

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
VISAKHAPATNAM | MONDAY | 1 MARCH 2021



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Congress collapsing across India: Shah



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Eight killed in Myanmar crackdown

SPORTS | 8

Wrestler Vinesh bags gold in Ukraine



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WEATHER

Max: 36.6°C
Min: 22.8°C
RH: 98%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Fog.
Max/Min temp.
36/22 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Vidiya till 8.35 am; Magha Bahula Tadiya till 5.46 am (Tuesday)
Star: Uttara till 7.36 am; Hasta till 5.31 am (Tuesday)
Variyam: 3.16 pm to 4.43 pm
Durmuhurtam: 12.51 pm to 1.38 pm; 3.11 pm to 3.58 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
HIJRI CALENDAR
Rajab 16, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.50 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.45 pm
Maghrib: 6.15 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.16 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.02 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 9.11 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 7.04 AM

COUNTER POINT



They are my real daughters, didis, auntsies... all are contesting polls!

SHORT TAKES

Maha min resigns on woman's death

Mumbai: Maharashtra minister Sanjay Rathod, facing flak from Opposition BJP after being linked to a woman's death, on Sunday resigned from the state Cabinet. Rathod made the announcement after submitting his resignation to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who is also the president of his Shiv Sena party.

■ Report on Page 4

Arunachal turns Covid-free state

Itanagar: Arunachal Pradesh became a coronavirus-free state on Sunday with the three active cases recovering from the disease, a senior health official said. The total caseload in the northeastern state remained at 16,836, while the number of recoveries stood at 16,780, State Surveillance Officer Lobsang Jampa said.

Traders to go on nationwide strike

New Delhi: Traders' body CAIT said it will launch a nationwide agitation against issues related to the GST and alleged malpractices of foreign e-commerce firms. "The campaign will begin from March 5 and continue till April 5," CAIT said.

Western navy gets new commander

New Delhi: Vice-Admiral R. Hari Kumar took over as the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief (FOC-in-C) of the Western Naval Command on Sunday, the Navy said. He succeeded Vice Admiral Ajit Kumar who retired upon superannuation on Sunday after a career of 40 years.

■ Report on Page 4

INSIDE

■ STATE... PAGE 2
No elections in 3 corporations

■ STATE... PAGE 3
Both YSRC, TD face rebels in Vizianagaram



Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle PSLV-C51, carrying Brazilian satellite Amazonia-1, lifts off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota on Sunday.

Isro launches 19 satellites under new business unit

PATHRI
RAJASEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, FEB. 28

Entering the new-age of space commerce, the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) on Sunday launched 19 satellites into space from Brazil, the US and India with textbook precision in its first launch of the

year. This was the first dedicated mission of Isro's commercial arm NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), a public sector unit set up under the department of space in 2019. Sunday's mission was under a commercial arrangement with Spaceflight Inc, a satellite ride-share and mission management provider based

in Seattle. The satellites were hoisted by the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C51) rocket, which lifted off from the spaceport at Sriharikota. This was one of the longest flights of the PSLV and lasted one hour, 55 minutes and seven seconds.

■ Page 2: Amazonia-1 in orbit in 17 minutes

AP's 520 vax centres gear up for phase-3 from today

55 lakh over 60 yrs and those above 45 with illness to benefit

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 28

AP has set up 520 Covid vaccination centres to administer jabs to those aged over 60 years and those aged over 45 with multiple health complications, apart from health-care workers and frontline warriors, in Phase-3 starting from Monday.

State health authorities have set up 40 vaccination centres in each of the 13 districts and the target is to administer 150 doses to beneficiaries per day. The 40 CVCs are set up at seven private empaneled hospitals, 10 government hospitals meant for cops and 23 government hospitals for the targeted beneficiaries.

These government hospitals include: Primary Health Centres, Urban Primary Health Centres, District Hospitals, Area Hospitals and Teaching Hospitals. As the upgraded CoWIN-2.0 portal becomes operational, the health authorities will permit walk-in of beneficiaries.

■ Page 2: Beneficiaries must carry Aadhaar card

HOW TO REGISTER FOR GETTING COVID-19 VACCINE

Step 1 - Vaccination registration will be available from 9 a.m. on Monday (March 1) at www.cowin.gov.in website

Step 2 - Click on the registration link, provide mobile phone or Aadhaar number;

Step 3 - This will result in receipt of an OTP which needs to be entered on the website;

Step 4 - The location of the vaccination can be chosen, one that is convenient to go to (As per Director of Health Services, beneficiaries should also be able to map directions and distance from their home to the vaccination centre of their choice);

Step 5 - On the designated day and at the chosen time, visit the vaccination centre, get the first dose; after this, the second dose will be scheduled;

Step 6 - Following the second dose, a reference ID will be received on the registered mobile using which a vaccination certificate can be downloaded from the Cowin website.

A user guide on registration and post registration processes is available online at <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/> which can be downloaded clicking on the '28.02.2021 User Manual - Citizen Registration & Appointment for Vaccination Ver 1.1' link on the page

What happens if the vaccination appointment is missed?

The scheduled appointment is automatically cancelled and beneficiary will have to set up a fresh appointment

Documents required for the registration process?

- For those between 45 and 59 years with comorbidities, a medical certificate signed by a MBBS doctor will have to be uploaded mentioning the comorbid condition;
- Everyone should carry with them for the vaccination the ID card mentioned during the registration process. A Voter ID Card, or a Photo ID Card may also suffice



How much will the vaccination cost?

Free at all government vaccination centres, ₹250 max per dose at private vaccination centres.

ARMY'S HIRING EXAM CANCELLED AFTER LEAKAGE

New Delhi, Feb. 28: The Army has cancelled an examination for pan-India recruitment of general duty personnel after paper was found to have been leaked, officials said on Sunday.

They said at least three persons were arrested in Pune in this connection. "The Indian Army has zero tolerance towards corrupt practices in the recruitment process for selection of suitable candidates," an official said. Based on a proactive joint operation with local police at Pune, a case of possible leakage for the Common Entrance Examination for Recruitment of Soldiers (General Duty) was reported last night, the official added. While further investigation is still underway, it was decided to cancel the examination.

— PTI

POSCO invited to set up steel plant in state

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 28

The AP government has invited POSCO India Private Limited, the Indian subsidiary of the Korean conglomerate POSCO, to establish a greenfield integrated steel plant at Krishnapatnam in Nellore district.

In a letter addressed to Sung Lae. Chun, chairman and managing director of POSCO India, special chief secretary, R. Karikal Valaven said the government is keen on having the unit at Krishnapatnam while pointing to the interest expressed by the firm on the location.

The government move

gained significance in the backdrop of growing resentment over Centre's disinvestment plans of Vizag Steel Plant (VSP).

The letter is seen as an attempt by the state government to divert the plant to Krishnapatnam and safeguard the interests of VSP and its workers. In his letter, Valaven said, "I would like to highlight the fact that the government of AP has been a front-runner in providing unparalleled support to the industry and the industrial policy 2020-23 is considered as one of the best in the country."

■ Page 3: Industry to get boost in Krishnapatnam

POWER | PLAY Govt to cash in on welfare sops

YSRC, Oppn in big fight on local bodies

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 28

The urban local bodies elections have turned into a big fight between the ruling YSR Congress and the Opposition, with the YSRC banking on positive votes and its rivals hoping to reap a harvest of anti-government votes.

The withdrawal of nomination would start on March 2 and end on March 3 while elections would be held on March 10. There were 12 municipal corporations in 13 districts of the state covering 671 divisions.

Similarly, there were 75 municipalities and nagar panchayats with 2,123 wards where elections are scheduled for March 10. The ruling YSRC with the credit of winning 82 per cent seats in the gram panchayat elections are

putting all efforts to continue the winning spree.

It hopes to cash in on the positive factors like the state government's welfare schemes. Telugu Desam and other Opposition parties are pinning their hopes on anti-government sentiments among sections of the people.

As many as 6,103 candidates have filed their nominations for 671 divisions under the 12 municipal corporations of Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, Guntur, Machilipatnam, Eluru, Vizianagaram, Antapur, Kurnool, Kadapa, Tirupati, Chittoor and Ongole.

Some 2,171 candidates belong to the YSRC, 1,569 to the TD, 364 of the Jana Sena, 323 from the BJP, 136 from the CPM, 1107 independents, 268 the from Congress and the

rest 165 belonging to several other political parties.

Similarly, in 75 municipalities and 2,123 Nagar Panchayats wards, as many as 5,235 candidates filed nominations from the YSRC, 3,357 from the TD, 524 from the BJP, 408 from the Jana Sena, 166 from the Congress, 144 from the CPIM, 1,283 independents and 225 from other political parties.

The ruling YSRC has claimed that its party supporters grabbed 10,536 gram panchayats out of a total of 13,092 while the main opposition TD won 438 gram panchayats. As many as 455 gram panchayats were won by the Jana Sena, the BJP and supporters of other parties.

■ Page 2: TD claims urban voters are angry

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SHORT TAKES

TAMIL NADU
WINS ADVOCATES
CRICKET TOURNEYDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 28

The Tamil Nadu team emerged as the winner of the first South India Advocates Tournament, the Karnataka team stood in second place, and the AP team secured third place. The final of the tournament was held in the ACA cricket stadium at Mulapadu on Friday. AP High Court Judge Justice Joymalya Bagchi presented the cup and mementoes to the winner and runners up teams. Andhra team all-rounder Kranthi got the Man of the Match award. High Court judges Justice A.V. Seshasai, Justice Ravu Raghunath Rao, High Court advocate general S. Sriram and Andhra Cricket Association secretary V. Durgaprasad praised the AACT organising committee for conducting the tournament, which is the first of its kind. They asserted the need for participating in sports for physical and mental fitness and asked lawyers to play their interested sports frequently.

CIVIC PROBLEMS
IN ONGOLE AFFECT
MUNICIPAL POLLSDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 28

Various civic problems including sewage disposal and scarcity of drinking water haunt the 100 years old Ongole town which was upgraded as Corporation eight years back. Elections for the civic body was held last in 2005 and the plans to hold elections was postponed twice because of court cases over the merger of some villages into the corporation apart from other reasons. The situation continued even after Ongole was elevated as corporation. The proposal to hold elections in March last year came to a halt because of the outbreak of Covid when the nomination process was in progress. As the SEC gave notification for the election now, the election process has commenced from where it was stopped.

Those in the fray are certain to face a piquant situation as the majority of 1,81,558 voters living in the 50 divisions are certain to pull them up for the serious civic issues they are facing from decades.

SEC: ONLY FIVE
PERSONS AT A
TIME TO CAMPAIGNDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 28

State Election Commissioner (SEC) Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar has made it clear that no more than five persons will be allowed to campaign at a time in municipal elections being held all over the Andhra Pradesh. This is in view of threat posed by Covid-19 pandemic. Permission for campaigns or road shows will accordingly be given through a single window system.

The SEC further said special teams have been constituted to curb distribution of alcohol and money to lure voters in the civic body polls.

Responding to a question whether a second chance will be given to candidates who had been forced to withdraw their nominations, Ramesh Kumar said the election commission is reviewing the matter and orders will be issued soon. He announced that to make elections transparent, SEC has arranged a meeting with all political parties on Monday. He wished municipal elections too are held in a peaceful manner like the earlier panchayat polls.

Ramesh Kumar said a helpline is being set up to help voters. SEC has decided that only government staff will issue voter slips to electors by March 5. This is to prevent ward and village volunteers from canvassing for any political party while distributing voter slips in elections to urban local bodies.

Elections for 12 municipal corporations and 75 municipalities / nagar panchayats across the state are slated on March 10.

● **THE SEC** further said special teams have been constituted to curb distribution of alcohol and money to lure voters in the civic body polls.

● **POLLS FOR 12** municipal corporations and 75 municipalities / nagar panchayats across the state are slated on March 10.

No polls in 3 corporations,
30 municipalities in state

Majority of the municipalities raised objections over the merger of villages

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 28

There is no election in three municipal corporations and 30 municipalities in AP due to court cases and merger of villages with the adjoining municipalities.

The three corporations are Srikakulam, Rajahmundry and Nellore.

Officials said that in a majority of the municipalities, objections were registered over the merger of the adjacent villages into municipalities.

Petitions were filed in courts, which is the main cause for cancellation of the elections.

The elections were cancelled in 30 municipalities and Nagar Panchayats due to court cases, ward division disputes and survey of SC, ST and BC voters. There is no election in Tadepalli municipality in Amaravati region where chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy lived, due to court cases against merger of villages.

There is no election in Mangalagiri, Bapatla, Ponnur, Narasaraopet, Jaggaiahpet, Gudivada, Amudalavalasa, Rajam, Tadepalligudem, Tanuku, Pallikollu, Bhimavaram, Akividu, Chintalapudi, Ibrahimpatnam, Tadigadapa, Kandukur, Podili, Darsi, Gudur, Kavali, Buchireddypalem, Alluru, Srikalahasti, Kuppam, Rajampet, Kamalapuram, Pamidi and Penukonda.

● **THE ELECTIONS** were cancelled in 30 municipalities and Nagar Panchayats due to court cases, ward division disputes and survey of SC, ST and BC voters. There is no election in Tadepalli municipality in Amaravati region where Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy lived, due to court cases against merger of villages.



Guntur MP Galla Jaydev, Guntur East and West incharges SK. Nazeeb and K. Ravindra along with CPI leader J. Ajay Kumar and others taking part in door to door campaign at 3rd & 11th divisions in Sagadigunta, Guntur city on Sunday.

— E. TEJO ROY

TD claims urban voters angry

From page 1

YSRC ministers Botsa Satyanarayana, Kurasala Kannababu, Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy, Perni Venkataramaiah, Vellampalli Srinivas Rao and others claimed that a majority of the families got benefits from the multiple welfare schemes. At least one welfare scheme reached every family, and this “increased the trust of the people on the YSRC government.”

They recalled that Chandrababu Naidu had earlier released a manifesto for gram panchayat elections but the public dismissed it as a gimmick and supported the YSRC-backed candidates. Single nominations were filed for 84 wards and divisions in the municipal elections and the TD filed nominations in Pulivendula, Jammalamadugu and Macherla municipalities. This reflected the political bankruptcy of the main Opposition party, they

● **YSRC LEADERS** said the government has lost several legal battles but it is winning the ballot war with the support of the public. “We hope we would continue the winning spree in the municipal elections with the positive votes.”

The leaders said the YSRC government has lost several legal battles but it is winning the ballot war with the support of the public. “We hope we would continue the winning spree in the municipal elections with the positive votes.”

On the other hand, the TD claims urban voters are its traditional supporters and a majority of the urbanites are up-in-arms against the government for the increase in taxes post-the Covid times. TD MP Kesineni Srinivas alias Nani said several taxes have been increased by the YSRC government

and it is planning to hike the property tax, water cess, garbage collection charges etc by nearly 500 per cent after the municipal elections.

“Employment in urban local bodies is largely hit due to a shortage of sand, as also increased prices of cement, iron, steel and other construction materials. The people are waiting for their turn to teach a strong lesson to the YSRC government and they are hoping to win municipal elections with a profusion of anti-incumbency votes.”

Political analysts say the main fight at the hustings is between the YSRC and the TD. The other parties would be “extras”. They said urban voters are traditionally supporters of the TD but this trend changed in the 2019 elections.

Hence, there are chances of the ruling party re-registering the 2019 sweep in the 2020 municipal elections.

HIGHLIGHTS OF AMAZONIA-1 LAUNCH

● **THE PSLV-C51/AMAZONIA-1** mission was Isro's first launch of the year and the first dedicated commercial mission for NewSpace India Ltd, a newly floated company under the department of space.

● **THE PSLV-C51** used the DL variant with solid strap-on boosters.

● **IT WAS** the 39th launch from the first launchpad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, the 78th launch vehicle mission and the 53rd flight of the PSLV.

● **ISRO HAS** launched 342 foreign satellites from 34 countries.

● **THE INDIAN** co-passenger satellites include Satish Dhawan Satellite (SDSAT) built by Space Kidz India. It is a nano-satellite intended to study radiation levels, space weather and demonstrate long-range communication technologies.

● **UNITYSAT IS** a combination of three satellites jointly designed and built by Jeppiaar Institute of Technology, Sriperumbudur, G.H. Raisoni College of Engineering, Nagpur,

and Sri Shakthi Institute of Engineering and Technology, Coimbatore (Sri Shakthi Sat). The satellite is meant to provide radio relay services.

● **THE PSLV** carried aloft the Sindhua Netra, a DRDO satellite meant for technology demonstration.

● **SAI-1 NANOCONECT-2** is a USA satellite meant for technology demonstration.

● **THE PSLV** launched 12 USA satellites christened SpaceBEEs meant for two-way satellite communications and data relay.

extremely proud and honoured to launch the first satellite designed, integrated and operated by Brazil.”

Brazilian science and technology minister Marcos Cesar Pontes said “Amazonia-1 is an important mission for Brazil which also marks the

beginning of a new era for satellite development in the country.”

He emphasised the importance of the partnership between India and Brazil and said they were looking forward to strengthening ties with India.

Narayanan G., chair-

man, and managing director, NSIL thanked INPE Brazil for choosing Isro and NSIL's strength and Spaceflight Inc, USA for facilitating this mission.

Amazonia-1 is an optical earth observation satellite of Brazil's National Institute for Space

Research (INPE).

It will provide remote sensing data to monitor deforestation in the Amazon region and analyse diversified agriculture across Brazil.

The co-passenger satellites included four from IN-SPACE and 14 from NSIL — a commercial satellite from India and 13 from the US. Of the four satellites from IN-SPACE, three were UNITYsats designed and built as a joint development by Jeppiaar Institute of Technology, Sriperumbudur, G.H. Raisoni College of Engineering, Nagpur, and Sri Shakthi Institute of Engineering and Technology, Coimbatore.

Dr Sivan accompanied the efforts of the teams in building the satellites. “These satellites were the fruition of the new space reforms announced by the government of India wherein Isro promoted and handled the teams. I'm sure this mission will inspire other academic institutions and industries to build satellites,” he said.

SIVAN: LAUNCH OF 5 SATELLITES
RESULT OF REFORMS BY CENTREDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 28

Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) Chairman Dr K. Sivan said the launch of five Indian satellites on Sunday was the result of the reforms in the space sector that were announced by the Centre.

He said Isro had held the development of the satellite produced by three universities (UNITYsat) and SDSAT by Space Kidz India, apart from Sindhua Netra, a technology demonstrator from the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

He said UNITYsat was designed and built jointly by Jeppiaar Institute of Technology, Sriperumbudur (JITSat), G.H. Raisoni College of Engineering, Nagpur (GHRCEsat) and Sri Shakthi Institute of Engineering and Technology, Coimbatore (Sri Shakthi Sat). The satellite is intended for providing radio relay services. Sivan said Isro had scheduled 14 space missions this year, including six to launch satellites, seven launch missions and an unmanned test of India's human space mission Gaganyaan.

Beneficiaries
must carry
Aadhaar card

From page 1

Once the portal gets launched officially on Monday, the authorities may allow on-site registrations for vaccination.

The beneficiaries are advised to carry Aadhaar card or electoral photo identity card or any other ID proof.

Those aged more than 45 years and suffering with comorbidities are supposed to bring doctor's certificate specifying the details of health complications, before getting a shot.

State health authorities say there are nearly 55 lakh people aged 60 years plus, and 45 to 49 years in the state as per the 2011 Census and it has to be seen as to how many of them will turn up for vaccination.

A senior health official will manage each vaccination centre to supervise the vaccination process and district-level health officials including district medical and health officer, district immunisation officer and others are still undergoing training on the vaccination in Phase-3.

Though Covid-19 vaccines like Covishield and Covaxin are to be administered free of cost at government hospitals, the Centre has allowed private hospitals too to do

this and charge ₹250 including ₹100 as service charge for each dose. Private hospitals would procure requisite doses of vaccine from government agencies in districts by paying the cost of the vaccine in advance.

Though the state government permitted some private hospitals to administer the vaccine, they are yet to lift the stocks from government stores.

The reason is that there is no estimate of how many beneficiaries will turn up for the jab.

Moreover, several private doctors are considering whether to administer vaccine simply at ₹150 per dose by not collecting a service charge.

AP health director Dr. Geetha Prasadini said, “We have set up 520 vaccination centres, 40 each in a district, to administer the vaccine. An estimate is of administering 150 doses per day at each session site for Monday, the first day of Phase-3 vaccination. Initially, there will be walk-in of beneficiaries at the session site. Depending on the response on the first day, we will take a decision either to enhance or reduce the number of CVCs and also the number of doses per day.”

Poll campaign picks
up pace in VizagK.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 28

The campaign has picked up momentum for elections to the 98 wards of the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation which are being held after a gap of 14 years.

Sunday witnessed hectic campaign and whirlwind visits of wards by MPs, MLAs and state level leaders of political parties. Visakhapatnam Lok Sabha member M.V.V. Satyanarayana toured most of the wards, while Anakapalle MP Dr K. Satyavathi visited four wards under Anakapalle zone of the corporation.

Vasupalli Ganesh Kumar, Visakhapatnam South MLA, who switched over to YSRC,

campaigned for the ruling party in the wards located in the old town. Belonging to the fishermen community, he visited the harbour area and localities with fisherfolk population.

YSRC Visakhapatnam president Vamsi Krishna Yadav, tipped to be the mayor, visited houses in his 21st ward. He is being challenged by independent candidate Mohammed Ghouse. Top leaders of the party accompanied Vamsi Krishna.

TD MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishnababu campaigned for the party candidates in Jalaripeta, his stronghold, and Lawon's Bay Colony. Visakhapatnam West MLA P.V.G.R. Naidu addressed several election meetings in Gajuwaka and Sriharipuram industrial areas.

VSP will not be
privatised: SomuDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 28

BJP state president Somu Veeraj said that the Vizag Steel Plant (VSP) will not be privatised. Inaugurating the BJP-Jana Sena election office in Gajuwaka in Visakhapatnam on Sunday, Veeraj said he had a meeting with party president J.P. Nadda, home minister Amit Shah and Union steel minister Dharmendra Pradhan on the issue.

“VSP will remain here and under the public sec-

tor. Some parties are waiting for an opportunity to make the BJP unpopular in the eyes of the public by spreading false rumours on the privatisation of VSP. Along with the steel plant, BJP will also develop the Visakhapatnam city,” Veeraj said. While campaigning for Saripalli Nookaraju for the 72nd ward in Gajuwaka, Veeraj said the party will not only develop the steel plant but also improve service conditions of the workers and do justice to the project trustees.

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SHORT TAKES

MYSTERY SHROUDS MURDER

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 28

In a ghastly incident, unidentified persons brutally murdered a 49-year-old man by hitting him on the head with a boulder when he was sleeping in the verandah of his relatives home at Mahimlakuru village in Atmakur mandal of SPSR Nellore district during the early hours of Sunday.

The deceased, identified as Venkata Narasaiah, who eked out a livelihood by doing some odd jobs as a daily wage worker and was an alcoholic.

He has been living along with their relatives. On Saturday, he consumed liquor, drank and went to sleep in the verandah of the house.

The unidentified accused killed him by battering his head with a stone. Local people said he got many enemies as he quarrels with people often after consuming liquor. Atmakur police registered a case and are investigating.

2 STUDENTS DROWN IN YELERU CANAL

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 28

Two students studying Class X of Pithapuram drowned in the Yeleru canal, and their bodies were found on Sunday night.

According to Pithapuram Rural police, five students went to the Gorrikhand canal for fishing. When they were hunting the fish by sitting on the shore, two students, Konda Mahathi Vasu and Vegam Teja, slipped down into the canal and drowned.

The police and fire department officials rushed to the spot and conducted search operations. Pithapuram Rural Sub-Inspector Mr. Pardha Saradhi registered a case. Pithapuram former MLA S.V.S.N. Varma rushed to the spot and expressed condolences on the death of the students and consoled their parents.

WOMAN, LOVER END LIVES AT TALLAPALEM

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, FEB. 28

A married woman and her lover ended their lives by consuming pesticide at Tallapalem village of Nidadavolu mandal in West Godavari district on Sunday.

According to police, Vemana Kusuma Naga Sai, 30, of Tangellamudi village and Vemana Srinivasa Rao of Tallapalem village got married seven years ago. The couple has a daughter and a son.

Kusuma subsequently allegedly got involved in extra-marital relationship with Shaik Naguru of Eluru. On Sunday, her husband caught them red handed in a house at Tallapalem village. Srinivasa told her that he would inform her parents about the matter. Following this, Shaik Naguru and Kusuma consumed pesticide and died.

Nidadavolu sub-inspector Y. Jagadeswara Rao said their bodies have been shifted to Nidadavolu government hospital for post-mortem. A case has been registered and is under investigation under supervision of Nidadavolu circle inspector.

BJP BATS FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 28

Advising the state government to conduct the ensuing polls to local bodies in a free and fair manner, MLC and BJP leader V. Narayana Reddy said one has to compete in elections and win the hearts of people by respecting the principles of democracy.

Addressing the media at the BJP office on Sunday, he said that it is unfair to take over the powers of the constitutional bodies for conducting the polls. District unit president of BJP, G. Bharat Kumar, alleged that both State Election Commission and the State Government have failed to conduct the recent panchayat polls in a fair manner.

Stressing that BJP is not afraid of the ruling party in the state, he claimed that they won sarpanch posts in three panchayats apart from eight vice sarpanch posts and 120 ward member posts despite tough fight in 50 panchayats. Party leaders B. Srinivasulu, T. Kondalaih Yadav, and others were present.

Both YSRC, Desam face rebels in Vizianagaram

TD fields SC, BC candidates from some OC wards to contest

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIZIANAGARAM, FEB. 28

Scion of Vizianagaram P. Ashok Gajapati Raju, former union minister, and his daughter Adithi are spearheading Telugu Desam's campaign for Vizianagaram Municipal Corporation. Both are taking head on the powerful YSRC led by local MLA Kolagatla Veerabhadra Swamy. YSRC had won all the nine Assembly segments and MP seat in the district during general elections.

Apart from YSRC, Ashok Gajapati Raju has an adversary from his own party in the form of former MLA Meesala Gita, who was denied party nomination in the last general elections. She has raised a banner of revolt against Raju and established a separate TD party office, though it had been from an office in Vizianagaram Fort for

● Ruling party leaders have filed nominations as independent candidates from 19 of the total 50 wards

● Ashok has an adversary from his own party in the form of former MLA Meesala Gita, who was denied party nomination in the last general elections. She has raised a banner of revolt against Raju and established a separate TD party office

decades. Fearing that Gita would interfere in party affairs for ensuing elections, the TD high command made her Bobbili in-charge. "The party has been divided vertically between Ashok and Gita, a strong BC leader in Vizianagaram district," said a senior Telugu Desam leader. As a result, the contest between ruling and

opposition parties could become a one-sided match in favour of YSRC, the leader pointed out; saying Gita might even dissuade BC leaders from campaigning for party candidates.

Another senior leader said TD has had to field SC and BC candidates from some OC wards, as none came forward to contest polls under the leadership of Ashok Gajapati Raju.

Yet, Adithi is vigorously campaigning for party candidates by visiting all wards, particularly that of K. Samantakamani, wife of Kandi Murali Naidu, senior party leader. TD has announced that Samantakamani will be its mayoral candidate.

Ruling YSRC is also not bereft of rebels' threat. Ruling party leaders have filed nominations as independent candidates from 19 of the total 50 wards. Some of

them are allegedly backed by minister Botsa Satyanarayana and others by Avanapu Chinnammalu, wife of former chairman Suribabu, apart from her sons Vijay and Vikram. All the three have filed their papers.

"The rebels issue will be settled on the last date of withdrawing nominations. It will be the high command decision whom to make a mayor and whom corporator," said the ruling party MLA Veerabhadra Swamy.

Though YSRC has not yet announced its mayoral candidate, it is likely that the MLA's daughter Kolagatla Sravani could hold the post of deputy mayor but be the de facto mayor. Incidentally, the mayoral post has been reserved for BC women. MLA's loyalist Asapu Sujatha is likely to be the choice of the party, sources said.

Joy ride



Children sit openly on a moving car as they enjoy their ride while going through various animal enclosures inside the Indira Gandhi Zoological Park in Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

UG DRAINAGE WORKS AT SNAIL'S PACE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, FEB. 28

Lack of a proper drainage system remains for long as the curse of this city. Open drains in many areas lay blocked for months without rain water arriving and draining away the solid dumps.

A hope was the underground drainage system initiated by the Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy government but nothing much has happened for its completion over the past 12 years.

Not all hope is lost, though. The municipal health engineering department is now making a fresh bid to complete the unfinished work. The proposals submitted at an estimated cost of ₹121 crore are still under the state government's consideration. These works will start after administrative clearances are granted, say officials.

The officials say there existed ₹94.35 crore in funds under the central Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) in the hands of the civic body. The authorities here are waiting for release of the remaining ₹36.65 crore from the state government to take the project forward.

The underground drainage system had been sanctioned for implementation in Kadapa in 2008, over a stretch of 351 km at an estimated cost of ₹72 crore under the Urban Infrastructure Development Scheme for Small and Medium Towns Scheme (UIDSSMT). The Ramky Constructions started the work in 2008 and stopped its activities in 2013.

The agreement with the company was terminated in 2015 after several notices were issued.

Industry to get boost in Krishnapatnam

FROM PAGE 1

AP has consistently ranked No. 1 in Ease of Doing Business rankings among Indian states and it is a testament to our strong commitment to industrial growth.

"With the same enthusiasm, I would like to extend an invite to the delegation from POSCO headquarters at Seoul to confirm your proposal for setting up an integrated steel plant in the land identified jointly by your team

and the Government of AP at Krishnapatnam and for further discussion on other required support under the State Industrial Policy."

The official pointed out that Krishnapatnam is poised to be the next industrial growth centre of Andhra Pradesh considering that it is strategically located on the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor, which is being developed with the support of the Centre.

He also said developing an integrated steel plant beside a world-class port offers multiple logistical advantages. Reminding that Krishnapatnam port is one of the largest automated ports in South Asia with a facility to handle Capesize and Panamax vessels, he said the state government would take all steps to hand over the land at the earliest to POSCO once a common understanding is achieved on the way forward.

PANCHAYATS TO BAN PLASTIC USE IN NELLORE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, FEB. 28

District Panchayat officials have embarked on a mission to prevent plastic use by imposing some restrictions in the rural areas from March 1 in view of the directions from higher authorities to implement the Plastic Waste (Management and Handling) Rule, 2016.

The objective of rules is to make villages in the district free from plastic by proper management and

recycling measures. In a notification issued on Saturday, district panchayat officers sought cooperation from the divisional-level panchayat officials, MPDOs, and mandal extension officers for the sustainable management of the plastic in all 900+ panchayats across SPSR Nellore district.

Incidentally, it is a known fact that there is no control over the use of plastic in rural areas, unlike in urban local body areas.

YSRC FAILED TO DEVELOP CIVIC BODIES: TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 28

Leader of Opposition in AP Legislative Council, Yanamala Ramakrishnu, alleged that YSR Congress failed to develop municipalities and munici-

pal corporations in the state for the past 20 months. He lamented that the government did not allot proper funds to urban local bodies, which shows the negligence of YSRC to develop municipalities and corporations.

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SHORT TAKES

MAHA MIN. LINKED TO WOMAN'S SUICIDE RESIGNS

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 28

Following intense pressure from all quarters, Maharashtra forest minister Sanjay Rathod of Shiv Sena resigned from the state cabinet on the eve of Maharashtra Legislature's budget session on Sunday in connection with the death of a social media star Pooja Chavan.

He is the first minister to resign from the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in its 15-months rule so far.

Rathod met Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray at Varsha bungalow, CM's official residence and tendered his resignation to him. He blamed the politics played by the BJP on the Pooja Chavan death case for his decision to quit as a minister.

"There was politics being played out on the issue; the manner in which the opposition said they will not let session proceedings happen, therefore I have stepped down. I want that the probe should be unfair and impartial, and truth should come out," he said after his resignation.

He added, "In an unfortunate incident a young girl from our Banjara community died and taking advantage of an incident, the opposition BJP through media and social media tried to destroy my political career. Whatever I did in my 30 years of political and social field, have been destroyed by the opposition. Now the truth should come out through an impartial probe."

PUDUCHERRY ASSEMBLY SPEAKER QUILTS

Puducherry, Feb. 28: Puducherry Assembly Speaker V.P. Sivakolundhu quit on Sunday citing health reasons even as his brother joined the BJP just over a month ahead of the elections in the Union Territory.

In the resignation letter to Lt Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan, a copy of which was made available to mediapersons here, Sivakolundhu, a Congress leader, said he quit as Speaker only on health grounds.

Later, he said that he handed over the letter of resignation addressed to the Lt Governor to the Assembly Secretary.

Sivakolundhu won from the Lawspet constituency in the 2016 Assembly elections on a Congress ticket.

Meanwhile, Sivakolundhu's brother V.P. Ramalingam joined the BJP in Karaikal in the presence of Union home minister Amit Shah, who is on a campaign visit.

Also, former DMK legislator K. Venkatesan and former Congress legislator K. Lakshminarayanan who had quit their MLA posts on February 21 joined the BJP in Karaikal in the presence of Shah who was in Karaikal to address a public meeting.

MALALA: DREAM TO SEE INDIA-PAK AS 'GOOD FRIENDS'

New Delhi, Feb. 28: The old philosophy of having borders and divisions doesn't work anymore and the people in India and Pakistan want to live in peace, Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai said on Sunday, stressing that it is her dream to see the two countries become "good friends".

She also said that minorities need protection in every country, be it Pakistan or India, adding that the issue is not related to religion but to the "exploitation of power" and must be taken seriously.

Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist for girls education who miraculously survived a bullet to the head from the militant Taliban in October 2012, said the news of internet shut-down and arrests of activists "protesting peacefully" in India is "worrying" and expressed the hope that the government will make sure that people are heard.

"It is my dream to see India and Pakistan become true good friends and that we can visit each other's countries. You can continue to watch Pakistani dramas, we can continue to watch Bollywood movies and enjoy cricket matches," the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner said.

She was speaking on her book "I am Malala: the story of the girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban" on the concluding day of the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) which is being held in the virtual mode.



Supporters during a joint rally by Left-Congress and Indian Secular Front (ISF) ahead of West Bengal Assembly elections at Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata on Sunday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Cong collapsing due to dynasty politics: Shah

Mocks Rahul for his 'no dedicated fisheries ministry' remark

R. MOHAN | DC KARAİKAL, FEB. 28

In active campaign mode after leaving Chennai for Karaikal in Puducherry on Sunday morning, Amit Shah took off on the opposition Congress, lambasting its erstwhile rule in the Union Territory. He accused former chief minister V. Narayanasamy of giving "cut money to the Gandhi family" from ₹15,000 crore central funds.

The Union home minister said that the Congress government which collapsed after losing its majority had indulged in petty politics over central schemes meant to serve the people of Puducherry.

Hitting out at Narayanasamy for blaming the BJP for the fall of his government, Shah said many senior leaders were leaving the Congress "because it is collapsing across the country due to dynasty politics."

During his speech he had time to aim his barbs at his pet target Rahul Gandhi.

Shah took an elaborate swipe at him, mocking him for saying there was no 'dedicated' fisheries ministry while pointing out that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had set one up two years ago.

"Rahul Gandhi said a few days ago here — Why has the Modi government not created a separate department for fishermen. Narendra Modiji has already worked to form a separate ministry for fishermen. Rahul bhaiya you were on leave, so you are not aware," Shah said to rub it into the former Congress President.

The "You were on leave" swipe was aimed at Rahul's frequent trips abroad which give endless ammunition to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "I want to ask the people of Puducherry... the party whose leader has been in Lok Sabha for four terms does not know the fisheries department started in the country two years ago. Can that party take care of the welfare of Puducherry?" he wondered.

Rahul tells TN CM to stop stooping before PM Modi

ARULOLI M. | DC TENKASI/ TIRUNELVELI, FEB. 28

To be worthy to earn the respect of the Tamil people, Prime Minister Narendra Modi should keep his mouth shut and ears open when he visits the state, suggested Rahul Gandhi, adding a word to Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami also, to stop stooping before Prime Minister Modi if he wants votes this election.

Addressing the electorates at Pavoorchathiram in Tenkasi constituency, in the second day of his three-day election campaign in the southern districts on Sunday, Congress leader, Rahul Gandhi criticised the Prime Minister of trying to control Tamil Nadu as he does with its Chief Minister, Edappadi K. Palaniswami, threatening him with the ED and CBI.

"He may control the Chief Minister as the latter is corrupt, but not the Tamil people," said Rahul Gandhi. The state now needs a leader like former chief minister Kamaraj, who listened to the people and implemented schemes for their development. So, Modi also should keep his ears open and listen to the people, and keep his mouth shut.

"I'm looking forward for a government to work for the people after the election, so that the state would reach its full potential in all fields," added Rahul, promising his commitment for the formation of such a government in Tamil Nadu.

NEP totally flawed, says Congress leader

Participating in an interaction with professors and teachers organised by the People's Education Protection Movement at St. Xavier's college in Tirunelveli, Rahul Gandhi said, "The Centre's 'New Education' policy is an attempt to promote a particular ideology. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) was framed without proper consultations with major stakeholders in the education system."

PEOPLE WILL TEACH DIDI A LESSON: ISF CHIEF

Kolkata, Feb. 28: The newly formed Indian Secular Front (ISF) led by Abbas Siddiqui on Sunday vowed to defeat the TMC and the BJP in the upcoming Assembly elections, asserting that people of West Bengal would teach Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee "a lesson for her arrogance".

Proclaiming support for the Left Front and its allies in the state, Siddiqui said Bengal will get the better of the BJP and "its B-team Mamata Banerjee" in the polls.

However, in a word of caution for the Congress, with which his partys talks are in choppy waters, Siddiqui said that he is in politics to become a partner and get his rightful claims. "Mamata and her TMC have destroyed democracy and unleashed anarchy. They will pay for it in the elections. The TMC government did nothing for the minorities," he said. — PTI

the Left and the secular forces will fight to defeat the corrupt TMC government and the BJP in the state, will fight for a better Bengal," Yechury said while addressing a joint rally at the Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata ahead of the Assembly election in WB.

The CPI(M) leader alleged that the Mamata Banerjee administration is doing the same to youths what the Modi government is doing against the farmers. "Many people ask me what we would do in case of a hung Assembly I tell them to direct their question to the TMC as they are in the best position to answer it. "The TMC has been part of NDA (for several years) since 1998. It was part of NDA government (at the Centre). In case of a hung Assembly, I am confident that TMC would join hands with the BJP to form the government," he said. — PTI

MADE IN INDIA

Only when every person takes pride in indigenous product, India will become self-reliant: PM

Aatmanirbhar Bharat a national spirit, says Modi

New Delhi, Feb. 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday underlined that Aatmanirbhar Bharat doesn't just remain an economic campaign but becomes a national spirit, he asserted.

"When we see fighter plane Tejas made in our own country doing acrobatics in the sky, when Made in India tanks, Made in India missiles increase our pride, when we see Made in India coaches in Metro trains in wealthy-advanced nations, when we see Made in India Corona vaccines reaching dozens of countries, then our heads are held high," Modi said.

Noting that is not that connects with the idea of self-reliance, Aatmanirbhar Bharat doesn't just remain an economic campaign but becomes a national spirit, he asserted.

Modi highlighted an assertion made by a person who had written to him from Kolkata that the Aatmanirbhar Bharat campaign is not just a government policy but also a national spirit, and said this was hundred per cent correct.

When every person in the country takes pride in indigenous products and

only bigger things will make India self-reliant, he said, be it textiles Made in India, handicraft goods made by talented artisans of the country, electronic appliances, mobiles, in every field "we have to raise this pride". "When we move forward with this thought, only then will we become self-reliant in the truest sense," the PM said.

Modi expressed happiness that the mantra of self-reliant India is reaching the villages. He cited several examples of people using innovative techniques to emerge as shining examples of Aatmanirbhar Bharat. — PTI

New Delhi, Feb. 28: Underlining the importance of collective responsibility towards water conservation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday called for a 100-day campaign to clean up all water bodies and prepare them for rain water harvesting before the monsoon season starts.

In his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' broadcast, Modi said water has been crucial for the development of humankind for centuries. "We have to understand our collective responsibility towards water conservation," he said.

The Prime Minister also said that when people feel proud of indigenous products then Aatmanirbhar Bharat does not just remain an economic programme but becomes a national spirit. Noting that monsoon

One year on, LNJP Corona warriors recall challenges

5 states continue to report 86.37% cases

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

At a time when Covid-19 cases are going up in six states, India is all set to begin the second phase of the Coronavirus vaccination drive, to cover 10 crore people across the country from Monday.

With 16,752 new cases detected in the past 24 hours, the total Covid-19 caseload in the country has gone up to 1,10,96,731. The death toll has risen to 1,57,051, with 113 new fatalities in 24 hours. The country's case fatality rate is 1.42 per cent.

Of the new cases, 86.37 per cent of the infections are from Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.

This comes as much of India is reporting a sharp fall in cases — with daily infections for the county falling to less than 20,000

ers faced the heavy brunt of the pandemic, as doctors, nurses, served patients day in and day out, without any weekly breaks, isolated from their family members for days, weeks or even months.

Amit Anand, a 35-year-doctor at the 2,000-bed LNJP Hospital who has been on duty since the outbreak of the pandemic here, said, "It's one year of Covid-19, and I also met

from a peak of over 90,000 in September.

The Centre has told states reporting a hike in Covid-19 cases to follow effective surveillance strategies in respect of potential "superspreader" events.

They have been advised to go for effective testing, comprehensive tracking, prompt isolation of positive cases and quick quarantine of close contacts.

The Centre has already deputed high-level multidisciplinary teams to Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Jammu and Kashmir to ascertain the reasons for the surge and coordinate with the state health departments in Covid-19 control and containment measures.

India now has 1,64,511 active cases.

my family back home, after a gap of one year."

The Begusarai native, whose wife also holds an MBBS degree, said, "I met my wife and son, now two-and-a-half years old, in Bokaro this February, and he almost didn't recognise me. The pandemic literally separated us from our families. But we have to do our job, which we have chosen, so that motivated us throughout this very tough period." — PTI



R. Hari Kumar

R. HARI KUMAR APPOINTED WESTERN NAVAL COMMANDER

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

Vice Admiral R. Hari Kumar on Sunday took over as the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief (FOC-in-C) of Indian Navy's most crucial command Western Naval Command that is responsible for the all naval forces in the Arabian Sea and western parts of the Indian Ocean.

Western Naval Command saw extensive operational deployments in response to developing security situation post the Pulwama attack and the Galwan crisis in Ladakh across the Indian Ocean Region.

Vice Admiral Kumar succeeds Vice Admiral Ajit Kumar, who retires upon superannuation, after an illustrious career, spanning forty years, in the Indian Navy.

At a ceremony held at the Command Post of Headquarters, Western Naval Command, the outgoing and incoming Commanders-in-Chief were accorded a Guard of Honour after which the formal handing-taking over took place with the handing over of the baton to the new Commander-in-Chief. On assuming command Vice Admiral Kumar laid a wreath at the Gaurav Stambh monument.

Vice Admiral Kumar was CISC/ VCDS (Vice Chief of Defence Staff) at HQIDS prior to taking over as FOC-in-C Western Naval Command.

Vice Admiral Kumar, an alumnus of the National Defence Academy was commissioned into the Indian Navy in January 1983. He specialised in Gunnery and has commanded five ships including a Destroyer and the aircraft carrier INS Viraat.

SHORT TAKES

10 KILLED IN SHOOTOUT ON MEXICO CARTEL

Mexico City: Ten men were killed and a woman and two boys were wounded in a shooting attack on a home in western Mexico on Saturday.

Prosecutors in the state of Jalisco said the bullet-ridden bodies of the 10 men were found by police on the sidewalk in front of the home. Another wounded boy was found inside, and a woman and another boy were located at a local hospital.

The prosecutors' office said the attack was carried out by unidentified assailants travelling in an SUV. The state is home to the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, one of Mexico's most violent and powerful.

RUSSIA SATELLITE TO MONITOR ARCTIC CLIMATE

Moscow: A Soyuz rocket blasted off from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on Sunday carrying Russia's first satellite for monitoring the Arctic's climate, the Roscosmos space agency said.

Video published by the Russian space agency showed the Soyuz blaster launching against grey skies at 0655 GMT, carrying an Arktika-M satellite.

Space agency chief Dmitry Rogozin wrote on Twitter later that communication with the satellite had been established.

The monitoring system will need at least two satellites to operate properly, the space agency said.

"As part of the system, they will provide round-the-clock all-weather monitoring of the Earth's surface and the seas of the Arctic Ocean," it added.

'EXORCIST' HELD AFTER CHILD KILLED IN RITUAL

Colombo, Feb. 28: Sri Lankan police on Sunday arrested a self-proclaimed exorcist after a nine-year-old girl she had beaten as part of a ritual died.

The unidentified woman allegedly struck the girl repeatedly with a cane, claiming it was a way to drive out a demon that had possessed the child, said police spokesman Ajith Rohana.

The girl's parents had taken her to the woman in the village of Meegahawatte, just outside the capital Colombo, where neighbours responded to the cries of the child but not in time to save her, Rohana added.

"The child had collapsed after the severe beating she received. She was found dead on admission to hospital," he said.

There have been a number of such alleged exorcism attempts in the area in recent years, police added, with some causing physical harm — including death.

SPACEWALKING ASTRONAUTS PREP STATION

Cape Canaveral (US): Spacewalking astronauts ventured out Sunday to install support frames for new, high-efficiency solar panels arriving at the International Space Station later this year.

Nasa's Kate Rubins and Victor Glover emerged from the orbiting lab lugging 8-foot (2.5-meter) duffle-style bags stuffed with hundreds of pounds of mounting brackets and struts. The equipment was so big and awkward that it had to be taken apart like furniture, just to get through the ha.

"We know it's super tight in there," Mission Control radioed.

The astronauts headed with their unusually large load to the far port side of the station, careful not to bump into anything. That's where the station's oldest and most degraded solar wings are located.

With more people and experiments flying on the space station, more power will be needed to keep everything running, according to Nasa. The six new solar panels — to be delivered in pairs by SpaceX over the coming year or so — should boost the station's electrical capability by as much as 30 per cent.

Rubins and Glover had to assemble and bolt down the struts for the first two solar panels, due to launch in June.

The eight solar panels up there now are 12 to 20 years old — most of them past their design lifetime and deteriorating. Each panel is 112 feet (34 meters) long by 39 feet (12 meters) wide.

8 killed in Myanmar as junta fires on anti-coup protesters

UN condemns violence, says at least 18 killed, calls on military to halt

Yangon, Feb. 28: Myanmar security forces opened fire on protesters on Sunday, killing at least eight in the bloodiest action so far to smother opposition to the military coup four weeks ago.

The junta is battling to contain a massive street movement demanding it yield power and release ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who was detained along with top political allies at the start of the month.

Sunday brought a significant escalation in force, with fatal shootings of protesters in at least four cities around the country, as police and soldiers attempted to bring the civil disobedience campaign to heel.

The United Nations condemned the deadly crackdown, saying it had received credible information that as many as 18 people may have been killed.

"We strongly condemn the escalating violence against protests in Myanmar and call on the military to immediately halt the use of force against peaceful protesters," Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the UN human rights office, said.

Three men were killed and at least 20 others injured when security forces moved on a rally in the southern coastal hub of Dawei.

Rescue worker Pyae Zaw Hein said the trio were "shot dead with live



Protesters take cover behind homemade shields during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon on Sunday. — AFP

rounds", while the injured were hit by rubber bullets.

"More wounded people keep coming in," he said.

Two teenagers were gunned down in Bago, a two-hour drive north of commercial capital Yangon. Ambulance driver Than Lwin Oo said he had sent the bodies of the 18-year-olds to the mortuary at Bago's main hospital.

Officers in Yangon began dispersing small crowds

minutes before the slated beginning of the day's protest, with a 23-year-old man shot dead in the city's east. "His wife is heartbroken," Win Ko, a social worker who visited the man's widow, said. "She's three months pregnant." In Mandalay, an emergency doctor said that two men had died from gunshot wounds.

Elsewhere protesters took up positions behind

barricades and wielded homemade shields to defend themselves against the onslaught, with police using tear gas to clear some rallies.

Hundreds of people had been arrested by evening and transported to the city's notorious Insein Prison, where many of Myanmar's leading democracy campaigners have served long jail terms under previous dictator-

ships. At least one journalist documenting Sunday's assaults by security forces was beaten and detained further north in Myitkya, a city at the headwaters of the Irrawaddy river, according to local outlet The 74 Media.

Another reporter was shot with rubber bullets while covering a protest in the central city of Pyay, their employer said. — AFP

Second former aide of NY gov alleges he sexually abused her

New York, Feb. 28: A second ex-employee of powerful New York state Governor Andrew Cuomo has accused him of sexual harassment, charges the governor denied on Saturday.

This time the allegations came from 25-year-old former health adviser Charlotte Bennett, who told *The New York Times* that the governor sexually harassed her in the spring of 2020.

According to Bennett, the 63-year-old politician said in June that he was open to dating women in their 20s, and asked her if she thought age made a difference in romantic

relationships, the *Times* reported.

While Cuomo never tried to touch her, "I understood that the governor wanted to sleep with me, and felt horribly uncomfortable and scared," Bennett told the paper.

She added that she spoke to Cuomo's chief of staff and legal counsel, who transferred her to another post in another building. Bennett was happy with the new job and decided not to insist on an investigation.

Cuomo became a national star last spring with his straight-talking yet empathetic coronavirus briefings that contrasted sharply

with then-president Donald Trump's dismissive approach to the pandemic.

But the harassment allegations come as he faces a growing storm over his handling of the coronavirus in nursing homes in his state.

In a statement Saturday, Cuomo said he "never made advances toward Ms Bennett nor did I ever intend to act in any way that was inappropriate." He said he wanted instead to support Bennett, who had told him that she was a sexual assault survivor.

The governor, whose third term expires at the

end of 2022, called for "a full and thorough outside review" of these charges, led by a former federal judge.

"I ask all New Yorkers to await the findings of the review so that they know the facts before making any judgments," he added.

This is the second time in a week that the Democratic governor, who has led New York state for 10 years, has been accused of sexual harassment.

On Wednesday, another ex-adviser, Lindsey Boylan, said in a blog that he had harassed her when she was working for his administration, from 2015 to 2018. — AFP

Yemen rebels claim Saudi strikes

Sanaa, Feb. 28: Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels on Sunday claimed the attempted strikes that targeted neighbouring Saudi Arabia overnight and threatened more attacks, as fighting in the grinding civil war escalates.

Huthi fighters have intensified operations against the kingdom as air strikes by the Saudi-led military coalition pound rebel positions in the north of Yemen, in a bid to stop their offensive to seize the government's last northern stronghold of Marib.

Years of war have already pushed Yemen to the brink of famine.

Saudi Arabia — which has been backing the Yemeni government against the rebels since 2015 — said Saturday it thwarted a Huthi missile that targeted Riyadh.

"The operation was carried out with a ballistic missile and 15 drones... targeting sensitive areas in the enemy's capital of Riyadh," said Huthi spokesman Yahya al-Saree, according to the rebels' *Al-Masirah* TV channel.

"Our operations will continue and will expand as long as the aggression and siege on our country continues." Fragments of the missile scattered over several Riyadh neighbourhoods, damaging at least one home but no casualties were reported, Saudi's state-run *Al-Ekhabariya* television said.

Separately, the coalition said it had intercepted six Huthi drones targeting the kingdom, including the southern cities of Khamis Mushait and Jizan.

The Huthis have escalat-

ed cross-border attacks on the kingdom even after the United States delisted the rebels as terrorists, reversing a decision by the administration of former president Donald Trump.

The designation had been widely criticised by aid organisations, who warned it would hamper their efforts to alleviate a humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

US President Joe Biden halted support to Saudi offensive operations in Yemen's war, which he called a "catastrophe" that "has to end". — AFP

Beijing uses new security law on HK dissidents

Hong Kong, Feb. 28: Dozens of Hong Kong dissidents were charged with subversion on Sunday in the largest use yet of Beijing's sweeping new national security law, as authorities seek to cripple the finance hub's democracy movement.

Police arrested 55 of the city's best-known pro-democracy campaigners in a series of dawn raids last month. On Sunday, 47 were charged with one count each of "conspiracy to commit subversion" — one of the new national security crimes — with police saying the group would appear in court on Monday morning.

Democracy supporters described the move as a body blow. "Every prominent voice of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong now is either jailed, in exile, or charged for subversion of state power," activist Sophie Mak wrote on Twitter.

The European Union's office in Hong Kong said the charges were of "great concern".

"The nature of these charges makes clear that legitimate political pluralism will no longer be tolerated in Hong Kong," the office added.

Beijing is battling to stamp out dissent in semi-

● **THE BROADLY** worded security law, imposed on the city last June, criminalises any act deemed to be subversion, secession, terrorism or collusion with foreign forces.

autonomous Hong Kong after swathes of the population hit the streets in 2019 in huge and sometimes violent democracy protests.

The broadly worded security law, imposed on the city last June, criminalises any act deemed to be subversion, secession, terrorism or collusion with foreign forces.

Those charged are routinely denied bail until trial and face up to life in prison if convicted.

The activists charged on Sunday represent a broad cross-section of Hong Kong's opposition, from veteran former pro-democracy lawmakers to academics, lawyers, social workers and a host of youth activists.

Joshua Wong, one of the city's most recognisable pro-democracy figures, was among those charged, visited by police inside prison where he is currently serving a sentence for organising protests in 2019. — AFP

Rubber bullets to stop stir in Bangla

Dhaka, Feb. 28: Dozens were injured on Sunday as Bangladesh police fired rubber bullets and tear gas at opposition activists to prevent new protests over the death of a writer in jail, police and a party official said.

Live footage from local television station Channel 24 showed a road and footpath in front of the National Press Club — a favourite protest site in the capital Dhaka — turning into a battleground as police beat protesters with batons to disperse them.

Clashes ensued as student activists from the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist

Party (BNP) hurled rocks and attacked officers with plastic pipes, prompting police to retaliate by "firing rubber bullets and tear gas", Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka police Sazzadur Rahman said.

"They did not take any permission (for the protests)," he added, defending the police's move to clear the protesters.

BNP spokesman Rizvi Ahmed said about 30 student activists of the party including a senior leader were injured in the clashes. Several policemen were also hurt, including an officer who was rushed to hospital. — AFP

Pope to spend his final days in Rome

Buenos Aires, Feb. 28: Pope Francis expects to die in Rome, still the Catholic pontiff, without returning to spend his final days in his native Argentina, according to a new book titled *The Health of Popes*.

In an interview granted to Argentine journalist and physician Nelson Castro at the Vatican in February 2019, the Pope said he thinks about death, but does not fear it.

Extracts from the book were published Saturday in Argentine daily *La Nacion*. Asked how he sees his final days, Francis, who is 84, responded: "I will be pope, either active or emeritus, and in Rome. I will not return to Argentina." Francis has had to cancel some events

in recent months due to a painful problem with sciatica, but is not known to suffer any other major ailments.

The Vatican has always been reticent about a pope's health. According to the new book, "this is the first time that a pope has discussed his health with the transparency afforded by Francis." The pontiff, formerly the archbishop of Buenos Aires, says he does not miss his native Argentina, where he was born Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the son of Italian immigrants.

"No, I do not miss it. I lived there for 76 years. What pains me are its problems" — an allusion to the economic crisis shaking the South American country. — AFP

FICTIONAL | DETECTIVE Historian Shrabani Basu's new book set to hit bookstores in India on March 10

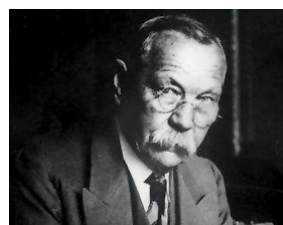
Author to uncover Indian 'mystery' by Holmes

London, Feb. 28: Arthur Conan Doyle, the British creator of the world-famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, was drawn to investigate just one real-life crime during his lifetime and it involved a British Indian man wrongly accused of a series of mysterious crimes in an English village in the early 20th century.

The story of that Indian-origin barrister, George Edalji, has now been dug up in detail and brought to life in a new book by London-based historian-author Shrabani Basu, who chanced upon the mystery and pursued it through archival records

and letters over the years. The result is *The Mystery of the Parsee Lawyer: Arthur Conan Doyle, George Edalji and the case of the foreigner in the English village*, which is released in the UK next week and in India on March 10.

"I think Indian readers will find it interesting that in 1907 Arthur Conan Doyle responded to a letter by a young Indian lawyer appealing to him for help to clear his name, and he took up the cause," said Basu, the author of previous historical accounts such as *'Spy Princess: The Life of Noor Inayat Khan'* and *'Victoria and Abdul: The*



Arthur Conan Doyle

Extraordinary True Story of the Queen's Closest Confidant." "Even Jawaharlal Nehru, who was an 18-year-old student at the time in Harrow School in London, got fascinated with the case and remarked that George had no doubt been targeted because he was Indian," she said.

● **THE SHERLOCK** Holmes author meticulously pieced clues together to conclude that George had been the victim of racism for being a "Hindoo" — as all Indians were referred to at the time.

The story, which revolves around several threatening letters and the distressing killing and mutilation of animals, was one of the most famous cases of miscarriage of justice in Edwardian England which was forgotten over time. Conan Doyle, whom George Edalji had turned

to for help after being jailed for crimes he did not commit, encountered a mystery worthy of his fictional detective.

The Sherlock Holmes author meticulously pieced clues together to conclude that George had been the victim of racism for being a "Hindoo" — as all Indians were referred to at the time. "What fascinated me was the fact that the only true crime that Arthur Conan Doyle investigated personally was to do with an Indian.

To me, it was a story that was calling out to be told. Like most people, I am a fan of the Sherlock Holmes books and love a

mystery," said Basu. While the intriguing incident took place over 100 years ago, the scenario has resonance even in modern-day Britain.

"The more I read the letters and the press coverage at the time, the more it felt that this could be happening now. Mistrust of immigrants, the fear of the foreigner, have been issues in Western society for a while now. The whole Brexit debate focussed on immigrants from eastern Europe entering the country and taking local jobs. Anonymous letters continue today, in the form of hate mail and online trolling," reflects Basu. — PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

1 MARCH 2021

Code flawed, equates media, gossip, art

A code of ethics and a three-tier grievance redressal mechanism are applicable to news publishers, Over The Top (OTT) entertainment platforms and digital media encompassing the social media that is used by millions of Indians. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 have recycled many existing provisions with the sole aim of establishing stringent government control over the giants of the Big Tech world. The logic of placing the digital news media in the same basket as a social gossip platform and entertainment channel is fundamentally flawed.

Official India is under pressure like never before. The country's international image has been hit hard in the arrest of Disha Ravi after India chose to respond to the likes of pop singer Rihanna and climate activist Greta Thunberg. The response is seen now in the new moves to rein in the digital world, which fall just short of the notorious pre-publication censorship attempted during the Emergency in 1975. As a hypersensitive nation that makes the most requests to digital media sites to take down content, India will be judged by its intent in its actions after empowering itself formally.

The streaming media like OTT platforms also host creativity in avant-garde content and it's moot whether government servants can stand in judgment on such matters

The second fundamental flaw in this hotch-potch approach, which mercifully falls short of creating a Great Firewall type of censorship as in China's total control over its Internet ecosystem, is that compliance regulations are being added to existing provisions even as a bipartisan Parliamentary panel is studying the subject in detail after inviting representatives of Big Tech to depose before it. The impatience is owed to the image hits and subsequent crude retaliatory responses by the bureaucracy in intimidating the media and criminalising dissent. The sum total of this effort at damage control is the casting of a huge shadow on media freedom in the guise of averting irresponsible comment on social media by individuals.

There is little to fault the framing of compliance requirements being thrust upon a social media that has till now gone scot-free while monetising hate and doing little to keep out fake news. They cannot host all manner of irresponsible comment in the guise of freedom of speech either. They may have armed the common man with a platform to vent out his angst, but they are not a substitute for organised news presentation. Nor can news media be clubbed with social media under one umbrella. News content is subject to various rules and regulations already and additional compliance requirements will only burden them while threatening their established news streaming procedures through oversight committees filled with bureaucrats.

The sensitivities of the bureaucracy or the ruling party alone cannot be the sole criterion for reining in the social media. In the normal course, the government should have prepared legislation for data protection and privacy issues rather than look at it in the narrow perspective of controlling opinion being expressed on social media even as certain elements tyrannise the net through vicious online trolling. The streaming media like OTT platforms also host creativity in avant-garde content and it's moot whether government servants can stand in judgment on such matters as the art of cinema. In short, these rules are best abandoned and legislation prepared with greater thought.

Stakes high in state polls

The elections to four state Assemblies and a Union territory in March and April this year will assume added significance because it would be a major milestone in the lives of two major national parties in their efforts to survive and succeed even as it will decide the fate of several regional parties.

As for the BJP, the south and the east were a forbidden territory in its formative years but not anymore. It is ruling Karnataka, Assam and Tripura, and is a partner in government in many northeastern states. The party is now eyeing West Bengal, once a formidable Left citadel, with some confidence. A win there will not just add a state to its kitty; it will make for a major psychological breakthrough. The party, by virtue of its being in power at the Centre, has ensured its political relevance in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry through deft political manoeuvring.

The stakes are high for the Congress, whether the party realises it or not. The fall of the ministry in Puducherry will have consequences in both Tamil Nadu and Kerala: The DMK has now been less accommodative of its claims in Tamil Nadu while in Kerala, the party and the UDF it heads will have to convince the voters that they are not up for sale if they were to be voted back. It is also to be seen how the party puts up a fight in Assam.

The regional majors — the Trinamul Congress, the AIADMK and the DMK — will have their bases intact whether they win or lose but power is a major factor that keeps them going. A loss is sure to leave the Trinamul gasping for breath; and hence the stiff opposition to the eight-phase voting in the state. The Left is of little consequence in West Bengal and hence a return to power in Kerala has become all the more critical for the formation. A very interesting and significant electoral battle looks to be unfolding.

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Subhani



Special effort needed in Pak to make truce work



Syed Ata Hasnain

No one in India or for that matter in Pakistan seems too enthused by the joint statement of the two directors-general of military operations (DGMOs) of India and Pakistan recommitting to the spirit of the November 2003 ceasefire. It essentially means an attempted quieting of the Line of Control and removal of the dangers of escalation caused by the artillery exchanges and missile attacks on villages and fortifications which cause casualties among the civilian and uniformed elements in the LoC's vicinity. The cynicism is understandable; renewed attempts have been made in the past too but unless actions in the military domain are accompanied by those in the political, diplomatic and social domains the glue for peace and stability just doesn't set. Quoting statistics of ceasefire violations (CFVs) over the years is meaningless. It's more important to understand how and why those ceasefire agreements did not succeed.

CFVs have three connotations. First is the tactical purpose; usually to give covering fire for terrorist infiltration, a practice which has been on the wane with quieter means of infiltration. Second is a reminder to the world by Pakistan to project the continued existence of the J&K issue; a few casualties, civilian or military, does get sentiments high in both India and Pakistan, with the world worrying about escalation between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. The initiation of such CFVs by Pakistan is often in conjunction with politico-diplomatic events like the UN General Assembly session or timed with visits of important international leaders to

either country. The third is usually a spirit of competition, also called "moral ascendancy"; and no specific reason for CFVs except something contrived such as an allegation of construction of fresh fortifications.

What it takes to keep the ceasefire in place without violations is the existence of a conducive political and diplomatic environment, absence or minimisation of infiltration related events and stability in hinterland streets. The November 2003 ceasefire, many times incorrectly called a unilateral ceasefire by Pakistan, was a result of tremendous back-room work by the political leaderships and diplomats who too understood the significance of a quiet LoC on the overall peace process. This time Moed Yusuf, Pakistan's national security adviser, has denied any back channels were worked between him and India's NSA Ajit Doval and ascribes the ceasefire agreement to military-to-military discussions and consultation. This appears to be Pakistan's way of trying to prove the initiative didn't come from it but rather from India. In other words, that Pakistan had minimal compulsion to call for a ceasefire and attaches little importance to it. That is usually a ploy by a country known to resort to violations of international norms.

Even if we agree that it's unimportant about who took the initiative, will a political-diplomatic situation exist in the near future to allow the ceasefire to persist without CFVs. It is best not to expect a zero CFV situation in the near future as flexibility towards the agreement may actually help to give it more substance. Imran Khan and Moed Yusuf have both tried to focus on

one theme — that is the absolute lack of any change by Pakistan in its J&K policy — even as the ceasefire comes into effect. In the 2004-08 the ceasefire held with minimal CFVs except in some areas like Mendhar. Both sides continued back channel discussions and didn't allow CFVs to upset them. It lasted as long as there was no big-ticket event; Mumbai 26/11 effectively put an end to them and the CFVs multiplied progressively. A big-ticket event remains a threat this time too.

The strategic environment of the emerging times appears different from the recent past. Internationally, there appears a trend towards dilution of confrontation to assist the world recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. The passing of the Donald Trump era is marked by new hope which America's new President Joe Biden and his administration is attempting to facilitate. Pakistan's importance due to its influence in Afghanistan and the high-end relationship it has with China gives it scope to punch above its weight. It also knows that handling Afghanistan if the US withdraws fully is going to be a Pakistani responsibility. With China also not averse to finding an exit from the embarrassment it suffered in Ladakh, Pakistan, by initiating the ceasefire recommitment, is reaping the benefits of the emerging environment. If it can reduce violence and curtail the chances of a larger conflagration on its eastern border, it can handle Afghanistan far better; that wins US support too as it helps in an easier draw-down and eventual departure of US troops. With Ladakh cooling down, there's little sense for

Pakistan to keep the LoC or Kashmir hot. But everything is temporary, for how long it cannot be said. Yet, it provides a window for all stakeholders to revisit their core interests and examine their bottom lines for any possibilities of permanent peace.

With Pakistan reiterating there is no change to its J&K policy and India going strongly in the direction of full and final integration of the people and territories of J&K under the Indian Constitution, the ceasefire seems only a positive blip in the canvas of conflict and despair. No one expects any change in either policy, and there's no finality of outcomes expected anytime soon. The ceasefire is something which creates a more congenial environment in which to improve ties, which can then eventually help resolve the tenuous issues between the two countries; no one expects any miracles in the short term.

Noticeably, in the midst of all the buildup of negativity on the J&K and Ladakh fronts, it was only Imran Khan who continued his fusillade, personal and otherwise, against the Indian leadership. Prime Minister Narendra Modi maintained a statesman-like approach, not naming the adversaries or indulging in name-calling, with the fullest regard to the future, in which he knew negotiation and discussion will be with the very same people you abuse.

The obstacles to the ceasefire are many, the chief one being the lack of acceptance of peace with India by Pakistan's "Deep State", and the intent of the jihadi elements to disallow any peace. It is only a special effort by the Pakistan Army, civil society in Pakistan and the media which can hope to ensure that the ceasefire lasts and becomes a stepping stone to the beginning of a peace process between India and Pakistan.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps

With Ladakh cooling down, there's little sense for Pakistan to keep the LoC or Kashmir hot. But everything is temporary, for how long it cannot be said.

LETTERS

TRAFFIC CHALLANS

Greed for money is the main reason why laws are disrespected (*Errant pharmacists set to lose licence, DC, Feb. 28*). Prior to independence, I was told businessmen were afraid of authorities and could not think of violating rules, at least in medicine. However, after independence, it was free for all with people and traders on one side and the corrupt politician/officials nexus on the other destroying the system.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

MODI SATELLITE

The naming of Motera stadium after PM Modi caused much furore and heartburn among the Opposition parties and intellectuals. Now, Isro has added fuel to the fire by including Modi's photo atop the satellite (*Gita on Isro's first 2021 launch, DC, Feb. 28*). Another irritant for secularists, atheists and rationalists is inclusion of Bhagavad Gita after prayers at Tirumala. All the traditional ceremonies will be viewed by frustrated Opposition with a jaundice eye.

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

AP POLICE

It is encouraging to read what AP police has done (*AP Police Wins Four Awards At National Level, DC, Feb. 28*). It is using digital technology efficiently and helping to protect women and children.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Madras Mail rams into goods train near Vijayawada

HYDERABAD, FEBRUARY. 28 Thirty-nine persons, including 12 railway employees, sustained minor injuries, when No. 4 Down Madras-Howrah Mail rammed into the rear of a stationary goods train at Pedda Ayutapalle station on the Vijayawada-Nidadavolu section of the South Central Railway, at about 5.55 a.m.

A press release by the Railways said that the engine and three carriages of the mail as also eight wagons and the brake van of the goods train derailed.

Kishwar Desai
London Diary



Britain's spot of schadenfreude; pregnancy triggers definition row

It is only befitting that good news about the vaccination drive is accompanied with good weather too — which for UK means sunny days here again! The mood has definitely begun to lift. There is also much more confidence because the vaccination programme has been so successful. Twenty million have already been vaccinated (36 per cent of population), more than in France, Germany, Italy and Spain put together. There is the joy of revenge, having Brexit, that Europe is doing worse. We are now vaccinating the age group 60 plus with the promise of all by end-June. (I have, too, received my call for the vaccine from NHS!) And the best part is that the government has also ordered the single shot Johnson and Johnson vaccine which can be stored in a refrigerator — and thus does not face the challenges of a Pfizer vaccine for storage. This sounds ideal for India — where a single shot that could be stored easily would mean faster vaccination for the entire population. Trials have shown that the Johnson vaccine is over 90 per cent successful against the virus — so definitely things are getting better and better!

The only problem with the hot weather is that all chances of social distancing are gone! The weekend saw people already stripping down and going to the beach, and eventually to the bars. Despite all warnings to be careful — the British always jump back into anarchy with the slightest bit of warm weather. While in India we rush indoors and switch on our air conditioners on warm days, in the UK, they head outdoors and lie down on any available open space — treating parks like green beaches. Except the Desi community of course, who are safely indoors, avoiding the hot sun, and switching on fans, if they have them.

Ministers are still being cautious after the earlier mistakes of a premature relaxation of lockdown. But it looks like schools will reopen early March. Young people bored out of their heads at home will love this break. But even more so their parents. Apparently home teaching has been harder on the older ones than on the children. Teaching fractions and knowing what a gerund is or locating Botswana is trying. So apparently

Google has been working over time answering the parents' inquiries. Once schools reopen, they will have a sigh of relief and promptly forget problems of the past participate.

Wednesday is Budget Day. Normally no one cares much except the business pages of newspapers. But the Chancellor Rishi Sunak (or "Disy Rishi") retains his popularity, despite the threat of the looming increase in taxes ...which he has already begun to warn everyone about. The media is in a quandary about how to tackle him. Normally, a Chancellor belonging to a minority group, Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) would deserve warm sympathy and several encouraging tweets. But how do you deal with a Chancellor who is public school, Oxford and Stanford educated, successful as a hedge fund manager and sufficiently at home with billions and fractions not to have to go to Google to do his sums? Hmmm... could some of the good publicity be due to the special adviser helping him calibrate his image, his clothes, his winning slogans ? Why not? I think having good public relations

and communications is half the battle won!

The saga of the pregnant minister came to a climax last week in Parliament (we had mentioned it some time back). Of course, at first, there was a shock that no provision had been made in law for a minister to have maternity leave. But then it was discovered that the word woman (or man) falls foul of equality legislation. So the word "person" was used instead of "woman" in the drafting of the bill. The "person" had to be pregnant, etc.

When the bill came to the House of Lords there were 38 identical amendments from various lords and Baronesses asking that the word "person" be replaced by "woman". But — in these days of political correctness — there was worry about the trans community which takes the view that the word "woman" is discriminatory. Biological sex at birth is different from identity one can choose and what would happen if a "trans person" fell pregnant? This is a tricky issue not to be mocked. But all decided that, for this matter, the word "woman" was appropriate. So

no vote had to be taken on the amendments. The bill has now passed both houses and is law. Phew!

By the way, cricket or Test matches or spin bowling are taboo subjects after the inglorious collapse in Ahmedabad. Maybe England will send a team of 11 players who are Persons of Indian Origin. Then England may win.

On the same note, may I add that the reverse colonisation of Britain may be already taking place — at least in the eyes of some Indian film producers. The film adaptation of the novel, *The Girl On The Train*, has mainly Indian characters, all living in London, speaking Hindi. There are a few white British characters, but all minor. It is as though the White British were suddenly wiped out from the city. For those of us living here — it makes the adaptation quite unreal... as yet...

Kishwar Desai is an award winning author and playwright. Her latest book The Longest Kiss: The Life And Times of Devika Rani has just been published.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,099.99	-3.80
Nifty 50	14,529.20	-3.76
S&P 500*	3,811.15	-0.48
Dollar (₹)	73.47	-1.42
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.83	0.80
Euro (₹)	88.76	-0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,599₹342	0.75
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.13	-1.12
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.229	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.491	-0.024

* As of Friday/saturday

FPIs invest over ₹25,700 cr in equities in Feb.

Remaining net buyers for the second consecutive month this year, overseas investors pumped in Rs 23,663 crore in Indian markets in February on account of positive sentiment due to the Union Budget 2021-22 and strong third quarter earnings. Foreign portfolio investors invested a net Rs 25,787 crore into equities but pulled out Rs 2,124 crore from the bonds market during February 1-26, the depositories data showed.

FY20 GST annual returns can be filed till March 31



The finance ministry has extended the deadline for filing GST annual returns for 2019-20 by a month till March 31. This is the second extension given by the Centre after extending it from Dec. 31 to Feb. 28. In view of the difficulties expressed by the taxpayers in meeting this time limit, Government has decided to extend the due date for furnishing of GSTR-9 and GSTR-9C for the financial year 2019-20 to March 31, a statement said.

Pakistan may resume import of cotton from India

Pakistan may allow cotton import from India through land route as prospects of gradual restoration of bilateral trade ties have brightened after the new ceasefire agreement along the Line of Control. Citing sources in the commerce ministry, *The Express Tribune* reported that adviser to the prime minister on commerce Abdul Razak Dawood may take a decision on whether to import cotton and yarn from India next week.

Honda looking to export India-made H'ness CB350 bike

Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) is exploring the possibility of exporting its mid-sized premium bike H'ness CB350 to various markets across the globe even as it works to cater to the robust demand for the model in the domestic market, according to director (sales and marketing) Yadvinder Singh Guleria. The company rolls out the bike with over 90 per cent localisation from its Manesar facility.



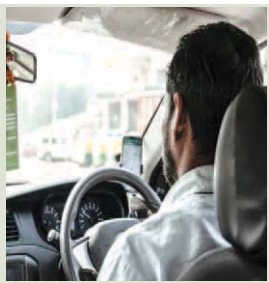
■ Drivers in India work for long hours: ILO App-based cabbies among worst paid

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 28

App-based taxi drivers in India work for an average 82 hours a week, which is much higher than the average of both traditional taxi services and app-based services in developing countries, finds the International Labour Organisation. Not just that, hourly earnings of these app-based taxi drivers in India fall at the lowest-end among developing countries.

Most workers in the taxi and delivery sectors work long hours and have high work intensity. Long working hours in the transportation sector, particularly in traditional taxi services, have been an enduring concern in developing countries. This situation has also penetrated into app-based platforms, finds a survey-based ILO study of app-based services in developing countries.

While average working hours in the traditional taxi and delivery sectors are 70 and 57 hours per week, respectively, they are 65 and 59 hours, respectively, in the app-based sectors, with over half the respondents working more than these averages. In India the weekly average is as high as 82 hours for app-based taxi services. The report quotes a driver of a leading Indian app-based taxi service platform as saying that he has to work for 12 hours and sometimes more but he does not get paid accordingly.



TOUGH LIFE

► App-based taxi drivers in India work for an average 82 hours a week

► A sizeable proportion works seven days a week

► Hourly earnings in India was lowest in the group of countries under study, including Chile, Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco and Ukraine

► Hourly earnings for workers in taxi services range between \$1.1 in India and \$8.2 in Lebanon

A sizeable proportion of workers in both the app-based taxi and delivery sectors work seven days a week. About 28 per cent of respondents in the app-based taxi sector reported working for over 12 hours, while half the respondents in the app-based delivery sector reported working for over 10 hours on three or more days per week.

Gamification platforms or offer of freebies and incentives have created opportunities for drivers to access higher earnings or bonuses, incentivising them to work long hours. This may also lead to high work intensity, as workers often do not take breaks in order to be able to meet their targets or due to the fear of losing a client or an order. On some platforms, workers' break times are controlled by the algorithm, sometimes to the second, and workers can be fined for staying offline for too long.

The report also finds that the hourly earnings in India was the lowest in the group of countries under study, which includes Chile, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco and Ukraine. Hourly earnings, which includes waiting time, for workers in these sectors range between \$1.1 in India and \$8.2 in Lebanon.

"The minimum income guarantee will be paid if I log in for 12 hours, six days a week and complete 60 orders, without holidays on weekends. Then I receive Rs 6,000 per week," a worker in a leading app-based delivery platform in India was quoted in the report.

In all countries, the majority of workers earn less than the average in these sectors. Moreover, incomes of workers on location-based platforms have been severely impacted by the Cvoid-19 pandemic.



K. V. Subramanian
Kolkata, Feb. 28: Chief economic advisor K. V. Subramanian has backed a proposal to bring petroleum products under the ambit of the goods and services tax (GST).

He, however, said the decision will have to be taken by the GST Council.

"It will be a good move, but the decision rests with the GST Council," Subramanian said during a recent interaction with Ficci FLO members.

Petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan had also urged Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman to bring petroleum products under the ambit of the GST.

The continuous rise in fuel prices has burdened the common man and become a political issue in states where assembly elections are due.

Subramanian also said inflationary pressures are mostly on account of "food inflation".

— PTI

When does commodities boom turn into supercycle?

MARK BURTON, THOMAS BIESHEUVEL & ALEX LONGLEY
FEB. 28

A surge in commodity prices has Wall Street banks gearing up for the arrival of what may be a new supercycle -- an extended period during which demand drives prices well above their long-run trend. A major impetus is the massive stimulus spending by governments as they juice up their economies following pandemic lockdowns. The evidence includes surging copper and agricultural prices and oil back at pre-Covid-19 levels. One theory is that this could be just the start of a years-long rally in appetite for raw materials across the board, but the reality is more complicated.

What is a supercycle?
A sustained spell of abnormally strong demand and growth that producers struggle to match, sparking a rally in prices that can last years, or in some cases a decade or more. For some analysts, the current rally is rekindling memories of the supercycle seen during China's rise to economic heavyweight status beginning in the early 2000s. Commodities have experi-

enced three other comparable cycles since the start of the 20th century. US industrialisation sparked the first in the early 1900s, global rearmament fuelled another in the 1930s and the re-industrialisation and reconstruction of Europe and Japan following the Second World War drove a third during the 1950s and 1960s.

What did the last one look like?
From around 2002, China entered a phase of roaring economic growth, fuelled by a rollout of modern infrastructure and cities on an unprecedented scale. Suppliers struggled to fulfil surging demand for natural resources. In commodities, there's often a time lag to get the product where it's wanted since adding capacity, such as opening a new mine, doesn't happen overnight. For more than a decade, materials, including iron ore, were in tight supply. Copper, priced below \$2,000 a tonne for much of the 1990s, broke \$10,000 and oil jumped from \$20 a barrel to \$140.

Who says this is another supercycle?
Among the bulls are analysts at JPMorgan Chase



& Co and Goldman Sachs Group Inc. The commodities rally will be a story of a "roaring 20s" post-pandemic economic recovery as well as ultra-loose monetary and fiscal policies,

Explainer

according to JPMorgan. Commodities may also jump as an unintended consequence of the fight against climate change, which threatens to constrain oil supplies while boosting demand for metals needed to build renewable energy infrastructure and manufacture batteries and electric vehicles, it said. Those include cobalt and lithium. Furthermore, commodities are typically viewed as a hedge against infla-

PSU general insurers trim offices in smaller cities

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 28

Public sector general insurers are bolstering their physical presence in tier-1 cities while closing down offices in smaller cities and towns. Their presence in tier-II cities and beyond has come down to 32 per cent share of offices of all general and health insurers from 36 per cent in a years' time.

Public sector general insurers closed a total of 578 offices in smaller cities in the last financial year. As many as 360 offices in tier-III cities were shut. The count of offices in all the smaller cities and towns, except tier-VI, cities came down. Tier-VI cities got 38 new offices. Still, only about one per cent of general insurance offices are in tier-VI locations.

Private general insurers and standalone health insurers opened 85 new offices in cities beyond tier-I. However, private general insurers have very limited presence in cities beyond tier-II. In tier-III cities they have 32 offices but only 14 offices in tier- IV and V cities. Standalone health insurers do not have a presence beyond tier-IV cities.

Data from the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority shows 138 districts in India do not have any offices of general insurers or standalone health insurers. No wonder, non-life insurance penetration in India stands at an abysmally low 0.94 per cent.

Tier-I cities, meanwhile,



OVER ₹8,300 CR COVID CLAIMS SETTLED

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, FEB. 28

With the country gearing up for the second phase of the Covid-19 vaccination drive from Monday, Indian insurers have already settled over Rs 8,300 crore Covid-19 claims so far.

"The Indian insurance industry has already settled the Covid-19 pandemic related claims to the tune of Rs 8,378 crore so far. The industry, which had shown a negative growth since the onset of Covid-19 pandemic in the beginning of FY2021, has already recorded five per cent of positive

growth and will further recover in the days ahead," Irdai chairman Subhash Chandra Khuntia said, addressing a National Insurance Academy-Swiss Re event on Friday.

"The general insurance industry has taken a lead by settling total claims of Rs 7,136 crore, while the balance amount has come from the life insurance industry. Nevertheless, insurers have also been able to adapt to challenges posed by the pandemic and they were resilient in providing services to their policyholders without any disruption," he said.

got an increased share of offices at 68 per cent in FY20 from 64 per cent in FY19. Tier-1 cities have 7,796 offices of general and health insurers, of which 367 were added in FY20.

Public sector general insurers added 34 new offices in tier-1 cities in FY20, private general insurers added 164 offices and standalone health insurers 169 offices.

Specialised insurers like Export Credit Guarantee Corporation and Agricultural Insurance Company, which have offices only in tier 1 cities, added none.

Despite these additions, both public and private general insurers were operating 11,394 offices in FY20 as against 11,578 offices in FY19 all over the country—a decrease by 184 offices.

Trying to get Airbus unit in India: Goyal



Piyush Goyal

New Delhi, Feb. 28: Union minister Piyush Goyal said he is "actively pursuing" Airbus to begin manufacturing aeroplanes in India.

Addressing the CEOs session at Toy Fair 2021 on Saturday, the commerce and industry minister said: "We are looking at world domination in the toy sector and anything short of that would be a terrible disappointment".

Narrating an experience from his childhood about a toy setup for planes that influenced him to aspire to become a toy manufacturer, the minister said, "It is another matter that I don't think I will be able to do it, but I'm actively pursuing Airbus to try and get them to come to India to start manufacturing aeroplanes in India".

— PTI

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SHORT TAKES

Asia Cup set to be postponed?

Karachi: PCB chairman Ehsan Mani said the ICC has assured them it will get a written assurance from the BCCI by next month that all its players, officials, fans and journalists will be issued visas for the World T20 Cup to be held in India. On Sunday, Mani also said that the Asia Cup scheduled to be held in June this year in Sri Lanka will need to be postponed if India qualifies for the World Test Championships final. "I have informed the board that the BCCI was supposed to give us visa assurances by 31st December but that didn't happen because their President, Saurav Ganguly was twice hospitalised," he said at a media conference here. "But I have now again taken up this matter with the ICC and am in touch with them. I also have another virtual conference with them tomorrow on this issue. The ICC has told us that we will get our written confirmation by the end of next month." — *PTI*

Gold for para archer Rakesh

New Delhi: Indian para archer Rakesh Kumar stood on top of the podium in the Compound event while the pair of Harvinder Singh and Pooja grabbed gold in the recurve mixed team event at the Fazza world ranking tournament in Dubai. Rakesh defeated compatriot Shyam Sunder 143-135 in the final after his 143-138 semifinal win over Turkey's Agyan. Harvinder and Pooja got the better of number one ranked team from Turkey. Shyam Sunder and Jyoti Balian won silver in the Compound mixed team event. Both of them also won silver medals in the individual events as well. As many as 70 archers from 11 nations are competing in this year's Championships which will also mark the return of Para Archery action after a year. — *PTI*

Ronaldo scores as Juventus held

Rome: Cristiano Ronaldo scored his 19th goal this campaign but champions Juventus had to settle for a 1-1 draw at Hellas Verona in Serie A on Saturday. The draw gives leaders Inter Milan the chance to pull 10 points clear of Juventus when they play mid-table Genoa on Sunday. Juventus are third and three points adrift of second-placed AC Milan who travel to Roma, two points behind the champions in fourth, on Sunday. "We managed to take the lead, which was the hardest part, it's a pity not being able to hold it," said Juve coach Andrea Pirlo. Pirlo's side paid for their many absences and a redesigned defence with Leonardo Bonucci and Giorgio Chiellini out injured and Danilo suspended. "We lacked experienced players, we had many youngsters on the pitch and there are details that they don't understand," continued Pirlo. "I asked Ronaldo and Alex Sandro to make their voices heard, but it wasn't enough." — *AFP*

Mary Kom to lead Indian challenge

New Delhi: Six-time world champion M.C. Mary Kom will spearhead a 14-member Indian boxing in the Boxam International tournament in Castellon, Spain from March 1 to 7. According to a release issued by the Boxing Federation of India, the Indian contingent left for Spain in early hours on Sunday. Besides Mary Kom, the team also has Commonwealth Games silver medalist Manish Kaushik (63kg). The duo are key highlights of the Indian team as they are set to make a return to the ring for the first time since the Asian Olympic Qualifiers held in Jordan in March last year. — *PTI*

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Everton vs Southampton from 1.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1

WWE

Raw: Bouts from 6.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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THAT'S ALL, FOAKES!

Keeper Ben says England should stop worrying about the pitch factor

Ahmedabad, Feb. 28: The square turner at the Chepauk for the second Test and the Ahmedabad dust bowl provided for the 'pink ball' game are hardest surfaces that Ben Foakes has kept on in his nascent international career.

India have put England on the mat with a couple of tracks which aided the home spinners as Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel ran riot, giving India 2-1 lead in the four-match series.

"Last two games are the hardest pitches I have kept on. In the last game the pink ball was skidding, I haven't seen a wicket like that and keeping on it was a good challenge," Foakes, who has replaced Jos Buttler as per England's rotation policy, said during a virtual media conference.

By his own admission, Foakes hasn't seen a cricket ball turn so much. "The two pitches that I have played, I have never seen ball turn like that. It's certainly very challenging. It's like having day five pitch from ball one."

But for one of world's best glovesman, the last two games were learning experience and real fun.

"When the ball spins, it's fun to keep and in Sri Lanka, it was easy because it was consistent and you knew the ball is going to turn. What I found during pink ball Test was it could spin square past batter or it could skid."

He admitted that no keeper can take every catch on these sort of tracks.

As far as the last Test goes, Foakes feels that the team needs to make peace with the fact that wicket will behave a certain way and yet they have to give their best shot. "Understanding and making peace that we are going to get out in a certain way. We have to grind it out and just put runs on the board. Be solid and understand our gameplan which will be different for all of us. If you get out, get out but trying to do it your way."

He also feels that a positive mindset and clarity in their game plan will only help as testing times can also affect the capability of judgement. — *PTI*



Ben Foakes (left)

The two pitches that I have played, I have never seen ball turn like that. It's certainly very challenging. It's like having day five pitch from ball one.

— BEN FOAKES
England wicketkeeper

Eng panicked against spin: Chappell

New Delhi, Feb. 28: India figured out England's general "ineptitude against spin" during the second Test in Chennai and used it to their advantage in the 'Pink Ball' game by unleashing a spin-heavy attack on a helpful track, says former Australia captain Ian Chappell.

"India's decision to select three spinners for the Test was prompted by England's batting on a tricky Chennai pitch, where their batsmen — Joe Root excepted — displayed a distinct ineptitude against spin," Chappell wrote in a column in *ESPNews*. "India correctly calculated that would result in mental scarring and used it to their advantage."

Chappell said it was poor defence which led to England's collapse in the third Test.

"When faced with a seri-

LYON LAMBASTS CRITICS FOR 'CRYING' OVER MOTERA STRIP

Melbourne, Feb. 28: Star Australia spinner Nathan Lyon is baffled by all the hullabaloo over the Motera pitch, saying "everyone seems to start crying" when the ball starts spinning but no one speaks out when teams are bundled out for low scores on seaming tracks.

However, Lyon gave a thumbs up to the curator: "We play on seaming wickets around the world and get bowled out for 47, 60. Nobody ever says a thing (about the pitch). But as soon as it starts spinning, everyone in the world seems to start crying about it." Lyon was quoted as saying by *The West Australian*.

"I don't get it. I'm all for it, it was entertaining." Lyon, who had scripted an incredible journey from being a pitch curator to one of the greatest off-spinners, said he would like to get the Ahmedabad curator to Sydney Cricket Ground. — *PTI*

ous spin challenge, the

England batsmen didn't trust their defence, which eventually resulted in panicked attempts to attack the Indian spin-

ners," he wrote.

"How can a risky premeditated shot be less dangerous than what was previously a trusted technique to unsettle good

spinners?," he questioned.

Chappell said "Shrewd use of footwork not only helps negate the spin but also puts a batsman in a position to direct the ball where he wants."

"To be fair, this is a skill to be learned at a young age. Which prompts the question: why is it not widely taught in England, where sweeping is misguidedly touted as the secret to playing spin bowling successfully?"

Ollie Pope had decided to use his feet against the Indian spinners but Chappell said "he had the right idea but the wrong execution."

"Pope was conscious of the keeper as he tentatively ventured out of his crease, which meant he was worried he would miss the delivery. That results in footwork that hinders rather than helps." — *PTI*

ROHIT REACHES CAREER-BEST 8TH RANK IN TESTS

Dubai, Feb. 28: Opener Rohit Sharma touched his career-best eighth position in the ICC Test Batsmen's Rankings on Sunday with a six-place jump after his impressive show in India's 10-wicket win over England in the third Test in Ahmedabad. Player of the match Axar Patel and R. Ashwin have also made solid gains after playing a crucial role in India's win on a spin-friendly track.

Patel's 11-wicket match haul has helped him gain 30 slots to reach 38th position while Ashwin's seven wickets have lifted him four places to third position. — *PTI*



Andhra players are all smiles after defeating Jharkhand by seven wickets in their Vijay Hazare Trophy match in Indore on Sunday.

Andhra make quarterfinals

Indore, Feb. 28: Andhra outplayed Jharkhand by seven wickets to emerge on top of Group 'B' in the Vijay Hazare Trophy cricket tournament here on Sunday.

Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh finished on 12 points each from five matches but Andhra emerged on top, thanks to their higher net run-rate and secured a place in the knockout phase.

Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh finished second, third and fourth respectively, followed by Punjab (8 points) and Vidarbha (4).

On Sunday, Andhra batsman chased the target of 139 runs in just 9.5 overs and improved their net run rate tremendously to jump to the top spot in the group from third place.

Sent in to bat, Jharkhand struggled with only four batsmen managing double

figures. Skipper Ishan Kishan made 38 (68 balls, 3 fours), the team's highest score, while medium-pacer M Harishankar Reddy was very impressive with a four-wicket haul for Andhra.

Ashwin Hebbar (44, 18 balls, 4x4s, 4x6s) and Ricky Bhui (57) went on the attack from the start with the Jharkhand bowlers having no respite. The duo added 82 in 5.5 overs before Hebbar fell to Shahbaz Nadeem (1/26). Bhui continued with his aggressive ways and despite losing captain Hanuma Vihari (4), he saw the team home in the company of Naren Reddy (16 not out, 7 balls, 1x4, 2x6s). — *PTI*

BRIEF SCORES

■ **Jharkhand 139 in 46.2 overs** (Ishan Kishan 38, Anukul Roy 30; M. Harishankar Reddy 4/30) lost to Andhra 140/3 in 9.5 overs (Ashwin Hebbar 44, Ricky Bhui 57 n.o.). **Points:** Andhra 4, Jharkhand 0.

Shanumaga bags gold for Andhra

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 28

of Tamil Nadu and ahead of Karnataka's Pruthvi.

SELECTED RESULTS

Nalubothu Shanumaga Srinivas of Andhra Pradesh clinched gold in the Men's U-20 200 metres at the 32nd South Zone National Junior Athletics Championship held at Calicut in Kerala on Sunday.

Shanumaga clocked 21.67 seconds to top the event. Meanwhile, his statemate Sai Lakshmi Bolla (4:58.95, 3. Jyoti Durga Swarupa (Andhra Pradesh) 5:4.25.

■ **Boys U-18 javelin throw:** 1. S. Rajadurai (Tamil Nadu) 53.94 metres, 2. T. V. Lavanya Kumar (Andhra Pradesh) 52.86m, S. Pruthvi (Karnataka) 51.52m.

■ **Women's U-20 200m:** 1. P. D. Anjali (Kerala) 24.42 secs, 2. Ancy Sojan (Kerala) 24.70 secs, 3. Kunja Rajitha (Andhra Pradesh) 25.66 secs.

■ **Boys U-18 200m:** 1. S. Barath (Tamil Nadu) 22.21 secs, 2. K. Abijith (Kerala) 22.57 secs, 3. Arika Jogulu (Andhra Pradesh) 22.79 secs.

■ **Men's U-20 javelin throw:** 1. Jibin Thomas (Kerala) 56.80 metres, 2. Vignesh Nambiar (Kerala) 54.51m, 3. Vijay Vepuri (Andhra Pradesh) 54.47m.

Vinesh returns with a gold

Kiev (Ukraine), Feb. 28: Star Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat on Sunday pinned 2017 world champion V. Kaladzinskay to grab a gold medal at the Outstanding Ukrainian Wrestlers and Coaches Memorial tournament here, and returned to the mat in style after a long coronavirus-forced break. Up against the world number seven Belarusian, it was not an easy bout for the world number three Indian as the two grapplers kept testing each other with consistent attacks in the sea-saw battle in which Vinesh prevailed.

Vinesh opened up a 4-0 lead in the 53kg final with



a throw which she initiated with a left-leg attack but Kaladzinskay made it 4-4 with her brilliant move.

Vinesh took the break leading 6-4, adding to her score with a take down, 10 seconds before the break.

● **Up against the world No.7, it was not an easy bout for Vinesh as the two grapplers kept testing each other with consistent attacks in the sea-saw battle in which the Indian prevailed.**

The Belarusian put pressure on the Indian with another four-point throw but with 25 seconds to go, Vinesh's move fetched her four more points for a 10-8 lead. She got into a position from where she pinned

Kaladzinskay to ensure herself a gold.

Since the coronavirus halted all competitions last year, it was the first competition for Vinesh, who is the only Indian woman wrestler to have qualified for the Tokyo Games.

Asked about her defence, Vinesh's Belgian coach Woller Akos said he would speak only after he discusses the bout with his ward. The next tournament for Vinesh is UWW ranking series event — Matteo Pellicone in Italy, where fellow Tokyo Qualifiers Bajrang Punia and Ravi Dahiya will also be seen in action from March 4-7. — *PTI*

Hosts should take the feelings of fans into consideration



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

The third Test match at Ahmedabad is really done and (literally) dusted. With the much-touted game, certainly not a 'match,' over in a little less than two days and smiles and frowns on the face of the two competing teams, only the aftermath remains. Like a bitter pill swallowed to regain strength. While India seem to be in the pink of health, England's colour can best be described as pale for obvious reasons. The speculators, unfortunately, were left with unused stubs of

tickets for three days.

As expected there was a backlash from those who represent the visitors, the content of which makes for interesting reading. Noteworthy Englishmen like Nasser Hussain, David 'Bumble' Lloyd and the irrepressible Geoffrey Boycott panned their team for various reasons. From lack of intent as batsmen who were found wanting in spin-friendly conditions and a ball that skidded much more than it bounced, and team selection where the visitors went in with only one spin-

ner, the team management got the stick from their former players.

On the other hand, former England skipper Micheal Vaughan rested the blame solely on the playing surface saying that the pitch wasn't good enough for Test cricket and if 'India is allowed to get away with producing such surfaces, the more toothless the ICC will look.' Heat and dust has always been a bugbear with the English whenever they have visited their former colony to play the game that they invented. Even while playing around the tropic of cancer when the weather is generally hot and dry, Vaughan and co expected a grass laden pitch which will enable swing and seam just like the village greens back home.

The expectations, though slightly different, also prompted England skipper Joe Root to opt for four seamers leaving out off-spinner Dom Bess as the pink ball 'swung' on practice pitches.

So what makes a good pitch and what does not is the latest debate to hit the cricket world. R. Ashwin who is in the prime of form, gave his opinion while sniping back at an English reporter in a presser held a few days ago. When asked if the Motera pitch was a 'good Test wicket' and if there was a 'contest between bat and ball,' Ashwin used the old management trick of throwing the question back asking the reporter what in his opinion a good surface was and who defines it.

Ashwin, known for his

straight talk, might have sounded a tad cocky but he did make a point. And his focus was that questions such as these (relating to the host country taking home advantage) are invariably asked when a visiting team loses in India and never abroad. Stating that no one asked if the pitches were good or bad when India toured New Zealand last year and the two Test matches ended in a total of five days, the Chennai spinner emphasised that Indians were taught to play on the surfaces given to them without any complaint.

It is a fact that 'pink' ball Test matches tend to get over much before the stipulated time not giving paying spectators their money's worth, thereby debunking the very reason for conducting these

day/night games: to increase the footfall in stadiums and getting in more fans. Ashwin may have made a point which can be debated till the cows come home but pitches such as these that challenge stroke making are out of tune with the tenet of the day which sells the game only on entertaining run fests.

India's recent remarkable show against Australia at the Sydney and Brisbane Tests came on nasty pitches against (almost) intimidating bowling by the hosts. The draw and win at these venues, against all odds, with the matches lasting all five days, was a fabulous testament to Test cricket and gave the fans moments they would remember forever. Testing the patience and ability of batsmen and bowlers in unfamiliar con-

ditions is the reason it's called 'Test' cricket. When games such as the last encounter at Ahmedabad end in less than half the time allotted, it does leave a true blue cricket fan wanting.

Going on to the fourth and last Test match at the same venue, one hopes that the organisers take the feelings of the fan into consideration. Winning at any cost seems to be the philosophy of modern cricketers but it goes against the doctrine on which the edifice of Test cricket was built.

While victory is what the fans will undoubtedly want they would also expect it to be a fair win giving batsmen and bowlers an equal chance. Unless the organisers respect the wishes of fans, Test cricket will remain on 'skid row.'