lakh people indi-

rectly. General Secretary, Kambham Chinnapa Reddy, Kadapa, said that the increased prices of essential commodities were also having a negative impact on the hospitality sector.

Some officials are creating troubles citing lack of trade licenses, while some other officials are collecting food samples, he told the Pioneer.

He urged the authorities to co-operate in taking the hospitality sector forward in difficult times.

He appealed to CM YS Jaganmohan Reddy to take measures for reviving the hospitality sector in the same he had supported all other sectors during Covid. He recalled that the government had waived power bills for cinema halls.



Mekapati thanks Piyush for special trains to transport mangoes from AP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

AP Commerce and Industry minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy thanked Union Railways Minister Piyush Goyal for conceding his request and acting swiftly to run special trains from the state for transporting mangoes.

He also sought additional Kisan rails from AP to transport surplus of bananas and tomatoes among other products.

Goutham Reddy was responding to a tweet by Piyush Goyal who had shared the train ferrying mango pictures on twitter.

Vijayawada Railway Division flagged off its first Kisan Rail from Nuzvid on April 11 to

Vijayawada Rly Division flagged off its first Kisan Rail from Nuzvid on April 11 to assist the mango traders in marketing their farm produce for better price realisation by providing cost-effective transportation.

providing cost-effective transportation.

The rail has been loaded with 220 tonnes of mangoes packed in carton boxes in 20 general coaches and is being transported to Adarsh Nagar, New Delhi.

This is the first mango rake loading after a long gap of six years, fetching Vijayawada Division earnings of Rs 9.90 lakh. It is expected that around 35 to 40 rakes will be loaded this summer season adding a revenue of Rs 3.5 to Rs 4 crore.

This became possible due to dedicated efforts of BDU Team of the Division by recapturing the mango traffic which was earlier diverted to roadways. Further, a 50 per cent tariff

concession was extended to the farmers/traders under the scheme "Operation Greens - TOP to Total" by Union Ministry of Food processing Industries for transportation in the Kisan Rails.

The Government of India has started the concept of running Kisan Rails for boosting the income of the farm sector, while providing hassle-free, safe and fast transport services for the marketing of the agriculture sector.

To further encourage the farmers, the Ministry of Food Processing Industries announced extension of 50 per cent tariff concession on the transportation of notified fruits and vegetables through Kisan Rail trains.

SHORT TAKES

Home guard shoots wife with service revolver

VIJAYAWADA: A home guard allegedly shot dead his wife with a service revolver here at their house in Gollapudi on Monday. According to ACP (West Zone) Hanumantha Rao, the accused home guard Vinod Kumar was working as an assistant to ASP Shashikanth. The ASP went to Anantapur three days ago and he had given his service revolver to the Vinod Kumar who preserved it in his house. An altercation took place between the home guard and his wife Surya Ratnaprabha over mortgaging gold jewellery. In a fit of rage, the home guard fired one round at his wife with the revolver and the bullet pierced through her chest. The neighbours shifted her to the government general hospital, where she was declared brought dead. Police registered a case and took up investigation. The police shifted the body for post-mortem and arrested the accused.

Woman poisons two daughters, self, dies

VIJAYAWADA: In a shocking incident, a young woman poisoned her two daughters and consumed the same in a bid to end life. All the three died while undergoing treatment here at Nunna village on Monday. The deceased were identified as Vani (26) and her two daughters Eshavana (3) and 10-month-old infant Akshaya. According to police, Vani fed poisonous substance to her two daughters and consumed the same to commit suicide on Monday. She informed her husband Surendra that she fed poison to the kids and consumed the same. He immediately rushed to his house and shifted them to the government general hospital with the help of neighbours. However, they died while undergoing treatment at the hospital. The husband of the deceased was doing a petty business and financial problems were suspected to be the motive behind the suicide.

Ban on marine fishing for 61 days from April 15 in EG

KAKINADA: Joint Director of Fisheries P V Satvanarayana on Monday announced that the marine fishing has been banned for 61 days commencing from April 15. He said the mechanised and motorised fishing boats were prohibited from undertaking the fishing operations at sea in the territorial waters along the entire coast area of Andhra Pradesh and the government has issued the relevant orders. He said stringent action would be initiated against those violating the marine fishing prohibitory orders during the notified period ending June 14.

Two red sanders smugglers arrested, 28 logs seized

TIRUPATI: Task Force sleuths on Monday arrested two smugglers and seized 28 red sanders logs from them near Gundlapalli forest in Pallam section of Srikalahasti range. According to DSPs Giridhar and Muralidhar, the combing teams headed by RSIs Vasu and Suresh started combing operations from Sunday night at Pallam section. They found that a group was carrying red sanders logs near Gundlapalli village. When the Task Force men tried to nab them, the smugglers fled into the forest leaving the logs behind. However, the 'red' guards were able to nab two smugglers identified as Jangam Guravaiah (40) of Settipalli near Tirupati and Pooli Muniram (37) of Gundlapalli in Srikalahasti mandal. The sleuths have also seized two motor vehicles of the smugglers which were found at the place.

BJP, TDP have no agenda for Tirupati by-poll, says Nani

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Information and Public Relations Minister Perni Venkatramaiah (Nani) slammed the opposition parties for making false allegations against YSRCP ahead of the by-poll for Tirupati Lok Sabha seat.

Speaking to the media at party central office here on Monday, the Minister said that TDP and BJP have no agenda for campaign in Tirupati by-poll. BJP is not in a position to seek votes by explaining what it has done to people, while TDP is indulging in propagating false information, he said.

It is only YSRCP that has fulfilled the promises made and asking for votes in the upcoming election, he added.

Despite being fully aware that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has can-



celled his Tirupati public meeting due to the spike in Covid-19 cases, TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu and his son Nara Lokesh have been making false allegations with ulterior motives.

He reminded that it was the

father-son duo that left for Hyderabad as they were scared of Covid and added that TDP have been gathering crowds for meeting in Tirupati and spreading corona in Tirupati. He said TDP followers and cadre have lost confidence in the leadership of Naidu and are looking for an alternative.

Alleging that BJP was instigating communal hatred in the state by indulging in religious politics without having any responsibility towards society, he questioned why people should vote for BJP in Tirupati by-poll.

He asserted that Tirupati by-poll is a referendum for the 22-month governance of Jaganmohan Reddy.

He also appreciated Chief Minister for his village and ward secretariat initiative and the recognition in the form of awards.

SRMT donates ₹20L for Covid relief fund

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Noted industrial house SRMT has donated Rs 20 lakh for Covid-19 relief fund and the company chairman K Saradhi has presented the cheque to the district Co-lector D Muralidhara Reddy at the secretariat volunteers' seva puraskar utsav held at RMC auditorium here on Monday. While thanking the SRMT house for the gesture, the Collector hoped that the other commercial organisations would also come forward to extend their assistance to the Covid-19 relief fund.

MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy and MP Vanga Geeta Viswanath who were present have complemented SRMT chairman and recalled that he had donated Rs 10 lakh at the time of Covid first wave also.

Madireddy enjoys adventure sports in Teesta

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
■ AMARAVATI

Dr Madireddy Pratap, AP Additional Director General of Fire Services Department, on Monday went on an adventurous river rafting in Teesta River in Cooch Behar of West Bengal where he has been posted as police officer.

It may be recalled that five persons were killed when CISF forces opened firing on the day of polling. Therefore, he had to stay back in Cooch Behar.

He has been given accommodation in a forest guesthouse amidst Teesta River.

Therefore, he along with his team went on a river rafting expedition for one hour in the river studded with huge boulders and narrow turns. Earlier, he went on a river rafting expedition for 16 hours from Bhadrachalam to Rajamahendravaram along with his son and some of his colleagues. However, the rafting expedi-

tion in Teesta river is a completely different experience. There is a vast difference in the waters of the two rivers. In Godavari, one can swim slowly enjoying the pristine natural beauty. However, the Teesta River is full of boulders and narrow twists and turns. The expedition here is dangerous, but more thrilling than the one in Godavari river.

In the morning, Madireddy Pratap went for paragliding for about half-an-hour hovering over the hills of Teesta river. The nature is as dangerous as beautiful here.

He claims to have a thrilling experience living amidst the huge forest which has many species of flora and fauna.

"At night, wild animals surround the guesthouse which is secured by an electrical fence protecting the inmates. Till I am relieved from duties here, I will have good time indulging in such adventurous sports," says Madireddy Pratap.

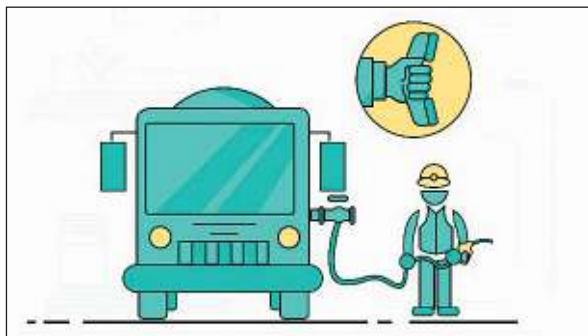


Vizag-based start-up begins mobile petrol pump

SUMIT ONKA
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Cashing in on the problems faced by bulk consumers of fuel, a Vizag-based fuel start-up has started a facility of doorstep diesel delivery through their mobile petrol pumps.

Fuel is required on an everyday basis for the smooth functioning of heavy machinery in local industries, generators in hospitals, civic bodies and villages for tractors. To ease the lives of the end-consumers without the hassles of diesel procurement, Satyamamba Filling Station is now offering the service. Earlier, the bulk consumers of the diesel had to procure it from retail outlets in barrels which used to cause a lot of



spillages and dead mileage in energy procurement.

Efficient energy distribution infrastructure was lacking. Doorstep diesel delivery will solve many such problems in providing diesel to bulk consumers in a legal manner.

Doorstep diesel delivery is a new revolution in the field of energy distribution in India. Doorstep diesel delivery is approved by the government and is a new-age concept of effective distribution of diesel. This new fuel start-up is run

Earlier, the bulk consumers had to procure diesel from retail outlets in barrels which used to cause spillages and dead mileage in energy procurement.

by Rajeshwara Prasad who already has a petrol pump, established in 1969, which was started by his grandfather and

now the 3rd generation has done a value addition to their business by launching doorstep diesel delivery.

"We have recently acquired double-dispensing mobile fuel pumps which will go around the city to address the needs of various end-users at their doorstep. We are delivering diesel to pharma companies, stone crushers, schools, and colleges," said Rajeshwara Prasad.

"I always look forward to new opportunities for expansion. Doorstep diesel delivery will help me in reaching out to my customers and develop connections. Earlier, customers had to come to my petrol pump to get diesel for their machinery, but now I can directly go to them," he shared.

Corona spreading its tentacles

SINGASWAMI BHANU PRAKASH ■ TIRUPATI

The Covid-19 cases were going up steadily in Chittoor district over the last few weeks and Tirupati, where the by-elections for the Lok Sabha were being held, recorded the highest number of cases with a massive increase in the past two days. Apart from the elections, a heavy influx of pilgrims to Tirumala, the abode of Lord Sri Venkateswara was also said to be a reason for the increase in the cases.

It was causing uproar among the local people and the official circles were under pressure to tackle the situation with a second wave corona pandemic.

The coronavirus cases were increasing daily in Chittoor district and about 719 cases were registered on Sunday and 624 cases on Monday, which was the highest in the state which recorded a total of 4541 active cases. Moreover, Andhra Pradesh was identified as one among the eight states in the country with the highest case-load. The Chittoor district also secured a dubious distinction by registering the highest number of Covid-19 deaths last year with 887 deaths.

Since the district was sharing borders with Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, it was receiving lakhs of devotees for temples in Tirupati, Kanipakkam and Srikalahasti. Heavy pilgrim rush was attributed to the spreading of the pandemic in the district. The pilgrims coming from Maharashtra and Gujarat where the highest number of Covid-19 cases were registering, was also a reason for the increase in the corona cases. The TTD authorities have failed to take steps for preventing the spread of corona, it is alleged. A group of TDP leaders including Vangalpudi Anitha, Gottipati Ravi Kumar, Sandhya and others who visited Tirumala temple recently for darshan and the very next day they tested Corona positive. So, it was an example of how

CHITTOOR DISTRICT



Back-to-back polls adding fuel to fire!

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

A series of polls that were going on in the Chittoor district has proved fatal for the spreading of Covid-19. All the political parties have taken Tirupati by-polls as a prestigious one. The ZPTC and MPTC elections were just concluded and immediately, the by-election has started. Many public meetings and door-to-door campaigns were the order of the day in Tirupati and state and national level leaders were

making a beeline to attract the voters. Janasena Chief Pawan Kalyan has gone into self-quarantine after the Tirupati election campaign, as the party cadres who accompanied him were affected with corona. Even the TDP cadres and senior leaders who held election rallies in Tirupati also tested corona positive. Chief Minister Jagannathan Reddy has also cancelled his election campaign due to a surge in corona cases in the district.

"All the roads and streets in the city are jam-packed with the people engaged by the political parties for the door-to-door campaign, distributing pamphlets without wearing masks and not following the social distance. It may cause for the spread of corona" said Venkat Koushik, a resident of Korlagunta. "I wonder how the police officials are giving permissions for the huge gatherings and public meetings with massive crowds gathering, despite the Covid-19 guidelines in

the context of the second wave of Corona," Mohan Kumar, a resident of Lakshmiapuram said. However, Collector Hari Naryana said the Tirupati by-poll would be conducted in full adherence with Covid-19 guidelines. Additional booths were arranged for the voters where there was a strength of more than 1000 voters. Steps were taken to stop the spread of Corona across the district by deploying revenue, police, medical and para-medical staff, he said.

the Tirumala temple was spreading the cases.

"The TTD officials are allowing pilgrims indiscriminately for darshan in the main temple, there is neither physical distance nor masks for people. The pilgrims are having darshan pushing each other in the queue lines. More pilgrims are allowed into the queue lines in the time slot against the schedule, leading to the spreading of

the corona," A Malathi a devotee from Chittoor commented.

"Steps must be taken by the TTD management to avoid heavy crowd into the shrine and the pilgrims must be allowed only after checking their corona test certificates especially from the pilgrims coming from states like Maharashtra and Gujarat," said a devotee Gayatri from Nellore.

District Collector Hari Naryana appealed to the people to wear masks without fail while venturing out to check the spread of the coronavirus. He said the people aged above 45 years must be vaccinated. The district secured third place in the state in the Covid vaccination and 100 vaccination centres were established with spot registration facility, he said and added that there was

no shortage of vaccine doses in the district.

"At this juncture, the best way to tackle the pandemic spread is that everyone should wear masks and maintain social distance. Despite our efforts the response from the general public is poor in wearing masks and follow other Covid restrictions," Dr Penchalaiah, District Medical and Health Officer said.

Services of village volunteers lauded

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The services rendered by the secretariat volunteers for people were laudable as they were working as per the aspirations of Chief Minister Y S Jagannathan Reddy, Minister for Power, Forests, Environment & Science and Technology Balineni Srinivasa Reddy said on Monday.

Participating at a meeting to distribute awards to the best volunteers held here on Monday, the Minister said the volunteer system set up by Jagannathan Reddy was ideal for the whole country. The volunteer system came into being 20 months ago and they were rendering yeoman services to the poor and the weaker sections of the society.

Srinivasa Reddy reminded that the Chief Minister has implemented the system of volunteers with the main objective of providing welfare benefits to all the deserving poor irrespective of their political affiliations. Jagannathan



Reddy once said he would believe volunteers more than the MLAs and the volunteers would have a bright future in the state, he said.

Member of Parliament Magunta Srinivasu Reddy said the role of volunteers was important in the implementation of welfare schemes for the poor. Collector Pola Bhaskar said there were volunteers as a bridge to provide welfare benefits to the poor. He also said the welfare schemes were directly taken to homes with

the help of volunteers to prevent people from running pillar to post for the schemes. Disbursement of pensions through volunteers was a role model in the state, he said.

District SP Siddhartha Kaushal explained that the services of volunteers have gained international recognition. The Minister presented Seva Vajra awards to five volunteers from the Ongole constituency and Seva Ratna awards to 20 volunteers. Another 1,370 Seva Mitra awards were presented to the volunteers. ZP CEO Kailash Girishwar, City Commissioner Bhagyalakshmi and officials were present.

Later, Srinivasa Reddy along with the District Collector conducted a review on the growing number of Covid-19 cases in Prakasam district. The minister advised the authorities to take precautions against the spread of the Covid virus. Mayor Sujatha and others were present on the occasion.

YSRCP victory in Tirupati by-poll certain: Balineni

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Victory of the YSR Congress party in the ongoing by-elections for Tirupati Parliament seat was certain beyond any doubt, Minister of State for Power, Forests and Environment and Science and Technology Balineni Srinivasa Reddy said on Monday.

After inaugurating several development works in Ongole, the Minister said the Chief Minister wrote a letter to the people saying that he was not coming for the campaign keeping in view the public health. Balineni said that some people are distorting it. How BJP and TDP could do development when they were not in power, he asked. "The people have

given us the authority to develop and the welfare schemes introduced by the Chief Minister YS Jagannathan Reddy would brought us victory," the Minister said.

He laid the foundation stone for the 32/11KV substation in Ongole and visited the works which were under progress such as underground power cables and also visited the grain purchase center.

Minister Balineni was accompanied by Ongole MP Magunta Sreenivasulu Reddy, Ongole Mayor Gangada Sujatha, Deputy Mayors Vemuri Suryanarayana, SC Satyanarayana, Ongole Market Yard Chairman Ramachandra Rao and others.

ANJANADRI AS HANUMAN'S BIRTHPLACE

TTD to present proofs today

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The devotees across the globe were eagerly waiting for the scientific pieces of evidence to be presented by TTD establishing that Lord Rama Bhakta Hanuman's birthplace was Anjanadri Hills of Holy Tirumala. The TTD committee was presenting all the proofs claiming that the birthplace of Lord Anjaneya on Tuesday. The entire media also concentrated on what the TTD was going to prove scientifically about the mythological incident with historic proofs.

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) on Telugu New Year Ugadi was set to prove with scientific evidence that Tirumala was the birthplace of Lord Anjaneya (Hanuman). In December 2020, the TTD constituted an expert committee under the aegis of TTD Executive Officer KS Jawahar Reddy to research and prove that Lord Anjaneya



was born in Tirumala Hills.

The EO said that Tirumala will be recognized as the birthplace of Anjaneya from now onwards for which the committee members will inform the public on the day of Ugadi festival by presenting the various astrological, scriptural and other scientific evidence to prove it. A comprehensive book with all the shreds of evidence establishing Anjanadri

as the birthplace of Anjaneya will be presented on the Telugu New Year day Ugadi.

Ugadi Asthanam (Traditional temple Court) will be observed on Tuesday in the Tirumala shrine between 7 to 9 am at Bangaru Vakili in the presence of Sri Malayappa Swamy and his consorts Sri Devi and Bhudevi along with Vishwakshena, the head of Lord's Army.

Three youth drown in Godavari

PNS ■ ELURU

Three young people drowned in the Godavari river while bathing at Chagallu in West Godavari district on Sunday. Their bodies were fished out on Monday morning.

According to reports, six young persons including Hemant, Satyanarayana and Somaraju of Chagallu village went for a bath in the Godavari river and went missing.

The bodies were taken to the government hospital for post-mortem.

The police said three youths managed to reach the shore, the remaining three could not make it. A case has been registered.

Vax shortage hits 'Tika Utsav' in WG

PNS ■ ELURU

The 'Tika Utsav' came to a halt due to shortage of vaccine stocks in West Godavari district on Sunday. The people went back without taking jab at two centers in Eluru urban mandal and another centre at Kenataparru village. The district medical and health officials said they would get 20,000 doses of Covaxin in a day or two. Two type of vaccines Covaxin and Covishield were used in the district.

Only 600 doses of Covishield were used on Sunday. About 6,422 people were vaccinated on April 8 and 11,468 on April 9, about 7,941 on April 10 and 1700 people given vaccination on April 11 at the centers set up in the dis-

trict.

Minister Alla Kali Srinivas was vaccinated with the first dose while District SP Narayan Nayak and some police officers were given a second jab. On an average 2,000 doses of vaccine were coming from the Central Drugs department of Vijayawada to West Godavari district.

The government has stepped up efforts to create awareness among the people on the corona. The police personnel were advising people on the roads across the district. Since people were queuing up for the vaccine as they fear second wave of corona. Short supply of vaccine doses became a major problem as 'Tika Utsav' initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was going at a snail's pace.

'No other Saab here, except CM Jagan Saab'

PNS ■ NELLORE

"Hundreds of Vakeel Saabs can come and go, but none can do anything as Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is the only Saab in the state, CM Saab is Jagan Saab," Dr Poluboina Anil Kumar Yadav, Minister for Water Resources remarked on Monday.

He was speaking to the media at the YSR Congress party district office in Nellore on Monday. The YSRCP MPs were ready to resign if the party lost Tirupati by-election, the TDP has guts to accept it, he challenged.

Minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy had already thrown a challenge and that the TDP leaders had fled from the scene closing their tails as they were unable to accept the challenge, he said and added that the TDP leaders should feel



shy as Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy cancelled his public meeting in the wake of the corona surge keeping in mind the public health. He said that he did not understand why Chandrababu reacted to the movie ticket prices of Vakeel Saab.

Beach resort raided, 34 gamblers held

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The police conducted a raid on a beach resort near Muthayapalem in Bapatla mandal of Guntur district late in the night on Sunday and took 34 persons while they were playing poker. They seized Rs 24.74 lakh in cash from the gamblers.

The Bapatla police raided Sunny Resorts and recovered 10 cars from the spot. A case has been registered and the investigation is on.

However, the police did not reveal the names of the arrested persons.

It was felt that some prominent personalities were among the 34 gamblers who were arrested in the raid.



TDP leader Kotamreddy warns cops against bias

PNS ■ NELLORE

Nellore TDP in-charge president Kotamreddy Srinivasulu Reddy has warned that if the police acted like YSRCP leaders, they would have to pay a heavy price in future. He said the police refused to register a complaint against a village volunteer acting in favour of the ruling YSRCP. The police were acting as YCP supporters, he said while speaking to the media at Muthukur police station on Monday.

Kotamreddy's followers, along with local leaders, staged a protest in front of the Muthukur police station and raised slogans against the

police and YSRCP. On the occasion, he asked how government schemes were being propagated by the volunteers.

He alleged that the police have rejected their complaint against the ward volunteer, who has campaigned for YSRCP and they immediately registered a case against the TDP leaders accepting the complaint by the volunteer.

Reddy also warned that the police should act unbiased and do justice to people. The TDP government would come to power soon and then action would be taken against the police officials, who were acting as YSRCP leaders, he added.

Training for vet assistants

PNS ■ KAKINADA

A training programme was organized for village animal husbandry assistants for recruitment in the village secretariats spread across the district. District Joint Director NT Srinivasa Rao on Monday inaugurated the first batch of the training programme at Karapa in Kakinada rural constituency.

He said the State government has appointed village animal husbandry assistants in the respective village secretariats after implementing the secretariat system.

The were currently staying at the Rythu Bharosa Centers and performing duties. The government has directed them to undergo fresh training for four months and conduct examinations for 1000 marks after the training.

The pay scale would be implemented only for those who pass it. In East Godavari district, 1000 posts of Animal Husbandry Assistants have been created. However, only 685 were employed.



BJP National President JP Nadda is addressing an election rally at Naidupet in Nellore district as part of election campaign for Tirupati Parliament by-poll on Monday. (Below) The public attended at the meeting



PDS rice seized in Markapur

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The revenue and police officials have seized ration rice stored illegally at a rice mill in the vicinity of Rayavaram village railway station in Markapur mandal on Monday.

The authorities seized a PDS rice-laden lorry with 350 bags parked in front of Sri Vasavi rice mill and another 350 bags in the godown. A total of 700 bags of government PDS rice were seized in the raid.

Tahasildar Vidyasagar, SI G Kotayya, ASI Srinivasa Rao, RI Gopi, police personnel were present.



Vinukonda residents besiege Collectorate

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The residents of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Nagar colony in Vinukonda town of Guntur district laid a siege to the collectorate on Monday alleging that power supply and drinking water supply to their colony was disrupted for the last few days. They said they were residing in permanent structures in the mosque manyam for many years. But, some leaders were trying to vacate them after the YSRCP government came to power, they alleged.

Under the auspices of the CPI, the Azad Nagar Colony Residents Welfare Association held a maha dharna in front of

the Guntur Collector's office. CPI (M) Assistant Secretary of State Muppalla Nageswara Rao, who took part in the dharna said thousands of people have been living in Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Nagar Colony in Vinukonda town for the last 16 years. He alleged that the authorities were acting cruelly against the people. Later, the leaders submitted a memorandum to District Joint Collector Sridhar Reddy.

CPI district secretary Jangala Ajay Kumar, Vinukonda constituency secretary A Maruthi Varaprasad, former municipal vice-chairman Sandrapati Saide and others led the dharna programme.

India denounces linking climate issues to economic recovery

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has denounced attempts to link climate issues to economic recovery amid the coronavirus pandemic at the forthcoming G20 talks, saying it will impose a huge developmental cost on developing countries.

The US administration has been pushing for a strong climate agenda as part of the process of recovery from the pandemic. Senior government officials feel that imposing "green" conditionalities on trade, investment, financing for development, etc. amid the "worst economic impact of a lifetime would be adding insult to injury as far as poor and developing countries are concerned".

"India is definitely adhering to its climate commitments and we are willing to do more, but I am uncomfortable with bringing it on to G20 platform."

He was responding to deputy director of OCED Development Centre Bonaglia said. Countering him, Sanyal said the link between pandemics and climate change is far from established. "Whether or not we have climate change, global pandemics happen from time to time."

P Harish, additional secretary (economic relations) in the Ministry of External Affairs, criticised efforts to establish a goalpost outside the Paris framework in the G20. He mentioned that India is the only G20 country that has met its

Paris commitments and nationally determined contributions.

It won't be correct to ignore the historic caseload and developmental situation where India's per capita GDP is only 5 per cent of that of G7 and fraction of the G20 GDP, and per capita energy consumption as compared to global average is far lower.

"We have many years ahead of us where we come up to the world average in terms of energy consumption and per capita GDP. Constraining our options at this point through extra conditionalities will not only impose a financial cost but also a huge developmental cost," the senior official said.

"Imposing conditionalities amid the worst economic impact of a lifetime by seeking green recovery...in a range of areas, on trade, investment, financing for development, this would be adding insult to injury as far as the poor and developing countries' situation is concerned," he said.

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Fourth Covid wave: Affecting younger population more

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Delhi is causing high-grade fever, spreading faster and affecting the younger population, especially those in the age group of 30 to 50, more, according to experts.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has said the fourth wave is more dangerous than the previous ones and according to data available with him, 65 per cent of patients infected this time are below 45 years.

The sudden spike in COVID-19 cases in Delhi over the last few days and across the country has baffled medical experts.

Some doctors said the reason behind a large number of people contracting the infection this year vis-a-vis last year could be that the "virus has mutated" and the current strain is more infectious.

"The younger population goes out for work, uses public



transportation and hence, there are more chances of coming into contact with others. Many people are still not wearing masks or maintaining social distancing, which has contributed to the rise in cases," said Suranjit Chatterjee, a senior consultant at Apollo Hospitals here.

He, however, pointed out that the number of deaths in Delhi is still much lower compared to what was recorded during the previous waves in June, September and November.

Chatterjee, a COVID-19 survivor himself, said doctors in their 40s and 50s and other younger healthcare workers, say in their 30s, are getting infected in the current wave despite most of them having taken both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Thirty-seven doctors at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Delhi have tested positive for COVID-19 during the fourth wave of the pandemic. Of these, five have been admitted for treatment, hospital sources had said last Thursday.

INDIA CORNER

President Kovind returns to Rashtrapati Bhavan after surgery

President Ram Nath Kovind on Monday said he has returned to Rashtrapati Bhavan after bypass surgery at the AIIMS here. "I have returned to Rashtrapati Bhavan after my surgery. My speedy recovery is thanks to wishes and prayers of all of you and exceptional care given by doctors and nursing staff at AIIMS and Army's RR hospital. I am thankful to everyone! I am glad to be back home, Kovind tweeted. Kovind, 75, had on March 30 underwent a cardiac bypass surgery at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here. In a tweet on April 3, the Rashtrapati Bhavan had said, "President Kovind was shifted from the ICU to a special room in the AIIMS today. His health has been improving continuously. Doctors are constantly monitoring his condition and have advised him to take rest."



Meal services banned in domestic flights under 2 hours

Airlines are not permitted to serve meals in domestic flights that have a duration of less than two hours, the Civil Aviation Ministry said on Monday, as coronavirus cases continue to spiral across the country. The ban will come into effect from Thursday, the ministry said in its order. When scheduled domestic flights were resumed on May 25 after coronavirus lockdown last year, the ministry had allowed the airlines to serve in-flight meals under certain conditions. Modifying the previous order, the ministry's fresh directive said: "The airlines, operating flights on domestic sectors, may provide meals services on board, where the in-flight duration is two hours or more." The ministry said it decided to review the on-board meal services in domestic flights due to the "the increasing threat of COVID-19 and its variants".



CBI calls Maharashtra former home minister for questioning

The CBI has called former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh for questioning on Wednesday in connection with allegations of corruption levelled against him by former Mumbai Police commissioner Param Bir Singh and suspended officer Sachin Waze, officials said. Waze, an assistant police inspector, is under investigation in the case of an explosive-laden SUV found outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence in south Mumbai. The notice calling Deshmukh to join the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe was issued on Monday morning, a day after his two aides Sanjeev Palande and Kundan recorded their statements before the agency, the officials said. The CBI is carrying out a preliminary inquiry into allegations against Deshmukh levelled by Singh after he was removed from the coveted post of Mumbai Police commissioner.



Youth dies while dousing forest fire in Pithoragarh

A youth died while dousing a wildfire in his village in the Didihat forest range in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district, officials said on Monday. The incident occurred on Saturday when a fire broke out in Athkhawli and Sarpanch Purn Singh Mehta called youths from the village to extinguish the blaze, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Vinay Bhargava said. The victim, Pankaj Singh Deopa (19), fell into a 500-metre-deep, fire-filled gorge, the officer said, adding he was pulled out of it and rushed to a hospital where doctors declared him dead. Deopa had lost his job during the coronavirus-induced lockdown and was staying with his family in the village. His death took the toll in forest fire in Uttarakhand this year to seven. Two deaths were reported in Almora in January and two each in Bageshwar and Pauri districts in February. Forest fires continue to rage in Pithoragarh and Champawat districts in the eastern part of Kumaon region due to a lack of moisture in the forests, with little or no rain during the winter months in the area this year, according to the DFO.



Judge who gave Babri verdict is 'Up-lokayukta'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Retired judge Surendra Kumar Yadav, who gave the verdict in the high-profile Babri mosque demolition case, took oath as an 'up-lokayukta in Uttar Pradesh on Monday.

"Yadav was appointed as third 'up-lokayukta' by the Governor on April 6. On Monday, Yadav was administered oath by Lokayukta Sanjay Mishra in the presence of other senior officers," an official statement said here.

The anti-corruption watchdog comprises the Lokayukta and three 'up-lokayuktas'.

Delhi police denies illegal detention of Lakha's cousin

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Monday refuted allegations that it had "illegally" detained gangster-turned-activist Lakha Sidhana's cousin Gurdeep Singh in Punjab, even as a team of its Special Cell questioned him.

Sidhana is wanted by the Delhi Police in connection with the Republic Day violence in the national capital, when thousands of protesting farmers, who reached ITO from the Ghazipur border, dashed with the police. Many of the protesters, driving tractors, reached the Red Fort and entered the monument, where a religious flag was also hoisted. Over 500 police personnel were injured in the violence.

In a statement, the police said it is learnt that allegations and misinformation are being propagated on the social media regarding the



detention of one Gurdeep Singh alias Mundi by a Delhi Police team in Punjab.

Several cases were registered by the Delhi Police in connection with the Republic Day violence in the national capital, a large number of suspects have been examined and about 160 accused belonging to Delhi and several other states arrested. Sidhana is wanted in some of these cases and is deliberately evading arrest, the statement said.

According to the police, on April 8, a Special Cell team that was moving in the vicinity of Patiala in search of Sidhana, questioned Singh. He was asked about the presence and movements of Sidhana and thereafter, he was relieved with a direction to appear and join investigation as and when required.

"The investigation is being conducted as per law and in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

"The investigation is being conducted as per law and in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Ambani security scare: Riyaz Kazi suspended after arrest

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Assistant Police Inspector Riyaz Kazi, a colleague of police officer Sachin Waze, was suspended from service on Monday, a day after he was arrested by the NIA probing the recovery of an explosives-laden SUV found outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence here and the subsequent murder of Mansukh Hiran, an official said.

Additional Commissioner of Police (Arms unit) Virendra Mishra has issued the order suspending Kazi which stated that he cannot do any private work and action will be taken against him if his order is violated. Kazi has been ordered to appear before the Local Arms Unit every Friday. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested Kazi on Sunday after a fresh round of questioning. A holiday court here had remanded Kazi in the NIA's custody till April 16.



The NIA suspects that Kazi assisted Waze, who headed the Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU) until his arrest on March 13, in obtaining fake number plates used for the explosives-laden SUV.

Kazi was previously questioned multiple times by the NIA in connection with the recovery of the SUV on February 25 and the subsequent death of Hiran, the purported owner of that vehicle.

Hiran was found dead in a creek in Thane on March 5.

Kazi was shunted out of the Mumbai Crime Branch last month, an official had said. Earlier, in a CCTV footage, Kazi was seen entering a number plates shop in suburban Vikhroli and having a conversation with the outlet's owner. He was also seen taking away a digital video recorder and a computer from the shop. Kazi was also seen collecting CCTV footage from Waze's housing complex in neighbouring Thane, the official had said.

Non-adherence to virus norms, virulent strains could be behind surge: Randeep

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

People not adhering to COVID-appropriate behaviour and the circulation of highly infectious strains of SARS-CoV-2 could be the primary reasons behind the surge in coronavirus infections in India, AIIMS Director Dr Randeep Guleria said on Monday.

He also warned that if the situation is not reversed, then the galloping infection rate will eventually cause a huge strain on the country's healthcare system. He sought stricter enforcement of COVID-appropriate behaviour on the ground level by the administration and authorities.

"Around February, when cases started to decrease, people



became lax towards following COVID-appropriate behaviour as they thought the virus had become ineffective.

"People are taking the disease lightly now. If you go out, you see that marketplaces, restaurants and shopping malls are crowded and full of people and these all are super-spreader events," Guleria said.

Earlier, if one sick person was able to infect around 30 per cent of their contacts, this time those getting the disease are infecting a larger number of people, he said.

"So, the rate of spread of the infection is fast possibly due to the highly infectious and transmissible strains circulating," he added.

Various strains of SARS-CoV-2, including the UK, South Africa and Brazil variants, are circulating in India and have been termed as highly transmissible by experts.

Guleria said the entire humanity is going through a difficult time and "unless it is important, people should not venture out. Also, it has to be ensured that there is no gathering and stricter enforcement of COVID-appropriate behaviour has to be ensured".

"We may lose the gains we have made so far if we do not pay heed now," and the situation may completely get out of control, he said.

"If the situation is not reversed, then the galloping infection rate will eventually cause a huge strain on the healthcare system also," he stressed.

The AIIMS chief also urged people to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Cops deployed in Pipili ahead of by-poll

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Police on Monday deployed about 1,000 armed policemen in Pipili Assembly segment in Puri district to ensure peaceful polling in the by-election to be held on April 17.

Director General of Police Abhay visited Pipili and said three companies (1 company comprise three platoons of jawans) of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF), 29 platoons

(each platoon comprise 30 personnel) of the Odisha State Armed Police (OSAP) and one platoon of Swift Action Force (SAF) have been deployed in the area.

This apart 60 state police officers have also been engaged in by-poll duty.

The DGP said that the constituency has been divided into several security zones to ensure an incident-free poll. Two ASPs and three DSPs will be in charge of each zone to monitor the law and order situation.

Official sources said as many as 80 critical booths have been identified in the constituency.

The DGP also reviewed the pre-poll violence in Pipili at a meeting attended by Director (Intelligence), RK Sharma, and the ADGP (Law and Order), Yashwant Jethwa.

Fire breaks out near flyover in Kolkata

PNS ■ KOLKATA

A fire broke out in waste materials lying near a flyover along a major road in Baguiati area in the eastern fringes of Kolkata on Monday and two cars

abandoned there were gutted, fire department officials said.

No casualty took place. The blaze was spotted near a traffic guard office beside VIP Road at around 3.50 pm and two fire tenders doused it in 20 minutes, the officials said.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who was passing by the spot while returning home after attending a public rally in the nearby Dum Dum area, stopped her car on the flyover.



Ceasefire pacts with 3 Naga insurgent groups

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Monday extended the ceasefire agreements with three insurgent groups of Nagaland for one more year till April next year.

In a statement, the Ministry of Home Affairs said the ceasefire agreements are in operation between the government of India and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN/IM), National Socialist Council of Nagaland/Reformation (NSCN/R) and National Socialist Council of Nagaland/K-Khango (NSCN/K-Khango).

"It was decided to extend the ceasefire agreements for a further period of one year with effect from April 28, 2021 to April 27, 2022 with NSCN/IM and NSCN/R and from April 18, 2021 to April 17, 2022 with NSCN/K-Khango," the statement said.

These agreements were signed on Monday.

The three outfits are break-away factions of dominant groups NSCN-IM and NSCN-K. The NSCN-IM had entered into a ceasefire agreement with the central government in 1997 and has since then been engaged in peace negotiations.

No golden rule

Armed Forces personnel react differently to different life-threatening situations

There are no golden rules for self-defence except that one has to gauge the gravity of the situation and act accordingly. Whether the security personnel deployed at West Bengal's polling stations would fire below or above the waist — especially as an agitated mob advances towards them — depends upon their threat perception and exigency. Even firing to kill is justified if the situation calls for it and if there are no other practical options. What is uncalled for in a certain situation can be well defensible in another. Recently, what happened in Sitalkuchi, Cooch Behar, is really unfortunate as four lives were lost in firing by the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel and no amount of sympathy or compensation can bring them back.



However, what is more unfortunate is the blame game politics taking place between the BJP and the TMC. While Chief Minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee termed the incident "genocide", Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that her exhortation to gherao the Central forces had instigated the people to attack the CISF. Sceptics argue that the deaths could have been averted had the CISF jawans fired on their legs with the intention of dispersing the mob and not killing anybody — an argument echoed by Mamata. However, such suggestions are solely being made based on politicisation of the issue and are far from being practical; these people know nothing about what is required to be done by a professional force under such circumstances and have no idea of how fast things develop on the ground.

It cannot be denied that when an agitated mob of 300-400 people advances towards a polling booth to ransack it or towards the security personnel with an intention of snatching their weapons or even killing them should they put up resistance, the use of mild or medium force can aggravate the situation. In such a situation, the use of means like lathicharge, water cannon, rubber bullets or teargas, instead of acting as a deterrent, can rather act as a provocation to the mob which then can charge the personnel with more ferocity. What would follow is a bloodbath in which the security personnel and common citizens both lose their lives in large numbers. To keep the body count low and to disperse the bloodthirsty mob, there is no practical option but to fire with the intention to kill as only that would act as a deterrent under such circumstances. However, such nitty-gritty and technical knowhow are an integral part of the training of any professional force which is deployed to maintain law and order. Mamata's allegations that the CISF has no experience in controlling mobs are more unfounded than real. However, there should be a thorough inquiry into the incident and those responsible for instigating the violence should not be spared. If the security personnel are at fault, strictest action must be taken against those responsible. But we expect our politicians not to do any further politics on the matter — at least not over the deaths. It's plain shameful.

PICTALK



Devotees offer prayers at Har Ki Pauri in Haridwar during the ongoing Kumbh Mela

PTI

Tikait flexes muscles

The farmers have renewed their dialogue call while throwing a challenge to the Haryana CM

It appears that Bharatiya Kisan Union leader and Samyukt Kisan Morcha linchpin Rakesh Tikait has returned to the protest theatre with renewed vigour after his sabatical, a period he had advised his comrades to utilise harvesting the season's crop till next month. Freshly back after attending to their domestic chores and familial duties, the cultivators sitting on dharna since November 2020 along the Capital's borders already made their presence felt last weekend when they blocked the Ghazipur border in what they said was a "warning to the Government". Thousands among these protesters have come from Haryana, Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh, even though there now is a nationwide wave in support of their cause — the repeal of the three agriculture legislations that, they say, have been enacted to benefit certain corporates. But now, it seems, the farmer leaders have opted to flexing their muscles even though they well realise that no important political decisions at the national level would be taken in earnest till the results

of elections to four States and a Union Territory are declared in early May.

It is in this light that Tikait is taking the fight to Haryana Chief Minister ML Khattar's door by claiming that the latter wouldn't be allowed to enter Badauli village in Panipat, where the Chief Minister is scheduled to be on April 14 for unveiling a statue of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar on the Dalit icon's birth anniversary. The farmer leader alleged that the actual reason for Khattar's visit was to "disturb the amity" among the area's cultivators "as per the BJP's plot". To avoid causing any imagined injury among Babasaheb's followers, Tikait also clarified that the farmers were not against the statue, they were against Khattar. In the same vein, however, ostensibly not to shut down any possible avenue which may lead to a dialogue with the Centre, the farmer leaders have also claimed that they are still willing to talk to the Centre on the three contentious Acts if invited for the same. Their only preconditions remain that the talks should resume where these were discontinued on January 22 and that their demands for total repeal remain unchanged. Well, though it seems like catch-22 without any quick resolution in sight, one would sincerely hope that under no situation would either side resort to any abhorrent step, such as violence.

Nepal staring at political disquiet

The Nepal top court's decision not favouring Oli has come as a surprise and now his political survival hangs by a fine thread



RISHI GUPTA

After long political and judicial scuffling in Nepal, its top court in two important verdicts nullified the dissolution of the democratically elected Parliament by the President and termed illegal the 2018 merger of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) into the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), saying that another party existed with the same name. It means that the UML and the Maoist parties are back to their old selves.

While the reinstatement of the House comes as a big blow to Prime Minister KP Oli, who has emerged as an ultra-nationalist leader, an unexpected verdict on the future of a divided NCP has eventually put a full stop to the power struggle between the party chairs of the erstwhile NCP, Oli and Prachanda.

The verdict is being seen as an extrajudicial effort to save the country from plunging into political instability. Considering Oli's influence over the President's office, the Council of Ministers, Security Council, extraconstitutional bodies and the Press, it was believed that the court would favour Oli and acknowledge his faction as the legitimate NCP. That would have left Prachanda with no option but to form a new faction. Oli's legal team had also believed in a favourable verdict but the actual result has deepened the political crisis. Now, if the Maoists withdraw support, the Government will fall. The Madhesh-based Janata Samajbadi Party might prove to be the kingmaker as it can support the Nepali Congress and the Maoists to form a Government or ally with Oli to give further lease to his premiership.

An expected outcome: The 2018 merger of the two mainstream rivals had generated optimism among the Nepalese people that the new leadership was showing political maturity. However, it was only a matter of political survival for Oli and Prachanda as the former had planned to weaken the



Opposition by bringing archival Prachanda on board. Prachanda was facing serious corruption cases and the charges of *en masse* killing during the decade-long Maoist movement. Prachanda has gone on record to claim alleged 5,000 killings during the movement. Since Oli was the strongest ally, Prachanda could avoid trials at the UN and the International Court of Justice. Therefore, the merger was a self-serving decision by the duo against the widespread belief that they had shown political maturity in the interest of their people. Hence, the fallout was inevitable.

Blaming and seeking: With the eventual fall, Oli is seeking to mend ties with New Delhi. To reach out to India, he has appeared on a number of Indian news channels to cry foul against former Prime Minister Prachanda, blaming him for dividing the party. The same Oli created his political stronghold through his anti-India manoeuvring and bashing of the Indian media for being unfair towards the "victim" country.

Oli's public relations office and foreign policy advisory group had come fully geared to criticise India on the border



IF THE MAOISTS WITHDRAW SUPPORT, THE GOVERNMENT WILL FALL. THE MADHESH-BASED JANATA SAMAJBADI PARTY MIGHT PROVE TO BE THE KINGMAKER AS IT CAN SUPPORT THE NEPALI CONGRESS AND THE MAOISTS TO FORM A GOVERNMENT OR ALLY WITH OLII

dispute. These offices are now attempting all the tricks to reach out to New Delhi. Also, despite a projected bonhomie with China, Oli is pushing for the supplies of the COVID-19 vaccines from India.

However, testing the trust will be the core of India's new relations with Nepal. On the other hand, Oli's biased approach towards China had come at the cost of substantial economic losses. Also, he signed the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance with Beijing, endangering the lives and rights of 20,000 Tibetan refugees in Nepal. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an obsession with the current regime despite Sri Lanka's exposé of the Chinese wrongdoings.

While Oli may call it a balancing act between India and China, his actions speak otherwise. The alleged soft funding from China to Oli's political adventures in Nepal through the Madan Bhandari Foundation needs no explanation to assert his bonhomie with the dragon.

Uncertain future: While the politicians do not wish for Nepal to plunge back into insurgency, Oli's authoritarian attitude has cost Nepal dearly.

Politically, democracy is a casualty considering Oli's dream of a one-party rule in Nepal, with no political opponents outside and within the UML.

On the foreign policy front, Nepal, with its vast hydropower potential, can use India's expertise in generating power. A mutually beneficial plan could have paved the way for Nepal's economic growth. However, far from new agreements, Nepal seems to have no plan to revitalise treaties like the Mahakali, signed in 1996 with India, which can generate cooperation between them. Meanwhile, false promises under the BRI and dreams of a trans-Himalayan railway with China have garnered Oli enough political capital.

Oli's aspirations, accompanied by hollow economic and development strategies, will lead Nepal towards an uncertain future which is being watched carefully by the people of Nepal and international actors, including India.

(The author is an ICSSR Doctoral Fellow at the JNU and Visiting Fellow at the Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs, Kathmandu. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TIME TO REDEFINE RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

Sir — When Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited both New Delhi and Islamabad during his whirlwind tour, the visible and palpable warmth between the two nations at Islamabad was conspicuous by its absence in Delhi. Not mere photo ops, Russia's assurance to Pakistan on supply of highly sophisticated military equipment and the promise to conduct joint military exercise there does not bode well for India's interests. Well, it is not as if all of a sudden Moscow has found a new strategic and military partner in Islamabad. For years, after a considerable period of strong dislike, Russia has built bridges with Pakistan in its own way. But in international relations, what is unsaid often matters more than what is said. Foreign policy is a matter of costs and benefits; no two nations are permanent foes. New Delhi, of course, is not on a slippery slope as far as its military and trade ties with Moscow are concerned.

But international diplomacy is a clever struggle where minds speak more than words. New Delhi's proximity with Washington has not gone unnoticed in Russian diplomatic circles, especially when India has always called Russia an "old friend". Friends have the right to quarrel but if that translates into a fight, then the repercussions are bound to vitiate the atmosphere in the region. As a matter of protocol, a visiting Foreign Minister may or may not call on the Prime Minister of the host country. But PM Narendra Modi is known to rise above formalities. Therefore, tongues wagged when Lavrov left for Islamabad without meeting the PM.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

MAMATA BANERJEE IS LIKE LAKSHMI BAI

Sir — Visuals of an injured Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on a wheelchair leading the fight bring up the memory of Rani Lakshmi Bai, the warrior queen of the princely State of Jhansi, on horseback with a raised sword challenging the mighty British Raj undaunted. Bouquet or brick-

CAPFs inept in handling law & order



It seems that the personnel of the central security forces deployed in election duties are not adequately trained to defuse a threat created by a violent mob without resorting to firing to kill. What happened in West Bengal's Cooch Behar has proved their incompetence in handling the law and order situation. The perception that the central forces deployed in the State are not as politically neutral as they should be is not far from reality and it erodes their institutional credibility. Further, the Election Commission (EC) is supposed to

ensure a level playing field for all the parties and apply rules uniformly and not selectively. But its decisions that invariably go in favour of the BJP make it look like an arm of the ruling party. The EC has given us reasons to wonder if it follows the dictates of the Government.

It would be disingenuous of the EC to claim that it had not scheduled the polling in eight phases at the BJP's behest to suit its campaign plan. The task of safeguarding democracy is better served by the EC by being party-blind and playing its role impartially. Mahatma Gandhi's teaching is that means should be as fair as the end. But if what the BJP does in West Bengal is anything to go by, for it the end of wresting power from the TMC justifies whatever means it adopts, be it communal polarisation, misuse of institutions, spurge of money or unleashing violence. It is an inversion of truth to say that the BJP adheres to Gandhian non-violence.

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

bats to Mamata Banerjee depends on which part of the political spectrum one is positioned. Bigotry threatens to disturb communal harmony in the State and change its cherished culture. Like waters from a breached glacial lake, money flows into the State unchecked. The Enforcement Directorate follows every Trinamool leader closely to jump upon him tooth and claw. And the platoons have their fingers on the trigger always to 'ruthlessly' enforce "law and order" in West Bengal.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

NEED TO EDUCATE PEOPLE ON COVID

Sir — It is unfortunate to note that the scourge of COVID-19 is still continuing worldwide. Right now, there has been unnecessary panic among the people despite all the serious efforts to fight the virus. As a result, my family members

, including my mother, had to cancel their train tickets to Chennai from Tuticorin — most of them have been wearing masks. What exactly is the reason for the current tense situation? Countries have been fighting with the pandemic for more than a year now. In fact, all the healthcare and emergency measures like vaccines, face masks, washing of hands and social distancing have been in place to date. In spite of such strict guidelines, people have started ignoring mandatory things like wearing a mask for unknown reasons, maybe due to their lethargic attitude to the crisis.

People must understand that prevention is always better than cure. The WHO should take immediate steps to explain the latest status on COVID and vaccines.

P Senthil | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

I urge everyone to cooperate and follow the COVID protocols and don't rush to hospital unless necessary and go and vaccinate if you are eligible.

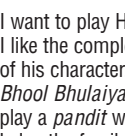


Delhi CM — Arvind Kejriwal



The struggle against Iran and its proxies and Iranian armament is a huge task. The situation that exists today is not necessarily the one that will exist tomorrow.

Israeli Prime Minister — Benjamin Netanyahu



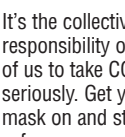
I want to play Hitler as I like the complexity of his character. In *Bhool Bhulaiya 2*, I play a *pandit* who helps the family when they feel the existence of ghosts.

Actor — Govind Namdev



It was lovely to watch Prithvi bat so effortlessly and timing the ball so nicely. He went through a bad patch earlier and has come back as a champion.

Cricketer — Shikhar Dhawan



It's the collective responsibility of all of us to take COVID seriously. Get your mask on and stay safe.

Telangana's Cabinet Minister — KT Rama Rao

FIRST COLUMN

REMEMBERING THE ‘GREATEST INDIAN’

Ambedkar did not seek equality only for Dalits but tried to bring all of India under the umbrella of his great ideals



RATTAN LAL KATARIA

A few years ago, a major English TV news channel in the country started a drive to choose the “Greatest Indian” through online and mobile voting. The people of the country chose Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar as the “Greatest Indian.” This is Babasaheb’s greatest legacy. Unlike other leaders, he is still as relevant in the hearts of crores of Dalits and those who fight for a dignified life for underprivileged Indians, as he was in his time. As the country celebrates the 130th birth anniversary of Babasaheb on April 14, Ambedkar’s struggle and values continue to inspire Indians and even the Black community in the US and others fighting discrimination across the globe. Ambedkar was different from other leaders in the sense that he encouraged the underprivileged to get their rights through education and political struggle. Despite all the protests, insults, reproach and neglect, he did not tread the path of violence and never dreamed of destroying the system. Staying within the confines of constitutional commitments, working within the system and changing it from within, were the hallmarks of his struggle.



Babasaheb was not only the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, he firmly believed in the role of constitutional values in keeping the democratic system alive. Education, democratic struggle and unity were the core of his philosophy. He drew the path between socialist philosophy and communism for social justice. After the Round Table Conferences in 1931, the British proposed a separate electorate. When Madan Mohan Malaviya spoke to Babasaheb in this regard and envisaged its wider implications on Hindu society, Ambedkar agreed to have a more consistent reservation system for Dalits in place of a separate electorate. Thus, the historic Poona Pact of 1932 was signed. Ambedkar always fought for social justice and said that the scriptures that approve untouchability needed to be seen in the light of new knowledge. Ambedkar did not seek equality, fraternity and freedom only for the Dalits but also tried to bring the entire Indian society under the umbrella of his great ideals. When Pandit Nehru went back on his promise on the Hindu Code Bill, Ambedkar resigned from the Cabinet. Currently, while there is intense churning on its role in ensuring democracy and social justice on a global scale, Babasaheb has become more relevant than ever.

The values of dialogue, constitutional struggle and constant coordination are now playing an important role in making the present system more effective. Babasaheb had also made similar efforts in the process of nation building. Just as the Government is working to re-establish India as the “Vishwa Guru”, Ambedkar, too, constantly strived for a global stature for Bharat. He was opposed to the prominence of competitive allegiance of religion, culture, caste and language. He believed that this made it difficult to cultivate Indianness and loyalty to India. He said, “I want people to be Indian first and to be Indian till the end, nothing but Indian.”

Following in his footsteps, the Centre is not only ensuring social justice, but is also striving to bring the underprivileged into the mainstream through economic empowerment. ‘Start-up India’, ‘Stand-up India’, the National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation and scholarships for secondary and higher studies, are all efforts in this direction. On April 14, the whole world will salute Babasaheb, the true son of the nation, and his contribution towards nation building will be remembered. However, the younger generation must not only follow Babasaheb’s ideals on his birth anniversary but every moment of their life.

(The writer is Minister of State, Social Justice & Empowerment and Jal Shakti. The views expressed are personal.)

Nix sovereign guarantee clause for the NaBFID

To bail out an entity majority-owned and controlled by private parties using the taxpayers’ funds is a bad idea



UTTAM GUPTA



ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THESE PREREQUISITES ARE LACKING, RESULTING IN SHORTFALL IN CASH FLOWS, THEN EVEN THE OFFER OF SOVEREIGN GUARANTEE WON’T PROVIDE MUCH COMFORT EVEN AS THE NaBFID, TOO, WILL END UP BEING A DRAIN ON THE EXCHEQUER JUST AS THE ERSTWHILE IDBI



In her Budget speech, Finance Minister (FM) Nirmala Sitharaman had proposed setting up of a new Development Financial Institution (DFI) termed the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID). The Government passed a Bill to establish the NaBFID, its objective being “to coordinate with the Centre and States, regulators, financial institutions (FIs), institutional investors and other relevant stakeholders, in India or outside India, to facilitate building and improving the relevant institutions to support the development of long-term non-recourse infrastructure financing in India, including the domestic bonds and derivatives markets.”

The NaBFID will also be involved “in lending or investing, directly or indirectly, and seek to attract investments from private sector investors and institutional investors, in infrastructure projects located in or outside India.” It will also help provide financing options for projects under the much-trumpeted National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP). Under the NIP, the Union Government has identified over 7,000 projects in all crucial sectors such as roads, highways, railways, ports, power transmission lines, gas pipelines and so on, requiring an investment of over ₹100 lakh crore over the next five years.

The Government will infuse ₹20,000 crore in NaBFID as budgetary support which will be leveraged to generate a financing capability of over ₹3,00,000 crore. This is peanuts when compared to the mammoth requirement of around ₹90 lakh crore (excluding about ₹10 lakh crore: ₹4,39,000 crore spent during 2020-21, plus a planned spending of ₹5,54,000 crore for 2021-22). But the moot question is whether the new DFI is a sustainable proposition?

This is not the first time that the idea of a DFI has been floated. The first such institution, namely the Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI), was set up in 1948, followed by the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) in 1964. In the private sector, the Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) was set up in 1955. This was in sync with the global trend in Europe, Japan, the US and other Asian countries where the DFIs were set up primarily to rebuild infrastructure devastated by World War II. After the task was completed, those institutions were wound up. In India, how far these institutions (IDBI/IFCI) helped in building infrastructure is debatable. However, one thing is abundantly clear; they became a drain on the national exchequer through a variety of supports such as Government guarantees, capital commitments including from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) along with direct and indirect financing by the latter to meet their needs.

In the 90s, the Narasimham/Khan committees recommended — as part of the financial reforms package — their gradual phase-out. They were either required to transform into banks or close if they couldn’t.

The panels also recommended the development of domestic bonds and derivatives markets to galvanise investors to deploy their savings for long-term financing infrastructure projects. As a follow up, the then Vajpayee Government converted the IDBI into a commercial bank in 2003. The promoters of ICICI did this much earlier in 1994 by converting the institution into the ICICI Bank. However, the other most

crucial recommendation remained unattended. In the absence of sustainable arrangements for channelising household savings for long-term investment (a bank’s source of capital is primarily short-term deposits resulting in what is termed as asset-liability mismatch), currently much of infrastructure financing is done by the Government of India (GOI) by way of budgetary support.

The GOI, in turn, raises resources — albeit by providing budgetary support — by imposing cesses, fees and other levies such as the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF), the Permanent Bridge Fees Fund (PBFF) and monetisation of the National Highways Fund (NHF). For instance, during 2020-21, out of the ₹42,500 crore allocated to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) for executing roads and highways projects, the contribution of the above-mentioned funds was 49 per cent, 27 per cent and 24 per cent respectively.

In this backdrop, and with the present arrangement meeting only a small portion of the mammoth funding needs (₹100 lakh crore under the NIP), setting up of dedicated institutions such as the NaBFID *prima facie* appears to be an attractive proposition. In fact, the Modi Government wants to use the NaBFID as an anchor DFI.

To begin with, the NaBFID will be 100 per cent owned by the GOI, with equity capital coming by way of budgetary support. Over a period of time, the latter will reduce its shareholding to 26 per cent, implying that the majority ownership and control

(albeit 74 per cent) will eventually be in private hands. It would be a professionally-run body, with the Government only appointing the Chairperson.

The proposed structure of the new DFI points towards the Government going for a hands-off approach as the Act does not provide for an oversight mechanism; it will be free from the “three Cs” i.e. the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Central Vigilance Commission and the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. In fact, it goes a step forward by seeking to protect the management for the decisions taken as an “act of good faith.” Up to this point, things are hunky-dory.

However, problems begin to creep when we look at this: “The Act empowers the GOI to extend sovereign guarantee in case of a default.” The guarantees cover a wide range like any liabilities of its own subsidiaries, joint ventures, branches and other similar arrangements; letters of comfort, or letters of credit for loans or bonds and debentures issued by any DFI funding infrastructure projects in India; and guarantee of the NaBFID’s bonds, debentures, loans and borrowings from multilateral institutions, sovereign wealth funds (SWFs), and other foreign institutions. To bail out an entity majority-owned and controlled by private parties using the taxpayers’ funds is a bad idea. Furthermore, to do this when the Government is not even exercising any external oversight makes it abhorrent. The FM’s defence that “an audited report would be placed in Parliament every year, besides the

NaBFID having to furnish to the GOI and the RBI a copy of its balance sheet and accounts, together with a copy of the auditor’s report and a report of its working during the relevant year, within four months from the date on which its accounts were closed and balanced” does not inspire confidence.

One shudders to fathom the contingent liabilities emanating from the above open-ended guarantees provided under the Act and their impact on the fiscal deficit (FD). Already, the FD for 2021-22 is put at 6.8 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product which is almost double of what is permitted under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management. For 2025-26, the FM puts it at 4.5 per cent. The NaBFID Act would result in spiralling of these numbers.

Team Modi needs to take a relook at the “sovereign guarantee” clause in the NaBFID Act. It should be deleted. As for giving comfort to investors, if only project proponents can generate the desired cash flows (this would require transparency and efficiency in project execution, simplified processes, enforcement of contracts, freedom from bureaucratic red tape and above all, realistic pricing of services shorn of populism), this will be automatically assured.

On the other hand, if these prerequisites are lacking, resulting in shortfall in cash flows, then even the offer of sovereign guarantee won’t provide much comfort even as the NaBFID, too, will end up being a drain on the exchequer just as the erstwhile IDBI.

The writer is a New Delhi-based policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THIS IS GENOCIDE. I HAVE SEEN THE PICTURES. THE CENTRAL FORCES HAD SIMPLY SPRAYED THE BULLETS INSTEAD OF AIMING AT THE LEGS.
—WEST BENGAL CM
MAMATA BANERJEE



EVERY DEATH IS SAD BUT WHY IS IT THAT MAMATA DIDI HAS TO PLAY POLITICS OF APPEASEMENT WITH EVERY DEATH?
—UNION HOME MINISTER
AMIT SHAH

Playing politics over vaccines will not help the cause

The Opposition should develop credible policy alternatives instead of blaming the Govt, and the Centre must be transparent in distribution of the COVID shots

Should political parties play politics over COVID-19? That is what is happening over the delivery of vaccines in the last few days. It has resulted in a fight between the Opposition-ruled States and the Centre for more doses of the coveted jabs as the former and the latter have accused each other of “discrimination” and “neglect” respectively.

When COVID-19 hit the country in January 2020, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi took the Chief Ministers (CMs) and even the public on board about how to effectively deal with the situation. He held several meetings with the CMs and consulted and guided the States, promising them of all possible help. They worked in tandem.

The pandemic helped the Governments focus on the



KALYANI SHANKAR

The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.

deteriorating healthcare system, lack of hospitals and facilities, inadequate social protection, the need for more funds for the health sector, health insurance and so on. Both the PM and the CMs needed each other and leaned on each other to tackle the enormous medical emergency.

However, both were looking at an electorate and their position at the end of their terms. Therefore, it became an individual race for every one of them. However, whether the Government mishandled the lockdown last year came into question. Still, the lockdown itself did not turn into a political issue. Even the Opposition parties could not go beyond a point to criticise the Modi Government.

Now, after one year, with the pandemic running into its

second wave, politics seems to have taken over. When things go wrong, it is politics that comes to the fore.

Now, there are vaccine shortages and there was an obvious miscalculation on the part of the authorities. If something goes wrong, the Centre blames the States while the States blame the Centre for not delivering the required doses of vaccines. The demand pertaining to the shots has also gone up. The initial response from the public was one of “wait and watch”, but now there is a clamour for vaccines as India became the second worst-hit nation in the world.

While the BJP touts Modi as the saviour of the people and lauds his efforts in handling the pandemic, the CMs of the non-BJP ruled States are now alleging that they are getting a stepmotherly treat-



ment. The fact is that all the political parties have realised that COVID-19 has become a long-term game and they cannot simply sit and not play politics over it. So, everything, right from the approval of the vaccines to allocation to the States, is being politicised.

Former CM of Uttar Pradesh Akhilesh Yadav has declared that he would not take the “BJP vaccine”. Others have questioned the efficacy of the vaccines and rightful-

ly the promise of vaccine availability made to the people in poll-bound States by the ruling party.

It is a time of reckoning for the State Governments and all political parties. Recently, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, while addressing the CMs of Congress-led States, asked them to prioritise COVID-19 containment. She also accused the Modi Government of “mismanaging the pandemic situation by allowing the export of vaccines resulting in vaccine shortage” in India.

She said: “As the principal Opposition party, it is our responsibility to raise issues and push the Government to move away from PR tactics and act in the interest of the people.”

The current wave of infections will test the country’s health infrastructure and

improvements in it since last year. Maharashtra was the worst-hit State during both the significant surges of COVID-19 cases. As of April 8, almost 24 million doses were in stock and another 19 million were in the pipeline. Some 3-3.5 million doses have been administered on an everyday basis, according to data made available by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The second wave came when people started celebrating the success with respect to effectively tackling the first wave. The period also coincided with the Assembly elections in five States and mega religious events like the Kumbh Mela. On March 7, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan even declared that “we are in the endgame of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

However, this is not the

appropriate time to question “who” and “why” with respect to the mishandling of the crisis. The real question is what the Centre and State Governments have done during the pandemic and what they can do to contain the second wave. The Opposition must understand that it should be more vigilant, active, public-spirited and courageous.

The Opposition parties should play their role as an institutional watchdog and develop credible policy alternatives instead of blaming the Government. The Modi Government should be transparent in distributing the vaccines and in addressing the concerns of the CMs of the Opposition-ruled States. All the sides should realise that this is an unprecedented crisis, and playing politics will not help.

Sensex nosedives 1,708 pts amid massive selloff

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex plummeted 1,708 points on Monday following an across-the-board selloff as spiking COVID-19 cases in the country spooked investors. The 30-share BSE index sank 1,707.94 points or 3.44 per cent to end at 47,883.38. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty plunged 524.05 points or 3.53 per cent to finish at 14,310.80. IndusInd Bank was the top loser in the Sensex pack, tanking over 8 per cent, followed by Bajaj Finance, SBI, ONGC, Titan, M&M, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank. Dr Reddy's was the sole gainer, rising 1.5 per cent.

climbing over 4 per cent. "Domestic equities reminded the bloodbath of March 2020 as record rise in COVID-19 cases in the country and possibility of lockdowns in several states dented investors' sentiments," said Binod Modi, Head - Strategy at Reliance Securities. Concerns of possible reversal in economic momentum and earnings recovery made investors risk-averse and huge selloff led to the erosion of nearly Rs 9 lakh crore in investor wealth, he added. Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Tokyo were in the red, while Seoul ended with mild gains. Stock exchanges in Europe were largely trading on a positive note in mid-session deals. Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.57 per cent higher at USD 63.31 per barrel.

India will come out of Covid crisis with flying colours: Deloitte CEO

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

India will come out of the COVID-19 crisis that has impacted the entire world with flying colours, Deloitte CEO Punit Renjen has said, asserting that the 21st century is "India's century". Renjen said the Indian government has performed well in addressing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. "This is India's century and I'm convinced about it," the 60-year-old prominent Indian-American business leader told PTI in an interview. "I am certainly a little biased given my (Indian) heritage but I'm actually convinced that this is India's century because of just the raw talent that exists in India, the number of people that comprise India, the democratic tradition that has been around for 75 years," he said. Observing that the pandemic impacted everyone, Renjen said the pandemic impacted India very hard, given the lockdown that the government had to put in place, given the size of the population and what the virus



potentially could do to India. The Rohtak-born Indian-American CEO, who has been heading Deloitte since 2015, described as "remarkable" a recent report from the International Monetary Fund which projected 12.5 per cent growth rate for the country. "Nobody can say with precision, but I really believe that India is going to come out of this pandemic growing at the fastest rate;... definitely the fastest large economy," he said. "I think the recovery is going to be very strong. The fundamentals (of Indian economy) are there and I'm very

bullish as is Deloitte on India," said Renjen, also a member of the Deloitte Global Board of Directors. "This was a very unpredictable virus. India is a country of 1.3 billion people and there are communities in India like Dharavi in Mumbai that are highly congested areas, which are really prime areas for the virus to spread, he said. "Given all of those conditions, I believe that the Indian economy, the Indian people have weathered this as well as they possibly could," he said, adding that, however, there have been difficult times but that is not just unique to India.

Coforge acquires SLK Global at 'enterprise value' of USD 195 mn

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Noida-based IT solutions provider Coforge on Monday picked up a controlling stake in SLK Global Solutions, a business process transformation services provider primarily to the financial services industry, for a reported enterprise value of USD 195 million. The deal will further strengthen the financial services vertical of Coforge, scale up its BPM operations and expand its US footprint, the company said in a statement, which did not quantify the deal value. However, sources told that the enterprise value of the deal is around \$195 million. Though based in Bengaluru, SLK has most of clients in the US banking and insurance sectors and has deep domain expertise in the banking and insurance businesses of North America.



Fall in gold prices may not impact NBFCs asset quality

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The recent fall in gold prices is unlikely to affect the asset quality of non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) lending against gold in a considerable manner, according to a report. However, banks that were aggressively disbursing gold loans during the last fiscal may see some impact on their asset quality, Crisil Ratings said in a report. On a 30-day rolling basis, the gold price has corrected around 10 per cent over the past six months, while on an absolute basis it has fallen twice that rate.

"The correction in gold prices in recent months is not expected to materially impact the asset quality of NBFCs lending against gold," the agency said. Apart from periodically collecting interest over the past few fiscal, NBFCs have ensured that disbursement loan-to-value (LTV) is maintained below 75 per cent, it said. For NBFCs, the average portfolio LTV as of December 31, 2020, was close to 63-67 per cent, while the average LTV on incremental disbursements in the October-December 2020 quarter was around 70 per cent.



Surya Roshni bags Rs 299 cr order for supply of steel pipes

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lighting and steel pipe products maker Surya Roshni on Monday said it has bagged an order worth Rs 299 crore for supply of carbon steel line pipes to Numaligarh Refinery Ltd for Paradip Numaligarh Crude Oil Pipeline project in Odisha. "The company has obtained an order amount of Rs 299.07 crore (excluding GST) for supply of... external coated carbon steel line pipes to Numaligarh Refinery for Paradip Numaligarh Crude Oil Pipeline project," Surya Roshni said in a regulatory filing. The order is to be executed within 15 months, it added. Shares of Surya Roshni were trading 6.87 per cent lower at Rs 359.15 apiece.

'India must capture all segments of financial market to fuel growth'

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

India is on the right track and is innovating on the policy side, including on digital identity and payments, but it also needs to capture all the segments of the financial market and institutions to make sure that every piece fits together like a puzzle to fuel growth in the country, according to a top IMF official. "The goal is to have an economy and a financial system that can absorb shocks. Balance sheets can be better managed, Non-Performing Loans (NPLs) can be better managed," Tobias Adrian, Director of the Monetary and Capital Markets Department of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) told PTI in an interview. The non-bank financial system can be better seen, and capital markets have to be deepened and made more robust, he said during the last week's annual Spring meeting of the IMF and the World Bank. Of course, there is the whole fintech agenda as well, which is important in India as it is everywhere else in the world. "We are in the technological revolution in payment space. And I think India has



been path-breaking in many of these technologies and payment systems. Now there is lending that is done in India that is not done anywhere else because the infrastructure is quite strong in this area. But of course, more can be done," Adrian said in response to a question. The IMF official underscored the significance of investments into financial institutions, into oversight, and into infrastructures to ensure that the "financial system can absorb shocks and that is sustaining growth" in a long-term way. India, he said, is on the right track and is innovating on the policy side. "It has been quite innovative on digital identity, for example. I think no country is laying like India in that

respect," he said, noting that the country needs to capture all the segments of the financial market and financial institutions to make sure that every piece fits together like a puzzle to fuel growth in India. The general lesson from the COVID-19 crisis, he said, is that when the terrible adverse shock hits one need to aggressively supply liquidity. Secondly, the fiscal support was very important in this particular crisis and that of course dependent on how much fiscal space each country had. Thirdly, of course financial sector policies have been very successful. Debt moratoria, interest rate payments for that debt in particular are fully compatible with regulatory and accounting flexibility, he said.

Recovery sustains in telcos' operating metrics, says ICRA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

ICRA on Monday said it expects steady recovery in telecom sector to sustain by way of ARPU expansion which is likely to boost revenues and margins for the industry. That said, debt continues to remain the Achilles heel of the industry, it cautioned. ICRA expects total industry debt to remain elevated at Rs 5 lakh crore as on March 31, 2022.

The next round of tariff hikes can provide a fillip to the industry Average Revenue Per User (ARPU). The expansion in profitability is expected to result in improvement in the debt coverage metrics of the industry, but it would continue to remain weak given the high debt levels, ICRA observed. Elevated debt levels will continue to remain the "major impediment" as industry added AGR levies related debt and spectrum debt after recently-concluded auctions.

Biocon's arm gets GMP compliance certificate

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Biotechnology firm Biocon on Monday said its subsidiary Biocon Pharma has received GMP compliance certificate from UK's health regulator MHRA for its Bengaluru facility. "Biocon Pharma Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Biocon Limited, has received a certificate of GMP compliance from the MHRA, the UK, for its manufacturing facility at Biocon Park in Bengaluru," Biocon said.

MONEY MATTERS

Silver futures drop on subdued demand



Silver futures on Monday dropped Rs 98 to Rs 66,885 per kg as participants reduced their bets on low demand. On the Multi Commodity Exchange, silver contracts for May delivery tumbled by Rs 98, or 0.15

per cent, to Rs 66,885 per kg in a business turnover of 9,516 lots. Silver traded lower by 0.47 per cent at USD 25.21 per ounce in New York.

Will send clarification to DoT over show-cause notice: VIL



Vodafone Idea Ltd (VIL) on Monday said it will be sending a "suitable clarification" to the telecom department on show-cause notice over non-payment of licence fee in seven circles, and noted that any payment not made on March 25, would be paid on April 15 with interest. Last week, the Department of Telecom (DoT) issued a show-cause notice to VIL over non-payment of licence fee for the fourth quarter of 2020-21, with regard to circles of Bihar, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh (East), Odisha, as well as national long distance. "We will be sending suitable clarification to DoT with reference to the said show-cause notice," VIL said in a regulatory filing. VIL explained that payment of licence fee is regular quarterly exercise based on self-calculation of revenue for each quarter. Generally, the payment is made on 15th day of the month following the quarter-end, but in the fourth quarter an estimated payment is required by March 25.

Flipkart inks pact with Adani Group to create 2,500 jobs



to strengthen logistics and data centre capabilities of the Walmart-owned company and create about 2,500 direct jobs. In this two-pronged partnership, Flipkart will work with Adani Logistics Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd, to strengthen its supply chain infrastructure and further enhance its ability to serve its rapidly growing base of customers, a statement said. In addition, Flipkart will set up its third data centre at Adaniconnex's Chennai-based facility, leveraging the latter's expertise and industry-leading data centre technology solutions, it added. Adaniconnex is a new joint venture formed between EdgeConneX and Adani Enterprises Ltd.

Amazon to cover vax cost for over 10 lakh employees



Amazon on Monday said it will cover the COVID-19 vaccination cost for all its India employees and associates as well as those in partner network ecosystem. This would include delivery service partner associates, including Amazon Flex drivers, 'I Have Space' store partners, trucking partners and their eligible dependents, a statement said. The benefit also will be available to all sellers on Amazon.in with an active listing since last year, it added. come available to individuals above 45 years of age in India, Amazon India is encouraging its employees, associates, sellers on Amazon.in and partners to get vaccinated at the earliest appropriate time to protect themselves, their families, and their communities," it said. The company has also set up comprehensive support mechanisms for employees and associates working with Amazon and hired through staffing agencies, it added.

CEOs gather to speak out against voting law changes

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

More than a hundred top executives and corporate leaders gathered online this weekend to discuss their response to restrictive voting laws under consideration in several states and already enacted in Georgia, according to a statement from organizers of the meeting. The statement didn't identify the participants, but The Washington Post reported that



the meeting included executives from major airlines, retailers and manufacturers and at least one NFL owner. Without offering specifics, the statement — issued by the Yale School of Management and two other civic groups —

noted that that "CEOs indicated readiness to act individually and collectively to shore up American democracy and ensure Americans have access to a world class voting system." Such actions could include halting donations to politicians who support the bills and even delaying investments in states that pass the restrictive measures, according to Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, a Yale management professor and one of the organizers.

Man Industries bags order worth Rs 766 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Pipe manufacturer Man Industries on Monday said it has bagged a new order worth Rs 766 crore. "The company has received a new order worth Rs 766 crore from the domestic hydrocarbon sector," Man Industries said in a regulatory filing. Man Industries said with this new order the unexecuted order book as on date stands at approximately Rs 1,900 crore to be executed in the current financial year. "This order reflects a robust



business environment and also showcases the trust customers have in the company's technological and executional capabilities," the company added.

Moon says EV battery settlement 'meaningful'

PNS ■ SEOUL

South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Monday welcomed a decision by two South Korean electric vehicle battery makers to settle a long-running intellectual property dispute that had threatened thousands of American jobs and President Joe Biden's environmental policies. In agreeing to pay 2 trillion won (USD 1.8 billion) to LG Energy Solution over stolen trade secrets, SK Innovation can now move ahead with plans to manufacture batteries in Georgia for electrically powered Ford pickup trucks and Volkswagen SUVs. In a series of tweets, Moon said the companies' last-minute settlement on Sunday was "fortu-



nate" and "very meaningful" and would help stabilise global supply chains in a fast-moving industry that's experiencing growing pains. South Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy in a press release called for "stronger cooperation and solidarity" between South Korean battery companies which should now focus on "preparing for the future in face of

intense global competition." The agreement between the companies averted an intervention by Biden in a case closely watched for its implications for his clean-energy agenda, which includes drastically increasing use of electric vehicles to help address climate change. Biden had until Sunday night to decide whether to step in, following a February ruling by a trade commission. He called the agreement a "win for American workers and the American auto industry." In a regulatory filing to South Korean financial authorities, SK Innovation said it will provide LG Energy a lump-sum payment of 1 trillion won (\$888 million) and

the same maximum amount in royalties. The companies also agreed to withdraw all pending trade disputes in the United States and South Korea and not assert new claims for 10 years. The U.S. International Trade Commission had decided in February that SK stole 22 trade secrets from LG Energy and that SK Innovation should be barred from importing, making or selling batteries in the United States for 10 years. The decision had jeopardized a \$2.6 billion battery factory that SK Innovation is building in Commerce, Georgia. The company has contracts to make batteries for an electric Ford F-150 pickup truck and an electric Volkswagen SUV.

The ever-increasing fanbase of the popular band When Chai Met Toast is in for a treat. The band's latest release *Awesome In Disguise* is all about *#LeapingForth* and being one's own superhero. With soulful music and a message, the band talks to *The Pioneer's* K RAMYA SREE about their project, upcoming albums, and more.



AWESOME IN DISGUISE!

Taking awesomeness to the next level for passionate fans, *&flix* has released a special music video *Awesome In Disguise* in collaboration with the leading multinational pop-folk band When Chai Met Toast. An ode to those who inspire us to take a leap of faith, the upbeat soundtrack depicts how it's not just the suits and superpowers, but the heart which is where the awesomeness stems from. The track which is a foot-tapping melody talks about a journey of bringing together a group of marvelous people to unleash what makes them awesome and extraordinary. Packed with mesmerising acoustics, the music inspires you to *#LeapForth* with faith that puts you on the path of redefining yourself. Along with the band members Achyuth Jaigopal, Ashwin Gopakumar, Pai Sailesh, and Pale Francis, the music video also brings forth those individuals who have achieved nothing short of miraculous feats through their spectacular show of strength, skill, and sheer will. Featuring in this video will be Parul Arora, the National Gold Medalist Gymnast who aced backflips in a saree, Anam Hashim, India's only professional

street bike freestyle athlete to have won laurels for the country on a global stage and Sagar Waghela, the star boy of the skateboarding circuit, and more. Other featured talents include Manasi Joshi, Indian para-badminton player, the current World Champion and a changemaker in the sporting world and Hydroman aka Jaydeep Gohil, India's first underwater dancer. With a message that strength isn't only defined by your physical capacity to outperform others but rather by your sheer tenacity and will of mind to overcome hurdles and prove yourself every single time, the band members say, "Superheroes aren't just characters with tremendous physique and superpowers but rather one of sound mind and a good heart. This particular trait is so often seen in select few who go out of the way and never once retire from successive faults and failures but rather give it all it takes to see their dream turn into reality. Here are so many superheroes amongst us, with unmatched abilities and identities and hence the *Awesome In Disguise* title.

Being a part of the *&flix* campaign gave us the opportunity to express through the song, the topic of overcoming fears and leaping forth from the hurdles that lie in your path, a subject we naturally relate to in our song-writing. Speaking about the music video exclusively with *The Pioneer*, they add, "The concept is trying to clearly explain that it's not the instrument that you choose, but the path in itself that defines your hero journey. *Awesome In Disguise* is a compilation of several acts of unabashed passion and courage that inspire others among us to do better. Heroes are not meant to be only watched, but rather a beacon of hope guide in times of dilemma and doubt. The music video conveys that even though we may hesitate to look beyond our comfort zones or face our fears openly, we all have the inner ability to be our own superhero." The fan base of When Chai Met Toast has been steadily increasing with every passing day. "It's very heart-warming to see more people discovering our

music and listening to our songs. We were on a six-city tour recently and had entire audiences sing back every word! It was an indescribable feeling. The love showered on us by these incredible fans everywhere is absolutely encouraging and gives us a spectacular high and zest every time we perform in front of the crowds. The medley of tunes from all over India which is basically the soul and rhythm of this band and our music has steadily seen an acceptable form of the culture here in India and is now slowly shaping up to be one of the most favoured types of music among young listeners," the band tells us. When Chai Met Toasts clearly stands for pop culture rendition of capturing life the way it is through our music and this just felt like the perfect fit. What's next in store for the band? They reveal, "You can expect a wave of anticipation and excitement in the coming months. Along with another single due to release in the coming month, we also have the full album of *When We Feel Young* releasing soon."

SHOOTING POST-COVID FELT LIKE HOMECOMING: TAHER



SHIKHA DUGGAL

Taher Shabbir, who had once played the lead actor opposite Tollywood actress Taapsee Pannu in *Naam Shabana*, is now tasting stardom even on OTT platforms, and why not, it's the new normal! Re-inventing his approach towards digital platforms, the *Guilty* fame is busy carving a niche for himself in this industry. Not only has he made his presence felt in Bollywood, he also has been part of several recent OTT hits including *Guilty*, *Poison 2*, *Hundred* and is now rooting for *Bekaboo 2* that's full of an ensemble cast! The new psycho-thriller will make you jump at every scary scene, and messes with your mind. With Taher playing a vital role in it, it's a whole new different ball-game for him as well. There is a distinct difference between suspense and surprise and not confusing the two, *Bekaboo 2* picks up right where season one left, following up on a young author, Anaysha, who shot to fame overnight owing to a book she wrote not-so-ethically! "There is a target been set on almost everyone in the series. None is aware of who is after their lives and happiness and this is the whole USP, the one that's going to keep the audiences engrossed. My character Kiyan is a borderline psychotic and seeks revenge on quite a few people, especially Ananysha and Kashti! Kiyan doesn't let things go easily and neither forgives quickly. Season 2 will see a more evolved version of my character," shares Taher who made his film debut with Shahrulkh Khan-led *Fan*. At the moment, keeping everyone on their toes with his new venture on the digital platform, the one thing he loves about being in the showbiz industry is the nature of its job. Allowing him to adorn multiple personalities and the ability to separate it from both 'real' and 'reel', being another person for a while is exciting for him! It gives him a kick. Certainly to be able to sustain in this industry is quite challenging yet, Taher Shabbir managed to endure with the way he projected those sincere looking characters on screen. As actors, they sometimes live up to the audience's expectations and sometimes do fail miserably, but the one thing that remains constant is continuing to give path-breaking performances regardless of the conditions that you're working in. Whether you're working in an exotic outdoor location or in the gullies of Mumbai, as an actor what the business demands is to be passionate about it and so is Taher. Telling us how he progressed into the character of Kiyan, he says, "As per the script, Kiyan has a lot of potential. What I needed currently was to work my ass off on the body language because it's a grey character out there seeking revenge. Now, how the series is going to be received is not in my hands but as an actor, I know that I have given my one hundred percent! I want the

show to be fabulous and the one that stays with the audience." He's not playing a morally grey character, he's out and out seeking revenge! Not having anything wholly good about himself in the series, it's his way of projecting the character that's turning out to be an interesting addition to the plotline because it's a grey character. He's going to keep the storyline unpredictable for the viewers throughout desiring to be a classic example of how grey characters are played. There's no black and white about OTT certainly changing the very face of media today! Years worth of change, we believe. Due to the crowd pulling to every OTT platform that's possible, the competition is also rising and how. The time is ripe for OTTs even in the future because few of them are still hesitant to go to theatres, there's a re-surge in infections unfortunately. Everyone's going through an industry shift and mainstream content being released online is a trend that's going to continue. "OTT platforms are the future of the entertainment industry catering to various genres and stories. The platforms are growing at lightning speed! The way things are going, it might be possible that people will only prefer OTT as they are easily accessible and at any place. With their diverse content and growing audience, digital platforms are anticipated to be the new normal for everyone," he adds on how

OTT is staying ahead in the competition! Every set is taking precautions because sanitisation has undoubtedly become the need of the hour! To be secure even while working is everyone's priority and that cannot be compromised on. The actor shares his experience of shooting amid these unprecedented times and this is his takeaway from that — "I was excited to face the camera after a brief hiatus. It felt like a homecoming of sorts! While makers ensure that all the guidelines are followed on sets, actors are also being extra cautious. There were limited people on sets and we wore masks regularly. At every point in and around the sets, there were sanitiser bottles and sprays. It was quite a distinct experience, although now we are pretty much used to it now. It has become a new normal for everyone sadly! Day by day, it was getting challenging to shoot during such restrictions, however keeping the guidelines in mind, I made sure that I carry my sanitisers, mask, gloves, etc. It was not only to ensure my safety but also to ensure the safety of my fellow cast and crew members." Advising the budding actors to not let an ignorant cloud of judgement stopping you from being in this industry and never to pull your contemporary down in pursuit of success, Taher Shabbir solely believes in working on one's inner self rather! Forgiveness should be more for oneself than for others, he concludes.



On National Safe Motherhood Day, public health expert Poonam Muttreja said that the focus needs to be widened to include morbidity as an important aspect of maternal health.

We have witnessed a steep rise in maternal deaths during the Covid-19 pandemic. This crisis has shown us that we must strengthen health systems to cope with emergencies without impacting essential services," says Executive Director, Population Foundation of India, Poonam Muttreja. Besides the overwhelming burden of Covid-19 cases in India, the indirect effects of the pandemic are cause for concern, especially in the case of already vulnerable communities. Women and children have been disproportionately affected, with studies registering a significant increase in the numbers of stillbirths and maternal deaths compared to pre-Covid periods. A recent review in *The Lancet*, of studies on maternal and child health outcomes, has confirmed that the impact of the Covid-19-associated lockdowns has been dev-

A cause for concern



astating for mothers and newborns. Low and middle-income countries (LMICs) have been worst affected. Clinics and public health facilities being inaccessible to many during pandemic-induced lockdowns cut off thousands from essential health services. The United Nations has estimated that this may have caused an additional 2,20,000 child deaths and 11,000 maternal deaths in South Asia alone. These numbers are likely to increase with India potentially accounting for the largest proportions. In India, the number of women who received all four antenatal check-ups during the pandemic also dropped by 51 per cent and the number of institutional deliveries were down by 79 per cent. The demand for family plan-

ning services satisfied by modern methods fell by 67 per cent. National Safe Motherhood Day is celebrated on Kasturba Gandhi's birth anniversary, April 11, every year. This year, the focus was on ensuring access to quality family planning services and reproductive health services for all. A robust family planning programme is an important way of curbing preventable deaths. "More accessible and equitable family planning services that offers a wider choice of contraceptive methods to couples are a simple, low-cost intervention that can reduce maternal and child mortality by preventing early pregnancies and unwanted pregnancies at a later age," says Poonam.

"At Population Foundation of India, we have engaged with policy-makers, donors, NGOs and communities to consistently raise the discourse on the need for informed decision making on women's health. We promote effective and gender-sensitive health and development strategies and policies. We have constantly emphasised the importance of planned families, birth spacing and delayed marriage as strategies to improve maternal health," she adds. Gender inequality, gender-based violence and lack of agency continue to impact women's ability to access maternal and antenatal health services. In India, regressive gender norms continue to result in a preference for sons, leading to frequent pregnancies. Further social norms around child and early marriages also impact maternal and child health. While the full impact of the pandemic on the public health system will not be clear for some time, Covid-19 has underscored that stronger maternal and child care systems are a critical requirement of health system strengthening going forward. The foundation has been working at the national, state and community level to change perceptions around gender family planning, adolescent sexuality and reproductive health.

NTR'S NEXT, A PAN-INDIA FILM, WITH KORATALA



Young Tiger NTR who is currently busy shooting for SS Rajamouli's *RRR*, where he plays the role of Komaram Bheem, will next collaborate with Koratala Siva. Although rumours are rife that actor will work with Trivikram Srinivas for his next, as per the ongoing buzz, the film has been shelved for now and that the actor has given his nod to Koratala. The film will start in June after NTR completes *RRR*. Mikkilineni Sudhakar is going to produce this pan-India movie. Makers of the film announced that the film will release on April 29, 2022. Trivikram Srinivas in the place of NTR, will be working with Super Star Mahesh Babu, it is learnt.



THE FILM WILL GO ON FLOORS IN JUNE AFTER NTR COMPLETES SHOOTING FOR *RRR*. MIKKILINENI SUDHAKAR IS GOING TO PRODUCE THIS PAN-INDIA MOVIE THAT WILL HIT THE BIG SREENS ON APRIL 29, 2022.

RAVI TEJA 'PLAYS SMART' IN *KHILADI* TEASER

Mass Maharaja Ravi Teja and director Ramesh Varma who are in top form are coming up with an action entertainer *Khiladi*. The film's teaser was launched on Monday as a treat for fans and movie buffs and it promises *Khiladi* is going to be an action-

packed commercial entertainer. Apart from action, there are high intense emotions, romance and some thrilling elements as well in the teaser.

Ravi Teja who falls in love with Dimple Hayathi tries to assassinate her, making us curious to know what led him to take the extreme decision.

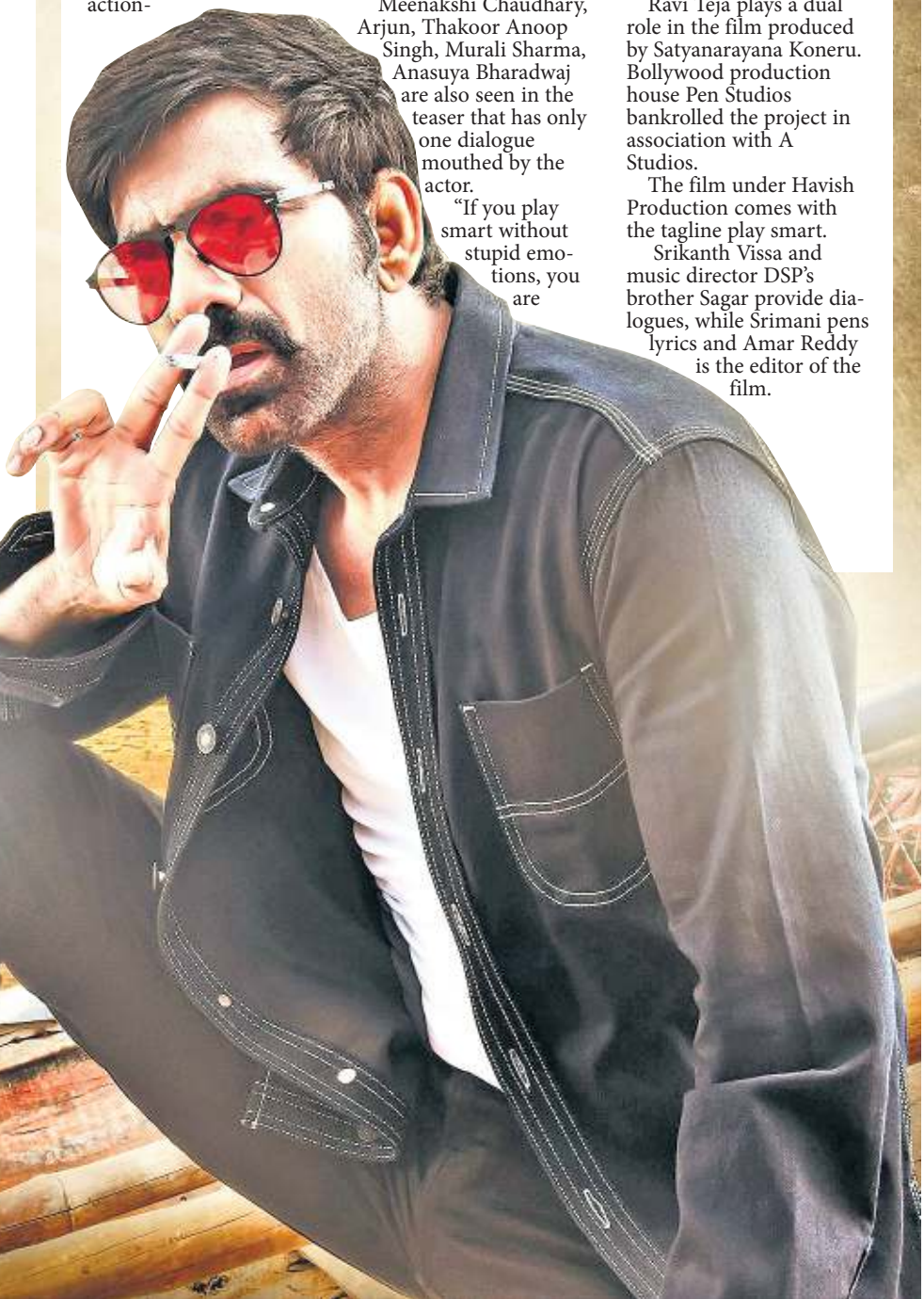
Meenakshi Chaudhary, Arjun, Thakoor Anoop Singh, Murali Sharma, Anasuya Bharadwaj are also seen in the teaser that has only one dialogue mouthed by the actor.

"If you play smart without stupid emotions, you are

unstoppable," says Ravi Teja and this defines his ruthless character. Sujit Vasudev and GK Vishnu's cinematography and Devi Sri Prasad's background score are the major assets of the film, other than Ravi Teja's intense performance. Being made on huge budget, every frame looks lavish.

Ravi Teja plays a dual role in the film produced by Satyanarayana Koneru. Bollywood production house Pen Studios bankrolled the project in association with A Studios.

The film under Havish Production comes with the tagline play smart. Srikanth Vissa and music director DSP's brother Sagar provide dialogues, while Srirani pens lyrics and Amar Reddy is the editor of the film.



'With *Baahubali*, we learnt how to get the business together'

Actor Rana Daggubati feels that films from South industry have always been pan-India but the globally renowned film *Baahubali* showed the way to make business the right way in a pan-India arrangement. Rana played the role of antagonist Bhallaladeva in the two-part film franchise. Talking about the culture of pan-India films spreading and how it was *Baahubali* that started it, the actor reflects on other films in the past, which have also had a huge reach nationally.

"I was an audience before an actor and to me whether I was watching a Hindi film or a Telugu film the sentiment was the same. I live in Hyderabad and for me be it (Amitabh) Bachchan sir's film or a Kamal Haasan film, the vibes were the same. Time and again there were films which broke the barriers. Like Mani (Ratnam) sir's film *Roza*, that was originally a Tamil film. Nobody in the Hindi belt had a problem

with that. They loved it as much as the South Indians loved it. Audience never has a problem (with language)," says the actor, who recently released his film *Aranya*.

The Hindi version of the same film is titled *Haathi Mere Saathi* but it had to be postponed due to the rising Covid cases in Maharashtra.

Rana goes on to add, "The only thing that changed with *Baahubali* is that we learnt how to get the business together and how do we actually come forth and release it. For a fact, this year they have been selling dubbed rights of all Telugu films, people on television are watching it and other languages. They were working on different spaces, they are now also watching it on OTT but now that is changing."

ADITI'S DISTRESSFUL LOOK IN *MAHA SAMUDRAM*

Sharwanand and Siddharth have teamed up an intense drama titled *Maha Samudram*. While Anu Emmanuel and Aditi Rao Hydari are playing female leads, Ajay Bhupathi of *Rx100* fame will don the director's hat for the film, whose shooting is progressing at a very brisk pace.

The first look of Aditi Rao Hydari has been unveiled on Monday and the heroine looks distressful. 'An Immeasurable Love' is what the makers captioned the look. She will be seen in the role of Maha.

The film is set to release on August 19. AK Entertainments is producing the movie. Other details regarding the remaining cast and crew will be out soon.



Gemini group forays into music

Gemini group needs no introduction. The company has been through the golden age in the Indian film industry.

Being one of the first companies to join the film industry after the country's independence, the group has hundreds of films to its credit, making and introducing several stars to the audiences. The group includes several affiliates such

as Gemini Film Circuit, Gemini VFX and Gemini Studios.

Having ruled the industry for the past 75 years, preparations are underway for Gemini's Diamond Jubilee celebrations too. It was during this time that the company decided to enter the music industry and announced the launch of Gemini Records.

In addition to creating private albums, Gemini Records will take over the rights to film



songs too. The company has operations in Chennai as well as Hyderabad. Gemini is credited with producing many prestigious films in Telugu and Tamil. Completing several years in

such a competitive world is no achievement.

Now with their foray into the music industry, fans are looking forward to unique content from various artists.

Wild Dog on Netflix

Akkineni Nagarjuna's action and thriller drama *Wild Dog* that hit the silver screens on April 2, helmed by Solomon, opened to positive response by the movie lovers and the critics alike but failed to ring box office bells.

Originally slated for an OTT release, the makers decided to release in theatres later.

And now the latest we hear is that Netflix bought the OTT rights of *Wild Dog* for a good price and the film is likely to end its theatrical run in the coming weeks, so the attention has once again turned towards its OTT release.

The film might stream on Netflix from mid May. However, there have also been reports claiming that the action drama *Wild Dog* might release on the OTT platform in the first week of June.

An official confirmation regarding the same is awaited.

