

ANALYSIS 7
EXPORT SUBSIDIES
FACE WTO CHALLENGE

MONEY 8
SENSEX TANKS 883 POINTS AS COVID
SPOOKS MARKET; NIFTY BELOW 14,400

SPORTS 11
BRAVO TAKES
CSK TO 188

VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY APRIL 20, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



'I'M VERY CRITICAL ABOUT MYSELF'

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TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Chaitra & Shukla Paksha Panchangam
Tithi: Ashtami: 12:42 am (Next Day)
Nakshatram: Punarvasu: 06:52 am
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 03:22 pm - 04:56 pm
Yamagandam: 09:07 am - 10:41 am
Varjyam: 03:14 pm - 04:55 pm
Gulika: 12:15 pm - 01:48 pm
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritkalam: 01:17 am - 02:57 am
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:50 am - 12:40 pm

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy
Temp: 38
Humidity: 49%
Sunrise: 05:56 am
Sunset: 06:33 pm
Current Weather Conditions Updated April 19, 2021 5:00 PM

Control with Centre, rue states

SNCN ACHARYULU
■ HYDERABAD

The handling of the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic by the Central Government, especially its refusal to allow the State Governments to take some specific decisions is causing immense heartburn among the latter, and the anger is building up. State Governments feel that the Centre has centralised all the issues relating to Coronavirus control, resulting in them appearing to be mere puppets, acting only on the directions of the Union Government, in the eyes of the general public. State governments complain of not being allowed a free hand to take any decision. TRS senior leaders say that though the failure of the Central government in controlling the coronavirus pandemic is glaring, it is the State Governments that are getting a bad name.

State declares holidays for Classes I to IX

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In the wake of a rapid increase in the number of Covid-19 cases, Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh on Monday declared holidays for Class I to IX in schools across the State from Tuesday.

Jawahar Reddy given full charge of CCC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Government on Monday appointed TTD Executive Officer KS Jawahar Reddy as the chairperson of the Covid Command Control Centre that was revived recently in view of the Covid second wave. He has been asked to take charge of the control centre immediately. The Government last Thursday revived the State Covid

Command and Control Centre with 21 All India Services officers, to take necessary steps for Covid-19 management and vaccination on a daily basis. One senior officer was deputed to each of the 13 districts for monitoring and guiding the district administrations in taking the necessary steps for Covid-19 management and vaccination.

Put up for sale, VSP helping critical Covid patients breathe

SUMIT ONKA
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In the spotlight due to Union Government's decision to privatise it, Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited, the

corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), has risen to the occasion by helping the critical Covid-19 patients to breathe since the pandemic broke out. Since the outbreak of the pandemic,

Visakhapatnam Steel Plant is catering to the demand of oxygen in the state hospitals. Oxygen is required in the steel plants for the production of the steel with the basic oxygen process.

Navy seizes drugs worth Rs 3,000 cr

PNS ■ KOCHI

The Indian Navy has busted an international smuggling racket operating through Arabian sea, seizing narcotics worth Rs 3,000 crore from a Sri Lankan fishing vessel which originated from Pakistan, a Defence spokesman said here on Monday. The Indian Naval Ship "Suvarna", which was on surveillance patrol in the Arabian Sea, also arrested five Sri Lankan nationals on board the vessel, he said.

Virus claims life of two more Secretariat staffers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

There is discernible panic among the AP Secretariat employees after two more of their colleagues died of Covid-related complications on Monday. Panchayat Raj department section officer Shanthi Kumari and ASN Murthy, a record assistant in the Home department, passed away, within days of testing positive for Covid-19. Their deaths took to four the number of Secretariat employees

who have succumbed to the virus, V Padma Rao and G Ravikanth being the other unfortunate victims. On Monday, Secretariat employees demanded permission to 'work-from-home' and cited the fact that over 50 employees working in various departments have tested positive for the virus. It's learnt that the senior officials are carrying out their duties from the HoD offices in Vijayawada and Guntur out of fear of Covid.

Manmohan Singh, KCR test positive

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao have tested positive for Covid-19. While Manmohan Singh was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences with a mild fever, KCR exhibited mild symptoms and has been advised isolation. He is staying at his farmhouse in Gajwel where a team of doctors is monitoring his health. Doctors are monitoring Manmohan Singh's condition. Incidentally, he has taken both the doses of Covid-19 vaccine.

State Govt sanctions revised cost of Polavaram project works

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government on Monday issued Revised Administrative Approval for certain works of Polavaram project from Rs 5,535.41 crore to Rs 7,192.02 crore. The revised estimates were prepared for construction of earth dam gaps I & III, earth cum rock fill dam for gap-II, spill channel, approach channel and pilot channel, spillway with crest level +25.72 and its ancillary works and excavation of foundations of 960 MW



hydroelectric power house, approach channel, intake structure, tailrace pool, tailrace channel etc.,

of Polavaram Irrigation Project are also included in the revised estimates. "Government accorded Revised Administrative Approval for an amount of Rs 7,192.02 crores against the administrative approval already accorded on September, 8, 2016 for Rs 5,535.41 crore, subject to the condition that entire cost is within the revised estimates approved by the CWC, New Delhi and also ensure that reimbursement from the GoI is obtained," said the GO issued on Monday.

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Oppn allegations baseless, Modi leading war on Covid efficiently

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched the second major war on Coronavirus with the Tika Utsav - beginning of the birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar to conclude on that of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule.

Whether one agrees or not, the country is armed with more experience and resources to tackle the virus when compared to last year.

Vaccination is going on at a brisk pace in India compared to other countries. China took 109 days to administer the vaccine to 10 crore people, the USA 89 days but India took only 85 days.

The PM has gone on record hundreds of times that everyone in the country should receive their vaccine and should take precautions till the vaccination programme is

through.

The domestic drug companies are producing the vaccine according to their capacity. The Centre has supplied over 14.5 crore vaccines to states. Another 10 crore vaccines are under transportation.

The Centre states that there is no shortage of vaccine and is supplying it to states according to a plan. However, the states being ruled by opposition parties are politicising the issue complaining of shortage.

Last year, the Centre launched a decisive battle against the pandemic. Under Modi's leadership, everyone, right from Chief Ministers to the common man, endured difficulties to keep the virus at bay. They endured the lockdown clamped on the country for months together.

The Centre announced a series of decisions to support all

Last year, the Centre launched a decisive battle against the pandemic. Under Modi's leadership, everyone, right from Chief Ministers to the common man, endured difficulties to keep the virus at bay. They endured the lockdown clamped on the country for months together.

sectors of activity to face the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic. These measures helped the economy recover.

Today, the economic growth of other nations has slumped to 3.3 percent, while the IMF and World Bank declare that India is poised to achieve a growth of 12.5 per cent.

No one could ignore the leadership of Modi in declaring a decisive war against the virus, encouraging scientists to manufacture the vaccine, cautioning the people to observe

precautions besides receiving the vaccine and taking crucial decisions to help the economy recover.

The Opposition parties are singing a new tune blaming Modi for taking part in rallies extensively in West Bengal and for allowing Kumbh Mela. They blame Modi for rapid spreading of the virus in the country.

As a political leader, it's Modi's responsibility to campaign for the party not only in West Bengal, but wherever



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

elections are held. It is clearly evident that the opposition, unable to stomach the welcome Modi receives wherever he goes, is trying to derive political mileage out of the pandemic. Rahul Gandhi who dared not step on the soil of West Bengal gave up the fight in the middle on the pretext of

Covid.

If the wind is favourable to them, Opposition parties harp on one thing, if not, they sing a different tune.

What is the reason for Maharashtra achieving the dubious distinction of reporting the highest number of Covid cases and over 60,000 deaths due to the virus? Are there any elections going on there? Is there Kumbh Mela in Rajasthan which reported over four lakh Covid cases and more than 3,000 deaths due to the virus?

In fact, is there any day when Modi ignored the severity of the pandemic or the people's problems? It is true that he might have addressed over 20 rallies in West Bengal.

Despite his hectic election schedule, he returned to Delhi and reviewed the Covid situation many times in April.

On April 4, he addressed a high-level meeting of officials and reviewed vaccine availability. In connection with the World Health Day on April 7, Modi called upon the people to take precautions to improve their immunity. At the CMS' conference on April 8, he called for a united attack on the virus and made it clear that the people and administrative machinery cannot afford to be lackadaisical.

Launching the Tika Utsav on April 11, he said that the second major war has been declared against the Coronavirus. He called on Governors of various states on the birth anniversary of Dr BR

Ambedkar. At another high-level meeting on April 17, Modi reviewed the preparedness of states to face the virus.

He enquired about scaling up the vaccine production, oxygen plants in hospitals, availability of Remdesivir injections and of ventilators and so on. On April 18, he reviewed the Covid situation in his Lok Sabha constituency and on April 19, he reviewed the Covid situation in the country again with officials.

Can anyone say that the PM is not paying attention to Covid in view of the series of review meetings chaired by him and guiding the country to implement remedial measures on a war-footing?

Winning elections is important for Modi but, what is more important is winning the hearts of people.



Info panel takes its own sweet time to clear RTI appeals

SNV SUDHIR
VIJAYAWADA

An analysis of orders disposed by the AP State Information Commission (SIC) over a period of time has revealed that not many women in Andhra Pradesh are interested in utilising Right To Information (RTI) Act that was brought in by the Centre to bring transparency in the functioning of governments.

It was also found that on an average, the SIC has taken more than 273 days to dispose of an appeal.

As per an analysis done by United Forum for RTI Campaign - Andhra Pradesh and LibTech India, it was found that only 7 percent of the appellants/complainants are women and the remaining 93 percent are from men.

"From these numbers it's evident this transparency legislation is not being used by the women population at all. While the reasons for the same are not clear, it helps to conduct awareness activities and campaigns to encourage women to use the Right to Information Act," Chakradhar Buddha of United Forum for RTI Campaign - AP who coordinated the study analysis, told The Pioneer.

Around 769 randomly chosen orders of the State Information Commission from February 2019 to November 2020 were analysed for the study.

"We sampled these 769

orders from the SIC orders and made sure that orders by all the information commissioners are covered in the study," Chakradhar said.

While United Forum for RTI Campaign - AP is a confederation of around 70 civil society organisations started in 2007, LibTech India is a team of engineers, social workers and social scientists who are interested in improving public service delivery in India.

On average the SIC took more than 273 days to dispose of an appeal/ complaint registered with the SIC. The disposal period included the number of days between the date of appeal/complaint received at the SIC to the date of disposal.

Of the 769 orders analysed, the maximum number of days taken by the SIC to dispose of an appeal/ complaint was 866 days and the minimum was about 15 days.

As of January, 2021, there are 3,962 cases, of which 2,530 are appeals, 1,432 complaints pending at the SIC. On average, the SIC disposed of a little more than 519 cases in the last six months at this rate it will take more than 7 and a half months to clear the pending cases.

"People approach the SIC as they didn't receive the requested information or on time, if the SIC itself takes months to dispose of the appeals, complaints received the objective of transparency law is defeated,"

another coordinator of the study, Kagga Venkata Krishna told The Pioneer.

Interestingly information sought in 65 percent of the applications comes under Proactive Disclosure of information i.e., Section 4(2) of the RTI Act. It mandates every public authority to provide as much information suo motu to the public at regular intervals through various means of communications, including the Internet, so that the public need not resort to the use of RTI Act.

"If the information was voluntarily disclosed to the public, the need to apply for information under RTI would not have been there, thereby saving resources for all the parties involved," added Chakradhar.

Non-speaking orders a concern

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In the orders of 68 percent of the disposed cases, the SIC did not quote relevant Sections and 37 percent did not have the details of info sought by the appellant. It deprives all the involved parties of the fundamental right to know the basis of judgment, which plays a crucial role when a judgment goes to legal scrutiny.

"In several cases where information was denied by the panel, it was found that the

orders were not adequately reasoned and could be termed to be non-speaking orders. Such orders merely summarise the contention of the information seeker and the denial by the PIO and conclude by stating that intervention of the Commission was not required, without providing valid reasons under the Act," Chakradhar Buddha said.

The Supreme Court has regularly cautioned against the tendency of adjudicators to give cryptic, unreasoned orders.

AP had no separate IC until '18

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

After the bifurcation of the state in June 2014, both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana had a common Information Commission functioning till September, 2017 operating from Hyderabad. With the constitution of Telangana information commission in September 2017, AP has been left with no infor-

mation commission.

As per Schedule 10, of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014, a separate Information Commission was to be constituted for AP but only in late 2018, Andhra Pradesh state information commission (SIC) was constituted, that too under the direction from the apex court.

Effectively Andhra Pradesh has functioned

without information commission for the large part so far, post state bifurcation.

Based on the directions of the Supreme Court, as on date six commissioners were appointed - 3 in October 2018, 1 in May 2019 and the last 2 in July 2020. The post of Chief Information Commissioner was filled up as recently as July 2020.

AP reports 27 deaths, 5,963 cases

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

As many as 27 people succumbed to Covid-19 in AP on Monday, the highest toll in a day after October 20, even as the state registered 5,963 fresh cases.

After 1.57 crore tests, the gross Covid-19 positives in the state rose to 9.68 lakh, a health department bulletin said. In the 24 hours ending 9 am on Monday, 2,569 Coronavirus-infected persons recovered, pushing the total recoveries to 9,12,510.

The overall toll climbed to 7,437, it said. The state now has 48,053 active cases, the highest after October 8.

As the percentage of active cases increased to five, the overall recovery rate dipped further to 94.3 per cent.

Once again, Chittoor district reported 1,182 fresh cases in a day, followed by Guntur 938, Srikakulam 893, East Godavari 626, Visakhapatnam 565, SPS Nellore 491, Kurnool 434 and Prakasam 280. Krishna, Anantapur and Kadapa added 156-189 new cases while Vizianagaram and West Godavari reported 19 each.

Krishna district saw six fresh Covid-19 fatalities, Chittoor and SPS Nellore four each, Guntur, Kadapa, Kurnool, Prakasam, Srikakulam and Visakhapatnam two each and Anantapur one.

Meanwhile, state Covid Nodal Officer Arja Srikanth said that 35,465 patients are currently in home isolation, and 7,535 are hospitalised.

All above 18 eligible for vaccine from May 1

Continued from Page 1

The private vaccination providers would need to transparently declare their self-set vaccination price and the eligibility through this channel would be opened up to all adults, that is everyone above the age of 18, the statement added.

Vaccination will continue as before in the government of India vaccination centres free of cost to the eligible population - healthcare and frontline workers and all people above 45 years of age.

The Union Health Ministry

said the important decision to allow vaccination to everyone above the age of 18 from May 1 was taken in a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Prime Minister said that the government has been working hard for over a year to ensure that maximum numbers of Indians are able to get the vaccine in the shortest possible time. He added that India is vaccinating people at world record pace and we will continue this with even greater momentum," it added.

Virus claims life of 2 more Secretariat ...

Continued from Page 1

AP Secretariat Employees president Venkata Rami Reddy on Monday thanked the state government for arranging Covid tests and said that with more than 40 employees tested positive so far.

Venkata Rami Reddy, on behalf of the employees, requested the Chief Secretary to permit them to work from home or allow at least 50 percent of the employees to work from home on rotation basis so as to get relief from the infection, he added.

Meanwhile, Panchayat Raj Minister Peddireddy Ramchandra Reddy expressed shock over the death of the

two employees and expressed condolences to their families. He also maintained two minutes of silence in his chamber. The Minister appealed to the Secretariat employees to take precautionary measures and to undergo tests if they experienced symptoms.

Meanwhile, Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu said that it was very unfortunate that the Secretariat employees succumbed to Covid. He demanded that the state government take all measures to ensure good treatment to the employees tested positive.

Naidu also demanded permission for the employees to work from home in the wake of severe second wave.

SCR adds record 308.8 km track

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Despite Covid pandemic, South Central Railway has added a record 308.8 km track to its railway network, which is perhaps the highest in the financial year history of the zone.

The achievement also includes commissioning of 42.5 km of new railway lines, 161.5 km of double lines, 60.4 km of third lines and 44.4 km

of gauge conversion works.

That's not all, 750 track km of railway lines were also electrified. The maximum permissible speed across 3,593 track km has been enhanced, while golden quadrilateral and high density network routes were sanctioned for 130 kmph.

In addition, provision of double distant signals for length of 100 route km was taken up. During the last

financial year, the zone witnessed unprecedented challenges in lockdown and also in operation of special trains.

However, with efforts put by staff, the zone has recorded major achievements. The zone came up with a variety of new services such as exclusive milk special trains, parcel express to Bangladesh, which led to registering the best ever parcel revenue of Rs 108 crore.

Control with Centre, rue states

Continued from Page 1

They point to the fact that across the country, it is the state governments that are busy with vaccination and the Centre is responsible for supply of the vaccine doses.

There is huge demand for Covaxin and Covishield in the country. Bharat Biotech, that manufactures Covaxin is located in Hyderabad while Covishield is produced by the Serum Institute of India, located in Pune of Maharashtra State.

The fact is that the Telangana Government cannot purchase Covaxin from Bharat Biotech directly, nor does the Maharashtra Government buy Covishield from the SII.

"The Centre alone is the buyer and supplier of all vaccines to the states. States cannot purchase the vaccines from the companies directly as required by them. Due to the shortage of vaccines, it is the state governments that are being blamed by the common public," said a senior TRS leader

on condition of anonymity.

While the state governments are blaming the Centre for inadequate supply of vaccines, the Centre accuses the State governments of mismanaging the administration of doses.

He said that the governments of both the Telugu states are in no position to speak out openly against the Central government on this issue because of various factors.

A senior officer of the Telangana government said that the states don't have any free hand in combating the pandemic. "Whatever the Centre orders, the State governments have to act accordingly. Though Covaxin is being manufactured locally in Hyderabad, our Government has to look towards Delhi (centre) to get doses."

An AP AP government official said the States cannot even take a decision on opening or closing of cinema theatres, bars and pubs. "We have to act as per the Centre's directions," he said.

Put up for sale, VSP helping ...

Continued from Page 1

Andhra Pradesh was one among the states reporting a significant number of daily infections during the first wave. With the oxygen production capacity of VSP, AP can produce 200 tonnes of medical oxygen. The private oxygen supplying agencies are placing indent of around 60 MT now which shows there is enough medical oxygen available in the state so far.

"RINL is committed to meet the demand of O2 requirements substantially to AP and other states for the alleviation of human sufferings. Last Fiscal (2020-21), RINL supplied 8,842 tonnes of O2 as per requirement," said a top brass at the RINL-VSP.

A senior officer said, "The Air Separation Plant (ASP) in RINL has a total of five units of oxygen

extraction plants for 7.3 mtpa capacity steel plants. Of this, three units are of 550 tonnes/day capacity and two are of 600 tonnes/day capacity." Every day on an average, ASP produces 2,600 tonnes of oxygen gas and 100 tonnes of liquid oxygen, he added. This liquid oxygen of 100 tonnes is being given out for medical purposes, he confirmed.

"Rising to the occasion of oxygen requirements for Covid patients in the second wave, RINL has already supplied around 400 tonnes of liquid oxygen last week to various destinations in Andhra Pradesh and other states as instructed by the authorities," said a senior officer.

About 28 oxygen plants located in the steel plants of both public and private sectors are supplying about 1,500 tonnes of medical oxygen daily.

State declares holidays for...

Continued from Page 1

The Minister also said that these classes were exempt from exams and the students would be promoted. The Minister clarified that the Government would go ahead and conduct the SSC examinations as well as the AP Intermediate exams as per schedule. He said that the examinations would be conducted taking all precautions for Covid-19. The department is reviewing the situation every day and Covid-19 tests of students are being conducted, the Minister said. SSC exams will be held from June 7 to June 16, 2021. The timetable for the same was released on February 3, 2021. For Class 12, the exams will be held from May 6 to May 23, 2021. The Centre had last week taken the decision to cancel CBSE Board Exams for Class 10 and postpone Class 12 exams.

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HYDERABAD	421
VIJAYAWADA	393
VISAKHAPATNAM	505
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Navy seizes drugs worth Rs 3,000 cr

Continued from Page 1

"This is a major catch, not only in terms of the quantity and cost, but also from the perspective of disruption of the illegal narcotics smuggling routes, which emanate from the Makran coast in Pakistan and flow towards the Indian, Maldivian and Sri Lankan destinations," the spokesman said.

Navy sources said the fishing vessel was brought to Kochi on Monday morning. The crew are being jointly interrogated by officials from various agencies, including the Narcotics Control Bureau, at the Southern Naval Command, sources told PTI. They

will be handed over to the NCB for further investigation.

Earlier, the spokesman said INS "Suvarna" encountered the fishing vessel moving around in a suspicious manner in the Arabian sea.

"To investigate the vessel, the ship's team conducted a boarding and search operation, which led to the seizure of more than 300 kg of narcotics substances", he said.

The approximate value of the seizure in the international market is estimated to be Rs 3,000 crore, he said.

He, however, did not disclose the exact location from where the seizure was effected, or the day.

Jawahar Reddy given full charge of CCC

Continued from Page 1

"In view of the increase in Covid cases in states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh,

Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, it is important that proactive and effective steps be taken by the Andhra Pradesh government too. With the Covid-19

pandemic being dynamic in nature, the State Covid Command and Control Centre was revived to take appropriate measures to handle the evolving situation in the State,"

said the GO issued on Thursday. Ten IAS officers of 2019 batch were assigned on '104' call centre duty. While assigning one senior officer to each districts, the government

asked them to report at their allotted districts immediately, and attend the meeting over video link of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy with all district collectors on Friday.

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'Vaccines don't lead to Covid infection'

■ Covid Nodal Officer Arja Srikanth clears the air on post-vaccination symptoms

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

With ambiguous reports and misleading rumours doing rounds on social media, people raised doubts over the safety and efficiency of these vaccines being administered to people as part of the ongoing drive. Confusion prevailed among people because of these misleading posts on post-vaccination symptoms.



worried about. Treatment is with paracetamol 650 mg only," said the official.

Many people got relief and assumed that they were not infected with the coronavirus when a post conveyed the message that whoever tests positive after vaccination is not actually Covid positive.

However the State Covid Nodal Officer Dr Arja Srikanth rubbished the rumours spread over the social media. Andhra Pradesh Covid command and control centre on Monday clarified that a positive report even after inoculation indicates that the virus was already present and positivity was not because of the vaccine.

"Post vaccination if RT-PCR is positive, it means that the disease is already present. The positivity is not because of the vaccine," said an official from the command centre.

He said neither Covaxin nor Covishield will lead to RT-PCR positive status. "Fever post vaccination is not to be

Only health, frontline workers, vaccinated on Monday

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

People made a beeline to vaccination centres on Monday morning, but they were disheartened to know that the vaccine was being administered only to health staff, frontline workers and persons seeking a second dose. Miscommunication among the government departments led to the confusion and the beneficiaries had to come all the way to the vaccination centres in scorching sun and return home without receiving vaccine shot. The state government on Sunday took a decision to vaccinate healthcare and frontline workers in the state from Monday. However, the vaccination programme for people above 45 years seeking a dose is in progress. The vaccination programme came to a grinding halt due to unavailability of vaccine doses. The Union government on Saturday had released about six lakh doses of Covid vaccine and on Sunday it has sent another two lakh doses which are being distributed across 13 districts of state. A total of eight lakh doses are ready for vaccination. People



Krishna district Collector A Md Imtiaz inspects Covid vaccination centre at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram in Vijayawada on Monday.

have been waiting for the past three days for getting vaccinated as the doses have exhausted completely by Friday (April 16). People above 45 years rushed to vaccination centres on Monday only to know that vaccine doses were being given to healthcare, frontline workers and people who have already received the first dose. Meanwhile, Krishna district Collector A MD Imtiaz said that vaccine would be administered to frontline and healthcare workers

at 66 vaccination centres in the district. He inaugurated the vaccination drive at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram and Police Parade grounds in Vijayawada on Monday. He said that frontline and healthcare workers, who haven't received the shot yet, would be given vaccine shot. The collector said that beneficiaries who took the first dose of vaccine were given the second dose at all the vaccination centres in the district.

CM releases first tranche of Jagananna Vidya Deevena

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Monday released the first instalment of Jagananna Vidya Deevena of Rs 671.45 crore, the money being directly credited into the bank accounts of the mothers of 10.88 lakh students pursuing higher studies.

Speaking about the scheme, the Chief Minister said that it has been designed to make education accessible to the poor and the needy in the state. "The real wealth which can be given to the future generation is education, which alone can eradicate poverty and change their lives, and this is the purpose behind the Jagananna Vidya Deevena," he said.

As promised during Jagan's 3,648 km padayatra, the government had released Rs 4,207.85 crore towards the fee reimbursement for the year 2019-20, besides clearing Rs 1,880 crore pending dues of the previous government during 2018-19.

Jagan pointed out that none of the previous governments have cleared fee reimbursement arrears on such a large scale.

Further, the Chief Minister said that the state government has been very much committed



to the education sector and thus rolled out schemes like Jagananna Goru Mudha, Amma Vodi, Vasati Deevena to ensure that no family runs into debts for the sake of getting educated.

So far, a total of Rs 4,879 crore has been spent under Jagananna Vidya Deevena benefiting 10.88 lakh students.

Earlier, the money was paid directly to college managements, but from now on it's being credited to the mother's accounts as they could have better supervision on the college facilities and students' wellbeing, which would also improve accountability from college management.

If any problem arises with college management or with Vidya Deevena, beneficiaries were advised to call on toll-free number 1902.

Under Jagananna Vidya Deevena, fee reimbursement will be credited into mothers' accounts in four instalments, where the government has released the first tranche on Monday and the second will be released in July, third in December, and the fourth tranche in February next year.

Last year, around 10.11 lakh students had benefited and this year the number increased by 77,000, benefiting 10.88 lakh students, said the Chief Minister.

SHORT TAKES

Voluntary half-day lockdown in Vizag Agency

VISAKHAPATNAM: All the traders and business establishments have decided to observe half-day lockdown in Araku from Tuesday onwards. The shops will open at 6 m and close at 2 pm, barring essential services like medical shops and milk booths. Bakeries and sweet shops were allowed to open till 4 pm and the motor and vehicle mechanics could open any time with the permission of the traders association in case of emergency. The Araku Valley Traders' Welfare Association and Civil Welfare Society held a meeting on Sunday and took the decision as there was sudden spike in the positive cases. The decision has been conveyed to the local MLA Chetti Palguna, Inspector and local sarpanch P Dasbabu. The traders also observed a similar lockdown last year in June and July months and MLA himself announced a voluntary lockdown from August 7 to August 10. Elders of the valley and some youth organisations launched a vigorous campaign educating the shop owners, their employees and fast food centres on the necessity of using masks, sanitisers and maintaining social distance. President of the traders association K Krishna Rao warned that action would be taken against the shops for violating the lockdown.

Two employees of State High Court succumb to virus

VIJAYAWADA: As the state reels under second wave of Covid, two employees of the Andhra Pradesh High Court succumbed to coronavirus on Monday. The deceased were identified as Sri Latha, a junior assistant, and Subramanayam, a typist, working at the High Court. As many as four people working in AP secretariat had died due to coronavirus during the past week taking the death toll due to Covid to six in Amaravati. As many as 5,963 new positive cases were reported across the state during the past 24 hours. In all, 29 succumbed to corona taking the toll to 7,437. The state has 48,053 active cases after 2,569 people made complete recovery from the virus.

EG SP Adnan inaugurates rest house for Home Guards

KAKINADA: East Godavari Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayeem Asmi on Monday inaugurated the Home Guards' welfare rest house situated on the first floor of the police subsidy canteen building in the District Police Office campus here on Monday. Addressing a meeting on the occasion, he said that the renovated barrack would be of great use to the Home guards visiting the district headquarters from distant places on various official duties. He advised the Home guards to make proper use of the facility and instructed the officials concerned to maintain the premises clean. Additional SP administration Karanam Kumar, Special Branch DSPs Ambika Prasad, Venkateswararao, Home Guard RI Sriharirao, Armed Reserve Inspector Sk Mehabuba, RI anti-naxal squad Ramesh Kumar, District Police Association President Satyamurthy, Treasurer Balaramamurthy and others attended the event.

600 litres of jaggery wash destroyed, three held

KAKINADA: The Jaggampeta police on Monday conducted a raid on illicit liquor brewing dens in Mallisala village and destroyed 600 litres of fermented jaggery wash ready for distillation. As many as 20 litres of ID liquor was also seized. Three persons were arrested and sent to judicial remand.

Covid claims life of two cops

HYDERABAD: Two policemen working in different police stations in the Hyderabad City Police limits passed away due to Covid. An Assistant Sub-inspector Radhakrishna working at Bowenpally Police Station passed away on Monday at a private hospital while undergoing treatment. The ASI was admitted on April 8 at the hospital after he tested positive for COVID-19. He was also fighting other health issues as well, officials said. In the second incident, a head constable attached to the Dabeerpura Police Station passed away due to COVID-19 at a private hospital. T Jitender was admitted to hospital after he tested positive earlier this month and died while undergoing treatment early on Monday.

Toddler sold by father rescued

HYDERABAD: The Rajendranagar police on Monday rescued a two-month-old boy, who was sold by his father last week. According to the police, Syed Hyder had sold the child to a relative a few days ago for money to clear debts. The relative then sold the baby to another couple. Based on a complaint from the child's mother, Shahana Begum, the police registered a case and took Hyder into custody. Following the hints he gave, police tracked the couple and rescued the child.

Man tortures 2 wives suspecting fidelity

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a horrific incident of brutality, a man subjected his two wives to torture suspecting their fidelity in Chatti village under agency mandal of Chinturu in East Godavari district.

According to the police, the accused tied up his wives and forced them to place their hands in boiling oil to prove chastity. Taking his depravity a step further, the accused, identified as Kalyanam Venkanna put chilli powder in his wife's private parts.

According to Chinturu DSP Khadar Bhasha, Venkanna and his mother Kalyanam Maremma are the natives of Chatti village under Chinturu mandal in East Godavari district.

trict.

For two years, Venkanna, an alcohol addict, used to torture his wives Sumati and Jayamma both physically and mentally since he suspected their fidelity. The police said that he had the active support of his mother Maremma in the torture.

According to the complaint, the accused doused petrol, put one of the victim's hands in hot water and tortured her ruthlessly. The second victim's hands were tied up and her nose and ear were cut with a sickle and pliers and the entire sordid act was videotaped by another person.

The torture took place on April 3, but came to light 15 days later after the two victims complained to the Chinturu police.

Vasireddy Padma seeks stern action against accused

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP State Mahila Commission Chairperson Vasireddy Padma on Monday urged the East Godavari district SP Nayeem Hasmi to take strict action against Kalyanam Venkanna who brutally tortured his two wives suspecting their fidelity. She asked the SP to arrest the accused person immediately and provide security to the victims.

Vasireddy Padma said that Venkat tortured both his wives. Padma asked the SP to initiate severe action against the culprit

who tried to kill his both wives by torturing them inhumanly. Vasireddy Padma said that if the victims had not escaped, the Venkanna would have killed them. She reminded that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has initiated various laws to punish the persons that misbehave with women and children. She further said that the department would take stern action on Rajesh Yadav of Ashok Nagar in Kakinada who was sexually harassing a few young women on the pretext of helping them for their education.

TTD extends ₹300 ticket quota up to 90 days

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) on Monday extended the Rs 300 ticket quota to devotees for the next 90 days in case they had missed the opportunity between April 21 and 30 amid the rising Covid cases. "As the Covid cases are increasing across the country from the past few days, TTD has taken some important decisions keeping in view the pilgrims' health and security," said a TTD official.

The Temple had stopped issuing Slotted Sarva Darshan (SSD) tokens amid the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the TTD management has appealed to the devotees, suffering from fever, common cold and other health issues, to postpone their Tirumala visit.

Strictly implement social distancing in public places, CM tells officials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Monday instructed the officials to focus on tracing and testing and also to strictly enforce social distancing at hotels, convention centres and cinema halls.

He also asked them to step up the door-to-door survey for fevers by the volunteers and also ensure sufficient oxygen supply to hospitals. He also said that a fine of Rs 100 should be imposed on persons for not wearing masks.

Participating in a review meeting with the officials on Covid situation, the Chief Minister asked them to give wide publicity to 104 call centre so that it becomes the solution for all the Covid-related queries and inquiries. He asked the officials to strictly enforce 6 feet distance



- Jagan tells officials to strictly impose social distancing in hotels, cinema halls
- CM reviews oxygen supply to hospitals
- Rs 100 fine for not wearing a mask

between two persons at the function halls, convention centres and also a two seat gap

between two persons in cinema halls.

The Chief Minister asked them to monitor preparedness of hospitals, availability of doctors, sanitation etc round-the-clock. He had asked them to ensure that the state receives its share of oxygen from Vizag steel plant. He also told them to monitor oxygen production in the state.

The officials apprised the Chief Minister that the state government had signed agreements with several agencies for supply of 310 tonnes of oxygen. At present, around 26,446 oxygen beds in 146 hospitals are available across the state.

If all these beds are occupied around 347 kilo litres of oxygen is required in a day. State has the storage capacity of 577 kilo litres of oxygen which will be sufficient for one-and-half day.

Naidu writes to ECI against code violation in by-poll

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP chief and leader of the opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday wrote a letter to Chief Election Commissioner alleging gross violation of model code of conduct by YSRCP leaders during by-election to Tirupati parliamentary constituency held on April 17.

He said that the Tirupati by-election would go down in the history in Andhra Pradesh as the most dubious election held so far.

The TDP has given a series of complaints to the Returning Officer, Tirupati, Chief Electoral Officer, AP and Election Observers and ECI and brought to their notice the serious and potential issues that would mar the elections and derail democracy.

Naidu alleged that the local election authorities were complacent or cooperated with the ruling YSRCP and followed their dictums.

"The low voter turnout of 64.29 per cent when compared with the voter turnout on April 11, 2019 is an evident of the nexus between the ruling party leaders and officials," he alleged.

Interestingly, while the number of voters had increased, voter turnout dropped by 15.17 per cent. The ruling YSRCP had created a sense of fear among the voters, while there was poor distribution of voter slips to the voters by the Booth Level Officers (BLOs), he said.

"Low voter turnout registered in all the seven assembly segments in Tirupati parliamentary constituency indi-



TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu alleged that the local election authorities were complacent and helped the YSRCP leaders and followed their dictums.

cates that fake voters from outside had landed in large numbers in Tirupati," he alleged.

The YSRCP henchmen concentrated more on Tirupati assembly segment as it is an urban constituency and voters often remain anonymous and do not know each other. Further, in the early hours of polling day impersonators from outside had deterred the genuine voters from casting their votes, he said.

Hyd has more Aadhaar cards than population

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The city created a record in issuing the Aadhaar cards in the local population. This is attributed to migrant workers and students registering their names for Aadhaar cards from Hyderabad, leading to issuing more cards than the local population.

According to the UIDAI statistics, over 1.21 crore received Aadhaar card in Hyderabad. The metropolitan cities of Delhi and Mumbai occupied the next two places because of very high migrant population there too.

People from AP, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Assam,

Jarkhand, Bihar, MP, Odisha, Rajasthan and those from the North-East migrate to here because of educational and employment opportunities here. Moreover, the city has become IT, health and industrial hub. Students who arrive here for education live here for years altogether. As a result, several civic services, banking and other activities Aadhaar serves as a valid identity. The population growth in city has come down. The growth rate was 28.91 per cent during 1991-2001 period, while it came down to 26 per cent by 2011 and further down to 17 per cent by 2017. According to 2011 census, the city population is 74.04 lakh, but it reached 93.06 lakh by 2017.

Spiritual tourism leads to Covid spike in dist.

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

With Covid-19 positive increasing rapidly in the state during the second wave, the Chittoor district administration, health authorities and TTD officials are taking strict measure to contain the further spread of the deadly coronavirus.

The district has so far recorded 918 Covid deaths and 10,0254 Covid positive cases since the outbreak of the pandemic, with majority cases and casualties arising in pilgrim city of Tirupati, the devotional destination of Lord Sri Venkateshwara shrine at Tirumala attracting over a lakh pilgrims daily from all over country.

As the second Covid wave spiralled with more cases and deaths being registered in Tirupati city, the district the Chittoor administration has



reopened Sri Padmavati Nilayam on the outskirts as a Covid isolation centre in the first week of April.

The Covid wards at Ruia Government hospital and TTD's SVIMS hospital are brimming with Covid cases and even the TTD's BIRRD hospital has been pressed into Covid treatment.

Dr Vengamamba, AP Covid hospital in-charge and director of SVIMS hospital, said that the

Covid cases were on the rise in April and patients were coming from all over five districts.

District Collector Hari Narayana said that 12.5 lakh Covid tests were completed in the districts so far and the number of positive cases was on the rise.

Explaining the reasons for surge in positive cases in the district, he said: "We are a gateway district by road and rail to Tamil Nadu, Kerala and

Karnataka with huge passenger and cargo traffic. Daily 120 trains and around 3,000 buses touch Tirupati ferrying 2 lakh persons."

Besides tomato and groundnut trade, the spiritual tourism of Sri Venkateshwara temple is allegedly leading to spike in positive cases in the region.

TTD has been providing darshan for over 55,000 devotees daily with Rs 300 special darshan online tickets and sarva darshan tokens issued at Tirupati till April 12.

TTD officials say they would soon reduce or stop the online darshan tickets from May onwards if the Covid scenario continued unabated. Since last week, TTD has stopped issuing 25,000 sarva darshan tokens at Tirupati. But summer vaccination and cancellation of exams has also hindered pilgrimages to Tirumala.



30 pilgrims hurt as RTC bus overturns in Kurnool

PNS ■ KURNOL

At least 30 pilgrims injured when an RTC bus in which they were travelling met with an accident and overturned at Pedda Bodanam in Chagalamarri mandal of Kurnool district on Monday. A group of pilgrims were travelling in the APSRTC bus (AP04T X2556) from the Kadapa depot to visit some temples in the Kurnool district. One of the tyres got burst and the bus flipped and then overturned about 8.30 am on Monday. About 51 people were travelling in the bus at the time of the accident and 30 people received injuries. The condition of the two pilgrims was said to be critical. The injured were rushed to

Aalagadda Government Hospital. The bus driver and the conductor were among the injured. Driver Subbanna's right leg got fractured, while conductor Nagaraju received minor injuries. The accident occurred while the bus was going to Kurnool from Kadapa. A woman, who suffered a severe head injury, belongs to Vankamarri in Kadapa district. Some pilgrims from Telangana were also among the injured who boarded the bus at Mydukur. They said that they were returning from pilgrimage in Brahmamgari Mutt to their destination. The injured were shifted to Allagadda Government Hospital in 108 vehicles. The Chagalamarri police reached the spot and are investigating the case.

Agri yield promising in Dalwa season: Kannababu

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The agriculture production in the district was promising as expected and harvesting of 30 per cent of Dalwa crop was completed in the current season, Agriculture and Cooperation Minister Kurasala Kannababu said on Monday. While reviewing with the agriculture officials at his camp office here on Monday, Kannababu said water supply to irrigation canals was stalled from March 31 due to ongoing works of Polavaram project cofferdam. It was decided in the interest of the farmers and however, irrigation water would be supplied for the eastern delta till April 17 and central delta up to April 20. Kannababu said the weather conditions were conducive for the agriculture crops in the current season and the average crop yield in the district was 46 bags per acre and 75 kg more per acre than that of last year yield. The Minister said as many as 414 rice harvesting and



threshing machines were available in the district and another 120 would be made ready in a week. Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy deposited the interest amount to their respective bank accounts on Tuesday. A total of 39,671

farmers received Rs 630.73 lakh in East Godavari district, which has been credited to their savings accounts, he added. VT Rama Rao, Joint Director of Agriculture and others were present on the occasion.

School HM, son held in fake certificate racket in Prakasam

PNS ■ ONGOLE

An incident that brought disgrace to the teaching profession came to light in which a school headmaster was involved in a fake certificate racket in Prakasam district. Yalamanchili Kannaiah was working as a headmaster in Donakonda mandal and his son Krishna Kant were arrested on Monday in connection with the fake certificates at Kakarla village in Ardhaveedu mandal of Prakasam district. Surprisingly, the accused were sent behind the bars following a complaint lodged by his wife and his son, who was also co-accused with the racket helping his father in preparing fake certificates. The police said Kannaiah had differences with his wife Manoharamma and they were living separately. However, their son Krishna Kant was with his father and taking part in the illegal affairs along with him. In a bid to eliminate his wife, Kannaiah asked his son Krishna Kanth to kill her. So that he could inherit all her wealth. They further said Kannaiah took Rs 80,000 in two instalments from one Venkata



Headmaster Kannaiah, son Krishna Kant

Ramakrishna by offering him a peon job in a Gurukul (Residential) school. Headmaster Kannaiah's son Krishna Kant was also involved in the racket helping his father in preparing fake certificates. The police said Kannaiah had differences with his wife Manoharamma and they were living separately. However, their son Krishna Kant was with his father and taking part in the illegal affairs along with him. In a bid to eliminate his wife, Kannaiah asked his son Krishna Kanth to kill her. So that he could inherit all her wealth. In turn, Krishna Kanth shared

his father's conspiracy with his mother. Both had approached SP Siddhartha Kaushal along with victim Ramakrishna and complained against Kannaiah and his fake certificate racket. On the directives of SP Siddhartha Kaushal, Ardhaveedu SI B Sambasiva Rao conducted searches in Kannaiah's house at Kakarla village and seized some blank fake certificates, rubber stamps and fake TCs. Kannaiah and his son were taken into custody. They were remanded to judicial custody. Incidentally, Kannaiah was about to retire from service in three months.

Announcement on Hanuman's birthplace on April 21: TTD EO

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Tirumala - Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Executive Officer Dr K Jawahar Reddy on Monday asked the researchers to get ready with adequate evidence to prove Hanuman's birthplace was Anjanadri. An announcement would be made on the facts of Hanuman's birthplace on April 21, the auspicious day of Srirama Navami. The EO said that the devotees after having darshan at Srivari temple on Sri Rama Navami should be informed about the birthplace of Hanuman on the Nada Neerajanam stage located in



front of the temple at 11 am with proper evidence through the media. Later, JEO Dharmar Reddy, National University of Sanskrit Vice Chancellor Acharya Muralidhara Sharma,

Annamacharya Project Director Dakshinamoorthy Sharma, SV Higher Theological Institute Project Officer Dr Akella Vibhishana Sharma and others discussed it at length.

'Many students denied fee reimbursement'

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

TDP senior leader Gorantla Butchiah Chowdhary has alleged that the fee reimbursement was being given to only one member of a family, thereby greatly reducing the number of beneficiaries. Making a strong criticism against the 'Jagananna Vidya Deevana' scheme for which the Chief Minister deposited funds to the beneficiaries on Monday, Butchiah Chowdhary asked what about the rest of the students who were studying at home? He lashed out at the government for changing the names of education schemes sponsored from the Central budget.

Institutions cautioned against Covid threat

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The managements of prayer halls, religious institutions, cinema theatres, quarries and rice mills were cautioned against Covid prevalence and advised to take strict measures to contain the pandemic in the Prakasam district because of increasing corona cases. District Joint Collector Venkata Murali held a special meeting at Prakasam Bhavan here on Monday with the representatives of prayer halls and other religious organisations, cinema theatres, quarries and rice mills and suggested them to maintain high alert.



They have been educated about the precautionary measures to be taken in the wake of the increasing number of cases day by day in Ongole as well as in the district. The JC said that everyone was asked to cooperate in

controlling the surge of the corona. In the wake of Ramadan month, he advised to maintain physical distance during mass prayers and it should be made mandatory to wear masks. The representatives of the establishments

were asked to strictly enforce the Covid regulations. Later, a poster to create awareness was released to prevent the spread of corona. Additional SP B Ravi Chandra and other officials participated in the meeting.

Rs 45.63 cr under 'Jagananna Vidya Deevana' disbursed in Kadapa

PNS ■ KADAPA

The main objective of the State government was to ensure that poverty should not be a barrier to education and hence, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy credited the first instalment of "Jagananna Vidya Deevana" for the academic year 2020-2021 to the accounts of students' mothers, Deputy Chief Minister State Deputy Chief Minister Amjad Basha Shaik Bepari said on Monday. He said about Rs 45.63 crore was deposited in the accounts of 54,502 mothers of 72,039 eligible students across Kadapa district. After participating in the video conference with the Chief Minister, he said a total of Rs. 45.63 crore was given to the beneficiaries in Kadapa district under the "Jagananna Vidya Deevana" scheme, Amjad Basha said.



Joint Collectors M Gautami and Dharmachandra Reddy were also present on the occasion. The Deputy CM said the students could meet the District Officer of the concerned Welfare Department or the State Government by calling the Call Center '1902' if they faced any problem in

getting 'Vidya Deevana' amounts. The event was attended by District EDs of SC, ST, BC, Minority Welfare Departments, Education Officers, students of various degree and engineering colleges and their parents participated in the programme.

'Vidya Deevana' a boon for poor students: MLA

PNS ■ AVANIGADDA

The 'Jagananna Vidya Deevana' scheme implemented by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy would change the fate of poor students in the state, Avaniigadda MLA Simhadri Ramesh Babu said on Monday. The distribution of cheques was organized on Monday in the conference hall of the local Tahsildar office here. Simhadri said that in the first quarter, Rs.4.47 crore was credited to the bank account of students' mothers.

Partial lockdown clamped in Repalle

PNS ■ GUNTUR

A partial lockdown would be imposed in Repalle from Tuesday to May 2 following a high incidence of Covid, Repalle Tahsildar Vijayashree announced here on Monday. She held a review meeting

with representatives of all government departments and business representatives at her office on Monday. The Tahsildar said that as per the instructions given by the government and considering the suggestions given by the business people, the meet-

ing decided to allow medical shops to keep open and other business establishments such as hotels and restaurants would be opened only between 9 am and 2 pm. However, food parcel service would be made available till 4 pm.

Doctors set up Covid helpline in Nellore

PNS ■ NELLORE

A group of doctors of Nellore have set up a helpline center voluntarily to serve the needy as part of corona prevention measures. The experienced doctors as well as the volunteers were made available to provide assistance to the Covid patients. Following are the details of doctors who were available at Nellore Doctors Corona Helpline Center include: Dr. B. Rajeshwara Rao - 9490300445, Dr. MV Ramanayya - 94903 00431, Dr. K. Srinivas Naik - 92464 34342, Dr. G. Dayakarao - 93900 61333, Dr. Seven Hills - 94405 03813 and Dr. Khader Basha - 9849238745. The volunteers available to help in the helpline center are G. Kamayya - 9490300435, Bujjaya - 9490300432, P. Srinivasu - 9441625825, Ch. Anand Ram Singh - 9490098916, R. Nagesh - 9440893123 and G. Srinivasa Rao - 949035860.

TIME FOR WORSHIP



Minister for Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Kodali Nani coming out of the temple after having darshan at Srisailem on Monday. He was accompanied by his wife Anupama and daughters Kanakadurga and Vijayadurga

Gurjanapalli Lord Venkateswara looks for shelter!

DHV SAMBASIVA RAO ■ KAKINADA

Though the Lord Venkateswara Swamy was known as the world's richest God in Tirumala, the Lord Venkateswara in Gurjanapalli of Karapa mandal of East Godavari district was looking for a shelter after the existing temple was totally dilapidated and ruined. Unfortunately, Lord Venkateswara was taking shelter in a makeshift shed in the village despite having many lands in the name of the temple. According to the revenue records, Sri Venugopaswamy and Sri Venkateswaraswamy temple has owned about 7.81 acres of land donated by donors and it was recognised as a 6C grade ancient temple. The Endowments Department was maintaining the temple, but no effort was made to build a new temple for the Lord. The villagers raised funds to build a temporary shed to house Lord Venkateswara and Lord

Venugopala Swamy. Believing that the Lord would solve their problems, people worship him by promising vows and fulfil them later. But the Lord Venkateswara of Gurjanapalli was himself looking for help to have a shelter. Earlier, Former Executive Officer Pubbinidi Venkateswara Rao of the village had complained to the revenue and endowment officials explaining the plight of the Lord. The villagers said no officer responded till now. Some persons occupied the temple land and constructing a fisheries hatchery. Speaking to 'The Pioneer', Venkateswara Rao said that the Lord's land encroached and the value of the land as per the present market value would be around Rs 1 crore per acre. Earlier, the government has taken about 2.20 acres of land for setting up a government school and another 1.56 acres of land was taken by the Revenue Department from the Endowment Department under



land acquisition. It was distributed as house-sites to the poor. The government has to compensate if the endowment land was acquired. But it was not done till now, Venkateswara Rao said. The Supreme Court had issued clear guidelines that the government has to give alternate land in lieu of the land acquired. Ex-sarpanch Pampana

Kannarao informed that some portion of the revenue land acquired for housing was still vacant. Some people were occupying it and many buildings were coming up. When an individual grabbed a two-acre orchard, the villagers had complained to the Endowment Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, but no action was

initiated against him till now. Meanwhile, District Collector Muralidhar Reddy inquired about the recent encroachments of Lord Venkateswara Swamy's temple lands. Following his direction, Revenue Assistant District Commissioner KNVD Prasad reported the matter to the government that no compensation was paid for the land, which

was previously acquired by the government for building a cyclone shelter and a school building. Revenue Inspector VL Narasimha Reddy said the matter was reported to the district Collector stating that a private individual had been cultivating a eucalyptus garden for the past two years. He, however, said he would submit a report to the government about the ongoing encroachments where a hatchery was being constructed. A notice had been served to the private individual, who was building hatchery earlier. Similarly, the AP Transco had also lodged a complaint with the AE and Karapa tahsildar, temple administrator Vadadi Satyanarayana Murthy said. But no action initiated against the encroacher. He urged the officials of the Revenue Department to pay compensation for the temple lands so that a new temple could be built for Lord Venkateswara and Sri Venugopala Swamy.

Covid: India logs record surge of 2,73,810 new cases, 1,619 fatalities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

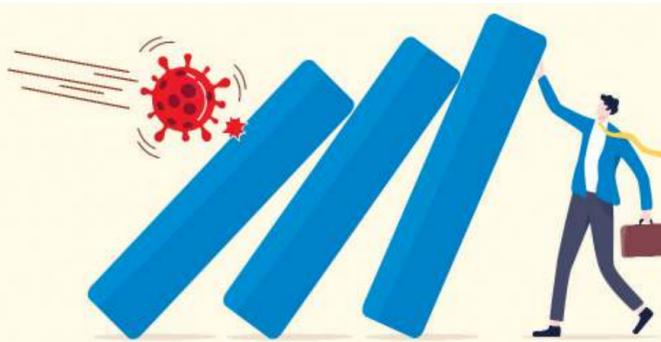
India's total tally of COVID-19 cases crossed the 1.50-crore mark with around 25 lakh cases being added in just 15 days, while active cases surpassed the 19-lakh mark, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

The nationwide tally of COVID-19 cases mounted to 1,50,61,919 with a record single-day rise of 2,73,810 coronavirus infections.

The death toll increased to 1,78,769 with a record 1,619 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The country's total COVID-19 infections had surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19 after which it took 107 days to cross the 1.25 crore on April 5. However, it only took 15 days for the cases to cross the 1.50-crore mark.

Registering a steady increase for the 40th day in a row, the



active cases increased to 19,29,329, comprising 12.81 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has dropped to 86 per cent.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,29,53,821 and the case fatality rate has further

dropped to 1.19 per cent, 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, 26,78,94,549 samples have been tested up to April 18 with 13,56,133 samples being tested on Sunday.

The 1,619 new fatalities include 503 from Maharashtra, 170 from Chhattisgarh, 161

from Delhi, 127 from Uttar Pradesh, 110 from Gujarat, 81 from Karnataka, 68 from Punjab, 66 from Madhya Pradesh, 50 from Jharkhand, 42 each from Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, 29 from Haryana, 28 from West Bengal and 25 from Kerala.

A total of 1,78,769 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 60,473 from Maharashtra, 13,351 from Karnataka, 13,113 from Tamil Nadu, 12,121 from West Bengal, 9,830 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,902 from Punjab and 7,410 from Andhra Pradesh.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

'Congress-ruled states busy raising doubts about vaccines'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hitting back at senior Congress leader Manmohan Singh for his critique of the government's COVID-19 management, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Monday alleged the second wave of the pandemic was instead fuelled by Congress ruled states as they were busy raising doubts about vaccines rather than vaccinating people.

Responding to Singh's letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Vardhan also said that the letter drafters of the senior Congress leader have done a great disservice to his standing.

Acknowledging that while Singh understands the importance of vaccination as an important method of fighting the COVID-19 battle, Vardhan said in his letter that "irresponsible" public pronouncements made by some Congress leaders have resulted in a below national average vaccination coverage of senior citizens and even front-line workers in some of the Congress-ruled states.



Tweeting the letter to Singh, the health minister said, "History shall be kinder to you Dr Manmohan Singh ji if your offer of 'constructive cooperation' and valuable advice was followed by your @INCIndia leaders as well in such extraordinary times!"

Singh on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Modi suggesting five measures to battle the COVID-19 crisis, including ramping up vaccination and boosting supply of medicines. Vardhan said, "People in responsible positions in your party as well as in the state governments formed by your party do

not seem to share your view."

He expressed shock that senior members of the Congress party are yet to utter a single word of gratitude towards scientists and vaccine manufacturers for innovating under trying circumstances and empowering the world with vaccines.

"Let alone thanking our scientists, many Congress members and Congress ruled state governments have taken extraordinary interest in spreading falsehoods regarding the efficacy of these vaccines, thereby fuelling vaccine hesitancy, and playing with the lives of our countrymen."

INDIA CORNER

Over 1.22 crore people vaccinated in Maharashtra so far

A total of 1,22,83,050 people have so far received COVID-19 vaccine in Maharashtra, the state government said on Monday. On Sunday, 1,27,079 beneficiaries received the jabs in 1,515 sessions, an official statement said. So far, 10,67,486 health care workers have received their first dose of vaccine, it said, adding that 5,42,627 health care workers have got their second dose. Similarly, 11,13,691 frontline workers have till now taken the first dose and 3,67,965 of them have been administered the second dose, it said. So far, 87,86,940 aged above 45 have received their first dose and 4,04,341 have taken their second dose, the statement said.



Summer vacation in Bengal schools to start from April 20

The West Bengal government on Monday said summer vacation in schools will begin from as early as Tuesday in view of rising COVID-19 cases in the state. The summer break usually starts from the first week of May. "Classes for 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th standard had resumed from mid-February (in state-aided and state-run schools). "But, due to the present COVID-19 situation, we are forced to prepone the summer vacation. The education department will issue necessary notifications today," Education Minister Partha Chatterjee said. Chatterjee said he would also urge private schools to follow suit. The decision comes amid reports of many teachers in schools testing positive in the past two months. The headmaster of a state-run school in Jadavpur, however, told PTI that online classes will continue for students of Class 10 and 12 during the vacation "or the early phase of the vacation".



Odisha reports record 14,445 new Covid cases

Odisha reports record 14,445 new COVID-19 cases, interstate bus services Odisha on Monday reported the highest ever single-day rise in COVID-19 cases as 4,445 people tested positive, pushing the coastal state's tally to over 3.72 lakh, a senior official said. Four more people died in the state, following which the toll rose to 1,948, he said. The previous daily high was recorded on September 25 last year when the state reported 4,356 cases. All 30 districts in the state reported new cases, the official said. Of the new cases, 2,574 were reported from the quarantine centres, while the rest 1,871 were local contacts. Sundergarh, bordering Chhattisgarh, reported the highest 722 new cases. Khurda reported 587 cases, followed by Nuapada (437), Kailashandi (273), Cuttack (251) and Sambalpur (241).



Take up only urgent matters via video conference: Delhi HC

In view of an exponential rise in COVID-19 cases in the national capital, the Delhi High Court on Monday ordered district courts to take up only urgent matters and that too through video conferencing. Delhi on Sunday recorded the biggest jump in its daily COVID-19 tally with 25,462 fresh cases, while the positivity rate shot up to 29.74 per cent — meaning almost every third sample being tested in the city is turning out to be positive. The direction by the high court comes a day after it decided that from April 19 onwards it will only take up "extremely urgent matters" filed this year. In the office order issued in respect of the subordinate courts, the high court said, "In view of the alarming rise in COVID-19 cases in the National Capital Territory of Delhi, in continuation of this court's office order dated April 8, 2021, it is ordered that all the judicial officers of district courts in Delhi shall take up only urgent cases of their respective courts, through video-conferencing mode." It is further ordered that all other matters listed before Delhi district courts be adjourned en bloc by respective courts and information in this regard be uploaded on the website(s) of Delhi district courts," the order, issued by the office of the Delhi High Court Registrar General, Manoj Jain, said.



Delhi court judge dies of COVID-19

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A 47-year-old district court judge succumbed to COVID-19 at a government hospital here on Monday.

Kovai Venugopal, who was a judge at the Saket Family Court, died at 11 am at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Naryana Hospital.

According to the court sources, he was admitted to the hospital on Sunday and was being treated in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) ward.

Saket Bar Association secretary Dhir Singh Kasana alleged that the incident was a result of 'negligence on the part of the government'.

Cabinet secy to discuss on medical oxygen with states

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba has convened a meeting of chief secretaries and senior officials of 10 states and Delhi on Monday to discuss the issue of medical oxygen, officials said.

There have been reports of shortage of the medical oxygen for COVID-19 patients in different parts of the country in the last few days due to a surge in cases.

The meeting is scheduled at 3 pm and it will be held virtually. The cabinet secretary has convened a video conference for Monday on the issue of medical oxygen with chief secretaries and senior officials of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh,



Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Delhi, a government official said.

The Centre on Friday had directed states to ensure uninterrupted movement of medical oxygen carrying vehicles borders and said

that they must not impose any curb on production and supply of the essential public health commodity anywhere. On Sunday, the government banned supply of oxygen to industrial units, except in nine specified categories.

'Bengal shouldn't be a party to national degeneration'

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Bengal should not be a party to the "national degeneration" by choosing to be governed by central leaders instead of the local ones as that would strengthen the concentration of power in the hands of those whose record on economic policy and social justice are "seriously defective", Nobel laureate Amartya Sen said.

Lauding the Mamata Banerjee government for its welfare programmes, especially the ones meant for girls, the beneficial expansion of rural infrastructure and assurance of food security, the renowned economist, however, stressed that corruption issues in the state have to be addressed.

In an interview with PTI, Sen rued the fact that identity politics has reared its ugly head in Bengal's political landscape and blamed the flag-bearers of Hindutva for sharpening the communal divisions some-



thing that Bengali luminaries - from Rabindranath Tagore to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose - had "worked hard to replace with peaceful understanding".

"If Bengal ends up being governed by central rulers, not local leaders, it will vastly strengthen the concentration of power in India in the hands of those whose conception of minority rights is extremely limited and whose record on economic policy and social justice seems seriously defective."

"Bengal should not have to be a party to that national degeneration," Sen said when asked whether the outcome of the

assembly elections will have a bearing on national politics.

He emphasised that Bengal wants unity, not divisions.

"It is not surprising that identity issues will tend to come into electoral propaganda. However, the focus has often been much narrower than the Indian identity or the Bengali identity. It has gone further than Bengali sub-nationalism."

The fanning of the dangerous flames of communal divisions has not occurred as strongly in Bengal since 1946, as it is happening now."

Sen, a fierce critic of the Narendra Modi government, further said, "What Mahatma Gandhi did in the 1940s can be undone with a huge cost and sacrifice in Bengal, and this evil negation has unfortunately received much encouragement in this election. Bengal wants unity, not divisions -- as Gandhiji so clearly explained."

Remdesivir row: Sena alleges bid to disturb law & health order

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Shiv Sena on Monday slammed BJP leaders Devendra Fadnis and Pravin Darekar for objecting to Mumbai police's grilling of a pharma firm's top executive over alleged stocking of Remdesivir vials, and wondered if there was a conspiracy to disturb the law and health order.

An editorial in the Sena mouthpiece 'Saamana' accused the BJP of having a clear agenda that the Maharashtra government should fail in handling the COVID-19 situation, and charged it with making persistent efforts in that direction with the help of the Centre.

It said the Maharashtra government and the opposition should be unanimous at least on the issue of saving

lives of people and no one should seek political mileage out of pyres of people dying for want of the drug, which is in high demand for treating COVID-19 patients. Mumbai police questioned a pharma company director on Saturday following information that thousands of vials of Remdesivir were to be flown out of the country, despite a ban on its export.

On learning that the company director was being questioned, former chief minister Fadnis and another state BJP leader Darekar had rushed to the police station.

They said the BJP was reaching out to pharma companies due to the shortage of Remdesivir in the state. Fadnis said it was their sincere attempt to get Remdesivir for Maharashtra.

Bengal: BJP candidate's house attacked

PNS ■ BARRACKPORE

A BJP candidate's house was attacked with crude bombs in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, police said on Monday.

The house of Sanmoy Bandopadhyay, BJP's Panihati candidate, was attacked late on Sunday, they said.

The incident happened in the Khardaha police station area where Bandopadhyay lives, they added.

A person was arrested in connection with the incident, a senior officer of the Barrackpore Police said.

There was no report of any injury to anyone, he said.

Raut for special Parliament session to discuss Covid

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut on Monday called for convening a special session of Parliament for at least two days to discuss the COVID-19 situation in the country.

Terming the COVID-19 situation as "unprecedented and almost war-like", Raut said he held discussions with some key leaders from across the country on Sunday over the issue and all of them were of the view that the situation is "serious".

"It's an unprecedented & almost a war like situation. Utmost confusion & tension everywhere! No beds, no oxy-



gen & no vaccination as well! It's nothing but TOTAL CHAOS! A Spl session of the Parliament for at least 2 days should be called to discuss the situation!" the Rajya Sabha member tweeted.

Interacting with reporters here, Raut, without taking any names, claimed that some states hid the actual number of COVID-19 cases.

'Double protection with fitted mask'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Wearing two tightly-fitted face masks can nearly double the effectiveness of filtering out SARS-CoV-2-sized particles, preventing them from reaching the wearer's nose and mouth and causing COVID-19, according to a study.

The research, published in the journal JAMA Internal Medicine, shows that the reason for the enhanced filtration is not so much adding layers of cloth, but eliminating any gaps or poor-fitting areas of a mask.

"The medical procedure masks are designed to have very good filtration potential based on their material, but the way they fit our faces isn't perfect," said Emily Sickbert-Bennett, an associate professor at the University of North Carolina (UNC) in the US, and lead author of the study.



port attached to tubing in the exposure chamber that measured the concentration of particles entering the breathing space underneath the researcher's mask.

A second tube measured the ambient concentration of particles in the chamber.

The researchers determined the FFE by measuring particle concentration in the breathing space underneath the mask compared to that in the chamber.

"We also had the researchers in the chamber undergo a series of range-of-motion activities to simulate the typical motions a person may do throughout their day -- bending at the waist, talking, and looking left, right, up and down," said Phillip Clapp from the UNC School of Medicine.

According to their findings, the baseline FFE of a mask differs from person to person,

due to each individual's unique face and mask fit.

Generally, a procedure mask without altering the fit, is about 40-60 per cent effective at keeping COVID-19-sized particles out, the researchers said.

A cloth mask is about 40 per cent effective, they said.

Their latest findings on doubling of face masks shows that when a cloth mask is placed over a surgical mask, the FFE improved by about 20 per cent.

The filtration efficiency improved even more with a snug-fitting, sleeve-type mask, such as a gaiter, according to the researchers.

When layered over procedure masks, cloth masks improve fit by eliminating gaps and holding the procedure mask closer to the face, consistently covering the nose and mouth.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Faith put to test?

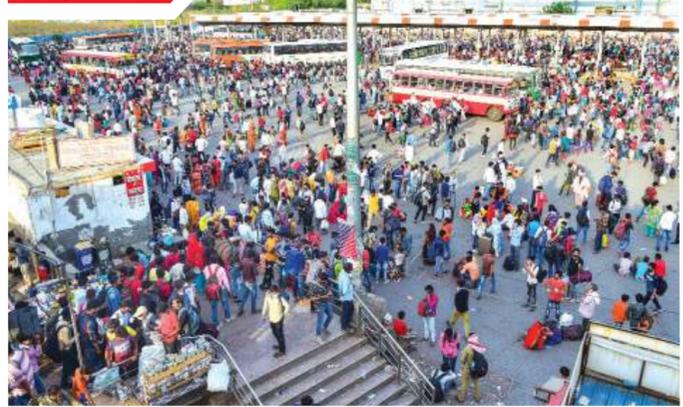
The seers' response to the PM's Kumbh appeal must not be seen as weak-willed or forced

The ongoing pandemic has ravaged everyone alike. It doesn't matter if one is a common citizen, a bureaucrat, politician or a sadhu (seer) or belongs to which gender, the Coronavirus just doesn't discriminate. The virus is spreading like a wildfire and has put to test not only the economies, Governments and the healthcare infrastructure, but also faith and religion. The Maha Kumbh Mela at Haridwar, earlier slated to close on April 30, now wears a deserted look — after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to keep the remaining part of the Mela "symbolic" in the backdrop of the surging COVID-19 cases. With the pilgrims and seers leaving Haridwar, the skeptics may view it any way they like but no one should see it as a defeat of faith. Here, the matter of faith and religiosity needs to be seen through the prism of science — the philosophy as followed and professed by the great Indian monk Swami Vivekananda. The silent exodus from Haridwar proves yet again that for the flag-bearers and followers of the world's most ancient or primordial religious order — the 'Sanatan dharma' — science is as sacrosanct as faith. This is what our seers have done and this is exactly what they have been doing since ages. We should be thankful to the seers for heeding the PM's appeal and deciding to vacate the site. For thousands of 'batuks' (new inductees) and numerous others who must have

been waiting to participate in the major religious event, giving up on the *Shahi Snan* (royal bath) or cutting short their stay is no mean sacrifice.

But they have done so willingly to serve the greater cause of humanity by helping to break the transmission chain. The Kumbh is not only about 'Snan' (holy bath); it is in fact like a universe in microcosm — representing the very idea and soul of existence. But it's always good to surrender one's interests willingly when it's a question of the greater good of humankind. This behaviour is in sharp contrast to the Tablighi Jamaat members — spitting on policemen and volunteers, urinating/defecating openly inside their quarantine centres and abusing doctors and nurses. It's really for the reader to decide for herself/himself which behaviour is close to fundamentalism and which one is sympathetic, accommodative and humane. After the Prime Minister's appeal, Juna *akhada's* Acharya Mahamandaleswar Swami Avdhesanand Giri announced the formal conclusion of the Maha Kumbh Mela for their followers, saying that the remaining *Shahi Snan* should be observed symbolically on April 27. Many people assert that COVID-19 is here, and maybe will stay for long, but the Kumbh — which represents the primeval culture and its ethos in a nutshell — certainly has been around much longer. It's a good time to remember the famous lines by poet Iqbal: "*Kuchh baat hai ki hasti mit-ti nahi hamaari, sadiyon raha hai dushman daur-e-zamaan hamara.*" It doesn't matter if that *dushman* (enemy) be as mighty as the Coronavirus. With faith by our side, we shall surely win.

PICTALK



Passengers at the Anand Vihar terminal after the Delhi Government announced a six-day lockdown

What Modi really means to people



PRAFULL GORADIA

Even before becoming the Prime Minister, and ever since, Modi has scaled newer peaks of popularity, both at home and abroad

Member of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh Tapir Gao, speaking in Parliament on April 1, described Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi as an avatar of God who is taking the country in the right direction. Gao said that Modi's work for tea plantation workers in West Bengal and Assam is "like an avatar of *Bhagwan*". Ladakh's MP Jamyang Tsering Namgyal hailed the PM as a *yug purush* (man of the era) for realising BJP ideologue Syama Prasad Mookerjee's dream. Mookerjee had opposed the special status to Jammu & Kashmir.

An ordinary mortal, I am unable to either corroborate or contradict these opinions. All I can do is to quote from the *Gita*. Chapter 4 of the *Bhagwad Gita*, delivered by Krishna to Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, states: "Whenever and wherever there is a decline of the practice of *dharma*, O Bharat (Arjuna), and a predominant rise of *adhama* (evil) — I incarnate Myself. To deliver the pious and annihilate the evildoers, as well as to re-establish *dharma*, I appear, era after era."

From the time I first met Modi by chance at the Vadodara airport in 1991 and had a 15-minute chat, I feel I met someone extraordinary. He was then the general secretary of the Gujarat BJP — the party had yet to come to power in the State. We remained in touch after that and until he became the PM, when I realised that he had flown to another planet and I had remained where I was.

In his first term as the Gujarat Chief Minister, his name and fame had spread across the State to West Bengal and as far as Assam. The Bengali elite, which generally looked down on the BJP as communal, invited Modi to the Calcutta Club for a seminar on the Uniform Civil Code. Years later, in 2006, at Mumbai's Shanmukhananda Hall, Modi addressed a packed audience, speaking about his introduction of new technologies for agriculture in Gujarat. He revealed that earlier, at a



party rally in Guwahati, he had been interrupted by the audience who said they would rather hear about how he was tackling infiltrators from Bangladesh. Modi told the Mumbai audience to tumultuous applause that his reply was that in Assam, people were oppressed by Bangladeshis but, in Gujarat, it was the Bangladeshis who felt oppressed by Modi.

In 2013, Modi was chosen as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate by the RSS without consulting the party's bigwigs; the ambitions of the latter would come in his way. It had never happened before. This was the measure of his popularity having spread throughout the country while he was busy with Gujarat. I was flabbergasted when I saw him on television as the PM for an exclusive lunch with Queen Elizabeth II at the Buckingham Palace and, on the same visit, addressing the British Parliament. Such honour has not been showered on any Indian leader — not even Jawaharlal Nehru. Soon thereafter, Modi addressed the US Congress, which only PV Narasimha Rao had done before. All this for a man who only until a few years ago had been denied a visa by Washington, with London



MODI'S CHARISMA HAS NOT BEEN CIRCUMSCRIBED BY THE BORDERS AND SHORES OF INDIA. THE COUNTRY HAS RISEN IN THE EYES AND MINDS OF THE WORLD. A TELLING EXAMPLE IS INDIA'S RESPONSE TO THE LATEST ROUND OF CHINESE REVANCHISM, PARTICULARLY THE GALWAN INCIDENT

being hesitant. This denotes that Modi has a rare charisma that travels electronically, not merely electrically.

The flash of his charisma has not halted here. As the PM, he made friends with President Barack Obama. The next American President, Donald Trump, went gaga over him, sumptuously demonstrated at the 'Howdy Modi' rally at Houston, Texas, in September 2020. Earlier, Modi had commanded a similar performance in London, when then British PM David Cameron was present and delighted.

Modi's charisma has not been circumscribed by the borders and shores of India. The country has risen in the eyes and minds of the world. A telling example is India's response to the latest round of Chinese revanchism, particularly the Galwan incident on the Ladakh border, wherein China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) stealthily intruded and killed 20 Indian soldiers. Not only did the Indian Army hit back to inflict 40 or more casualties on the Chinese, it also occupied several strategic peaks along the Ladakh border, signalling its intent to escalate the conflict. More importantly, Modi did not issue mere protests from

Delhi, as the previous PMs had done, but landed in Ladakh at our Army's forward base, barely miles from where the PLA is stationed across the Line of Actual Control, sounding India's determination to roll back any Chinese adventurism. Beijing is now talking about the benefits of bonhomie and peace with India.

Pakistan remained a bogey until Modi came to power. Educated Indians would generally caution why New Delhi couldn't be too tough with Pakistan because of the 20 crore Muslims in India! Without harming a single hair of any Indian, Modi has silenced Islamabad to the extent that General Bajwa, Pakistan's *de facto* ruler, has started singing paeans of peace.

Prior to Modi, the behaviour of India's political class made our people equate themselves with Pakistan. India's image in the world alternated between that of a cat and a rat. Modi has made the world believe that India is truly a lion. Readers may assess what this gentleman truly is — a human being, a superhuman or an avatar.

(The writer is a well-known columnist and an author. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CREMATORIUMS CAN BECOME HOTSPOTS

Sir — It is time to set up makeshift crematoriums and designate more burial grounds for the COVID casualties. With the second wave, the spectre of COVID has become even more frightening for all of us. The catastrophic spike in cases is coupled with a high death toll. The crematoriums and burial grounds are struggling to keep up, as the bodies pile up.

Why are crematoriums and morgues not considered a priority in our country by the policymakers? How many more pandemics do we need to understand the importance of such places? The non-functional morgues and crematoriums in Mumbai were in a pathetic and deplorable condition even before COVID-19 invaded our lives. The tender for the reconstruction of a morgue at St Georges Hospital is yet to be floated. The urgent need for a functional crematorium and morgue in Mumbai is being felt now more than ever, so that every citizen who ends up there can have a semblance of dignity in death.

No less weightage should be given to the dignity of those who have died as compared to the safety of the living. We are facing a shortage of crematoriums and burial grounds. As a result the dead, both COVID and non-COVID victims, and their loved ones have to wait a long time for the last rites. The overcrowding and long wait could turn these locations into virus hotspots. There is also the question of the safety of crematorium and burial ground workers. Is anyone listening?

CK Subramaniam | Mumbai

THE ONSLAUGHT OF PANDEMIC

Sir — To say that India is in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic is to state the obvious. The Lancet's COVID-19 Commission forecasts that at the current rate of the runaway infection, there could be 2,300 deaths every day by the first week of June. The situation is so grave that UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has again deferred his visit to India. The pandemic has brought about a profound change in our thinking and

Distribute the vaccine fairly



This refers to the editorial 'Fighting blindfolded' (April 19). I concur with the editorial view that the Governments and the scientific community are struggling hard to pin down the virus and the pandemic, but to no avail. However, it has been noticed that Indian vaccine manufacturers are unable to comply with the contractual terms and conditions laid down by the UK — the country that has given the license and technology to manufacture Covishield.

Since the stocks of the domestic vaccine supplies are limited, the imports of vaccines approved by the European Medical Agency (EMA) and US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA)

should be managed accordingly. The Centre and State Governments are not focussing on the percentage of the population that has not been vaccinated yet. It is important to increase the vaccination efforts. Some school teachers, bus, taxi and three-wheeler drivers, municipal and panchayat workers and advocates should be considered for vaccination irrespective of their age.

The Government should also explain how it will ensure the distribution of vaccines among different States in a fair and transparent manner. Since the last one year, COVID-19 has posed a serious challenge to the world and India and has drastically changed our behaviour and the way of life. In the meantime, the lockdown announced by the Delhi Government is a welcome step. Such restrictions are needed in Haryana and other neighbouring States as well. We all have a collective responsibility in our fight against the pandemic. The insouciance on part of any one State can weaken our fight against the Coronavirus.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

understanding of life. The second wave is having a devastating effect on lives and livelihood and is pushing people to live in the shadow of death and despair. The anxiety and suffering caused by the pandemic is a reality for us. Lockdown-like curbs have exacerbated hardships in many parts of the country. The general feeling is that no one can predict what will happen next.

The healthcare system is teetering on the edge of collapse as evidenced by the shortage of medical oxygen cylinders, hospital beds and antiviral drug Remdesivir (its sale in the black market is a shame) and vaccination doses. The Government appears to be floundering helplessly in the face of the inexorable surge in cases. It is difficult to say that it has risen to the challenge.

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

attacked our country and we are its helpless victims. It is spreading like wildfire. Many State Governments have imposed restrictions on the movement of people, including night curfews. Vaccination, oxygen and hospital bed scarcity continue to haunt people. They are unable to get vaccinated in the Government facilities due to the shortage of shots. People are reeling under fear. At this point, night curfew seems to be meaningless and does not serve the desired purpose since most of the people are already locked in their houses during night. It should rather have been in the afternoon. Also, police should not deal with people who come out during curfew hours in a high-handed manner.

Sravana Ramachandran | Chennai

POLICE MUST ACT SENSITIVELY

Sir — The double mutant Coronavirus has

SOUNDBITE

The production of Remdesivir is adequate. We have banned exports as a precaution but in panic people are buying in bulk, which is leading to a shortage.



Union Home Minister — Amit Shah

I am in the UAE for a bilateral visit and not an India-specific agenda. My agenda is UAE-Pakistan and not India-Pakistan.

Pakistan Foreign Minister — Shah Mahmood Qureshi

If your script is not good, your acting won't come off well, and I say this even for theatrical releases. Why should you have weaker scripts just because it is in the theatrical space?



Actor — Boman Irani

Hardik Pandya, who hasn't bowled at all in the first three matches of Mumbai Indians, could be bowling in this Indian Premier League (IPL).

Head coach of Mumbai Indians — Mahela Jayawardene

When people are pleading for Remdesivir and struggling for each vial, one BJP leader is hoarding the injection.



Congress leader — Priyanka Gandhi

The guides

Rahul and Mamata show the way, curb election rallies in view of the explosion in COVID cases

As the number of COVID-19 cases rises exponentially, in West Bengal that is currently witnessing the Assembly elections as well as elsewhere in the country, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee have taken a major decision in the larger interest of the State's population. While the Congress scion has cancelled all his public meetings in West Bengal, the TMC chief will not campaign in Kolkata anymore. Both the leaders have reportedly taken this decision in view of the rising COVID-19 infections in the State. While voting in three of the eight-phase Assembly elections is yet to be held, the State on Saturday registered its highest single-day spike of 7,713 new COVID-19 cases, taking the tally to 6,51,508. The death toll rose to 10,540 after 34 fresh fatalities were reported. Around the same time, 2.6 lakh new COVID-19 patients were detected across India in a single day. While Mamata will hold only one "symbolic" meeting in the State capital on the last day of campaigning, which is April 26, her election rallies in all other districts of the State will not be longer than 30 minutes.

For his part, Rahul — who had only recently reached the State to campaign for the Congress candidates — has suspended all his public rallies there and advised all political leaders to "think deeply about the consequences of holding large public rallies under the current circumstances", understandably inviting plaudits from senior leaders of his party. The Congress leader had earlier taken a jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi after the BJP's star campaigner praised the people of West Bengal for turning up in large numbers for his political rally on Saturday. Rahul's move is certain to create pressure on the other main players in the fray, most notably the BJP and the TMC. While one is free to align with any political party or ideology, nobody is entitled to put the lives of anybody else on the line simply for the sake of amassing votes, especially in these sordid times. In this light, the decision by Rahul and Mamata deserves unregulated praise as, if nothing else, it puts the lives of the people of the State at greater premium than the lust for votes to form the next Government in West Bengal. Needless to say, other leaders would do well to take a leaf out of this sensible development.



Passengers at the Anand Vihar terminal after the Delhi Government announced a six-day lockdown





FIRST COLUMN

GIVE JUSTICE TO WOMEN LAWYERS



KALYANI SHANKAR

Justice has always been represented in a feminine form. Everyone has seen the statue of Lady Justice wearing a blindfold and holding a beam balance and a sword. But unfortunately, women are far from being adequately represented in the judiciary and do not have much of a role to play in our judicial system. Women have become the country's President, Prime Minister, Chief Ministers and Governors. They have occupied other constitutional positions but a woman has never graced the office of the Chief Justice of India (CJI). There have been voices calling for the better representation of women in the judiciary. Recently, CJI SA Bobde lamented this gap, just days ahead of his slated retirement on April 23. Let alone being elevated to the post of CJI, many women judges cross their retirement age even before reaching the Supreme Court. In India as in other countries, including the US and Britain, the number of women judges is dismal. It was only in 1981 that US President Ronald Reagan appointed Sandra Day O'Connor as the first-ever woman judge of the Supreme Court, to fulfil his campaign promise.



The International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), a non-governmental organisation with approximately 4,000 members in 100 countries, believes that women judges are unique in advancing women's rights throughout the world. Attorney-General KK Venugopal had also observed that "improving the representation of women in the judiciary could go a long way towards a more balanced and empathetic approach in cases involving sexual violence." In its plea to the Supreme Court, the Women Lawyers Association has said that the representation of women in the apex court was "abysmally low" as it brought to the court's notice that the top court had seen only eight women judges and only one out of 25 High Courts (HC) in the country has a woman Chief Justice (CJ Himra Kohli of Telangana HC). There are only 73 women out of total 661 judges in HCs while there is no single woman judge in five HCs, namely, Manipur, Meghalaya, Patna, Tripura and Uttarakhand. Further, only 12 women have been designated as senior counsels by the top court so far.

The judiciary is a male-dominated field. More importantly, the seniority tradition plays a significant role in choosing the Chief Justice. Naturally, when the number of designated senior women lawyers is disproportionately low, the chances of women becoming judges also remain minimal. There are many reasons for women not getting the top slot. CJI Bobde observed that many women lawyers had declined judgeship citing domestic responsibilities. But women lawyers counter that point saying that many successful men lawyers had also declined to become judges. Further, the income of a successful lawyer is much more than the perks and the salary of a judge, though there is prestige attached to the position.

The problem also trickles down to the lower courts where there are fewer women judges despite no shortage of women entering the legal profession. Some States have a reservation policy for women lawyers in the lower courts but it is missing in the HCs and the Supreme Court. Women comprised 44 per cent of candidates who have qualified the 2019 Common Law Admission Test for National Law Universities. After Justice Indira Banerjee's superannuation from the top court recently, Justice Indira Banerjee is the only woman judge in the apex court, which has the sanctioned strength of 34 judges.

Currently, the Supreme Court has five vacancies. Up till now, only eight women judges have graced the apex court. There is no shortage of brilliant women HC judges and lawyers in the country who, if elevated to the top court on time, can become the CJI. The timely appointment of more women judges is the way forward. For this, the Supreme Court collegium should take the initiative.

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

Export subsidies face WTO challenge

The leeway to withdraw subsidies was meant for those developing nations which in 1995 had GNI in excess of \$1,000 per capita. It can't be availed by India, which is in a different category



UTTAM GUPTA

The Coronavirus pandemic played havoc with the economy of the country during the first half of last year. However, exports were beginning to look up in March — touching a record \$34 billion which was higher than \$33 billion in March 2019 — and signalling a sharp increase during the current fiscal. But now, the exporters face a triple whammy. First, they have not received export benefits worth approximately ₹35,000 crore under the Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS). Under the MEIS, which was withdrawn on January 1 this year, exporters were eligible for duty credit scrip — a jargon to compensate for their loss on payment of duties — amounting to two-five per cent of the freight-on-board value of the shipment. Against a total approved amount of ₹55,000 crore, the Union Government has released just about ₹20,000 crore (mostly claims for 2019-20) thereby leaving a gap of ₹35,000 crore.

This has led to a liquidity crunch. And, with the Budget provision for export subsidy during 2021-22 being just ₹13,000 crore, the situation is unlikely to improve and will seriously impede the exporters' capacity to ramp up supplies to meet the resurgent demand from key global markets, particularly the US and EU.

Second, the Government has not yet notified the refund rates under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme, which replaced the MEIS in January. Under the RoDTEP, exporters are eligible for reimbursement of various embedded taxes and levies paid on inputs consumed in exports — but not subsumed by the Goods and Services Tax (GST). A committee headed by former Commerce Secretary GK Pillai tasked with determining the refund rates, after an exhaustive exercise involving scrutiny of embedded levies on 8,000-9,000 tariff lines, had submitted its recommendations in March.

However, it will be some time before the Finance Ministry's Revenue Department — currently vetting the recommended tax remission rates — notifies them. The exporters need to factor in these while firming up contracts for supplies to importers. Although, eventually they will get the refunds retrospectively (from January 1) once the rates are notified, not knowing them in advance creates uncertainty with regard to their ability to decide what price to charge. If, the notified rate turns out to be lower than what the exporter has actually built into the offer price, he will be subjected to a loss.

The above two factors i.e. the delay in release of pending dues under the erstwhile MEIS and the delay in notification of refund rates under the RoDTEP, make for a deadly combination hampering the ability of exporters to sustain the tempo of revival in exports, buoyant demand conditions notwithstanding. Add to this a third factor which relates to the vulnerability of the Indian export subsidy regime to challenge at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In early 2018, the US had challenged at least half a dozen of India's export subsidy schemes, including the MEIS. The US Trade Representative (USTR) argued that the schemes provide financial benefits to Indian exporters, creating an "uneven playing field", thereby enabling them to sell goods



MEANWHILE, INDIA HAS ABOLISHED THE MEIS AND LAUNCHED RODTEP. THE OFFICIAL THINK TANK MAY FEEL THAT THE NEW SCHEME IS 'COMPLIANT' WITH THE WTO'S NORMS, BUT DAMOCLES' SWORD STILL HANGS OVER US AS THE US HAS ALREADY ASKED THE GOVERNMENT TO EXPLAIN THIS SCHEME AND ITS STRUCTURE, AND MAY EVEN FOLLOW THIS UP BY CHALLENGING IT AT THE WTO

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



at a cheaper rate, which was detrimental to the interests of US manufacturers and workers. Even as export subsidies violate the WTO's rules, a limited exception was made for specified developing countries that may continue to provide export subsidies temporarily until they reach a defined economic benchmark of \$1,000 per capita gross national income (GNI). Further, developing countries that had a GNI of over \$1,000 per capita at the time when the WTO was set up in 1995, were allowed eight years to wind up their export promotion schemes.

India's GNI being below the \$1,000 per capita-mark, it initially availed of the exemption from no export subsidy obligation. But in 2015, it surpassed the threshold, thereby pushing it into the "no-exemption" zone. The USTR has accused India of not just continuing with subsidies, but further expanding their scope (the MEIS launched in 2015 was rapidly expanded to include more than 8,000 eligible products, nearly double the number of products covered at its inception).

Accordingly, it wanted India to withdraw the subsidies. But the latter insisted on a transition period of eight years that, too, from 2017 when the WTO notified the fact of its crossing the threshold. The Indian stance is anomalous.

India had ample opportunity to plan. It had 20 years available (1995 to 2015) to get adjusted to

a WTO-compatible scenario. That was not done and when the D-day arrived, it wanted more time, which was a totally illogical move. The leeway to withdraw subsisting export subsidies within the eight-year time frame was meant for those developing countries which in 1995 had GNI in excess of \$1,000 per capita. It can't be availed by India which falls in a different category.

The Indian position being untenable, the decision of the WTO Dispute Settlement Panel (DSP) has gone against New Delhi. We appealed against the DSP decision before the appellate authority of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) and a verdict is yet to come. Meanwhile, India has abolished the MEIS and launched RoDTEP. The official think tank may feel that the new scheme is "compliant" with the WTO's norms. But Damocles' sword still hangs over us as the US has already asked the Government to explain this scheme and its structure, and may even follow this up by challenging it at the WTO.

The confidence of Team Modi stems from the fact that the RoDTEP is a scheme only for the reimbursement of duties on exported products; hence, there is no financial support from the Government. The duties considered in fixing the refund rates include all the levies that are not subsumed by the GST. These are taxes on crude oil, natural gas,

petroleum products such as petrol, diesel, ATF, electricity, mandi tax, stamp duty, besides embedded central GST and compensation cess (under GST, the cess is levied on the so-called demerit products in the highest slab of 28 per cent and the proceeds thereof to be used for compensating the States for the shortfall in revenue).

Given the highly complex nature of these duties and the wide variations between the Centre and the States, it may not be easy to justify giving remission for each one of them. A better way of ensuring that exports are not hamstrung is to bring all the aforementioned products under the GST, besides abolishing all local taxes. The compensation cess will anyway go on March 31, 2022 — as per the extant law. As for the embedded central GST, mechanisms are available for its refund under the GST scheme which treats exports as zero rated. This will require a fundamental change in the extant approach of "first burdening exporters with taxes, then refunding" to one whereby "taxes are not levied in the first place or their burden is kept at a bare minimum." While, this transition may take some time, in the interregnum, remission rates under the RoDTEP should be notified without any further delay. All outstanding dues to exporters should be promptly cleared to enable them to ramp up supplies for catering to the resurgent demand.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

WE MUST RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO LOOK AT THE NUMBERS BEING VACCINATED, AND FOCUS ON THE PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION VACCINATED.

—FORMER PRIME MINISTER
MANMOHAN SINGH



WHILE YOU UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF VACCINATION... PEOPLE IN RESPONSIBLE POSITIONS IN YOUR PARTY DO NOT SEEM TO SHARE YOUR VIEW.

—UNION HEALTH MINISTER
HARSH VARDHAN

Women's participation missing in water resource management

To encourage female participation, the Govt has made it obligatory for each water committee to have 50 per cent women members

Globally, women are increasingly being recognised for their important role in the management of water resources. Every International Women's Day, there is much noise about the inclusion of women in water programmes and the heart-breaking statistics regarding drudgery, school absenteeism and so on. Many platitudes are offered but before the end of March, everything fizzles out, until the next year. The Global Gender Gap Index 2020 ranked India at 112 out of 153 countries, with an overall unemployment rate of 9.1 per cent. Urban unemployment was at 8.8 per cent and unemployment among women was 18 per cent.

Any water supply hurdles lead to a substantial economic and social impact that disproportionately affects females. For instance, the time and



POONAM SEWAK

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effort spent in water collection hits women's income-generation ability, impacts attendance of girls in schools and interferes with the time required to tend to the sick at home. Therefore, women quickly see the advantages of investing in water treatment infrastructure and often play a crucial role in convincing the community to undertake its construction, operation, maintenance and management.

For decades, studies have examined the role of women in the water sector. They have found substantial improvements in the governance, transparency and sustainability of water supplies when men and women are involved in equal measure than when women are involved only marginally or not at all. Water projects that involve women in design planning and operations are more sustainable than those that do not. Yet, women make up less

than 17 per cent of the water, sanitation and hygiene labour force and only a fraction of policymakers, regulators, management and technical experts.

The participation of women in the water sector is often assumed to be a rural issue. Women are significantly missing in utilities which can draw benefits such as lower levels of non-revenue water losses, improved cash flow and more resources for investment in infrastructure and increasing service quality. This will lead to the engagement of fewer Government subsidies which can be utilised for other essential services. The key to driving user-centred design improvements and reforms across the urban water sector in developing countries is to create conditions that can attract, retain, and promote women in roles in which they can shape the design, construction and reha-



bilitation of new and existing water supply systems.

India has set an ambitious goal, as part of the Jal Jeevan Mission (Rural) to provide functional household tap connections, piped water services to its entire population at an outlay of \$90 billion by 2025. To bridge the gender gap, the Government has tied up with the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Kendra to train women in masonry and impart them skills to become electrical and motor mechanics. To encourage

women's participation, the Government has made it obligatory for each paani samiti (water committee) constituted for water supply management to have 50 per cent women members. Through the situation is changing, the Government should put greater emphasis on building Self-Help Groups into a competitive alternative to private operators. Providing safe drinking water to 1.35 billion people in urban and rural India is a huge challenge. The emergence of COVID-19 has further accentuated the need for clean water. Prioritising women's engagement to regulate water programmes will ensure effective usage of water resources.

In India, where women have been trained and licenced as hand pump mechanics, customers rate female mechanics as more accessible and responsive than their male counter-

parts. As a result, in areas served by women mechanics, there is more preventative maintenance and fewer breakdowns. Many of these women understand that a broken hand pump results in girls/women having to travel greater distances to collect water, losing productive time and increasing risks to their safety.

Initially, society found it futile to train women, but with repeated success, the female workforce not only became active participants but also modified the entire management of community water systems. The work-life balance for women has been significantly disturbed in these challenging times.

However, it has taught women to multitask and manage the household while diligently working from home. With a male-dominated Indian economic system, there is an

urgent need to rectify the gender imbalance by driving awareness, through knowledge-sharing and developing a sense of decision-making and entrepreneurship among women. With successful revenue streams driven by women-led businesses, the Government has also started focusing on promoting women entrepreneurship covering rural, semi and urban geographies.

To bring down the patriarchal barriers and make significant progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6, it is essential to create a successful Private-Public-Partnership (PPP) model for upskilling and teaching women groups especially regarding post-work gaps, mentoring and feedback process. Through the bottom-up approach of the PPP model, economic opportunities need to be created to promote the well-being of women.

Sensex tanks 883 points as Covid spooks market; Nifty below 14,400

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex plummeted 883 points on Monday following a massive across-the-board selloff as mounting COVID-19 cases spooked domestic investors. After crashing over 1,469 points in early trade, the 30-share BSE index pared some initial losses but still ended 882.61 points or 1.81 per cent lower at 47,949.42. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty tanked 258.40 points or 1.77 per cent to 14,359.45. PowerGrid was the top loser in the Sensex pack, slumping over 4 per cent, followed by ONGC, IndusInd Bank, Kotak Bank, L&T, Asian Paints and Bajaj Auto. On the other hand, Dr Reddy's and a n d

Infosys were the only gainers. Domestic equities, which were looking resilient for last couple of days, fell sharply on sharp spike in COVID-19 cases across the country and enhanced economic restrictions imposed by several states. Announcements of wider mobility restriction by Rajasthan and Delhi governments dented investors' sentiments," said Binod Modi, Head Strategy at Reliance Securities. Barring pharma and IT, which remained resilient, all key sectoral indices witnessed sharp correction. Financials and automobiles witnessed steeper correction. Notably, volatility index soared by over 11 per cent, which does not augur well. Investors' wealth got eroded by over Rs 3 trillion today, he added. India's total tally of

COVID-19 cases crossed 1.50 crore with a record single-day rise of 2,73,810 new coronavirus infections, while the active cases surpassed the 19-lakh mark, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced a six-day lockdown from 10 pm on Monday till 5 am on April 26 which he said was necessary as the city's health system was stretched to its limits. Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Seoul and Tokyo ended on a positive note. Stock exchanges in Europe were also largely trading with gains in mid-session deals. Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.25 per cent lower at USD 66.60 per barrel.



India will become top EV maker in the world: Nitin

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, recently said that India will soon become the number one manufacturer of electric vehicles in the world. Addressing Amazon's Smbhav Summit virtually, Gadkari said he is confident that lithium-ion batteries would be fully manufactured in the country as early as in the next six months, giving the much-needed push to India's EV agenda. Speaking at the summit, Gadkari said, "India is moving ahead towards making electric vehicles. In due course of time, we will be the number one electric vehicle (EV) maker in the world. All reputed brands are present in India." The Union Minister highlighted the fact that the government is also working to launch hydrogen fuel cell technology, which uses chemical reactions between hydrogen and oxygen to generate electrical energy, eliminating the use of fossil fuels.

Gadkari also said that the government wants to encourage automakers to introduce flex-fuel engines in the country and that he is in the final stages of discussion with manufacturers in India. Earlier this month, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas announced a partnership between state-run oil company IndianOil and Phinergy, an Israeli start-up company to build Aluminium-Air systems in India. The Union Minister believes that in the next two years, the cost of electric vehicles will come down and will be as competitive as petrol and diesel vehicles. He expressed the need for the quality of EVs manufactured in India to be of international standard, as he wants to make the Indian automobile industry the number one manufacturing hub in the world. For that purpose, the Government of India is now encouraging the use of ethanol, methanol, bio-CNG, electric and hydrogen fuel cell.

Govt working to save lives: FM tells India Inc amid Covid surge

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said she has taken inputs from various industry chambers on concerns of India Inc with regard to the management of COVID pandemic and the centre would continue to work with state governments to save lives and livelihoods. She sought feedback from businesses to deal with the impact of the second COVID-19 wave on the country's economy. "Spoke on telephone with each of the following business/Chamber leaders. Took their inputs on industry/Association related matters. Informed them that GoI at various levels from @PMOIndia is responding to #Covidmanagement. Working together with states for lives



and livelihoods," she said in a tweet. The Finance Minister had interactions with heads of industry chambers including CII president Uday Kotak, Uday Shankar, president Ficci, and Vineet Agarwal president Assocham. She also spoke to many business leaders like Tata Steel managing director T V Narendran, L&T chairman A M Naik, TCS managing director Rajesh Gopinathan, Maruti Suzuki chairman R C Bhargava, TVS Group chair-

man Venu Srinivasan and Hero Moto Corp managing director Pawan Munjal to take their feedback on situation arising out of surging COVID-19 cases and local containments. Last week, the Finance Minister made it clear that the government would not go for lockdowns in a big way and only resort to local containment to break the COVID-19 chain. "Even with the second wave, we are very clear that we are not going in for lockdowns in a big way. We don't want to totally arrest the economy. The local level isolation of patients, or households which have people in quarantines are the methods through which the crisis will be handled, the second wave will be handled. There shall not be lockdown," Sitharaman had said.

Macrotech shares tumble over 10 pc in debut trade

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Macrotech Developers on Monday made a tepid market debut, listing with a discount of over 10 per cent from the issue price of Rs 486. The stock listed at Rs 439, registering a decline of 9.67 per cent from the issue price on BSE. It further tumbled 13.34 per cent to Rs 421.15. On NSE, it debuted at Rs 436, lower by 10.28 per cent from the issue price. The initial public offer of realty major Macrotech Developers was subscribed 1.36 times earlier this month.

MONEY MATTERS

HDFC Bank embarks on tech transformation agenda: MD



Having faced multiple episodes of digital banking glitches in the last two years, HDFC Bank has embarked on a 'Technology Transformation Agenda' to provide safe and secure banking services to its customers. HDFC Bank managing director Sashi Jagdishan in a letter to employees said the bank has faced five instances of downtime in last 28 months and every instance has hardened the bank's resolve to do better, keeping customers in mind. It is to be noted that the RBI temporarily barred HDFC Bank in December 2020, from launching new digital banking initiatives and issuing new credit cards after taking a serious note of service outages at the lender over the last two years. The bank was penalised by the RBI for two major outages, one in November 2018, and the other in December 2019.

Gold jumps Rs 411; silver gains Rs 338



Gold rallied by Rs 411 to Rs 47,291 per 10 gram in the national capital on Monday reflecting strong buying in the global precious metal and rupee depreciation, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 46,880 per 10 gram. Silver also gained Rs 338 to Rs 68,335 per kilogram from Rs 67,997 per kilogram in the previous trade. The Indian rupee slumped 52 paise to 74.87 against the US dollar in opening trade on Monday. In the international market, gold was trading with gains at USD 1,787 per ounce and silver was quoting marginally higher at USD 26.08 per ounce. "Gold prices rallied on weaker dollar and fall in US bond yields," according to HDFC Securities, Senior Analyst (Commodities), Tapan Patel.

Rupee drops by 52 paise to 74.87 against US dollar



The rupee plunged by 52 paise to close at 74.87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday amid a lacklustre trend in the domestic equities as investors fretted over the prospects of lockdown in some parts of the country amid a surge in COVID-19 cases. At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 74.80 against the greenback and traded in the range of 74.79 to 75.05 during the day. The rupee finally ended at 74.87 against the American currency, registering a fall of 52 paise over its previous close. On Friday, the rupee had settled at 74.35 a dollar. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.49 per cent to 91.11. Forex traders said the surge in coronavirus infections over the weekend increased the risk of more broadbased lockdowns. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced a lockdown from 10 pm on Monday night till 5 am next Monday in view of an exponential rise in coronavirus cases and the city's health system being stretched to its limits.

Sebi to auction PVP Global Ventures property on May 12

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi on Monday said it will auction a property of PVP Global Ventures at a reserve price of Rs 22.55 crore on May 12, to recover dues. The property to be put on sale is a vacant land situated in Telangana, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a notice. "The said properties standing in the names of Arete Real Estate Developers Private

Limited and Expressions Real Estates Private Limited were attached in the recovery proceedings, as offered by the said entities along with no objection for realisation of the dues from Shri Prasad V Potluri and PVP Global Ventures Private Limited, through sale thereof," Sebi noted. The regulator has engaged Quirk Realty Ltd to assist it for the sale of the property, through e-auction platform, C1 India.

Razorpay raises \$160 mn funding from Sequoia Capital, GIC, others

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Razorpay on Monday said it has raised USD 160 million (about Rs 1,192.6 crore) in funding from Sequoia Capital, GIC and others with the valuation of the payment solutions provider tripling to USD 3 billion. The Series E funding round was co-led by Sequoia Capital and GIC, along with participation from Ribbit Capital and Matrix Partners. "We will use the capital to scale up our Business Banking suite, invest in new acquisitions and launch in International markets, including South-East Asian countries," Razorpay CEO and co-founder Harshil Mathur said. He added that the company also continues to hire aggressively to fuel its growth plans. Bengaluru-based Razorpay provides intelligent automated payment and busi-



ness banking solutions to help businesses manage their money flow end-to-end. With this funding, Razorpay has raised a total of USD 366.5 million in funding since its inception in 2014. The company had entered the Unicorn Club (companies with valuation of over USD 1 billion) in October last year, when it had raised USD 100 million. The pandemic has provided a major boost to tech-led startups with a sharp increase in consumers opting for e-services like online classes, e-commerce and digital banking. This is also driving

greater investor interest in these businesses. In the past few weeks, a number of startups in the country including Meesho, Groww, ShareChat and Cred have raised funding and entered the Unicorn Club. "But there is more work to be done, we believe there is a dire need to develop new banking technologies that meet the rising demand. So, we plan to use these funds to further expand our banking and lending product suite so that we not only provide a better experience to businesses and their customers but significantly contribute to the growth of our partner businesses," he added. Mathur noted that the company's neo-banking platform, RazorpayX, saw 400 per cent growth in transaction volume in the last 12 months.

Prestige Estates forms JV with Century group

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Prestige Estates Projects has formed a joint venture with Century group to develop an office park in Bengaluru with an estimated construction cost of around Rs 900 crore. Prestige Estates, one of the leading real estate firm in the country, plans to develop around 2.5 million sq ft of space in this park. "We have formed a joint venture with Century group for the development of office park in Bengaluru," Prestige Office Ventures CEO Juggy Marwaha said. Century group owns around 16 acre of land through two special purpose vehicles (SPVs), he said.

Complete closure not a solution: RAI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the Delhi government announcing a six-day lockdown, Retailers Association of India (RAI) on Monday said a complete closure is not a solution, while calling for a balance between lives and livelihood. The retailers' body asked the state government to allow all sizes and formats of non-food retail to take orders over phone and other electronic means for home deliveries. Further, store premises can be allowed to be opened to the limited extent of fulfilling only home delivery orders, it said. "We appreciate Delhi government's efforts to curb the surge of the pandemic in the Capital city. However, we believe that complete closure is not a solution. There has to



be a balance between lives and livelihood to ensure that while lives are saved livelihoods are not lost," RAI CEO Kumar Rajagopalan said in a statement. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced a lockdown from 10 pm on Monday night till 5 am next Monday, in view of an exponential rise in coronavirus cases and the city's health system being stretched to its limits. Rajagopalan asked the state government to permit all sizes and formats of non-food retail to take orders over phone and other electronic means for home deliveries.

Top-500 cos' cash cycles stretched by 6 days: EY

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The pandemic has impacted the working capital management for companies and stretched top-500 listed companies' cash cycles by six days, a study by a consultancy firm said on Monday. In the 12 months ended September 30, 2020, businesses in India saw an increase in the cash-to-cash cycle by 6 days year-on-year, the study of top-500 listed companies by EY, said. Businesses in India have an opportunity to free up to Rs 5.2 lakh crore tied up in working capital, which can help businesses rebound much strongly from the crisis, it added. The study said 69 per cent of companies extended their payables to offset the effects of the pandemic on working capital.



It explained that the pandemic-induced lockdowns resulted in increased inventory balances and reduced collections for companies. Prudent companies resorted to the strategy of extending payables. Large and medium enterprises continue to be more efficient in managing their working capital requirements. Higher bargaining power combined with effective business processes to manage working capital for large businesses resulted in a working capital cycle of 29 days shorter than the small enterprises, it added.

Automakers fear dent in sales in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading automobile companies like Maruti Suzuki India (MSI), Toyota Kirloskar Motor and Honda Cars fear dent in sales as COVID-19 cases surged across the country. The country's largest carmaker MSI stated that the auto sales were correlated closely with economic growth and also (being a discretionary purchase) with the consumer sentiment. "The COVID-19 situation deterioration is obviously a negative for customer sentiment and thus has a negative impact on sales," MSI Executive Director (Sales and Marketing) Shashank Srivastava told PTI when asked about the impact of second wave of the pandemic on the company's sales. Lockdowns make it physically not possible to deliver cars but even the deterioration in



COVID-19 situation without lockdown also psychologically dents consumer propensity to buy, he noted. Similarly, Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) Senior Vice President Naveen Soni acknowledged that localised restrictions have impacted order flow and delivery schedules. "We will be able access trends and define numbers

only by the end of the month depending on the severity and extension of the restrictions. As of date, we have had a good number of pending orders that had to be carried forward from the month of February and March to April. Therefore, we are striving to meet the customer demand in spite of the local restrictions and lockdowns," he noted. On manufacturing opera-

tions, Soni said the company continues to cautiously proceed with vehicle production. "Our immediate focus is to fasten and streamline the demand and supply processes with more accuracy and manage production, along with faster deliveries making it easier and convenient for customers by reducing the delivery time," he added. Well-being of the employees as well as dealer and supplier staff are sacrosanct and the automaker has already reintroduced monitoring systems which were in place including submission of a self-declaration health form, Soni said. "As responsible corporates, we are continuously monitoring the situation carefully and will take accurate actions, as and when required. More importantly, this time we have precious lessons from last year to learn, unlearn and reflect upon," he noted.

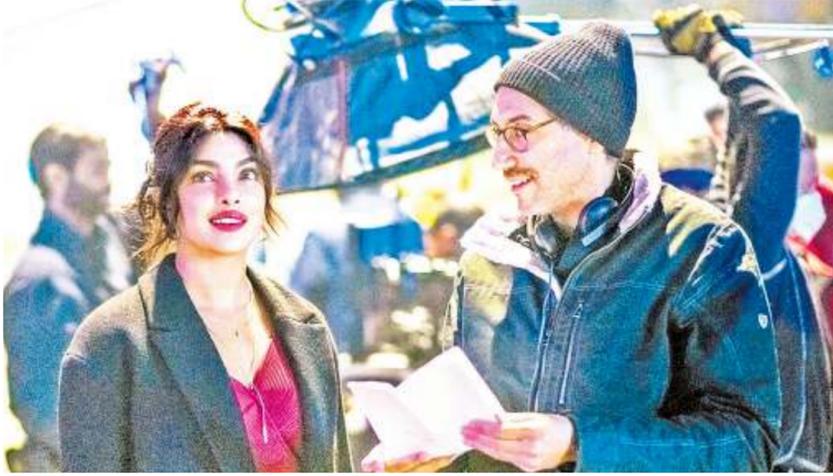
Internshala, Nestlé bring 350 internships for Ind students



The recruitment and training platform, Internshala is hosting Nestlé India's Nesternship. The internship program offers 1000 virtual internships in 2021 in various fields including finance, human resources, sales, e-commerce, marketing, legal, corporate affairs, engineering, food technology, IT, and supply chain. For the summer batch, interested students can apply to 350 virtual internships from 22nd April 2021 to 24th April 2021. The initiative aims at enhancing the competence and employability of the youth in India. These internships will offer experiential learning to empower students with skills and to make them future-ready. Each intern will be assigned a mentor from Nestlé to guide them during the course of their internship. Additionally, each intern will be provided with Amazon vouchers worth Rs 5,000 per month.

what's brewing?

PeeCee extends support to The White Tiger director, as he faces racism in US



Irani-American director Ramin Bahrani of *The White Tiger* fame was recently sub-

jected to racial abuse in the US. Priyanka Chopra, who was also a part of the film, commented on the issue. According to a report,

a bystander passed racial comments on Bahrani when he was in an interview on the streets. The man reportedly said, "You all think

you run the world. You all don't run s---." The man also shouted at him to go back to his country as he drove away in his car.

Reacting to the same, Priyanka reportedly asks if America was not supposed to be a melting pot of all people from all backgrounds. She added that the US was built on the back of immigrants in search of the American dream, a life of freedom, opportunity, and a safe place not only for themselves but for their families.

Bahrani has been nominated in the Best Adapted Screenplay category at the 93rd Academy Awards for *The White Tiger*. The film is an adaptation of Aravind Adiga's book of the same name.

Apart from this, he has films like *Man Push Cart*, *Chop Shop*, *Goodbye Solo* and *Fahrenheit 451* to his credit. Priyanka, on the other hand, is yet to announce her next Bollywood film.

Alia Bhatt-Ranbir Kapoor leave for Maldives post Covid-19 recovery

After recovering from Covid-19 recently, actors Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor left for the Maldives on Monday. They were spotted by the paparazzi at the Mumbai airport.

Alia was seen in a yellow top, white jacket and white pants. She had her hair tied in a bun and was wearing a protective mask. Ranbir was also seen in a white T-shirt and blue pants, carrying a bag.

Alia and Ranbir are the latest Bollywood celebrities to leave for the Maldives amid rising coronavirus cases in India. On Sunday, rumoured couple Disha Patani and Tiger Shroff took a flight to the Maldives from Mumbai. Before that, on Friday, actor Sara Ali Khan flew to the holiday destination with her mother, Amrita Singh.

Alia was diagnosed with Covid-19 earlier this month. She took to Instagram last week to announce that she had tested negative for the disease. Ranbir had tested positive in March and recovered a few days later.

While Ranbir was under home quarantine, Alia seemed to be missing him. She took to Instagram to share a throwback picture of their hands, clasped together. "Major missing," Alia had captioned her post.



Alia and Ranbir have been dating for three years. Ranbir admitted in an interview last year that they would've tied the knot already had it not been for the pandemic. "I don't want to jinx it by saying anything. I want to tick mark that goal very soon in my life," he had told journalist Rajeev

Masand. The couple will soon be seen on the big screen together for the first time in Ayan Mukerji's *Brahmastra*. The film is part of a fantasy epic trilogy and has long been delayed. It also stars Amitabh Bachchan and Mouni Roy.

GABBY BARRETT PRAISES CARRIE UNDERWOOD FOR MOTHERHOOD TIPS AT 2021 ACM AWARDS

During the 2021 ACM Awards, *American Idol*'s Gabby Barrett discussed one of her first nights out since welcoming a baby with Cade Foehner.

The 2021 ACM Awards was a big night for Gabby Barrett. In addition to being nominated for Single of the Year thanks to *I Hope*, the country singer also experienced one of her first nights out since becoming a mom.

While celebrating her accomplishments, Gabby couldn't help but give thanks to Carrie Underwood for her help away from any stages.

"Carrie has been somebody who has

been extremely nice to me," the former *American Idol* contestant told reporters. "Even when I was pregnant, she is just awesome. She had said, 'If you ever need any advice or anything, just let me know.' And of course, I took her up on that because I need all the advice I can have with babies. She has been absolutely amazing with that."

Back in January, Gabby welcomed her first child with husband Cade Foehner. The Nashville award show marked her first major public appearance since becoming a mom.

"I'm normally in bed right now," she joked to reporters. "This is way past by

bedtime, but this is well worth it! Everything is going good. My real world has just flipped upside down with my sweet little girl and I have announced that I am going to go on tour with Thomas Rhett so I am excited for that."

During the 2021 ACM Awards, the 21-year-old singer walked away with the award for New Female Artist of the Year. Soon after accepting her trophy, Gabby admitted she "went back and changed a dirty diaper."

While walking the red carpet, however, things were a bit more glamorous. Gabby worked with celebrity makeup artist Tarryn Feldman for her beauty look.



Leaked photos from Thor: Love and Thunder set tease Christian Bale's new look for film

Actor Christian Bale will soon be seen playing Gorr the God Butcher in *Thor: Love and Thunder*. Bale, who is known for undergoing dramatic body transformations for his characters, will look totally different in his upcoming movie.

His pictures from the set are going viral on social media in which he's seen in a slimmed-down look and a shaved head leaving his fans excited.

Thor: Love and Thunder, which is currently in production in Australia, is scheduled to release on February 11, 2022.

Gorr the God Butcher is an intriguing Marvel supervillain, who is the nemesis of Thor in the 2022 film. In the comics, the supervillain grew up on an unnamed and barren planet. After his family died due to starvation and an earthquake, Gorr lost his belief in gods and promised to kill



them all. He is totally a new character in the Marvel canon.

Thor: Love and Thunder, the fourth Thor film, is being directed by Taika Waititi. The script was written by Waititi and Jennifer Kaytin Robinson, while actors like Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman and Tessa Thompson are also a part of the movie.

Thompson's Valkyrie will make a comeback too.

Bale, who is no stranger to comic-book films, has earlier worked with Christopher Nolan in the Dark Knight trilogy. He was also highly appreciated for movies like *American Hustle*, *Henry V*, *Mandolins*, and *Exodus: Gods and Kings*.

FUN

ARCHIE

I CAN'T MAKE ANY SENSE OUT OF THIS ALGEBRA!
ER, ARCH!
ER, ARCH-- YOUR BOOK IS UPSIDE-DOWN!
YEAH, I KNOW!
I ALREADY TRIED IT THE OTHER WAY AND IT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE THEN EITHER!

CALVIN AND HOBBS

BAD NEWS ON YOUR POLLS, DAD. YOU DROPPED ANOTHER FIVE POINTS.
IT SEEMS THAT ALTHOUGH YOUR RECOGNITION FACTOR IS HIGH, THE SCANDALS OF YOUR ADMINISTRATION CONTINUE TO HAUNT YOU.
SCANDALS? WHAT SCANDALS?
BEDTIMEGATE AND HOME-WORKGATE COME READILY TO MIND.
INSTANCES OF TRUE LEADERSHIP HISTORY WILL VINDICATE ME.
I WONDER WHAT MY NEW DAD WILL LOOK LIKE.

GARFIELD

SALAD'S READY!
GARFIELD?
SALAD'S READY!
I'M NOT SURE WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO WITH THAT INFORMATION

REALITY CHECK

IT'S EXPENSIVE, BUT ON THE WEEKENDS HE LIKES TO REALLY GET AWAY FROM IT ALL!

SPEED BUMP

I DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO COME INSIDE. I JUST WANTED YOU TO GIVE ME THE OPTION.

CROSSWORD

JUNIOR CROSSWORD 830

1	2	3	4	5	6
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					

NANCY

THAT NANCY, SHE'S SUCH A SWEET GIRL.
ALSO A SALT GIRL.
AND SHE DOESN'T SHY AWAY FROM THAT BUTTER, EITHER.
WOW, SHE IS GOING IN ON THAT CORNBREAD.
OBTUSILY!

SUDOKU

4	9	2		1	6			
		9		6	5			
								4
		8	5					2
7								3
1			9	2				
3								
	5	1		7				
9	1		6		8	4		

Yesterday's solution

2	1	6	4	5	7	3	8	9
7	8	3	9	2	1	4	5	6
4	9	5	8	3	6	7	2	1
3	6	9	2	4	8	1	7	5
1	2	8	3	7	5	6	9	4
5	4	7	6	1	9	2	3	8
9	3	2	1	8	4	5	6	7
8	7	1	5	6	2	9	4	3
6	5	4	7	9	3	8	1	2

Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- Motion
- A spicy Indian food dish
- Similar
- Quit your job
- At this place
- Remedy
- Mother or father
- Of greater age
- A fruit with pips
- A place for sick or injured people

DOWN

- Dirty stains
- A long journey by sea or in space
- Animal flesh for eating
- Loud sounds
- A figure in a field to frighten birds
- One third of fifty-one
- With nobody in it
- A communication device
- Kick out of school
- Catch a mouse with this

SOLUTION

N	U	I	S	A	N	C	E	
I	T	U	P	W				
G	R	E	M	A	I	L	E	
H	M	B	S	E				
T	A	B	L	E	O	T	O	P
M	B	O	T	A				
A	T	L	A	S	S	E	R	V
R	W	I	A	S				
E	Y	E	L	I	D	K	I	D
F	O	L	E					
T	R	E	L	E	A	B	L	E

'CAN BE A BAHU AND A BEACH BABE AT THE SAME TIME'



Actress Poulomi Das is ruling the OTT scene and the internet too. The *Dil Hi Toh Hai* actress talks to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL about how she manages to stand strong with her head held high, schools trolls like a boss and lives a wholesome life.

She's fearless, and embraced her imperfections by flaunting them widely on OTT screens! Without caring about what the world thinks about her skin colour, actress Poulomi Das went on to participate in *India's Next Top Model* garnering praises from Malaika Arora and Anusha Dandekar. This South Asian beauty hailing from Kolkata is here to tell us that we don't have to hide our so-called flaws but rather celebrate those with pride. She never needed any

beauty filter and is adamant about sharing words of encouragement to her followers bringing in skin positivity and bring in a revolution in the glamour world. Breaking stereotypes of the country which was once obsessed with milky skin and fairness, Poulomi Das has become the face of the relaunched product 'Glow and Lovely' and we can't help but love her for advocating for women of colour. To prepare for her recent role — Poulomi read up works by a lot of authors, worked on her appearance, and pursued an appropriate diet, however, there was a time when people wondered earlier if they would ever see a dark-skinned actress on television screens. Ever since the interview of Meghan Markle and

Prince Harry with Oprah Winfrey was televised across the globe — conversation on racism broke the internet. Recently, the former First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama reacted to the colourism debate by saying, "It wasn't a complete surprise to hear Meghan's feelings." Closer home, fashion designer Masaba took to her social media to write, "What if I told you that no matter where you come from, the colour of your skin or the hook of your nose, or the scar from 7th grade is amazing. You must always keep your chin up."

Poulomi states, "It never mattered to me the way I looked because my audiences always accepted me as I was. To some extent, showbiz is addressing the issues of representation and now normalising it. There were always two ways for me to look at criticism — either it taught me a lesson or was distressing! The ones who have the capability of teaching us are the set of people who come from a well-informed background while those who speak utter nonsense are the anonymous cowards without any identities online. This is, unfortunately, a part of our jobs now and I prefer paying attention to the former set of people, you'll see I tried changing accordingly. I don't give a damn about faceless accounts online!" A lawyer-turned-actress

is filled with stories of triumph and hardships based on her colour at times, yet it was her pride that allowed her to fight all the stereotypes and humiliation down the lane. "I lucked out, I was happily pursuing my law profession and suddenly the door towards the world of enchantment — modeling opened for me. I wondered at first if I would be able to act further on if I got a chance because I succumbed to stage phobia often. The obsession with deeply 'gora rang' is at least not concerned when I work today and that gave me so much confidence to add acting as an ornament to my portfolio. I got my first show for my colour, and things snowballed around me and the way I look," she chortled.

With as many appearances as she can on OTT, Poulomi Das can be thought about as the Radhika Apte for the digital entertainment platforms currently finding it immensely vital to speak about colorism issues. "We have more content to watch now, there are 'originals' been made catering to local languages as well. It lets you have a good time in the comfort of your home. We still are eager to watch new movies on screen but it's just that the screens have changed to either mobile, television, or tablets. Everyone's willing to wait whenever the next web series is releasing! Many producers are choosing to release their small-budget films or web shows directly on OTT platforms only due to its popularity. Even a less familiar name has some screen presence now!" she added.

She talks about the kind of summons she had to face, "There are bold scenes as per the requirement of the script at times. Being bold and sensuous sells the most on the web! We should not be bound by saying we will only

work in certain kinds of films and series. I am really happy that such bold shows are being made and people are loving them. I am an actress who can be a *sanskari bahu* and a bikini babe at the same time because that's my job! However, I do have my set of boundaries."

Poulomi doesn't believe that nepotism thwarts the chances of other talented artists because she says you can't blame all the ills on nepotism. Like she struck gold with many of her performances on OTT and proved her mettle, there are many others too. Talking more about it, she says, "You'll find a star kid everywhere and this prevailing issue of hierarchy is present in every other fraternity, not just the movie business. Ours is more prominent because it's on camera! Hereafter, I am going to be a privileged mother too in the coming times that doesn't mean I'll abstain my kids from those advantages. Nonetheless, those who have it all in the silver spoon mustn't scorn it either. I'll constantly pester them about my struggles."

Sharing her cavernous camaraderie with Indian television's heartthrob Karan Kundra, Poulomi tells that Karan is a compassionate co-star, a second family that she's got in Mumbai and a proper *theth* Punjabi who taught her Punjabi slang. He's that brother from another mother who's just a phone call away, she informs. Working seven days a week without taking an off, some days, she has suffered depression and some have been the most jolly-good days! The word *Kaali* has never been an insult to her and she strongly believes online comments represent how people actually feel about themselves. *The Pioneer* wishes Poulomi Das success for her latest OTT venture *Bekaboo 2!*

'Fan'ning IPL mania

K RAMYA SREE

Fans are the most important and integral part of the VIVO IPL 2021, considering the current times where the world has seen some difficult days due to Covid-19. From kids to the elderly, everyone is glued to their TV and smartphones, busy watching the IPL. The tournament brings families together, celebrating the season, wherein everyone sits together and enjoys the match. *The Pioneer* catches up with some of the ardent fans who make IPL happen, and chats to understand their mantra for this season.

Harman Kaur



An MS Dhoni fan for over 15 years now, Harman Kaur, doesn't miss a single CSK game in Punjab. In 2018, a bandage on one of her legs didn't stop her from going to watch CSK vs Punjab match at Mohali. She had gone to meet

him in the hotel but she could only see him sitting on the bus and waved at him. She has also done up her house with Dhoni's poster.

In the virtual era, how is she celebrating IPL this year? She tells us, "My family and I never miss a game of CSK and we will continue to keep that spirit going on. IPL will always be a celebration for my family whether at home or the stadium. This season, we planned special south Indian Chennai meals during CSK matches — for the first match, we had idli-vada and sambar special. We are also wearing CSK jerseys and rooting for the team from the first ball to the last one."

She has a passionate group of CSK fans where she lives. They play gully cricket on weekends wearing CSK jerseys to cheer the team and pass the message that they are with the team. CSK for them is like a family. And the team's performance leaves a deep impact on her.

Gargi Rastogi

A hardcore fan of Delhi Capitals, Gargi Rastogi, has composed a special song on DC's new skipper Rishabh Pant and she dedicates the song to all DC fans and the entire team of DC.

"IPL this year will be entertaining for fans, as all teams have come back with a winning spirit. I am a huge fan of Delhi Capitals, and with Rishabh Pant leading the side and win-



ning their first match against power-player team CSK — I'm sure DC is going to shine this year. I'm expecting IPL to be extremely competitive till the very end. DC's success mantra for the season is to play tough and be tough. The entire team has to show their strengths and come together as a 'tough' team to defeat," shares the youngster.

Yash Pathak



A 24-year-old up-coming cricketer, who has played cricket at the highest level of Kanga League, a division Training under Pravin Amre, Yash Pathak has been a fan of Punjab Kings. Yash Pathak got a chance to

be a part of the Kings XI Punjab's development camp where he trained with the main team.

Being a cricketer himself and a huge fan of IPL, what are his expectations from this year's IPL? He shares, "Growing up, I started playing gully cricket for fun and eventually ended up being a fan of all forms of the sport. IPL introduced a new brand of cricket to me and I experienced this first-hand when I got selected for the Kings XI Punjab (Now Punjab Kings) development camp. At the camp, I trained with the main team for a couple of days and that made me fall in love with the team and ultimately become a fan. With every season, IPL sets a new benchmark for enthralling and nail-biting action. So, with IPL coming back to India, I am expecting a lot of cricketing action every evening. I am also hopeful that KL Rahul and the boys will continue with their form and help us lift the cup this year. With a new team and a new name, we are ought to grab the title in 2021."

"I am a person who enjoys community viewing and talking about cricket, but the pandemic has restricted us from organising an on-ground screening. With the virtual screening that my parents and I organise, we have devised new ways of staying together and enjoying cricket," adds he.

Saravanan

A six or a four, 'whistle podu', is a must, and whistle Podu happens to be one of the biggest fan pages of CSK and Dhoni, who are into charity and social work. They shared the plans about setting up screens/ projectors to watch the match and support the CSK team.

"Dhoni Anna has always been and will be our hero! Every year, we wait for MS Dhoni to don the yellow colour and lead the army to a well-deserved title. Although we tried, 2020



was not our year. So, with a fresh perspective, CSK will return to India for its fourth title.

I am expecting CSK to unfurl the yellow flag in Ahmedabad on May 30, 2021," says Saravanan.

"Covid can never dampen the spirits of cricket lovers. Fans will keep finding different ways to support the team. We prefer watching the game LIVE but we will watch it at home this year, but the yellow paint will always go on during all CSK games," he shares on virtual screenings of IPL.

Nikash Kanhar

Like many others, even Nikash is expecting a crazy comeback from RCB team of which he is a die-hard fan. "With a great start, I am certain players like Maxwell and Kohli will rain sixes on their opponents. We just want to see the outburst of RCB. We too want to live the cup and we are expecting to bring the cup home for the first time," he says.

Painting the body with tri-colors during the IPL games was the norm before Covid hit. "The only thing changes are the place where we will showcase our passion, the adrenaline will always be high, be it a stadium or in front of the TV at home.

We are excited about our first win against the best team, and we are sure there will be more wins this season," he adds.

Bollywood superstar and youth icon Ranveer Singh is a cultural phenomenon — an actor, a bona fide fashion icon, the face of Indian hip hop, an artist entrepreneur — he is a genuine disruptor and a true blue game-changer in the sphere of entertainment in India. Ranveer has carved his name in the history of Indian cinema over the span of a decade with his incredible erasing performances. He says he has achieved everything in life by believing in impossible is nothing. He chose to lead from the front in the music industry too by founding an artist collective Inc Ink — a platform that supports talented musicians across the country to shine bright on a global stage. We caught up with Ranveer Singh to discuss how he always believed in the possibility of achieving the impossible.

From multiple rejections at the start of your career to becoming people's superstar now. Tell us about the time when you stared at uncertainty as a struggler and how you kept your eyes on the prize and told yourself that impossible is nothing.

At different points and in several instances during my struggling years, I felt like there was no hope. Getting one's foot inside the door of a largely exclusive entertainment industry seemed unachievable. But I persisted — you could say I was both hungry and foolish, and More than anything believed in my abilities and in my potential. Even back then, when I had nothing, the same driven, tenacious and meticulous work ethic was characteristic of my hustle. I was well aware of what a long shot it was. But I was willing to take that leap of faith. When there wasn't a good lead in sight for long periods, the phone wouldn't ring for months, my faith was challenged, but I debunked the idea that what I was trying to achieve was impossible. I stayed focused in the most testing of times. I almost forced the universe into making it happen for me. My single-mindedness and determination eventually paid off and



Debunked the idea that what I try to achieve is impossible: Ranveer Singh

my dream became my reality. Ever since, every day feels like I am living a dream." **When you joined the film industry you were told that you didn't have the quintessential looks associated with an actor, nor did you have film lineage. You are now a global youth icon of India. What has been the biggest learnings on your journey to superstardom?**

"When young actors, especially 'outsiders', come up to me seeking advice on how to navigate their hustle — the first and most important thing I tell them is "do it for the right reasons. Do it simply because you love performing." I urge them to not be lured towards performing arts or the entertainment business because success in this field comes with fame and money. Those are transient, they are frills — just trappings. So I say, Be true to your craft and do it for the love of, and for the joy of performing. Another thing I learned along the way, is that authenticity has the most resonance. If you try being something that you are inherently not, you are doing a disservice to yourself. If you stay true to who you are, if you lose the fear of being judged, only then will you vibrate at a high fre-

quency. 'You do you', I tell them. Be original, be your unique self. And another important thing I've learned is to keep taking risks. The bigger the risk, the bigger the reward. You may falter during that process, but I believe that there are no failures in life — there are only lessons." **While your career truly shows that impossible is nothing for you, you are now providing a huge platform to fellow dreamers who are rank outsiders in the music industry. Tell us about the moment when you decided that an outsider has to stand beside fellow outsiders.**

"One can have the passion and grit and can even prepare endlessly for the moment that one gets to shine. But often times the missing piece of the puzzle is 'opportunity'. My hustle was as difficult as it was because of the sheer lack of opportunities. That's what I wanted to create for fellow dreamers. To provide the opportunity to young creators who were burning with passion. To give them a platform to showcase their talent. It is my way of giving back. It is my way of paying forward the blessings I have received. It is my way of showing gratitude to the universe."

Bravo takes CSK to 188

DJ impresses in his late cameo which includes six off final ball as others fail to convert good start into big score

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A cameo from Dwayne Bravo towards the end of the innings helped Chennai Super Kings post 188 for nine against Rajasthan Royals at Wankhede Stadium on Monday.

CSK lost wickets towards the end with the batsmen going for big hits and also in the face of some good bowling by Royals.

Bravo (20 not out off 8 balls) smashed a huge six off the last ball of the innings from Mustafizur Rahman (1/37) to ensure the Super Kings got close to 190.

Faf du Plessis post scored with 33 off 17 balls as the CSK batsmen got starts but couldn't capitalise on them after being put in to bat.

Young Chetan Sakariya (3/36 from 4 overs) was the best bowler for Rajasthan while Chris Morris finished with 2/33 despite conceding 15 runs in his final over.

Dhoni, in his 200th match as CSK captain, came in to bat at No 7 but could not get going as quickly as he would have liked. He, however, managed two boundaries in his 17-ball 18 before being beaten by an off-cutter by Sakariya only to give a catch to Jos Buttler. He survived a run-out chance and a few anxious moments in his brief knock.

Ambati Rayudu (27, 17 balls, 3 sixes) and Suresh Raina (18, 15 balls, 1 four, 1 six) added 45 runs in quick time for the fourth wicket before the former perished going for an attacking shot on the off-side off Sakariya.

Sakariya struck again a few balls later, getting Raina to hit one straight to Morris at mid-off as CSK slipped to 125 for five in 15th over.

Rayudu hit sixes off successive deliveries in Tewatia's second over, scoring 14 runs as he and Raina attempted to take advantage of the



Chennai Super Kings batsman Dwayne Bravo attempts to hit ball for a six during his unbeaten 20 run innings against Rajasthan Royals at Wankhede Stadium. ©IPL20.com

IT WAS ON APRIL 19 IN 2008 THAT CSK PLAYED THEIR FIRST-EVER IPL GAME, HERALDING MS DHONI'S CAPTAINCY DEBUT IN YELLOW AND 13 YEARS LATER ON MONDAY, HE CAPTAINED CHENNAI SUPER KINGS FOR 200TH TIME

SCOREBOARD

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS (188-9)

Ruturaj Gaikwad c Dube b Mustafizur	10
Faf du Plessis c Parag b Morris	33
Moeen Ali c Parag b Tewatia	26
Suresh Raina c Morris b Sakariya	18
Ambati Rayudu c Parag b Sakariya	27
Ravindra Jadeja c Samson b Morris	8
MS Dhoni c Buttler b Sakariya	18
Sam Curran run out (Mustafizur/Samson)	13
Dwayne Bravo not out	20
Shardul Thakur run out (Samson/Mustafizur)	1
Deepak Chahar not out	0
Extras (b 1, lb 4, w 8, nb 1, p 0)	14
Total (9 wks, 20 Overs)	188
Fall of Wickets: 25-1 (Ruturaj Gaikwad, 3.5), 45-2 (Faf du Plessis, 5.4), 78-3 (Moeen Ali, 9.2), 123-4 (Ambati Rayudu, 13.2), 125-5 (Suresh Raina, 13.5), 147-6 (MS Dhoni, 17.2), 163-7 (Ravindra Jadeja, 18.3), 174-8 (Sam Curran, 19.1), 180-9 (Shardul Thakur, 19.4)	

Bowling

Jaydev Unadkat	4-0-40-0
Chetan Sakariya	4-0-36-3
Mustafizur Rahman	4-0-37-1
Chris Morris	4-0-33-2
Rahul Tewatia	3-0-21-1
Riyun Parag	1-0-16-0

fifth and sixth bowlers (Tewatia and Riyun Parag) employed by Royals skipper Samson.

Tewatia had begun well by conceding only five runs in his opening over and got ride of Moeen Ali (26 off 20).

Opener Ruturaj Gaikwad's struggles continued as his attempt to hit his way out saw him miscue a pull only to see it lob to Shivam Dube off Rahman. He fell for 10 (13 balls, 1 four) after adding 25 runs for the first wicket with fellow opener du Plessis.

Faf showed intent and waded into Unadkat in the fifth over, hammering three fours and one six before an ambitious shot brought his downfall off Morris' bowling.

Mayank wasn't stressed about low scores



PBKs batsman Mayank Agarwal plays a shot during his innings. ©IPL

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Back in form with a scintillating half-century, Punjab Kings' Mayank Agarwal says he wasn't too stressed about not firing in the first couple of IPL matches and tried to stick to the things that worked for him in the last edition.

Mayank, who had amassed 424 runs in the last season in the UAE, had scored 14 and 0 against Rajasthan Royals and Chennai Super Kings to make a dismal start to the ongoing season.

However, the 30-year-old from Bangalore found his touch on Sunday as he smashed a sizzling 36-ball 69 to help Punjab post 195 for four against Delhi Capitals.

"I wasn't thinking too much, I planned to do and keep the mindset that worked for me last year. I thought last match I had a good ball, I didn't want to stress too much about it and wanted to look forward and so stuck to what worked for me," he said during a virtual press-conference.

"I was batting well in the nets, I was getting into good positions, it was about holding shape and I don't want to live in the previous games and I am happy how I batted."

The total, however, didn't prove enough as last year's runners-up Delhi Capitals romped home in 18.2 overs, riding on opener Shikhar Dhawan's 49-ball 92.

"I thought it was a good total. It wasn't as easy in the first innings and I thought dew played a factor coming in the second innings," Mayank said.

"I thought Delhi Capitals batted exceedingly well, also there was a dew factor. Credited to Delhi bowlers how they executed after the 12 overs, they went into death bowling and executed it beautifully."

Asked how can dew be countered to make it an even contest, Mayank said: "I don't think we can do much about it as players. It boils down to execution under pressure and practising that. Those are the things which are under our control."

boundarymeter

4s 346

6s 147

PLAYER	RUNS
1. Shikhar Dhawan (DC)	186
2. Glenn Maxwell (RCB)	176
3. KL Rahul (PBKS)	157

PLAYER	WKTS
1. Harshal Patel (RCB)	9
2. Rahul Chahar (MI)	7
3. Avesh Khan (DC)	6

MOST SIXES	COUNT
1. Deepak Hooda (PBKS)	8
2. Glenn Maxwell (RCB)	8
3. Sanju Samson (RR)	7

SUMMER SLAM



Kolkata Knight Riders teammates Prasidh Krishna, left, and Kuldeep Yadav wearing PPE kits pose for photo in flight as the team travel to Chennai for upcoming IPL matches. ©KKRiders

MURALITHARAN DISCHARGED

Sri Lankan legend Muttiah Muralitharan was discharged on Monday after undergoing a coronary angioplasty at a city hospital in Chennai. The former spinner, who is part of the Sunrisers Hyderabad support staff, went for the planned procedure on Sunday. Muralitharan would rejoin the SRH squad after undergoing the mandatory seven-day quarantine period.

PLAY WITH POSITIVE MINDSET: DHAWAN

DC batsman Shikhar Dhawan, who played match winning 92 against Punjab Kings says Delhi Capitals will have to play with a positive mindset against Mumbai Indians. "They (MI) have played three games in Chennai, so they know the conditions there. For us the challenge will be to switch on mentally according to the wicket and prepare our plan. Then we just have to go out there and implement the plan and play with a positive mindset and look to win the game."

'WAS WORRIED ABOUT MY TECHNIQUE'

Prithvi Shaw says he had started "worrying" about his technique after being dropped in Australia before roaring back to form in domestic cricket, thanks to a few technical changes he made in his game. "After getting dropped from the Test side after the first Test in Australia, I started worrying about my technique on why I was getting bowled. Even if it was a minor mistake, I wanted to minimize that. I started working on it there itself," said Shaw.

POINTS TABLE

	P	W	L	NRR	PTS	
1	RCB	3	3	0	+0.750	6
2	CSK	3	2	1	+1.194	4
3	DC	3	2	1	+0.453	4
4	MI	3	2	1	+0.367	4
5	KKR	3	1	2	-0.633	2
6	RR	3	1	2	-0.719	2
7	PBKS	3	1	2	-0.967	2
8	SRH	3	0	3	-0.483	0

Delhi eye revenge against MI Chennai wickets not unplayable: Mahela

KEY PLAYERS

SHIKHAR DHAWAN
Gabbar is in good form and was the highest run scorer in both the matches Delhi's won this season

RAHUL CHAHAR
Rahul was the wrecker-in-chief against KKR and SRH helping MI defend 150 run target with ease

PTI ■ CHENNAI

A battle royale is in the offing as heavyweights Mumbai Indians and Delhi Capitals cross swords, looking to outsmart each other here on Tuesday.

Up against a resurgent side, defending champions MI will need to address their middle-order woes if they are to go for a third consecutive win.

Mumbai skipper Rohit Sharma has got starts and he would be keen to convert it into a big one and so would be Quinton de Kock.

MI have the likes of Suryakumar Yadav, Ishan Kishan, Kieron Pollard, Hardik Pandya and his brother Krunal, who can pummel any attack into submission on their day, but they are yet to fire on all cylinders.

The Mumbai bowlers, led by pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, have been splendid in the last two games when they successfully defended low scores of 150 and 152 respectively. Strike bowlers Bumrah (3 wickets) and New Zealander Trent Boult (6 wickets) have been exceptional at the death.

Leg-spinner Rahul Chahar, whom bowling coach Shane Bond described as a "wicket-taking bowler", has grabbed seven wickets in last two games.

Meanwhile, for Delhi Capitals, the biggest positive has been the form of Shikhar Dhawan, who is the leading scorer so far in the tournament with 186 runs.

Dhawan and young Prithvi Shaw form a lethal opening combination, but the Mumbaiers need to convert his starts into big scores.

Delhi opted for Australian Steve Smith on Sunday but, as they are next playing on the slow Chepauk track, they might go back to Ajinkya Rahane, who is looking better suited for such tracks.

Skipper Rishabh Pant has the ability to take any attack to the

VENUE: CHIDAMBARAM STADIUM, CHENNAI

HEAD TO HEAD

Matches	28
Delhi Capitals	12
Mumbai Indians	16

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

- MI beat Delhi Capitals by 5 wickets in Abu Dhabi
- Mumbai Indians won by 9 wickets against DC in Dubai
- Mumbai Indians defeated Delhi Capitals by 57 runs in Dubai (Qualifier 1)
- Mumbai Indians beat Delhi Capitals by 5 wickets in Dubai (Final)

201

Kieron Pollard with 201 sixes in 150 innings of 167 matches, is the only MI batsman to smash 200 or more sixes in IPL

194

Rishabh Pant who hit 194 fours in 71 innings of as many matches, needs just six fours to become only second batsman after Virender Sehwag (266 fours in 79 innings) to complete a double century of fours for Delhi Capitals in IPL

cleaners. The DC team management would be hoping that the top-order fires in unison against the defending champions, to whom they had lost in the final last year.

Their pace attack is led by South African Kagiso Rabada and Chris Woakes, and the two have been impressive so far. They have an additional option in Anrich Nortje, who has also joined the squad.

Delhi played four pacers in the game against Punjab, but in Chennai, they could play more spinners as the track is conducive for the slower bowlers.

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The wickets in Chennai are not unplayable but challenging being on slower side, insisted Mumbai Indians head coach Mahela Jayawardene as teams batting first have dominated the matches played at the Chepauk stadium, so far.

Out of six matches played here, thrice teams managed 150-plus score and five times the team that has batted first won the match.

"They are not unplayable wickets. They are good, competitive wickets. And adapting to challenges is always the key for any batsmen or any team. We have been consistent with that approach, it is challenging, but our bowlers have adapted pretty well," Jayawardene said ahead of the team's game against Delhi Capitals.

The 43-year-old former Sri Lanka batsman also said all-rounder Hardik Pandya



Mumbai Indians head coach Mahela Jayawardene during team's nets session. ©mipaltan

has not yet bowled this season due to the niggle he picked up during the ODI series against England.

"We were looking forward for him to be bowling this season but after those matches against England, the last ODI, I believe he picked up niggle, so that is something that we are nursing at the moment."

Jayawardene however exuded confidence that the team would be able to use Hardik's services as a bowler.

"We don't want to risk it, because it is important that we make sure that he (Hardik) is in a position to comfortably come in and bowl. So hopefully in the next few weeks, with a bit of work and all that, we might see him bowling."

"It is not that we are deliberately trying to not bowl him, we would love to have him bowling, but as soon as the niggle is off and he is comfortable, we should be able to use that asset as well," he said.

shortpasses

INDIA OPEN POSTPONED

NEW DELHI: The India Open Super 500 tournament was on Monday postponed due to the raging Covid-19 cases. The \$400,000 India Open was scheduled to be held behind closed doors in Delhi from May 11 to 16.

INDIA ASSURED OF 4 MEDALS

NEW DELHI: Asian champion Vinka and Aliyfa Pathan were among the four Indian boxers who progressed to the semifinals of the youth world championships in Kielce, Poland. Gitika and Poonam are the other two boxers.

NAPOLI END INTER STREAK

NAPLES: Christian Eriksen claimed a point for Serie A leaders Inter Milan whose 11-match winning streak ended with a 1-1 draw at Napoli on Sunday. But Inter still have a comfortable margin (9 pts) at the top of the table.

REAL HELD BY GETAFE

MADRID: A depleted Real Madrid delivered a major boost to Atletico Madrid's title hopes on Sunday by drawing 0-0 with Getafe in La Liga. Atletico had thrashed Elbar 5-0 to reignite their own fading challenge and their victory proved even more valuable after Real's goalless draw.

UEFA DELAY FINAL DECISION

MONTREUX: UEFA will announce the final decision over the host cities for this year's delayed Euro 2020 on Friday, with Munich, Bilbao and Dublin in danger of being dropped from the list if the trio cannot welcome spectators to stadiums.



Spurs sack Mourinho

AFP ■ LONDON

Jose Mourinho was sacked by Tottenham on Monday just six days before they play Manchester City in the League Cup final as the Portuguese boss paid the price for a turbulent campaign.

Mourinho, 58, was dismissed after only 17 months in charge, even though he could have led the club to their first silverware since 2008.

Tottenham have been struggling in their bid to qualify for the Champions League via a top-four finish in the Premier League. They are currently seventh, five points behind fourth placed West Ham, and suffered a shock Europa League last-16 exit against Dinamo Zagreb.

"The club can today announce that Jose Mourinho and his coaching staff have been relieved of their duties," a Spurs statement said.

Tottenham's academy coach Ryan Mason will take first-team training this week and is set to pick the team for Wednesday's Premier League clash with Southampton and the League Cup final.

UEFA confirm 36 team CL reform

AFP ■ LONDON

UEFA has given the green light for a 36-team Champions League reform which will include a single league format to replace the group stage.

European football's main governing body announced a number of changes to the competition on Monday amid reports of a rival Super League formation which could see 12 of the biggest clubs on the continent breakaway.

The changes are slated to come into effect in 2024, with fixtures set to be played on Thursdays instead of Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and a play-off round added to the first stage.

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin has outlined the main reasons behind the reform in an official statement, which reads: "This new format supports the status and future of the domestic game throughout Europe as well. It retains the principle that domestic performance should be the key to qualification and reconfirms the principles of solidarity."

The traditional group stage concept which has seen four teams compete in eight pools with the top two qualifying for the last 16 will be scrapped in favour of a single league including 36 teams.

Each team will play a total of 10 games home and away, with the top eight automatically qualifying for the last 16 and those finishing between ninth and 24th to compete in two-legged play-offs to decide who else makes the knockout stage.

The teams that finish lower than 24th will exit European competition completely, and the last 16, quarter-finals, semi-finals and final will all continue with their original format.

The calendar has yet to be worked out to accommodate four additional matches but they will be played between September and January, while France have been handed a fifth qualifying spot from Ligue 1.

'I'M VERY CRITICAL ABOUT MYSELF'

Nivetha has been a force to be reckoned with, ever since her debut. The kind of roles and scripts she chose, at even nascent stages in her career, is commendable.

K RAMYA SREE writes about the actress' recent success *Vakeel Saab*, how she prepped for the role, her upcoming projects, and more..

She was introduced to us as Catherine and entertained us as Pallavi. She was again seen as Pallavi in the recent blockbuster *Vakeel Saab*. Nivetha Thomas says, she is conscious about the roles she does and that she doesn't bother about the screen time, it's the impression her role will leave that she cares about.

"When I choose a film, it should be character-driven. For me, there is no women-centric or men-centric film. It is always about the character," she says.

Speaking of the biggest compliment she got after *Vakeel Saab*, she says it is being called "Pallavi". "Whenever I posted a picture or video, people started to call me Pallavi, and the comments section was filled with people calling me Pallavi. It felt nice and happy that Chiranjeevi *garu* went to theatres with his family to watch the film despite the rising Covid cases."

Sharing her association with Pawan Kalyan and what she took from him, Nivetha explains, "Pawan Kalyan *garu* is a quiet person. I love the way he talks and the command he has over the Telugu language. He is so good with his fluency, that I want to watch him speak more and more. I always wanted to see him as a lawyer and I'm happy he

played a lawyer in this film. What Pawan sir did for this film, I don't think anybody could've done."

"Pawan sir carried great responsibility in this film. Venu sir took proper care of it and I'm super proud of what he did. After I came out of the theatres, I straightaway wanted to go Venu sir and give him a big hug," adds the V actress.

Nivetha says she consciously made a choice to not watch *Pink* after she signed *Vakeel Saab*. "I watched *Pink* twice in theatres when it was released. Because the film served the purpose and we started talking about it and had debates on it. I loved watching Tapsee and her performance. When I'm reprising the role of Tapsee Pannu, there are comparisons, because we are two different people, you cannot really compare the nuances of it. Personally from an actor's point of view, I made a decision to not watch *Pink* after I signed *Vakeel Saab*. Venu sir and I always said *Vakeel Saab* should have a soul of its own and not make the audience feel it's a remake of *Pink*," she explains.

For Nivetha, the experience of working for a film will conclude only after she watches it in the theatres. As she was tested Covid positive, she couldn't watch the film in theatres right after its release, but when she watched it

later, she says it was just papers flying in the theatres. "I was quarantined when the film released. For me, the experience of a movie will complete only if I watch the film in theatres. After I tested negative, I immediately watched the film in theatres and that's when I started reading comments, reviews, and more. It was just papers flying around."

When asked what made her come on board this film, Nivetha shares, "I always wondered if I am as strong as Pallavi, if I really am able to go to the police station and file a complaint multiple times. I would want to be like Pallavi, a strong fierce girl and that made me do this film."

"I'm very critical about myself. I have never been taken myself or my work for granted. Whenever I listen to compliments about my work, it always feels like it's my debut work. Being in front of the camera is what makes me thrive," adds she.

"Right now I am working on a Korean remake of *Midnight Runners* directed by Sudheer sir. I think I'm very open to seeing what kind of roles come my way and what people expect of me. I want people to approach me with any kind of role," concludes the actress.



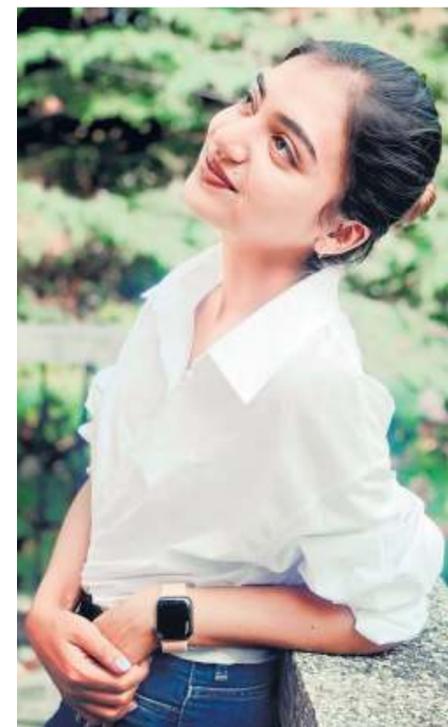
NAZRIYA NAZIM JOINS NANI FOR ANTE SUNDARANIKI

Natural Star Nani's 28th film *Ante Sundaraniki* being, directed by Vivek Athreya under Mythri Movie banner, marks launchpad of Nazriya Nazim Fahadh in Telugu. The actress who is well-known to Telugu audiences with films like *Raja Rani*, has joined the shoot of *Ante Sundaraniki* on Monday. The team is presently canning scenes of Nazriya Nazim and others in Hyderabad.

The actress is very excited to start the shooting of her first Telugu film. "Andarki Namaskaram. Today I started shooting for my first Telugu film. First is always special. *Ante Sundaraniki* will be special," tweeted the actress.

Ante Sundaraniki is a musical rom-com with an original story. "Welcoming the actress, producers of Mythri Movie Makers specified, "Team #AnteSundaraniki welcomes you #NazriyaFahadh & yesss this movie will be special Natural star @nameisnani #VivekAthreya #VivekSagar #NikethBommi #NANI28," tweeted Mythri Movie Makers.

Continuing their journey with Vivek Athreya after *Brochevarevarura*, Vivek Sagar is scoring music for the film, while Raviteja Girijala will work as editor, as Niketh Bommi cranks the camera.



VD, Sukumar's film will only get bigger

Rumours were rife that Arjun Reddy actor Vijay Deverakonda's film with director Sukumar, announced in September 2020, by Falcon Creations LLP as its debut production, has been shelved due to busy schedule of the actor and the director.

The production house on Monday put a full stop to all these rumours.

"Team Falcon urges everyone not to believe in misinformation and strongly condemns rumours. Director @aryasukku and Rowdy Star @TheDeverakonda combination is very much on.

#Sukumar-VijayDeverakonda film is only going to GET BIGGER," tweeted Falcon, urging everyone to not believe in the unwanted rumours.

"As per the schedule, Sukumar and Vijay film will hit the sets and this film will



only get bigger," said Falcon.

Currently Vijay Deverakonda is doing pan-India film *Liger* while Sukumar is doing *Pushpa* will Stylish Star Allu Arjun.

Once both Vijay and Sukumar wrap up their commitments, this combination will go floors.



Sam's generous gift to auto-driver

Samantha wowed people with her generosity once again by helping a female auto driver Kavitha. The actress gifted her an expensive car and helped her to run a cab service.

We all know that Samantha started her

own NGO, Pratyusha Support in 2012, which provides medical support to poor women and underprivileged children.

Recently, the *Majili* actress came out in support of a female auto driver named Kavitha, by gifting her an expensive car worth Rs 12.5 lakh to help her start her own cab service. Kavitha visited the

sets of Samantha's talk show earlier this year and revealed that she was a victim of domestic violence.

She is an auto driver who ekes out a living driving an auto from Miyapur to Bachupally. When Samantha came to know how Kavitha is struggling, she promised to gift her a

car to help her run a cab service.

On the work front, Samantha will be seen playing the lead role in an upcoming film Gunasekhar's mythological drama *Shakunthalam* and she is also waiting for the release of the web show *The Family Man 2*.



Not worried if my films work or not, says Fahadh

Malayalam actor Fahadh Faasil who is making his Tollywood debut with *Pushpa* was recently seen in *Joji* and the actor's performance is being appreciated since it dropped recently on Amazon Prime Video. The National Award-winning actor says he is never worried about the reactions his films might receive.

"I am not worried about my films working or not. When it doesn't work it hurts, but for me it's the process which is exciting, to identify a film and work on it.

You like an idea, you go to the shoot and then you improvise and finish shooting, and your fight is whether you have done justice to what you initially conceived. It is a constant fight," Fahadh

tells. The actor, who made his presence felt in films like *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum*, *Bangalore Days*, and *Kumbalangi Nights*, says he is always thinking about how to make his work be better.

"Even when your film works, you think that there are so many things you could have done and there are so many things that you missed out on.

This process is never complete, and I am in love with the process, which you are exploring. You are dealing with human emotions, you are trying to understand people better. I like love this aspect of my job and I want to do this as long as I can," he says.

So what are the qualities he looks for in a script? "I want it to be as real as looking out of the window. I need that connection and need to believe that it



happened somewhere, and to approach it honestly. What I have

constantly tried to do is to do real stuff," says the actor.