





## SHORT TAKES

## 5 YSRC NOMINEES ELECTED TO COUNCIL UNCONTESTED

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

Five YSRC nominees have been declared elected uncontested in the biennial elections to the Council by the MLAs.

In a statement issued here on Monday, the office of chief electoral officer said that in the biennial election held to the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council by MLAs to fill up five seats, five YSRC nominees were elected uncontested.

They are: Balli Kalyanachakravarthy, Mohammed Karimunnisa, C. Ramchandra Ian, Srinivasa Duvvada and Shaikh Mohammed Iqbal.

In a separate development, YSRC nominee Challa Bhageerath Reddy was elected uncontested in the by-election to the Council from MLAs quota.

The office of chief electoral officer in a statement announced that Challa Bhageerath Reddy, YSRC nominee, was elected uncontested in the by-poll held to the AP Legislative Council by MLAs to fill up one casual vacancy.

## CALL TO PREVENT POLLUTION OF ELURU CANAL

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

Chief secretary Adityanath Das directed the authorities to take measures to prevent pollution of Eluru canal and continue testing of drinking water for six more months.

The CS held a review meeting with several senior officials from various departments on Monday on measures taken up following mystery illness affecting 622 persons in Eluru and its surrounding areas last December. The meeting also discussed the reports submitted by the AIIMS, IIC, NEERI and others as the state government constituted a high-level committee headed by the Chief Secretary following the development of mystery illness affecting several people.

The CS asked the authorities not to allow washing of vehicles in the Eluru canal water and called for measures to supply potable water to the people. He directed the authorities to check the drinking water pipelines in the town.

The CS called for efforts to ensure that the farmers use only quality fertilisers and pesticides and felt the need to encourage them to opt for organic and natural farming.

## SOMIREDDY TELLS GOVT TO REGULATE EDIBLE OIL PRICES

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 8

Telugu Desam politburo member Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy demanded the authorities to regulate the prices of oils and bring an order directing the oil companies to supply edible oils at Rs. 80 per litre, considering the day-to-day difficulties of the poor due to skyrocketing prices.

Speaking to the media here on Monday, the former minister alleged that the people living in coastal mandals of AP are facing problems because of the pollution from the oil refining companies and also due to the soaring prices.

Somireddy claimed that the cost of edible oil per litre was ₹80 during the TD regime and pointed out that it is touching ₹150-160 now in YSRC rule, because the state government has no control on this sector. Even though the imported crude is being refined here, he lamented the population, especially from the middle-class and poorer sections are facing severe problems.

## 'TAKE MEASURES TO CONDUCT POLLS IN ORDERLY MANNER'

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 8

District collector and District Electoral Officer M. Harinarayanan directed municipal commissioners to take all the necessary measures to conduct the municipal elections in a peaceful and orderly manner in strict compliance with the code of conduct for municipal elections.

Reviewing the poll-arrangements with officials at the district secretariat here on Monday, the collector asked all the municipal commissioners to focus on ballot papers, strong rooms, distribution of postal ballots, postal ballot facilitation centre, distribution of voter slips and others in their jurisdictions.

## Women's special



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy flags off to Disha vehicles from the Camp Office on Monday. Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, DGP Gautam Sawang, ministers T. Vantitha, M. Sucharitha, Women's Commission chairperson Vasireddy Padma, Disha Act Special officer Krithika Shukla, IPS officer Deepika M. Patil and others are also seen.

## Parties, candidates get shock in Eluru municipal corporation

Many candidates spent heavily on campaigning, distributed allurements

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 8

The stay granted by the Andhra Pradesh High Court on the municipal corporation elections in Eluru has come as a rude-shock to all political parties and candidates.

A single-judge bench, headed by Justice DVSS Somayajulu heard a batch of petitions seeking an interim order to stay the March 10 polls to the Eluru municipal corporation. They reasoned that the authorities failed to rectify the anomalies in preparation of electoral rolls and provision of reservation.

Seven gram panchayats surrounding Eluru town were merged with the municipal corporation on December 31, 2019 and petitions were filed on the irregularities in delimita-

## Order wasn't complied: Petitioner

From Page 1

Based on petitions filed earlier stating that revision of electoral rolls was not done as per Electors Rules, 1960 and provisions of Representation of People's Act, 1950. The court in its earlier order issued on March 5, 2020, directed the district election and municipal corporation authorities to rectify the anomalies in the

electoral rolls. When the State Election Commission asked the district and Eluru municipal authorities on the status, the officials are learnt to have informed the SEC that all anomalies were rectified and accordingly, the SEC notified the election to the municipal corporation on March 9, 2020 along with other civic bodies. However, during the hearing on Monday,

the court asked whether its earlier order to rectify anomalies in preparation of electoral rolls and other irregularities were addressed.

When the petitioners' counsel Nimmagadda Venkateswarlu informed the court its earlier order was not complied with, the court issued an interim order to stay the Eluru municipal corporation elections.

tion of wards.

The candidates and parties have campaigned aggressively and many of them were confident of a win. But, with just two days left for the polling, the High Court issued a stay order and abruptly

stopped the poll process on Monday afternoon.

Notably, many candidates had spent heavily on campaigning and even distributed allurements including liquor packs to voters and campaigners. The campaign was to end

on Monday night for the polls slated for Wednesday.

A leader of the ruling party, Thota Sudhir, said they were eagerly waiting for March 10. The court order came as a dampener. Sudheer's wife Hema Madhuri is contesting

from ward 38 on behalf of the YSRC. YSRC leader Narendra was also upset. He said the prospects of the ruling party were good.

There are 50 divisions in Eluru Corporation in West Godavari district, of which single nominations were filed for three divisions.

The elections were to be held for 47 divisions.

## Will win 80 divisions, assert YSRC

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8:

Exuding confidence, YSRC ministers claimed that the party would win in 80 of 98 divisions in the GVMC corporation elections, scheduled to be held on Wednesday.

After campaigning came to end Monday evening, ministers Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao and K. Kannababu told media persons that TD would lose deposits in many divisions. Knowing that the party would lose the elections, many TD candidates had withdrawn from the contest, they said.

Hearing the alarm bells, Chandrababu Naidu and his son Lokesh came running to Visakhapatnam, the ministers said.

They said people were yet to forget how TD was swept away in the general elections and the recent panchayat elections. Now the same situation will prevail in the municipal elections, Srinivasa Rao said.

Listing out the benefits

## Ganta campaigns for party candidates

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8:

Former minister and Visakhapatnam North MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao for the first time campaigned for the party candidates contesting for GVMC corporation elections on Monday.

Srinivasa Rao has been keeping aloof from party activities and recently submitted his resignation to the Assembly protesting against privatisation of steel plant. After one to one meeting with party's national president Chandrababu Naidu, who

given to people of Visakhapatnam, they assured that the issue of Simhachalam temple lands would be settled soon, metro rail from Aganpudi to Bhogapuram

was in Visakhapatnam to campaign for the election, Ganta came out for campaigning.

He along with MLC Duvvarapu Rama Rao campaigned for E. Sujatha contesting for 55th division. Ganta visited several colonies and residential areas in his constituency seeking votes for the party.

MLAs of Visakhapatnam East and Visakhapatnam North Velagapudi Rama Krishna Babu and PVGR Naidu also had hectic campaign schedules in the day. The party flags and processions were seen only in the assembly segments of these three MLAs.

would come up at a cost of around ₹8,000 crore, RK Beach from Visakhapatnam to Bhimili would be beautified spending ₹100 crore, would develop Fintech city in 21

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acres of land investing ₹800 crore, spend ₹500 crore for beach road from Bhimili to Bhogapuram and ₹2,000 crore for biotechnology park on 175 acres in which 50 companies would set up their projects.

"Steel plant will not be privatised and we will develop Vizag city in all respects," the ministers said and added that Visakhapatnam would become the capital of Andhra Pradesh.

## Sajjala predicts YSRC win in ULB elections

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

YSR Congress state general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy has predicted that the party would fare exceedingly well in the upcoming urban local body polls.

Speaking to media persons here on Monday, the state government advisor said that they were confident of winning 90% wards and 100% municipal corporations and municipalities in the urban local body polls as the people in the state were supporting Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. He said that they fared better than in 2019 in the recent gram panchayat elections by ensuring maximum gram panchayats to their party supported candidates.

Taking pot shots at Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu and Nara Lokesh for abusing people, he castigated actor and TD legislator

Balakrishna for slapping a party supporter during his visit to Hindupur and faulted Ashok Gajapati Raju for slapping a woman supporter. He said that frustration of the party chief has run into the party leaders and this was leading them to such atrocious behaviour.

## SAJJALA REFUTES NEWS ABOUT THE CRISIS IN YSRC

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

YSR Congress state general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy refuted the baseless news beamed by a national channel stating party crisis.

Sajjala said that the national channel was playing a story claiming that there was a revolt in the YSR Congress and the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was holding a meeting with the core committee to resolve it. He said that they were shocked at the telecast of such a blatant lie and opined that the pride of five crore people in the state was at stake.

Maintaining that a series of welfare schemes initiated by their government reached 95% of the people in the state, he appealed to the people to support their party in the upcoming urban local body polls in the state. He stated that this was even more important if they wished to get their problems resolved.

## Balayya stopped from campaigning in Hindupur

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 8

Film star and Hindupur MLA Nandamuri Balakrishna faced an embarrassing situation when a large number of YSRC cadres obstructed his vehicle from moving ahead at Mothukapalle in Hindupur municipality, which he is visiting for the second time. Ruling party workers contended that a repeat road show by actor-turned-MLA could not be permitted as per rules.

Balakrishna has been making hectic efforts to retain Hindupur for the Telugu Desam by touring all wards and main streets of municipality as part of his campaign.

TD is stronger in rural than urban areas. On this basis, YSRC leadership is focusing on defeating the opposition party in Hindupur municipality. Their aim is to further demoralise TD workers after former chief minister Chandrababu Naidu lost his home turf Kuppam in the recent gram panchayat polls. They feel Balakrishna losing Hindupur municipality was drive another nail in TD's coffin.

Already, several leaders, including former MLA Pamisetty Ranganayak-

ulu, have quit Telugu Desam and joined YSRC, which is expected to impact TD in various wards including Muddireddypalle.

Before Ranganayakulu, another former MLA Abdul Ghani too quit Telugu Desam and joined the ruling party. Balakrishna is thus campaigning alone for TD's victory from the municipality of Hindupur, which his father and TD founder N. T. Rama Rao had won there.

After YSRC cadres obstructed the actor MLA's vehicle contending he could not campaign for the second time, police had to intervene as both ruling and opposition party workers were present in large numbers, which could have led to clashes.

Police used mild force to disburse both the groups from the spot.

Balakrishna also celebrated the International Women's Day in Hindupur by cutting a cake in the presence of a large number of women, who all tried to feed the cake to the film star.

Organisers at the cake-cutting event took care to ensure that a situation did not repeat again when the MLA slapped a photographer for taking too many close-up shots.

## BJP= B FOR BABU, J FOR JAGAN AND P FOR PAWAN, SAYS TULASI REDDY

**Kadapa:** PCC working president Dr N. Tulasi Reddy explained that BJP means B for Babu, J for Jagan and P for Pawan. TD, YSRC and Jana Sena have become puppets in the BJP's hands, he alleged. He spoke to the media at Vempalli on Monday. He alleged that these three parties were holding the interests of the state hostage at the centre for their selfish interests.

## Gajapati 'manhandles' woman on Women's Day

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8

While world celebrated International Women's Day, the scion of Vizianagaram and former Union minister P. Ashok Gajapati Raju allegedly manhandled a woman party worker during a campaign in Vizianagaram on Monday. The incident shocked the entire region and activists condemned the action.

TD workers led by Ashok were campaigning at Nagavamsapu Veedhi 14th division in Vizianagaram along with a large number of women. According to video clips

shown by news channels and social media platforms, Ashok was seen telling all to not shower petals on him. "Do you want to send me to hospital," he asked them angrily. He repeated the question and allegedly manhandled a woman.

Local leaders and cadres who were with Ashok Gajapati Raju were shocked and sent the woman away.

Ashok later told party workers that the woman did it on him deliberately. She has not been identified. Later, the campaign went ahead, led by Ashok Gajapati Raju.

Superintendent of police of Vizianagaram B. Raja Kumari denied

Ashok Gajapati Raju manhandling the woman. "The camphor fire flared up and Ashok tried to douse it. He never slapped her, according to our inquiry," the superintendent said.

The former minister's close relative Sanchaita Gajapati Raju condemned the incident in her tweet. She said "What way to observe Women's Day! The patriarchal arrogance was manifest in Ashok. What more can we expect from a man like him," she said.

Former TD MLA from Vizianagaram Meesala Gita said if the incident was true it should be condemned in strongest terms.



## SHORT TAKES

## AP REPORTS 74 COVID CASES, TWO DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

Andhra Pradesh registered 74 fresh cases of Covid-19 and two deaths.

The state health authorities reported on Monday that out of 25,907 samples tested, 74 persons were infected with confirmed Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,42,62,086 samples tested so far in the state, 8,90,766 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,82,581 were recovered while undergoing treatment and 1,009 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Chittoor registered the highest at 29, followed by 13 in Kurnool, eight in Krishna, seven in Srikakulam, five each in East Godavari and YSR Kadapa, two each in Guntur, Nellore and Visakhapatnam, one in Prakasam and zero cases in Anantapur, Vizianagaram and West Godavari. Chittoor topped the state with regard to the cumulative cases with 293.

## 58 SELECTED AS SCIENTIFIC ASSISTANTS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

Fifty-eight candidates have been provisionally selected for the posts of scientific assistants (physical, chemical and biology/serology) in the forensic science lab for AP.

The State Level Police Recruitment Board, in a statement issued here on Monday, stated that out of 8,127 candidates who appeared for the written test, 3,481 were qualified, and of them, 58 were provisionally selected based on the marks they secured in the written examination.

Their provisional selection is the subject total result of the character and verification of their antecedents.

## Women's Day feat



Women from various organisations perform a dance during a procession marking International Women's Day near GVMC Gandhi Statue junction in Visakhapatnam on Monday. — P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

## Unions to lay siege to RINL today, block NH

Finance minister announced that Centre will go ahead

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8

Thousands of people blocked the National Highway 16 from steel plant main gate to Aganampudi junction, a six kilometre stretch, protesting against the announcement made by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament that the Centre was going ahead with the privatisation of the Visakhapatnam steel plant, on Monday.

Reports said soon after

the announcement, the steel plant employees and local people gathered at the steel plant main gate and decided to block the national highway, said member of the Steel Plant Parirakashana Samithi Ganga Rao.

He said the agitation will continue from now onwards till the Central government revoked the decision.

He also announced that the trade unions would lay siege to the RINL administrative office on Tuesday in protest against the statement

issued by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Parliament.

The unions also warned of intensifying the agitation against privatisation all over the State, if the Centre went ahead with their proposition.

The State president of CITU Ch. Narsinga Rao asked the finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman to stop from making provocative statements on privatisation of the Steel Plant.

The minister on Monday announced in

Parliament for the second time that the central government has decided to privatise the steel plant and the State government has neither any rights or part of it.

Rao said it was not true that the State government had no share in the company. The RINL has been giving ₹44,000 crore as taxes and dividends and it was the state government which acquired 22,000 acres of land from the farmers. In addition, the State government has been providing infrastructural facilities.

## POLICE CHALK OUT PLANS FOR SAFE POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 8

Nellore SP Bhaskar Bhusan informed that the district police wing is all geared up for the elections in four municipalities in the district and are on a high alert to thwart the possibilities of any untoward incidents.

Reviewing the municipal elections' arrangements with police officials at the District Police Office in Nellore on Monday, the SP informed that they had deputed as many as 2,346 police personnel on election duty to help people vote peacefully. The poll-duty staff includes 2 additional SPs, 8 DSPs, 20 circle inspectors, 103 sub-inspectors, 550 asst. head constables, 1,293 constables and 372 home guards.

He said about 28 route mobile parties, 24 striking forces, 100 pickets, 20 check posts, 35 static surveillance teams, 50 flying squads and 20 shadow parties were being arranged for the municipal elections. He appealed to the public to inform the police on Dial 100 if they find any suspicious activity during the elections.

The SP asked the police officials to identify sensitive and hyper-sensitive polling stations and elaborate security arrangements accordingly. He also instructed the officials concerned to conduct vehicular checks in their jurisdiction. He said they are planning to conduct a flag march and create awareness among the public on the Model Code of Conduct.

● The SP informed that they had deputed as many as 2,346 police personnel on election duty to help people vote peacefully.

## Respecting women and girls must begin at home: TTD JEO

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 8

Respecting women and girls must begin at home, so that everyone will automatically respect them on the road, at workplaces, in schools and colleges, thus changing society's mindset, said TTD JEO Sada Bhargavi.

TTD has celebrated International Women's Day at Mahati auditorium in Tirupati on Monday. Addressing the gathering here, the chief guest Ms Sada Bhargavi said that women have a dignified place in the Indian culture and that respecting women

should start from home and then the whole society will respect it.

The JEO said, as per the Hindu mythology, even gods gave a superior place to women and even the Indian epic Mahabharata also stated that a war would be triggered if a woman was humiliated.

"In the present world, a woman has to play a powerful role in the family and in society. In every family, a mother has to teach her son to respect women. Attacks on women will also be reduced if they are considered as mothers," she added.

## TIRUPATI URBAN POLICE WING ORGANISES CANCER SCREENING

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 8

Marking International Women's Day, the Tirupati Urban district police wing has organised a free cancer screening camp for the women police personnel and female family members of police officers at the AR grounds here on Monday.

Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences (SVIMS) extended its support by sending a pink bus to conduct the free cancer detection tests for

women police.

Inaugurating the health camp, SP Ch. Venkata Appala Naidu stressed the need for early detection of cancer to cure it and emphasised the need for more awareness of cancer screening tests. He urged the women police personnel to go for the cancer screening tests regularly.

"Women should not feel shy to go for the cancer screening tests, and it should be done once every six months," Appala Naidu said.

## GOV TAKES PART IN A MEET ON 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 8

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan participated in the national committee's first meeting for commemoration of the 75th anniversary of India's Independence through the video conference from Raj Bhavan here on Monday.

The Centre constituted the high-level national committee for commemoration of the 75th anniversary of India's Independence under

● Gov participated in the national committee's first meeting for commemoration of the 75th anniversary of India's Independence through the video conference from Raj Bhavan here on Monday

the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and AP Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan was nominated to be its member earlier.

## VRO arrested for taking ₹20k bribe

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 8

On Monday, sleuths of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) caught a village revenue officer (VRO) in Kurichedu village and mandal, Prakasam district, for demanding and accepting a bribe of ₹20,000 from a person for doing an official favour.

According to ACB, one D. Venkata Siva Rama Krishna from Kurichedu village lodged a complaint to the DSP, ACB, Ongole stating that VRO K. Venkata Nagaraju has demanded a bribe of ₹30,000. He alleged that he

was asked to pay ₹20,000 as an initial payment for mutation and issue of Pattadar passbooks for the land to an extent of 2.65 acres in the names of his mother and brother.

In this connection, the ACB sleuths laid a trap on Monday at about 11.40 am against the accused officer Venkata Nagaraju and caught him red-handed at his private room in Kurichedu Village. The chemical test conducted on the fingers of both hands of the VRO and inner linings of the pant rear pocket yielded positive results in the chemical test.

## Teenager robs ₹25L from his friend's house

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 8

The city police arrested a juvenile and his mother for committing theft of ₹25 lakh cash from his friend's house.

The 15-year-old, a Class X student of a private school, was addicted to online gambling and other vices. He has a friend Rahul, who has been staying in the same locality (Adarsh Nagar near Old Dairy Farm) and used to visit him regularly.

The boy decided to take the crime route to meet the vices and recently observed that Rahul's father kept huge amounts of cash in the house. When Rahul and his father were away from home and his mother busy with other works, the boy went to the house and stole ₹8 lakh on February 8. Similarly, on March 4, he sneaked into the house with a duplicate key and stole another ₹17 lakh cash.

Based on the complaint from Rahul's father, the Arilova police registered a case and began investigat-

● The 15-year-old, a Class X student of a private school, was addicted to online gambling and other vices. He has a friend Rahul, who has been staying in the same locality (Adarsh Nagar near Old Dairy Farm) and used to visit him regularly.

● When Rahul and his father were away from home and his mother busy with other works, the boy went to the house and stole ₹8 lakh on February 8.

The investigation has revealed that the boy's mother purchased over ₹9 lakh worth of gold jewellery with the stolen money, and the boy also purchased ₹6 lakh worth of cricket bats, bike and other valuables. The boy was taken into custody and ₹2 lakh cash was recovered from his home.

The police have recovered another ₹14.84 lakh cash, gold jewellery worth ₹4 lakh and cricket bats, a bike, and few others.

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IN BRIEF

MP PASSES ANTI-CONVERSION LEGISLATION

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MAR 8

The controversial Freedom of Religion Bill 2021, providing 10 years imprisonment for religious conversion of a girl through marriage or by any other fraudulent means was on Monday passed in the Madhya Pradesh assembly.

The bill, popularly known as ‘Love Jihad’ law, was passed by voice vote amid opposition by Congress which described it as “an attack on personal freedom and violation of Constitution”.

State home minister Narottam Mishra however justified the bill saying that instances of some people marrying girls of other religions by concealing their real identities for conversion have of late come to the fore, forcing the government to legislate the law to check such illegal practices.

“I am not against ‘love’, but against ‘jihad’ (religious war)”, he observed.

Mr Mishra took a dig at Congress for opposing the bill, saying that the Opposition party always pursued politics of appeasement to cultivate vote banks.

Participating in the debate, BJP MLA Rameswar Sharma said the bill was necessary to check the disturbing trend witnessed in tribal regions of the state in which Christian and Muslim men were found marrying tribal girls to usurp various privileges provided to adivasis by the government.

SPECULATIONS RIFE AS U'KHAND CM TO MEET PM

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

Amid growing speculations over a leadership change in BJP ruled Uttarakhand, chief minister Trivendra Rawat reached New Delhi to meet the party top brass. Mr Rawat met BJP president JP Nadda late evening.

Earlier during the day, Mr Nadda had met Union home minister Amit Shah in Parliament. BJP general secretary organisation BL Santhosh also attended the meeting, giving rise to speculations that it was related to the Uttarakhand issue. Mr Rawat is likely to meet PM Narendra Modi and Mr Shah on Tuesday. The CM also met BJP Rajya Sabha MP Anil Baluni before his meeting with Mr Nadda.

A section within the BJP state unit is of the view that going to polls, scheduled next year, with Mr Rawat as the CM can dent the poll prospects. This section of BJP leaders, including some ministers and MLAs are miffed with the CM over various issues, including administrative. However, those supporting Mr Rawat claim that the other faction is giving the opposition ammunition.

The opposition - Congress and AAP - lapped up the factionalism brewing in the ruling BJP camp and claimed that many dissenting BJP MLAs are in touch with them.

SUSPENSION OF 10 AKALI MLAS REVOKED

Chandigarh, Mar 8: Punjab Assembly Speaker Rana K P Singh on Monday revoked the suspension of 10 Shiromani Akali Dal legislators. In the ongoing budget session, the speaker said the legislators can participate in the discussion on the budget, which was presented on Monday.

The 10 Akali legislators were suspended on Friday for disrupting Chief Minister Amarinder Singh’s speech on the governor’s address twice.

The Amarinder Singh-led government presented its last budget with a total size of ₹1,68,015 crore for 2021-22, making bulk of its provisions for agriculture, urban development, water resources, health and other sectors.

Dedicating the state budget to the farmers who are protesting against the Centre’s three farm laws, Finance minister Manpreet Singh Badal decided against levying any fresh taxes in the state which will go to the Assembly polls early next year.

Announcing the next phase of the Congress-led government’s flagship programme ‘crop loan waiver scheme’, Badal announced an allocation of ₹1,712 crore in which Rs 1,186 crore of 1.13 lakh farmers and ₹526 crore of landless farm workers will be waived.

JOLT TO DIDI: DENIED TICKETS, 5 TRINAMUL MLAS JOIN BJP

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 8

Dealing another blow to their party supremo and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on the eve of the Assembly elections, five sitting Trinamul Congress MLAs on Monday joined the BJP after they were denied tickets by her this time.

Another Trinamul leader, Sarala Murmu, who had got a ticket to a seat she did not want to contest from, walked into the saffron party after she was replaced.

The five sitting MLAs who defected to the BJP are four-time legislator of Satgachhia in South 24 Parganas and a close aide of Ms Banerjee, Sonali Guha, Sital Sardar of Sankrail, Jatu Lahiri of Shibpur in Howrah, Rabindranath Bhattacharya of Singur in Hooghly and Dipendu Biswas of Basirhat Dakshin in North 24 Parganas.

They made the switch to the saffron party in presence of its state chief and Midnapore MP Dilip Ghosh and national vice-president Mukul Roy, to whom many of them made a beeline after finding their names not in the TMC list.

The five MLAs took the drastic step after Ms Banerjee, while announcing the TMC candidates’ list, had regretted having dropped so many sitting MLAs but assured that she would set up a Vidhan Parishad to accommodate the old guard like Ms Guha as Legislative Council members.

The ruling TMC received another jolt during day after it replaced Ms Murmu, who wanted to contest from Old Malda, citing her “ill health”, with Pradeep Baskey at Habibpur in Malda in the morning. Disgusted, Ms Murmu joined the BJP. Besides, the BJP also took control of the Malda Zilla Parishad by inducting its 14 members to its fold from the Trinamul Congress.

Leading a rally of women TMC candidates, including several Bengali film and TV actors in Kolkata on Women’s Day, Mamata dared Prime Minister Narendra Modi to “compete with her on the road like a street fighter”.

Hiren’s death case now to be probed by NIA

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 8

The probe into the death of Mansukh Hiren, the owner of the explosives laden vehicle that was found outside industrialist Mukesh Ambani’s residence, has been transferred from Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS) to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Reacting to this Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has stated that transfer of Mansukh’s murder case from ATS to NIA suggests something was fishy. The investigation into Hiren’s death was transferred to the NIA on Monday and the NIA was in the process of re-registering the case into his death.

Speaking to the reporters in Mumbai on Monday, Mr Thackeray said that governments come and go, but the official administrative machinery remains the same and one needs to trust it. Mr Thackeray also said that the state had handed over the case of the vehicle laden with explosives and the mysterious death of Hiren to the ATS. According to him, the NIA taking over the case shows something was fishy. “If the Centre is planning on taking



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee participates in a rally with her party women candidates, who are contesting from different constituencies for the upcoming state Assembly polls, to mark International Women’s Day in Kolkata on Monday.

- PTI

Kerala CM starts campaign with direct attack on Shah

During a rally, the home minister had termed Kerala as ‘most corrupt’

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 8

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday hit out at union home minister Amit Shah saying that he had insulted the people of the state by terming Kerala as “most corrupt state”.

Mr Vijayan while addressing an election meeting in his constituency Dharmadam in Kannur district said that several agencies had adjudged Kerala as the least corrupt state. The home minister is trying to mislead the people by creating smoke-screen. You created “achehe din” by facilitating 16,000 per cent increase in wealth,” he said while referring to the allegations related to Shah’s son.

At the public meeting held in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday, Amit Shah had put certain questions to the chief minister about the involvement of his former principal secretary in

gold smuggling case, appointment of key accused in government department, her trips to Gulf along with senior official, corruption and mysterious death of a person allegedly involved in gold smuggling.

Mr Vijayan put counter questions to Amit Shah. Why have the central agencies not been able to crack the gold smuggling case even after eight months? How did Thiruvananthapuram international airport, which is under Centre’s complete control, become a gold smuggling hub under the NDA regime? Isn’t the main person who conspired gold smuggling a Sangh Parivar man?

He also took a dig at Mr Shah saying that he had not been in jail on the charges of murder, fake encounter, snooping, kidnapping.

“Amit Shah should remember that he faced such serious charges. “People of Kerala know who Pinarayi Vijayan is. They have seen our work,” he said.

About mysterious murder as alleged by Shah, Mr Vijayan said that let the home minister clearly state the facts instead of creating a smokescreen. “If he reveals the name of the person, I am sure Kerala police will probe the matter,” he said.

The chief minister said Mr Shah personified “communal politics.”

He said Kerala does not believe in the communal politics that he espoused. “Our culture is not his culture. We are following the footsteps of our great social reformers Sree Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swami, Mahatma Ayyankali, Ayya Guru who spoke about communal harmony and universal brotherhood,” he said.

Mr Vijayan criticised the Congress for failing to utter a word against Shah and his party.

Earlier, Mr Vijayan who arrived in Kannur was given a warm reception by LDF workers at the international airport. He was taken in a procession to

Dharmadam.

The chief minister was elected from Dharmadam constituency in 2016 with a huge margin of 36,905 votes. Though the Congress and BJP are yet to announce their candidates, political observers say Mr Vijayan might retain the seat comfortably considering the support his party enjoys in the constituency.

Meanwhile, the state leadership of CPM decided to exclude Law Minister A K Balan’s wife Dr P K Jameela from the list of probable candidates for Tharoor constituency. Her name was taken off following opposition within the party.

Meanwhile, with the Congress high command directing that 60 per cent of the party candidates for the forthcoming assembly polls should be youth, women and new faces, the state leadership will have to make changes in the existing list of probable candidates.

Sources said that at the national executive meet-

ing of Youth Congress, Rahul Gandhi is believed to have reiterated that the representation for youth and women in the list of candidates should not come down.

Youth Congress state president Shafi Parambil MLA who attended the national executive meeting apprised Mr Gandhi about the less number of youth and new faces in the existing list.

Sources said based on the feedback, Rahul is understood to have spoken to the PCC leadership asking them to ensure good representation for youth and women. The Congress high command has also asked the PCC to prune the list of probables before submitting to the screening committee. As of now two to five names figure in the list for each constituency. Kerala PCC president Mr Mullappally Rama-chandran is likely to contest the polls from Kannur district. Earlier he had decided to keep off the electoral fray and concentrate on campaign.

MODI LIKELY TO ADDRESS 5 RALLIES IN KERALA

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAR. 8

The BJP has decided to field party national vice president A P Abdullakutty from Malappuram Lok Sabha constituency for the bypoll to be held along with the assembly elections. The decision was conveyed in a statement issued by BJP’s central election committee in Delhi.

The decision to field Abdullakutty has been taken in view of the peculiarity of the Muslim dominated Malappuram constituency. This is Abdullakutty’s first election after joining the BJP. Earlier, he was MP twice from the CPM and later MLA from the Congress for one term.

The BJP has projected Abdullakutty as the party’s Muslim face by elevating him to the post of national vice president. The Muslim League and the CPM have not decided the candidates for the Malappuram constituency as yet.

The Malappuram Lok Sabha bypoll was warranted by sitting MP and Muslim League leader P K Kunhalikutty’s resignation. Kunhalikutty who returned to Kerala politics, would be contesting the forthcoming Assembly polls.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is slated to address five public meetings as part of the campaign in Kerala. Amit Shah will be addressing seven meetings. Rajnath Singh, J P Nadda, Nirmala Sitharaman, Yogi Adityanath are the other star campaigners who would be soliciting votes for the party in Kerala in the coming days.

BJP NOT TO ANNOUNCE CM FACE IN ASSAM

Guwahati, Mar 8: The BJP will not announce the chief ministerial candidate before the Assam polls and a decision in this regard will be taken by its Parliamentary Board at the time of forming the next government, the saffron party state unit president Ranjeet Kumar Dass said on Monday.

Incumbent chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and influential minister and convener of the North East Democratic Front (NEDA) Himanta Biswa Sarma have also said the ultimate decision on selecting a person for the chief minister chair in the new government will be that of the party’s Parliamentary board.

This is in contrary to the position in 2016, when BJP had projected the then union minister Sarbananda Sonowal as its chief ministerial face before the elections were held.

“When there is no government, then the CM name is projected. When we are in government, then we do not project any name for the CM post,” Dass said. -PTT

Remarks on rape case last week completely misreported, says SC

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde on Monday said his remark to a rape accused that “will you marry her” was taken out of context and “misreported”.

Expressing dissatisfaction with the “misreporting” of the proceedings, Chief Justice heading a bench also comprising Justice A.S.Bopanna and Justice V. Rama subramanian said that “We have the highest respect for womanhood”. “We have

given highest respect to womanhood. We asked ‘are you going to marry’. We didn’t order (to) marry,” the CJJ said.

The clarification from the top court came in the course of the hearing of a petition by a 14-year old girl from Haryana seeking court’s nod for the termination of her 26 week old pregnancy. Agreeing with the bench that it was a case of misreporting, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said “You asked a question in a different context. You were quoted

out of context.” Lawyer Biju for the petitioner girl seeking termination of pregnancy described the alleged misreporting as “tarnishing of the image of the highest court”.

The question had arisen in the context of an understanding between the victim girl’s mother with the mother of the accused, who is now 23, that he would marry her (victim) after she becomes an adult.

In a hearing on March 1, the CJJ had asked the petitioner accused if he would

marry the victim making it clear that court was not compelling him or offering an option.

However, entire thing got closed after accused petitioner seeking anticipatory bail said that he had offered to marry the victim girl but she refused and now he is married to another woman.

Rejecting his plea for anticipatory bail, the top court in the last hearing granted him four weeks of protection from arrest, giving him liberty to seek bail from the trial court.

MAJOR | CONCERN

India sees over 18,000 new cases for third consecutive day

Covid cases surge, recovery rate drops

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 8

New cases of coronavirus infection in India were recorded above 18,000 for the third consecutive day taking the total tally of Covid-19 cases to 1,12,29,398, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

The active cases also registered an increase for the sixth consecutive day and the active caseload increased to 1,88,747 which now comprises 1.68 per cent of the total infections. The recovery rate has dropped further to

96.91 per cent, the data stated.

A total of 18,599 new infections were registered in a day, while the death toll increased to 1,57,853 with 97 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed. On January 29, 18,855 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,08,82,798 which translates to a national recovery rate of 96.91 per cent, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.41 per cent.

The count of active cases

● ACCORDING TO THE ICMR, 22,19,68,271 samples have been tested up to March 7 with 5,37,764 samples being tested on Sunday.

across India saw a net increase of 4,224 on Monday, compared with 4,219 on Sunday. States that have seen the biggest daily net increase in active cases are Maharashtra (5,090), Punjab (333), Karnataka (268), Haryana (133), and Gujarat (115).

With 14,278 new daily recoveries, India’s recov-

ery rate stands at 96.91%, while fatality rate remains unchanged at 1.41%.

The Indian states and UTs with the worst case fatality rate at present are Punjab (3.15%), Maharashtra (2.36%), and Gujarat (2.19%). The rate in as many as 15 is higher than the national average.

Delhi recorded as many as 239 fresh coronavirus cases on Monday. With this, the tally of cases in the national capital has reached over 6.41 lakh, while the death toll mounted to 10,924. Three fatalities have been recorded in the last 24

hours, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department.

India’s Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

According to the ICMR, 22,19,68,271 samples have been tested up to March 7 with 5,37,764 samples being tested on Sunday.





## SHORT TAKES

PHILIPPINE COPS  
KILL 9 IN RAIDS  
ON REBELS

Manila, March 8: Philippine police backed by military forces killed nine people over the weekend in a series of raids against suspected communist insurgents, with authorities saying the suspects opened fire first. Others, however, said those killed were unarmed activists. Police said Monday that all of those killed were associated with “communist terrorist groups” and had shot at officers while they were serving search warrants.

The suspects died while being brought to hospitals, police said. Police served at least 24 search warrants, mostly for illegal firearms and explosives, in a number of locations.

THREE DEAD IN  
KENTUCKY  
OVERDOSES

Hazard (Kentucky), March 8: Police in a southeastern Kentucky community are working with a federal drug enforcement agency to identify the source of suspected overdoses that resulted in three deaths and sickened several other people, including two officers. The Hazard Police Department said on Facebook that officers responding to a report of suspected overdoses in an apartment found three bodies Thursday.

A fourth person suspected of overdosing was taken to a hospital while eight more overdoses have since been reported in the city, the statement said.

Police urged residents to use caution if they see any substance that is not easily recognizable.

FIVE BALOCH  
ULTRAS KILLED  
IN PAKISTAN

Karachi, March 8: Pakistan's security forces on Monday killed five militants of the outlawed Balochistan Liberation Army in the country's restive Balochistan province.

The militants of the separatist outfit were killed following an intelligence-based operation in Splinji area of Mastung district, a senior official of the Counter Terrorism Department in Quetta said.

They were planning a big terror attack in Quetta. Explosives, detonators and arms were recovered from their hideout. The five militants were involved in carrying out attacks on labourers and security forces. “When we raided their hideout, they opened fire on the police officials instead of surrendering,” he said.

UN SAYS FIRE IN  
YEMENI MIGRANT  
CENTRE KILLS 8

Cairo, March 8: The UN migration agency said a fire broke out Sunday in a detention centre for migrants in Yemen's capital, killing at least eight people and injuring more than 170 others.

The International Organisation for Migration said the cause of the fire at the detention centre in Sanaa was not immediately clear. Over 90 wounded migrants were in serious condition, IOM said. The detention centre is run by the Houthis rebels, who have controlled the capital since the outbreak of Yemen's conflict more than six years ago.

The Houthis said they were investigating to determine the cause of the fire. A UN official said the fire broke out in a hangar close to the main building of the detention centre.

SEDITION CHARGE  
AGAINST MORE  
THAI ACTIVISTS

Bangkok, March 8: Prosecutors in Thailand charged 18 pro-democracy activists with sedition on Monday, while lodging additional charges of insulting the monarchy against three of them.

The charges, which carry a maximum penalty of up to seven years in prison, stem from an anti-government rally in September.

The three charged with violating the lese majeste law, which outlaws criticism of senior members of the royal family, are Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul, Jatupat Boonpattaraksa and Panupong Jadnok. A court denied bail for all three, and they were being transferred to prison. Thai authorities have stepped up their legal offensive against those involved in a student-led protest movement.

## Meghan alleges royal racism in tell-all

Former actress tells chat show host Oprah Winfrey that she had contemplated suicide

Los Angeles/London, March 8: Meghan Markle struggled as a new member of Britain's royal family after her marriage to Prince Harry to such a degree that she even contemplated suicide, the Duchess of Sussex revealed in an explosive tell-all interview with American chat show host Oprah Winfrey.

The two-hour special, aired on the CBS network in the US on Sunday and set to be aired on ITV in the UK on Monday night, saw Prince Harry joining his wife half-way through as the couple also spoke about concerns of racism within the royal ranks after being asked about their son Archie's expected skin colour when mixed-race Meghan was pregnant with their first child.

I just didn't want to be alive anymore, Meghan said, adding that when she went to the institution for help she was told it would not be forthcoming as it wouldn't be good for the institution. The 39-year-old former American actress, who is pregnant with her second child, revealed that the couple are expecting a baby girl and shared how the palace decided that their first-born, Archie, could not be a prince and would therefore have no security. She alluded to “concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he's born”.

Who is having that conversation?” asked a stunned Winfrey. Meghan replied: “That was relayed to me from Harry, those were conversations the family had with him, and I think it

● THE 39-YEAR-OLD former American actress, who is pregnant with her second child, revealed that the couple are expecting a baby girl and shared how the palace decided that their first-born, Archie, could not be a prince and would therefore have no security.

was really hard to be able to see those as compartmentalised conversations. They were saying they didn't want him to be a prince or a princess and that he wasn't going to receive security.”

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex's children do not automatically become princes or princesses because of a rule that has been in place since 1917, unless the Queen steps in.

Both Meghan and Harry refused to divulge who exactly made remarks about their son's skin tone, with Meghan admitting that if she revealed who was involved in such talks it would be very damaging to them.

That conversation I'm never going to share,” asserted Harry. The 36-year-old Duke of Sussex, who is still sixth in line to the British throne, also spoke of his hurt at his father Prince Charles not taking his calls after the couple decided to step back as frontline royals last year.

[I had] three conversations with my grandmother [Queen Elizabeth II] and two conversations with my



Britain's Prince Harry (L) and his wife Meghan (C), Duchess of Sussex, in a conversation with US television host Oprah Winfrey. — AFP

father [Charles], before he stopped taking my calls, he said. It was, like, I needed to do this for my family. This is not a surprise to anybody. It's really sad that it's got to this point. But I've got to do something for my own mental health, my wife's and for Archie's as well, because I could see where this was headed, he said, in reference to the couple's decision to relocate. They have since moved

to California after formally stepping down from royal duties in March 2020, and it was announced last month that they would not be returning as working members of the royal family. Harry said the couple were only able to afford their new life in California because of his mother Diana Princess of Wales. My family literally cut me off financially. I've got what my mum left me. Without

that, we never would have been able to do this I think she saw it coming, he said.

Asked by Winfrey how they would respond to accusations that they were money-grabbing because of deals they have signed with Netflix and Spotify since moving to California, Harry replied: First of all this was never the intention. We're certainly not complaining. Life is great. We've got a beautiful house, beautiful family. The dogs are really happy.

From my perspective all I needed was enough money to be able to pay for security, to keep my family safe, he said. During the interview, the royal family were also accused of failing to protect the Duke and Duchess, with Meghan saying the situation “started to really worsen” after the couple married in 2018.

— PTI

Myanmar forces  
kill 2 protesters

Mandalay (Myanmar), March 8: Security forces shot dead two people in northern Myanmar on Monday, local media reported, as the military government continued its attempt to stamp out opposition to its February 1 coup. The Irrawaddy newspaper said the victims were shot in the head during anti-coup protests in Myitkyina in Kachin State. Graphic video on social media showed protesters in the street backing away from tear gas, responding with rocks, then fleeing after a fusillade of what seemed to be automatic gunfire.

Demonstrators hurriedly carried away a number of casualties, including one apparent fatality, a person who had clearly sustained a severe head wound. A second body was seen a little later, on a stretcher, his head covered with a cloth.

Security forces also clamped down on anti-coup protesters elsewhere Monday, firing tear gas to break up a crowd of around 1,000 people who were demonstrating in the capital, Naypyitaw. The protesters deployed fire extinguishers to create a smoke screen as they fled from authorities. Meanwhile, thousands of protesters marching in Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, dispersed on their own amid fears that soldiers and police were planning to use force to break up their demonstration.

Large-scale protests have occurred daily across many cities and towns in Myanmar since the

AUSTRALIA ENDS  
DEFENCE TIES  
WITH MYANMAR

Canberra, March 8: Australia has suspended its defence cooperation with Myanmar and is redirecting humanitarian aid because of the military takeover of the government and ongoing detention of an Australian citizen. Foreign Minister Marise Payne said on Monday that Australian diplomats only had access to economic policy adviser Sean Turnell twice since he was detained in early February.

She described the access as “very limited consular support.” “We continue to absolutely call for the release of Professor Sean Turnell,” Payne told *Australian Broadcasting Corp.* Australia announced late Sunday it had suspended a defence training programme with Myanmar worth about 1.5 million Australian dollars (\$1.2 million) over five years. The programme had been restricted to non-combat areas. — AP

country's military seized power, and security forces have responded with ever greater use of lethal force and mass arrests.

The coup and its violent aftermath have led foreign governments and international organizations to impose measures against Myanmar's military leaders. — AP

20 dead in E. Guinea blasts  
Sweden sentences woman  
for taking child to IS area

Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), March 8: A series of explosions at a military barracks in Equatorial Guinea killed at least 20 people and wounded more than 600 others on Sunday, authorities said. President Teodoro Obiang Nguema said the explosion at 4 pm local time was due to the “negligent handling of dynamite” in the military barracks located in the neighbourhood of Mondong Nkuantoma in Bata.

“The impact of the explosion caused damage in almost all the houses and buildings in Bata,” the president said in a statement, which was in Spanish. The defence ministry released a statement late Sunday saying that a fire at a weapons depot in the barracks caused the explosion of high-calibre ammunition. It said the provisional toll was 20 dead and 600 injured, adding that the cause of the explosions will be fully investigated. The country's president said the fire may have been due residents burning the fields surrounding the barracks.

State television showed a huge plume of smoke rising above the explosion site as crowds fled, with many people crying out “we don't know what happened, but it is all destroyed.” Images on local media seen by *The Associated Press* show people screaming and crying running through the streets amid debris and smoke. Roofs of houses were ripped off and wounded people were being carried into a hospital. Equatorial Guinea, an African country of 1.3 million people located south of Cameroon, was a colony of Spain until it gained its independence in 1968. Bata has roughly 175,000

Stockholm, March 8: A southern Swedish court on Monday sentenced a woman to three years in prison for taking her 2-year-old son to Syria in 2014, to an area that was then controlled by the Islamic State (IS) group.

The woman, who lived in the southern town of Landskrona, has allegedly told the child's father that she and the boy were only going on a holiday to Turkey. However, once in Turkey, the two crossed into Syria and IS-run territory. The Lund District Court said the woman, who was not named, took the child to an area “where there was war and an environment characterised by the violent ideology of the Islamic State group.”

The court, which did not identify the woman's nationality, rejected her claims that she had only

● A SOUTHERN Swedish court on Monday sentenced a woman to three years in prison for taking her 2-year-old son to Syria in 2014, to an area that was then controlled by the Islamic State (IS) group.

● THE COURT, which did not identify the woman's nationality, rejected her claims that she had only intended to go to Syria for a few days to see how it was and then return.

● SHE MANAGED to escape to Turkey where she was arrested with her son and two other children she had given birth to in the meantime.

intended to go to Syria for a few days to see how it was there and then return home.

inhabitants. Earlier, the Health Ministry had tweeted that 17 were killed and the president's statement mentioned 15 dead.

The Health Ministry made a call for blood donors and volunteer health workers to go to the Regional Hospital de Bata, one of three hospitals treating the wounded. The ministry said its health workers were treating the injured at the site of the tragedy and in medical facilities, but feared people were still missing under the rubble.

The blasts were a shock for the oil rich Central African nation. Foreign Minister Simeón Oyono Esono Angue met with foreign ambassadors and asked for aid. “It is important for us to ask our brother countries for their assistance in this lamentable situation since we have a health emergency (due to Covid-19) and the tragedy in Bata,” he said.

A doctor calling into TVGE, who went by his first name, Florentino, said the situation was a “moment of crisis” and

She also told the court that she had become interested in religion after the death of a close relative.

“She intended to move to Syria with her son and settle there permanently, and took her son away from his father in an arbitrary manner,” said the court statement.

In 2017, when the Islamic State's reign began to collapse, she fled from Raqqa — the city that was known as the capital of the so-called IS “caliphate” — and was captured by Syrian Kurdish troops, the *Sydsvenska* daily wrote.

She managed to escape to Turkey where she was arrested with her son and two other children she had given birth to in the meantime, with an IS foreign fighter from Tunisia, the daily wrote. She was extradited from Turkey to Sweden. — AP

U.S., S. KOREA  
AGREE ON NEW  
COST-SHARING  
TROOP DEAL

Seoul, March 8: South Korea and the United States have reached agreement on Seoul's contribution to the costs of the US troop presence on the peninsula, Seoul said Monday, as the two allies kicked off annual joint military exercises.

The issue had bedevilled the two allies' security alliance under former president Donald Trump, who had a transactional approach to foreign policy and repeatedly accused the South of free-riding.

Washington stations 28,500 troops in the country to defend it from the nuclear-armed North, which invaded in 1950. They are a key part of US forces' deployment in Asia, but negotiations over funding had been gridlocked by the former US administration's demands that the South pay billions of dollars more towards their costs.

The Trump administration initially insisted on \$5 billion a year — a more than fivefold increase. Under the previous deal, which expired at the end of 2019, Seoul paid Washington about \$920 million annually.

Seoul's foreign ministry said the two sides had reached an agreement “in principle” without specifying the agreed amount. “The government will resolve a gap that has lasted for more than a year through a swift signing of an agreement,” it said in a statement. The new deal must still be approved by the South Korean legislature. US President Joe Biden has vowed to revive frayed US alliances under his predecessor to counter the challenges posed by Russia, China, Iran and North Korea.

The two sides “will now pursue the final steps needed to conclude the Special Measures Agreement for signature and entry into force that will strengthen our Alliance and our shared defence,” it added. — AP

CHINA PLAN TO  
INSTAL PATRIOTS  
NOT PURGE OF  
OPPN: LAM

Hong Kong, March 8: Hong Kong's leader on Monday praised China's plan to ensure only “patriots” remain in politics, denying the move was a purge of the opposition. Chief Executive Carrie Lam ruled out any need to consult the public on the changes, as they were decreed by Beijing. Legislation to vet all election candidates in Hong Kong is currently being discussed by China's rubber-stamp parliament and is expected to be adopted on Thursday. China has said only those deemed “patriotic” will be allowed to stand.

Critics say the radical overhaul of the city's already limited democratic system will demolish what remains of the pro-democracy opposition and ensure only loyalists remain, an argument that Lam rejected on Monday. “The improvements to the electoral system are not designed to favour someone, it is designed to ensure that whoever is administering Hong Kong is patriotic,” Lam, a pro-Beijing appointee, told reporters after returning from the gathering in Beijing.

“The decision is timely, necessary, lawful and constitutional, and the central authorities' leadership and decision-making power are out of question.” Authoritarian China promised Hong Kong would keep a degree of autonomy and certain freedoms when it reverted from British colonial rule in 1997.

The city has a partially elected legislature and China also promised to one day grant residents universal suffrage. Critics had for years complained freedoms were being steadily eroded. Beijing then ramped up the dismantling of the financial hub's democratic pillars. — AP

## MYTHICAL | ANGELS

Seven hail from Afghanistan who are receiving posthumous honours

## 15 nations' women feted by Jill Biden for courage

Washington, March 8: First lady Jill Biden says nearly two dozen women the State Department is honouring for their courage made an intentional decision to persist and demand justice despite their fear. The 21 women being recognised Monday with the department's International Women of Courage Award include seven from Afghanistan who are receiving posthumous honours. The first lady says that the women's stories make it easy to think of them as mythical heroes or angels among us but that they're also humans

who want to enjoy life's simple pleasures.

Some of these women have spent their lives fighting for their cause. Others are just starting out on a journey they didn't ask for, Biden says in remarks prepared for the ceremony, which were obtained by *The Associated Press*.

Some were called to service, and some couldn't escape it, Biden says. They are fighting for their own lives and for their children. They want to right the wrongs of our past, to build a brighter future for everyone. They aren't

● SOME WERE called to service, and some couldn't escape it, Jill Biden says. They are fighting for their own lives and for their children. They want to right the wrongs of our past, to build a brighter future for everyone. They aren't immune to fear. No one is.

Biden says that in the course of ordinary lives, each of the women made an extraordinary choice.

You see, courage isn't really found, Biden says. “It doesn't conjure away

our doubts. It's an intentional decision made.

The ceremony is being held virtually and not at the State Department because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The 14 living awardees are from Belarus, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Iran, Myanmar, Nepal, Somalia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Venezuela.

“These women made an extraordinary choice, to persist, to demand justice, to believe that, despite the obstacles and fear they faced, there is a future

worth fighting for,” Biden says.

Touching on the past year, the first lady says the pandemic shows how the things that connect us, our love for family and friends, our hope that we will be together soon transcend language and distance. She says that diplomacy, at its best, is a recognition of this connection and that the United States, under President Joe Biden's leadership, will support women around the world.

We will make the choice to lead, to be bold and to lift up the women and girls

everywhere who light our way, Biden says in her prepared remarks. For 15 years, we have honoured women around the world who have made the extraordinary choice to fight for something bigger than themselves.

Today, we recommit to being worthy of that courage, to understanding that our lives are tied together in immeasurable and powerful ways and to choosing, every day, to honor that connection, she says. We will stand with you as we build a brighter future for us all. — AP



DECCAN  
Chronicle  
9 MARCH 2021

# Regional power strong in TN, alliances ready

The regional satraps of the South were always powerful enough politicians to make this region of India mostly stay off rule by mainstream national parties and not just in the couple of decades of the new millennium. As a bastion of Dravidian rule since 1967, Tamil Nadu has been even more of an outlier in national politics. The regional versus the national is at play once again as alliance talks on seat-sharing meandered in compulsory coalition politics in which the Dravidian majors seek out the national parties to be partners or vice versa, but without ever conceding a share in power in Tamil Nadu by way of a coalition government. Both the Congress, an older player in Tamil Nadu's politics, and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party may have been miffed but still had no recourse but to accept a lesser number of seats in their respective alliances.

The battle lines are drawn for the Tamil Nadu leg of the polls, which is due on April 6, with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)-Congress alliance pitted against the twice triumphant All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)-led front of 2011 and 2016, but which has a new ally now in the BJP. There were never any great ideological barriers against joining either alliance as most parties in the Tamil Nadu mix have been allies on either side in the past. The presence of the BJP in an alliance for the Assembly polls triggers the secular versus majoritarian religious politics debate whereas the two Dravidian fronts used to be separated in the past only by theism versus atheism theme of religious politics. The narrowness of the 2016 verdict suggests that the contests may be even tighter this time.

Friends have remained friends like the Pattal Makkal Katchi (PMK)with the AIAMDK since 2011 and "frenemies" have stayed back for now after abandoning fleeting thoughts of switching alliances. Fringe players like Kamal Haasan, whose fledgling party Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) fared reasonably well in a few urban pockets in the Lok Sabha polls of 2019, may make things a bit interesting at the hustings, even though the electorate can be expected to continue to vest power in one of the two major Dravidian parties. The big difference this time around is that Tamil Nadu has moved on from the days of its larger-than life leaders like M. Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran (MGR) and Jayalalithaa, and the Assembly polls for 234 seats without them is a first since the mid-1950s, when M. Karunanidhi of the DMK made his poll debut.

The anti-incumbency factor after two terms will be weighing heavily on the ruling party-led combine while his father's longtime lieutenant M.K. Stalin will be hoping the trends favour his vaulting to the gaddi for the first time. Association with the BJP did not work for the AIADMK in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, which was a 37-1 washout, which means the pressure may be even more on Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami and his deputy O. Panneerselvam, who have kept the state government going for four long years. And, however hard Kamal Haasan may have tried to stress on ridding the state of the corrupt Dravidian parties, institutionalised graft has never appeared to have been an issue with the franchisees somewhat accustomed to accepting cash-for-votes besides freebies from their rulers.

## Heed Pope's call for peace

The pictures that the world got to see through the lenses of Pope Francis' entourage on his recent visit to Iraq reflect the destruction the region has witnessed in the last two decades and the urgent need to rebuild it by ushering in peace. The Pope's call for an end to violence was meant for all those who were responsible for it, which started with the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003. Each player who held sway in the region, the Islamic State included, bathed itself in inglorious acts in the land which created and nurtured one of the most ancient of human civilisations. As St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "no one was righteous, not even one", in this deadly game.

The import of the visit, the first one by the head of the Roman Catholic Church, is that it was not meant for photo ops alone. Pope Francis met leaders of every community that has been hit. He visited Qaraqosh, a Christian town, and Mosul, a Sunni heartland, both overrun by the Islamic State, and Erbil, capital of the autonomous Kurdish region. He met Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of the most senior leaders in Shia Islam, in the holy city of Najaf. He had an emotional meeting with the father of Alan Kurdi, the boy whose body was washed up on a Turkish beach six years ago, epitomising the sufferings of Syrians who tried to escape the savagery of war. He also visited Ur, the land of Prophet Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths.

Winding up the visit, the Pope, who commands no military divisions, made an urgent appeal to humanity: we must reaffirm our conviction that fraternity is more durable than fratricide, that hope is more powerful than hatred, that peace more powerful than war. Now, he who has ears, let him hear.

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Subhani



# Stop meddle & muddle: Rework regional policy



Mohan Guruswamy

Much as we would like to exalt our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as the founder of modern India's foreign policy, like all other major countries our policy too derives its basis from one man, France's Cardinal Richelieu, who enshrined national interest as the only guiding principle to conduct affairs with other nations. The French have an elegant phrase for it. *Raison d'état*. Richelieu rejected the notion that policy should be based on values and sentimental considerations. He believed, as we all still do, that the State has permanent interests, the singular pursuit of which requires much intellectual and moral flexibility. He believed that the only challenge facing a policymaker is to decide what the national interest was and what it required? It was this singular pursuit that had Catholic France intervening in the Thirty Years War (1618-48) on the Protestant side to block the increasing power of the Pope. At Richelieu's prompting, the philosopher Jean de Silhon defined the concept of reason of state as "a mean between what conscience permits and affairs require".

How we see our national interest depends on how we see ourselves. Therein lies the rub. The rump Republic of India sees itself as the successor to the British Raj, which left these shores in 1947. For the two centuries that Britain was the paramount power in India, India's national interests were synonymous with those of Britain. The paramount power's paramount interest, as far as India was concerned, was to keep the goose that laid the golden egg healthy and well. Lord

Curzon of Kedleston, who was Viceroy of India (1898-1905) and later Britain's foreign secretary (1919-24), is still regarded by many of our foreign policy elite as the man who outlined India's grand strategic vision and its focus on fixing borders. It is argued by these people that while the political context might have changed, geography has not. Physical geography may not have changed, but political geography has changed very much. Afghanistan is no longer the glacis on which the war for India will be fought. Neither are Tibet and Xinjiang buffers any longer against northern threats. The threats are at our doorsteps now.

In the immediate period after 1947, India's foreign policy was still conducted by the Western educated elite who had imbibed their lessons in Cambridge and Oxford and believed they were legatees of the white man's burden, including the defence of India. India's immediate neighbours, for their own reasons, still largely see India's conduct towards them as the continuation of the British legacy. It didn't help very much when the Oxbridge elite were followed by the St. Stephen's elite who were also cast about the same last "laat sahib" mould.

Consequently, our diplomats have tended to be overbearing with the smaller non-hostile neighbours, often treating them like errant schoolboys. This is the constant lament heard in the neighbourhood, whether it is in Colombo or Kathmandu. Increasingly, such voices are being heard in Thimphu as well. With Bangladesh, too, we have rapidly descended from being the liberator to the neighbourhood bully. The dominant Indian discourse

of "the demographic aggression" by Bangladesh "ghusbaits" has created a certain unhelpful mentality in both countries. What after all must a nation think when its larger neighbour thinks of it as an unending source of human vermin?

To add to our woes, we still seem to be wearing those Curzonian blinkers that have bequeathed us the Great Game mentality with its focus on highways, railway lines and sea lanes and ports as military threats. South Block still doesn't seem to have realised that modern military means and technology have made the theories of Mahan and Mackinder largely irrelevant. It is this kind of infantilism that makes us see every Chinese investment in the cash-starved region as a threat to India's hegemony, when even our worst fears about Hambantota or Gwadar make them juicy and easy targets.

While excoriating foreign secretary Earl Russell in the House of Lords on February 4, 1864, Edward Stanley, the Earl of Derby, said: "The foreign policy of the Earl may be summed up in two short homely but expressive words — meddle and muddle." But we are now no longer prepared to behave like Lord Curzon either. The tension between that Curzonian tendency to meddle and the passive spirit of Jawaharlal Nehru to muddle still persists. We see this manifested in New Delhi's policy responses to the current situations in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh or the Maldives — with more muddle than meddle. The muddle in

**Our diplomats have tended to be overbearing with the smaller non-hostile neighbours, often treating them like errant schoolboys. This is the constant lament heard in the neighbourhood, whether it is in Colombo or Kathmandu.**

South Block is not due to the limited number of options. There is no *l'em-barrass des richesses*, but a poverty of clarity.

The most significant development of this century so far has been the rise of China as an economic powerhouse, with its military not lagging far behind. Former Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi, responding to criticism about China's assertiveness, just said: "China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that's just a fact." Indeed it is, and at this point in time even India is much too small to be able to compete with it in its spree of chequebook diplomacy. Most of India's regional neighbours are poor countries and if their adversity forces them not to look at Chinese gift horses in the teeth, then we must understand it. In other circumstances, we too might have done so too? Debt doesn't kill. I recall the dictum enunciated by Walter Wriston, the legendary Citibank chairman who told my class at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy over 40 years ago: "Countries don't go under, they just roll over".

But our inherited Curzonian vision and now a little bit of the American-induced notion of containment are pushing India into a confrontationalist posture with China. India will do well to remind itself that of the four countries that are a part of the "Quadrilateral", only India has a long and contentious land border with China. The other three players are hooked up to China's growth engine and are also the most responsible for its rise — America with its trade profligacy, and Japan with its massive investments and transfer of technology. They have created today's China. India must be wary about becoming their cat's paw.

*The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.*

## LETTERS

### WOMEN POWER

Telugu Desam president and former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, having totally lost credibility, is now questioning the voter about his/her *rosham* (pride). His campaign for the civic polls on behalf of his party makes it more comical than the one we witness in Telugu movies. Words like 'corruption', 'perseverance', etc., coming from him are like the Satan preaching the Gospel. The electorate, I think, would understand the predicament of Naidu by now and might simply ignore his utterances as nothing but comic relief.

**Govardhana Myneedu**  
*Vijayawada*

### NO COBRAS PLEASE

Eating humble pie, Sasikala declaring her disinterest to be active in politics for the upcoming Assembly elections of Tamil Nadu is tactically a good move for the AIADMK. Her involvement would have lead to a disintegration of support base, weakening the ruling party's stake at the hustings. It would have helped the rival DMK to sail through. Now, the opposing camps are looking equal forces, with a slight tilt of winning probability towards the DMK camp.

**Dr D.V.G. Sankararao**  
*Vizianagaram*

## 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

### Peaceful civil disobedience in East Pak

NEW DELHI, MARCH. 8  
Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's writ rather than President Yahya Khan's seems to run in East Pakistan today as a non-violent civil disobedience movement got under way to force the military rulers to lift the Martial Law and hand over power to the elected representatives.

While Radio Pakistan in its national bulletins backed out news from the east wing except for a long official report giving casualty figures of last week's disturbances, Dacca Radio played a recorded version of the Awami League leader's speech of yesterday which described the east wing's struggle as "a fight for liberation".

Aakar Patel



# India's image in free fall, but govt in denial on real causes

In 2020, the Narendra Modi government decided to improve India's standing on various indices that showed a deterioration in governance. These indices that were upsetting New Delhi spanned from those produced by non-profits working in specialised areas, multilateral bodies like the United Nations, institutions traditionally seen as being on the Right, like the World Economic Forum and The Economist, and also the government's own data.

The government was clearly concerned about its drop. We know this as it put out a press release on July 10 with the headline: "Niti Aayog organises a virtual workshop to monitor performance of 29 select Global Indices". At this workshop it was decided that the government would prepare a "single, informative dashboard for all the 29 Global Indices" which would allow for "monitoring of the parameters as per official data as well as the data source used by the publishing agencies".

This monitoring exercise was "not just to improve rankings but to improve systems and drive reforms to attract investments and to shape India's perception globally".

The government appeared to

believe that the issue was one related to image rather than reality. A report the next month said the government was "working to improve India's ranking on 29 global indices, and it wants the message to reach everyone loud and clear". The way it would do this was "a massive publicity campaign" that would "shape India's perception" through advertising and "micro-sites of ministries" and it would also "publicise the problems, parameters and data sources of global indices".

Would this address the problem at hand? It would not. The issue was not one of perception or bias, but one of fact. The world was not conspiring to show us in a bad light. The solution lay in acknowledging that India had been declining in several areas since 2014 and working on trying to improve them. Spending money on a media campaign would not change the numbers. India's discrediting the data of all these agencies and institutions was unlikely to reverse the views of those who had looked at and understood the facts.

Under Prime Minister Modi, India's ranking rose on three indicators (including the World Bank's Doing Business index), it remained the

same on two but and fell on forty-one. The decline was so broad and so pronounced that organisations captured similar results through different methodologies. India since 2014 has done poorly on six indices that tracked civil liberties and pluralism, five that tracked health and literacy, two tracking religious freedom and minorities, two tracking Internet denial, six tracking national power of various types, four tracking the rule of law and corruption, four tracking sustainability and environment, four tracking gender issues and their safety, four tracking economic freedoms of Indians and four tracking urban spaces.

The record leaves little room for debate or dispute. The scale and rapidity of decline in governance is manifest. It may appear strange that the Modi government should have thought reversing this performance required "a massive publicity campaign" which would "shape India's perception" through advertising and more websites, but it is how the government thought. A more credible response might have been to say that the decline was not the Modi government's doing entirely; to deny it altogether was to run away from the problem. The solution was not

"image correction" but improving performance through governance.

After the publicity strategy had fallen through for whatever reason, the government then decided at the end of 2020 that if it asked ministries to "ensure swift and updated data" it would help on the indices. This was based on the assumption that the government's work was excellent; it was merely data lag that caused it to plummet. This was also of course wrong, and the indices that have come out after that showed continued decline.

The latest report has come last week from Freedom House, which says that India is not free but "partly free". This is not opinion; it is based on a set of indicators. India says it is democratic. Freedom House agrees. It gives India 34/40 on political rights. Full marks for free and fair elections, Election Commission impartiality, freedom to start political parties, opportunities for the Opposition to increase their power. Not full marks on whether voting is hampered by violence and affected communal tension. All this we already know. The fact is that we do very well on political rights, and in fact the government gets 3/4 on transparency, which is

hardly accurate.

The real problem is political rights are only 40 per cent of the Freedom House score. The other 60 per cent is civil liberties. Here we perform poorly (33/60). On the issues of freedom of expression, religion, academic freedom, freedom of assembly, freedom for NGOs to work (the report names the attack on my former organisation Amnesty India specifically), rule of law, independence of judiciary, due process by the police and so on, our rating is poor. Can we disagree with this? We cannot. The answer is not to deny, as the government has done through a one-page response. This will not work because another report is coming soon: the reputable Varieties of Democracy report from the University of Gothenburg. Last year's report had said: "India has continued on a path of steep decline, to the extent it has almost lost its status as a democracy."

Our precipitous decline is being noticed and recorded abroad with alarm. It is strange that within India we are carrying on as if it is business as usual.

*The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist*



## quick BITES

### INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	50,441.07	0.07
Nifty 50	14,956.20	0.12
S&P 500*	3,870.96	0.76
Dollar (₹)	73.25	-0.30
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.94	-0.02
Euro (₹)	86.96	0.17
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,114▼122	0.27
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.27	-1.57
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.223	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.592	0.038

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## Govt nets over ₹53,300 cr from Vivad Se Vishwas

The Centre has realised Rs 53,346 crore through direct tax dispute resolution scheme Vivad Se Vishwas till February 22. To a query in the Lok Sabha on whether the government has been able to achieve the objective of settling income tax cases after launching the Vivad Se Vishwas scheme, minister of state for finance Anurag Singh Thakur said, "Yes". He said over 1.28 lakh declarations have been filed under the scheme.

## Tata Motors gets shareholders nod for PV hiving off



Tata Motors said its shareholders have approved hiving off its passenger vehicles business into a separate entity. On March 5, the shareholders voted to consider and approve the transfer of the passenger vehicles business unit to TML Business Analytics Services Ltd as a going concern on a slump sale basis for a lump sum consideration. The firm had said that its PV business has been valued at Rs 9,417 crore.

## BELM shares surge over 20% over bid response

Shares of BELM Ltd soared as high as over 20 per cent to lock into the upper circuit limit and touch 52-week-high values on exchanges amid reports that multiple firms are looking to buy the government's 26 per cent stake in the firm. On the BSE, the scrip surged 20 per cent to its 52-week high value of Rs 1,406.25, also its upper circuit limit. On the NSE, the shares jumped 20 per cent to Rs 1,416.

## TVS Motor rides in Apache RTR 200 4V at ₹1.28 L

TVS Motor introduced Apache RTR 200 4V (single-channel ABS) motorcycle with innovative "segment-first features" priced at Rs 1.28 lakh at Delhi showroom. Introduced at a premium of Rs 1,000 over the outgoing model, the 2021 variant boasts of a host of segment-first features like three ride modes, adjustable front suspension, adjustable brake and clutch levers, and race-tuned slipper clutch.



## Groundwater extraction causing them to sink Coastal cities inundating four times faster: Study

JONATHAN TIRONE  
MARCH 8

The economic impacts of rising sea levels will be felt four times faster by people living in some of the world's biggest coastal cities, which are sinking beneath their own weight into manmade cavities created below the surface.

The scientific assessment published on Monday in Nature Climate Change is the second in a month to show that coastal economies are more vulnerable than previously thought to the danger of rising sea levels. The extraction of groundwater and other resources from beneath cities, including Jakarta, New Orleans and Shanghai, is causing them to slowly sink, a phenomena called subsidence, resulting in greater risks from flooding and storm surges.



"Due to its coincidence with major population centres, subsidence has global social and economic implications," reads the peer-reviewed research written by scientists from China, France, Germany and the UK. "These results indicate that the impacts and adaptation needs are much higher than reported global sea-level rise measurements suggest."

While sea-levels have

risen at about 2.5 millimetres a year globally over the last two decades, coastal residents representing some 58 per cent of the world's population have experienced average relative sea-level increases of 7.8 to 9.9 millimetres annually, according to the research, which used satellite data to gauge changes in land elevation.

The risks of groundwater extraction have long been

known but the new research suggests policy makers can regulate development and groundwater extraction to slow down and mitigate the impact of higher oceans.

"Human-induced subsidence in and surrounding coastal cities can be rapidly reduced with appropriate policy for groundwater utilisation and drainage," the researchers wrote. "Such policy would offer substantial and rapid benefits to reduce growth of coastal flood exposure due to relative sea-level rise."

For cities like Jakarta, the window to mitigate sinking ground levels and rising seas is already closing. Indonesia is relocating its capital to higher ground on the island of Borneo, a move that will cost billions of dollars by the time it begins later this decade.

—Bloomberg

## IMF suggests carbon tax for India

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 8

Levying a carbon-tax will help India accelerate the shift away from thermal power generation in order to become a global leader in achieving emission reduction targets while boosting revenues to reduce the country's fiscal deficit, finds the International Monetary Fund.

While India is expected to achieve both its 40 per cent non-fossil fuel target and

its emissions intensity target by 2030, the country's current emissions target is not as strong compared to some other countries. India's mitigation policy is of central interest to the global community as significant economic and population growth is likely to account for a larger share of global emission in the next 10 to 20 years. India has an opportunity to become a world leader by taking bolder steps toward mitigation, says the IMF.

To achieve larger emission reductions, India may need to focus on phasing out its reliance on coal-fired power plants. For this, levying a direct tax on fossil-fuel production, in proportion to carbon content and carbon emissions would accelerate the shift away from thermal power generation while also providing a fiscal dividend. A \$50 per tonne carbon tax would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 35 per cent below a "no-policy-change" baseline scenario by 2030.

Unlike subsidisation for renewable energy, which carries a fiscal cost, a substantial carbon tax could provide a large fiscal boon to India. A \$50 per tonne carbon tax would generate 1.5 to 2 per cent of GDP in additional fiscal revenues by 2030. If this boost to revenues were used to cut the country's deficit, it would play a large role in counteracting the deterioration in India's fiscal position.

## DEBT INDEX FUND WITH SIX-YEAR MATURITY LAUNCHED

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

Edelweiss Asset Management Company announced the launch of Edelweiss Nifty PSU Bond Plus SDL Index Fund-2026, a unique index fund investing in state development loans (SDLs) and PSU bonds. Passively managed, this index fund, with a defined maturity date, will invest in AAA-rated PSU bonds and SDLs.

"This is a first ever, open-ended, target maturity index fund. Proportion of investments of AAA PSU bonds and SDLs will be equally divided with a weightage of 50 per cent each," the fund said.

Exposure to any single company's bonds or loans would be capped at 15 per cent of the corpus. Subsequently, there will be a quarterly rebalancing and review of the index constituents, Edelweiss AMC said.

The Edelweiss Nifty PSU Bond Plus SDL Index Fund – 2026 NFO will be open for subscription between March 10 and March 16.

The fund with a minimum investment amount of Rs 5,000 will have a defined maturity date of April 30, 2026.

The fund will aim to hold the bonds till maturity.

## India poised to weather global bond rout with record reserves

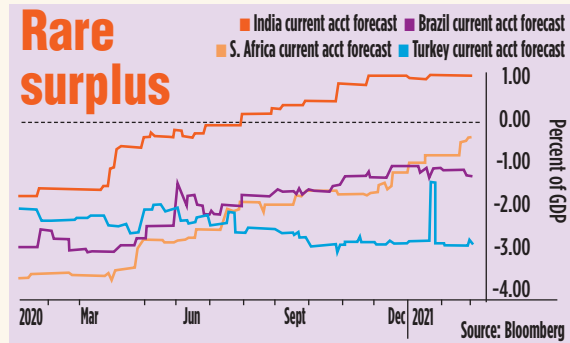
SUBHADIP SIRCAR &  
KARTIK GOYAL  
MARCH 8

India's record foreign-exchange reserves and a rare current-account surplus look set to cushion the nation's currency and bonds from a global surge in interest rates.

While the central bank does have its hands full managing the government's large debt issuance, strategists see the country in a much stronger financial position now than it was during previous bouts of turmoil in world markets. They cite the rupee, which has eked out a gain this year, defying the slump seen in most emerging-market currencies, and relative stability of India's bonds.

With reserves closing in on \$600 billion and a current-account surplus forecast to exceed 1 per cent of gross domestic product, talk of India as one of five fragile emerging markets has mostly faded away. When the description was coined during the taper tantrum in 2013, inflation in India was running at around 10 per cent.

Data due on March 12 is projected to show con-



sumer prices rising at less than half that level, and well below the 6.6 per cent average of last year. Meanwhile, benchmark 10-year bond yields have largely been capped since last year by the central bank and the nation's stocks continue to see foreign inflows.

"India's markets are likely to be relatively immune to higher US yields in the weeks ahead," said Mitul Kotecha, chief EM Asia and Europe strategist at TD Securities Ltd in Singapore. "India has been a key beneficiary of equity inflows into Asia and we do not see outflows persisting."

According to analysts, Indian stocks have attracted about \$6 billion of foreign inflows this year, the

highest in emerging Asia after China, and well above those of the country's erstwhile "Fragile Five" peers. The prospect of strong economic growth has been underpinned by an early start to India's coronavirus inoculation campaign, aided by domestically produced vaccines.

India's central bank has added \$127 billion to its foreign-exchange kitty since the beginning of January last year, the biggest increase among major Asian economies. At the current rate of accumulation, India is on course to pass Russia and take fourth place in global rankings for reserves, behind China, Japan and Switzerland.

—Bloomberg

## ANUPAM RASAYAN PRICES IPO IN ₹553-555 BAND

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MARCH 8

Surat-based specialty chemical maker Anupam Rasayan' Rs 760-crore initial public offering opens on March 12.

The price band for the public issue has been fixed at Rs 553 to Rs 555 per equity share of Rs 10 face value.

"The issue aggregating up to Rs 760 crore is a fresh issuance of equity shares...The company proposes to utilise the net proceeds towards repayment of debt and for general corporate purposes," the company said during a virtual press conference.

The company has two distinct verticals of life science related specialty chemicals comprising products related to agrochemicals, personal care and pharmaceuticals; and other specialty chemicals, comprising specialty pigment and dyes, and polymer additives.

Anupam Rasayan has developed long-term relationships with various multinational corporations, which has helped the company expand its product offerings and geographic reach across Europe, Japan and United States, the company said.

As of December 31, 2020, the company operates through six multi-purpose manufacturing facilities based in Gujarat, with four facilities located at Sachin, Surat.

## Larger firms recover better than smaller ones

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 8

Larger companies have demonstrated better recovery in terms of sales and profitability compared to their smaller counterparts, finds an analysis by CMIE.

"India's smart economic recovery is described as one in which large companies did well for themselves even as the smaller ones languished. MSMEs have suffered as they are unable to survive the sudden and prolonged lockdown and the consequent shrinking of overall business. Large companies are not only better placed to ride out the storm but also gain by cannibalising markets of the withering smaller companies," says Mahesh Vyas, CEO of CMIE.

The private think-tank studied the quarterly financial statements of 3,220 listed non-finance companies to understand growth in net sales, wages and profitability.

Listed companies have been recording a fall in net sales in year-on-year comparisons well before the lockdown pounded them. Then, in the first quarter of the lockdown net sales were down by a massive 39 per cent, followed by 10 per cent in the September quarter and a little less than one per cent in the December quarter.

The lockdown affected companies of all sizes severely. But, the recovery was selective. Larger



companies have recovered in terms of sales growth while smaller companies still see shrinking sales.

The largest companies by size saw their sales shrink by 1.5 per cent in the December quarter. If petroleum refining and aviation industries are removed, the largest companies showed positive growth. Sixty-two per cent of such companies reported growth in net sales. Large companies too registered a growth of 6.6 per cent.

All the other companies in the mid- and small segment recorded a fall in sales and the extent of the fall in sales was inversely proportional to the company size.

Similarly, the wage bill of all the companies increased by 3.5 per cent in the December quarter. The largest companies saw a higher 4.7 per cent increase in the wage bill while large companies saw a 1.2 per cent increase. All other companies saw a fall in their wage bill. The fall in the wage bill increases as the size of the companies becomes smaller.

## Blackstone calls off Mphasis stake sale

BAJU KALESH  
MARCH 8

Blackstone Group Inc. has shelved a planned sale of its majority stake in Indian IT outsourcing services provider Mphasis Ltd over valuations, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The private equity firm rejected the two bidders in the final round as their offers didn't meet its expectations, said the person, who asked not to be identified as the information is private.

Blackstone has informed the interested parties that it has halted the sale, the

person added.

Blackstone bought a 60.5 per cent stake in Mumbai-listed Mphasis from Hewlett Packard Enterprise Co in 2016 at Rs 430 (\$5.87) per share. The private equity firm also made an open offer to acquire additional shares from other shareholders.

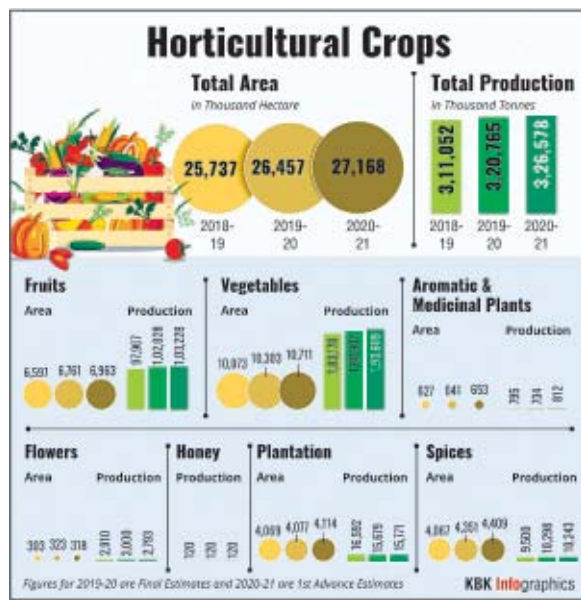
As of end of 2020, Blackstone owned about 56 per cent in the tech firm.

The asset manager started identifying buyers for its majority stake in Mphasis a few months ago. It had held talks with prospective investors, including Carlyle Group

Inc. and Singapore state investment fund GIC Pte. Shares in Mphasis reached an all-time high at Rs 1,788 each on February 23. While the stock has receded from the peak, it's still trading at around Rs 1,600, almost four times above Blackstone's offer price five years ago.

A media report on Monday said that negotiations between Blackstone and Carlyle have hit an impasse over valuations.

Representatives for Blackstone and Carlyle declined to comment, while a representative for GIC couldn't immediately comment. —Bloomberg



## BOSCH TO OPEN AUTOMOTIVE CHIP FACTORY IN GERMANY MID-YR

Frankfurt, March 8: German technology group Bosch said on Monday it would open an automotive chip factory in Dresden in June to build on its leadership in sensor chips that will boost the electric car industry.

The one billion euro (\$1.2 billion) plant will produce sensor chips to be installed in electric and hybrid electric vehicles.

Bosch began testing the fully automated production of prototype chips, a step towards starting full-scale production at the end of the year, it said.

The plant will not produce all of the sort of semiconductor chips now in short supply, causing disruptions to the global car industry, but so-called ASICs (application-specific integrated circuit) microchips, remedying parts of the bottlenecks and only from the end of 2021 onwards.

The factory, partly financed by the Free State of Saxony and federal government in Berlin, will employ 700 people. Plans for the plant were announced in 2017.

The local and federal governments want to make Dresden a centre for semiconductor research and manufacturing.

—Reuters

### DEPRIVED | GENDER

## Legal limits on economic opportunities persist

## Women still fired for pregnancy in 28 nations

KATHLEEN HAYS &  
MICHAEL HEATH  
MARCH 8

There are still almost 30 countries where women can be fired from their jobs simply for getting pregnant, World Bank chief economist Carmen Reinhart said in a discussion on how the pandemic is making it even harder for women to escape poverty.

Speaking in a television conversation with Ceyla Pazarbasioglu, director of strategy and policy at the International Monetary

Fund, Reinhart said the economic fallout from Covid-19 had been "very regressive," hitting the most vulnerable hardest, included women and girls.

"We are seeing big setbacks on schooling, girls are taken out that will not return," said Reinhart, speaking on International Women's Day. She cited a report late last year that found extreme poverty was expected to rise for the first time in more than two decades with a disproportionately high share of women among the new poor.



Carmen Reinhart

The pandemic has contributed to an increase in violence against women and is reinforcing gender inequality in many countries, with women on average having roughly three-quarters of the legal rights of men, according

to the World Bank.

While laws have improved in some countries, women in many nations still face legal limits on economic opportunities, including restrictions on travel without a male guardian, the lender said.

Pazarbasioglu of the IMF said it's very important to have "a women's lens in policies."

"That's what we are pushing in our surveillance, in our lending, in our analytical work and in our capacity development," she said.

—Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## Bajrang takes gold, No.1 rank

**Rome:** Olympic-bound Indian wrestler Bajrang Punia pulled off a two-pointer in the last 30 seconds of the gold medal bout to defend his title at the Matteo Pellicone Ranking Series event, a result that propelled him back to world number one rank.

Up against Mongolia's Tulga Tumur Ochir, Bajrang was trailing 0-2 till the final moments of the 65kg final but managed to level the scores, 30 seconds from the final whistle.

Since the last scoring point came from the Indian, he was declared the winner on criteria on Sunday night.

Bajrang's leg defence seemed to be a particularly improved aspect of his game in the one-year break, forced by the coronavirus pandemic.

Bajrang was placed second in the rankings before the event and is now on top of the table in the 65kg category with 14 points. — PTI

## Mumbai pip Goa for historic final

**Goa:** Two hundred and ten minutes of football over two legs, yet there was no winners to head into the final between Mumbai City FC and FC Goa!

Such was the battle, that it came down to ISL's first-ever sudden death in a penalty-shootout to decide the first finalists of Season 7. And it turned out to be Mumbai City who had the last laugh as they edged FC Goa on penalties 6-5.

One of the highlights of the thriller was when both coaches decided to substitute their goalkeepers with the contest heading into the penalty shootout. Goa brought on Naveen Kumar while Mumbai raised some eyebrows when they decided to field Phurba Lachenpa in place of skipper and one of the best goalkeepers of the season Amrinder Singh. But, as it turned out to be, the Sikkimese gloveman survived the battle of nerves, helping Mumbai City book a place in the final for the first time.

## Sharath, Sathiyam and Batra in Rd 2

**Doha:** Ace Indian paddlers Achanta Sharath Kamal, Sathiyam Gnanasekaran and Manika Batra started their campaign at the WTT Star Contender Doha on a winning note by progressing into the second round of their respective singles categories, here on Monday.

Sharath struggled in the initial stages as he lost the first game against Brian Afanador before the world no. 32 recovered well to seal the match 8-11, 11-8, 11-7, 11-1 against the Puerto Rican in the first round.

World no. 37 Sathiyam was also trailing 0-2 in his opening match before making a remarkable comeback to pull off a sensational 9-11, 7-11, 11-7, 11-4, 11-4 victory against France's Emmanuel Lebeson.

Commonwealth Games gold medalist Batra notched up a comfortable 11-5, 11-9, 11-9 win against Chinese Taipei's Hsein-Tzu Cheng in the first round.

## Team LeBron dominate All-Star

**Atlanta:** Damian Lillard nailed a game-ending three pointer from just inside half court as LeBron James improved to 4-0 as an NBA All-Star Game captain with a 170-150 win over Team Durant on Sunday.

Giannis Antetokounmpo captured the Kobe Bryant MVP Award going a perfect 16-of-16 from the field for a game high 35 points in Atlanta.

James improved to 4-0 in All-Star games he has served as a team captain. He finished with four points in just 13 minutes of playing time. — AFP

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**Vijay Hazare Trophy:** Quarterfinal from 9 am on Star Sports 1, HD

## FOOTBALL

**Indian Super League:** Second Semifinal, 2nd leg — Mohun Bagan vs North East United from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, HD

**Champions League:** Round of 16, Second Leg — Juventus vs Porto from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2; Dortmund vs Sevilla from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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## CATCH 20-20!

## Team management in dilemma to choose players for series

**Ahmedabad, March 8:** The Indian team management faces a problem of plenty going into the five T20 Internationals against England, an assignment which marks the beginning of the side's build-up to this year's T20 World Cup at home.

There are 19 players available for selection and with two in contention for each slot, the XI for the five games, starting here on Friday, will be an indication to how head coach Ravi Shastri, captain Virat Kohli and bowling coach Bharat Arun are looking at the next six to seven months for the shortest format.

Will they look for a settled combination to first clinch the series and then experiment or will they field absolute rookies in the squad looking at the bigger picture?

For a team that's so closely followed, the result does matter and that's why one can expect a settled first eleven for the first three games since all matches are at the same venue on similar kind of tracks.

The roaring comeback of Rishabh Pant will lead to a lot of interesting developments at the top of the order.

Pant's inclusion means that K.L. Rahul, who till a few months back was the first choice keeper-opener, is unlikely to don the big gloves.

Shikhar Dhawan and Rohit Sharma are a settled white ball opening pair till recently but Rahul's emergence as a potent white ball specialist has spiced up the competition. Dhawan recently had a score of 150 odd in the Vijay Hazare Trophy for Delhi and when it comes to Rohit, there's nothing to be discussed.

So where does the team management fit in Rahul, who has been a successful



Shikhar Dhawan



K.L. Rahul



Deepak Chahar



Shreyas Iyer



Bhuvneshwar Kumar

IPL opener? Will he be slotted in the middle-order as Dhawan's game is not suited to batting lower down?

These are two pertinent questions and in the answer, will be a follow-up question.

With skipper Kohli himself coming in at No 3 and two game-changers like Pant and all-rounder Hardik Pandya expected to play the big shots at Nos 5 and 6, where does it ideally leave Rahul?

The only place he can be slotted is No 4 but Shreyas

Iyer and Suryakumar Yadav are also jostling for a place.

If one closely follows the pattern of picking the playing XI, Surya, a sentimental favourite, will have to wait for his turn as Shreyas has done nothing wrong.

But when it comes to a three-way battle between Rahul, Shreyas and Surya, the Karnataka man beats the two Mumbai boys hollow with his repertoire of strokes and ability to shift gears.

Similarly, in the pace

department, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, once upon a time India's best white ball exponent, is coming back after a long lay-off and will be engaged in a two-way fight with Deepak Chahar and Shardul Thakur.

For Bhuvneshwar, his experience and being a better bowler at the death compared to Chahar holds him in good stead but he hasn't played a lot of cricket save a few Mushtaq Ali games.

Yuzvendra Chahal, Washington Sundar and

Axar Patel are the three spinners expected to feature in the playing XI on the sluggish Motera tracks.

In all, there are too many good players and very little space to fit all of them with three sure-shot picks

Mohammed Shami, Ravindra Jadeja and Jasprit Bumrah already resting or recuperating from injury.

Once they comeback, it will be a bigger selection headache for the management but one that they won't mind. — PTI

## Blown away in opener, India eye turnaround

**Lucknow, March 8:** A rusty Indian women's cricket team will be seeking some rhythm in the second ODI against South Africa here on Tuesday after being outplayed by the visitors in the series-opener.

Though captain Mithali Raj and her deputy Harmanpreet Kaur had insisted that rustiness won't be an issue in their first series in 12 months, India clearly looked a side which had not played for a long time in the opener of the five-match series on Sunday.

South Africa, on the other hand, were clinical and will be hard to beat in the coming games.

After the game, Kaur realised the players needed some time to gel

## ICC WOMEN EVENTS TO HAVE MORE TEAMS FROM 2026

**Dubai, March 8:** The ICC tournaments for women cricketers will have more teams from 2026 onwards with the governing body on Monday announcing its expansion plan for the game to mark the international women's day.

The ICC said the T20 World Cup will have 12 teams instead of 10

from the 2026 edition.

The ODI World Cup will also be expanded — from eight teams to 10 — from the 2029 edition. The 2024 T20 edition will continue to be a 10-team affair and the next two ODI World Cups will have eight teams which is the norm at the moment. — PTI

as a unit. Barring Kaur, Raj and Deepthi Sharma to a certain extent, none of the batters could apply themselves on a decent batting surface.

The spinners, who are traditionally considered

India's strength, hardly troubled the Proteas duo of Lizelle Lee and Laura Wolvaardt, who put up the highest ever opening wicket stand against India to run away with the contest. — PTI

## Red Devils shatter City's winning run

**London, March 8:** Manchester United shattered Manchester City's record winning streak with an impressive 2-0 victory against the Premier League leaders, while Liverpool hit a new low as relegation-threatened Fulham won at Anfield on Sunday.

Pep Guardiola's side were on an English top-flight record run of 21 successive wins in all competitions heading into the Manchester derby. But United ruined City's 28-game unbeaten run in all competitions thanks to an early penalty from Bruno Fernandes and Luke Shaw's second-half strike at the Etihad Stadium. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's team moved above Leicester into second place, but they are still 11 points behind City with 10 games left.

Likely to be replaced by City as champions,

## THE RESULTS

**Manchester City** 0  
**Manchester United** 2  
(Fernandes 2-pen, Shaw 50)

**Liverpool** 0  
**Fulham** 1  
(Lemina 45)

**Tottenham** 4  
(Bale 25, 49, Kane 52, 77)  
**Crystal Palace** 1  
(Benteke 45+1)

**West Brom** 0  
**Newcastle** 0

Liverpool have now lost six consecutive home league games after third-bottom Fulham's well-deserved 1-0 win.

That dismal run is all the more remarkable as Jurgen Klopp's men had gone nearly four years without a league defeat at home in 68 games between April 2017 and January this year. — AFP

## Djokovic on top for record weeks

## Surpasses Federer's World No.1 mark

**Paris, March 8:** Novak Djokovic set a new landmark of 311 weeks as world number one on Monday, one week longer than Roger Federer whose tally of a record 20 Grand Slam titles is now firmly in the Serb's sights.

"Big day today", tennis superstar wrote on *Twitter*. Djokovic, 33, won his 18th major at the Australian Open in February.

With Federer turning 40 in August, the Serb has time on his side. He is also a year younger than Rafael Nadal who also has 20 majors.

"It really excites me to walk the path of legends and giants of this sport," said Djokovic, in a statement released by the ATP.

"To know that I earned my place among them by following my childhood dream is a beautiful confirmation that when you do things out of love and passion, everything is possible," he added.

He has spent 88 weeks at number one, across two different stints.

Djokovic reclaimed the top ranking from Nadal in February 2020 and finished as year-end number one for the sixth time, tying the record set by Pete Sampras.

ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi said: "Novak's many achievements in tennis are nothing short of extraordinary. Among

● The Serb set a new landmark of 311 weeks as world number one on Monday, one week longer than Federer.

them this record may stand as his single most impressive. "Reaching No. 1 is something many players dream of and very few ever accomplish, and to have held the top spot for longer than anyone is testament to the levels of sustained excellence that Novak has redefined in our sport."

Federer, who returns to action in Doha this week after more than a year out of action to recover from two knee operations, slipped out of the top five on Monday to sixth. His place was taken by Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Djokovic made his top 100 debut in July 2005, just weeks after Nadal had won his first Roland Garros.

He was top 50 in June 2006, top 20 for the first time in October 2006 and top 10 by March 2007.

He first became world number one at the age of 24 on July 4, 2011, the day after winning Wimbledon for the first time, beating Nadal in the final.

Only a six-month injury absence in 2017 saw his ranking plunge, all the way to 22 the following summer. — AFP



Priyank Panchal

## Priyank ton ends Andhra campaign

**New Delhi, March 8:** Skipper Priyank Panchal's stroke-filled 134 and an equally impressive show from the bowlers set up Gujarat's massive 117-run win over Andhra in the quarterfinal of the Vijay Hazare Trophy on Monday.

Gujarat rode on Panchal's 134 to post a competitive 299 for 7 and then bundled out the opposition for 182, to make it to the semifinal. India Test star and Andhra captain Hanuma Vihari was out for a five-ball duck.

Opting to bat at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, Gujarat lost Dhruv Raval (18) early, after he was dismissed by medium pacer KV Sasikanth (2/55).

However, Panchal and Rahul Shah (36) rallied the Gujarat innings with their 80-run second-wicket stand. Andhra kept making inroads at regular intervals with medium-pacer M. Harishankar Reddy (3/60) being the pick

of the bowlers. Chasing 300, Andhra was struggling at 21/3, as Gujarat's Arzan Nagwaswalla (4/28) wreaked havoc, removing CR Gnaneshwar (6), Ashwin Hebbur (10) and Vihari cheaply.

It became 36 for 4 as left-arm spinner Hardik Patel (1/27) removed Nitish Kumar Reddy (5) as Andhra lost its half side for 58. Later, Ricky Bhui (67 off 76) and Naren Reddy (28) added 61 runs but could only delay the inevitable and Andhra were eventually bundled out for 182. — PTI

## BRIEF SCORES

■ Gujarat 299/7 in 50 overs (Priyank Panchal 134; Rahul Shah 36; M. Harishankar Reddy 3/60, A. Lalith Mohan 2/55) bt Andhra 182 in 41.2 overs (Ricky Bhui 67, Arzan Nagwaswalla 4/28; Piyyush Chawla 3/33).

■ Karnataka 338/3 in 50 overs (Ravikumar Samarth 192, D. Padikkal 101; Basil NP 3/57) bt Kerala 258 in 43.4 overs (V. Govind 92; M. Azharuddeen 52; Ronit More 5/36).

