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VIJAYAWADA | THURSDAY | 11 MARCH 2021



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Vol. 32 No. 280 Established 1938 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

WEATHER

Max: 36.0°C
Min: 20.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
36/20 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Trayodashi till 2.42 pm
Star: Dhanishta till 9.46 pm
Varjyam: 5.16 am to 6.59 am (Friday)
Durmuhurtam: 10.27 am to 11.14 am; 3.11 pm to 3.59 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Rajab 26, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.55 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.00 pm
Maghrib: 6.25 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.18 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.16 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 4.58 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 5.29 PM

COUNTER POINT



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TTD'S 57 VEDIC STUDENTS TEST COVID POSITIVE

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 10

As many as 57 students at the Vedic school run by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) at Dharmagiri Veda Vignana Peetham in Tirumala have tested positive to Covid-19.

TTD management shifted them to the local SVIMS hospital for treatment.

It was following the relaxation of Covid-19 norms that the school was reopened for classes.

All the 435 students underwent Covid tests (RT-PCR) five days ago and got negative reports before coming and joining the school.

However, when the TTD medical wing conducted the rapid test to students and staff on Tuesday, about 57 students tested positive and asymptomatic. Later, RT-PCR tests were done on the students. None has exhibited any Covid symptom so far and they remained healthy.

TTD staff carried out tests on the remaining 378 students and 10 faculty in Dharmagiri Veda Patashala and they too tested negative. TTD said it has been taking all precautions to check the spread of the virus.

● All the 435 students underwent Covid-19 tests (RT-PCR) five days ago and got negative reports before coming and joining the school. ation.

Urban civic body polls see 62% voter turnout

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

Andhra Pradesh has registered overall 62.28 per cent polling in elections held for urban local bodies throughout the state on Wednesday. The voting percentage is expected to go up further. Both State Election Commission (SEC) and municipal administration authorities had not got the final polling tallies from the districts till 7 pm.

Polls were held in 12 municipal corporations and 71 municipalities / nagar panchayats. The average percentage of polling was 11.71 at 9 am, 32.23 at 11 am, 42.84 at 1 pm, 53.57 at 3 pm and 62.28 at 5 pm.

Municipalities and nagar panchayats witnessed higher turnout of voters given the fact that out of 29,47,027 voters, 20,82,283 exercised their franchise, registering a poll percentage of 70.66. However, polling was relatively lesser in the 12 municipal corporations, as out of 48,09,173 voters, only 27,48,013 turned up at polling stations to cast their vote, recording a poll percentage of 57.14. Overall, out of 77,56,200 voters, only 48,30,296 vot-



A challenged woman being carried by her relatives to cast her vote at AU High School during the GVMC elections in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. — DC

ers cast their vote, indicating a provisional poll percentage of 62.28. East Godavari district registered highest voting in the state at 75.93 per cent. Kurnool was lowest at 56.83 per cent. Rest of the poll percentages are Srikakulam 71.52, Vizianagaram 68.22, Visakhapatnam 56.83, West Godavari 62.02, Krishna 61.31,

Guntur 61.77, Prakasam 75.49, Nellore 71.06, Anantapur 66.11, Kadapa 65.01 and Chittoor 62.21.

Among the 12 municipal corporations, Ongole registered the highest poll percentage at 75.52 while Kurnool the lowest of 49.26.

■ Page 2: Elections were largely peaceful, says SEC

Didi says she was attacked by men

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MARCH 10

Hours after filing her nomination in Nandigram, the hot seat of the West Bengal Assembly elections, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, in an explosive claim, alleged that she was attacked by a group of men in a "conspiracy" in the absence of police personnel, including the East Midnapore superintendent of police, in the constituency on Wednesday evening, leaving her injured.

The Trinamul Congress supremo, with injuries on her legs and forehead, was later rushed to Kolkata in a "green corridor" and was admitted to the Woodburn Ward of SSKM Hospital after she was wheeled in a stretcher.

The TMC has launched protests across the state. Rattled by Ms Banerjee's complaint, the Election Commission has sought a report on the serious security breach from the district administration.

The CM, who is a Z-plus category protectee, and is usually surrounded by a contingent of at least 25 security personnel in close quarters, apparently fell down, according to sources close to her.

Seated on the front seat of her car, Ms Banerjee,

Standing beside my car, I was doing namaskar. Suddenly four or five men blocked my car. They shoved and pushed me, leaving me injured. My legs got swollen. It is paining very much."

— MAMATA BANERJEE
West Bengal Chief Minister

gasping for breath, told the media: "Standing beside my car, I was doing namaskar. Suddenly four or five men blocked my car. They shoved and pushed me, leaving me injured. My legs got swollen. It is paining very much."

Asked about any foul play, she added: "It was definitely a conspiracy. The attack was deliberate. No police personnel were present there. Even the SP was not there. I will lodge a complaint with the EC."

Questioning Ms Banerjee's version, Barrackpore BJP MP Arjun Singh wondered: "Who will attack her being the CM as well as the home minister of the state? How can someone attack the CM when a distance of 2 km is cleared for her movement wherever she visits? If there was any attack, the IPS officers should be suspended."

SEVA VAJRA FOR 875 VOLUNTEERS ON UGADI EVE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

As many as 875 volunteers for the AP government would get the Seva Vajra, 4,000 volunteers the Seva Ratna and 2,18,115 volunteers the Seva Mitra awards as also a grand felicitation for their excellent services.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy announced this while conducting a review meeting on volunteers and housing department at his camp office in Tadepalli on Wednesday. He took a close look at the medals, certificates and badges that were readied for presentation to volunteers.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to provide quality construction materials to beneficiaries of the housing. There was also the need for improving the housing and infrastructure facilities in Jagananna colonies.

He said the state would award volunteers under three categories – Seva Vajra, Seva Ratna and Seva Mitra on the eve of Ugadi, in due recognition of their services.

■ Page 2: Use good items for Jagananna colonies: CM

CHINA HAS NOT VACATED INDIAN AREAS, SAYS U.S.

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

China's People's Liberation Army "has not yet withdrawn from several forward positions" at the Line of Actual Control that it had seized after the initial clashes with Indian forces, a top US military commander told the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington on Tuesday.

He also said the US and Indian navies are now securely sharing information, and India has substantially increased its acquisition of US defence gear.

Adm. Philip S. Davidson, US Navy head in the Indo-Pacific Command, said China's expansionary territorial ambitions were on display along its western border, where the PLA engaged in a standoff with Indian forces along the LAC since May 2020.

He said the standoff was predicated by clashes over construction activity near the disputed border, and that PLA elements subsequently forward-deployed roughly 50,000 soldiers along the LAC, leading to a counter-deployment by the Indian Army.

"The PLA has not yet withdrawn from several forward positions it seized following the initial clash," he said.

Tirath sworn in as U'khand CM

CM takes oath alone, to pick Cabinet later

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/DEHRADUN, MARCH 10

Tirath Singh Rawat, 56, currently Pauri Garhwal MP, on Wednesday was sworn in as the chief minister of Uttarakhand, replacing Trivendra Singh Rawat, who was forced to resign after discontent over his leadership and some of his decisions, including giving the state summer capital Gairsen the status of a new division.

Faced with dissension in its state unit as the central leadership was busy gearing up for the Assembly polls, due early next year, the BJP top brass decided to go in for a change of guard after sensing that the brewing dissension could spoil its chances of retaining power in the hill state. The BJP top brass took less than a week to defuse the political crisis after initial reports suggested that going to the polls with Trivendra Rawat as CM will not be favourable for it in polls.

The former CM had failed to pacify his detractors and the BJP leader-

BJP-JJP GOVT IN HARYANA BEATS NO-TRUST VOTE

Chandigarh, March 10: The BJP-JJP government in Haryana survived the floor test on Wednesday, comfortably defeating the no-confidence motion moved against it by the Congress. The motion was defeated following division of votes. Speaker Gian Chand Gupta announced in the House that 55 members had voted against the motion while 32 MLAs had backed it.

■ Full report on Page 4

ship was wary that if no action was taken, the party could face the same fate as that of the then ruling Congress in 2016, when around a dozen of its MLAs had revolted.

A former journalist and also a former BJP state unit chief, Tirath Singh Rawat is known for his down-to-earth nature. In his parliamentary constituency, the first-time

MP is popular for being very approachable.

Mr Rawat was administered the oath of office by Uttarakhand Governor Baby Rani Maurya at a simple function held at the Bhavan, Dehradun. The new CM was the only person who was sworn in on Wednesday, which means the members of his Cabinet will be finalised and sworn in later.

Earlier in the day, Mr Rawat was elected as the leader of the Uttarakhand BJP legislature party. His name came as a surprise to many as it was not among the nearly half-dozen names doing the rounds in the media over the past few days as contenders for the top post.

As his name was announced as the legislature party leader, Mr Rawat's supporters burst into celebrations at the party office in Dehradun.

"I am a small party worker from a village. I had never imagined that I will be given an opportunity like this by the party. I hope that with everyone's cooperation and blessings, I will fulfil the expectations from me," said the new CM.

POWER | START

Relaxation allows Aurobindo Realty to own two ports

AP eases rule to help Aurobindo

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 10

The Andhra Pradesh government on Wednesday relaxed rules to facilitate Aurobindo Realty own controlling stake in two ports – the existing Kakinada deep water port and the proposed Kakinada SEZ port.

There was an embargo on acquiring the controlling stake in two ports falling within a distance of 75 km. Infrastructure and investment special chief secretary Karikal Valaven issued orders relaxing the condi-

● The state government took legal opinion from former Chief Justice of India V.N. Khare and advocate general S. Sriram before approving the Aurobindo's request for rule relaxation.

tions. The state government took legal opinion from former Chief Justice of India V.N. Khare and advocate general S. Sriram before approving the Aurobindo's request for rule relaxation. The government also

allowed GMR group to buy back 26 per cent stake in the port project, though it sold its entire equity to Aurobindo, to fulfill the condition that the original concessionaire of the port project (GMR in this case) should not leave the project before two years of commencement of port operations.

Aurobindo which initially acquired 51 per cent stake of the GMR group in the proposed KSEZ and greenfield port later managed to take over the remaining 49 per cent held by the K.V. Rao and associates, who are

close to both the TD and Congress governments of the past.

Aurobindo group, close to CM Jagan, also made K.V. Rao sell his stake in the existing deep water port. Both the legal experts, the former CJI and AG, opined that the government has power to make changes in the concession agreement when larger public interest is involved. Defending its decision, the government said the proposed investment by Aurobindo will give a boost to the state's economy and create jobs,

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OTHER STORIES

PARTIES PERMITTED TO AFFIX OWN SEAL TO STRONG ROOMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

The State Election Commission has made arrangements for protection of ballot boxes in the strong rooms till the day of counting of votes polled in the urban local body polls, on March 14.

Accordingly, all the ballot boxes with ballot papers would be placed in the strong rooms having armed guards for protection. Web cameras would be installed to keep continuous monitoring at strong rooms.

In the wake of apprehensions raised by the political parties on the safety of ballot boxes, the SEC has permitted the political parties to affix their own seal to the strong rooms. It has allowed the opening of strong rooms in the morning before the commencement of counting of votes scheduled to be held on March 14, only in the presence of political parties.

NAIDU: OFFICIALS COLLUDED WITH YSRC IN POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday appealed to the State Election Commission to take stringent action against officials conniving with YSRC leaders and not ensuring that the election process was held in a democratic manner.

He accused the YSRC leaders of wantonly attacking TD cadres following fears that the ruling party will be unable to win municipal polls if elections are held in a free and fair manner. He accused police of needlessly arresting MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu and Telugu Nadu Students' Federation president Pranav Gopal when they visited the polling booth at AU High School polling on hearing about rigging there. This shows misuse of power by YSRC government, he said.

Naidu further alleged that in the 13th division of Machilipatnam, YSRC activists brandished knives and attacked TD sympathiser Dinakar out of fear of facing defeat in the polls.

MLA VELAGAPUDI HELD, FREED IN VISAKHAPATNAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 10

Senior TD leader and third time MLA from Visakhapatnam East Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu and Telugu Nadu Students Front leader Pranav Gopal were taken into custody by the III Town police in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

III Town circle inspector K. Eswara Rao said it was a preventive arrest since the MLA and the student leader entered prohibited 100 metre at a polling booth under Word No. 21 in China Waltair. They were brought to the III Town police station and later released on self bail.

The MLA and the student leader rushed to the polling booth after the TD candidate of Ward No. 21 P. Avinash complained to him that the ruling YSRC workers were rigging the polls. Around 200 YSRC workers tried to prevent them but they managed to enter the booth. The ruling party workers later tried to block his vehicle. The MLA's followers however, managed to send him away from the spot. The police picked them at AU High School grounds and took them into preventive custody.

ROJA: RECOGNISE BACKSTABBERS WITHIN THE PARTY

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 10

Infighting within the YSRC was out in the open again after Nagari MLA R.K. Roja levelled allegations against her rival group members within the ruling party and urged the high command to recognise the backstabbers and take action against them. Speaking to the media after casting her vote at the Nagari municipality on Wednesday, she alleged that her rivals within the party are working against the party's will and for its defeat in the Nagari and Puttur municipal elections. She charged her rivals of fielding rebels in the Nagari and Puttur municipal elections to reduce the winning chances of the YSRC.

Low voting in corporations

Voters in municipal areas evinced more interest in casting their vote

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

Voters in municipal areas evinced more interest in casting their vote compared to those in municipal corporations during the polling for these bodies on Wednesday.

The voting percentage was 58.05 per cent by 5 pm in Vijayawada municipal corporation while it was 75.90 per cent in the municipalities in Krishna district. Similarly, 57.15 per cent voting was registered in Guntur municipal corporation by 5 pm while it was 69.19 per cent in the municipalities in the district.

The ruling YSRC is hoping to massively win the corporations and municipalities on the basis of the welfare schemes the Jagan-led government is implementing despite the Corona spread and the resultant financial crises.

The voting percentage was good in Machilipatnam municipal corporation compared to Vijayawada and Guntur corporations. Some 71.14 per cent voting was registered in the former by 5 pm. The voter turnout was poor in initial hours in Vijayawada city and it picked up after 10 am.

More of women voters than men rushed to the polling booths to cast their votes in the morning hours. Political analysts say city-dwellers show less interest in lining up for voting and many take it as a holiday to go places. Hence, the low poll percentage, they say.

People from lower strata of society are showing more interest in voting while high-end residential colonies couldn't care less about polls and voting.

The elections to Guntur municipal corporation were held after 11 years. The voting percentage in the 2019 assembly elections in Guntur East and West constituencies was 69.99 per cent and 65.68 per cent. These dropped to 57.15 per cent in the present elections.

Guntur MP Galla Jayadev, Guntur East and West MLAs Md Mustafa and Maddali Giridhar with their party activists tried to spread awareness among the voters about the importance of voting, but this failed to yield good results.

Interestingly, in Machilipatnam, which was upgraded as a municipal corporation, people in large numbers queued up to cast their votes. This increased the poll percentage to 71.14 per cent. Minister for transport Perni Venkataramaiah alias Nani stood in queue and cast his vote. He said people are happy with the welfare schemes of the YSRC government.

Meanwhile, TD mayoral candidate Kesineni Swetha said redrawing of divisions created inconvenience to voters as their votes got shifted to other divisions. She lamented that in many instances, the names of members of same family got split into various divisions.

She alleged that the YSRC was trying to thwart the win of Telugu Desam through such objectionable tactics, but the people up in arms against the Jagan government clearly backed the TD in the civic polls.

● People from lower strata of society are showing more interest in voting while high-end residential colonies couldn't care less about polls and voting.



People, wearing the face masks, stand at a queue to cast their votes in Vivekananda school in Vijayawada on Wednesday. — DECCAN CHRONICLE

Ex-MP's car damaged in poll disturbances

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

Former MP and YSRC leader Modugula Venugopala Reddy has accused Telugu Desam activists of attacking and damaging his car during municipal polls at Guntur.

Giving details of the incident, the ex-MP said the TD leaders in 42 division had made some girls belonging to a hostel in Guntur city cast their votes illegally. He said wearing different dresses and masks, the girls kept repeatedly coming to the

polling booth and fraudulently voted giving out separate names.

Venugopala Reddy said while he caught one girl red handed, his party activists found three other girls voting illegally.

Following this, the former MP said, Telugu Desam goondas attacked his car with a big boulder and damaged the vehicle. He pointed out that though he had submitted memorandums to the State Election Commission and police officials to ensure law and order and avoid impersonation, there was no proper

supervision.

In a separate incident, Guntur MP Galla Jayadev rushed to 43 division at Guntur and demanded action against YSRC leaders for allegedly casting fake votes. Heated arguments ensued between YSRC and TD activists, leading to jostling. Police swung into action and dispersed the two groups.

Guntur collector Vivek Yadav removed Route 3 officer O. Venkateswarlu from election duty in Sattenapalli owing to latter's negligence in discharging his duties.



Noted actor and Hindupur MLA Nandamuri Balakrishna, along with his wife Vasundhara, stands in a queue at polling station in Chowdeswari Colony in Hindupur municipality in Anantapur district on Wednesday. — DC

BALAYYA CASTS HIS VOTE IN HINDUPUR

Anantapur: Nandamuri Balakrishna, accompanied by his wife Vasundhara, cast vote by standing in the queue at polling station in Chowdeswari Colony in Hindupur.

Balakrishna who has residence in Hindupur and enrolled votes in Chowdeswari Colony of 22nd municipal ward of Hindupur special grade

PEDDA REDDY HAS THREATENED TD CANDIDATES, ALLEGES DEEPAK REDDY

Anantapur: MLC Deepak Reddy objected to the poor action by the State Election Commission even after representations were submitted with concrete evidence.

Deepak Reddy, son-in-law of former TD legislator J.C. Prabhakar Reddy, recalled that Tadipatri MLA K. Pedda Reddy misused powers and threat-

ened TD candidates when they were filing their nominations.

"Our former municipal chairman candidature was torn by YSRC leaders in order to make the MLA's son's election unanimous", he said and added that evidence was submitted to SEC, but no action was initiated", Deepak Reddy alleged.

RINL PRIVATISATION ISSUE MAY HELP CPM WIN VSP TOWNSHIP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 10

The ongoing agitation against the proposals to privatise Visakhapatnam Steel Plant may help the CPM to retain ward no 78, which covers the entire township. In the 2007 elections, CPM candidate K. Vimala won with a handsome majority.

The ward has 11,560 voters and of them only 47 per cent exercised their franchise on Wednesday.

"The privatisation move helped us in getting good votes. We may get 50 per cent of the total votes polled," said contesting candidate Dr B. Ganga Rao, who is also the executive member of Visakha Ukku Parirakshana Committee that is spearheading the agitation.

He is contesting against YSRC candidate E. Govinda Rajulu and TD's Deepti.

The ruling party candidate and TD spent a lot of money, supplied liquor and lavish food in the township during the last one week campaign, Ganga Rao alleged.

The CPM has fielded 19 candidates-all in the industrial suburbs and has no alliance with any political party.

AGITATION FOR VSP SUSPENDED IN VIEW OF POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 10

The Visakhapatnam Ukku Parirakshana Committee, that is spearheading the movement against privatisation of the steel plant, suspended the agitation for a day on Wednesday to facilitate the employees and members of trade unions and political parties to participate in the municipal elections.

Some leaders of trade unions, Left and other political parties are also contesting the elections.

The next course of action would be decided on Thursday morning when the leaders converge at Kurmannapalem junction near the Steel Plant main gate.

SEC: Elections were largely peaceful

From Page 1

The rest include Vizianagaram (63.98%), GVMC (56.01), Eluru (56.33), Machilipatnam (71.14), Vijayawada (56.81), Guntur (57.15), Anantapur (56.41), Kadapa (54.85), Chittoor (66.06) and Tirupati (53.44 per cent).

SEC N. Ramesh Kumar asserted that municipal elections concluded in a free and fair manner with exception of a few stray incidents. For the first time, no re-poll has been necessitated in both civic bodies as also the recently concluded gram panchayat elections.

However, there were a few instances of poll-related violence. Reports have been called from concerned collectors and SPs in this regard.

The election commissioner said the counting of votes will be taken up on March 14. Election of mayors and deputy mayors for municipal corporations and chairperson and vice-chairpersons for municipalities / Nagar panchayats will be held at the earliest, he stated.

Separately, director general of police Gautam Sawang said polling went off peacefully even though a large number of voters turned up at polling stations to cast their votes.

In Visakhapatnam, TD MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu and Telugu Nadu Students Front leader Pranav Gopal were ta-

ken into preventive custody by police when they entered the 100-metre prohibited area at a polling booth in Division 21 of China Waltair. They were subsequently released on self-bail.

Visakhapatnam Ukku Parirakshana Committee, which is spearheading the movement against privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, suspended its agitation on Wednesday for enabling steel plant employees to take part in the municipal elections.

In Nellore district, residents of Nukalapalem in Sullurpet municipality boycotted the election in protest against merger of their village with the civic body.

At Eluru municipal corporation in West Godavari district, deputy chief minister and health minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas was unable to cast his vote, as his name went missing from the electoral rolls. Scores of other voters faced a similar fate.

In East Godavari district, police took into custody supporters of both BJP and Telugu Desam while they were distributing money to voters in Ramachandrapuram and Peddapuram municipalities. Ramachandrapuram police arrested seven BJP supporters and seized ₹37,000 from them. Peddapuram police seized ₹60,500 from TD supporters in ward number 27.

NELLIMERLA TOPS POLL PERCENTAGE IN NORTH ANDHRA WITH 79.68%

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 10

Barring incident of TD MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu arrest and his subsequent release, the polling for two corporations and nine municipalities went off peacefully in North coastal districts on Wednesday.

The highest poll percentage was registered in Nellimarla in Vizianagaram district with 79.68 per cent and lowest in Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation which registered 56.01.

Srikakulam district registered 71.52 per cent. Among the three municipalities in this district, Ichapuram municipality recorded 67.65 per cent, Palasa-Kasibugga 73.20

percent and Palakonda 73.48 per cent.

Vizianagaram district registered 68.9 per cent. Vizianagaram corporation recorded 64.5 per cent and among the municipalities, Nellimerla registered 79.68 per cent, Saluru 72.75, Bobbili 74.64 and Parvathipuram 74.43.

In Visakhapatnam district, Elemanchili recorded 75.69 per cent and Narsipatnam 73.94. Visakhapatnam GVMC once again registered a low of 56.01, four per cent more than the 2007 election.

Election observers said the high percentage of polling in the municipalities in north coastal Andhra would give advantage to the ruling YSR Congress.

CM: Use quality material for Jagananna colonies

From Page 1

Seva Mitra will be awarded for 2,18,115 volunteers who served for over a year without complaints. The Seva Ratna award for 4,000 volunteers would involve five each volunteers selected from every mandal, five from each municipality and 10 from each corporation.

"Seva Vajra" award for 875 volunteers will see five volunteers selected from each constituency. The selections will be done on the yardstick of efficiency they have shown in the door-to-door survey, etc.

A financial incentive of ₹10,000 would be given to Seva Mitras, ₹20,000 to Seva Ratnas and ₹30,000 to Seva Vajras. The Chief Minister inspected the medals, certificates and badges to be awarded to volunteers.

Reviewing the progress of the housing scheme, the Chief Minister asked officials to provide construction materials to those who opt to build their houses on their own. Ensure they are provided with steel, cement and other construction materials at a lower price, he said.

He directed the officials to focus attention on providing water and electricity facilities in these housing colonies so that the construction works would be expedited. Officials must also focus on solving the problems related to house sites that are facing legal disputes.

"There should be no compromise in the quality of construction of these houses," he has said. The Chief Minister directed the officials to ensure that the width of roads in Jagananna colonies should not be less than 20feet. He examined in detail the designs for the development of infrastructure facilities such as roads, drainage, electricity in Jagananna colonies and suggested changes.

VSP | DISINVESTMENT **Swamy says he will accompany CM in a delegation to Delhi**

BJP MP opposes Centre's move to privatise VSP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 10

BJP MP Subramanian Swamy has opposed the Centre's move to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

Swamy met Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at his camp office here on Wednesday. Later, Swamy told the media that the CM had already addressed two

letters to PM Modi on the steel plant issue. "I would also accompany the CM in a delegation of all-party leaders to New Delhi to meet the PM and present our views against the disinvestment of the VSP."

The BJP MP was in the city to attend a case in the AP High Court representing the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams in a defamation suit worth ₹100 crore filed against

the Telugu daily Andhra Jyothi. This was in connection with the publishing of a false report on TTD.

Swamy said he suspected the role of former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu in the efforts to defame the TTD.

He welcomed the CM's decision to conduct an audit of TTD's finances with the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy offers memento to BJP MP Subramanian Swamy at his house on Wednesday.



Khattar govt wins first no-trust vote

After 6-hour discussions, Speaker said 55 members voted against motion, 32 backed it

Chandigarh, March 10: The BJP-JJP government in Haryana survived the floor test on Wednesday, comfortably defeating the no-confidence motion moved against it by the main opposition Congress. The motion was defeated following division of votes.

At the end of a marathon six-hour discussion on the motion, Speaker Gian Chand Gupta announced in the House that 55 members had voted against the motion while 32 legislators had backed it.

In place of secret voting, which former chief minister B.S. Hooda had earlier demanded in the House, the Speaker first asked the members favouring the motion to rise from their seats and those against it were asked to stand.

A headcount was done later. The 55 members who voted against the motion included 39 from the BJP, 10 of ally Jannayak Janta Party, five Independents and Gopal Kanda from Haryana Lokhit Party.

The BJP has 40 members in the Assembly which includes the Speaker. Thirty members of the Congress and two Independents — Balraj Kundu and Sombir Sangwan — who had earlier withdrawn support, backed the motion.

The opposition camp would have needed 45 members to win the no confidence motion. In the 90-member Haryana Assembly, currently having an effective strength of 88 members, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has 40 members, the JJP 10 and the Congress 30.

Seven are Independents, five of whom are supporting the government, while one member is of the Haryana Lokhit Party. While the ruling BJP-JJP was batting on a comfortable wicket with numbers on their side, moving the motion, the first no-trust vote which 16-month old Khattar government faced, Leader of Opposition Hooda claimed the ruling dispensation has lost people's trust.

He also said it would expose those who were claiming to stand in favour of farmers if they vote against the motion.

— PTI



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee holds on to her injured leg after her campaign trial at Nandigram in Purba Medinipur on Wednesday. — PTI

Jolt to Cong. in Kerala as P.C. Chacko resigns

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI / THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 10

The Congress on Wednesday received a jolt with its senior leader from the poll bound state of Kerala P.C. Chacko calling it quits from the party. He sent in his resignation to the party chief Sonia Gandhi.

He said, "I have quit Congress and sent my resignation to the party's interim chief Sonia Gandhi. I had been deliberating upon this decision for the past many days. I come from Kerala where there's no Congress party as such. There are two parties — Congress (I) and Congress (A). It's a coordination committee of two parties functioning as the Kerala Congress unit. The 'A' group was headed by former chief minister Oommen Chandy and the 'I' group by state chief Ramesh Chennithala and these groups had been active for many years."

He further charged the Congress of not having

internal democracy. "There is no democracy left in Congress. The list of candidates has not been discussed with the state Congress committee. There are no panels for any discussions on polls, winnability of candidates. There have always been factions in parties, even in the Congress, but there is no point anymore," he added.

The recommendations of the groups being placed at the screening committee were being meekly accepted by the central leadership. "Under these circumstances there was no point in continuing in the Congress," he said.

Chacko, however, ruled out possibility of joining the BJP. "The BJP has no future in Kerala. It is not a party that is widely acceptable among the people of Kerala," he said.

The Congress high command is already feeling the pressure from the letter writers group who wanted change in the party and the latest allegation from Chacko has only added to its woes.



SHORT TAKES

U.S. ‘HYPING UP’ TAIWAN INVADE THREAT: CHINA

Beijing, March 10: China on Wednesday accused a top US commander of attempting to “hype up” the threat of an invasion of Taiwan to inflate Washington’s defence spend and justify its own military chicanery in Asia.

The US’ top military officer in Asia-Pacific, Admiral Philip Davidson, on Tuesday said China could invade Taiwan within the next six years, as Beijing accelerates its moves to supplant American military power in Asia. “Some US people continue to use the Taiwan issue to hype up China’s military threat,” foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters in Beijing.

PLAN TO ATTACK JEWS: MAN HELD IN SINGAPORE

Singapore, March 10: Singapore has detained a full-time national serviceman (NSF) for planning to carry out a knife attack against Jews at a local synagogue, according to a media report on Wednesday.

Singaporean Amirull Ali, 20, had also made plans to travel to Gaza, Palestine, to join the military wing of Hamas in its fight against Israel, the Internal Security Department said.

Amirull was self-radicalised with a deep hatred for Israel after being convinced that Palestinians were being oppressed in the Israel-Palestine conflict, the ISD said.

He was arrested on February 5 while he was an NSF, a compulsory military service for young Singaporeans in the Singapore Armed Forces.

N. KOREAN TO BE EXTRADITED TO THE U.S.

Kuala Lumpur, March 10: Malaysia’s top court ruled that a North Korean man can be extradited to the United States to face money laundering charges, rejecting his assertion that the US charge was politically motivated.

The Federal Court on Tuesday refused to accept Mun Chol Myong’s arguments because it was not a trial, and agreed with a lower court that prosecutors had followed procedures, said defence lawyer Gooi Soon Seng.

Mun, who is in his 50s, has lived in Malaysia for a decade and was arrested in May 2019 after US authorities requested his extradition.

Malaysia’s government approved the extradition, but Mun challenged the US bid.

NON-MUSLIMS CAN USE ‘ALLAH’: MALAYSIA COURT

Kuala Lumpur, March 10: A Malaysian court ruled on Wednesday that non-Muslims can use the word “Allah” to refer to God, in a major decision in a divisive issue for religious freedom in the Muslim-majority country.

The High Court decision squashed a 35-year-old government ban on the usage of Allah and three other Arabic words by Christian publications, deeming the ban unconstitutional, said the plaintiff’s lawyer, Annou Xavier. The government has previously said Allah should be reserved exclusively for Muslims to avoid confusion that could lead them to convert to other religions, a stance that is unique to Malaysia and hasn’t been an issue in other Muslim-majority nations.

YOUTHS ATTACK ATHENS PS WITH PETROL BOMBS

Athens, March 10: Greek youths protesting an incident of police violence attacked an Athens police station with petrol bombs and severely injured one officer on Tuesday.

The violence came during a march by several thousand people in the southern Nea Smyrni district. Greek media said dozens of people attacked a motorcycle police officer with stones and clubs, severely injuring him.

Earlier, police said they had confiscated quantities of petrol bombs at the beginning of the protest. They said several participants in the march were armed with iron bars. The march to the Nea Smyrni police station was in reaction to an incident on Sunday during police enforcement of virus lockdown measures in a square in the Nea Smyrni area.

Royal remarks raise race issue in C’wealth

Cape Town, March 10: In countries with historic ties to Britain, allegations by Prince Harry and Meghan that an unnamed member of the royal family had “concerns” over how dark their unborn baby’s skin might be have raised a thorny question: Do those nations really want to be so closely connected to Britain and its royal family anymore? It was expected the interview would expose more rifts in the royal family. Now it seems to be risking divisions within the “family” of the Commonwealth — an association of 54 countries, most of them former British colonies, held together by historic ties.

For decades, Queen Elizabeth II has been the driving force behind the Commonwealth. After the TV interview, shown in the US on the eve of Commonwealth Day, former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull cited it as another reason for the country to sever its constitutional ties to the British monarchy.

“After the end of the queen’s reign, that is the time for us to say: OK, we’ve passed that watershed,” Turnbull told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

UK TALK SHOW HOST QUILTS OVER MEGHAN COMMENT

London, March 10: British talk show host Piers Morgan has quit the show “Good Morning Britain” after making controversial comments about the Duchess of Sussex.

The UK’s media watchdog said earlier Tuesday that it was launching an investigation into the show under its harm and offence rules after receiving more than 41,000 complaints about his comments on Meghan.

“Do we really want to have whoever happens to be the head of state, the king or queen of the UK, automatically our head of state?” The value of the Commonwealth has been debated before, with critics questioning if countries and people once colonised — and even oppressed — should remain in such an association with a former coloniser.

EU-UK ties dip over ‘vaccine ban’ comments

Brussels, March 10: Relations between the European Union and recently departed Britain took another diplomatic dip on Wednesday when the EU envoy in London was summoned to explain comments that Britain had issued a vaccine export ban. The United Kingdom was so irate about Tuesday’s comments from European Council President Charles Michel that Britain had “imposed an outright ban on the export of vaccines,” that it called in the ambassador for a morning meeting.

A British government statement said that it “has not blocked the export of a single Covid-19 vaccine. Any references to a UK export ban or any restrictions on vaccines are completely false.” The spat comes against a background that the Covid-19 vaccination drive in Britain is seen as a huge success while that in the 27-nation bloc has been a major failure.

The United Kingdom has given about 35 per cent of its adults a vaccine shot while the EU is further back with 9.5 per

PAK TO CLOSE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Islamabad, March 10: Pakistan announced on Wednesday that all educational institutions in cities worst hit due to the Coronavirus pandemic will be closed down from March 15 for two weeks due to a surge in Covid-19 cases in the country.

Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood announced the decision after the National Command and Control Centre (NCOC) reviewed the Coronavirus situation at educational institutions.

cent. Already uneasy bedfellows during Britain’s 47 years of EU membership, thing got progressively worse since the 2016 referendum when the United Kingdom voted to leave the bloc. After acrimonious departure talks, the split became official last year.

YAHYA SINWAR RE-ELECTED GAZA HAMAS CHIEF

Gaza City, March 10: Yahya Sinwar was re-elected Wednesday as the head of Hamas’s political wing in Gaza, extending his tenure as the Islamist movement’s de facto leader in the Israeli-blockaded Palestinian enclave, Hamas said.

Sinwar, a former commander of Hamas’s military branch, served more than two decades in an Israeli prison before he was released in 2011 as a part of a prisoner exchange.

First elected to the post in 2017, he faced four challengers this time, including Nizar Awadallah, the former head of Hamas’s advisory Shura Council. Hamas’s overall chief Ismail Haniyeh, currently based in Qatar, congratulated Sinwar in a statement. “The movement’s commitment to (internal) elections every four years confirms our deep faith in the principle of rotating power,” Haniyeh said.

Sinwar’s re-election comes ahead of May 22 Palestinian legislative polls. The Islamist group is considered a terrorist organisation by much of the Western world.

Protesters adapt tactics after Myanmar police use violence

Forces’ crackdown has failed to slow protests against the Feb. 1 coup

Mandalay, March 10: Protesters against the military takeover in Myanmar carried homemade shields and moved with more caution and agility Tuesday, adapting their tactics to the escalating violence from security forces not reluctant to use lethal force to break up crowds.

In Mandalay, the nation’s second-largest city, about a thousand demonstrators emerged onto the streets, those in the vanguard carrying shields marked with a three-fingered salute, the movement’s symbol of defiance. They marched for just a few minutes before dispersing to avoid a possible confrontation with riot police. Another group made a mobile protest, driving through the streets on motorbikes.

Security forces trying to stop people from gathering have used water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets most often, but also have fired live ammunition at crowds. The crackdown has left more than 60 protesters dead but has failed to slow the widespread protests against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

A school principal involved in the protest movement died Tuesday from unknown causes after being taken into custody by security forces, according to media reports and an activist who knew him. The death of Zaw Myat Lin in custody was the second in recent days.



Anti-coup protesters retreat from the frontlines after discharging fire extinguishers towards a line of riot policemen in Yangon, Myanmar, on Wednesday.

● MYANMAR SECURITY forces on Wednesday raided the Mingalar Taung Nyunt neighbourhood in Yangon that houses state railway workers who have gone on strike to protest the coup. Photos, video showed officers blocking streets and people escaping. At least three arrests were reported.

BIMSTEC MEET: LANKA INVITES MYANMAR FM, TRIGGERS ROW

Colombo, March 10: Sri Lanka has invited the new foreign minister of Myanmar’s junta to the BIMSTEC ministerial meeting next month, triggering a controversy that it is endorsing the military coup in that nation. Sri Lanka has neither endorsed or rejected the recognition of the

military regime which topped Myanmar’s elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s government on Feb. 1, just as it was to start its second term. The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy after five decades of military rule.

Sri Lanka’s FM Dinesh Gunawardena invited the

military regime’s FM Wunna Maung Lwin, for a virtual meeting of the FMs of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand under the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) on April 1.

Biden administration will not defend Trump immigration rule

FBI releases new video after bombs left at RNC, DNC offices

Washington, March 10: The FBI has released new video showing someone placing two pipe bombs outside the offices of the Republican and Democratic national committees the night before the Jan. 6 riot at the US Capitol.

The explosive devices were placed outside the two buildings between 7:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. on Jan. 5 and were located by law enforcement the next day.

US Capitol Police and agents from the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were called to the Republican National Committee’s office around 12:45 p.m. on Jan. 6.

About 30 minutes later, as the agents and bomb technicians were still investigating at the RNC, another call came in for a similar explosive device found at the Democratic National

Committee headquarters nearby. The bombs were rendered safe, and no one was hurt.

The video, released Tuesday, shows a person in a gray hooded sweatshirt, a face mask and gloves appearing to place one of the explosives under a bench outside the DNC and separately shows the person walking in an alley near the RNC before the bomb was placed there.

outgrowth of the Biden administration’s effort to undo Trump administration immigration policies. The new administration recently dismissed high court appeals over former President Donald Trump’s effort to deny funding to so-called sanctuary communities.

The justices, at the administration’s request, also put off cases they had

agreed to hear over the funding of portions of the wall along the border with Mexico and the policy of forcing asylum seekers to wait in Mexico for their hearings.

No China role in Dalai succession: US

Washington, March 10: The Chinese government should have no role in the succession process of the Panchen Lama more than 25 years ago, including by ‘disappearing’ the Panchen Lama as a child and attempting to replace him with a PRC (People’s Republic of China) government-chosen successor, it remains an outrageous abuse of religious

freedom,” Price said.

Previous president Donald Trump in December had signed into law a bill which called for establishing a US consulate in Tibet and building an international coalition to ensure that the next Dalai Lama is appointed solely by the Tibetan Buddhist community without China’s interference.

It is the policy of the

United States to take all appropriate measures to hold accountable senior officials of the Chinese government or the Chinese Communist Party who directly interfere with the identification and installation of the future 15th Dalai Lama of Tibetan Buddhism, successor to the 14th Dalai Lama, the act said.

● Beijing’s interference in the succession of the Panchen Lama more than 25 years ago, including by ‘disappearing’ the Panchen Lama and attempting to replace him with a government-chosen successor, it remains an abuse of religious freedom.

— NED PRICE
State Dept Spokesperson

During intervals without virus curbs, infection rates were four per cent higher

Higher airborne pollen levels behind Covid risk

Berlin, March 10: Higher concentration of airborne pollen is associated with increased novel Coronavirus infection rates, according to a study that used data from 31 countries across five continents.

Researchers at the Technical University of Munich (TUM) and the Helmholtz Zentrum Munchen in Germany noted that people in high-risk groups can protect themselves by watching pollen forecasts and wearing dust filter masks. The team collected data on airborne pollen concentrations, weather conditions and SARS-CoV-2 infections, taking into

consideration the variation of infection rates from one day to another, and the total number of positive tests. The researchers also included data on population density and the effects of lockdown measures.

The study, published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, analysed pollen data from 130 stations in 31 countries on five continents. The team showed that airborne pollen can account for, on average, 44 per cent of the variation in infection rates, with humidity and air temperature also playing a role in some cases.

● THE STUDY, published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, analysed pollen data from 130 stations in 31 countries on five continents.

During intervals without lockdown regulations, infection rates were on average four per cent higher with every increase of 100 grains of airborne pollen per cubic metre, the researchers said. In some German cities, concentrations of up to 500 pollen grains per cubic metre per day led to an overall increase in infection rates of more

than 20 per cent, they said. However, in the regions where lockdown rules were in effect, the infection numbers were on average only half as high at comparable pollen concentrations, according to the study. The researchers explained that high pollen concentrations lead to a weaker immune response in airways to viruses that can cause coughs and colds. They noted that when a virus enters the body, infected cells usually send out messenger proteins, adding this is also the case with SARS-CoV-2.

These proteins, known as antiviral interferons,

signal nearby cells to escalate their antiviral defenses to keep the invaders at bay. Additionally, an appropriate inflammation response is activated to fight the viruses, according to the researchers.

However, the researchers said, if airborne pollen concentrations are high, and pollen grains are inhaled with the virus particles, fewer antiviral interferons are generated. The beneficial inflammatory response itself is also affected, they said. The study suggests that high concentration of pollen can lead to an increase in the number of respiratory illnesses,

including Covid-19.

Whether individuals are allergic to the different pollen types is irrelevant, the researchers said. “You cannot avoid exposure to airborne pollen,” says Stefanie Gilles, first author of the study. “People in high-risk groups should, therefore, be informed that high levels of airborne pollen concentrations lead to an increased susceptibility to viral respiratory tract infections,” Gilles said.

The researchers noted that when studying the spread of SARS-CoV-2, environmental factors such as pollen must be taken into account.



Yusuf Raza Gilani

PAK HC REJECTS PLEA AGAINST GILANI POLL WIN

Islamabad, March 10: The Islamabad High Court on Wednesday rejected a petition by Prime Minister Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party challenging former premier Yusuf Raza Gilani’s upset win in the Senate elections, ruling that it was not appropriate to “unnecessarily drag” the judiciary in political matters.

Gilani, who contested the Senate election as a Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) candidate, defeated ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidate and Finance Minister Abdul Hafeez Shaikh by securing 169 votes against 164 votes by Shaikh on Wednesday, giving a major blow to Prime Minister Imran Khan who had personally campaigned for his Cabinet colleague.

The Opposition had demanded the prime minister’s resignation after the debacle following which Khan decided to take a vote of confidence on Saturday which he won comfortably. The Islamabad High Court (IHC) heard a plea by PTI lawmaker Ali Nawaz.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Hyderabad FC rope in Hitesh

Hyderabad: Young midfielder Hitesh Sharma has signed a two-year contract extension with Indian Super League (ISL) side Hyderabad FC, the club said on Wednesday. "I am really proud and happy to have signed this contract with Hyderabad FC," said Hitesh. "I believe that we have the best players, the best management and the best coaches we can ask for at the club and I hope to continue the hard work for years to come," he added. The 23-year-old, who joined Hyderabad FC in January 2020, played a crucial role in the side's fight for a place in the top-4 this league campaign. He made 15 appearances (13 starts) and grew into a regular in the first team under head coach Manolo Marquez this season. He played a total of 1,060 minutes in the season, which remains his busiest league campaign in his career. — PTI

Mohammedan SC held by Punjab

Kolkata: Punjab FC snatched a remarkable 3-3 draw after Mohammedan SC scored two goals in as many minutes in the second half in a thrilling I-League clash here on Wednesday. Chenchu Gleytshen's brace was cancelled out by Faisal Ali and Pedro Manzi strikes in the second half. Azharuddin Mallick then gave Mohammedan the lead again only for Ashish Jha to score the equaliser for Punjab in the 88th minute. Punjab FC showed intent and played like they had to prove something, in the opening minutes of the match. In the 34th minute, Chenchu headed home from inside of the box after he was found by a Pritam Singh cross. Punjab FC wasted little time in the second half and doubled their lead just seconds into the half. In the 46th minute, Chenchu was found by a cross and the forward unleashed a swirling finesse shot that crashed into the back of the net. — PTI

Indian team set for Le Mans race

New Delhi: Racing Team India is set to become the first all-Indian-driver team to race in the iconic 24 Hours of Le Mans, after having been granted a provisional entry for this year's edition of the twice-round-the-clock classic. The team, which features an all-Indian driver line up of Narain Karthikeyan, Arjun Maini and Naveen Rao, will compete in the LMP2-AM category of the iconic race. The No. 74 car will be prepared and run by Eurasia Motorsport, making it a true-blue Asian effort. Padma Shri awardee and India's first Formula One driver Narain Karthikeyan said, "This is a proud moment not just for our team, but for our nation as a whole. Racing at Le Mans with an Indian team is a dream I have nurtured since 2009 when I first visited the Circuit de la Sarthe. I would like to thank all of our sponsors and partners, and especially the ACO and the Asian Le Mans Series team."

Sharath crashes in quarterfinals

Doha: Veteran Sharath Kamal bowed out of the World Table Tennis Star Contender series after going down in straight games to World No. 12 Dmitrij Ovtcharov in the men's singles pre-quarterfinals here on Wednesday. Sharath, ranked 32nd, lost 9-11 8-11, 6-11 to the German in a lop-sided contest. Sharath showed consistency in the first game against Dmitrij, who recently won the WTT Contenders title, and came close. But he could never get under the skin of a man who was in superb form. He looked good again the second but could not overcome the blues. In the end, the third game was so easy for the German that he didn't need to make any extra effort to complete the task. Dmitrij will take on Swede Anton Kallberg in the quarterfinals on Thursday. — PTI

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

FOOTBALL

Champions League: Round of 16, 1st leg — Slavia Praha vs Rangers from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 1; Manchester United vs AC Milan from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 2; Dinamo Zagreb vs Tottenham Hotspur from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1; Olympiakos vs Arsenal from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2; Roma vs Shakhtar Donetsk from 1.30 am (Friday) on Sony Six, HD

NATS AND BOLTS

Varun fails fitness test as injured Natarajan is at NCA

Ahmedabad, March 10: Leg-spinner Varun Chakravarthy's failure to clear fitness tests has ruled him out while pacer T. Natarajan is racing against time to be battle-ready, making him doubtful for at least the early part of India's five-match T20 series against England starting here on Friday.

Chakravarthy has repeatedly failed to clear the fitness test at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru while yorker specialist Natarajan is yet to join the squad here due to an apparent "shoulder niggle".

"Varun Chakravarthy was selected because he recovered from his shoulder injury that ruled him out of the Australia series. He did his rehab at the NCA and started throwing normally."

"However, he has failed to clear the YoYo test mark stipulated for a 2km run at least twice," a senior BCCI source said.

The question now being asked is why did the Chetan Sharma led committee select such a player, who, after the month of October, hasn't played even one competitive game for his state Tamil Nadu.

"We can understand he was doing his rehab during Mushtaq Ali (T20 Championship). But then again, he didn't play a single Vijay Hazare Trophy game. How do you assess his match fitness based on games that he played five months back? I guess Varun Chakravarthy is a lesson for selectors," said the source.

"If a player is generally not maintaining the standards set by this Indian team, his bowling alone can't be a criteria for selection," the source added.

It is learnt that Rahul Chahar will be inducted in the squad as he is already in the bio-bubble since the start of the Test series.

In case of Natarajan, the NCA medical staff is trying to get him fit or at least the later part of the



India pacer T. Natarajan in this file photo

series. Rahul Tewatia is training with the Indian team in Ahmedabad as he awaits his second fitness Test results.

INDIA LEAP TO NO.2 IN T20 RANKINGS

India climbed a spot to second in the latest ICC men's T20 International team rankings ahead of a five-match series against top-placed England beginning on March 12.

England are seven points ahead of India, who were third before the away series against Australia. Australia's 2-3 loss to New Zealand in a recent five-game series pushed the side below India with just one point.

In the T20 batting chart, India batsman KL Rahul lost a place to be at the third spot but skipper Virat Kohli retained his sixth position. — PTI

Southampton to host the India vs Kiwis WTC final

Dubai, March 10: The International Cricket Council on Wednesday formally announced that Southampton will host the inaugural World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand in June and a limited number of fans could be allowed if the easing of lockdown in the UK continues.

The game will be played inside a bio-secure bubble at the Hampshire Bowl in Southampton from June 18-22. The venue was confirmed on Monday by BCCI President Sourav Ganguly.

"Should the UK government's phased easing of Covid-19 lockdown measures proceed as planned, it is anticipated that a limited number of fans will be allowed into the Hampshire Bowl to watch the final," the ICC statement read.

Initially, the final was supposed to be held at the Lord's but the ICC Board and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) decided to change the venue to ensure that the fixture could be staged safely with the potential impact of Covid-19 minimised for all involved.

"In selecting the Hampshire Bowl, the ICC drew on ECB's experience of delivering a full summer of bio-safe international cricket in 2020."

"The venue provides world-class playing and training facilities, giving both teams the best possible environment in which to prepare," the ICC said.

"The ICC WTC final is the pinnacle event in the Test calendar and is intended to be a week-long celebration of the oldest form of the game," Geoff Allardice, ICC General Manager, Cricket said. — PTI

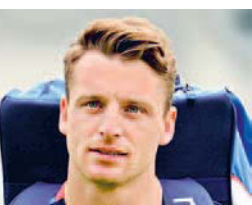
India are favourites for T20 World Cup: Buttler

Ahmedabad, March 10: England white-ball vice-captain Jos Buttler feels hosts India, who are strong in every format of the game, are favourites for this year's T20 World Cup.

India will host the tournament in October and November.

"Going into World Cups, you probably look at hosts nations one specially as strong as India who are going to be favourites for that tournament," Buttler said.

"There are many excellent teams, in the last few World Cups hosts



Jos Buttler

nations have performed very well. India is of course strong in every format and T20 is no different and especially playing at home I see India as the favourites," Buttler added.

"It's vital for us to play and hopefully you wanna

win that series and take that confidence and gel together as a group and have that clarity ahead of the World Cup."

"So, it's a fantastic opportunity for us as a side to be playing against India in World Cup conditions," he added.

"This is a great benefit for us. Being here and to play in Ahmedabad in the brand new stadium which may play a big part in the World Cup and no one has played here before. So it's a big advantage for us to learn about conditions," Buttler said. — PTI



Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli with teammates during a training session at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. — PTI

Bach back as Olympic boss

Lausanne, March 10: International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach promised to deliver a "safe, secure" Tokyo Olympics this year as he was re-elected for a second term on Wednesday.

As he opened the IOC Session, Bach said it was no longer a question of whether the Olympics, which were postponed last year as the coronavirus pandemic spread around the globe, would take place but in what conditions they will be held.

"Tokyo remains the best prepared Olympic city ever and at this moment, we have no reason to doubt that the opening ceremony will take place on July 23," Bach said.

"The question is not whether, the question is how these Olympic Games will take place."

"The IOC is working at full speed together with our Japanese partners and friends to make the postponed Olympic Games a safe manifestation of peace, solidarity and resilience of humankind in overcoming the pandemic."

Bach said his aim was to create "a safe, secure and fair environment for all the athletes".

The local Japanese organisers are due to announce by the end of the month whether foreign



Thomas Bach

spectators will be allowed to attend the Games, although it is widely reported that they will be barred due to Covid-19 concerns.

Bach, 67, received unanimous backing in the election for IOC president in which he was the sole candidate, with 93 of the 94 valid votes from IOC members in favour of his reelection.

"Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart for this overwhelming vote of confidence and trust," said Bach, sending out a 'virtual' hug to his supporters.

"This is more overwhelming given the reforms and difficult decisions we had to take."

"It's touching me deeply and also makes me humble," the German said, describing his first eight-year mandate as "not so easy". — AFP



Dortmund's Erling Haaland celebrates after scoring his side's second goal against Sevilla during their Champions League match in Dortmund, Germany, on Tuesday. — AP

Porto end Juve campaign in CL

Turin (Italy), March 10: Cristiano Ronaldo's Juventus crashed out of the Champions League in the Last 16 for the second year running on Tuesday, losing to 10-man Porto on away goals despite winning the second leg 3-2 in Turin.

Sergio Oliveira's extra-time free-kick sent twice former winners Porto through to the quarterfinals as the tie finished 4-4 on aggregate.

Leading 2-1 from the first leg in Portugal, Oliveira's first-half penalty increased Porto's advantage but Juventus levelled the tie through two goals

from Federico Chiesa. Oliveira then rifled home a low free-kick on 115 minutes, which passed through the legs of Ronaldo, with Adrien Rabiot's header in reply coming in vain for Juventus.

Meanwhile, Erling Braut Haaland scored twice as Borussia Dortmund held off a late Sevilla fightback to reach the Champions League quarterfinals with a 'crazy, amazing' 5-4 aggregate win after a frantic 2-2 second-leg draw.

Haaland tapped in a first-half opener and scored a retaken penalty after the break at Signal Iduna Park. — AFP

IPL best prep for T20 WC: Billings

Ahmedabad, March 10: England wicket-keeper batsman Sam Billings feels the upcoming IPL will be good preparation for the T20 World Cup later this year but conceded that he will get limited game time due to the "phenomenal" competition in the Delhi Capitals' squad.

"You look at the squad that Delhi have, and especially the overseas options: you could go with any combination and it would be a successful one," Sam said.

"The competition for places is phenomenal: they obviously got to the final last year, so game time might be limited,

but it comes back to the point of preparing for a World Cup and giving myself the best chance in these conditions to prepare for that."

Sam recalled the first time he got a glimpse of the flamboyant Rishabh Pant.

"With Pant, I played with him for 2 years when I was in Delhi. I turned to Rahul Dravid and asked 'who is this kid?' He was smacking Nathan Coulter-Nile, Chris Morris, Rabada everywhere in the open net. I was just thinking 'this is unbelievable!' and that year he lit up. It's been great to see him evolve," Sam said. — PTI

Regd. No. AP/VJA/41/24/2000.
Printed and published from Vijayawada by K.Sudhakar, on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Deccan Chronicle Holdings Press, No. C 3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, VIJAYAWADA.
RNI Registration No. 45061/90
Editorial: 2555962 Fax: 2555234 Board: 2555284, 2555287, 2555185
Grams: CHRONICLE Editor: Kaushik Mitter

