

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | SATURDAY 13 | MARCH 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 33°C  
**Min:** 22°C  
**Rainfall:** Nil

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Maasi 29  
**Tithi:** Amavasai  
**Star:** Puratathi  
**Rahukalam:** 9 am to 10.30 am  
**Yamagandam:** 1.30 pm to 3 pm  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 5.11 am  
**Zohar:** 12.25 pm  
**Asar:** 3.41 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.19 pm  
**Isha:** 7.29 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.19 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.18 AM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 6.18 AM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 6.24 PM**

## CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+24,838)	(+140)
1,13,33,484	1,58,483

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+ 670)  
**TN:** 8,58,272 12,539

### WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

11,93,61,106

### DEATHS

26,45,637

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES  
**219**

worldometers.info

## Mamata discharged from hospital

**Kolkata:** Two days after being admitted to state-run SSKM Hospital here with severe bone injuries, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was discharged from the medical establishment on Friday evening after doctors found her recovery to be “satisfactory”. Doctors took the decision after the 66-year-old TMC supremo repeatedly requested them to discharge her from the medical establishment.

## Gunmen abduct 30 students from school in northwest Nigeria

**Lagos (Nigeria):** Gunmen have attacked a school in northwestern Nigeria and kidnapped at least 30 students just weeks after a similar attack in the region, authorities said Friday. The latest abduction took place late Thursday night at the Federal College of Forestry Mechanization, Afaka, in the Igabi local government area of Kaduna state, police said. “About 30 students, a mix of males and females, are yet to be accounted for,” the state’s commissioner for International Security and Home Affairs, Samuel Aruwan, said in a statement.

## COUNTER POINT



**We should not have taken leaders of different factions of the same party!**



**CITY | 2**  
**Deputy CM files papers in Bodi**



**WORLD | 5**  
**Biden sets goal of July 4th to ‘mark freedom’ from Covid-19**

## SPORT | 8

**Muguruza enters Dubai last four**



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## FIRST VIRTUAL SUMMIT

# Quad meet focuses on Covid vaccine, economic recovery

**Washington, March 12:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi and three other Quad leaders on Friday decided to join forces to expand safe, affordable and effective vaccine production and equitable access in a bid to speed up economic recovery and benefit global health in the wake of the deadly Covid-19 pandemic.

In a joint statement issued after the first virtual summit of the Quad leaders — Mr Modi, US President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga — recognised that none of them could be safe as long as the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread. “Building on the progress our countries have achieved on health security, we will join forces to expand safe, affordable and effective vaccine production and equitable access, to speed economic recovery and benefit global health. “With steadfast commitment to the health and safety of our own people, we also recognise that



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison participate in a virtual Quad summit on Friday. — PTI

none of us can be safe as long as the pandemic continues to spread,” the leaders said in the Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement: “The Spirit of the Quad”. They said that they will collaborate to strengthen equitable vaccine access for the Indo-Pacific, with close coordination with multilateral organisations including the World Health Organization and COVAX.

“We call for transparent and results-oriented reform at the World

Health Organisation,” they said, adding that to advance these goals and others, they redouble their commitment to Quad engagement.

The four leaders said they will combine their nations’ medical, scientific, financing, manufacturing and delivery, and development capabilities and establish a vaccine expert working group to implement “our path-breaking commitment to safe and effective vaccine distribution”. —PTI ■ P4

# DMK releases list, Stalin to contest from Kolathur

**G. BABU JAYAKUMAR D. SEKAR | DC**  
CHENNAI, MARCH 12

The DMK announced its full list of 173 candidates for the April 6 Assembly elections, which was a balanced mix of old and new faces, and contained the names of party president M.K. Stalin and youth wing secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin.

Mr Stalin will be contesting again from Kolathur in Chennai, while Udhaynidhi Stalin will be trying his luck for the first time from Chepauk-Triplicane constituency, which once elected his grandfather and party patriarch the late M. Karunanidhi to the Assembly.

The release of the list by Friday noon by Mr Stalin evoked celebrations in several parts of the state even as party cadre and functionaries geared up for the campaign in their respective constituencies.

Mr Stalin arrived at Anna Arivalayam, the party headquarters, to make the announcement with thousands of party cadre and aspirants waiting eagerly.

Earlier in the morning, the DMK president went to the Gopalapuram residence



DMK president MK Stalin releases party candidates’ list for the April 6 Assembly elections at Anna Arivalayam on Friday. Also seen are DMK general secretary Durai Murugan and party MP T.R. Baalu. — DC

to pay homage to the portrait of his father and also call on his mother Dayaluammal.

He then drove down to the resting places of C.N. Annadurai and Karunaidhi. Mr Stalin expressed the hope that the DMK would win overwhelmingly the April 6 elections, repeating the results of the 1971 elections that saw the party symbol ‘rising sun’ emerging victorious in 184 constituencies.

Now, though the DMK is fielding only 173 candidates, a total of 187 candidates would be contesting on the party symbol.

Of the 173 DMK candi-

dates, including 12 women, 124 of them will be directly confronting the AIADMK and 14 of them will be facing BJP nominees. Almost all senior party leaders and 74 sitting MLAs have been chosen to contest the elections, apart from fist timers.

Besides Udhayanidhi Stalin, the prominent among the first-time candidates are Dr N. Ezhilan, a doctor by profession who had been the voice of the party and the Dravidian movement in many platforms for quite some time, and Prabakar Raja, son of traders’ association president Vikramaraja. ■ P2

# No govt official can act as state election commission, rules SC

**New Delhi, March 12:** In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court on Friday held that a person employed with the government cannot work as state election commissioners (SECs) and came down on the Goa government for giving its law secretary the additional charge of the SEC.

The apex court said the state poll panels shall be headed by independent persons who do not hold any office under the state government and if they hold any such offices, then they have to resign before taking charge of SEC.

The top court said election commissioners have to be independent persons and no state can appoint a person who holds any office with the government.

A bench headed by Justice R.F. Nariman also directed the Goa state election body to issue the notification for



the local body polls within 10 days from today and complete the election process by April 30. “Under the constitutional mandate, it is the duty of the state to not interfere with the functioning of the state election commission,” the bench held in its judgement delivered on the appeal of the state government. The judgement came on an appeal by the Goa government against the high court’s ruling on panchayat polls. The case pertained to local body elections in Goa in which reservation of wards for woman and Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes were allegedly not carried out in terms of state law. — PTI

## SC issues notice on PIL challenging provisions of places of worship Act

**New Delhi, March 12:** The Supreme Court sought the Centre’s response Friday to a plea filed before it challenging the validity of certain provisions of a 1991 law, which prohibit the filing of a lawsuit to reclaim a place of worship or seek a change in its character from what prevailed on August 15, 1947. The petition alleges that the 1991-law creates an “arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date” of August 15, 1947 for maintaining the character of the places of worship or pilgrimage against encroachment done by “fundamentalist-barbaric invaders and law-breakers”. — PTI ■ P4

## England beat India by 8 wickets in first T20



Pacer Jofra Archer took three wickets as England restricted India to 124 for 7 before winning the opening T20 by eight wickets in Ahmedabad on Friday. — BCCI ■Report on P8

## Kamal to contest from Kovai south constituency

**Chennai, March 12:** Actor-turned politician Kamal Haasan would make his electoral debut, contesting from Coimbatore South constituency in the April 6 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.

The Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) president made the announcement here on Friday, releasing the second list of 43 party candidates which included veteran politician Pazha Karupiah and yesterday actor Sripriya who had paired with Haasan in many films in the 70s and 80s. The party also named candidates for 18 constituencies in neighbouring Puducherry which also goes to polls on April 6 for its 30-member assembly.

■ Full report on P2

# Why special DGP not suspended, asks HC

**Chennai, March 12:** The Madras high court on Friday indicted the State government for not suspending a former Special DGP, accused of sexually harassing a subordinate woman IPS officer, saying it should have been the first thing to have been done.

“Why has the special DGP not been suspended till date? That is the first thing you should have done. You have suspended the SP who

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT CASE

waylaid the victim, but not the Special DGP,” Justice N Anand Venkatesh said.

The judge posed the questions when the proceedings, initiated by him last week on his own, came for further hearing on Friday.

Only then SP (Chengalpattu), who allegedly tried to stop the woman SP while she was proceeding to Chennai to lodge a sexual

harassment complaint against the accused, had been suspended, on the directions of the Election Commission of India.

“He was only an arrow. The bow is the Special DGP, who has not yet been suspended”, the judge bemoaned and asked what was the impediment in taking the said action against the police officer, since put

under ‘compulsory wait.’ The matter is at the stage of inquiry. Only after a detailed inquiry will the truth come out, the judge added.

He also praised the media for strict adherence to his earlier restraint order, by not disclosing names of the victim, accused and the witnesses. The investigation in the case would be closely monitored by the court, he said. —PTI

## India’s Covid-19 tally up by 23,285 cases, highest in 78 days

**New Delhi, March 12:** India recorded 23,285 cases of coronavirus infection in a day, the highest in around 78 days, taking the total tally of Covid-19 cases to 1,13,08,846, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Friday.

The death toll increased to 1,58,306 with 117 new fatalities. The total active caseload increased to 1,97,237, which now comprises 1.74 per cent of the total infections, while the recovery rate has dropped to 96.86 per cent.

On December 24, 24,712 new infections were reported in a span of 24 hours. Maharashtra recorded 14,317 new coronavirus cases, the highest one-day spike this year, which took its caseload to 22,66,374, a health official said. Nagpur city recorded the highest 1,701 new cases, followed by 1,514 cases in Pune and 1,509 in Mumbai city. — PTI

# Mithali first Indian woman cricketer to score 10,000 runs

**Lucknow, March 12:** Veteran batter Mithali Raj on Friday became the first Indian woman cricketer and second internationally to complete 10,000 runs across all formats.

The 38-year-old Mithali, captain of India’s ODI team, joined England’s Charlotte Edwards in the elite club. Mithali achieved the feat with a boundary off Anne Bosch in the 28th over of India’s innings during

the ongoing third ODI against South Africa here. Mithali has amassed 663 runs in 10 Test matches with a best score of 214, while she has 6974 and 2364 runs from 212 ODIs and 89 T20 Internationals respectively. The figures add up to 10,001.

Mithali said being consistent mattered more to her than these individual milestones. “When you play for this long, you go through dif-

ferent milestones. This being one of it, the key for me has always been consistency and I have always believed in scoring runs each time I go out to bat, whether it is domestic or international cricket,” she said. — Agencies

India ODI captain Mithali Raj cuts a cake to celebrate her feat of completing 10,000 international runs on Friday. — BCCI



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## SHORT TAKES

AMMK releases third  
list of candidates for  
April 6 TN polls

Chennai, Mar 12 (PTI) The Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam, led by expelled AIADMK leader V K Sasikala's nephew T T V Dhinakaran, on Friday released the third list of 130 candidates for next month's Assembly elections, taking its number to 195. AMMK's allies include Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) and Asaduddin Owaisi-led AIMIM and they have been allotted six and three seats, respectively. On Friday, Dhinakaran released the candidates for 130 seats, adding to the 65 he has already named. The party chief is contesting from Kovilpatti against local AIADMK strongman and Information Minister Kadambur Raju. Single phase polls to a total of 234 seats in Tamil Nadu are scheduled on April 6. The party also named nominees to nine seats in the neighbouring union territory of Puducherry, which will also go to polls on April 6. — PTI

Kamal Haasan to  
contest from  
Coimbatore south  
constituency

Chennai, March 12: Actor-turned politician Kamal Haasan would make his electoral debut, contesting from Coimbatore South constituency in the April 6 Tamil Nadu assembly elections.

The Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) president made the announcement here on Friday, releasing the second list of 43 party candidates which included veteran politician Pazha Karuppiiah and yesteryear actor Sripriya who had paired with Haasan in many films in the 70s and 80s.

The party also named candidates for 18 constituencies in neighbouring Puducherry which also goes to polls on April 6 for its 30-member assembly.

Haasan, whose party is heading a three-party coalition in Tamil Nadu, will be up against the nominees of BJP and Congress, partners in the AIADMK and DMK led alliances respectively, in Coimbatore South.

Three years after floating the MNM, the 66-year old Haasan is taking the electoral plunge. He chose not to contest the 2019 Lok Sabha elections while his party polled 3.7 per cent votes, entering the fray in 37 constituencies.

Remembering his late father Sreenivasan, Haasan, declared the chief ministerial candidate by three-party front, expressed confidence that the people of Coimbatore South constituency would enable him to voice his views in the assembly by voting for him.

"My father's dream was I should become an IAS officer and then enter politics. Though I could not realise his dream (of becoming an IAS officer), my party comprises many (former) IAS officers. That is a proud moment for us," he told reporters here.

The party is facing the coming election with allies, actor R Sarath Kumar-headed All India Samathuva Makkal Katchi (AISMK) and India Jananayaka Katchi (IJK) of Lok Sabha MP Paarivendhar and has announced it will test its fortunes from 154 of the 234 seats, leaving the rest to its two partners.

Pazha Karuppiiah, a former AIADMK MLA who later switched over to DMK, will contest from Thiyagarayanagar constituency in the city.

Karuppiiah, who was keeping himself away from mainstream politics after quitting the DMK in 2019, joined the MNM recently.

Actress Sripriya would also make her electoral debut, testing her fortunes from Mylapore constituency here.

Former IAS officer M Santhosh Babu, who was earlier given Villivakkam constituency here, has been shifted to Velachery, in south Chennai. Sriharan Bala has been nominated in Villivakkam constituency.

MNM vice president R Mahendran, who unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha elections from Coimbatore constituency in 2019, has been nominated from Singanallur in the textile city.

The party had released its first list of 70 candidates on Wednesday. The leaders of MNM, AISMK, IJK have been describing their coalition as the "First Front" and not a "Third Front" as was being mentioned by some.

— PTI

Van with ₹22.50 crore gold  
jewelry seized in Tirupatur

Poll flying squad officials engaged in vehicle inspection at a checkpoint near Chinnakandili next to Kandili in Tirupatur district on Thursday night, stopped a minivan owned by Titan company, Hosur, and found its occupants carrying gold jewels worth ₹22.50 crore, accompanied by armed guards as escorts. They told the squad that the stock was meant for distribution to outlets in Tirupatur, Tiruvannamalai and Vellore. When officials tried to open the safe lock, it could not be opened since it had a password, which only Titan officials knew. The group also told the squad that related papers were also there in the safe. But, squad officials took the van to the office of the additional collector, Tirupatur, and posted armed security personnel to guard it. Investigations are underway.

— K. Senthil Nathan



MNM founder Kamal Haasan introduces his party candidates on Friday.

— DC

Karur court dismisses  
Kamal's quash pleaDC CORRESPONDENT  
MADURAI, MARCH 12

Actor-turned politician and Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) founder leader, Kamal Haasan's petition seeking to quash the case pending against him in Karur court was dismissed by the Madurai bench of the Madras high court, on Friday.

Kamal Haasan was booked under Sections 153A and 295A of the IPC charging him of promoting enmity between communities based on religion and maliciously attempting to outrage the religious sentiment and

faith of the people for his comments on Godse, during his election campaign in 2019, at Aravakurichi.

Refuting the charges against him, Kamal Haasan filed a petition at the Madurai high court bench of the Madras high court, seeking intervention of the court to quash the case pending against him with the Aravakurichi police. Justice Hemalatha, who took up the case on Friday, said that the case could not be quashed as police had filed the chargesheet against Kamal at the Karur magistrate court, and hence, dismissed the

petition.

The high court bench also adjourned the hearing to April 8 another petition by Kamal seeking to quash a case registered against him by the Thoothukudi South police in 2018, for visiting Thoothukudi general hospital during the Sterlite issue along with his party men, violating section 144 of the IPC.

The case was transferred to the CB-CID from Thoothukudi police for investigation. The judge also directed the CB-CID to join as a respondent in the petition filed by Kamal Haasan.

## Special observers

The Election Commission of India has appointed four Special Observers for the Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. Madhu Mahajan (Mobile 9444376337) and B R Balakrishnan (Mobile 9443763347), both retired IRS officers, are Special Expenditure Observers, while Alok Vardhan (Mobile 9444129844), a former IAS officer, is Special General Observer and Dharmendra Kumar (Mobile 9444129822), a retired IPS officer is Special Police Observer.

## Auto rickshaw taken back

The 'auto rickshaw' election symbol, touted to be the symbol of the party that actor Rajinikanth had proposed to launch, has been taken back by the Election Commission of India at the behest of the party to which it was allotted. The Makkal Sevai Katchi, a registered un-recognized political party, had sought the allocation of the symbol and it was granted by the ECI. Now it has been withdrawn following a request from the party.

HC asks ECI to consider plea to educate returning  
officers to ensure nominations & affidavits are perfectDC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 12

An advocate has approached the Madras high court to direct the Election Commission of India and Chief Electoral Officer to educate the Returning Officers, Voters, Contesting Candidates and Political Parties to ensure Nominations and Affidavits are perfect in all aspects within a stipulated time.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthil Kumar Ramamoorthy before whom the PIL filed by advocate B.Ramkumar Adityan came up for hearing on Friday, directed the ECI to consider and dispose of the representation of the petitioner.

According to the peti-



tioner, despite directions of the Apex court and high courts in various litigations and subsequent orders of the ECI, the Returning Officers of Tamil Nadu continuously, improperly accepted nominations. Every contesting candidate has to furnish details about enrollment of his or her vote such as serial number, part number, number of the legislative assembly constituency, name of the legislative assembly and State in

S.No.2 of Part A of Affidavit and Number of Legislative Assembly, Name of the Legislative Assembly and State in S.No.11 (3) Part B where his or her vote has enrolled, he added.

He said in order to verify completeness of the affidavits pertaining to the contested candidates including the returned candidates of 39 Parliamentary Constituencies in Tamil Nadu during the General Parliamentary Election 2019 was analyzed. Large scale irregularities were found in the affidavits of the contested candidates. The nomination and affidavit pertaining to 37 returned candidates of the Parliamentary election out of 39 candidates and one legislative assembly bye election were improperly accepted by the

returning officers. The two returned candidates A.Raja and Parivendhar alone filed complete and perfect nominations. The remedy, he seeks in this petition, was not against election of any of the returned candidates which can be obtained by filing an election petition. As per provisions, either any voter or contested candidates can alone file an election petition within 45 days from the date of publication of results.

It was the duty of the returning officer to check whether the information required was fully furnished at the time of filing of affidavit with the nomination paper, he added and also sought a direction to ECI to take action against the 37 returned candidates as per section 125A of the Representation of People Act.

## Dy CM files papers in Bodi

DC CORRESPONDENT  
BODINAYAKANUR, MARCH 12

Deputy chief minister and AIADMK coordinator, O Panneerselvam, on Friday, filed his nomination papers in Bodinayakanur, Theni district, on the first day of nomination.

The four term MLA got elected twice consecutively from Periyakulam constituency in Theni district in 2001 and 2006 elections, and twice from Bodinayakanur constituency in the 2011 and 2016 elections. O Panneerselvam on Friday filed his nomination for his third term in the Bodinayakanur with election returning officer, Vijaya.

Before reaching  
Bodinayakanur taluk

office, Panneerselvam went on a vehicle rally along the Bodinayakanur streets and also offered prayer at the Salakaliyamman temple, besides garlanding the temple bull.

Covid-19 precautionary norms were not followed either by candidate, O Panneerselvam, or his party men including Theni Lok Sabha member, O P Raveendranath.

Moreover, the election commission of India's (ECIs) instruction that not more than two persons along with the candidate should be allowed, also was flouted as the office room of the returning officer was crowded with AIADMK men when Panneerselvam filed his papers.



The deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam files nominations to contest in the Bodinayakanur constituency in Theni district on Friday.

— DC

Nagendran files nomination  
as BJP candidate for NellaiARULOLI M | DC  
TIRUNELVELI, MARCH 12

Former minister and vice-president of Tamil Nadu BJP, Nainar Nagendran, filed his nomination for Tirunelveli constituency on Friday even before his party released its final list of contestants.

Accompanied by none other than his younger son, Vijay, Nainar Nagendran submitted his nomination papers with the election returning officer for Tirunelveli assembly segment, Siva Krishnamurthy.

Later, responding to the media, he said that he hurriedly filed the nomination as March 12 was the most auspicious day for him as per his astrologer.

Accompanied by none other than his younger son Vijay, Nainar Nagendran submitted his nomination papers with the election returning officer for Tirunelveli assembly segment, Siva Krishnamurthy

riedly filed the nomination as March 12 was the most auspicious day for him as per his astrologer. Nainar Nagendran is hopeful of finding his name in the party's final list which is expected to be released anytime. Nainar

said that he has time till 3 pm on the last day of nomination on March 19 to submit Form-A and B, authorising him as BJP candidate for allotment of symbol.

He shied away to a question by media persons as to why none from the AIADMK or the BJP accompanied him for filing nominations.

Dhaya Shankar, BJP election in-charge for Tirunelveli constituency, told DC over phone, "Nainar Nagendran consulted with the party functionaries before filing his nomination. As it was the only auspicious day with-

in March 19, Nainar filed his nomination papers."

Nainar also had consulted AIADMK district secretary, Thatchai Ganesa Raja, who could not accompany him for filing the nomination papers, as Ganesa Raja himself a candidate for Nanguneri constituency, went there for his election works.

It is to be noted that Nainar also had started his campaign in Tirunelveli, claiming himself to be the BJP candidate for Tirunelveli constituency even before his party commenced seat sharing talks with the AIADMK.

Congress, BJP yet to  
announce candidatesG.BABU JAYAKUMAR &  
D. SEKAR | DC  
CHENNAI, MARCH 12

Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam was among the early birds to file the nomination papers for the April 6 Assembly elections on the first day itself since his party managed to release its list of candidates ahead of the other parties after wrapping up alliance deals.

Even as many parties were coming out with the names of their candidates on Friday, the Congress leaders were caught in consultations with no signs of the list being released in the next couple of days and many other parties too were holding discussions on identifying candidates to represent them, say the two Communist parties, the VCK and so on.

Panneerselvam filed his papers in his traditional constituency of Bodinayakanur and his

Even as many parties were coming out with the names of their candidates on Friday, the Congress leaders were caught in consultations with no signs of the list being released in the next couple of days and many other parties too were holding discussions on identifying candidates to represent them, say the two Communist parties, the VCK and so on

Cabinet colleague, M C Sampath also filed his nomination from Cuddalore on the day nominations opened across the State. The last day of filing nominations is March 19 and no nominations would be received on the Saturday and Sunday that come in between.

It is a different matter that the local AIADMK cadre protested against the handing over of the seat to the alliance partner and might not work with full enthusiasm during the elections. Now that Haasan too is rushing to contest from there, the constituency assumes

importance. Since the DMK, too, has given it to its alliance partner, the Congress, whose candidate is not known immediately, the elections will see a triangular fight between the three parties, all professing nationalist politics.

A ally of the MNM, the All India Samathuva Makkal Katchi, led by actor Sarthkumar, too, came out with a list of 40 constituencies that it would be contesting from without the name of candidates, while the TMC, which is part of the AIADMK front, named the contestants from the six seat allotted to it.

## Ezhilan contesting from Thousand Lights

From P1

Handing over the Virugambakkam constituency to Prabakar Raja earned the ire of the local DMK leader, Danasekar, who visited Anna Arivalayam later in the day to express his resentment.

Mr Ezhilan is contesting from Thousand Lights, the erstwhile constituency of Mr Stalin. Some of the other new faces in the list are former DMK general secretary late K. Anbazhagan's grandson A. Vetri Azhagan (Villivakkam), former speaker Sedapatti Muthiah's son M. Manimaran (Thirunagalam), late J. Anbalagan's brother J Karunanidhi (T. Nagar), late K.K. Samy's son K.P. Sankar

(Thiruvottiyur). Of the sitting MLAs, 74 of them have been nominated again while 20 have been denied seats. There are five doctorate degree holders, 9 doctors, 30 advocates, over 24 post-graduates and 13 engineering graduates in the list.

Two former mayors of Chennai will be fighting it out at Saidapet constituency. While Ma Subramaniam represents DMK, his rival will be Saidai Duraisamy of the AIADMK. In Andipatti constituency, which was once represented by the late M.G. Ramachandran and also J. Jayalalithaa, two brothers will be locking horns — DMK's A. Maharajan and AIADMK's Logirajan.

The DMK will be contesting 25 constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes and two for Scheduled Tribes. It has given seats to five persons who switched over to its side from the AIADMK following the death of Jayalalithaa.

Of them, Thanga Tamilselvan will take on Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam in Bodinayakanur and Senthil Balaji will cross swords with minister M.R. Vijayaabaskar at Karur. The other three are Lakshmanan in Villupuram, Rajakannappan in Muthukulathur and Markandeyan.

Mr Stalin will file his nomination on Monday, March 15.



## OTHER STORY

## Hemodialysis unit opened at Saveetha medical college and hospital

**Chennai, March. 12:** Saveetha Medical College and Hospital has inaugurated the Hemodialysis unit, high end dialysis equipment, on the occasion of World Kidney Day (March 11). Rotary Club of Guindy, Rotary International District 3232 (RID 3232), Rotary Club of Alor Star, Malaysia, RID 3300 & Rotary Club of Glenhaven&Hills-Kellyville, RID 9685 have donated \$50,000 USD (approx Rs 35 lakh) as Rotary Grants for the procurement of equipment that has been installed at the Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, Thandalam, according to a press release

## Pension Adalat on Monday

**Chennai, March. 12:** Pension Adalat will be conducted by the regional office of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation, Tambaram region on March 15 for pensioners under EPS who are drawing their pension at regional office, Tambaram. Those who want to get their pension related grievances redressed are requested to register their grievances by approaching directly 10.30am onwards on March 15 regional office, Tambaram or by sending an email to tamgrievances, Uepfindia.aov.in quoting the subject "Pension Adalat". Pensioners can also join the Adalat Virtually through Google Meet by following the link <http://mceet.google.com/zii-iuih-ufs> on 15.03.2021 from 11 am, according to a press release.

## Stray dog feeders enthused by the order of animal board

**T. SUDHEESH | DC CHENNAI, MARCH. 12**

The Animal Welfare Board of India's (AWBI) order instructing the law enforcement authorities to ensure that no harassment or hindrance is caused to the persons feeding street dogs at the designated feeding spots has enthused dog feeders in and around the city which has reported many such assault cases.

Sai Vignesh, founder, Almighty Animal Care Trust, Thiruvallur, who was attacked by two people last Thursday for feeding stray dogs, said the new order will help to boost the morale of selfless animal feeders. "Majority of the residents were not happy with me for a long time for feeding these animals. This ani-

mosity culminated in the attack as I tried to stop illegal catching of dogs by municipality authorities on Thursday", he told DC. In September last year, James Baynes, 56, an animal lover who has been feeding stray dogs at Jayachandran Nagar near Pallikaranai, was assaulted and abused by residents. He filed a complaint in the nearby police station and took to social media to recount his traumatic experience.

Antony Rubin, a city-based animal rights activist, says even educated people are unaware that taking care of animals is a fundamental duty. The AWBI instruction will help to create an awareness among people as well as the police which do not take these cases seriously, he said.

An animal lover in the city, feeding as many as 50 strays for over a decade, said on condition of anonymity that his neighbours were causing lot of problems for years to discourage him from the noble act. The new instruction of the AWBI would boost the confidence of people who are willing to feed animals especially during the pandemic, he said.

In the order, AWBI chairman Dr O.P. Chaudhary said it was a fundamental duty of the citizen under Article 51 (g) of the Constitution to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures.

Even though the board had issued advisories on February 26, 2015 and other advisories during the Covid-

19 period regarding feeding of homeless animals by the residents, the board is regularly receiving complaints about animal cruelty and harassment of individuals and ill-treatment of animals. The local police is not taking cognizance of such events', it said.

The AWBI also mentioned the Supreme Court order passed on May 7, 2015 in the AWBI Vs. A. Nagarajan case that instructed all state governments and union territories for implementation of the provisions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and rules made there under effectively to prevent unnecessary pain or suffering of animals and also to take appropriate action against the offenders inflicting cruelty to animals.

## 17-year-old girl found dead

**DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH. 12**

Four after a 17-year-old girl went missing from her house in Kalpattu village in Chengalpet district, the body of the girl was found in a well in the neighborhood in the early hours of Friday.

The deceased person has been identified as Rohini (17), daughter of Sentil Kumar - Jaysudha, residents of Kalpattu village. Rohini was studying class 12 in the Government school in PV Kalathur in the district.

According to police sources, Rohini went missing from her

house on March 08. After all the efforts to contact her went in vain, her parents lodged a complaint with the Thirukazhukundram police. The Thirukazhukundram police registered a girl missing case and began searching for her.

Meanwhile, in the early hours of Friday, locals alerted the police that the body of the missing girl was found in a well in the village. A police team rushed to the spot, recovered the body and sent it to the Chengalpet government hospital for post-mortem. Police are investigating the case further.

## Resolution of local panchayat has got no bearing on running of liquor shop: HC



**DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH. 12**

Pointing out the ruling of the Full Bench that the resolution of the local panchayat has got no bearing for the running of a liquor shop, the Madras high court has dismissed a Public Interest

Litigation, which sought a direction to the authorities to close down five Tasmac shops in Ramanathapuram district.

A division bench comprising Justices M.M.Sundresh and S. Ananthi dismissed the PIL filed by Muniyasamy.

The bench said this PIL has been filed seeking to take action for closure of shops, as they were situated in the prohibited distance. Though the counsel for the petitioner submitted that they were situated in prohibited distance, the counsel for the official respondents, namely, the

Chairman and Ramana-thapuram District Manager of Tasmac submitted that there was no such prohibition, as there was no religious/educational institution situated nearer as per the Rules, the bench added.

The bench said, "We have also perused the affi-

davit filed by the District Manager, Tasmac and the report of the Legal Services Authority. The report of the Legal Services authority merely indicates the prevailing situation of the area, in which the shops are situated. From that we do not find anything contrary to

the Rules. The Full bench of this court has already held that the resolution of the local panchayat has got no bearing for the running of a liquor shop. In such a view of the matter, we do not find any merit in this petition. Accordingly, this petition is dismissed".

## DMK fields 5 sitting MLAs for 5 constituencies in Thanjavur

**G. SRINIVASAN | DC THANJAVUR, MARCH 12**

The DMK has fielded five of its sitting MLAs for five assembly constituencies in Thanjavur district. While sitting MLA T.K.G. Neelam-

egam is the candidate for Thanjavur assembly constituency, Durai.Chandrasekaran, sitting MLA is the candidate for Thiruvaiyaru assembly seat. Other candidates are Anbalagan (sitting MLA) for Kumba-

konam, M. Ramachandran, (sitting MLA) for Orathanadu, Kovi. Sezhian (sitting MLA) for Thiruvaidamaruthu (reserve) constituency. The DMK has named K. Annadurai, former MLA for Pattukottai as its candi-

date and Ashok Kumar as candidate for Peravurani assembly constituency. Interestingly, the DMK has fielded its candidate at Pattukottai after 20 years, as it normally gives that seat either to the Tamil Maanila

Congress or the Congress, who were allies of the party in the past. Enadhi Balasubramanian contested as DMK candidate from Pattukottai in 2001, but lost it. Presently, the seat is with the AIADMK.

The DMK has given the Papanasam seat to its ally Manithaneya Makkal Katchi (MMK), where it is pitched against the AIADMK. The DMK is contesting against AIADMK candidates in Thanjavur, Orath-

anadu, Peravurani and Thiruvaidamaruthu. It is facing the BJP in Thiruvaiyaru, the Moovendar Munn-etra Kazhagam in Kumbakonam and Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) in Pattukottai.

## Governor urges youth to follow Gandhi's principles

**Chennai, March. 12 :** Tamil Nadu, which has its share in the country's glorious freedom movement, was always close to Mahatma Gandhi's heart, Governor Banwarilal Purohit said on Friday and urged the youth to imbibe the values and principles taught by the Father of the Nation and take India forward in the comity of nations. India, the governor said, is the fastest growing emerging economy of the world and is on the cusp of reaping benefits of the demographic dividend. The country is self-reliant and is respected all over the world not only for its political and economic stability but also for its deep cultural roots and social cohesion, Purohit said.

He was inaugurating the commemoration of 75th anniversary of India's Independence Day as part of the 'Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav' at Gandhi Mandapam campus, Guindy, here. "We owe all this in substantial measure to the freedom fighters of yesterday who silently underwent suffering in the long struggle that involved enormous sacrifices and hardships," the governor said. Quoting Gandhiji that

strength does not come from physical capacity alone, it comes from indomitable will, Purohit appealed to the youth "to imbibe the values that adorned our freedom movement, the values and principles taught to us by Father of Nation and with strong will make sterling contribution in nation building to take India still forward in the comity of nations." Pointing out that Tamil Nadu was always close to the Mahatma's heart, he said there were 13 Tamilian inmates when Gandhi started the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, initially with 25 inmates. "Mahatma Gandhi visited Tamil Nadu 20 times between 1896 and 1946. And during his first visit in 1896 he tried to learn Tamil and bought 9 Tamil books for the purpose," the governor said. During his visit to Madurai in 1921, he changed his attire to simple dhoti and upper cloth for the rest of his life.

"Tamil Nadu has its share in the glorious freedom movement of the country. Subramania Bharathi, Tirupur Kumaran, Veera Mangai Velu Nachiyar, Vanchinathan, Veerapa-

ndia Kattabomman, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Dheeran Chinnamalai, Marudu Pandiyar, Subramanian Siva, Pooli Theevan are some of the greatest freedom fighters produced by this part of the country," he said. The country is very proud of the spectacular contributions made by Tamil Nadu towards the freedom struggle. "I salute all those great freedom fighters," he said. A photo exhibition on freedom fighters was organised on the occasion. The Salt Satyagraha undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi's associate C. Rajagopalachari from Tiruchirappalli to Vedaranyam on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, located at a distance of 240 km, was re-enacted today at Old Post Office near Tiruchirappalli Railway junction where Rajaji's Salt March started. "A similar celebration is being organised in the Vellore Fort in order to re-enact and recall the first ever revolt by Indian soldiers against the British rulers and sacrifices made by the Indian Sepoys against the British oppression in the year 1806...", Purohit said. —PTI

## DMK, AIADMK draw battle lines in Tiruchy West

**R. VALAYAPATHY | DC TIRUCHY, MARCH. 12**

The Tiruchy West Assembly constituency considered to be one of the key constituencies among the nine assembly segments in the district by both the AIADMK and the DMK, as DMK's principal secretary and sitting MLA of Tiruchy west, K.N. Nehru, is going to seek a re-election from Tiruchy west in the April 6 assembly elections.

Rumours are rife that this time it could be a cake walk for Nehru as his opposition nominee of the AIADMK is a low profile person both in the party and the general public.

Since Independence, the present Tiruchy west constituency has seen several elections in the name of Tiruchy II constituency. The election commission during the 2009 election, renamed Tiruchy II as Tiruchy West, under the EC's 'constituency reconstruction' drill.

The Tiruchy west con-

stituency has a total electorate of 2,68,379 including 1,38,954 women electorates.

During the last assembly election, Nehru defeated his nearest AIADMK rival and former chief whip of the party R. Manoharan with a margin of over 28,000 votes. There is an overall assumption that Nehru, who defeated R. Manoharan, this time would surely run over his present AIADMK rival, Karumandapam Padmanabhan, who is deemed to be a weak candidate.

The DMK cadres commenced their electioneering soon after announcement of Nehru as party's candidate for Tiruchy west, by lighting crackers and distributing sweets to passers-by, seeking their vote for Nehru. They also took out rallies in different parts of the Tiruchy west assembly constituency.

Nehru himself claimed that during the last five years, the AIADMK government did not bother about the improvement

of basic amenities in the constituency, instead in the name of smart city scheme, the Tiruchirappalli city corporation only concentrated on establishment of parks.

Nehru said that he provided basic amenities to the people and also established anganwadi buildings and ration shop buildings, from his local area MLA development fund. He also claimed that during the DMK rule, the government was very keen to improve basic amenities especially improve road network, whereas in the last 10 years, the AIADMK government did not make any concrete schemes for his constituency.

On the other hand, the AIADMK cadres hoped that this time they would taste victory despite several rumors about party candidate Karumandapam Padmanabhan, as he belonged to the Kallar community, the dominant community in the constituency. Padmanabhan is also a hard worker of the

party. The AIADMK cadre also claim that the government had done several good things for the constituency besides helping the elderly people by sanctioning old age pension. During the lockdown period, the government had provided free rice and other essential commodities to card holders for more than eight months, besides Pongal gift.

When this correspondent contacted a few voters, particularly old aged voters, they said they were not bothered about who is going to win, but the one who forms the new government should improve the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial

Government medical college further, by equipping it with modern health care equipment, to early finish the railway overbridge near the railway junction, and to establish the integrated bus terminal, a long time expectation of the local residents.



1008 devotees take milk procession on the occasion of Maasi Peruvizha organised by Sri Angalaparameswari Temple in Triplicane, in Chennai.

—DC

## Plea to ban carton box raw materials export

**DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH. 12**

The corrugated box manufacturing companies, reeling under shortage of raw materials, have requested the central government to ban export of raw materials used in the production of corrugated boxes.

More than 2,000 micro small and medium enterprises are involved in manufacturing the corrugated box (carton box), for pharma, FMCG, food products, automobiles and electrical appliances in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Though the demand for the boxes has been on the rise since the outbreak of Covid-19, the manufacturers are not able to ensure supply, as thousands of tonnes of kraft paper are leaving Indian shores for export markets, leaving the local industry high and dry. The severe shortage, coupled with an unprecedented 65 per cent increase in the price of kraft paper, has pushed manufacturers to the brink of closure.

SICBMA president G. Nagaraj said the corrugated box industry is eco-friendly as

it uses biodegradable kraft paper as the main raw material. There are about 2,000 units in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry engaged in the manufacturing of corrugated boxes. They employ nearly 1,00,000 people - about 60 per cent of them are women.

He said industries can neither accommodate the sudden rise in the raw material cost nor pass it on to the end customers. Unless export is banned and supply of kraft paper is ensured, many industries will have to shut down their business, he said.

## Fake GST bill trading racket busted, businessman arrested

**DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH. 12**

The personnel of Directorate General of GST Intelligence, zonal unit, Coimbatore have arrested a businessman for evading GST to tune of ₹40 crore. During simultaneous raids conducted at his residence-cum-business premises, the officials unearthed a major fake GST bill trading racket having many fictitious registrations in Salem, Karur, Coimbatore and Pollachi.

He had projected as though these firms were engaging in different businesses including plywood and ceramic products in Tamil Nadu. These firms have passed on input tax credit without supply of goods with a taxable value of approximately Rs.318 crores, thereby availing and passing on fraudulent input tax credit of around Rs 40 crores to various entities.

According to sources, the busi-

nessman, in connivance with others, had set up and controlled various GST registrations, one of which was created under his own PAN, while other companies were registered in the name of his relatives and friends in order to avail and pass on ineligible input tax credit without supply of goods, thereby resulting in massive loss of revenue to the government.

During raids, incriminating documents including cheque books and passbooks of the bank accounts set up in the name of these fake firms were recovered from his residential premises. The accused admitted having aided in issuing fake bill through multiple fictitious registrations by misusing the facility extended by the government under GST regime for ease of doing business. The businessman was arrested and remanded under judicial custody. The officials are conducting further investigation.

## SC seeks response of TN police on DMK MP's plea

**New Delhi, March 11:** The Supreme Court on Friday sought a response from the Tamil Nadu police on DMK MP R S Bharathi's plea challenging a Madras High Court order refusing to quash a criminal case against him for allegedly making disparaging remarks against the SC community.

A bench of Justices L Nageswara Rao and S Ravindra Bhat took note of the submissions of lawyer Amit Anand Tiwari, appearing for the Rajya Sabha MP, and issued notices to Assistant Commissioner of Police of Crime Branch and the complainant Kalyana Sundaram. In the proceedings conducted through video conferencing, the bench sought the responses on the plea within two weeks. On February 22, the Madras High Court had dismissed the MP's plea to quash the case, observing that the prima facie "humiliated and insulted" people belonging to the Scheduled Caste community.

The high court had also directed the trial court to complete the trial on a day-to-day basis expeditiously



without any further delay. In his plea, filed through advocate Amit Anand Tiwari before the top court, Bharathi said the high court judgment erroneously notes that his statement is such that it will divide the people and create disharmony in society.

The FIR against Bharathi was registered under the IPC provisions as well as those of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, based on a complaint by Athi Tamilar Makkal Katchi leader Kalyana Sundaram on an alleged speech by the DMK leader at a party forum meeting. —PTI

## Glaucoma a complex eye disease: Expert

**DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH. 12**

The increasing population of senior citizens, diabetics and people with refractive errors are the reasons for increasing glaucoma cases in the country, said an expert, as part of the World Glaucoma Week

2021 that will end on Saturday.

Dr. R. Kaladevi, regional medical director, Dr Agarwal's Eye Hospital, said that glaucoma was more complex and dangerous as, unlike cataract, it is irreversible. Glaucoma is both under-diagnosed and under-treated. It takes place when the pressure inside the eye

(intraocular pressure) increases. The pressure is normal as long as the rate of production of aqueous humor; the clear liquid inside the front part of eyes, matches the rate of its drainage. However, when the channels carrying this fluid get blocked, the pressure inside the eye increases. This increased pressure

damages the optic nerve, which passes the visual messages to the brain.

Nearly 4.0 million people in India, including 1.6 million children, are blind or visually impaired. Next to cataracts and untreated refractive errors, glaucoma is the third leading cause of blindness in India.



## SHORT TAKES

## SHIVRAJ LIKELY TO GO FOR CABINET EXPANSION

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 12

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan may go for expansion of his cabinet after ongoing budget session of Assembly.

Chouhan held discussions with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leaders here in this regard a couple of days ago, a senior BJP leader in know of the development told this newspaper on Friday.

"The Chief Minister awaits nod from the Central leadership to go ahead with his plan to expand his ministry", the BJP leader said unwilling to be quoted.

Sources said the Chief Minister has been lobbying hard with the Central party leadership and RSS to induct his loyalist and former minister Rajendra Shukla, an influential leader from the Rewa region, considered a stronghold of BJP.

## VHP RAISES ₹2,500 CR FOR RAM TEMPLE

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 12

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has so far raised ₹2,500 crore through contributions from devotees across the country for construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya.

This was revealed by VHP national general secretary Milind Parande here.

Talking to reporters here late on Thursday, Parande said mobilisation of funds for construction of Ram temple have been carried out in different parts of the country and in some other countries.

However, details on funds mobilised in other countries were yet to be compiled, he added. VHP has mobilised ₹200 crore in Madhya Pradesh for construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya.

He said around 5.50 crore people belonging to 1.10 crore families in MP have made their contributions for the purpose.

The VHP volunteers have spread in around 45,000 villages in MP to seek contributions from people for construction of Ayodhya Ram temple.

## ABDUCTED GIRL RESCUED FROM BANGLADESH

**Hakimpur (WB), March 12:** A 16-year-old girl who was abducted from West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district and taken to Bangladesh has returned to her family, thanks to coordinated efforts by the border guards of the two countries, a BSF official said on Friday.

The girl, a resident of a village close to the international border, was taken to the neighbouring country by a Bangladeshi man on March 7, Border Security Force 112 Battalion Commandant Arun Kumar said.

The news of her abduction reached the BOP and Kumar established contact with his counterpart in the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) on the other side of the border.

He shared information about her with the BGB official. Constant liaison with the BGB and joint efforts of border guards of both the countries ensured the safe return of the girl who was handed over to her family on Thursday. — PTI

## SC notice to Centre on places of worship law

New Delhi, March 12:

The Supreme Court sought the Union government's response on Friday on a plea filed before it challenging the validity of certain provisions of a 1991 law, which prohibits the filing of a lawsuit to reclaim a place of worship or seek a change in its character from what prevailed on August 15, 1947.

The petition alleges that the 1991-law creates an "arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date" of August 15, 1947 for maintaining the character of the places of worship or pilgrimage against encroachment done by "fundamentalist-barbaric invaders and law-breakers".

A bench of Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and Justice A.S. Bopanna issued notice to the Centre on the plea filed by BJP leader and advocate Ashwini Upadhyay, seeking that sections 2, 3, 4 of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, be set aside on grounds including that these provisions take away the right of a judicial remedy to reclaim a place of worship of any person or a religious group.

Senior advocate Gopal Subramaniam appeared for the petitioner. The law has made only one exception -- on the dispute pertaining to the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri

● **THE PETITION** by BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyay alleges that the 1991-law creates an "arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date" of August 15, 1947 for maintaining the character of the places of worship or pilgrimage against encroachment done by "fundamentalist-barbaric invaders and law-breakers".

Masjid at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh.

The fresh plea assumes significance as there has been an ongoing demand by some Hindu groups to reclaim religious places at Mathura and Kashi, which are prohibited under the 1991 law.

The provisions not only offend the right of equality and life, but also violate the principles of secularism, which is an integral part of the Preamble and the basic structure of the Constitution, the plea says.

The PIL claims that the provisions of the law "not only offend Articles 14 (equality), 15 (prohibits discrimination of Indians on basis of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth), 21 (protection of life and personal liberty), 25 (freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion), 26 (freedom to

● **THE FRESH** plea assumes significance as there has been an ongoing demand by some Hindu groups to reclaim religious places at Mathura and Kashi, which are prohibited under the 1991 law. The law violates the principles of secularism, which is an integral part of the Preamble and the basic structure of the Constitution, it said

manage religious affairs) and 29 (protection of interests of minorities), but also violate the principles of secularism, which is an integral part of the Preamble and the basic structure of the Constitution".

The PIL contends that the Centre has barred the remedies against illegal encroachment on places of worship and pilgrimage of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs, who cannot file a suit or approach a high court.

The petitioner has sought a declaration from the court that the provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 are void and unconstitutional for being violative of the fundamental rights to equality, practise one's religion and maintain religious places, among others, as the law validates the "places of worship"

illegally made by "barbaric invaders".

The plea claims that the restriction to move court is against the principle of rule of law and secularism, and adds that "if the Ayodhya case had not been decided by the Supreme Court's constitution bench on November 9, 1919, Hindus would have been denied justice even after 500 years of the demolition of the temple".

"The Centre by making impugned sections has, without resolution of the disputes through process of the law, abated the suit/proceedings, which is 'per se' unconstitutional and beyond its law-making power."

"Moreover, impugned provisions cannot be forced with retrospective effect and the judicial remedy of dispute pending, arisen or arising cannot be barred. Centre neither can close the doors of Courts of First Instance, Appellate Courts, Constitutional Courts for aggrieved Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs nor take away the power of high courts and Supreme Court, conferred under Articles 226 and 32," it says. Earlier also, another public interest litigation (PIL) petition was filed by the Vishwa Bhadrar Pujari Purohit Mahasangh, seeking directions to declare section 4 of the Act as ultra vires.

— PTI

## TMC delegation meets EC, demands high-level probe

**New Delhi, March 12:** A TMC delegation met the Election Commission (EC) on Friday and demanded a high-level probe into an alleged attack on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram and claimed it was not an "unfortunate incident", but a conspiracy.

The six-member delegation of the Trinamul Congress (TMC) met the full EC team, including Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sunil Arora, for over an hour and submitted a memorandum to it, highlighting how BJP leaders in West Bengal had threatened the Chief Minister through tweets and other remarks.

"Injuries to Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram were not a result of an unfortunate incident but that of a conspiracy. The events leading up to the attempt on her life leave no doubt that the attack was part of a deep-rooted conspiracy," TMC MP Saugata Roy told reporters after meeting the EC.

In the memorandum, the TMC has made allegations against Suwendu Adhikari, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate from Nandigram in the upcoming state Assembly polls.

"When an attempt was made on the life of Banerjee, in which she was grievously hurt, to cover up the attack, eyewitnesses were planted, illustratively, eye-witnesses Chittaranjan Das and Debabrata Das, who testified that Banerjee's car was hit against an iron pillar, are associates of Suwendu Adhikari, BJP candidate from Nandigram," the memorandum said.

The party said BJP's state president Dilip Ghosh had uploaded a caricature depicting that she would be hit at Nandigram. Around the same time, numerous complaints were filed by the saffron party with the EC seeking immediate removal of the then police chief and IGP of West Bengal, it said.

After a delegation of TMC leaders met EC officials in Bengal, the poll body on Thursday sent a strongly-worded letter to the party on its memorandum over injuries to Ms Banerjee during the campaign, saying it looks "undignified to even respond" to allegations that the poll panel is doing things in the state at the behest of a "particular party".

— PTI



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greets party activists as she leaves SSKM Hospital in a wheelchair after being discharged in Kolkata on Friday. — PTI

## Mamata discharged from hospital

RAJIB CHOWDHURY | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 12

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was discharged from SSKM Hospital on Friday evening after she made "repeated requests" to the doctors, who had treated her, for her release on her lucky day, ignoring their advice to remain admitted under "observation" there for two more days for recovery from her leg injuries.

At around 7 pm the Trinamul Congress supreme, sitting on a wheelchair with a fresh plaster on her left leg for ankle fracture and feet injury, came out of the Woodburn Ward of the state government-run hospital, where she was admitted since Wednesday night after suffering injuries in a security breach during her Assembly election campaign at Nandigram in East Midnapore. With the help of state

minister and close aide Firhad Hakim and security personnel, Ms Banerjee, wearing a special pair of slippers, got on her car and returned in a convoy to her residence at Kalighat in South Kolkata.

SSKM director Monimoy Bandyopadhyay said: "The six-member board of doctors today morning opened the plaster slab and examined the wound of the CM. She responded to the treatment. Her improvements are very satisfying. The haematoma that was there has diminished considerably in size and the ankle's condition shows marked signs of improvement. A new plaster has been applied."

He added: "The board, after looking into the CM's general and local wound condition, decided in favour of keeping her for another 48 hours for observation, but due to repeated requests decided to discharge her."

## QUAD FOCUSES ON VACCINE, ECONOMY

From Page 1

"We are committed to leveraging our partnership to help the world's most dynamic region respond to historic crisis, so that it may be the free, open, accessible, diverse, and thriving Indo-Pacific we all seek," they said.

In New Delhi, briefing reporters on the summit, foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said it was decided that India's manufacturing capacity is something that is going to be leveraged to make US vaccines.

He said the financing for creation of additional capacities will come from the US and Japan while Australia will contribute to the last mile logistics and delivery issues. Australia will finance countries which are going to receive the vaccines.

"In today's context, it is one of the most important initiatives. We are talking about huge investments in creating additional vaccine capacities in India for exports to countries in the Indo-Pacific region for their betterment. We are talking about producing a billion doses of vaccines by the end of 2022," he said.

"India welcomes Quad vaccine initiatives as it recognises our own manufacturing capacities and capabilities," he said.

In November 2017, India, Japan, the US and Australia gave shape to the proposal of setting up the Quad. — PTI

## CBI, ED SUMMON TMC TOP LEADER AHEAD OF POLLS

RAJIB CHOWDHURY | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 12

On the eve of West Bengal Assembly election, two central agencies have summoned two heavyweight Trinamul Congress candidates including a two-time minister of the Mamata Banerjee government with a key party post for their questioning in two separate chit fund scams.

One of them is Partha Chatterjee who is contesting from his seat Behala West in Kolkata. He has been called by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the multi-crore I-Core chit fund scam to appear at its office in CGO Complex of Salt Lake next week. Dr Chatterjee is the state education as well as parliamentary affairs minister.

He is also the TMC secretary general.

This is the first time Dr Chatterjee with a clean image came under the scanner of the CBI following a central vigilance commission's report over his suspected link with the collapsed ponzy scheme company.

Another is the Saradha chit fund scam accused former transport minister Madan Mitra who is again contesting from Kamarhati where he lost in 2016.

He has been summoned by the Enforcement Directorate in the same case to appear on March 18 at its office in Salt Lake.

## G 23 leaders not part of 'star campaigners'

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

The Congress on Friday released a list of its "star campaigners" for the coming Assembly elections in West Bengal.

The party will have total of 30 "star campaigners", including party chief Sonia Gandhi, Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi, AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, former Rajasthan deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot, Mohammed Azharuddin, R.P.N. Singh, Salman Khurshid, among others.

Interestingly, however, the party has left out the names of most of the "G-23" letter-writers' group,

including Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal, Manish Tewari, Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Raj Babbar, among others.

The G-23 leaders had written to the Congress president Sonia Gandhi in August last year demanding sweeping changes in the functioning of the party.

A couple of weeks back, some of the change seekers addressed a programme in Jammu, including Mr Azad, Mr Sharma, Mr Sibal and a few others.

The high command loyalists had chided these leaders, saying that instead of being in Jammu they should be campaigning in the poll-going states.

## Amrit mahotsav



Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays homage to Mahatma Gandhi at the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad on Friday. Modi flagged off a 'Padyatra' (Freedom March) from the Sabarmati Ashram on the occasion of the launch of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' India@75.

— PTI

## PANDEMIC | BLUES

## New date for state public service exam announced under political pressure

## Lockdown back in several parts of Maha

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 12

Mumbai city reported 1,646 new Covid infections registered in the last 24 hours, recording the highest single-day spike in months. Maharashtra too sustained its surge with 15,817 fresh Covid infections, which was the highest single-day spike ever since pandemic was declared.

However, even as the state is experiencing the second wave of Covid, the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) on Friday announced a new date for its preliminary examination under immense political

pressure. The exam will be held on March 21. The announcement came a day after the BJP and Congress had expressed its opposition for postponing the exam. Earlier, the exam was scheduled on March 14.

The government sources said that the exams were postponed as lockdown has been imposed in several parts of the state in order to contain the spread of the virus. Since the outbreak of the Covid, the MPSC exam has been postponed five times affecting the lives of students. The new date was announced after Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's intervention.

Meanwhile, chief secretary of Maharashtra Sitaram Kunte held a review meeting of the districts via video conferencing. Kunte directed the district administrations to impose preventive measures to contain the spread of the infection.

Mumbai city has reported 1,500 plus new Covid cases for the third day in a row and more than 1,000 cases for the 10th straight day.

Not only Mumbai, Pune and Thane, but several cities and towns in Maharashtra, including Vidarbha and Marathwada regions, have been witnessing spike in cases. Lockdown or restrictions have been imposed in

several cities or districts in the state in a bid to prevent the spread of the virus.

A week-long lockdown has also been imposed in Nagpur. Due to the increase in cases in Parbhani district, lockdown will be imposed from tonight 12 am till 6 am on Monday morning. "We appeal to the people of Parbhani and other neighbouring districts, to cooperate," said Nawab Malik, Maharashtra cabinet minister.

As many as 79 persons including students, teachers and staff of three residential schools in Maharashtra's Palghar district have tested positive for Covid in the last week.



## SHORT TAKES

GURDEEP SINGH  
TAKES OATH AS  
PAK SENATOR

**Islamabad:** Gurdeep Singh from the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party took the oath on Friday as a Senator, becoming the first turban-clad Sikh representative in the upper house of Pakistan's Parliament.

Singh, from the party of Prime Minister Imran Khan became the first turban-clad Sikh representative from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan's Senate on March 3. He defeated rival candidates on a minority seat by a huge margin in the election to the upper chamber of Parliament.

Singh secured 103 votes in the House of 145 whereas Jamiat Ulema-e Islam (Fazlur) candidate Ranjeet Singh secured just 25 votes and Asif Bhatti of the Awami National Party received 12. Forty-seven other Senators also took oath on Friday.

SA ZULU KING  
GOODWILL  
ZWELITHINI DIES

**Johannesburg:** King Goodwill Zwelithini, the traditional leader of South Africa's Zulu nation, has died aged 72 after being hospitalised for more than a month, his family announced on Friday.

Zwelithini had health problems related to diabetes, according to local news reports. Zwelithini, the eighth Zulu king, reigned for more than 50 years, making him the longest-serving Zulu monarch. As the traditional leader of the Zulu nation, Zwelithini did not hold political office but had considerable influence over the country's estimated 12 million Zulus, the largest ethnic group of South Africa's 60 million people.

King Zwelithini was an outspoken critic of the government's planned land redistribution policy, which could affect large tracts of land belonging to the Zulu nation. The Ingonyama Trust controlled by the king owns 29 per cent of the land of the KwaZulu-Natal province, about 28,000 square kilometres, or 10,811 square miles.

ISRAEL, GREECE,  
CYPRUS HOLD  
NAVAL DRILL

**Jerusalem:** The Israeli military said on Friday that it has conducted a joint naval exercise with Greece and Cyprus, in the latest sign of increased cooperation among three countries that increasingly view Turkey as a rival in the Mediterranean Sea.

It said the "Noble Dina" exercise, which was led by Israel and also included France, covered "anti-submarine procedures, search and rescue scenarios, and a scenario simulating battle between ships." The exercise was concluded on Thursday.

WOMAN HELD  
FOR ASSAULT  
ON UBER DRIVER

**San Francisco:** A woman was arrested on Thursday on suspicion of pepper-spraying an Uber driver in San Francisco who was coughed at and insulted after he demanded a passenger wear a mask, police announced.

Malaysia King, 24, was arrested in Las Vegas on suspicion of assault with a caustic chemical, assault and battery and other charges. She was being held without bail.

It wasn't immediately clear whether she had an attorney to speak on her behalf.

## WHO says AstraZeneca is safe

Severe allergy added to AstraZeneca vaccine side-effects, says EU regulator

**Geneva, March 12:** The World Health Organisation said on Friday there was no reason to stop using AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine after several countries suspended the rollout over blood clot fears.

The WHO, which said its vaccines advisory committee was examining the safety data coming in, stressed that no causal link had been established between the vaccine and clotting.

The UN health agency also said that after the injection of more than 260 million Coronavirus vaccine doses so far around the world, no deaths had yet been attributed to a Covid-19 jab.

Denmark, Norway and Iceland paused the use of the AstraZeneca jab as a precaution after isolated reports of recipients developing blood clots.

Italy and Austria have banned the use of shots from separate batches of AstraZeneca, and Thailand and Bulgaria said they would delay the rollout of the shot. A range of health authorities around the world have insisted the jab is safe, including the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and

Biden sets goal of July 4th to  
'mark freedom' from Covid-19

**Washington, March 12:** US President Joe Biden has announced that all adult Americans will be eligible for Covid-19 vaccination by May 1, by which he will order states to allow all adults to receive vaccines; and July 4, when he said Americans can again celebrate Independence Day in person.

"After this long hard year, that will make this Independence Day something truly special, where

Biden offered an ambitious plan to lift the country from the worst health crisis using a pair of upcoming dates: May 1, by which he will order states to allow all adults to receive vaccines; and July 4, when he said Americans can again celebrate Independence Day in person.

"After this long hard year, that will make this Independence Day something truly special, where

we not only mark our independence as a nation but begin to mark our independence from this virus," he said in his address, shortly after he signed a \$1.9 trillion Coronavirus relief package approved by the US Congress.

His speech also came a year after the outbreak was classified as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation.

— PTI

the WHO.

"AstraZeneca is an excellent vaccine, as are the other vaccines that are being used," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris told reporters at a briefing in Geneva.

"Yes, we should continue using the AstraZeneca vaccine," she added, stressing though that any concerns over safety must be investigated.

"We must always ensure that we look for any safety signals when we roll out

vaccines, and we must review them," she said. "But there is no indication to not use it."

The EMA said on Thursday that there had been 30 cases of so-called thromboembolic events among five million people who had received the jab in Europe.

But European countries could still keep using the vaccine, the EU's drug regulator said.

Harris said that while a few countries had, as a

precaution, suspended the use of a specific batch of AstraZeneca vaccine distributed in Europe, based on reports of blood coagulation disorders, "a causal relationship has not been shown".

"Vaccination against Covid-19 doesn't reduce deaths from any other causes," she said.

"As of March 9, there have been over 268 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines administered since the start of the pandemic.

Gunmen abduct  
30 kids in Nigeria

**Lagos (Nigeria), March 12 :** Gunmen have attacked a school in north-western Nigeria and kidnapped at least 30 students just weeks after a similar attack in the region, authorities said on Friday.

The latest abduction took place late Thursday night at the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation, Afaka, in the Igabi local government area of Kaduna state, police said.

"About 30 students, a mix of males and females, are yet to be accounted for," the state's commissioner for International

Security and Home Affairs, Samuel Aruwan, said in a statement. Several staff of the school were also kidnapped, he added. Aruwan said the attack was carried out by a large group of "armed bandits," adding that the military engaged the attackers and were able to take 180 staff and students to safety.

An unspecified number of the students were injured and are receiving medical attention at a military facility. Security forces "are conducting an operation to track the missing students," Aruwan said.

— AP

## Cuomo faces impeachment inquiry



Andrew Cuomo

**Albany, March 12:** New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's grip on power appeared increasingly threatened on Thursday as a majority of state legislators called for his resignation.

Democrats launched an impeachment investigation and police in the state capital said they stood ready to investigate a groping allegation.

The firestorm around the Democrat grew a day after the Times Union of Albany reported that an unidentified aide had claimed Cuomo reached under her shirt and fondled her at his official residence late last year.

The woman hasn't filed a criminal complaint, but a lawyer for the governor said on Thursday that the

state had reported the allegation to the Albany Police Department after the woman involved declined to do so herself.

"In this case the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police

department and gave them the attorney's information," said Beth Garvey, the governor's acting counsel.

An Albany Police Department spokesperson, Steve Smith, didn't immediately return a message, but told that police had reached out to a representative for the woman. The possible involvement of police comes as more lawmakers called on Cuomo to resign over alleged misconduct with women and allegations that his administration concealed how many nursing home residents died of Covid-19.

At least 121 members of the state Assembly and Senate have said publicly they believe Cuomo

should quit office now, according to a tally.

The count includes 65 Democrats and 56 Republicans. The top Democrat in the state Assembly, Speaker Carl Heastie, on Thursday backed a plan for its judiciary committee to launch an impeachment investigation.

The committee can interview witnesses and subpoena documents and its inquiry could be wide-ranging: from alleged sexual misconduct to Covid-19 outbreaks at nursing homes.

It won't interfere with a separate inquiry of sexual harassment allegations being conducted by state Attorney General Letitia James, according to Heastie and James. — AP

Turkey plans to host  
Afghan peace talks

**Ankara, March 12:** Turkey plans to host an Afghan peace conference in Istanbul in April, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Friday, ahead of a deadline for a US troop withdrawal.

In a letter leaked to Afghanistan media, Secretary of State Antony Blinken en-

couraged Afghan leaders to consider a "new, inclusive government" and proposed that talks take place within weeks in Turkey to seal a peace deal with the Taliban.

Cavusoglu said Turkey considers itself "one of the most important actors in Afghanistan." — AFP

## Conserving Wildlife



People look at polar bears inside an enclosure at a newly-opened hotel, which allows guests a view of the animals from rooms in Harbin, northeastern China's Heilongjiang province, on Friday. Polar bears are listed as vulnerable species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

— AFP

## Twin births at 'all-time high' worldwide

**Paris, March 12:** More twins — one in every 42 children born — are coming into the world than ever before, according to new research citing the rapid rise in medically assisted reproduction as a key factor.

Some 1.6 million twins are born each year, about a third more than four decades ago, according to a study on Friday in Human Reproduction.

"The relative and absolute numbers of twins in the world are higher than they have ever been since the mid-twentieth century and this is likely to be an all-time high," said lead author Christiana Mondon, a professor at the University of



Representational image.

— AFP

Oxford. The rise of assisted reproductive technology (ART) in developed countries since the 1970s, espe-

cially the United States and Europe, has contributed significantly to the rise in multiple births, the study found.

Mothers giving birth at an older age — when twinning rates are higher — is also a factor, as are increased use of contraception, women choosing to start families later in life and lower overall fertility. Researchers gathered data from 165 countries from between 2010 and 2015, covering 99 per cent of the global population. For 112 of those nations twinning rates were also available for the period 1980 to 1985, making it possible to track changes over time.

In three quarters of the

countries with data for both periods, twin births increased by at least 10 per cent, the study found.

In Asia, the rate at which twins were born went up 32 per cent, and in North America it jumped by 71 per cent.

"In both periods, Africa had the highest twinning rates, and there was no significant increase over time," Mondon said.

This was most likely due to genetic differences between African populations and other parts of the world, he speculated.

There was a decrease in the number of twin births in only seven nations.

— AFP

**ICICI Bank**  
ICICI Bank Limited

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Corporate office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Mumbai 400 051.

**GOLD AUCTION CUM INVITATION NOTICE**

The below mentioned borrowers have been issued notice to sell all their ornaments and gold ornaments ("Facility") available by them from ICICI Bank Limited ("ICICI Bank"). We are constrained to conduct an auction of pledged gold ornaments on **March 24, 2021** as they have failed to repay the dues. ICICI Bank has the authority to remove account/change the auction date without any prior notice. Auction will be held online - <https://gold.auctm.in> between 12:30 pm to 3:30 pm. For detailed Terms and conditions, please log into given website. In case of deceased borrower, all conditions will be applicable to legal heirs.

Loan A/C No.	Customer Name	Branch Name	Customer Name	Branch Name	Customer Name	Branch Name	
40420500017	Munagantham A	Branch Name: Ambattur - Officers Colony	743505000103	V Premasanth	Branch Name: Chennai-Madurai	155505065643	Nanthakumar L
268905001085	Dhaval Prasad M	Branch Name: Chennai - Broadway	603605002545	Srikanth S	Branch Name: Chennai-Pondicherry	155505065658	Nanthakumar L
41210500551	G Manikandan	Branch Name: Chennai - Govindan Road	603505015608	Aravindh G	Branch Name: Chennai-Pondicherry	155505065657	Nanthakumar L
234305000855	Faiz Ahmad A	Branch Name: Chennai - Kottur	097005004482	S Rajnikanth	Branch Name: Chennai-Pondicherry	155505065659	Nanthakumar L
234305000825	Govindarajan C	Branch Name: Chennai - Kottur	097005004478	Abdul Rahman	Branch Name: Chennai-Pondicherry	155505065666	Nanthakumar L
216405001711	Vairaprakash Murugavel	Branch Name: Chennai - Kottur	097005004478	Abdul Rahman	Branch Name: Chennai-Pondicherry	155505065671	Nanthakumar L
216405001826	Vinodh Kumar K	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	604005005058	Ankita Srinivasan	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	155505065672	Nanthakumar L
352405000486	Manikandaraman A	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	154605002904	Rup	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	155505065673	Nanthakumar L
352405000489	Manikandaraman A	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	154605002929	Pannaselvam	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	155505065674	Nanthakumar L
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629005000940	V. Nagaraj	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	027505000915	Aashiq S	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	155505065676	Nanthakumar L
629005000841	Boia Chandrayantham V	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	154605001553	Viveka Anand M.K	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	155505065677	Nanthakumar L
321605000522	Kavitha Ranjit	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	021205000805	Priyanka Navneet	Branch Name: Chennai - Palavakkam	155505065678	Nanthakumar L
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# DECCAN Chronicle

13 MARCH 2021

## Polls a serious business, spare us all the theatrics

Spectacles and theatrics are essential ingredients of Indian elections and our leaders never fail to deliver them. Most leaders, however, also see to it that such elements only add to the colour of the electioneering process and do not impact the democratic process adversely.

But the reports emanating from West Bengal of late have not been confidence-inspiring ones. Instead, they do the opposite. Chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday alleged that four to five men attacked her in Nandigram where she is contesting the Assembly election. She suffered injuries to her leg and neck. The picture of the woman chief minister with bandage and visuals of her describing the body pain went viral instantly, igniting passions all over the state. Her allegation that there was no security detail to protect her accentuated the situation.

That version, however, underwent a substantial change the following day when she explained what happened the previous day. There was no mention of an attack nor a conspiracy. But by then, the state had witnessed a series of clashes between her followers and those of the BJP which has emerged as the principal opposition to her party, the Trinamul Congress, this time around. There was also an attempt to blame the Election Commission of India that has virtually taken over the state's administration and shifted the state police chief and his deputy recently.

Fair and free elections where citizens vote peacefully and elect their representatives and rulers are one of the seminal pillars of a functioning democracy. Every institution of the state has a responsibility towards ensuring it; more so for politicians in power. Every election is fought in a highly charged atmosphere and party cadres would miss no chance to

pounce on their opponents. It is for level-headed leaders to ensure that the ultimate goal is to create an atmosphere where every voter and her choice are respected. It is unfortunate that the West Bengal chief minister did not think through it before going public with a conspiracy theory.

In a democracy, people make their choices after processing information they receive. It is imperative that all those who are duty-bound to protect democracy and its institutions also ensure that the right information reaches the people and the wrong and fake do not. It is only in such a background that their decision would further the cause of democracy. Igniting passion based on religion or ideology or people's love for their leaders is easy but swaying people's opinion by good governance is not.

Politicians of all hues must be willing to place themselves for public scrutiny of what they have done or not done in the past while going to people seeking votes. Nothing should allow this process to be bypassed, for it will colour the very exercise and drain it of meaning. There must be no shortcuts to power.

The latest events send a reminder to the Election Commission, too: it is entering a minefield in the following days and no amount of caution and preparedness would be excessive in the conduct of the elections.

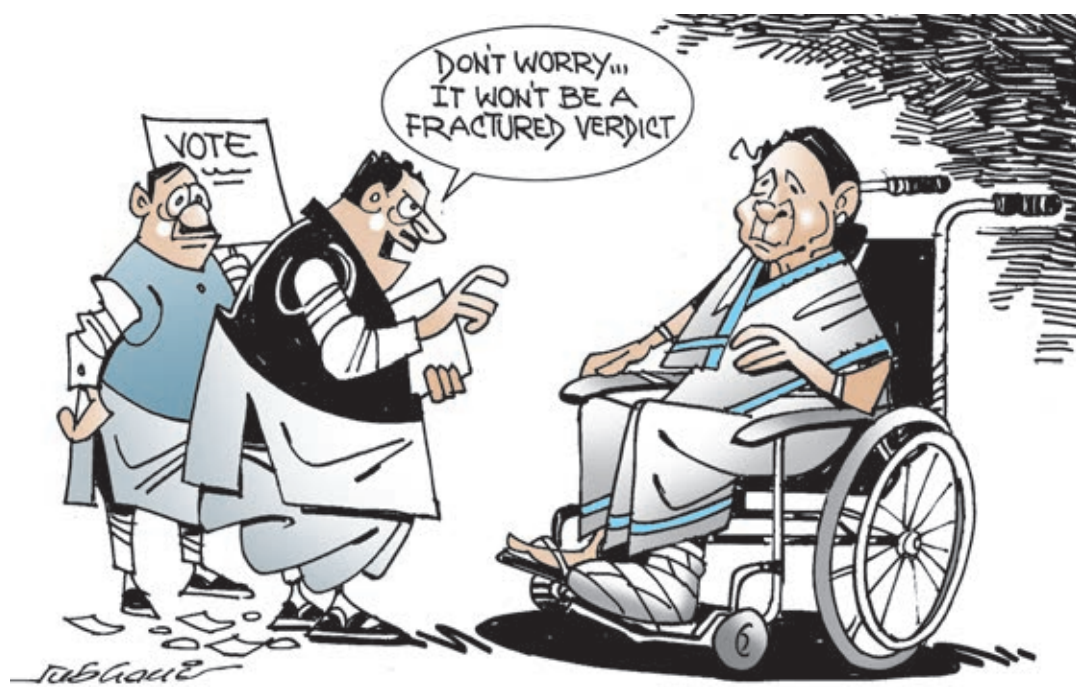
## Biden shows the way

US President Joe Biden signed a historic US \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief package heralding a path breaking measure that sets very high standards for the world while showing it the way out of the pain of the pandemic as well as the economic recession that came in its wake. There is something for everyone in the plan, from vaccination eligibility for every American by May and the promise of normal family gatherings by July 4 and the reopening of schools. Considering how his predecessor Donald Trump had mishandled the Covid-19 crisis into making America the worst sufferer, Mr Biden has not just tread a truly effective path; he has chosen the best possible response to a global crisis.

The American Rescue Plan, passed despite partisan resistance from Republican legislators, would take total Covid-related expenditure on public health and the economy from December 2020 to nearly \$3 trillion or 14 per cent of pre-pandemic GDP. This puts in the shade what Barack Obama's administration did after the economic crisis of 2008. At a time when the Democrats were in a majority in the House as well as the senate, the US had come up with a less than US \$1 trillion response to the sub-prime induced economic crisis. This massive fiscal stimulus plan emphasises that the only way to get our life back and get the economy back on track is to beat the virus even if only time can tell whether the inflation risk is worth the gamble.

What Mr Biden left unsaid in his optimistic speech on the anniversary of the day Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic was what the US is going to do about the millions of doses of AstraZeneca vaccine sitting idle in its manufacturing facilities because it is yet to get FDA clearance whereas 70 countries have authorised its use already and many, including EU countries, desperately need vaccine doses. Also, the prioritising of the Pfizer vaccine has meant the US has clamped down on export of certain inputs that are inhibiting its manufacture in India, the world's largest vaccine "fill-finish" manufacturer. Mr

Subhani



# Gandhis have had it if Congress flops in May



Saeed Naqvi

Wide Angle

Mullah Nasrullah spread out his ornate carpet on the front lawn of his house. He did push-ups on the carpet to become strong enough to protect his house... Meanwhile, thieves from two separate gates behind him tiptoed into his house. Friendly neighbours at the front gate alerted Mullah that his house was about to be burgled by two gangs.

Mullah laughed at them with supreme nonchalance. "You are wrong that they are two gangs", he said. "They are together in this scheme and I know what they are up to."

"What are they up to?" asked the neighbours.

"If I run to chase out one group, the other will steal my carpet", said Mullah, rolling his eyes cunningly, and did another push-up.

The neighbours beat their breasts, even as they saw the burglars cart away every item in Mullah's house.

The Mullah story possibly has universal application, but caution may be in order before transposing it on Rahul Gandhi's athletic performance at the St. Joseph's Higher Secondary School in Mulgumoodubin, Tamil Nadu. He left a Class 10 student, Meroli Shenigha, panting for breath in a competition. Rahul, 50, did 14 push-ups in 10 seconds, something of a record.

A yen for physical fitness is in his DNA. For his great-grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, yoga was incomplete without an extended shishasana, or headstand. But while Nehru was private about his exercises, the great-grandson is demonstrative. Nehru may also have been proud of his Kashmiri Pandit heritage, but never of ritual religiosity. In his will, he wrote that he didn't want any rituals for his crema-

tion. His colleagues, more "Hindu" than him, thought it unwise to have the last rites of the country's first Prime Minister, a Pandit to boot, be concluded without the Vedic rituals.

Taking his cue from there, Rahul Gandhi's most reliable town crier, Randeep Singh Surjewala, declared him a "Janeudhari" Brahmin, a declaration that Rahul seems to have taken to heart, touching base with every temple in town. Not to be outdone, sibling Priyanka too has been wearing tilaks on her forehead, large enough for a "yogini". She has been dipping in holy rivers in severe cold. If her brother has added gymnastics to his repertoire, Priyanka has fallen back on ethnic tourism in fancy dress. With expert ease she plucked "two leaves and a bud" in Assam's tea plantations.

The Gandhi siblings are busting their guts to hold onto the carpet as in the Mullah story. As for the Congress Party (The House), senior members have already bolted and joined the BJP. The remainder are running helter-skelter because the Gandhi family is unwilling to show them the road ahead. It is possible that they themselves do not know.

The Gandhis' state of funk may have been enhanced last week by Gujarat where, contrary to the promise of 2017, the

**The G-23 are at the moment afraid to strike. These hesitations may well give way to a day of the long knives in May after the results of the elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry are out.**

**Anything of a leftist hue, with the capacity to mobilise the people on a platform of roti, kapda, makaan... healthcare, universal free education, etc must be thwarted. Going by this criteria, the Congress is no threat.**

Congress has been beaten to a pulp by the BJP in the local body elections. Indeed, new entrants like the AAP and Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM, have impressively opened their accounts.

The "G-23" Congress letter-writers are what rural folk in North India call "Shivji Ki Baraat", representing all manner of fauna. Ghulam Nabi Azad has been grieving since at least the 2019 elections:

"They are not asking me to campaign". Those were days when Rahul, as Congress president, had resorted to practical politics — he would not be seen with Muslims during elections because that would enable the BJP to polarise the vote. What Rahul appears not to have learnt since then is that policies and strategy, not tricks, build a party's elan. When in the 2019 general election, the BJP won 303 seats as opposed to the Congress' 52, Rahul owned up to his responsibility and resigned as party president.

A chapter in the Congress' and the nation's political history was over. Or so one had thought. But no, his cohorts like Mr Surjewala would dance around him with deafening chants of a "Congress revival".

*Kuchh to hotay hain Mohabbat mein junoon ke aasaar/ Aur Kuchh log bhi deewana bana detay hain* (As it is, there are signs of monomania in obsessive love. Self-serving busybodies further enhance this streak).

Slowly, one saw him trek back from the political wilderness, to attempt, like Sisyphus, the climb again without ever bothering to ask — why is there so much focus on a leader with 52

members in a House of 545? Why does the media, which is owned by industrialists and controlled by the ruling party, heap such generous attention on the Gandhis?

Because they are no threat. Anything of a leftist hue, with the capacity to mobilise the people on a platform of *roti, kapda, makaan...* healthcare, universal free education, etc must be thwarted. Going by this criteria, the Congress is no threat. Policy differences between the BJP and the Congress are minimal. Foreign, economic, even social policies are more or less similar. The BJP's anti-Muslim stance is for Hindu consolidation. The Congress' studied neglect of Muslims serves the same purpose, only with better table manners. Also, the Gandhis and the residual Congress serve as an essential counterpoint in the BJP's musical score.

Essentially, the establishment has a high comfort level with two ruling class parties. One of them may be down and out, but it must remain in occupation of that slot. A vacuum will open up the chances of confusing, unknown amalgamations making a bid for power.

How long can the Mother, Son and his sister hang by a thread for sheer survival? The G-23 are at the moment willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike — just sending out hints but hesitating to go further.

These hesitations may well give way to a day of the long knives in May after the results of the elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry are out. If the Congress does well enough to preserve its self-respect in even two of these five states/UT, the Gandhis may yet be able to keep the carpet. But should they be trounced in all five, well, they had better look out. Little wonder that the all-round uncertainties are promoting a buzz about a "national government", an absurd thought unless the RSS and India Inc show interest.

*The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi*

## LETTERS

### COVID WORRIES

This refers to your report *Very worried about Maharashtra: Centre* (March 12). This is again a wakeup call to all cities in the country that people must not take the virus for granted and need to follow the protocols of appropriate behaviour. The health secretary is advising people to wear masks. The number of crowded places is increasing. Public discipline is required to avoid the spread of infection. Just think of the sacrifices made by frontline warriors to secure a hard-earned victory over corona.

Suresh V.V., Vellore

### POLITICS IN TN

**POLITICS SELDOM** throws up surprises in the Dravidian heartland. Ever since 1967, when the Congress was dethroned from power, Tamil Nadu has been ruled either by DMK or AIADMK. TN's socio-political landscape was nurtured by the Dravidian movement, which was built on the ethos of Tamil culture, language and valour and hence the State is different from the rest of the country. The distinctive features of the Dravidian movement have effectively blocked the entry of national parties into the State for over half a century. As Rajinikanth retreated from politics recently, a new political party emerging as a strong alternative to the two major Dravidian parties looks even more of a distant dream.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

### U'KHAND CHANGE OF GUARD

**THE APPOINTMENT** of Tirat Singh Rawat as the Chief Minister of Uttarakhand by the central leadership of BJP appears a prudent move for it is being aimed at addressing the brewing rebellion against his predecessor, Trivendra Singh Rawat, who earned their wrath on account of his centralised style of functioning and higher concentration of power in chief minister's office. The BJP leadership is believed to have effected a change of guard in Uttarakhand to avoid a repeat of what happened in Jharkhand earlier when its obduracy in not paying heed to saner voices in the state party unit in Jharkhand, who wanted to replace the then Chief Minister Raghubar Das, had led to the party's defeat in the 2019 state assembly polls. It should be noted here that no chief minister had completed his full term since the formation of state in 2000 except ND Tiwari.

M. Jeyaram, Sholavandan

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Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages & Kings



*"Did the Lord God give us noses  
For people to rub in our mistakes?  
And did he grant us toeses  
So we could stub them, for goodness  
sakes!"*

*And yes, he gave us mouths  
To eat, drink and not be 'Loud'  
And concealed bits and bobs —  
Of which we are rightly proud."*

— From Kabhi Kabhi Merey  
Ghar Mey Poleas Aajaatha Hein  
by Bachchoo

## My adventures with Oprah, the real queen of Yankeeland

Interviews with royals are like a virus plague, you don't want to catch them, but you can't avoid hearing all about them. The Queen of America, Oprah Winfrey, interviews Prince Harry and the Duchess of Sussex, the American actress Meghan Markle. I didn't watch the interview, but bits of it were forced on me wherever I looked — even intercut with news of the atrocities in Myanmar.

The most prominent pronouncement that this interview seemed to have yielded was Meghan's claim that before her son Archie was born, some unnamed Brit royal wondered

aloud, perhaps with some alarm or derision, how dark the baby's skin would be. The remark, if Meghan reported it accurately and without malice towards the royals with whom she has fallen out, was prompted by the fact that Meghan's mother is a "woman of colour" — if that's an accepted term. This was interpreted by Oprah and very many other people, including some panjandrum of the Commonwealth and several black US commentators, as a deeply racist concern. It can certainly be interpreted as such.

As Indians, gentle reader, we know that every grandmother and mother-in-law — and yes, very many fathers-in-law — have expressed the same anxiety. Their remarks haven't resulted in flurries in the newspapers or flutters and ruptures in the constitution of the Commonwealth. We take skin colourism as a nasty ingredient of our prejudices — which we shouldn't.

Years ago when Princess Diana died with Dodi-al-Fayed in a car accident in Paris, his father claimed that they had been murdered because Diana was pregnant with Dodi's child and the Duke of Edinburgh did-

n't want the future King William to have a Muslim stepbrother or sister.

It's highly probable that this Mohammed al Fayed was unaware that in the fourteenth century Isabelle of Castile, a direct descendant of Princess Zaida of Seville, a woman of colour, who in turn was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad himself, had married the Duke of York. From that Yorkist line, the present monarchy descends. So, Islam and Moorish skin colour are already somewhere in Archie's DNA.

The only royal interview I confess to watching was Prince Andrew being quizzed by the relentless Emily Maitlis about his paedophilia and association with the frolics and crimes of Jeffrey Epstein. My mild curiosity wasn't to do with royalty or how it would impact on the House of Windsor. I wondered if a British prince would face prosecution and jail and it was mildly amusing watching this idle icon of British tribalism sweat and squirm.

And now that poor Meghan, perhaps as a result of her "disclosures" in the Oprah interview, the victim in her own "confessions", has signed a \$100 million contract with Netflix, we

can all cry in chorus for her as she painfully stumbles and staggers all the way to the bank.

But enough of her — let's talk about me. I met Oprah or she met me when she was invited to a Channel 4 dinner and I worked there. It was a very select dinner and, I suppose, as the only editor of colour in the channel at the time, I was invited by our boss Michael Grade. We were served cocktails by uniformed barmen and then dinner in the boardroom by liveried waiters. No expense spared.

Oprah was seated at the head of the table with Michael and our beloved director of programmes, Liz Forgan. I was at the other end of the table and found myself sitting next to Oprah's press secretary lady. We chatted through the first course and she said they had watched a riveting programme the previous evening in which a white South African eleven-year-old had exchanged places and families with a black South African lad of the same age. I had to say it was my idea and my programme. She was fascinated and asked what else I planned.

I said one of the areas I wanted to venture into was to examine Jazz and

Soul as the classical music of America.

She was curious, if not hooked. "Which Soul and Jazz artists will you feature?"

"Depends on the thesis of the programme," I said. "We are working on it."

"Who are your favourites?" "Today? I suppose Stevie Wonder and, by far the best for voice and technique belong, of course, to Aretha Franklin. Shame about her dress sense."

The lady laughed and put her hand on her mouth as she did. Was this sacrilege?

Then she shouted across the room to Oprah and walked over to her at the other end of the table and the two of them came rushing over to me.

"You must tell her what you just said," the press lady insisted, the amused shock still on her features.

Oprah pulled up a chair. I repeated my, perhaps injudicious, remark. Oprah laughed. "I won't say that's so cheeky, but right on the ball," she said — or words to that effect.

Our brief encounter didn't hit the headlines. Netflix hasn't offered me a cent.







## SHORT TAKES

## No Canada, US Opens this year

**New Delhi:** The Badminton World Federation on Friday announced that this years US Open and Canada Open will not take place due to the Covid-19 "restrictions and complications" across the globe.

The US Open, a Super 300 tournament on the HSBC BWF World Tour, was slated to be played from July 6 to 11, while the Super 100 tournament in Canada Open was schedule for June 29 to July 4.

"The ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and complications left local organisers no choice but to cancel the tournaments," BWF said in a statement.

"The respective decisions of USA Badminton and Badminton Canada were made in consultation and agreement with the BWF," it added.

The cancellations follow the news that Badminton Asia has postponed its flagship event the Asia Championships. — *PTI*

## Federer hopes for Wimbledon high

**Doha:** Roger Federer admitted his goal was to be "100 per cent" back in business by the time Wimbledon rolls around after the 20-time Grand Slam title winner saw his comeback from 13 months out with injury end in Doha on Thursday.

The 39-year-old squandered a match point and was knocked out of the Qatar Open by Georgias Nikoloz Basilashvili in his first tournament since losing to Novak Djokovic in the Australian Open semi-finals in January 2020.

Federer, who underwent two knee surgeries last season, secured the first set against world number 42 Basilashvili but eventually wilted and lost the quarter-final tie, 3-6, 6-1, 7-5.

It was just his second match of his return having also needed three sets to see off Britains Dan Evans on Wednesday. — *AFP*

## Muguruza enters Dubai last four

**Dubai:** Garbine Muguruza overcame Aryna Sabalenka in a tight three-setter for a second consecutive week to storm into the Dubai semi-finals for a third time in seven appearances.

The Spaniard, a runner-up in Doha last week, bounced back from a set down to eliminate the third-seeded Sabalenka 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 and set up a showdown with Belgiums Elise Mertens.

Earlier on centre court, Mertens, the No.10 seed, pulled off a miraculous comeback, saving three match points en route to a 5-7, 7-5, 6-0 success over Jessica Pegula. The world No.18, who was down 5-7, 2-5 before she turned things around, is into the 15th tour-level semi-final of her career. "Its unbelievable to come back like this. I just didnt want to let it go, I just kept on fighting, and I think that was the spirit today," said Mertens. — *AFP*

## India to play WC qualifiers in Qatar

**New Delhi:** India will play their remaining three FIFA World Cup qualifiers in Qatar as the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) decided to host the matches in centralised venues owing to the coronavirus-related travel and quarantine restrictions.

## Live on TV

## FOOTBALL

**Indian Super League:** Final — Mumbai City vs Mohun Bagan from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

**English Premier League:** Leeds United vs Chelsea from 6 pm; Crystal Palace vs West Brom from 8.30 pm; Everton vs Burnley from 11 pm; Fulham vs Manchester City from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

**Italian League:** Sassuolo vs Verona from 7.30 pm; Benevento vs Fiorentina from 10.30 pm; Genoa vs Udinese from 1.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

## UFC

**Fight Night:** Leon Edwards vs Belal Muhammad and other bouts from 6.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2

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## LIONS ROAR

## Jason smashes 49 as England rout India in first T20



England's Jason Roy in action against India in their first Twenty20 in Ahmedabad on Friday. — *AP*

## NUMBERS GAME

**A TRIPLE CENTURY OF T-20 GAMES FOR KOHLI:**  
● Virat Kohli became fifth Indian and 31st player overall to complete a triple century of Twenty-20 matches. The first match of the five-Twenty-20 match series was 300th match in this form of cricket for Indian skipper.  
● Kohli who made his T-20 debut for Delhi against Himachal Pradesh at Delhi on April 3, 2007 and took 13 years and 344 days to reach this landmark.  
● Rohit Sharma (340 matches), M.S. Dhoni (331 matches), Suresh Raina (324 matches) and Dinesh Karthik (310 matches) are the other Indian to play 300 T-20 matches before Kohli.

— *S. PERVEZ QAISER*

## SCORECARD

**India:** Shikhar Dhawan b Mark Wood 4, K. L. Rahul b Jofra Archer 1, Virat Kohli c Chris Jordan b Adil Rashid 0, Rishabh Pant c Bairstow b Stokes 21, Shreyas Iyer c Malan b Chris Jordan 67, Hardik Pandya c Chris Jordan b Jofra Archer 19, Shardul Thakur c Malan b Jofra Archer 0, Washington Sundar (not out) 3, Axar Patel (not out) 7. Extras (w-2) 2. **Total (for 7 wks, in 20 overs) 124.**  
**FoW:** 2-1, 3-2, 20-3, 48-4, 102-5, 102-6, 117-7.  
**Bowler:** Adil Rashid 3-0-14-1, Jofra Archer 4-1-23-3, Mark

Wood 4-0-20-1, Chris Jordan 4-0-27-1, Ben Stokes 3-0-25-1, Sam Curran 2-0-15-0.  
**England:** Jason Roy lbw b Washington Sundar 49, Jos Buttler lbw b Chahal 28, David Malan (not out) 24, Jonny Bairstow (not out) 26. Extras (w-3) 3. **Total (for 2 wks, in 15.3 overs) 130.**  
**FoW:** 1-72, 2-89.  
**Bowling:** Axar Patel 3-0-24-0, Bhuvneshwar Kumar 2-0-15-0, Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-44-1, Hardik Pandya 2-0-13-0, Washington Sundar 2-3-0-18-1.

**Ahmedabad, March 12:** Indian batsmen had little to offer in the face of a regimented English bowling effort on a two-paced track as the hosts received an eight-wicket hammering in the opening Twenty20 International here on Friday.

Indian batsmen struggled to score freely before Shreyas Iyer showed the way with a dogged 67-run knock that took Virat Kohli's men to 124 for seven at the Narendra Modi stadium.

The home team could only manage 124 and in the absence of score-board pressure, England overhauled the target with ease in 15.3 overs to take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

The Indian batsmen never got the momentum going as England's pace-heavy attack, led by Mark Wood, used the extra bounce effectively to trouble them.

Most of the Indian batsmen went for flashy shots when placement would have served them well, as Iyer did later in the innings.

The world's biggest stadium played host to 67,000 fans, according to Cricinfo, way more than the 50 per cent capacity that was to be filled for the game in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Jason Roy scored a well-calculated 49-run knock while Jonny Bairstow's big hits showed there were no demons in the pitch as the Indians made it seem after being invited to bat by England skipper Eoin Morgan.

Roy struck the ball clean and hard to form a 72-run opening wicket stand with Jos Buttler (28), ending any hopes that the Indians harboured of getting back in the game.

The luxury of time allowed the England batsmen to play freely.

None of the Indian bowlers looked like ask-

ing tough questions to the visitors.

Roy was trapped by Washington Sundar but by that time England had

put 89 runs on the board. Bairstow (26) and Dawid Malan (24) took the side past the finish line.

— *PTI*

## Giles feels IPL is very beneficial for England

**London, March 12:** The Indian Premier League has been extremely beneficial for us, says ECB managing director Ashley Giles, who feels English cricketers presence in the lucrative T20 tournament has helped the national team in achieving the number one rank in white-ball formats.

Earlier this week, England's star player Jos Buttler said that the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had never asked him to skip the popular T20 event to be available for the Test series against New Zealand, which is set to clash with the final stages of the IPL.

"In my briefings with the players, I have encouraged players to think very carefully about what their programmes are. I have not directed them," Giles told in a Sky Sports show.

home the trophy. Its as simple as that.

Few would argue that there is a better candidate for the final than these two — both Bagan and Mumbai have been head and shoulders above the rest throughout the season.

Both the teams come into the final with identical records, 12 wins and just 4 defeats in the league stage.

Despite a nervy penalty-shootout win over FC Goa in the semifinal, it will be Mumbai who head into the final full of confidence.

They did the double over Bagan in the league stage,



Ashley Giles

"We aren't forcing either way. The IPL isn't going anywhere. It has extreme benefits to us. From this group here, I think, we have 12 of the 16 players going to the IPL."

"Years ago we found it very difficult for players to get into the IPL to experience that tournament. Now all of our players are in high demand and its probably the big reason why we are number one in world in both white-ball for-

mats," Giles said.

There are 12 England cricketers, some with million dollar contracts, playing in the IPL. The players include Buttler, Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer for Rajasthan Royals, Moeen Ali and Sam Curran for Chennai Super Kings and Dawid Malan for Punjab Kings.

The IPL is slated to begin from April 9 with the final scheduled to be played on May 30, while Englands opening Test against New Zealand begins on June 2.

"We have agreed for players to go to the IPL. Those two Test matches were arranged late, they didnt form part of the original schedule. We had agreed with the players and with the IPL that the players would be available right through the tournament and if they got to the later stages, they would be able to participate."

— *PTI*

## BEDI DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL AFTER 24 DAYS

**New Delhi, March 12:** Legendary former India spinner Bishan Singh Bedi has been discharged after spending more than three weeks at a city hospital here following a bypass surgery.

The 74-year-old former India captain had undergone a bypass surgery at the capitals Sir Ganga Ram Hospital last month after he suffered a heart attack.

He subsequently also underwent an operation to remove blood clotting in his brain.

"He was evaluated and was found to be having all three vessels of heart critically blocked," the statement from the hospital read.

"He was stabilised and underwent Coronary Artery Bypass Surgery, which was performed by Dr Ganesh Shrivani and his team on 18 February 2021. He has been discharged successfully in a stable condition on 11 March 2021," it added.

— *PTI*

## WOMEN'S | CRICKET

## Lee lords over India women in third ODI

**Lucknow, March 12:** South African opener Lizelle Lee single-handedly destroyed India's chances with a career-best unbeaten 132 as the home team lost by six runs via the Duckworth-Lewis (DLS) method in the rain-marred third womens ODI of the five-match series here on Friday.

Chasing 249, Lee starred for the visitors with her breathtaking knock that came off 131 balls and had 16 fours and two hits over the fence. South Africa now lead the series 2-1.

Lee kept South Africa abreast with the required rate, which eventually proved crucial after rain played spoilsport with the visitors at 223 for four in 46.3 overs, six ahead of India via the DLS method.

Earlier, Punam Raut

struck a second successive half-century — 77 off 108 balls — to power India to a fighting score.

South Africa were off to a decent start in their chase with the pair of Lee and stand-in skipper Laura Wolvaardt (12) adding 41 runs for the opening wicket. After Wolvaardt was cleaned up by off-spinner Deepti Sharma, Lara Goodall (16) and Lee took the innings forward with a 40-run stand for the second wicket. Mignon du Preez (37) too made a significant contribution as Lee kept South Africas chase alive by scoring the third century of her career. — *PTI*

**Brief Scores: India 248/5 in 50 overs (Punam Raut 77, Deepti Sharma 36 not out, Mithali Raj 36; Shabnim Ismail 2/46) lost to South Africa 223/4 in 46.3 overs (Lizelle Lee 132 not out; Julian Goswami 2/20).**

## Shooting star &amp; aspiring writer

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 12

Unlike most kids her age, R.B. Nethraa doesn't spend time in front of the television, nor does she fancy gadgets much. All of 13, Nethraa efficiently juggles her shooting career and school. An aspiring writer, she devotes her free time to books.

The Chennai girl, a student of Bhavan's Rajaji Vidyashram, has been making waves in the state shooting circuit. Nethraa served notice to her talent when she became the youngest to qualify for the 25m pistol event in the 12th South Zone shooting championship. She will now represent Tamil Nadu in the sub-youth, youth and junior categories at the national championship to be held in New Delhi in April.

Born to a doctor couple, Nethraa dabbled in different sports before finding her love in shooting. "She started with badminton, then moved to squash but was not happy. Then my husband and I decided to send her to the shooting academy," said Nishchita, Nethraa's mother.

Nethraa won a gold medal in the 10m Air Pistol team event with Arpita Raman and Sukhvinder Kaur in the recently concluded state championship. Nethraa is trained by Sumeet Sanghavi at Sumeet's Air-Gun Sports Academy in Kilpauk. Sumeet believes Nethraa has a bright future. "When she held the pistol for the first time, I was really surprised by her confidence," said Sumeet.

Nethraa also excels at school, her mother said. "She goes to the shooting range four times a week. Rest of the days, she focuses on her studies. She does not watch TV. She loves reading books."



R.B. Nethraa

(from left) R. Sivakumar (chairman of Tamil Nadu Badminton Super League), badminton star Jwala Gutta, former India cricketer Suresh Raina and actress Nikki Galrani at the launch of TNBSL second edition.

## 2ND EDITION OF TNBSL IN KOVAL

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 12

The second edition of the Tamil Nadu Badminton Super League will be held in Coimbatore (PSG CAS Indoor Stadium) in June. Chennai Super Kings player Suresh Raina and badminton star Jwala Gutta launched the tournament on Friday. Eight teams — Chennai Flying Gravity, Koval Kombans, Madurai Veerans, Karur Smashers, Villupuram Falcon Feathers, Marina Super Kings, Trichy Blasters and Tirupur Warriors — will participate in the roun-robin league.

## CITY CLIPS

## Former India volleyball player Chitraipandian no more

Former India volleyball player A.K. Chitraipandian passed away on Friday. He was the chairman of the Tamil Nadu Volleyball Association and the secretary of the Chennai District Volleyball Association. He represented Tamil Nadu for 10 years. He played 1980 test match against USSR in Chennai and 1984 Test in Russia. He also represented Indian Railways.

## RKM, MGR Janaki college champs

Ram Arvindh's century helped RKM Vivekananda College defeat Guru Nanak College 'A' to emerge champions in the seventh Pavit Singh Nayar Memorial all-India inter-college T20 tournament. Arvindh was adjudged the player of the final and player of tournament. In the women's final, J. Mythili's unbeaten 41 helped Dr. MGR Janaki College beat Chellammal College. She was named woman of the final. **Brief scores: Final: Women:** Dr. MGR Janaki College 120/5 in 19 overs (J. Mythili 41 (not out), R. Deepika 33; P. Kirithika 2/17) bt Chellammal College 112/8 in 19 overs (K. Logarathai 39; V. Priyanka 3/5). **Men:** RKM Vivekananda College 167/6 in 20 overs (Ram Arvindh 110, M. Vishal 31; Gurjapneet Singh 3/17) bt Guru Nanak College 'A' 147 in 18 overs (S. Aravind 47, R. Anirudh Seshadri 39; M. Silambarasan 4/18, P. Vidyuth 5/39).

## Battle of equals as Mumbai face Bagan

## ISL-7 | FINAL

● Both teams come into the final with identical records, 12 wins and just 4 defeats in the league stage.

the latter of those victories handing them the League Winners Shield.

For Mumbai, this will be a first-ever final, but coach Sergio Lobera, and a handful of his players have been here before when FC Goa lost to Bengaluru FC in 2018-19. The team though has

looked confident under Lobera.

"They (ATK Mohun Bagan) are a very good team with good players and have the momentum. But the most important thing now is to put the focus on ourselves and try to do our best."

"We have no specific plan, only small details about the opponent. We need to work 100 per cent on our style of play," said Lobera.

There will be few selection dilemmas for Lobera, with the exception of figuring out Mandar Rao Dessais replacement. The Goan will miss the final due to suspension.

In the other corner, there is Bagan, buoyed by Antonio Habas almost superhuman record in knockout games. He has already tasted glory twice and has a chance to create history by winning his second straight title and third overall.

On the eve of the final, the Spaniard sounded as focused as ever.

"We have to compete and our idea is to win against our opponents. My team is prepared for winning," he said.

Habas dismissed that previous results had no bearing on the match but that his side was braced for a tough test. — *PTI*