



### UP FOR GRABS

Actor Parineeti Chopra has shared what one has to do to become her best fan

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### NO TRADE WITH INDIA: IMRAN

The Cabinet headed by PM Imran Khan rejected the proposal of a high-powered committee to import cotton from India

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Odisha shuttler Pramod Bhagat enters finals of SL3 men's singles and men's doubles at Dubai Para Badminton meet

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# 3 BJP MLAs suspended

The MLAs, Jaynarayan Mishra, Bishnu Charan Sethi and Mohan Charan Majhi, were suspended for hurling shoes and headphones at the Speaker's podium

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** Three senior BJP MLAs have been suspended from the ongoing Budget session for hurling shoes and headphones at Speaker Surjya Narayan Patro's podium during the House proceedings Saturday.

The suspended legislators are Opposition chief whip Mohan Charan Majhi, deputy Leader of Opposition Bishnu Charan Sethi and senior BJP member Jayanarayan Mishra. The Speaker suspended the three leaders after examining the video footage.

The House Saturday witnessed ugly scenes as BJP MLAs hurled shoes, earphones and papers at the Speaker's podium during the proceedings. One of them also threw dustbin inside the House.

As the Speaker rejected an adjournment motion brought by Congress members on the mining issue, both BJP and Congress members alleged that the Speaker doesn't want to conduct any debate on the mining issue in the House. If the Speaker has any objection on the notice why did he not clarify it earlier, the Opposition leaders questioned.

Soon, BJP and Congress members rushed to the well of the House and created ruckus. Unable to run the House, the Speaker called an all-party meeting and later allowed debate on passing of the Odisha Lokayukta (Amendment) Bill and the Societies Registration (Odisha Amendment) Bill.



Jayanarayan Mishra



Bishnu Charan Sethi



Mohan Charan Majhi

Meanwhile, BJP members again went to the well and hurled two shoes, papers and three headphones towards the Speaker's podium. Hence, both the Bills were passed in the House without the participation of Opposition members. Following this, the House was adjourned till 4 pm.

As soon as the post-lunch session started, many Treasury bench members and Parliamentary Affairs Minister BK Arukha condemned the action of the Opposition and demanded exemplary action against the BJP members for insulting the chair and the House.

"During my 26 years as a member of the House, I have never witnessed such an unfortunate incident. Strong punishment should be given for such act," Arukha said.

Senior BJD legislator PK Deb de-

manded suspension of the BJP members while another member from BJD, Kishore Mohanty said, "It is the prerogative of the Speaker to take decision on which adjournment motion will be accepted or not. No one can challenge him." Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Narasingha Mishra said, "What has happened in the House is really unprecedented, undesirable and un-called for. I express my displeasure over the incident."

However, another senior Congress member Santosh Singh Saluja termed it as a trivial incident and said he is feels sorry for the untoward incident. "But you should not give much importance to the incident," he told the Speaker.

After hearing the members, the Speaker adjourned the proceedings and conveyed an all-party meeting to

watch the video footage of the incident. After the meeting, government chief whip Pramila Mallick moved a motion to suspend the three MLAs, which was adopted. Later, the Speaker announced that the three MLAs have been suspended till the end of the ongoing Budget session. He also requested them to leave the House immediately. However, within next two hours, the House was adjourned sine die, five working days ahead of schedule.

Till the time of writing this report, BJP members are on an "overnight" dharna near the Mahatma Gandhi's statue on the Assembly premises to protest the suspension order of the Speaker. Congress members too staged walk-out protesting against the non-acceptance of their adjournment motion. "I am not supporting the shoe hurl-

- Trouble began soon after the Speaker rejected an adjournment motion brought by Congress members on the mining issue
- Speaker adjourned the House sine die five working days ahead of schedule
- The BJP members are staging an "overnight" dharna atnear the Mahatma Gandhi statue on the Assembly premises and plan to meet the Governor Monday

ing incident. We could beg apology for any such incident even as I am unaware that who were involved in the incident. But, the Speaker has curtailed all the constitutional guidelines today. As a Leader of Opposition, I was not allowed to speak. The Bills were passed arbitrarily amid heavy ruckus," Leader of Opposition Pradipta Naik told reporters outside the House.

Reacting to the suspension, Mohan Majhi said "I have not hurled shoes. Throwing headphone towards Speaker's podium is not a new incident in the House."

However, Mishra welcomed his suspension. "We are opposing injustice in the Assembly. If I am suspended for opposing injustice, I would welcome it. The Speaker did not allow any Opposition member, including Leader of Opposition, to speak during passage of the Bills, which is unconstitutional."

## Night curfew back in 10 dists



REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** In view of rising COVID-19 cases, the state government Saturday announced night curfew in 10 districts between 10 pm and 5 am from Monday.

"In the interest of the general public and to prevent transmission of infection, it is directed that night curfew will be in force in the districts of Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Bargarh, Balangir, Nuapada, Kalahandi, Nabarangpur, Koraput and Malkangiri from April 5 till further orders," said an order issued by Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra.

As per the order, all shops, commercial establishments, offices, institutions and movement of individuals will be restricted or prohibited between 10 pm and 5 am in these districts. Only essential activities will be allowed during the curfew period.

Collectors and Municipal Commissioners will issue orders for their respective jurisdictions for clamping restrictions under Section 144 of CrPC, and ensure strict compliance. Collectors may also impose any further restrictions or allow such ac-

tivities as felt appropriate considering the local situation, it says.

The government has, however, kept emergency services pertaining to health, electricity, police, fire service, water supply, telecom, railway and airport out of the purview of restrictions. Employees of the Information Technology and media houses have been exempted from the curfew restrictions. Home delivery services have been allowed to function during the curfew hours.

Odisha has been consistently reporting more than 400 new COVID-19 cases daily for the past two days. While 452 more people were found COVID positive Saturday 461 had tested positive Friday. The districts which share borders with Chhattisgarh are especially vulnerable to rapid rise in infections.

The highest – 77 – fresh cases were reported in Khurda district, while western Odisha districts such as Nuapada (71), Sundargarh (75), Kalahandi (29) and Bargarh (19) too had high caseloads. The spurt in infections is attributed to movement of infected people from Chhattisgarh.

### IRREGULAR by MANJUL



It is an insult. Phalke should have been given Thalaiva award.

## 5 jawans killed in encounter with Naxals in Ch'garh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Raipur, April 3:** Five security personnel were killed and a few others injured Saturday in an encounter with Naxals at a forest in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, a top police officer said. According to the police, some Maoists are also suspected to have been killed during the exchange of fire.

"The gunbattle broke out in Tarrem area (along Sukma and Bijapur border) when a joint team of security forces was out on an anti-Naxal operation," Chhattisgarh Director General of Police DM Awasthi said.

The personnel belonging to the CRPF's elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action unit (CoBRA), the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and the Special Task Force (STF) were involved in the operation, he said. "As per the preliminary information, five jawans were killed and a few others were injured in the gunfight," Awasthi said, adding that further details are awaited.

WEATHER			
	BHUB	CTK	
TEMP			
MAX	37.4°C	36.0°C	
MIN	26.0°C	25.4°C	
Humidity	83%	85%	Forecast
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	Partly cloudy sky

## Covid effect: Srimandir to remain closed on Sundays

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** In view of the rising number of COVID-19 cases, the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) issued fresh Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Saturday as per which the 12th century shrine will remain open for all days of the week except Sunday for public darshan.

There will be complete sanitization of the temple premises on every Sunday, officials said.

A meeting held with all stakeholders under the Chairmanship of SJTA chief Krishan Kumar had a detailed discussions on the implementation of guidelines laid down in the SOP.



"It was discussed that a number of suggestions have been received for making changes in the SOP in view of the increasing trend in number of COVID-19 cases," Kumar said, adding that the matter was also discussed in the Chhatisha Nijog (servitor bodies) March 23.

According to new SOP, the temple will remain open on all days of

the week except Sundays. This will be as per the schedule of Niti (ritual) on different days. The public darshan of Lords will start latest by 6 am unless notified.

There will be complete sanitization of the temple premises on every Sunday. Night time sanitization of the temple premises will be conducted twice a week after closure of the temple for public darshan, he said.

There should be strict enforcement for ensuring COVID appropriate behaviour by all concerned.

"The guidelines issued by the state government with respect to restrictions on persons coming from other states, shall be scrupulously followed," he said.

## Police officer killed in US Capitol attack

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

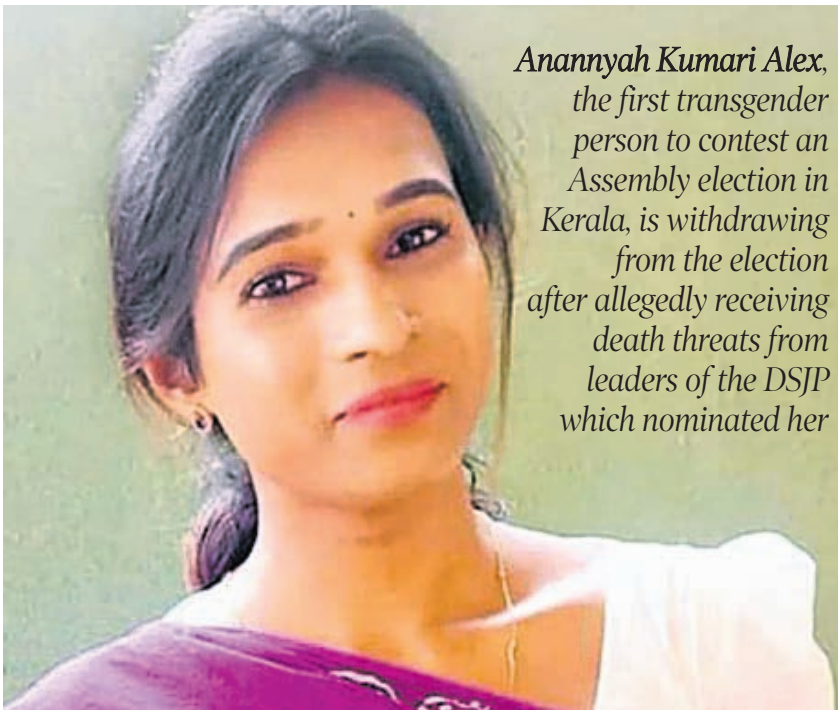
**New York, April 3:** A vehicle attack at the US Capitol killed a police officer and the alleged assailant was shot dead by law enforcement, as Washington is still reeling from the violent January 6 riots at the Congress.

The man who allegedly carried out the attack on Friday afternoon was identified as Noah Green, a 25-year-old man from Indiana, who according to his Facebook posts is an adherent of the Nation of Islam sect, which has been denounced by mainstream Muslims and has no connections to the faith despite the sect's name.

Acting Capitol Police Chief Yogananda Pittman said at a news conference that the car rammed two police officers at a Capitol checkpoint, killing one of them and injuring another.

The driver of the car came out wielding a knife and lunged at an officer who shot him, she said. The slain police officer has been identified by Capitol Police as 18-year veteran William "Billy" Evans.

# Kerala's first transgender candidate withdraws amid threats, harassment



Anannayh Kumari Alex, the first transgender person to contest an Assembly election in Kerala, is withdrawing from the election after allegedly receiving death threats from leaders of the DSJP which nominated her

AGENCIES

**Malappuram, April 3:** All set to be the first transgender person in Kerala to contest the Assembly election, Anannayh Kumari Alex is now withdrawing from the poll fray. Anannayh Kumari Alex alleged that she was mentally tortured and received death threats from leaders of the Democratic Social Justice Party (DSJP) which had nominated her.

Despite the fact that the last date for withdrawal of nomination papers has gone by, 28-year-old Alex has decided to end her election campaign. She was nominated from the Vengara constituency in the Malappuram district of Kerala against senior leader PK Kunhalikutty of the Indian Union Muslim League representing the United Democratic Front (UDF) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) candidate P Jiji representing the Left Democratic Front (LDF).

"The DSJP leaders forced me to speak poorly of UDF candidate PK Kunhalikutty and to criticise the LDF government," Alex said. "I was also forced by the party leaders to observe pardah during the election cam-

paign. The harassment came after I said that I would not do anything which would surrender my personality," she stated.

Alex continued, "I was used by DSJP party leaders. They had some plans and reasons for putting me in the front. But I didn't understand that earlier. I have a personality and my own opinions, and I am not ready to surrender that."

Anannayh Kumari Alex further alleged that DSJP leaders threatened to kill her when she opposed them. They portrayed me as a prostitute and insulted me, she claimed.

"I wanted to contest the election to ensure representation and equality for transgender people in Kerala. But it was the party that instructed me to contest from the Vengara constituency. It was not my decision initially," Alex said.

Anannayh Kumari Alex hails from Peruman in Kollam district of Kerala. She is Kerala's first transgender radio jockey. She is also a professional makeup artist and a news anchor employed at a private channel.

Kerala will go to the polls in a single phase April 6. The counting of the votes will be done May 2.

## Gangrape accused shot dead by cops

AGENCIES

**Meerut/New Delhi, April 3:** One of four men accused of the gangrape of a Class X student in western UP's Meerut has been shot by police as he and his accomplice attempted to escape custody while being taken to court. Police said the two accused - Lakhan and Vikas - were arrested earlier Saturday and were being taken to court when they snatched a pistol from one of the policemen guarding them and tried to flee. Police also said that in the encounter that the two were pinned down near a village. Lakhan opened fire, and was then shot in his leg by the cops' return fire.

"Today both accused were being taken to court, when they escaped by grabbing the gun of a Police Inspector. A combing operation was launched... the accused opened fire on police. We returned fire and Lakhan was shot in his leg," Keshav Kumar, the Superintendent of Police (Rural), said. Both accused have been re-captured, and Lakhan is being treated at a local hospital.

The young girl was allegedly gangraped by four men (two others are still on the run) Thursday.







# downtown

## Distancing helped tribals keep nCoV at bay: Naidu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** The tribal population in Odisha was largely untouched by the Covid-19 pandemic and their unique customary practices and traditions have helped them keep the infection at bay, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu said here Saturday while citing a study.

The report by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) noted that by habit, tribal people maintain a reasonable distance from one another when they walk, he said.

**We have great economic potential and can improve the human development index on all counts. We can fight hunger, disease, ignorance and every other evil that retard our growth**

M VENKAIAH NAIDU | VICE PRESIDENT

“Such safe distancing and hygiene norms, rooted in the tribal culture coupled with the natural food, have helped them stay safe during the pandemic,” Naidu said addressing the 50th convocation of Utkal University here.

Universities should focus on these positive aspects of tribal communities and include them in their curriculum, he said.

His comment came at a time when India Saturday recorded 89,129 new Covid-19 cases, the highest daily rise in around six-and-half-months, taking the nationwide tally of infections to over 1.23 crore.

Odisha is home to 62 tribal communities constituting 23 per cent of the state’s total population.

“The development and welfare of these tribal communities should be our priority. We should approach them with respect and sensitivity.



Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu, Governor Ganeshi Lal and other dignitaries at the 50th convocation of Utkal University in Bhubaneswar, Saturday

A paternalistic attitude is wrong. The truth is that we have a lot to learn from tribal communities who live a simple life in harmony with nature,” the Vice President said.

He also urged institutions like Utkal University to take up research on issues faced by tribal people and actively contribute to policy formation for their development and well-being.

Naidu also focused on the management of natural disasters that the coastal state faces regularly.

“You have seen regular occurrence of cyclones, floods and droughts in the state. Therefore, it is imperative to make disaster management an integral part of our education from the early days. This would prepare us better to face any such calamity in future. I hope Utkal University will take a lead in this regard,” he said.

Naidu, while asking students to be sensitive to the needs of the excluded, said that discipline, hon-

esty and hard work are the keys to success in any field, including public life.

“We have great economic potential and can improve the human development index on all counts. We can fight hunger, disease, ignorance and every other evil that retard our growth,” he remarked.

Talking about the rich culture and history of Odisha, the Vice President said the great land of Kalinga taught lesson of peace to Emperor Ashoka.

He also lauded the daring seafaring merchants of Kalinga, who established trade links with various countries.

“I want you (students) to take inspiration from their stories and imbibe the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation. Our universities and educational institutions also have an important role in this. They should equip students with requisite skills so that they can emerge as job creators, not mere job seekers,” he added.

## Capital city has 69 dreaded criminals

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** Habitual offenders engaged in various heinous criminal activities always give the police sleepless nights. It is considered the most important duty of a cop to keep strict vigil on these notorious criminals and thwart activities detrimental to peace and tranquility of an area.

The officers at police stations are supposed to send a list of such criminals in their area to the district superintendents of police and DCPs. According to information available through RTI, the city has around 69 such notorious criminals under various police limits.

The criminals who were involved in a number of cases related to the Arms Act, robbery, murder, or any property offence under the jurisdictions of various police stations

in the city, other districts or outside state are always under the scanner of the police.

Nayapalli police has sent the name of five such dreaded criminals to the DCP during the last couple of years. Four more come from Airfield police. The Khandagiri police recorded 14 such criminals, highest in the city. Similarly, 10 criminals have been mentioned as most wanted by the Jatni police.

Likewise, Sahid Nagar police sent names of eight dreaded criminals involved in various serious and heinous crimes under its jurisdiction.

Speaking to **Orissa POST**, DCP Umashankar Dash said, “We have been leaving no stone unturned to check the illegal activities of dreaded criminals who were arrested or are still at large.”

**We have been leaving no stone unturned to check illegal activities of dreaded criminals who were arrested or are still at large**

UMASHANKAR DASH | DCP, BHUBANESWAR

## FOREST FIRE



Fire brigade personnel dousing flames that engulfed a cashew forest at Konark in Puri district, Saturday. At least a hundred cashew trees were gutted

OP PHOTO

## FRBM, Lokayukta Amendment Bills passed

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** The Assembly Saturday passed six bills including the Odisha Lokayukta Amendment Bill on the last day of the session. The amendment was made to the Odisha Lokayukta Act, 2014 to allow re-appointment of the chairperson and members of the panel.

Now, after completion of the tenure, the chairperson and members of the Odisha Lokayukta can get re-appointed in any other state. In the original Act, the government has restricted re-appointment of the chairperson and members across the country.

Similarly, the House passed a Bill to amend Odisha Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2005 to allow the state government to raise the level of fiscal deficit by another 2 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP).

As per the amendment, additional 2 per cent fiscal deficit includes unconditional borrowing of 0.5 per cent of GSDP and another 0.5 per cent bonus for completion of



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The House passed a Bill to amend Odisha Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2005 to allow the state government to raise the level of fiscal deficit by another 2 per cent of the GSDP

Amendment to the Biju Patnaik University of Technology (BPUT) Act was also passed in the House to ensure its smooth functioning and achieve academic excellence

at least three of state-specific reforms. The balance 1 per cent depends on the implementation of four sectoral reforms, each carrying weightage of 0.25 per cent. The decision would give an additional leeway to the state government to go for higher borrowing for meeting its rising capital needs, sources

said. Similarly, amendment of the Biju Patnaik University of Technology (BPUT) Act was also passed in the House to ensure its smooth functioning and achieve academic excellence.

As per the amendment, term of office of the vice-chancellor of BPUT has been fixed for four years

instead of the current five years. Also, designation of professor, reader and lecturer will be re-designated as professor, associate professor and assistant professor in line with all-India pattern.

An OAS officer, not below the rank of joint secretary, will now be appointed as registrar of BPUT to ensure better and efficient management of the university. Similarly, an Odisha Finance Service officer will be appointed as finance officer of BPUT. The move is seen as an attempt by the state government to have control in day-to-day university affairs.

Annual report of the university will be tabled in the Assembly while the vice-chancellor has been authorised to constitute selection committee for recruitment of teaching and non-teaching posts.

Other Bills passed in the Assembly include Xavier University Odisha (Amendment) Bill, Odisha Advocates’ Welfare Fund (Amendment) Bill and Societies Registration (Odisha Amendment) Bill. All the five bills were passed without any participation of the Opposition BJP and Congress.

## STF seeks 5-day remand for leopard skin smugglers

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** The Special Task Force (STF) has sought the permission of the Khurda sessions court here for remand of the leopard skin smugglers arrested recently from Bolagarh area in Khurda.

The STF sought the court’s approval for remand to unearth the possible interstate link to the illegal trade of wildlife parts. Two criminals, Sudhira Behera and Subash Chandra Behera, were arrested from near the block office of Bolagarh on the intervening night of Thursday and Friday.

Sources claimed that the STF is likely to request the Maharashtra Police to nab the kingpin reportedly

operating the wildlife crime racket from there. The accused duo reportedly revealed the fact before the STF sleuths during initial interrogation.

The task force also released a mobile phone number (9439263646) urging the citizens to share information related to wildlife crimes in their locality with the police.

STF, the specialised wing of state police dealing with organized crime, has seized 12 leopard skins, six elephant tusks and two deer hide during the last one year. The sleuths have also rescued two live pangolins and 5 kg pangolin scales from the poachers. During the above period, as many as 24 wildlife criminals have been arrested under 13 cases.



















### BHARAT PLYWOODS

COLLEGE SQUARE, CUTTACK- 753003, PH.- 0671-2200164

## Fancy numbers a revenue booster

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** The state government, Saturday, reported a two-fold rise in revenue through sale of fancy and preferred vehicle registration numbers in past six months, with total earning standing at Rs 11.24 crore.

Taking to Twitter, the State Transport Authority (STA) stated that its revenue, which stood Rs 6 crore between October 2019 and March 2020, almost doubled during the same period of 2020-21. It also mentioned that while revenue from auctioning of fancy numbers was Rs 1.18 crore, income from advance booking of numbers was Rs 10.06 crore.

“After the introduction of auto-assignment of registration number, 11,543 owners opted for booking their choice number which was only 5,562 during the same period of last financial year. Through this, RTO Bhubaneswar-1 collected the highest revenue of Rs 2.81 crore. This was followed by RTO



PIC FOR REPRESENTATION

A total of 11,543 owners opted for booking their choice number

RTO Bhubaneswar-1 collected the highest revenue of ₹2.81 crore followed by RTO Cuttack (1.23 Cr).

The number OD-02 XX 0001 fetched the highest price of ₹ 1.75 lakh

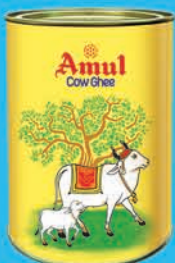
Cuttack (Rs 1.23 cr). Meanwhile, the number OD-02 XX 0001 fetched the highest price of Rs 1.75 lakh,” the STA said.

The STA had introduced dealer point automation from October 6, 2020, making Odisha the first state in country to

introduce paperless and contactless vehicle registration by introducing document upload through digital signature of the dealer.

Earlier the registration process used to take 5 to 7 days.

**Amul**



**Cow Ghee**  
1 L | ₹ 515\*



**Cow Ghee**  
1 L | ₹ 500\*



**Cow Ghee**  
40 mL | ₹ 20\*



**Cow Ghee**  
500 mL | ₹ 260\*



**Cow Ghee**  
200 mL | ₹ 111\*



**Cow Ghee**  
1 L | ₹ 515\*



**Brown Ghee**  
500 mL | ₹ 285\*



**Brown Ghee**  
200 mL | ₹ 120\*

11560564



# ₹1,066Cr revenue under-assessed: CAG

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) claimed, in its report tabled in the Assembly Saturday, claimed that revenue to the tune of ₹1,066.28 crore were under assessed/short levied or lost in 2018-19 fiscal.

The audit report stated that the test checks of 170 out of the 352 units under departments dealing with VAT, entry tax, GST, excise duty, stamp duty, registration fees, motor vehicle Tax and other non-tax receipts for 2018-19 were complete.

“Test check of records of tax and non-tax receipts revealed under-assessment/ short levy/ loss of revenue aggregating to ₹1,066.28 crore in 51,182 cases in 2018-19,” the report said.

“Irregular expenditure/payment amounting to ₹74.21 crore in 207 cases were detected. The departments concerned accepted irregularities of ₹0.31 crore in 149 cases pointed out in 2018-19. An amount of ₹0.37 crore was realised in four cases pertaining to audit findings of previous years,” the report added.

The CAG report also said that the assessing authority failed to apply appropriate provisions of the Odisha Value Added Act which resulted in short levy of penalty worth ₹446.74 lakh.

The report tried to pick holes in the planning and expenditures in the Biju Gaon Gadi Yojana (BGGY) scheme. According to the report,



## CLOSE SCRUTINY

TEST CHECK OF RECORDS OF TAX AND NON-TAX RECEIPTS REVEALED UNDER-ASSESSMENT/ SHORT LEVY/ LOSS OF REVENUE AGGREGATING TO ₹1,066.28 CRORE IN 51,182 CASES IN 2018-19

IRREGULAR EXPENDITURE/PAYMENT AMOUNTING TO ₹74.21 CRORE IN 207 CASES WERE DETECTED

THE REPORT SAID THAT THE ASSESSING AUTHORITY FAILED TO APPLY APPROPRIATE PROVISIONS OF THE ODISHA VALUE ADDED ACT WHICH RESULTED IN SHORT LEVY OF PENALTY WORTH ₹446.74 LAKH

## Auditor picks holes in drug supply, procurement

**BHUBANESWAR:** The CAG report on Social and General Sector claimed several irregularities in the drug procurement and supply between 2016 and 2019.

The reported found several lapses on the part of Odisha State Medical Corporation Limited (OSMCL) in discharging its duties. The audit report said that due to shortage of drug supply, the health institutions were bound to procure drugs locally at exorbitant prices, leading to loss to the exchequer.

“There was inordinate delay of five and seven months in finalisation of annual procurement plans for drugs and medical consumables and six to 17 months in respect of

**The report claimed that transferring pensions to the accounts of dead persons and apathy of panchayati raj institutions led to losses**

Equipment, Instrument and Furniture (EIF). Delay in finalisation of procurement plan impacted the procurement process and supply of drugs and medical consumables to health institutions,” the report said.

“Out of 3,471 Purchase Orders

(POs) placed for supply of drugs and medical consumables, 791 (23 per cent) POs were partially executed and 252 (7 per cent) POs were not executed at all, which led to less supply of drugs and consumables to the health institutions,” the report said.

The report also said, “Deficiencies in stock management led to expiry of 349 kinds of drugs valued at ₹4.18 crore during April 2017 to May 2019. Expiry of drugs was due to ineffective monitoring of indents, distribution, consumption, stock position of drugs through e-Niramaya software,” the report said.

“Short supply of drugs and medical consumables by OSMCL led to the health institutions procuring

detailed audit revealed several deficiencies in the programme such as inefficient planning, gaps in co-ordination, non-consideration of passenger footfall and inadequate incentives for operators that contributed towards lack of achievement of physical and financial targets under the scheme.

The report also talked about not imposing required royalty in the mining sector: “Royalty worth ₹124.26 crore was short-levied and contribution towards National Mineral Exploration Trust of ₹2.49 crore and District Mineral Foundation fund of ₹37.28 crore on sized coal was short realized,” the report said.

these items locally incurring extra expenditure. During 2018-19, test checked health institutions had incurred extra expenditure of ₹98.12 lakh (44 per cent) in procuring medicines worth ₹2.24 crore,” the report said.

The report also claimed that paying pensions in the accounts of dead persons and apathy of panchayati raj institutions led to losses. “Disbursement of old age pension in the name of dead beneficiaries, retention of funds by the Panchayat Extension Officers for years without refunding and manipulation of records resulted in suspected misappropriation of government money of ₹10.72 lakh.”

# 10 candidates in fray for Pipli bypoll

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Saturday said that a total of 10 candidates are into the electoral fray who will tussle to grab the MLA seat of the Pipli constituency.

CEO Sushil Kumar Lohani in his interaction with media Saturday said that a total of 15 candidates had filed their nominations for election. While applications of three were rejected during scrutiny, two more withdrew their nominations. He also added that besides candidates from BJD, BJP and the Congress, four other parties and three independent candidates are now all set to fight for the bypoll.

The details claimed that there are around 2,29,998 voters who are eligible to cast their votes in the election. This included 1,19,206 male 1,10,790 female and 2 trans-gender voters.

Lohani said that a total of 1,740 polling personnel are now engaged in the bypoll and their maiden round of training has already concluded. Their first round of vaccination was also done during their training classes.

The CEO said that it has identified a total of 102 critical polling stations while it has also worked out to ensure web casting of a total of 174 polling booths which is around 50 percent of the total booths in



There are around 1,740 polling personnel are now engaged in the bypoll election. This includes 1,19,206 male 1,10,790 female and 2 trans-gender voters

**A total of 348 wheel chairs have also been arranged for the voters. For the blind voters, Braille ballot papers have also been arranged**

the constituency. The election watchdog has also ensured 102 vehicles for movement of differently able voters from their homes to the polling booths. These differently able voters would also be given certificates for availing such facilities. “A total of 348 wheel chairs have also been arranged for the voters. For the blind voters, Braille ballot papers have also been arranged,” the CEO said. Postal ballot voting will also be allowed for people above the age of 80 years, differently abled and Covid-19 infected or suspected voters.

## PROMOTING HYGIENE



A cultural event underway at the weekly cleanliness drive on the Grand Road in Puri, Saturday

OP PHOTO

# 452 new cases up nCoV tally to 3,42,224

PNN/ AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** Odisha's Covid-19 tally mounted to 3, 42, 224 Saturday as 452 more people tested positive for the infection, a Health and Family Welfare department official said.

As many as 267 new cases were reported in quarantine centres, while 185 infections were detected during contact tracing, he said.

Khurda district, under which Bhubaneswar falls, reported the highest number of new cases at 77 followed by Sundargarh (75) and Nuapada (71).

The state's coronavirus death toll remained unchanged at 1,921 as no fresh fatality was reported since March 30, while 53 patients have died due to comorbidities to date. Odisha now has 2, 820 active cases, while 3, 37, 430 people have recovered from the disease thus far.

The state has so far tested over 91 lakh samples for Covid-19, including 26,700 Friday, while the state's positivity rate stands at 3.75 per cent, he said.

The state government is worried over a number of cases being reported in districts bordering Chhattisgarh, the official said.

While Nuapada reported 71 new cases, Kalahandi registered 29 fresh infections and Bargarh 19.

Odisha's Minister of State, Home, D S Mishra said the districts bordering Chhattisgarh are reporting a high number of cases because many people from these areas had last month attended a mega cricket tournament in Raipur.



People above 45 years queuing up at a Covid-19 vaccination centre at the Capital Hospital in Bhubaneswar, Saturday

The district administrations are keeping a close watch on the people visiting Chhattisgarh, he said. The state government has inoculated over 2.5 lakh people Friday, 50,000 more than the daily target. A total of 1,70,069 of the 2,52,080 beneficiaries were aged above 45.

“It is a good sign that people are coming forward to get inoculated. We are ready with the necessary infrastructure and plan to vaccinate 3 lakh people every day once the required number of doses are

available. “We have urged the Centre for more doses so that we can plan the sessions 15 days in advance,” Additional Chief Secretary, Health and Family Welfare, P K Mohapatra said.

## CMC makes norms stringent amid Covid resurge

### IN A NUTSHELL

Only 100 people can gather in a wedding ceremony while 50 are allowed to participate in the funeral-related ceremonies

No organisation or educational institution is permitted to hold annual functions

Any violation will invite penalties up to ₹50,000 and imprisonment of around two years

**CUTTACK:** The Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC) Saturday issued a new set of guidelines for wedding and other ceremonies in the wake of a steep rise in Covid-19 cases.

As per the new guidelines, only 100 people can gather in a wedding ceremony while 50 are allowed to participate in the funeral-related ceremonies.

“It is mandatory to follow Covid-19 norms at wedding and other ceremonies. The new guidelines will be effective from April 6,” said the civic body. The new guidelines also put restrictions on the organisation of conferences and any other

congregations under the territorial jurisdiction of the CMC.

“No organisation or educational institution is permitted to hold an-

nual functions. This apart, restrictions have been put on the organisation of centenary, golden and silver jubilee celebrations,” said a CMC official.

Outfits are bound to seek prior permission from the CMC for holding any gathering or event. Taking into account all aspects, the civic body may allow outfits and organisations to organise events with maximum of 100 people, said the official.

“Any violation of the new guidelines will invite penalties up to ₹50,000 and imprisonment of around two years,” said CMC secretary Latashree Bagh.

## Shops in City fined for flouting Covid norms

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Saturday carried out a Covid enforcement drive at Infocity's Khao Gali area and Patia in North Zone.

During the enforcement, 99 Hints bar was closed and ₹5,000 fine was collected from 99 North Restaurant for violation of Covid guidelines. In Khao Gali, one food van was sealed

and ₹13,500 fine collected from other food shops for non usage of mask. Near KIMS, one tea shop ‘Tapri Time’ was also shut as heavy crowding was observed.

Enforcement was carried out by BMC additional commissioner Laxmikant Sethi, ZDC North Purandar Nanda and Asst Commissioner, Enforcement, Lilan Prasad Sahu. Pramod Jena, Harihar Rout, Srikanth Mohanty and Prasant Pradhan were also part of team,

# 27 years after formation, Angul still reels under problems

*Due to rapid industrialization, people residing in several areas under Banarpal block have been losing their land. But these people are yet to get compensations as they were promised*

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Angul, April 3:** Angul district is celebrating completion of 27 years of being announced as a separate district. Angul was accorded the district status April 1, 1993. Over the years, the district has achieved a lot but is still lagging behind in several fields.

The district is home to many natural resources. Some nationalised companies like Nalco, NTPC and MCL have played a pivotal role in improving the district's financial condition. As regards its contribution to the state's exchequer, the district has been at the top of the list.

The district has made tremendous progress in the field of agri-

culture. The farmers have been in spotlight for cultivating cash crops like capsicum and broccoli. Similarly, the infrastructure of the district's education, health and tourism is getting stronger. While students from this district have been doing well in examinations for last couple of years, modernization of health facilities is on. And Satkosia's rich biodiversity has been attracting tourists from far and away.

But according to the people of the district, the district's progress could have been more if problems like unemployment, pollution, irrigation, drinking water, land acquisition, displacement, and medical vacancies had been addressed



properly. According to president, Jeevan, Jibika O Krushi Jami Suraksha Committee, Kishorenagar, Dinabandhu Pradhan, 16 years have passed since the state government

conducted the ground breaking ceremony of Sureswari Irrigation Project at Kishorenagar. The project has not progressed even an inch. Had it been completed, it could have

irrigated 1,965 acres of farmland. The government signed an MoU for a power plant here in 2010 and the project has since been neglected. Similarly, president, Talcher Suraksha Manch, Muralidhar Sahoo said the air pollution problem in Talcher area is alarmingly increasing, resulting in people suffering from respiratory diseases. Neither the administration nor the authorities of the mines and factories are taking any steps to improve the situation. People residing in Kaniha area are suffering the same problem.

Describing the problems of those who lost their land to various developmental projects, social activist Bauribandhu Sahu said due to rapid industrialization, people residing in several areas under Banarpal block have been losing their land. But these people are yet to get com-

pensations as they were promised.

The district headquarters hospital (DHH) and all the CHCs and PHCs have endless problems. They have a shortage of doctors and paramedical staff. A trauma care centre and burn unit are yet to be made functional in the DHH. At the same time, the demands for transforming the DHH into a super specialty hospital and then to a medical college have been raised but they are falling on deaf ears.

When contacted, District Collector Siddharth Shankar Swain said the district is already on the path of development. Many projects have been chalked out. Works on some have started. Once these projects are completed, the district would emerge as an example for others. The administration is laying emphasis on tourism, health, education, agriculture and sports.

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# Super specialty healthcare at VIMSAR soon

AUTHORITIES HAVE SET OUT TO COMPLETE INFRASTRUCTURE WORK IN NEXT SIX MONTHS

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sambalpur, April 3:** Super specialty healthcare services will be launched soon at VIMSAR in Sambalpur. The hospital authorities have set a target to complete the necessary infrastructure within next six months.

On the other hand, various out-fits and local intellectuals alleged that just completing the infrastructure will not ensure right healthcare services to people.

"Before completion of the building work for the super specialty services, the state government should approve all posts of doctors, medical and paramedical staff. Such a proposal was placed before the general body meeting of the VIMSAR," they observed.

According to reports, the super specialty medical requires a professor, an associate professor, an assistant professor and a senior resident doctor.

Besides, there is a need for an ICU, an anesthesia professor for an



operation theatre. Meanwhile, the VIMSAR authorities have requested the state government to fill up these posts.

Former executive member of VIMSAR, Dr Bikash Hota said if the state government does not fill up the posts before the completion of the super specialty building, it will create hurdles in the healthcare.

It may be noted here that a few days ago, Chief Minister Naveen

Patnaik approved various posts at the MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur. It is expected that various posts in the VIMSAR will be approved soon.

As regards the issue, VIMSAR Director Professor Lalit Meher said a letter has been sent to the state government for approval of the posts in VIMSAR.

VIMSAR assumes importance in the entire western Odisha and

**Healthy move**

VIMSAR assumes importance for people of western Odisha and some neighbouring states as most of them depend on its healthcare services

Former executive member of VIMSAR, Dr Bikash Hota said if the state government does not fill up the posts before the completion of the super specialty building, it will create hurdles in the healthcare

some neighbouring states as most people in this region are dependent on its healthcare services.

The state government estimated the cost of its infrastructure and medical implements at ₹150 crore. By March, about 80 percent of the building work has been completed. The super specialty facility will be equipped with five new departments. The building will have 58 ICUs and 180 general beds.

## Naveen inaugurates bridge in Ganjam

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar/Aska, April 3:** Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik inaugurated an important bridge in Aska area of Ganjam district Saturday.

According to the CM's Office, the new bridge was constructed in place of two dilapidated bridges of the British era. The new bridge will connect Aska with several important destinations of Ganjam.

The distance from Aska, Bhanjanagar, Chhatrapur including many other places of the district to Bhubaneswar would be minimised.

The new bridge will benefit around 3,50,000 locals by providing better road communication. "Ganjam is a developed district and a business centre of the state. Denizens in the district have earned a reputation for their hard work. I hope, the new bridge will bring in better opportunities for business, tourism and other sectors," CM Patnaik said.

"Better infrastructure is vital for all-round development of a place. Hence, my government has been dedicatedly working for infra development in Odisha. Construction of a number of bridges and laying of roads have brought visible development. World-class infrastructure is being developed now in the fields of tourism and sports," the CM added.

New roads will be laid across the state this year. Accordingly, 30 new bridges will be constructed. Around ₹2,300 crore will be spent. An additional ₹1,000 crore under BSY will be spent for new bridges.

## Neighbours disrobe woman in public

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Kendrapara, April 3:** Tension flared up in a village under Nikirai police limits in this district after a woman was stripped by her neighbours and brutally assaulted over a dispute, Saturday.

The matter came to the fore after a video of the barbaric act captured in mobile phones by some villagers went viral on social networking sites. The clip depicts the villagers disrobing the woman and mercilessly kicking and punching her. The villagers were also seen in the video assaulting her with lathis.

The incident is the fallout of a longstanding dispute of the woman with her in-laws and neighbours. According to a preliminary report by the police, the woman of another village fell in love with a youth of the village and eventually married him.

However, her marriage turned sour as her in-laws started torturing her for dowry. Later, she filed a complaint with police and a case was lodged in a family court for hearing. Her in-laws fled the village while she continued to live in the house. Her in-laws allegedly tried to drive her out of the house and sought the help of neighbours. The neighbours Saturday asked her to vacate the house but disrobed and assaulted her when she refused to oblige, Nikirai IIC Kabuli Barik said.

The woman screamed for help but none responded to her cries. Later, the victim and her perpetrators filed separate complaints at Nikirai police station. Police registered two separate cases and launched an investigation.

## FESTIVAL OF PENANCE



Servitors performing rituals as the famous Chadak Mela of Chandaneswar Mahadev in Bhograi of Balasore district kick-starts sans devotees amid Covid-19 restrictions, Saturday

## Silk City requires medical varsity: Ganjam BJD chief

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, April 3:** The demand for establishment of a medical science university in the state is slowly gaining ground with the ruling BJD making a strong pitch for the project in the Silk City, a report said. Sources said the state government has planned a medical university in the state and made an announcement in the State Assembly to this effect. The decision of the Chief Minister has been welcomed in various quarters including former Berhampur MLA-cum- BJD's Ganjam district president Ramesh Chandra Chyau Patnaik.

While welcoming the decision, Patnaik said the establishment of a medical science university should be made in Berhampur which has all the necessary infrastructure.

Speaking to **Orissa POST**, Chyau Patnaik said the number of medical colleges in the state affiliated to various universities has increased during the rule of the BJD government. However, the decision for establishment of a university especially for medical studies is a historic decision.

He said Berhampur is an ideal place for establishment of a med-

ical university as the MKCG Medical College and Hospital in the city, one of the premier medical colleges and hospital in the state is a very old institution and has the necessary infrastructure. Several big buildings have come up on the hospital premises at several hundred crores but many of them are lying vacant and unused.

The hospital has all the facilities for medical studies while a graduate nursing college also exists on its premises. Notably, at an extended executive committee meeting of the district BJD unit, a political resolution was adopted where a demand was made to give autonomous status to MKCG Medical College and Hospital or to declare it as a deemed university, June 22, 2018.

A demand was also made to fill up all vacant posts of doctors and technicians in the medical college and hospital. The proposal has been sent to the Chief Minister for his appraisal. Since then three years have passed but the demand is yet to be realised, he said. In this context, the state government which decided in favour of a medical science university should establish the institution in the Silk City.

## Central team visits Sundargarh to review infra for state's 2nd AIIMS



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sundargarh, April 3:** The prospect of Odisha having a second AIIMS has brightened up as a central team visited the Sundargarh Medical College and Hospital, Saturday.

According to a source, the central team had reached the district Friday and spent the night at a guest house of the NTPC at Darlipali.

The technical team visited Sundargarh Medical College and Hospital Saturday morning to review the available infrastructure.

## Girl alleges ragging by seniors in homoeopathy college

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sambalpur, April 3:** A female student of the Odisha Medical College of Homoeopathy and Research (OMCHR) in Sambalpur has brought serious allegations of ragging against her seniors. The incident took place March 31 but came to the fore Saturday morning.

Meanwhile, Health and Family Welfare Minister Naba Kishore Das has ordered an inquiry into the incident. Das in his letter to the Additional Chief Secretary, Health, has sought a report within three days and take action.

According to sources, the victim alleged that five senior students mentally tortured and harassed her. The girl complained in writing in this regard to the National Anti-Ragging Cell in New Delhi.

Swinging to action, the anti-ragging cell has directed the OMCHR authorities to initiate a probe and submit a report.

A team of anti-ragging squad of OMCHR has already initiated a probe following the direction of

## Health and Family Welfare Minister Naba Kishore Das has ordered an inquiry into the incident and sought a report in three days

the national cell, principal of the OMCHR professor Rajendra Kumar Singh expressed.

"The ragging incident came to the fore after they received a mail and a phone call from the New Delhi Anti-Ragging Cell April 1. Neither the hostel superintendent nor have we received any written or oral complaint of ragging from the student yet," Singh said.

"The incident took place in the girls' hostel and the complaint has been lodged against five students- 4 female students and 1 male student. We will complete the inquiry by today and the report will be submitted to the national anti-ragging authorities soon," the principal added.

## MAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT

## FOREST DEPT DIGS TRENCH AROUND SARISUA HILL

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Khaira, April 3:** In an attempt to ward off man-animal conflicts, the forest department has started digging a trench in the foothill of Sarisua hill under Khaira tehsil of Balasore district, a report said. A trench will be dug for two kilometers while a span of 200 metres has been dug.

Besides, the trench will create a hurdle for the mafia who have been plundering stone from the Sarisua hill over years.

Ramda, Bageipur, Baunsagadia, Kuturipal and Gavar have been witnessing elephant menace throughout the year.

The area was declared an eco-sensitive zone in 2017. Stone mining has posed a threat to flora and fauna in the area. The administration had closed down 107 stone mines in the hill.

## Health Minister Naba Kishore Das had written a letter to Union Health Minister for a second AIIMS at the Sundargarh Medical College and Hospital

proposal is under consideration in another state. In view of the health care requirements of Odisha, it is proposed that a second AIIMS may be considered for Western Odisha in the district of Sundargarh, it was stated.

As a CSR initiative, an MoU has been signed between the Odisha government and NTPC to establish a Medical College and Hospital. The construction of the project has been completed and the equipment procurement process is going on. The hospital is designed for 500 beds and the college will have 100 seats in MBBS.

It may be noted here that former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee laid the foundation stone of AIIMS Bhubaneswar July 15, 2003. It was established July 16, 2012.

# Forest set afire to make space for houses

SOME LOCAL YOUTHS IN SARASKANA AREA OF MAYURBHANJ HAVE BEEN SELLING FOREST LAND TO OUTSIDERS

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Saraskana, April 3:** Even as the state government and the forest department are worried over repeated forest fires in parts of the state, portions of Andhari forest under Deuli range in Mayurbhanj district were burnt to make space for houses, a report said.

According to the report, a fire was spotted inside Andhari forest in the daytime a few days ago. Later, a house was built at this place.

As fire has been sporadically breaking out in this forest, a large number of trees have been reduced to ashes. On the other hand, scared of fires, wild animals stray into human habitations, locals alleged.



This forest is close to NH-49 in Jharpokharia area. Locals alleged that burning forests has been turned into a commercial concern in the

area. What is most surprising is that some people sold parts of this gramya jungle to many people of West Bengal, Jharkhand and

## Though the forest department is aware of this development, no action has been taken in this direction, it was alleged

Mursidabad. They built houses and set up shops alongside the NH-49 and inside the forest.

Over last 10 years, some women in the name of forest protection started selling trees of the jungle and cleared the space. As villagers came to know about it, the forest protection committee comprising women were dis-

solved. Thereafter, some youths were roped in the committee.

Now, these youths are allegedly clearing trees and made plotting of the land. The forest land is being sold for ₹3 to ₹4 lakh per decimal. It was alleged that though the forest department is aware of this development, no action has been taken in this direction.

The tehsil authorities had served notices long ago, but no action is being taken. Forest officials said that land of the gramya jungle belongs to the tehsil administration, but trees belong to the forest department.

Local environmentalists are worried over such increasing encroachment of the forest land.

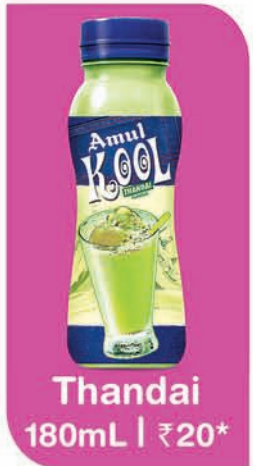
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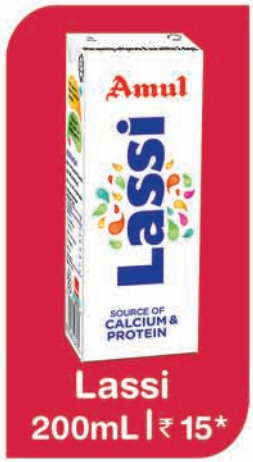
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If there comes a time when someone's livelihood has to be snatched, there is bound to be anguish. But if there is a dilemma on whether to save a life or a job, then it is important to give priority to life

**UDDHAV THACKERAY** | MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER

I need not advertise this as those bringing five-star hotel lunch to eat at the courtyard of a Dalit home are anti-Dalit, anti-backward caste and anti-minority in nature

**MAMATA BANERJEE** | WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER

Any sudden changes that disturbs the existing arrangements may jeopardise the procurement operations, thereby not only affecting the food security of the nation but also threatening the livelihood of millions of farmers, farm-workers and even traders

**AMARINDER SINGH** | PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER

## SHORT TAKES

### BJP leader shot dead

**Gorakhpur:** A 52-year-old local BJP leader, a contestant in the panchayat elections in Narayanpur in Uttar Pradesh, was shot dead while he was returning home after attending a public meeting, police said Saturday. Three people were detained following the killing of Brijesh Singh Friday night in the Moglaaha area. The fourth accused is at large, they said. Singh was shot around 11 pm and was rushed to the BRD Medical College, where doctors declared him dead, police said.

### Fire engulfs 700 huts

**Gurugram:** Some 700 huts were gutted in a massive blaze that broke out at in Gurugram's Nathupur village. The cause of the fire, which erupted in the intervening night of Friday and Saturday, is suspected to be electrical short-circuit. Of the 700 huts, 500 were completely gutted. Fire personnel evacuated residents from the huts and it took them about five hours to control the fire. No casualties or injuries have been reported. According to fire officials, they received a call of the incident at 2.08 am.

### LeT associates arrested in J&K

**Srinagar:** The Jammu and Kashmir police have solved a grenade throwing case and arrested two terrorist associates of LeT, officials said Saturday. Police said Dec 12, 2020 unknown terrorists hurled a hand grenade towards Police Post Bus Stand which missed the intended target and exploded outside gate of the police post, resulting in injuries to three civilians. Accordingly a case was registered by the police and investigation was set into motion.

### 12 govt offices default water tax

**Alibag (Maha):** Twelve government Institutions at Alibag in Maharashtra's Raigad district have not paid water tax worth Rs 40.54 lakh to the local civic body in the last six years, a top official said Saturday. Of them, the biggest defaulter is the Civil Hospital. Its outstanding water tax amount is Rs 36.68,800. Alibag Municipal Council president Prashant Naik said.



You had given 50 years to the Congress, 30 years to the communists and 10 years to the Trinamool Congress, I urge you to give five years to the BJP.. We will change the face of West Bengal

**YOGI ADITYANATH** | UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER

# Cut-money, Syndicate racket hindering Bengal's growth: PM



AGENCIES

**Kolkata, April 3:** Launching a scathing attack on the ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in particular, Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his second election rally Saturday at Sonarpur in South 24 Parganas district said that the cut-money culture and syndicate racket is hindering the growth of the state. Holding back-to-back rallies in Sonarpur and Haripal in Hooghly district, Modi said, the extortionists of Trinamool Congress hoarded the ration sent for the poor by the Centre. During Corona, the Centre sent 23 lakh metric tonnes paddy and one lakh metric tonnes pulses and for that the Centre had to pay nearly Rs 9,000 crore, but the Mamata Banerjee government didn't allow the Central benefit to reach you. They hoarded the ration. The as-

sistance sent to the state during Cyclone Amphan didn't reach. It was also looted.

Urging that a double-engine government can only provide all the Central benefits to the people of Bengal, Modi alleged that the ruling Trinamool Congress is hindering the growth of the state.

The Centre has developed 1,000 fast-track courts to give prompt justice to the women but it is not allowed here. The Centre provides free vaccination and Rs 1,000 for pregnant women but here the women are deprived of the benefit. The women don't get the benefits of Central loan facilities because they will have to give cut-money for that, the Prime Minister alleged.

Countering Mamata Banerjee's allegation against the partisan attitude of the Election Commission of India (ECI), Modi said, "Why are you so angry with the ECI and the security people? Are you angry

## Assam militants urged to join mainstream: PM

**Tamulpur:** Buoyed by a raft of peace agreements with underground outfits in the Northeast, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Saturday made a fervent appeal to militants in Assam who have not surrendered yet to return to the mainstream as they are needed to create an 'Atmanirbhar Assam'. Addressing an election rally here in Bodoland Territorial Region's (BTR) Baksa district, the prime minister said people of the state have rejected violence for development, peace, unity and stability. Accusing the Congress of encouraging violence, Modi said, "It is our responsibility to ensure the rehabilitation of those who have returned to the mainstream after years of struggle."

because they have not allowed you to give proxy votes? You should remember that 10 years before, they only gave you the chance to rule Bengal. You were happy then. Keep faith on the people."

Suggesting that Banerjee contesting from Nandigram is a big mistake, the Prime Minister said, "There are rumours (though I have not verified) inside the party that she might contest from another constituency. She will lose in Nandigram and if she loses from the second constituency also, the Trinamool Congress can never come to power."

## ASSAM EVM ROW

# Magisterial probe ordered, 3 arrested

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Guwahati/Silchar, April 3:** The Karimganj District Magistrate (DM) has ordered a magisterial inquiry and the police arrested three people in connection with the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) found in a BJP candidate wife's vehicle Thursday night, officials said Saturday.

A district official said that the Karimganj DM Anbamuthan MP (Repeat Anbamuthan MP) has ordered the magisterial inquiry and entrusted Additional District Magistrate Rajeshan Terang to conduct the probe and submit the report within three days.

Meanwhile, the police also arrested three people for attacking the private car in which the polling personnel along the polled EVM were travelling after the completion of the second phase of polling Thursday.

Three more people are also detained for questioning.

Two separate FIRs were also lodged with the police by the driver of the private car and polling personnel. A delegation of Congress and its ally All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) met the Karimganj District Superintendent of Police

Mayank Kumar and demanded the release of six people immediately.

The Election Commission Friday suspended the presiding officer, three other polling officials and an armed escort official and ordered re-polling at the Polling Station no 149 in Indira MV School under Ratabari (SC) assembly constituency after an EVM was found in a BJP candidate's wife's vehicle Thursday night.

"Although the seals of the EVM were found intact, it has nevertheless been decided to do a re-poll at the Indira MV School polling station as an added precautionary measure," the EC in a statement said Friday.

The statement had said that after the official car carrying the polled EVM machine to Karimganj broke down, the officials boarded a passing private car which was subsequently surrounded by a mob of about 50 people who started pelting stones at them.

The mob at Kanaishil (under Karimganj district) alleged that the EVM was being taken to be tampered with. The private car was owned by the wife of BJP candidate of the neighbouring Patharkandi constituency, Krishnendu Paul.

## SOLDIER TO RUN FROM KASHMIR TO KANYAKUMARI

Indian soldier Naik Velu P is all set to make his 30th birthday memorable as he left for a mission to enter his name in the Guinness Book of World Records by running from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, a distance of about 4,300 km, under 50 days



## FOR A CAUSE



Howrah Bridge illuminated in blue colour to create awareness on autism on the occasion of World Autism Awareness Day, in Kolkata

PTI PHOTO

# 4 astronauts to stay on busy training schedule

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Chennai, April 3:** The four Indian astronauts returned to India last month after completing their training in Russia and will undergo different kinds of training here, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief K Sivan said.

"They had landed in India March 28. The four astronauts will undergo space mission specific training in India," Sivan told IANS.

The four Indian astronauts were training since February 2020 at the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC) belonging to Glavkosmos which is a subsidiary of Russian space corporation Roscosmos.

According to Sivan, the four astronauts will continue to train till they board the Indian space module. The Rs 10,000 crore Indian human space flight mission is called Gaganyaan.

Queried about the training regime here, Sivan said, "The astronauts will have their physical fitness training that includes swimming, jogging. They will also have academic/theoretical classes as they have to understand the rocket, and the human space module."

"They will also be trained on simulators. The Gaganyaan module navigation terminals will be

simulated. The astronauts will be trained on various parameters that will be displayed on the terminals," he added.

The astronauts will later work on the Gaganyaan module as if they are flying.

"These apart, the astronauts will be trained on survival techniques so that they can survive in the sea as their landing module will land on the sea waters," Sivan said.

While the astronauts will be trained in Bengaluru and the survival techniques in Cochin, ISRO will carry out the engineering work related to Gaganyaan.

Glavkosmos had earlier said the four Indian astronauts were trained in abnormal descent module landing - in wooded and marshy areas in winter; on water surface, and in the steppe in summer.

"In June 2020, all Indian astronauts-elect passed training in short-term weightlessness mode aboard the IL-76MDK special laboratory aircraft, and in July, they were trained to lift aboard a helicopter while evacuating from the descent module landing point," Glavkosmos had said. The Indian fighter pilots were also trained in a centrifuge and in a hyperbaric chamber to prepare their organisms for sustaining spaceflight factors, such as G-force, hypoxia and pressure drops.



# What is driving mobile gaming amid the pandemic in India?

## FOR CONSUMERS TRYING TO DEAL WITH THE PROLONGED SOCIAL ISOLATION, ALONG WITH ALL THE ANXIETY AND AMBIGUITY OF THE LAST YEAR, MOBILE GAMING PROVIDED A CREATIVE OUTLET

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, April 3:** Amid the pandemic, especially the everything-from-home year, mobile gaming took off spectacularly in India. For consumers trying to deal with the prolonged social isolation, along with all the anxiety and ambiguity of the last year, mobile gaming provided a creative outlet.

From my vantage point, I know of loved ones and peers who took to mobile games more fervently during the past year. As we complete the pandemic anniversary, let us ponder over what is actually driving mobile gaming, and what does the future portend.

As smartphones continue to be the central nervous system of human lives, the dependence on phones for work, for learning, and most importantly, for unwinding

and socialising through gaming rose during the last year.

Much before the pandemic, mobile gaming was on the upswing, driven by the ubiquitous smartphones and the availability of low-cost data.

At CyberMedia Research (CMR), our ongoing research around gaming has thrown some interesting insights. For instance, mobile gaming in India is driven by an array of gamer personas, ranging from the serious to the hyper-casual gamers. The growth in mobile gaming was led not by serious gamers, but rather casual and hyper-casual gamers.

The democratisation of gaming can be traced to the smartphone usage. With smartphones, the need for dedicated gaming hardware devices is not felt. No consoles required. Additionally, mobile gaming apps evoke a sense of familiarity



with consumers. Think Puzzles. Or card games. With ease of access to such 'freemium' gaming apps online, more users than before, who typically do not identify themselves as 'gamers' have taken up gaming.

Our research points out the gam-

ing intents vary across consumer cohorts. For instance, serious gamers primarily play to 'relieve stress', while casual and hyper-casual gamers seek to have 'fun'. The choice of games is dictated by recommendations from friends and fam-

ily. Social networking and social messaging platforms are two of the prominent channels for consumer awareness around new games.

Today's gamers have, on an average, close to seven games installed on their mobile phones. Among these, there are at least four games that they play avidly. Interestingly, men prefer to unwind with mobile games in the early evening, while women mostly chose to play during late night. On an average, the duration of gaming play spans close to 90 minutes.

Indians have traditionally enjoyed freemium offerings and seek value. The spike in game time during the pandemic led many gamers to veer towards paid gaming apps.

For instance, six out of 10 serious gamers chose paid gaming apps, while others continued to use 'freemium' apps. Amidst the nationwide lockdown in early 2020,

use of paid gaming increased by 15 per cent, while 'freemium' gaming apps increased by a mere 8 per cent. It will be interesting to see how this trend pans out in 2021 and beyond. 'Freemium' will probably continue to be the mainstay.

When it comes to smartphones, today's gamers seek more -- more RAM, better battery life, increased storage, faster touch response and better processors.

Smartphone brands are responding to the evolving mobile gaming needs. They seek to differentiate themselves with a focus on high refresh rates for smoother performance, enhanced displays, and bigger batteries, among others.

As we look ahead, mobile gaming will only continue to become more mainstream. In doing so, it will become more exciting, more immersive and more social than before.



of the day quote

While the world came to a standstill, railway men never took a day off, and worked even harder at a great personal risk to keep the wheels of the economy moving



PIYUSH GOVAL | RAILWAY MINISTER

Their Sangh teaches them to attack, non-violent satyagrah makes the farmer fearless. We will face the Sangh together - and we will only stop after the three farm laws and three anti-national laws are repealed



RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

The BJP-Trinamool tug-of-war has dented, damaged and derailed the development of 'Shonar Bangla'. It is time for the people of West Bengal to show them that they are not going to be privy to the divisive and hate politics of the BJP and Trinamool



JAIVEER SHERGILL | CONG SPOKESPERSON

SHORT TAKES

2 boys found dead in dam

**Bhopal:** In a suspected case of drowning, two teenage boys were found dead in Bhopal's Kaliasot dam, police said Saturday. Their bodies were fished out this morning and sent for post-mortem, in-charge of Kolar police station Chandrakant Patel said. Friday evening, the police had received a complaint that two city boys, aged 14 and 15 years, had gone missing, he said.

8 kg heroin seized, 3 held

**Hosharpur:** The Punjab Police has busted a gang of drug smugglers, with the arrest of three persons, and seized eight kg of heroin, an official said Saturday. Addressing the media here, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Navjot Singh Mahal said acting on a tip off, a police team stopped an SUV at Thuna village on the Mahilpur-Phagwara road Friday night. While searching the vehicle, police seized eight kg of heroin, which was hidden in a cavity created near the radiator of the car, police said.

Undertrial prisoner dies

**Jammu:** An under-trial prisoner died under mysterious circumstances at a high-security central jail here, officials said Saturday. Sunny Singh, a resident of Deoli village, was facing charges in three cases, including that of murder, registered against him at Bishnah police station between 2008 and 2010, the officials said.

WOMAN GIVEN TWO DOSES OF VACCINE

In a major goof-up, an auxiliary nursing midwife (ANM) was on a phone call as she administered two shots of COVID-19 vaccine to a woman at a primary health centre in Akbarpur area of Kanpur Dehat district, officials said Saturday. As the news reached the woman's family members, they created uproar at the centre and later senior officials including the district magistrate and chief medical officer were informed about the alleged negligence.



COVID SURGE

India braces for COVID curbs

DAILY CORONAVIRUS CASES HAVE SURGED FROM AROUND 15,000 IN EARLY MARCH TO 88,000 OR SO AT THE START OF APRIL

AGENCIES

**Mumbai, April 3:** India's biggest cities braced for stricter lockdowns and other COVID-19 curbs Saturday as infections hit a six-month high, as a month-long surge continued in the country third-worst hit by the pandemic.

India's richest state, Maharashtra, accounted for more than half of the 89,129 new cases reported by the national health ministry in the last 24 hours, with a record 47,827 infections.

The state's chief minister warned citizens of a lockdown if cases continued to rise at their current rate, saying medical infrastructure would be inadequate in a couple of weeks.

In the southern state of Karnataka, home to India's tech capital Bengaluru, authorities ordered gyms to be closed, barred functions at religious places and told cinema halls, bars, pubs and restaurants to limit the number of people allowed in.

India's capital, New Delhi recorded more than 3,500 cases, its highest this year, but its chief minister ruled out another lockdown for now. Daily coronavirus cases have surged from around 15,000 in early March to 88,000 or so at the start of April.



The south Asian nation recorded 89,129 new infections and 714 deaths, the ministry said. That was the biggest daily rise since Sept. 20 and the most deaths since Oct. 21, according to a Reuters tally.

India follows only the United States and Brazil in infections, with more than 12 million recorded since the start of the outbreak.

The government has intensified its vaccination drive in recent weeks,

but the shots have been slow to reach India's 1.3 billion people.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has faced criticism for exporting vaccines produced in India when most Indians are yet to get them.

PUNJAB'S UK VARIANT A POTENTIAL THREAT

**NEW DELHI:** The UK variant of coronavirus found in Punjab is a potential threat due to its efficiency in spreading, while the double mutant found in Maharashtra is a matter of concern, but not a cause to create panic, suggested CSIR-CCMB Director Rakesh Mishra. Speaking with IANS, Mishra said the UK variant has contributed to the surge in cases in Punjab. "Somebody had travelled from the UK to Punjab, possibly in a group, and then people from this group would have gone to several places in Punjab, which has contributed to the surge," said Mishra. When asked why the UK variant has not been found majorly in cases in the neighbouring states of Himanchal Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi, Mishra said that may be those infected with the UK variant in Punjab have not travelled to places outside the state, or there has not been a super spreader event so far. However, it is a matter of time and there is a possibility that cases may show up later, Mishra noted. He added that both vaccines, AstraZeneca and Covaxin, are working well against the Punjab variant and the double mutant found in Maharashtra.

90 re-contesting Assam MLAs' assets grew 76% since 2016

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, April 3:** The average assets of 90 re-contesting MLAs fielded by various political parties in Assam, including Independent nominees, grew by 76 per cent in the last five years between 2016 and 2021 - a hike of around ₹1.91 crore - according to the data released by Assam Election Watch and the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

Of these 90 MLAs, three BJP leaders are in the top five list showing maximum increase in assets, followed by one from the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and another from the Bodoland People's Front. Assam Election Watch and ADR made the revelations based on the analysis of the self-sworn affidavits of these 90 MLAs who are contesting the ongoing three-phase Assam Assembly elections which began March 27.

The third and final round of polling will be held April 6, while the results will be declared May 2. The average asset of these 90 MLAs in 2016 was ₹2.52 crore. Now,

their average assets range is ₹ 4.44 crore. The average asset growth for these MLAs, between the Assam Assembly elections of 2016 and 2021 is ₹1.91 crore, the data said.

BJP MLA from the Dhakuakhana (SC) constituency, Naba Kumar Doley, has declared maximum increase in assets with a rise of ₹18.22 crore, from ₹7.30 crore in 2016 to ₹25.52 crore this year.

The assets of Nijam Uddin Choudhury of the AIUDF from the Algaipur constituency increased



OF THESE 90 MLAS, THREE BJP LEADERS ARE AMONG THE TOP FIVE

by ₹11.10 crore, from ₹2.71 crore in 2016 to ₹13.81 crore this year. Of the other two BJP leaders, assets of Himanta Biswa Sarma from Jalukbari constituency has risen by ₹10.89 crore, from ₹6.38 crore in 2016 to ₹17.27 crore in 2021.

Ashok Singhal is another BJP leader from the Dhekiajuli constituency whose assets grew by ₹ 9.82 crore, from ₹7.23 crore in 2016 to ₹17.06 crore this year. The assets of Bodoland People's Front MLA Chandan Brahma from the Sidli (ST) constituency has risen by ₹6.57 crore, from ₹ 9.58 crore in 2016 to ₹16.15 crore this year.

SOLITARY SILENCE



Historical Jantar Mantar wears a deserted look during a hot day, in Jaipur

PTI PHOTO

EC REDUCES HIMANTA SARMA'S CAMPAIGN BAN

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, April 3:** The Election Commission in a fresh order Saturday gave relief to BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma by reducing his ban from campaigning to 24 hours.

The commission's order came following Sarma's request to the poll body, mentioning accept my sincere regret and assurance of abiding MCC (Model Code of Conduct) in future, and be further pleased to reduce the period of debarment from election campaign from 48 hours to 24 hours.

Sarma had also pleaded on the

ground that he is himself a candidate in the constituency which is scheduled for poll April 6. The BJP leader is contesting from Jalukbari Assembly constituency.

The commission, having considered your unconditional apology and assurance, has decided to modify its order dated April 2, 2021 and reduce the period of debarment from the election campaign from 48 hours to 24 hours to the effect that permission may be granted for holding any public meetings, public processions, public rallies, road shows, etc., by the concerned district administration authorities, where

you (Himanta Biswa Sarma) are expected or likely to participate, the EC said.

You are directed to ensure compliance of the commissioner's directions.

The poll panel Friday had barred Sarma from campaigning for 48 hours on charges of threatening opposition leader Hagrama Mohilary of the Bodoland People's Front.

The EC, in its Friday order had barred Sarma from addressing any public meetings, road shows, media interviews, public processions, and public rallies, for 48 hours from immediate effect from April 2.

ISRO ESPIONAGE CASE

Probe panel submits report on Nambi's illegal arrest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 3:** A high-level probe panel appointed by the Supreme Court to take erring cops to task for causing "tremendous harassment" and "immeasurable anguish" to ISRO scientist Dr Nambi Narayanan in the 1994 espionage case has submitted its report to the apex court, sources said.

The SC had September 14, 2018 appointed the three-member panel headed by its former judge D K Jain while directing the Kerala government to cough up ₹50 lakh compensation for compelling Narayanan to undergo "immense humiliation". The scientist was arrested when the Congress was heading the government in Kerala. The panel, after investigation, submitted its report in a sealed cover to the apex court recently.



The CBI, in its probe, had held that the then top police officials in Kerala were responsible for Narayanan's illegal arrest.

The case also had its political fallout, with a section in the Congress targeting the then Chief Minister

late K Karunakaran over the issue, that eventually led to his resignation.

Over a period of almost two-and-a-half years, the panel headed by Justice Jain examined the circumstances leading to the arrest.

The espionage case, which had hit the headlines in 1994, pertained to allegations of transfer of certain confidential documents on India's space programme to foreign countries by two scientists and four others, including two Maldivian women.

The 79-year-old former scientist, who was given a clean chit by the CBI, maintained that the Kerala Police had "fabricated" the case and the technology he was accused to have stolen and sold in the 1994 case did not even exist at that time.

Narayanan had approached the apex court against a Kerala High Court judgement that said "no action needed to be taken" against former DGP Siby Mathews, who was then heading the SIT probe team, two retired superintendents of police, K K Joshua and S Vijayan, and the then Deputy Director, Intelligence Bureau, R B

Shree Kumar, who were later held responsible by the CBI for the scientist's illegal arrest. The apex court in its judgement had said, "We think that the obtaining factual scenario calls for constitution of a committee to find out ways and means to take appropriate steps against the erring officials."

"The criminal law was set in motion without any basis. It was initiated, if one is allowed to say, on some kind of fancy or notion," a bench headed by the then Chief Justice Dipak Misra had said.

"We are of the view that the appellant was arrested and he has suffered custody for almost 50 days. His arrest has been seriously criticised in the closure report of the CBI. From the aforesaid report, the harassment and mental torture faced by the appellant is obvious," the bench had added.

The judgement had said the "entire prosecution" initiated by the state police was "malicious and it has caused tremendous harassment and immeasurable anguish" to Narayanan. "It can be stated with certitude" that the fundamental right of life and personal liberty of Narayanan was "gravely affected".

The CBI, while giving a clean chit to the scientist, had said that Siby Mathews had left "the entire investigation to IB surrendering his duties" and ordered indiscriminate arrest of the scientist and others without adequate evidence.

The case had caught attention in October 1994, when Maldivian national Rasheedha was arrested in Thiruvananthapuram for allegedly obtaining secret drawings of ISRO rocket engines to sell to Pakistan.

Amul



Belgian Milk Chocolate 35 g | ₹ 40\*



Milk Chocolate 20 g | ₹ 15\*



55% Dark Chocolate 15 g | ₹ 10\*



Almond Bar 35 g | ₹ 20\*



Chocolate Syrup 30 g | ₹ 10\*



Sugar Free 55% Dark Chocolate 35 g | ₹ 30\*



Wafer Bar with chocolayer 15 g | ₹ 5\*



Wafer Bar with Dark Chocolate 15 g | ₹ 10\*

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Demonstrations had not been permitted while a coronavirus lockdown was in place, but restrictions were eased this week, meaning organised rallies can go ahead providing they are "COVID secure".

In London, police warned, "enforcement action will be taken, if needed, in the interests of public health". Some senior officers have said the "kill the bill" tag was deliberately provocative as "the bill" is a nickname in Britain for the police.



# business

## of the day quote

The VPT maintained 3rd position among major ports for the second year in succession. The year past also saw an increase of handling iron pellets and finished steel exports from the port to China

**K RAMMOHAN RAO** | CHAIRMAN, VISAKHAPATNAM PORT TRUST

Performance in the December quarter shows signs of fatigue creeping in, with most broking entities registering on-quarter de-growth in revenue, despite continued record client additions. This is in contrast with 18% sequential growth in the September quarter

**KRISHNAN SITARAMAN** | SENIOR DIRECTOR, CRISIL RATINGS

The strong growth in exports of engineering goods in the month of March suggests a bright outlook for the sector but one needs to be cautious before arriving at any conclusion on the basis of short term surge

**MAHESH DESAI** | CHAIRMAN, EEPC INDIA

## SHORT TAKES

### Bajaj Electricals declares lay-off

**New Delhi:** Bajaj Electricals Saturday said it has declared lay-off at its manufacturing unit located at Shikohabad in Uttar Pradesh. The layoff is with effect from April 3, 2021, until further notice, the company said in a regulatory filing. "... We have to inform you that the company has declared lay-off, as per the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, at the Company's manufacturing unit located at Shikohabad, Uttar Pradesh," the company said.

### GMR launches new vertical

**Hyderabad:** Infra major GMR Group Saturday launched a new business vertical dedicated to fostering and driving innovation GMR Innovex - with a vision to create an enabling framework for innovation across all aspects of the business. GMR Innovex will operate on an 'Open Innovation' model, acting as an 'Innovation Exchange' to partner with startups, corporates, innovation platforms, research institutions and academia to bring innovative ideas and solutions to life and help to nurture and sustain a culture of innovation.

### 'Individual loan biz continues to improve'

**New Delhi:** Mortgage lender HDFC Ltd Saturday said the company's individual loan business continued to exhibit improvement in the January-March quarter 2021 and loans worth ₹7,503 crore were assigned to its banking subsidiary. "The individual loan business continued to see strong improvements during the quarter ended March 31, 2021.

### 'Ramp up testing across states'

**New Delhi:** Industry body FICCI has urged the government to ramp up COVID testing across the states and open up the vaccination for the age group 18-45 years, while assuring it of the complete support of the industry in fighting the pandemic. "We are currently testing about 11 lakh samples a day. Further, there is capacity of performing much more tests with 2,440 labs in the country operational for COVID testing," FICCI President Uday Shankar said.



**Rising prices certainly do not augur well, particularly when this is from cost push factors arising from higher oil prices**

**M GOVINDA RAO** | CEA, BRICKWORK RATINGS

## MICROSOFT PUSHES BACK

Microsoft has announced to delay the reopening of its offices till September, after it stated to slowly reopen Redmond, Washington-based headquarters and nearby campuses from March 29 with a six-stage hybrid workplace strategy



# Surge in commodity prices to impact economy: Ind-Ra

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, April 3:** Further surge in global commodity prices will have serious implications for India's economy which is still struggling to come out of the Covid-19 impact, ratings agency Ind-Ra said.

As per Ind-Ra, a higher retail inflation not accompanied by a commensurate increase in wage growth will adversely impact the consumption demand and in turn investment revival in the economy.

"Though a spike in global agricultural commodity prices could benefit India, it may not move the needle favourably because India, despite the world's biggest exporter of Basmati rice, exported just \$6.59 billion worth of cereals and imported vegetable oil and pulses worth \$9.66 billion and \$1.44 billion, respectively, in FY20."

"On the other hand, India's import bill on oil, coal and nonferrous metals was \$129.86 billion,



\$22.45 billion and \$13.14 billion, respectively."

According to the agency, a faster-

**As per Ind-Ra, a higher retail inflation not accompanied by a commensurate increase in wage growth will adversely impact the consumption demand**

than-expected recovery in demand, the stimulus measures announced by the US, the roll out of Covid-19

vaccine and ultra-low interest rates are fuelling the surge in commodity prices.

Consequently, energy commodity prices over the past six months have increased by 55.4 per cent, the increase in non-energy commodity prices is 19.3 per cent.

Among the major non-energy subgroups, agricultural commodities rose by 16%, fertilisers 30.2% and metals and minerals by 25.1%.

On a more disaggregated level,

the prices of copper, aluminium, tin, nickel and zinc have gone up by 26.3%, 19.2%, 46.6%, 25.1% and 12.4% respectively. In addition, it warned against a commodity super cycle.

This phenomenon occurs as a "long-term, above-trend movements in a wide range of base material prices, driven by a structural change in demand".

The last such super cycle started in early 2000 and lasted till the global financial crisis of 2008.

# Gas producers continue to bleed as govt-dictated prices remain low: Icra

*The domestic gas price notified at \$1.79 per million British thermal unit for the six months beginning April 1 remains the lowest since the institution of the modified Rangarajan formula*

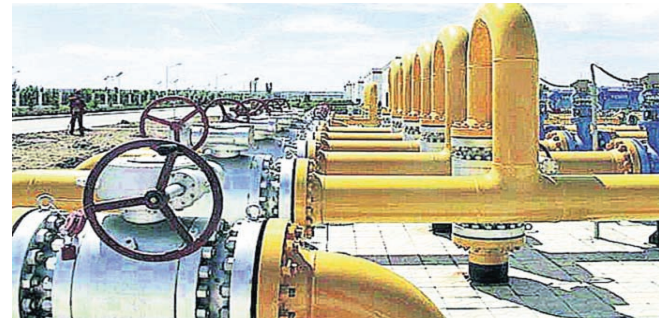
AGENCIES

**New Delhi, April 3:** Natural gas production remains a loss-making proposition for most fields for the Indian upstream producers as government-dictated gas price remains at its lowest level, rating agency Icra has said.

The domestic gas price notified at \$1.79 per million British thermal unit for the six months beginning April 1 remains the lowest since the institution of the modified Rangarajan formula.

Additionally, the ceiling on price for gas produced from deep water, ultra deepwater, high temperature and high-pressure fields has also been announced at \$3.62 per mmbtu for April-September 2021-22 which is 10.8% lower than the price ceiling of \$4.06 for October-March 2020-21 which would dampen the development of such projects.

"While this is unfavourable for do-



mestic producers, it will benefit gas consumers. The consumers will also benefit in the long run from the expectations of continued supply overhang," Icra said commenting on the gas price notified by the government earlier this week.

As per an Icra note, at such low gas prices, gas production remains a loss-making proposition for most fields for the Indian upstream producers notwithstanding some decline in oil field services/equipment costs.

However, the depreciation of Indian Rupee against US dollar, would aid the realisations of the gas producers but only to an extent.

Sabyasachi Majumdar, Senior Vice-President & Group Head, Corporate Sector Ratings, Icra, said, "Going forward, the supply glut is expected to keep prices of domestic gas low in the near to medium term leading to poor re-

turns even as domestic gas producers such as ONGC and Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL)-BP ramp up gas production significantly."

The absence of a floor and sustained low prices as has been seen in the past few years post implementation of the modified Rangarajan formula make exploration and production unviable even for benign geologies, Icra noted.

"Accordingly, low natural gas prices remain negative for the upstream sector adversely impacting revenues, profitability and cash accruals and the incumbents have petitioned the Government of India to provide a floor price for gas prices."

Spot LNG prices had breached \$30 per mmbtu in February 2021 due to increase in oil prices, unplanned outages at export facilities in several countries, multiple cold waves, high shipping rates and delays in the Panama canal.

# Big Bazaar launches 'Sabse Bada Offer'

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** Big Bazaar, India's leading hypermarket chain, has always been a pioneer in the innovative offerings it brings for its customers. In keeping with its tradition of providing Indian consumers the most value for their shopping, Big Bazaar announces its new ground-breaking proposition - the 'Sabse Bada Offer'.

For the first time ever, customers will get ₹500 worth of fruits and vegetables absolutely free on shopping of ₹2500. In addition to Big Bazaar stores, this offer can also be availed on the hypermarket's e-commerce website and app-shop.bigbazaar.com. The scheme is available from April 1 to April 14.

In addition to this mega offer



on Fruits & Vegetables, Big Bazaar is also participating in the New Year celebrations across various regions of India- Poila Boishakh in Bengal, Bihu in Assam, Ugadi in Andhra Pradesh & Telangana, Vishu in Kerala, Baisakhi in Punjab & Gudhi Padwa in Maharashtra. To make these festivals happier, Big Bazaar has planned lot of exciting offers across all categories.

This entire offer will help customers to save more on monthly grocery, apparel, home essentials, kitchen ware & electronics.

## BIZ BUZZ

### Sonalika posts 41.6% domestic growth

**Bhubaneswar:** Sonalika Tractors has added yet another feather of superlative achievement to the hat of its glorious journey. Sonalika has recorded its highest ever annual sales of 1,39,526 tractors in FY21 and among the leading market share gainers in the industry. The company has registered a phenomenal domestic growth rate of 41.6% over FY20 volumes, which is highest in industry and beaten industry growth (est.26.7 %) by a significant margin. Alongside, Sonalika has recorded its highest-ever annual rotavator sales of 50,000 units in FY21, recording double the volumes registered in FY20.Overall, Sonalika Tractors has sold 13,093tractors in March'21, registering a whopping135% growth over March'20. Raman Mittal, Executive Director, Sonalika Group, said, "Achieving a significant landmark of phenomenal domestic growth of 41.6% in FY21, which is highest in industry and surpassing industry growth (est. 26.7%)."



### Haier unveils big bottom mounted refrigerators

**Bhubaneswar:** Haier, the global leader in Home Appliances & Consumer Electronics brand unveiled 17 new variants of Big Bottom Mounted Refrigerators in 3 and 4-star range. The new additions to Haier's revolutionary BMR - Bottom Mounted Refrigerator series flaunt the all-new magic convertible series that allows temperature to be controlled between a wide range of +9 C to -24 C to cater to the unique requirements of different food items for retaining their freshness and nutrition for longer duration. The magic convertible technology helps in converting the refrigerator to 14 modes ranging from energy saving mode to surprise party mode. Unlike other refrigerators, Haier's Magic Convertible feature allows precise temperature control by every degree to store food items ranging from chicken, seafood to desserts and ice creams, cereals and vegetables - at a favorable temperature.



# Mega US infra plan, lending rates to strengthen rupee

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, April 3:** A mega US infrastructure creation programme along with likely retention of key lending rates and an accommodative stance by the Reserve Bank are expected to boost the rupee's prospects during the upcoming week.

Accordingly, US President Joe Biden recently announced a '\$2 trillion plus job plan', including \$621 billion to rebuild infrastructure. If passed by the US Congress, the plan will add pressure on the dollar against all the EM currencies including the rupee.

"Another US stimulus may keep equities buoyant and the rupee strong," Sajal Gupta, Head, Forex and Rates at Edelweiss Securities told IANS. "Expect the rupee to trade between 72.90 to 73.60 during next week."

Last week, the rupee closed at 73.11 per US dollar.



"The last trade week was very volatile for the forex market, especially on speculating trading ahead of Biden's additional stimulus," said Rahul Gupta, Head of Research-Currency, Emkay Global Financial Services.

"Biden announced his long-awaited \$2 trillion-plus job plan,

including \$621 billion to rebuild infrastructure. This new package would certainly be a big positive for the US economy if passed by Congress."

Furthermore, Gupta cited that some profit-booking has led to a fall in dollar gains. "For next week, we expect USDINR spot to trade in

**RBI's interventions in currency markets and spread of virus and pace of inoculations and global risk appetite will determine fate of the currency this week**

**DEVARSH VAKIL** | DEPUTY HEAD, RETAIL RESEARCH, HDFC SECURITIES

between 72.50-73.50."

Besides, the Reserve Bank's MPC is expected to retain key lending rates and an accommodative stance during the first monetary policy review of 2021-22.

"Next week, market participants will be keeping an eye on the RBI policy statement; expectation is that the central bank could keep rates unchanged and wait for some more time before taking any action to spur growth," said Gaurang Somaia, Forex & Bullion Analyst, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

"The RBI is likely to continue with the accommodative monetary policy

stance and wait for an opportune time to announce monetary action with a view to ensure the best possible outcome in terms of pushing growth without sacrificing the main objective of containing inflation."

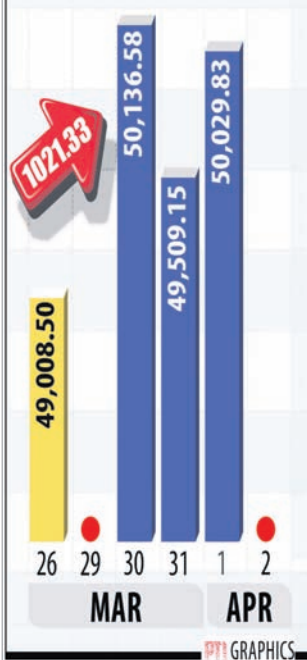
On the other hand, rising Covid cases will add pressure on the rupee. Lately, a new wave of Covid-19 infections has hit several states. This comes at a time when India is trying to ramp up the vaccination drive.

"RBI's interventions in currency markets and spread of virus and pace of inoculations and global risk appetite will determine fate of the currency this week," said Devarsh Vakil- Deputy Head of Retail Research at HDFC Securities.

"We expect it to gradually depreciate compared to greenback over the next few weeks."

The RBI is known to enter the markets via intermediaries to either sell or buy US dollars to keep the rupee in a stable orbit.

## SENSEX in a Week



## Govt allows further operational flexibility

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, April 3:** The government has allowed further flexibility to tax filers operating under the Quarterly Return Filing and Monthly Payment of Taxes (QRMP) scheme of GST.

These tax filers will now be permitted to declare invoices pertaining to movement of goods and services in their quarterly return form GSTR 1 to be filed in the last month of each quarter.

As per an advisory issued by the Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN), the taxpayer must ensure that any saved but not Filed/Submitted IFF (Invoice Furnishing Facility) records for the first two months of the quarter i.e. month of Jan-2021 or Feb-2021 must be deleted using RESET button before filing GSTR-1 for Jan-Mar-2021 quarter.

**GST FILERS**





**GIVING IT HIS ALL:** Jannik Sinner reaches for a shot during his match against Roberto Bautista Agut (not in pic) in Miami, Friday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Miami, April 3:** Former junior skiing champion Jannik Sinner has joined some fast company at the Miami Open. The 19-year-old Italian Friday became the fourth teenager to reach the Miami men's final. The others: Novak Djokovic, Rafa Nadal and Andre Agassi.

"It's nice, but it doesn't mean anything," Sinner said. "The road to have a big name is long. It's not done in one week of a tournament."

Sinner, who chose tennis over skiing at age 13, is playing in only his third top-level ATP event. He rallied in the semifinal to beat Spanish counterpuncher Roberto Bautista Agut 5-7, 6-4, 6-4.

Sinner will next face No.26-seeded Hubert Hurkacz of Poland, who advanced to his first ATP Masters 1000 final by beating No.4 Andrey Rublev 6-3, 6-4. Hurkacz, 24, im-

proved to 9-0 in Florida this year, including his second career ATP title in Delray Beach in January.

Djokovic, Nadal and Roger Federer skipped the tournament, creating opportunities for the four semifinalists.

"I have a good team. We knew many players were not coming here, especially the big three," Sinner said. "We approached this tournament to go very, very far."

On the women's side, No.1-ranked Ash Barty will play for her second consecutive Miami title Saturday against No.8 Bianca Andreescu, who edged No.23 Maria Sakkari in a three-setter, Friday. "I love a challenge," Andreescu said, "and I know she's going to challenge me Saturday."

The lanky Sinner, seeded 21st, has improved his ranking from 78th at the start of last year. He created a buzz by reaching the quar-

terfinals in his French Open debut in September and is projected to climb to at least No.24 next week.

"He has everything, no?" Bautista Agut said. "He has a big serve, he's big, he moves well, he has very good groundstrokes. Mentally he's also great and improving. He has a great future."

Sinner's matchup against the No.7-seeded Bautista Agut was a contrast in styles, with Sinner's overpowering groundstrokes gradually wearing down his dogged opponent.

Sinner caught a break at 3-all in the second set, when Bautista Agut let a ball go on break point, and it landed on the line.

"I thought that ball was going out, and it touches the line by one millimetre," Bautista Agut said. "Tennis, sometimes it's crazy, no? One ball can make a big difference in the match."

Sinner went on to hold and broke in the final game of the set to even the match. Down a break in the final set, Sinner rallied again and closed out the win with one last crushing groundstroke to break at love.

A fist pump was the extent of his celebration. He has an impassive demeanor he attributes to his parents, who make their living at a restaurant in northern Italy — his dad as a cook, his mother as a server.

"They are working every day a simple job," he said. "They know what it means to work hard."

Sinner and Hurkacz will play each other for the first time. Hurkacz, who defeated No.2-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas in the quarterfinals, has beaten two top 10 opponents in the same tournament for the first time. He's projected to move from no 37 to a career-high No.27 in next week's rankings.

'CAN PULL MY BODY FOR ANOTHER TWO TO THREE YEARS'

# UMESH STILL DETERMINED

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 3:** India pacer Umesh Yadav says he can 'mostly pull his body for another two to three years' and wants to make a match-winning contribution in the World Test Championship final against New Zealand in June.

Umesh has played 48 Tests in a stop-start career and is part of arguably India's best-ever pace attack, which also includes Ishant Sharma, Mohammad Shami and Jasprit Bumrah.

Despite doing well over the last three years, Umesh is not a sure starter in the playing eleven considering the competition which has gotten stiffer with the emergence of Mohammad Siraj.

"I am 33 now and I know that I can mostly pull my body for another two or three years, and there will be some youngsters who will be arriving (to play). I feel this is just healthy, because it ultimately ends up benefiting the team.

"When you have five or six fast bowlers on a tour of four or five Tests, you can play each one of them for two games to help reduce their stress and workload, so it helps that pack (of fast bowlers) play for longer," Umesh told 'ESPNews'.

Umesh has bowled more at home than overseas but feels experience helps him to perform in all conditions. "So I haven't played much overseas, and I haven't had much experience of those kinds of wickets. But I've played a fair amount of Tests so far and learnt with experience how a particular surface will behave.

"As far as the rest of my career is concerned, thank god that relatively I haven't had that many injuries. And that is satisfying as a fast bowler, because once a fast bowler starts getting injured (regularly), he tends to start struggling, which ultimately reduces his (playing) life.

"After an injury, there is the recovery, and then you need a rehab,



which consumes a lot of time, which you can never get back. But I have lost very little time to injury periods, which has kind of helped me lengthen my career. So I haven't had to compromise a lot on my pace as well," he said.

Umesh had suffered a calf injury in Australia but returned to the squad for the final two Tests against England at home. However, he did not get a game.

Given that he doesn't play limited overs cricket for India, Umesh can't

wait to make a contribution in the World Test Championship final.

"We have worked really hard to get there, and with players like me who are not regulars in white-ball cricket, it is this that we consider our World Cup. If I am able to perform well in that match and we end up winning, being world champions will forever be a memory," he said.

"The match is in England, where swing and seam are important, so I definitely see myself in the playing XI for that game," he added.

## Pramod, Kadam enter finals at Dubai tourney



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Dubai, April 3:** Indian shuttlers Pramod Bhagat and Sukant Kadam stormed into the finals of their respective categories in the 3rd Dubai Para Badminton Tournament here, Saturday.

In the SL3 category, World No.1 Pramod beat Malaysia's Muhammad Huzairi Abdul Malek 21-7, 21-17 to enter the men's singles final where he will face compatriot Kumar Nitesh. Pramod dominated his semifinal and looks like

the best bet to win the title.

In the men's doubles semifinals, Pramod and Manoj Sarkar defeated their Indian counterparts Mohammad Arwaz Ansari and Deep Ranjan Bisoyee 21-19, 23-21. They will face Sukant Kadam and Kumar Nitesh in the final.

However, Pramod and Pala Kohli lost their mixed doubles semifinal to France's Lucas Mazur and Faustine Noel 17-21, 21-11.

In the SL3 category, participants usually have impairment in one or both lower limbs and poor walking/running balance.

In the SL4 category, Kadam sailed into the final with a comfortable win over his German counterpart Marcel Adam. Sukant won the match in straight games 21-11, 21-11.

In the SL4 category, players have impairment in one or both lower limbs and minimal impairment in walking/running balance, but better compared to SL3.

## Blues lose 2-5 vs West Brom

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**London, April 3:** Struggling West Bromwich Albion caused a big Premier League shock Saturday by winning 5-2 at fourth-place Chelsea after the home team had Thiago Silva sent off in the first half at Stamford Bridge.

The experienced Brazilian was shown the red card in the 29th minute following two bookings.

Christian Pulisic had put Chelsea in front two minutes earlier, only to see Matheus Pereira strike twice in two minutes in first-half stoppage time for second-bottom West Brom.

Callum Robinson grabbed a third goal for West Brom in the 63rd minute. Mason Mount tapped in from close range to give Champions League quarterfinalist Chelsea hope.

Mbaye Diagne drilled in a low shot to put West Brom 4-2 up and Robinson clipped the ball over goalkeeper Edouard Mendy to complete a surprise scoreline.

## Dada obsessed with 'match-winner' Pant

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 3:** BCCI president Sourav Ganguly says he is 'obsessed' with Rishabh Pant's game and calls the swashbuckling India wicketkeeper-batsman 'an absolute match-winner'.

The former India captain added that he loves watching the likes of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma bat. "There are some fantastic players and I think as President of the Board I should not say who is my favourite player. All are favourite to me but I enjoy Kohli, I enjoy Rohit Sharma," Ganguly said during an interactive session organised by Classplus, a platform for educators to go digital.

"I am obsessed with Rishabh Pant because I think he is just an absolute match-winner. Jasprit Bumrah is good, Mohammed Shami is good, I like Shardul Thakur a lot because he has got the courage and guts.

"There is immense cricketing talent in India. When (Sunil) Gavaskar was there people used to



think what will happen after him, then came (Sachin) Tendulkar, (Rahul) Dravid, Anil Kumble. When Tendulkar, Dravid left, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Rishabh Pant took over," he said. "There is so much talent for cricket in India that I think it will produce world beaters in every generation."

Ganguly, who was picked for

but I was young. That (series) actually helped me to become a better cricketer.

"I came back stronger mentally. I was not fitter; I understood what international cricket was all about. I started to train myself over the period of 3-4 years not just physically but mentally also on how to handle the pressure," he recalled.

"My series in Australia in 1992 actually helped me become a better cricketer. When I went to England in 1996, I was much stronger. I knew what it takes to score runs in international level.

"I had another four years of domestic cricket under my belt where I kept scoring runs. Those four years I think was a blessing in disguise for me. Failures makes you better cricketer."

Ganguly, who underwent two rounds of angioplasty at a Kolkata hospital in January after complaining of chest pain, said he is hale and hearty now. "I am absolutely fit and fine and back to work, doing everything as I did before."

# RCB hopeful for title with arrival of Maxwell, Jamieson

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 3:** Armed with exciting new recruits, including Australia all-rounder Glenn Maxwell and New Zealand pacer Kyle Jamieson, perennial under-achievers Royal Challengers Bangalore will hope to battle hard in their bid for the elusive IPL trophy.

Balance issues in the squad, injuries and over reliance on skipper Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers marred RCB's chances to win the title last season. Off to a brilliant start, they ran out of steam towards the fag end of the tournament, losing five in a row to bow out in the Eliminator.

Having released 10 players ahead of the auction, the team management focussed on strengthening the batting and pace bowling units.

Here's is a SWOT analysis of the side that will take on defend-

ing champions Mumbai Indians in the tournament opener April 9

**STRENGTHS**

RCB have assembled a strong batting line up on paper. Run-machine Kohli, who enjoys an impressive record as an opener in the league, has already confirmed that he will be opening the innings.

Partnering Kohli will be the highly-talented Devdutt Padikkal who impressed everyone last season and is in red-hot form.

Young wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Azharuddeen, who had a staggering strike-rate of 194.54 in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, and New Zealand's Finn Allen are other attacking options at the top. De Villiers and Maxwell add the firepower to the middle-order while Sachin Baby, experienced Daniel Christian and Washington Sundar add to the depth.



Glenn Maxwell



Virat Kohli



Kyle Jamieson

RCB possess a potent spin battery and it augers well for them that they will be playing a major chunk of their matches on the slow tracks in Chennai and Ahmedabad.

Leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal

has enjoyed a lot of success in the league and will be eager to weave magic with the ball. He will be joined by the immensely accurate off-spinner Washington, who was Kohli's go to man in the powerplays last season.

**WEAKNESSES**

The RCB pace department does not inspire confidence. Navdeep Saini and Mohammed Siraj lack the experience of bowling with the white ball and have a propensity of leaking runs.

Jamieson has struggled in T20Is and has no experience of playing in India. Other options include medium pacer Harshal Patel, and the Australian trio of Christian, Daniel Sams and Kane Richardson.

**OPPORTUNITY**

The presence of several big hitters in the team could go in RCB's favour while chasing big totals. It is also the perfect opportunity for Maxwell to set the tournament ablaze. A proven match winner for Australia, the all-rounder has been a disappointment in the IPL.

RCB have two attacking batsmen in the uncapped Azharuddeen

and Sachin, who would be keen to grab on to their opportunities.

**THREATS:**

Maxwell is a vital cog in RCB's grand scheme of things this season. If he tanks with the bat, it could have disastrous consequences for the side.

The over-reliance on Kohli and de Villiers continued last year despite big signings. The Indian batsmen in the team need to step up to avoid going the familiar route.

The squad: Virat Kohli (C), AB de Villiers, Devdutt Padikkal, Yuzvendra Chahal, Mohammed Siraj, Kane Richardson, Washington Sundar, Pavan Deshpande, Finn Allen, Shahbaz Ahamad, Navdeep Saini, Adam Zampa, Kyle Jamieson, Glenn Maxwell, Rajat Patidar, Sachin Baby, Mohammed Azharuddeen, Daniel Christian, KS Bharat, Suyash Prabhudessai, Daniel Sams & Harshal Patel.