

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | TUESDAY | 16 MARCH 2021

WEATHER



Max: 35.6°C
Min: 19.2°C
RH: 25%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Partly cloudy sky. Max/Min temperature 37/19°C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Shuddha Tadiya till 9 pm
Star: Ashwini whole day
Variyam: 3.02 am to 4.49 am (Wednesday)
Durmuhurtam: 8.50 am to 9.38 am
Rahukalam: 3 am to 4.30 am
HIJRI CALENDAR
2nd Sha'ban, 1442 H
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.24 am
Zohar: 12.35 pm
Asar: 4.45 pm
Maghrib: 6.32 pm
Isha: 7.39 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.26 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.23 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 7.39 PM
MOONSET TODAY 8.06 AM

COUNTER POINT



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SHORT TAKES

Delhi L-G to get more powers

New Delhi: With the objective of giving a proper "interpretation" of an apex court ruling, the home ministry on Monday introduced in Bill in the Lok Sabha that gives overarching powers to the lieutenant governor in day-to-day functioning of the national capital, a move which is set to revive the tussle between the AAP government and the Centre. The Bill makes it mandatory for the Delhi government to take the opinion of the L-G before any executive action in the national capital.

FM DEFENDS PRIVATISATION OF GOVT FIRMS

New Delhi: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said efficient management and use of the latest technology by the private sector will help unlock the real value of CPSEs undergoing strategic sale and bring much higher dividends for the economy. She said Niti Aayog had been mandated to identify and recommend CPSEs — which are not in the 'priority sector' — for strategic disinvestment, based on the criteria of national security, sovereign functions at arm's length, and market imperfections and public purpose.

Full report on Page 7

PRICE MOVES

Excess production leads to a glut of onions in state

Onions continue in free fall season

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 15

The price of onions is continuing to fall after a recent spike. On Monday, onions were being sold for ₹20. The Malakpet market yard, considered the largest onion market in the city, received 70 truckloads of the bulbs, 43 of them from Maharashtra and Karnataka. Experts said that the overproduction of onions had led to the drop in prices. "The trucks from Karnataka and Maharashtra brought in 5,640 quintals of

The price falls steeply only twice. While the first is in March the next time would be September.

Many farmers had chosen to plant onions as the prices had risen last year. But the prices had risen around last March because farmers were unable to send their yield out due to the pandemic.

In the state, there are places like Mahbubnagar, Medak, and Tandur and in Andhra Pradesh we have Kurnool, from where we get onions. From these places we received 23 trucks carrying 2,760 quintals of onion," said Damodar, an AMC

with the agriculture department.

He said many farmers had chosen to plant onions as the prices had risen last year. But the prices had risen as farmers were unable to send their yield out due to the pandemic. "We had a lot of supply

issues last year. Now there is a surplus amount of onions," he told this newspaper.

G.V. Ramananjanyulu, agrarian expert from the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, said: "Going by the look of things, the prices of onions are expected to fall even further."

This is a usual occurrence, the price falls every time a new crop comes to the market. The price falls steeply only twice. While the first is in March the next time would be around September.

NATION | 4

Shivraj accuses Cong of following Jinnah



deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle

WORLD | 5

Beyonce, Swift win big at Grammys



SPORTS | 8

India vs England third T20 today



Vol. 20 No. 289 Established 1938 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

Formal ritual



Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan is being escorted to the joint session of the Telangana Legislature by Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao on the first day of the state legislature's budget session in Hyderabad on Monday.

— DC

Man who shot cop in Batla House encounter gets death

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

A Delhi court on Monday awarded death sentence to Ariz Khan, convicted for the murder of police inspector Mohan Chand Sharma and other offences in connection with the 2008 Batla House encounter. The court also imposed a fine of ₹11 lakh on Khan and directed ₹10 lakh be immediately released to deceased inspector Sharma's family.

During the hearing, the police sought the death penalty for Khan, a suspected member of the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen (IM), saying it was not just any killing but a murder of a law enforcement officer who was a defender of justice.

On March 8, the Additi-

onal Sessions Judge Sandeep Yadav had convicted Khan stating that the evidence produced by the prosecution duly proved the case beyond reasonable doubt.

The judge had said that it was "duly proved that Ariz Khan and his associates caused murder of police official and fired gunshot on the police official."

"The evidence adduced on record, including ocular, documentary and scientific, prosecution has proved beyond reasonable doubt that Khan along with accomplices with common intention obstructed inspector Sharma in discharging public function," the court had said. "Khan, along with his accomplices, also fired gunshots at head constables

Balwant and Balvir Singh," it had said.

During the encounter in Batla House at Jamia Nagar in south Delhi on September 19, 2008, two suspected terrorists, identified as Atif Amin and Mohammed Sajid, were killed while Inspector Sharma of Special Cell received gun shot during the encounter and later died. Three other terrorists identified as Ariz Khan and Shahzad escaped while Mohammad Saif surrendered to the police.

The encounter had taken place within a week of 2008 Delhi serial blasts. Later, Shahzad Ahmed was also arrested in 2010 and a trial court in July 2013 had sentenced him to life imprisonment in connection with the case.

CENTRE: NO EARLY JAB FOR JUDICIAL STAFF, LAWYERS

New Delhi, March 15:

The Centre told the Supreme Court on Monday that it may not be desirable to create a separate class of judges, lawyers and court staff below the age of 45 for administering the Covid-19 vaccine on priority basis.

It said the vaccine, which is already being produced beyond the manpower and infrastructural capacity, is also being exported in view of the global pandemic.

A bench of Chief Justice Bobde and Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian said that the court would consider the plea, seeking inclusion of judges, judicial staff and lawyers in the priority category for the Covid-19 vaccine, on March 18.

— PTI

TS plans people's budget without levy of a new tax

Govt plans surplus budget without any new tax proposal

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 15

The state government will present a revenue-surplus Budget for 2021-22 without imposing any new tax or tinkering with existing rates, official sources in the finance department said on Monday.

Finance minister T. Harish Rao will present Budget 2021-22 in the Assembly on March 18.

Though the state government's revenue earnings nosedived in 2020-21 due to the pandemic-related lockdown, the government has decided to go for a revenue-surplus budget based on optimism that the economy is limping back to normalcy since the beginning of 2021. Telangana state continues to be 'revenue surplus' since the formation of the state in 2014.

The new Budget size is expected to be between ₹1.85 lakh crore and ₹2 lakh crore, which will be highest-ever for Telangana state against the ₹1.82 lakh crore budget in 2020-21.

The state government is relying heavily on its own tax revenues and borrowings to meet budgetary targets in 2021-22 rather than

State's finances in control, says Gov

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 15

Despite the financial crisis in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the shape of the state's economy remained under control, said Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan while addressing a joint sitting of the budget session of the State Legislature on Monday.

The Governor said the state had evolved a strategy and ensured that the economy did not go out of control during the difficult Covid times. "Several innovative programmes and schemes were introduced by the government to place the state firmly on the path of progress."

"Telangana state is marching ahead with development in all sectors besides ensuring welfare to all sections of society. It is now

The Governor said the proof of Telangana emerging as a progressive state is in its positioning as the third best on the Niti Aayog's SDG India Index

stepping into another financial year with confidence," she noted.

She pointed out that the proof of Telangana emerging as a progressive and developed state is in its positioning as the third best on the UN-inspired Sustainable Development Goals India Index as adjudged by Niti Aayog.

"The state developed its own growth model by keeping the individual at the centre of all schemes."

Page 2: TS per capita income doubled: Governor

depending on central government funds. Funds from

the Centre towards tax devolution and other

grants witnessed a decline during the past two years.

The government pinned its hopes on GST and VAT to mop up revenues in the new fiscal.

Last year (2019-20), the government earned ₹47,000 crore through GST and VAT. This year (2020-21), it has already netted Rs 46,000 crore till February-end and revenues are expected to cross the ₹50,000 crore mark for the first time this fiscal (by end March 2021).

During the lockdown period between April and June 2020, the earnings through GST and VAT touched a low of ₹3,000 crore per month. However, the situation improved from September 2020.

In November 2020, the government earned ₹6,876 crore, which was a highest-ever growth rate of 77 per cent.

In December 2020, another ₹5,812 crore was earned. In January 2021, these earnings were of ₹5,223 crore and ₹5,093 crore in February. This is expected to rise further by this March-end as the government had roped in 400 special teams to recover GST, VAT dues from defaulters to realise the cent per cent collection target.

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OTHER STORIES

ENERGY MINISTER
THANKS GOVERNOR
FOR PRAISE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 15

Energy minister G. Jagadish Reddy has welcomed Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan Budget speech in the Assembly appreciating the progress made by the state in the power sector during the last six and a half years.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, Jagadish Reddy pointed out that before the TRS government came to power, Telangana state had suffered immense electricity cuts. Industry had to suffer power holidays. But after the KCR government took over, the state had made tremendous progress in the field of electricity.

The minister asserted that Telangana has the record of being the only state in the world to provide 24-hour free electricity to agriculture and uninterrupted power supply to all sectors. The transmission capacity of 13,900 MVA has now increased to 37,000 MVA. It is noteworthy that average per capita electricity consumption in the state is much higher than the national average of 1,208 units. Today, solar power generation has reached 4,840 MW from just 71 MW, he pointed out.

Jagadish Reddy maintained that even the union government has lauded Telangana for providing uninterrupted power supply without any cuts despite significant increase in the number of power connections. He said the Nitish Aayog

GOV. PRESENTS
LAPTOP TO
NEEDY STUDENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 15

Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan responded to the request of a student and presented him a laptop at Raj Bhavan on Monday. The beneficiary was D. Pramod, a third year PharmD student and native of Chegur village of Nandigama mandal in Ranga Reddy district.

The Governor used her discretionary grant to procure the laptop after receiving the request on her social media account. Pramod had appealed to the Governor to help him continue his studies that have moved to online mode due to the pandemic. Presenting the laptop to the student, the Governor told him to come out with flying colours in his studies and make it big in his chosen field. The student thanking the Governor said, "I am the son of a small farmer. It was very difficult for my family to buy a laptop for me."

KCR PUSHED TS
INTO DEBT TRAP:
KOMATIREDDY

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 15

Congress MP Komatireddy Venkat Reddy charged that the decisions taken by Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao had pushed the state into a debt trap. The condition is so bad that even salaries are not being paid to employees, he maintained.

Speaking while visiting Gajwel constituency in Siddipet district, Venkat Reddy alleged the Kaleshwaram lift irrigation scheme had been undertaken spending thousands of crores only to receive kickbacks from contractors implementing the project.

Vishweshwar quits Cong.

Former MP to take a three-month break from politics

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 15

Ending a long drama of suspense and keeping all sides waiting, senior leader Konda Vishweshwar Reddy formally resigned from the Congress on Monday.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, the former MP said, "All options are open. Since it would have been unethical to explore options while being in the Congress, I wanted to first submit my resignation to the party. I waited for all these days because I was waiting for the MLC elections to be over so as not to cause damage to Congress candidates, especially G. Chinna Reddy, who contested from the Hyderabad-Mahbub-nagar-Ranga Reddy graduates constituency."

After formally submitting his resignation, the former Lok Sabha member of Parliament from Chevella, said that he would be taking a three-month break from politics before finalising his next course of action.

"All options are open. I may join the BJP but I am not under any compulsion to join the saffron party," he said, before taking a dig at his former



party, the TRS, saying, "If the party gets a decent leadership, someone like Etala Rajendar or Harish Rao and apologises to the people of Telangana for its misdeeds, who knows, I might even join the TRS. But it is most unlikely."

Without ruling out even creating a new regional political party, bringing all those who are unhappy with the TRS and the Congress but not keen on moving to the BJP, he said, "I am presently keeping the choice on the table. I will meet and discuss with various leaders from all political parties and maybe float a new party in Telangana."

But if I take up this option, it won't be a dummy party but a real alternative to the TRS. It would be a strong party which will fight for the true spirit of Telangana," Reddy said. He said that if nothing

■ REDDY SAID that he is very open to joining the BJP, which is looking at this point of time as best placed to ending the TRS reign in the state, saying he would publicly talk about his next step in three months' time.

■ REDDY SAID that if nothing works out, he was even consider quitting politics. "I am here for a cause, not to benefit personally. If I cannot achieve the cause of rekindling the real spirit of Telangana, I don't rule out even quitting politics."

works out, he was even consider quitting politics. "I am here for a cause, not to benefit personally. If I cannot achieve the cause of rekindling the real spirit of Telangana, I don't rule out even quitting politics." Reddy, however, added that he is very open to joining the BJP, which is looking at this point of time as best placed to ending the TRS reign in the state, saying he would publicly talk about his next step in three months' time, after thinking and discussing the issue with various stakeholders.

Reddy had previously, on various public platforms, openly disclosed that he would quit Congress if the party functioning does not change. On Monday he finally officially resigned from the Congress.

Mr Reddy joined the

TRS in 2013 during the Telangana movement and won his maiden elections as a member of Parliament seat from the Chevella Lok Sabha constituency in the 2014 general elections by over a margin of 75,000 votes.

Later, he shifted his loyalties to the Congress during the Assembly elections in 2018. In 2019, he took part in the Lok Sabha elections from Congress but was defeated.

"After a hectic time campaigning in the MLC polls, I will be taking a break and won't be very active on Twitter for a week or so. However, I may organise a meeting with Tweeple this Sunday. In the meantime I will leave with a thought to think about, with a Tweet later today (sic)," Reddy tweeted through his official handle.

HC wants addition of
more witnesses in
Lawyers' murder case

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA
DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 15

The Telangana High Court on Monday asked the team probing the murder of advocate couple Gattu Vaman Rao and P.V. Nagamani to identify and add more eyewitnesses from among the passengers of the three buses that were present at the murder scene.

On Monday, the Ramagundam police commissioner submitted the second status report to the court on the progress of the investigation.

Referring to a mention in the report by the investigation team that five passengers of three RTC buses were enlisted as witnesses, the High Court said this will not suffice. More eyewitnesses from among the passengers should be included.

The court felt that the investigation being done by the police was progressing in the right direction and hence it was not inclined to order the hand over of the probe to the CBI. The court said it will monitor the investigation regularly.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijayen Reddy was dealing with two petitions on the dual murder. Of these, one was a suo motu petition and another a petition filed by G. Kishan Rao, father of Vaman Rao, seeking a CBI probe.

The status report said that out of the seven main accused, the confessional statements of the first three — Kunta Srinivas, Chiranjeevi,

● THE COURT felt that the investigation being done by the police was progressing in the right direction and hence it was not inclined to order the hand over of the probe to the CBI. The court said it will monitor the investigation regularly.

● THE REPORT said 21 eyewitnesses had been examined and the statements of 19 were recorded. CCTV and video recordings pertaining to the murder had been forwarded to the forensic laboratory and its report will be available within four weeks. Police protection has been extended to the eyewitnesses who sought police protection.

● ADVOCATE-GENERAL B.S. Prasad informed the court that the chargesheet will be filed after receipt of the FSL report. When counsel for Kishan Rao expressed doubts over the fairness of the investigation by the local police and sought a CBI probe, the court said it doesn't want to jeopardise the case and observed that handing over of the investigation to another agency right now would result in a phenomenal loss of time.

Kumar — were recorded under Section 164 Criminal Procedure Code and a requisition has been made before the magistrate for recording the statements of the remaining accused.

The report said 21 eyewitnesses had been examined and the statements of 19 were recorded. CCTV and video recordings pertaining to the murder had been forwarded to the forensic laboratory and its report will be available within four weeks. Police protection has been extended to the eyewitnesses who sought police protection.

Drivers and conductors of three RTC buses and five passengers travelling by the three buses were recorded. The court responded to this by saying more witnesses from among the passengers need be identified and statements obtained from them.

Advocate-General B.S. Prasad informed the court that the chargesheet will be filed after receipt of the FSL report. When counsel for Kishan Rao expressed doubts over the fairness of the investigation by the local police and sought a CBI probe, the court said it doesn't want to jeopardise the case and observed that handing over of the investigation to another agency right now would result in a phenomenal loss of time.

Asking the petitioner to keep faith in the court, it was pointed out that the court had suo motu taken up the matter and decided to monitor the case immediately after the murders.

The Ramangundam police was directed to file the next status report by April 7 and the case was adjourned to the same day for further hearing.

Rise in Covid-19 cases
in schools worries govt

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 15

With concerns being raised over growing Covid-19 cases across the country, the school education department says it is monitoring the situation closely with regard to opening of schools and following the safety protocol. This comes days after students and teachers in schools and colleges tested positive for coronavirus in districts like Adilabad and even Hyderabad.

Owing to the spike in cases in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, among others, a senior education department official told *Deccan Chronicle* that they have directed district officials for strong imposition of SOPs and safety protocols, especially those close to the state borders.

They also added that any decision pertaining to the approaching exams and offline classes will be taken by the government, which is closely monitoring the situation from the time schools and colleges reopened.

"The virus is still very much among us, and we are still collectively battling a pandemic.

Covid hits 14 in
Mancherial school

DC CORRESPONDENT
MANCHERIAL, MARCH 15

The second wave of Covid-19 virus is gradually spreading into schools as a result of which teachers and students are contracting the virus in old Adilabad district.

Around 11 teachers, two kitchen staff and a student tested positive in the government high school for girls in Mancherial town on Monday.

Some students of Tribal Welfare Residential School also tested posted

Realising this, we have opened the education sector with every possible safety protocol in place. We understand that Telangana is much better placed. But we took our time to reopen, compared to other states that hastened the reopening", the official said.

Earlier six students of a government school in Talamadugu tested posi-

positive in Mancherial headquarters.

This is in addition to the recent instance where five students from a tribal residential school in Boath mandal, Adilabad district, had tested positive.

While many students are attending online classes, quite a few are still unable to cope up with online classes in the absence of smartphones, poor signals and abysmal connectivity and no power supply, particularly in the remote villages of old Adilabad district.

On Monday, 15 persons, including 11 staff members, a student and 2 mess workers at the Macherial government girls high school also tested positive for the virus.



BJP leaders stage dharna in front of collectorate demands the state government to open centres to purchase Bengal gram from farmers and to ensure MSP in the Adilabad town on Monday.

Start centres to purchase
Bengal gram: BJP to govt

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, MARCH 15

The BJP leaders took out a rally in the Adilabad town and staged a dharna in front of the collectorate on Monday demanding the state government to start centers to purchase Bengal gram (Chana) from the farmers and ensure MSP.

The state government has stopped purchasing redgram, chana from the farmers in tune with the three farming acts brought in by the BJP led central government.

BJP leaders and activists led by the district president Payal Shankar and senior leader Ch. Suhasini Reddy took out a rally in the town and they staged a dharna in front of the

collectorate after reaching there.

Addressing on the occasion, Payal Shankar and Suhasini Reddy said middlemen are exploiting the farmers and purchasing Bengalgram at cheaper prices from them when the MSP was ₹5,100. The BJP leaders submitted a memorandum to the joint collector Sandhya Rani on the issue.

Bandi accuses state govt for
harassing Hindus over Bhainsa

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 15

Alleging that the state government was harassing Hindus in Bhainsa, BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar, accused Chief Minister K. Chandra-shekar Rao of intentionally depriving them of their constitutional and human rights. He said that if the government does not take any action against the culprits responsible for creating communal tension in the town, the party activists would storm Pragathi Bha-van demanding immediate justice.

Leading a party delegation to Raj Bha-van, he submitted a representation to Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundar-arajan



Bandi Sanjay Kumar

seeking her intervention in the Bhainsa incident. He told the Governor that unless the issue was resolved early, there could be law and order problems across the state.

Later, speaking to the media, he alleged that the government had entrusted the police administration to the MIM. He said that criminals, dep-orted from Maharash-tra and staying in Bhainsa were unleashing communal violence

under directions from MIM leaders. He lamented that the government was not even coming to the rescue of the victims, who had lost their properties. The BJP leader said that it was unfortunate that the government was filing cases against Hindus and allowing the actual perpetrators to go scot-free. He wondered if Chandra-shekar Rao had any humane considerations given that treatment of the rape victim, a minor, was being taken care of by the BJP and not the government.

He wanted to know why leaders from the Congress and Left parties were silent on the rape incident but do not hesitate to raise a hue and cry if such incidents are reported in other states.

TS PER CAPITA INCOME DOUBLED IN 7 YRS: GOVERNOR

From Page 1

"The government formulated plans based on available resources and needs. From 2014 to 2019, with a 17.24 per cent annual growth rate, the state increased its revenues and topped the country on this count," the Governor said.

"In 2013-2014, the state's GSDP was ₹4,51,580 crore and by 2019-20, it increased by 114.71 per cent with the GSDP put at ₹9,69,604 crore. Similarly,

in 2013-14, the per capita income in Telangana was ₹1,12,162, but by 2019-20, it has more than doubled it to ₹2,28,216," the Governor stated.

The estimated per capita income in 2020-21 would be ₹2,27,145 and the estimated GSDP would be ₹9,78,373 crore.

The Governor said the capital expenditure since the inception of the state stood at ₹2.3 lakh crore against the capital expenditure spent in the Telangana region in the

united Andhra Pradesh of ₹54,052 crore.

The Covid-19 recovery rate in the state was 98.88 per cent, she said.

Stating that the state government's policy was to "increase wealth and distribute it among the poor," Soundararajan said that, by allocating a large share of the increase in revenues for welfare programmes, the state transformed itself into one of the best welfare-oriented governments in the country.

WORK | MODE

Genco, BHEL discuss construction of 4,000 MW Yadadri plant
More Bhadradri power to flow soon

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 15

The Bhadradri Thermal Power Project, producing 540 mega watts of electricity, will add another 270 mega watts towards its commercial operations in the next 10 or 12 days, it was announced here on Monday.

The Bhadradri power project, at Manuguru in Bhadradri-Kothagudem district, comprises four 270 MW generation units of which two are operational. Work on the fourth unit is progressing at a fast pace and it is expected to begin commercial operations in

the first quarter of 2021-22.

The progress in this project's works, along with that of Yadadri Thermal Power Project, were on Monday reviewed at the TSGenco office.

The meeting was chaired by D. Prabhakar Rao, chairman and managing director of TS Genco and TS Transco, and Anil Kapoor, director (HR) holding additional charge of director (power) at BHEL. The progress of both the projects was reviewed in detail and Genco and BHEL officials were given directions to further expedite the projects.

BHEL is also executing

the 5x800 MW Yadadri Thermal Power Project at Dameracherla, Nalgonda district, for Genco.

The project is the largest thermal power project in south India and work on this project is also in full swing.

BHEL supplied sets contribute to nearly 90 per cent of the coal-based power stations installed in Telangana state, and projects equipped with BHEL-supplied sets such as the ones at Ramagundam, and Kothagudem, have consistently been winning merit awards from the Union power ministry for their performance.



D. Prabhakar Rao (right), the CMD of TSGenco, with Anil Kapoor, Director with BHEL.

— DC

OTHER STORIES

COMMUNIST LEADER BEDADA CHINNAIAH DIES

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 15

Bedada Chinnaiah (90), one of the first generation of communist fighters, died of illness on Sunday night at his younger brother Sattaiah's home in Mahabubabad.

A native of Kuravi village, Chinnaiah joined the Communist Party in 1946 and fought against the Razakars and took part in several movements. He also served many years of prison life. He worked with many early communist leaders like Puchapally Sundaraiah, Makineni Basava Punnaiah, Tarimella Nagi Reddy, Kondapalli Sitaramaiah. When the Communist Party split in 1964, Chinnaiah served as the CPM secretary for the Mahabubabad area. For the next several years he lead the public movements against the landlords in the area.

He has no family and has been working in the movement since his 18th year. He also worked extensively for the unity and strengthening of the Perika sangam in both the Telugu speaking states.

During his last days, he was staying at his brother Bedada Sattaiah's house in Mahabubabad and died on Sunday night.

Former MLA Bandi Pullaiah, CPI district secretary Vijaya Sarathi, CPI (M) district secretary Akula Raju and senior BJP leader Sriram Pullaiah and several other prominent leaders paid floral tributes to Chinnaiah on Monday.

OFFICIALS TOLD TO UTILISE FUNDS SANCTIONED

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 15

Instead of wasting the funds which were sanctioned by the government during this financial year, utilize them properly for implementation of various welfare schemes after grounding them, ordered the district collector K. Shashanka.

The collector chaired a meeting with the officials of various departments here at the collectorate conference hall in Karimnagar on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Shashanka ordered the officials to submit the complete details by Wednesday about the funds which were sanctioned by the government for various welfare schemes and how much of them were utilized till date. The officials of various departments will maintain current and P.D accounts in the banks under several welfare schemes. After analyzing the total accounts, submit the details about the funds which are still left in the accounts of their respective departments, he added.

Shashanka ordered to pay the property tax and electricity bills of various offices present in the Collectorate building along with charges of auditorium used by the officials of various departments. Submit the details of pending court cases of various offices within three days. Carryout 100 percent paperfree administration in the district and to wear handloom clothes on every Monday to support the weaver's community, he added.

Additional collector Shyam Prasad Lal, A. Narasimha Reddy, DRO Venkat Madhav Rao, Chief Planning Officer Kumaraiah, were among those who were present along with others.

Increase in MLC poll % rise hopes in candidates

Counting second preference votes may become inevitable

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 15

High voting percentage in Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduate MLC elections has surprised many poll experts. What made a high number of graduate voters go to polling booths is the question doing rounds.

While political parties had been expecting polling to be between 50-60 percent, 76.35 percent of graduates exercised their franchise. Of total 5.05 voters, 3.85 lakh voted. A candidate has to get 1.93 lakh votes to win the constituency with the first preference votes. It seems there are no chances of such a win in the present elections. Counting of second preference votes may become inevitable. The

TELANGANA JANA SAMITHI chief, MLC candidate prof. M. Kodandram said, "I hope the increased percentage of polling will favour me".



TRS candidate P. Rajeswara Reddy declared, "I have my own calculations. I will win the elections with a massive majority".



Congress candidate Ramulu Naik said there are reports that many graduate voters turned in favour of me in Wyra constituency of Khammam district.



highest poll percent in the constituency has thus raised the hopes of many candidates.

TJS candidate M. Kodandaram said, "I hope the increased percentage of polling will favour me". In Wyra of Khammam district, there are reports that many graduate voters turned out in favour of Congress candidate Ramulu Naik.

E. Venkateswara Rao, a poll expert said, "There are various interesting factors in the polling. Many graduate voters

stood two hours in the queues to cast their votes. It indicates that the result will be different than the previous one".

The poll percentage was 80 percent in Yadradri-Bhongiri, 82 percent in Siddipet and 83.37 in Janagoan district. Political activist K. Ramnarayana said this

represents dissent with the government among graduate voters.

However, TRS candidate Palla Rajeswara Reddy declared, "I have my own calculations. I will win the elections with a massive majority". Teenmar Mallanna is also hoping increased poll percentage may favour to him.

ALLOCATE ₹2000 CRORE TO OU, KU IN BUDGET: PDSU

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 15

Progressive Democratic Students Union (PDSU) demanded the State government to allocate sufficient funds to Osmania and Kakatiya Universities in the State Budget to run the education smoothly.

PDSU state vice-president S. Nageswara Rao said that all the universities in the state are facing problems due to lack of sufficient funds.

He said that the OU and KU required Rs 2000 crore and other universities need another ₹1000 crore to run the academic year of 2021-2022. He said that the government should allocate 30 percent of funds in the state budget to the education sector.

"The government is showing negligence on the education and not releasing proper funds to them. The educational institutions are cancelling different programs due to lack of funds", he said, adding that the Kerala and Delhi state government are allocating sufficient funds to the education sector. He said that the KCR government is trying to get more kickbacks and ignoring the education.

GWMC term ends; placed under special officer's rule

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 15

The governing term of the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation is going to end today after five years of a successful rule. With the completion of the governing body's term and the elections getting delayed by another two months, the state government decided to place the GWMC under a special officer's rule and appointed Warangal Urban district collector Rajeev-gandhi Hanumanthu, who took over on Monday.

This is the first governing body after the civic body was given the greater tag and the city has seen significant changes during the term. The GWMC took up the project to provide household drinking water under the AMRUT scheme at a cost of ₹550crore and the works are now in the final stages. Similarly, in the year 2016, when Warangal got selected for the smart city mission, development works with an estimate of ₹2200 crore were proposed. Works are underway with funds of ₹1000 crore in the first phase.

Under the HRIDAY scheme, ₹20 crore in the first phase and ₹21 crore in the second phase were released. Under the scheme, the development



Collector Rajeevgandhi Hanumanthu takes charge as the special officer of GWMC

works were taken up at Bhadrakali bund, Warangal fort, Dargha Kazipet and Padmakshi Gutta. ₹400 crore out of the ₹900 crore sanctioned under the CM's special fund were released and various development works are underway.

In the past five years, four commissioners represented the GWMC. As of 15 March 2016, Sarfaraz Ahmed was working as the commissioner. Later Sruthi Ojha, Ravi Kiran, and presently Pamela Satpathy worked as the commissioners. The first mayor of the GWMC Nannapuneni Narendar later contested the Warangal East Constituency and won the assembly seat. Corporator of division 26 Gunda Prakash was made the Mayor in 2019.

Previously, the WMC was placed under the special officer's rule under several occasions in 1995, 2000, 2005 and then from 2010 to 2016 until the current body took over.

RELEASE GWMC POLL SCHEDULE, DEMANDS PADMA

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 15

The KCR government has been making lame excuses for a long time and procrastinating the elections to the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) for fear of the BJP, said the party Warangal Urban district president Rao Padma.

If the government is really sincere, the election schedule should be released immediately, she demanded.

The TRS government was trying to further delay the delimitation of divisions under the GWMC by playing the leak drama of the wards.

"The government held the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) elections six months before the tenure. Why is the schedule not been released yet even after the Warangal Corporation period has expired?" she asked.

She demanded that the government hold immediate elections if it is really sincere about the development of Greater Warangal.

Vinay Bhaskar promotes biking for pollution free city

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 15

Rooting for a pollution-free Warangal, government Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar has been campaigning to promote the usage of bicycles by the citizens.

To this effect, he has been riding a bicycle to attend official meetings and also inspect the development works in the city apart from taking part in awareness cycle rallies.

"I decided to take up cycling to raise environmental awareness among the people and to create awareness about environmental protection. In the past, we have cycled to municipal council meetings as well as other events to raise awareness among the public. As a result of such programs, environmental pollution will be reduced and our Warangal city will become a healthier and greener city," Vinay said.

From young children to the elderly, obesity, high cholesterol, BP, sugar, etc., are the health problems that are being faced these days. Cycling is the best way to keep such diseases in check



Chief whip Vinay Bhaskar takes part in an awareness cycle rally with citizens in Warangal.

and achieve perfect health. Even the GWMC has laid new cycling tracks as part of the smart city mission to encourage the citizens, he added.

"In the current high-tech life, cycling is considered by many to be a disgrace. People are using a motorcycle or a car even to go to a grocery store in the colony. The result is a huge increase in petrol consumption and traffic problems," the MLA from Warangal West Constituency said.

In view of the coronavirus pandemic, the practice of cycling has caught the interest of the citizens chasing

health consciousness. Evidently, the number of bicycles going on sale too has seen a rise post lifting of the lockdown in May last year. Sambaiah, manager of Ramakrishna cycle store in Warangal said there was a significant increase in the number of bicycles being sold by them in the past few months.

"Earlier, the majority of our customers included those buying bicycles for their school-going children. However, now even the adults are coming forward to buy bicycles for themselves and ride as part of their daily workout," he said.

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Tense in Mahabubabad after poll day clash

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 15

Tension prevailed in Mahabubabad a day after the BJP and TRS party activists clashed at Nellikuduru during the polling on Sunday. Several BJP and TRS leaders were arrested by the police in connection with the clashes.

Section 144 was implemented in the district as

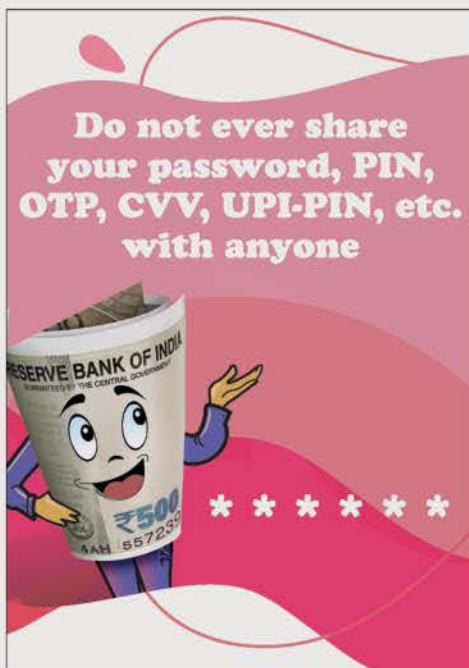
part of the MLC election code. Police also house arrested other BJP leaders and set up a heavy picket near the Mahabubabad MLA Shankar Naik Banoth Shankar Naik's camp office. However, the BJP activists charged towards the office raising slogans against the MLA. District BJP president Ram Chander Rao held Shankar Naik responsible for the clash

on Sunday and demanded the police to take action against him. The police obstructed and arrested 20 activists along with him.

Superintendent of police N. Koti Reddy said a case has been registered against the leaders of both parties. "The case is under investigation by the Thorur DSP Venkataramana. The culprits who caused the

violence would be brought to law," he said. Mahabubabad Municipal Vice Chairman Md. Fareed asked the BJP leaders to stop instigating the TRS activists and not to test their patience. He warned of dire consequences if such incidents are repeated.

BJP former MP Jitender Reddy said the TRS is resorting to 'jungle raj' in the state.



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SHORT TAKES

ANTI-KAMAL NATH LEADER EXPELLED FROM CONGRESS

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 15

AICC member Manak Agrawal who has recently criticised head of Madhya Pradesh Congress Kamal Nath for inducting a “supporter” of Mahatma Gandhi’s assassin Nathuram Godse in the party, was on Monday expelled from Congress on charges of ‘anti-party activities’ and indiscipline.

The development has brought to the fore ‘growing rift’ between Nath and Congress veteran Digvijay Singh since Agrawal was considered staunch loyalist of the latter.

The disciplinary committee of Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) which met here on Monday decided to expel Agrawal from the primary membership of the party for six years, a statement issued by PCC vice-president Chandrabhas Sekhar said.

Agrawal, however, cried foul saying that PCC was not empowered to take action against him since he was an AICC member.

He said he has done nothing wrong in disapproving party leadership’s decision to induct Godse’s supporter Babul Chourasia, a leader of Hindu Mahasabha, in Congress.

Congress spokesman here Narendra Singh Saluja however indicated that Agrawal was removed from the party for indulging in anti-party activities in the 2018 Assembly elections in MP.

BSP TO CONTEST ASSEMBLY POLLS IN 3 STATES, UT

Lucknow, March 15: Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati on Monday asserted that her party will contest the Assembly elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry on its own, saying the BSP has had a bitter experience of aligning with other parties in the past.

She also stated that her party will go alone in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections next year.

“We are working internally on the elections. We do not reveal our strategy. The BSP will contest on all the 403 Assembly seats in UP and will perform well. The performance of the party will be good in the panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh,” she told reporters at an event to pay tributes to BSP founder Kanshi Ram on his 87th birth anniversary.

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said her party has had a bitter experience of aligning with other parties in the past.

“The experience of our party forging an alliance with others has not been good. Our party leaders, workers and voters are highly disciplined. This is not the case with other parties of the country. In an alliance, our votes are transferred to the other party, but the votes of the other party are not transferred to us,” she said.

DHINAKARAN MOVES COURT IN AIADMK CASE

Chennai, March 15: AMMK leader T.T.V. Dhinakaran on Monday filed a memorandum before a city court, where a case challenging the resolutions adopted at the general council meeting of the AIADMK in September 2017 was pending, to detach him from the case.

Recording the same, the judge A.R.V. Ravi adjourned the matter to April 9 with a direction to the original petitioner, late chief minister J. Jayalalithaa’s confidante V.K. Sasikala, to inform the court of her stand on the issue.

The 2017 general council had expelled Sasikala and Dhinakaran as the party’s interim general secretary and deputy general secretary, months after she was convicted in a disproportionate assets case and then rival leaders, Chief Minister K. Palaniswami and his current deputy O. Panneerselvam, merging their led respective factions.

Originally, Sasikala moved the Madras High Court to declare the resolutions adopted at the general council meeting as null and void.

She also sought the court to declare Palaniswami, Panneerselvam, minister Dindigul C. Srinivasan and senior leaders S. Semmalai and E. Madhusudhanan as not members of the AIADMK.

‘Titans’ of TN politics file nominations

Palaniswami, Stalin, Dhinakaran, Kamal Haasan were among the many candidates who filed papers

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 15

The heavy rush for filing of nominations on Monday, an auspicious day in the Hindu calendar, saw more than 100 candidates for the April 6 Assembly elections submitting their papers with their respective returning officers across the state, including all the Chief Ministerial candidates.

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami (Edapadi), DMK president M.K. Stalin (Kolathur), AMMK general secretary T.T.V. Dhinakaran (Kovilpatti), Naam Thamizhar Katchi founder Seeman (Thiruvottiyur) and Makkal Neethi Maiam president Kamal Haasan (Coimbatore South) were among the hordes of candidates who filed their papers.

Most of the AIADMK minister nominated to contest the elections, Speaker Dhanapal, BJP state president L. Murugan, DMK Youth Wing secretary



DMK president M.K. Stalin arrives to file his nomination papers for the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections in Chennai on Monday. — PTI

Udhayanidhi Stalin, BJP national women’s wing president Vanathi Seenivasan also did not miss on the auspicious day. Soon after filing his nomination to contest from

Kolathur constituency in Chennai, Stalin left for Thiruvavur to launch his campaign from the birth place of his father the late M. Karunanidhi. He took a chartered flight to Trichy

to reach Thiruvavur.

Kamal Haasan, too, took a chartered flight to Coimbatore from Chennai, where he landed in the morning by a helicopter. He had boarded the helicopter fr-

om Kanchipuram, where he had stayed overnight after a campaign drive. Haasan’s helicopter landed at 11.30 am in Chennai and the flight to Coimbatore took off at 12.00 noon.

Shah mocks Didi’s campaign in wheelchair

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 15

Rubbing salt into the wounds of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Union home minister Amit Shah on Monday raised doubts on her claim that she was attacked as part of a conspiracy and teased the injured Trinamul supremo for resuming her poll campaign in a wheelchair and then wished her a quick recovery.

Shah, however, cancelled his attendance in person at the first of his two campaign rallies for the BJP candidates in the first phase of polls on March 27, blaming a snag in his helicopter in wake of a miserable turnout in Jhargram and addressed it virtually.

Mocking the CM in his second rally at Ranibandh in Bankura he said, “I apologise to you for my delay in reaching here. My helicopter developed a glitch. But I am not going to complain that there was a conspiracy in it. The helicopter malfunctions sometimes.”

He added, “I have seen Mamata suffered leg injuries. Didn’t you see it? How she got injured is yet to be ascertained. A probe is underway. TMC is crying of a ‘big conspiracy’ to leave her injured. But the EC has already called it an accident, not an attack. God knows who is speaking the truth.”

He also wondered, “Didi, you have got hurt and sad and you have started roaming around in a wheelchair. I want to ask her if she knows the pain of our 130 party workers who were killed in her politics of violence or not while she feels the pain of her leg injury? Weren’t the victims someone’s father or son or brother or husband? Didn’t they feel pain while dying? People of Bengal will give her their reply in votes this time. I pray to God for your quick recovery. But it would have been better if you felt pain for the 130 slain.”



Union home minister Amit Shah being felicitated during a programme Agramami Assam, ahead of Assam Assembly elections, at the Srimanta Sankaradeva International Auditorium in Guwahati on Monday. — PTI

MLA Debashree Roy quits TMC

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 15

The Trinamul Congress continues to bleed with desertions as another heavyweight MLA, Debashree Roy, on Monday quit the party while keeping the door ajar for her switch to the BJP at a time the saffron party is also hit by a revolt within over distribution of tickets to TMC turncoats.

Sending her resignation letter to TMC president Subrata Bakshi, the two-time legislator from

● **THE ACTOR-TURNED-POLITICIAN’S** exit from the TMC came a day after former Kolkata Mayor and TMC turncoat Sovan Chatterjee quit the BJP.

Raidighi in South 24 Parganas later alleged, “I had many complaints which were ignored. So I quit. If the BJP approaches me, I will look into the possibility.”

The actor-turned-politician’s exit from the TMC came a day after former Kolkata Mayor and TMC turncoat Sovan

Chatterjee, whom she was earlier very close to, quit the BJP alongwith his close friend Baishakhi Banerjee for not getting a ticket.

In fact, Roy tried to enter the BJP when Chatterjee and Baishakhi went to join it in August of 2019. But her chance diminished as Chatterjee, prompted by Baishakhi, strongly objected to her induction to the BJP and made it clear to the saffron party that they would not join if Roy was inducted.

During the day the BJP

workers laid a siege at their election office in Hastings of South Kolkata protesting against the distribution of tickets to TMC turncoats Rajib Banerjee at Dumjir and his aide Mohit Ghati at Panchla. They broke barricades and demonstrated in front of BJP vice-president Mukul Roy and Barrackpore MP Arjun Singh.

At Uttarpara in Hooghly where another TMC turncoat Prabir Ghoshal got a ticket, BJP supporters circulated posters against him.

Twitter to bring back #HerPoliticalJourney video series for women leaders

Twitter reveals plan to tackle poll-related ‘talk’

● **MEASURES INCLUDE** an information search prompt with the ECI and SEC to provide reliable information around the elections.

series of initiatives focussed on encouraging informed and healthy conversations between citizens, political parties, citizens, media, and society,” it said in a statement.

“The measures include an information search prompt with the Election Commission of India (@ECISVEEP) and State Election Commissions to provide reliable information around the elections,

a custom emoji to encourage participation, a series of pre-bunks and debunks to tackle election-related misinformation, and a youth discussion series titled #DemocracyAdda aimed at voter literacy and civic participation among young Indians for the upcoming elections.

These will be activated across six languages including English, Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Assamese and Malayalam, in order to cater to audiences across India.

Additionally, to put a focus on women in Indian politics, the service would be bringing back

#HerPoliticalJourney, a video series where women political leaders share their personal stories with leading women news journalists.

It is pertinent to mention here that voting for five Assembly elections will begin on March 27, with West Bengal hosting eight phases over a month. Counting of votes in the four states and one union territory will take place on May 2.

Twitter India public policy and government manager Payal Kamat said that public conversation is critical during elections, and “Twitter is where this

unfolds”. “With digital penetration accelerating in India, more people now have access to credible, authoritative and timely information — crucial tools for exercising their civic rights. By leveraging the power of the open Internet, we are encouraging people across India to be a part of the #AssemblyElections2021 conversation,” Kamat said.

Kamat thanked the Election Commission of India, the State Election Commissions for their support, and hoped that the platform’s efforts would “contribute to

healthy and vibrant civic dialogue”. Elaborating on the initiatives, Twitter said the information search prompt would make it easy to find credible and authoritative information about candidate lists, voting dates, polling booths, and EVM voter registration, among other election-related topics.

The custom emoji is aimed at stimulating participation in election-related discussions. Featuring an inked finger to represent a citizen who has exercised their right to vote, the emoji is available till May 10, 2021. — PTI

Pinarayi to contest from Dharmadom

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 15

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan filed his nomination papers from the Dharmadom Assembly constituency at the Collectorate in Kannur on Monday.

The Chief Minister, who is contesting for the second time from Dharmadom, took all Covid-19 safety measures including face shield, mask and gloves while filing the nomination papers. He was accompanied by senior CPM leaders including CPM Kannur district secretary M.V. Jayarajan.

Vijayan, 75, was elected from Dharmadom constituency in 2016 Assembly polls with a big margin of 36,905 votes. While he secured 87,329 votes, his

nearest Congress rival Mambaram Divakaran bagged 50,424 votes. The BJP candidate was way behind with just 12,763 votes.

While the Congress-led UDF is yet to finalise its candidate, the BJP has fielded its former state president C.K. Padmanabhan this time with the objective of putting up a better show. Earlier the UDF had planned to field Forward Bloc national secretary G. Devarajan against the Chief Minister.

However, the Forward Bloc leadership refused to contest from Dharmadom constituency citing ideological issues involved in taking on the top Marxist leader. Moreover, Forward Bloc is a constituent of the Left Front comprising CPM, CPI, RSP at the national level.



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

CONGRESS WILL DESTROY INDIA, SAYS SHIVRAJ

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MARCH 15

Bogged down by growing polarisation of Muslim votes, the BJP leaders have launched a frontal attack on Congress party accusing them of following the “footsteps of Jinnah” instead of Mahatma Gandhi in the ensuing Assam Assembly polls.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan who addressed three rallies in Upper Assam on Monday said, “Congress is not following in Mahatma Gandhi’s footsteps. Congress and Rahul Gandhi are following in Jinnah’s footsteps. And Jinnah’s steps will destroy Assam and India.”

Referring to the Congress alliance with AIUDF in Assam, Chauhan while addressing a public rally at Naharkatia in Dibrugarh district said, “Congress has allied with Badruddin Ajmal, who has filled Assam with infiltration... He has a perfume business, but is spreading poison in the society... If ‘naagraj’ or ‘saapraj’ ally, then Assam cannot be developed.”

LATHIKA MAY CONTEST AS INDEPENDENT

Thiruvananthapuram, March 15: Former Mahila Congress president in Kerala Lathika Subhash, who resigned from the post and tondured her head hurt over the denial of election ticket, on Monday said she would take a “decisive decision” about her political future this evening.

Her statement comes amidst widespread speculation that she would contest as an independent candidate from Ettumanoor, her hometown, in the April 6 Assembly polls.

“I will make a decisive decision about my future plan this evening. I am discussing it with my supporters and well-wishers. I cannot say anything about it right now,” Subhash said.

Sources close to her said the woman leader was likely to resign from her primary membership in the Congress party to contest from Ettumanoor constituency, the seat from where she had been keen to contest on the party ticket in the upcoming elections. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

JUSTICE FOR WOMEN: AUSSIES RALLY AT PARL

Canberra, March 15: Australians rallied in the capital and other cities Monday demanding justice for women and calling out misogyny and dangerous workplace cultures as the government reels from two rape allegations.

Outside Parliament House in Canberra, the crowd of hundreds was mostly female and most wore black. They carried placards, including "Justice for Women" and "Men, Own Your Guilt." Prime Minister Scott Morrison refused organisers' demand that he address the crowd. He agreed to meet a delegation of protesters in his office, but a meeting didn't take place.

ASTRAZENECA VAX: FRANCE STOPS USING IT

Paris, March 15: French President Emmanuel Macron says that France is suspending the use of the AstraZeneca Coronavirus vaccine out of precaution. Macron told a news conference Monday that French authorities have decided to suspend shots at least until Tuesday afternoon, when the European Medicines Agency will issue its recommendation over the vaccine. He didn't elaborate on the reasons for the decision. He said France hopes to be able to vaccine again with AstraZeneca shots "soon." Other countries, including Germany, on Monday said it would temporarily halt its use as a precaution amid reports that some people developed blood clots after receiving the shot. AstraZeneca and global health authorities insist the shot is safe.

WOMAN REJECTS MASK AT BANK, TO BE NABBED

Galveston (US), March 15: An arrest warrant was issued for a woman who refused to wear a mask at a Texas bank, saying to a police officer: "What are you going to do, arrest me?" Police have issued a warrant for the arrest of Terry Wright, 65, of Grants Pass, Oregon. The incident on Thursday at a Bank of America in Galveston was captured by the officer's body camera. Police say they've obtained an arrest warrant on resisting arrest and criminal trespassing charges. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott on Wednesday ended statewide orders requiring people to wear face masks in public places, declaring that businesses should decide for themselves what Covid-19 precautions to take on their properties.

SANDSTORM IN CHINA: FLIGHTS CANCELLED

Beijing, March 15: China's capital and a wide swath of the country's north were enveloped Monday in the worst sandstorm in a decade, leading to the cancellation of hundreds of flights. Skyscrapers in the centre of Beijing appeared to drop from sight amid the dust and sand. Traffic was snarled and more than 400 flights out of the capital's two main airports were cancelled before noon. Such storms used to occur regularly in the springtime as sand from western deserts blew eastwards, affecting areas as far as northern Japan. Massive planting of trees and bushes in fragile areas has reduced the storms' intensity, but the expansion of cities and industries has put constant pressure on the environment.

PRACHANDA TO DROP PARTY'S 'MAOIST CENTRE'

Kathmandu, March 15: Chief of Nepal's CPN-Maoist Centre (MC) Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" has proposed to drop "Maoist Centre" from the party's name to make it acceptable for communist forces in the country, who do not like Maoism, to join it, according to a media report on Monday.

CPN-MC member Shiv Kumar Mandal said that Prachanda was always in favour of unity among all communist forces of the country and suggested that if dropping "Maoist Centre" from the party's name could unite these forces, then the party should be ready for that. The proposal came as CPN-MC faces the heat after the Supreme Court nullified its merger with CPN-UML led by PM K.P. Sharma Oli.

Martial law in 6 Yangon townships

Security forces have killed dozens in crackdown on resistance to last month's military coup

Yangon, March 15: Myanmar's ruling junta has declared martial law in six townships in the country's largest city, as security forces killed dozens of protesters over the weekend in an increasingly lethal crackdown on resistance to last month's military coup.

State broadcaster MRTV said Monday that the Yangon townships of North Dagon, South Dagon, Dagon Seikkan and North Okkalapa have been put under martial law. An initial announcement was made late Sunday saying two other townships Hlaing Thar Yar and neighbouring Shwepyitha were being placed under martial law.

At least 38 people were killed Sunday and dozens were injured in one of the deadliest days of the crackdown on anti-coup protesters, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, or AAPP, an independent group tracking the toll of the violence. Several estimates from other sources gave higher figures.

Complicating efforts to organise new protests as well as media coverage of the crisis, mobile internet service has been cut, though access is still available through fixed broadband connections. Mobile data service has been used to stream live video coverage of protests, often showing security forces attacking demonstrators.

It had been turned off only from 1 am to 9 am for



Anti-coup protesters display cards and shout slogan as they protest against the military coup in Mandalay, Myanmar, on Monday.

— AP

several weeks, with no official explanation.

The blockage of internet service forced postponement of a court hearing in the capital, Natogyi, for Myanmar's detained leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who was supposed to take part via a video conference, said her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw.

Suu Kyi and President Win Myint were detained during the February 1 military takeover, and have been charged with several criminal offences that th-

their supporters believe are politically motivated to keep them locked up.

Since the takeover six weeks ago, Myanmar has been under a nationwide state of emergency, with its civilian leaders ousted and detained, and military leaders in charge of all government. But Sunday's announcement was the first use of martial law since the coup and suggested more direct military control of security, instead of local police.

The announcement said

that the State Administrative Council acted to enhance security and restore law and order, and that the Yangon regional commander has been entrusted with administrative, judicial and military powers in the area under his command. The orders cover six of Yangon's 33 townships, all of which suffered major violence in recent days.

Thirty-four of the deaths were in Yangon. Video from Hlaing Thar Yar township showed people running away after gun-

fire was heard at night-time. Those fleeing carried one injured person and tried to revive two others, one who seemed to be dead or dying, the footage from independent Democratic Voice of Burma showed.

Hlaing Thar Yar was the location of 22 civilian deaths Sunday, according to the AAPP, which said more than a dozen civilians were wounded and described a large number of junta forces engaged in the township.

— AP

China on Quad: No need to form 'exclusive cliques'

Beijing, March 15: China on Monday criticised the Quad, saying no "small cliques" should be formed, as it accused some countries of trying to "sow discord" among regional nations by "hyping" the China threat and asserted that they will not succeed. Quad countries involving the US, India, Australia and Japan held their first virtual summit on Friday during which President Joe Biden told leaders of the coalition that a "free and open" Indo-Pacific is essential to their countries and vowed that his country was committed to working with its partners and allies in the region to achieve stability.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the virtual summit alongside Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. "Certain countries should shake off their Cold-War mentality and ideological prejudice, refrain from forming closed and exclusive small circles, and do more things that are conducive to solidarity and cooperation among regional countries and regional peace and stability," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a media briefing here.

He was answering a question about the first Leaders' Summit of the Quad countries and the reported remarks by US National Secretary Advisor Jake Sullivan that the four leaders discussed the

challenge posed by China and said all four believed the democracies could help compete with autocracy. "For quite some time, certain countries have been so keen to exaggerate and hype up the so-called 'China threat' to sow discord among regional countries, especially to disrupt their relations with China," Zhao said.

"However, their actions, running counter to the trend of the times of peace, development and cooperation and the common aspirations of the countries and peoples in the region, will not be welcomed or succeed," he said.

"Exchanges and cooperation between countries should help expand mutual understanding and trust, instead of targeting or harming the interests of third parties," he added. Zhao also reacted angrily to reported remarks by US Defence Secretary Lloyd J. Austin that the goal of the US and its key allies is to ensure that they have the capabilities, operational plans and concepts to offer credible deterrence to China or anybody else who wants to take on America.

"In the era of globalisation, forming enclosed small cliques with ideology as the yardstick is the sure way to destroy the international order and after all, it is unpopular and will end in total failure," Zhao said. "The United States should treat China and China-US relations in a right mentality," he said. — PTI

Women power at Grammys as Beyonce, Swift win big

Los Angeles, March 15: Women artists were the big winners in the usually male-dominated top categories at the 63rd Grammy Awards was Beyonce, Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish made history with their trophy haul. The pandemic may have dimmed some of the lustre of the ceremony, held in a hybrid manner at the Los Angeles Convention Center with Covid-19 protocols in place, winners and performers ensured entertaining evening.

The ceremony, considered to be music's biggest event, has often been criticised for sidelining female artists in top categories, but the 2021 edition turned out to be a departure from that as Beyonce became most awarded female artist in Grammy history.

With 28 Grammy wins in

- THE NOMINATIONS were announced by Chopra Jonas and her pop star husband Nick Jonas from London. Chopra Jonas, 38, said announcing the nomination herself "made it so much more special". "So so proud," she added.
- ACTORS PRIYANKA Chopra Jonas, Rajkummar Rao and Adarsh Gourav on Monday celebrated the nomination of their film "The White Tiger" in the best adapted screenplay category at the upcoming 93rd edition of Academy Awards.

total, Beyonce broke the record set by veteran singer Alison Krauss. She trails only classical conductor Sir George Solti, who still holds the all-time record with 31 Grammys. She was nominated in nine categories and won in four, including best rap song with Megan Thee Stallion for "Savage" remix, Best R&B perform-

ance for "Black Parade" and best music video for 'Brown Skin Girl'.

"As an artist, I believe it's my job and all of our jobs to reflect the times. And it's been such a difficult time. And so, I want to uplift, encourage, and celebrate all the beautiful Black queens and kings that continue to inspire me and inspire the whole

world," she said. Beyonce also congratulated her nine-year-old daughter Blue Ivy Carter, credited as a collaborator on the song, for becoming the second youngest act to win a Grammy in the show's history following Leah Peasall's win at the age of eight in 2002.

"I know my daughter is watching... Blue, congratulations, she won a Grammy tonight. I'm so proud of you. And I'm so honored to be your Mommy," she added. Swift, who gave her first ever Grammy performance in five years singing a medley of songs from her albums 'Evermore' and 'Folklore', had a memorable year at the music gala. She won the album of the year for 'Folklore', becoming the first female artiste to win the top honour thrice. — PTI



Andrew Cuomo

BIDEN DECLINES TO CALL FOR CUOMO TO QUIT

Washington, March 15: President Joe Biden on Sunday passed up an opportunity to join other Democrats calling for the resignation of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who is under investigation after multiple allegations of sexual harassment.

Asked by a reporter if Cuomo should resign, Biden responded, "I think the investigation is underway and we should see what it brings us." Biden, who made the comments upon returning to the White House from a weekend at his home in Delaware, had not previously spoken publicly about the allegations against Cuomo.

However, his comments reflect the wait-and-see position the White House has taken regarding Cuomo's future. White House press secretary Jen Psaki would not say whether Biden believes Cuomo should resign. She said every woman who has come forward "deserves to have her voice heard, should be treated with respect and should be able to tell her story." She has said that the president supports the investigation. Several prominent New York Democrats, including Sens. Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, have called on Cuomo to step down. — AP

US, Japan in China-centric talks

Tokyo, March 15: Shared worry about China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region will take centre stage when President Joe Biden's defence chief and secretary of state visit Japan for their first in-person talks with their Japanese counterparts.

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived Monday, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken to join him later in Tokyo for meetings meant to reaffirm America's commitment to the region and to the two nations' alliance following former President

Donald Trump's more confrontational approach.

The two secretaries are holding so-called "two plus two" diplomatic and security talks on Tuesday with their Japanese counterparts, Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi. "The United States is now making a big push to revitalize our ties with friends and partners — both in one-to-one relationships and in multilateral institutions — and to recommit to our shared goals, values, and responsibilities," Blinken and Austin

said in a piece published Monday in *The Washington Post*.

The US and others share the values and principles of keeping an open Indo-Pacific region, but China is "all too willing to use coercion to get its way," the two ministers said. "Here again, we see how working with our allies is critical."

The United States will lead with diplomacy, maintain America's military might "and renew our alliances and ensure they're fit for purpose to address the threats and

opportunities of our time," Blinken and Austin wrote.

Together they can hold China accountable for its human rights abuses and other problems in Xinjiang, Tibet, as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan, they said. In a move meant to signal his intention for the US to return to the Asia-Pacific region, Biden on Friday held a first summit of the leaders from Australia, Japan, India and the US known as the "Quad" virtually and emphasised Washington's commitment to the region. — AP

FORMAL | RESPONSE

Catholic teaching holds that marriage is intended for the sake of creating new life

Vatican bars gay union blessing, says God 'can't bless sin'

Rome, March 15: The Vatican decreed Monday that the Catholic Church cannot bless same-sex unions since God "cannot bless sin". The Vatican's orthodox office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued a formal response Monday to a question about whether Catholic clergy can bless gay unions. The answer, contained in a two-page explanation published in seven languages and approved by Pope Francis, was "negative". The decree distinguished between the church's welcoming and blessing of gay people, which it upheld, but not

their unions since any such sacramental recognition could be confused with marriage.

The Vatican holds that gay people must be treated with dignity and respect, but that gay sex is "intrinsically disordered." Catholic teaching holds that marriage, a lifelong union between a man and woman, is part of God's plan and is intended for the sake of creating new life. Since gay unions are not intended to be part of that plan, they cannot be blessed by the church, the document said.

"The presence in such relationships of positive

- POPE FRANCIS has endorsed providing gay couples with legal protections in same-sex unions, but that is in reference to the civil sphere, not within the church.

elements, which are in themselves to be valued and appreciated, cannot justify these relationships and render them legitimate objects of an ecclesial blessing, since the positive elements exist within the context of a union not ordered to the Creator's plan," the response said. God "does not and cannot

bless sin: He blesses sinful man, so that he may recognise that he is part of his plan of love and allow himself to be changed by him," it said. Francis has endorsed providing gay couples with legal protections in same-sex unions, but that is in reference to the civil sphere, not within the church.

Those comments were made during an interview with a Mexican broadcaster, *Televisa*, in 2019, but were cut by the Vatican until they appeared in a documentary last year. While the documentary fudged the context, Francis was referring to the posi-

on he took when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires and the country's lawmakers were considering approving gay marriage, which he and the Catholic Church opposed.

Then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio instead supported providing legal protections for gay people in stable unions through a so-called "law of civil cohabitation." Francis told *Televisa*: "Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God." Speaking of families with gay children, he said: "You can't kick someone out of a family, nor make their life miserable

for this. What we have to have is a civil union law; that way they are legally covered." In the new document and an accompanying unsigned article, the Vatican said questions had been raised about whether the church should bless same-sex unions in a sacramental way in recent years, and after Francis had insisted on the need to better welcome and accompany gay people in the church. In the article, the Vatican stressed the "fundamental and decisive distinction" between gay individuals and gay unions, noting that "the negative judgment on the blessing

of unions of persons of the same sex does not imply a judgment on persons."

But it explained the rationale for forbidding a blessing of such unions, noting that any union that involves sexual activity outside of marriage cannot be blessed because it is not in a state of grace, or "ordered to both receive and express the good that is pronounced and given by the blessing."

And it added that blessing a same-sex union could give the impression of a sort of sacramental equivalence to marriage. — AP

DECCAN Chronicle

16 MARCH 2021

Why does SC need relook at Places of Worship Act?

The Supreme Court's decision to seek the opinion of the Union government on a public interest litigation petition (PIL) challenging the validity of certain provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991 appears to be a legitimate legal procedure but one that calls for meticulous handling by all stakeholders.

The petition contends that Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the Act create an "arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date" for retaining the character of the places of worship or pilgrimage. Section 3 of the Act bars conversion of any place of worship of any religious denomination into a place of worship of a different section of the same religious denomination or of a different religious denomination; Section 4(e) says any legal proceeding with respect to the conversion of the religious character of a place of worship shall abate and that no such proceedings shall lie on or after such commencement in any court, tribunal or other authority. In effect, the religious character of all religious places in India is fixed as per their character on the day of Independence and no person can alter it, nor can a court

From the looks of it, the PIL is an innocent demand for justice but in fact it stands logic and the Constitution on their heads. Parliament had passed the law in the backdrop of the demolition of the Babri Masjid...

entertain a petition seeking an alteration. The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute was the only exception the law mentions.

Going by the petitioner, the law has closed the legal options of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs against illegal encroachment on their places of worship and pilgrimage. Interestingly, the petitioner, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, raises the point that the law is ultra vires several key Articles of the Constitution which deal with equality, discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, protection of life and personal liberty, freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion, freedom to manage religious affairs and protection of interests of minorities. Moreover, the PIL

argues, it violates the principles of secularism, which is an integral part of the Preamble and the basic structure of the Constitution.

From the looks of it, the PIL is an innocent demand for justice but in fact it stands logic and the Constitution on their heads. Parliament had passed the law in the backdrop of the demolition of the Babri Masjid by a group of religious fundamentalists and vandals (who were last year absolved of their crime by the trial court). The P.V. Narasimha Rao government, that was accused of being a silent spectator to one of the most barbaric acts Independent India has witnessed, enacted the law to prevent a repeat of the same. This was because the same elements which brought down the Babri Masjid, showing scant regard for the basic concepts of democracy such as respect for the rule of law and the sanctity of judicial orders were targeting other such structures as well.

Civilisations survive and thrive not by going back to history and righting everything that went wrong. After all, the scale changes with time. India definitely doesn't have the luxury to engage its several future generations on issues religious with a scale that surpasses time, ignoring poverty, ignorance and disease. The Supreme Court will do justice to itself, and to the people, by remembering this simple point.

Jagan is South's big star

From being a political upstart who intrepidly challenged the mighty Sonia Gandhi at the height of the United Progressive Alliance's stint in power at the Centre to the latest founder of a powerful regional party in the South, to one of India's youngest chief ministers, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has traversed an exciting and peerless journey, lickety-split, with remarkable ease.

With a sweeping win even before his first term as chief minister reaches its mid-point, reducing the Opposition Telugu Desam led by an experienced political giant of another era, N. Chandrababu Naidu, to rubble, Mr Reddy is now the undisputed political czar of Andhra Pradesh. But is he actually more than just that?

A cursory scan of South India's political map — read hot in parts because of the ongoing Assembly election campaigns — will find the answer is yes. At a time when several incumbent CMs and their challengers are fighting to etch the next episode of their career and destiny, Mr Reddy is sitting pretty on his people-gifted throne.

Karnataka's B.S. Yediyurappa is past his prime and Telangana chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao is battling intense anti-incumbency and an exceptional political challenge from the BJP. Kerala's incumbent chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan may be on the verge of making history as a rare instance of a front retaining power in that state, but as part of a political party and ideology without any larger national salience or relevance, he will remain a state-level leader.

In Tamil Nadu, M.K. Stalin's long wait may finally be over and his tryst with power may bring upon him the status of being a new icon in national politics from the south. But a big "if" stands between Mr Stalin and the results on May 2. In the context, Mr Reddy is now bigger and more than just the chief of the YSR Congress or the CM of Andhra Pradesh; he is the most powerful political leader in South India. He's also the creator of a new brand of politics whose best times may still be ahead: far, far ahead.

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KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
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DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax: 040-27805256

Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234

Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P.), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285

Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswararam Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilalapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433

Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennimudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

Coimbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph: 0422 2231255
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Subhani



As Afghan mess grows, India must be cautious



Anand Sahay

Far & Near

It is becoming apparent that the Americans are finding it hard to orchestrate their plan to get out of the Afghan quagmire. The way things are going, an outcome satisfactory to all is unlikely from the set of ideas that Washington has lately advanced.

In these circumstances, India must learn to do its own sums even as it seeks to be collegial. Its abiding interests in the Afghan theatre are self-evident. Its best bet is to align with the people of Afghanistan at a crucial juncture, and to develop working relations with key constituencies, banking on the goodwill it has earned.

The Biden administration's ideas were projected in a letter by secretary of state Antony Blinken to President Ashraf Ghani, and the so-called draft peace proposals canvassed by Zalmay Khalilzad, the US special envoy for Afghan Reconciliation, to enable constitution-making afresh (in a new order), shape post-US governance through an interim government to start with and pave the way for a comprehensive ceasefire.

Practically rejecting this line, President Ghani declared on March 6: "Transfer of power through elections is a non-negotiable principle for us." He said that he was ready to discuss free and fair elections "under the auspices of the international community".

"We can also talk about the date of elections and reach a conclusion," the Afghan President added, showing readiness to forgo more than half his term. His words were pithily reaffirmed by vice-president Amrullah Saleh, a redoubtable former intelligence chief, suggesting that this is a deliberated position — indeed, the articulation of an alternative formulation to America's.

While the response of the key Afghan political elites like former President Hamid Karzai, chairman of the country's reconciliation process Abdullah Abdullah, and others to the US proposals isn't developed yet, President Ghani's interjection can leave little doubt that the US plan is facing rough weather inside Afghanistan.

There are indications that the Karzai group gives little credence to guarantees for peace the regional powers may offer at America's behest at the proposed UN-led conference in Turkey. Also, it is not enamoured of the idea of an unelected "guidance council", or shura of theologians, to exist alongside government structures in the US scheme — virtually a vetoing authority that may give the Taliban a further edge.

After Mr Ghani's public stance, taken in the Afghan Parliament, on March 8, a US state department spokesman was quoted as saying that it was "too early to say how the peace process is going". This seemed a dose of realism after Mr Blinken's hectoring letter.

President Ghani is neither widely popular, nor known to be a consensus-builder, but he does represent the current Afghan Constitution which the US had helped fashion (along with then interim President Hamid Karzai) in 2004, and which New Delhi had gone to considerable lengths to back. The gains arising from this Constitution at the popular level are backed by the new generation of Afghans, the largest constituency.

The Blinken epistle favours a UN-routed conference in Turkey (a "Bonn 2" of sorts) of leading countries that ring Afghanistan (India included, though it doesn't have a border with that coun-

try), presumably to get them to agree to a "unified approach" on Afghanistan's future.

This is not only wispy, it is self-serving. Does the US seriously believe that Pakistan, China, Russia, Iran and India, besides America itself (the six countries Mr Blinken envisages will be at the table), can project a "unified approach" as "these countries share an abiding common interest in a stable Afghanistan"?

While Pakistan and China may be expected to be favourable to the Taliban outright, what the US is perhaps really saying is that Iran, India (and Russia) should lump it and accept the Taliban's hegemony in Afghanistan once the remaining American troops have exited. Even if India or Iran can develop a functional relationship with the Taliban in time, how realistic is this prospect in the immediate future?

The US of course already accepts the Taliban as the hegemon. That indeed was the basis for the earlier Trump administration to reach the Doha agreement with this Pakistan-nurtured politico-military outfit in February 2020, and the reason why the Biden administration is being openly solicitous of the group which continues to rain violence on the Afghan people.

In the American scheme, half of all official positions will go to the Taliban in the envisaged interim government. Not to put too fine a point on it, the logic of things suggests that so long as the last US soldier exits unharmed, it will matter little to Washington if the Taliban (with Pakistan's and China's support this time) seeks to

bludgeon the country into submission yet again.

Disregarding the promises it had given the US of a negotiated peace with the Afghan government, as a condition for the final withdrawal of American troops under the Doha agreement, the Taliban went on a spree of violence, killing thousands in the course of the past year, along with targeted assassinations.

This was to project its military prowess to strengthen its negotiating stance vis-a-vis fellow Afghans, and to suitably impress the Americans further. And yet, astonishingly, Mr Blinken's letter to President Ghani speaks of a "revised proposal" for a 90-day "reduction in violence" — not "ceasefire" — to pre-empt the Taliban's "spring offensive", an annual feature, presumably so that peace parleys (to aid the US) are not prejudiced.

The question to ask is whether the Doha accord survives as an instrument of any merit after a year of bloody Taliban violence. If not, are there lessons in this for the future? But uninterested, the US is headed for "Bonn 2", probably on March 27. Besides, with the participation of the US, Russia, China and Pakistan, and invitations to senior Afghan figures, including government leaders, an earlier "peace" conference is due on March 18, hosted by Moscow. There is unseemly hurry.

Negotiated settlement or not, a May 1 withdrawal agreed by the former US President is not off the table. On the first anniversary of the Doha accord, the Taliban threatened that "any attempt against the agreement" will end in "failure of talks". The thought must terrify the Americans. Equally, Afghan national security adviser Hamdullah Mohib has said that Kabul was against "imposing" the Doha accord on the people. Completely split perspectives.

Afghanistan is said to be the graveyard of empires, but it is also proving to be the breeding ground of ironies. Trophies are sought to be handed out to the most violent.

LETTERS

MLC ELECTIONS

A massive turnout of graduates to exercise their democratic right by voting is a good sign. The Election Commission's enrolment drive and easily accessible online registration made a difference. Further, a small step of curbing money power in the election system can give a good chance of a committed representative win.

M.G. Sai Baba
Hyderabad

MAMATA BANERJEE

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee should be appreciated for her will power to continue the campaign for Assembly elections on a wheelchair (*Didi shuns bed rest, renews campaign in wheelchair, DC, March 15*). This will send a strong message to all women of various ages to be bold and brave to fight against all odds, that they face in their daily lives, like eve teasing, stalking and so on.

Indira Agarwal
Secunderabad

COVID-19 CASES

The report 'Daily Covid cases double in 1 week' (*DC, March 14*) is a wake-up call for the state to step up preventive measures to arrest the spread of Covid-19. The government may initiate young 'Covid volunteers' to continuously sensitise people to use masks, observe social distancing and hand sanitation and washing.

G.V.N. Murthy
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Directive issued to police, administrators

NEW DELHI, MARCH 15.

Bangla Dosh, as East Pakistanis have been calling their troubled land was on the verge of unilateral independence today with Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announcing that he was taking over control from the military authorities.

Mr. Rehman made the announcement just a the ultimatum given by the Marial Law authorities to employees of defence undertaking. who had been staying away from work in response to his call for non-cooperation was about to expire.

He had earlier asked the employees to defy the ultimatum which threatened them with dismissal and imprisonment.

Aakar Patel



BJP has never spelt out what 'parivartan' it hopes to bring

In 2019, the BJP won 18 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal. It is hard to see why it will not win the Assembly elections now because it has so much more resources than the rest (more than 90 per cent of electoral bond money, which is the anonymous but legal funding by corporates to political parties, according to RTI reports) and also the power of the Central administration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised he will bring real change to West Bengal. Perhaps he will. The interesting thing to me is that his party has never defined what this "change" is.

Formed in 1951, the Jan Sangh/BJP manifestos move effortlessly back and forth from grand and formless expression like "national rejuvenation yagna" directly to things like running more trains with third-class compartments as opposed to air-conditioned ones, pushing the benefits of cow manure and asking linguists to introduce technical and scientific terms based on Sanskrit to replace English.

The party's ideologue, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, did not want the states to exist. In his Integral Humanism lectures, he had said: "According to the

first para of the Constitution: 'India that is Bharat will be a federation of states', that is Bihar Mata, Banga Mata, Punjab Mata, Kannada Mata, Tamil Mata, all put together make Bharat Mata. This is ridiculous." He did not tell us that if we removed the states, what mechanism of administration would come between the Union government and the village.

In the first manifesto, the party identified blackmarketing, profiteering and nepotism as the country's key problems. Over time, the Jan Sangh dropped all references to these problems without saying whether they had been solved or had become less relevant to the party.

On agriculture, the party was for "encouragement of the use of mechanical appliances in agriculture". However, later it said that "tractors will be used only to break virgin soil. Their use for normal ploughing purposes will be discouraged". (1954). This was because it was trying to protect oxen from slaughter.

In 1971, the Jan Sangh resolved to limit the maximum income of all citizens to ₹2,000 per month and the minimum to ₹100, maintaining a 20:1 ratio. It would continue working on reduc-

ing this gap till it reached 10:1, which was the ideal gap and all Indians could only have incomes inside this range based on their position. Additional income earned by individuals over this limit would be taken by the government. Residential houses in cities would be on plots that did not exceed 1,000 square yards.

In 1954, the party said that it would repeal the Constitution's first amendment that curbed freedom of speech by imposing "reasonable restrictions". However, after 1954, this demand disappeared from the manifestos.

Interestingly, the Jan Sangh also said that it would repeal preventive detention laws which it said were absolutely in contradiction to individual liberty. This promise was made repeatedly in the 1950s. In time, both the Jan Sangh and the BJP became the most enthusiastic champions of preventive detention and laws like UAPA.

Even though the idols were smuggled into the mosque in December 1949, there was no reference to Ayodhya or a Ram temple there in any manifesto from 1951 to 1980.

In defence policy, it wanted compulsory military training for all boys and girls, removal of licences for possess-

ing muzzle-loading guns (an eighteenth century weapon) and expansion of the National Cadet Corps.

Like "Atma Nirbhar Bharat", the Jan Sangh's swadeshi meant giving subsidies to local industries and tariff protection. Import of consumer goods and luxury goods would be discouraged. Labour rights, including strikes and lockouts, would be discouraged.

Culturally, the party was against alcohol consumption and called for nationwide prohibition. It wanted English to be abolished and replaced in all spheres by local languages, and especially Hindi.

There is no comment whether positive or negative on the Constitution, which was adopted months before the first Jan Sangh manifesto, or even about the ideals it represents. Dr B.R. Ambedkar had proposed modest changes to Hindu personal law, especially on the question of inheritance for women. He identified two dominant forms of traditional inheritance law and modified one of them to make inheritance fairer for women. In its 1951 manifesto, the Jan Sangh opposed this reform.

While it signals anti-Muslim intent, the Jan Sangh did not have the trans-

parency of the BJP and its open dislike of Muslims. The Jan Sangh was unable to express its majoritarianism as clearly and in as full-throated a fashion as the BJP was later able to.

This was because it lacked a specific programme on the back of which to mobilise anti-Muslim sentiment, such as the campaign against the Babri Masjid. It was not important as an issue all this time. The lack of a mass-mobilisation issue meant that the Jan Sangh remained a minor player, getting only a few seats in each election. In the last election it contested under its own name, in 1971, the Jan Sangh won 22 seats and seven per cent of the vote, making it only the fourth largest party in Parliament. It was only under Lal Krishna Advani, and then especially under Narendra Modi, that the BJP became the mass-based electoral force it has become, from the cadre-based party that was the Jan Sangh. It is remarkable that this should have been achieved in the absence of a coherent, consistent ideology and even a definition of what "parivartan" it stood for and would bring.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50395.08	-0.78
Nifty 50	14929.50	-0.68
S&P 500*	3,940.39	-0.07
Dollar (₹)	72.47	0.45
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.11	0.14
Euro (₹)	86.68	0.05
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,364.61	0.13
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.56	-0.95
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.201	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.607	-0.028

* As of 8:30 PM IST

WPI inflation rises to 4.17% on costlier food, fuel

The wholesale price-based inflation rose for the second consecutive month to a 27-month high of 4.17 per cent in February, as food, fuel and power prices spiked. The WPI inflation was 2.03 per cent in January and 2.26 per cent in February last year. After witnessing months of softening of prices, the food articles in February saw 1.36 per cent inflation. In January it was (-) 2.80 per cent.

₹2,000 notes not printed in last 2 years: Govt in LS



The Rs 2,000 currency notes have not been printed in the last two years even as the quantum of the note has come down, the Lok Sabha was informed. In a written reply, minister of state for finance Anurag Singh Thakur said 3,362 million currency notes of Rs 2,000 denomination were in circulation on March 30, 2018, constituting 3.27 per cent and 37.26 per cent of the currency in terms of volume and trade respectively.

Kia Motors names Hardeep Singh Brar as sale head

Kia Motors India said it has appointed Hardeep Singh Brar (48) as national head of sales and marketing, with immediate effect. Prior to joining Kia, Brar had served at Great Wall Motors, Maruti Suzuki, Volkswagen, General Motors and Nissan. He is a mechanical engineer.



Hardeep Singh

UAE-listed firms must have one female director

Listed companies in the United Arab Emirates must have at least one woman on their board of directors, the Securities and Commodities Authority said. The move, an amendment of a previous decision by the authority's board, is "in the context of keenness to empower Emirati women and encourage them to play a greater role in the boards of directors of listed companies," the SCA said.



Sector set to see PE/VC, FII interest Bill to hike insurance FDI cap placed in RS

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MARCH 15

In a move that would open further avenues for investors of insurance companies and attract considerable activity from private equity, venture capital firms and foreign institutional investors (FIIs), the finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday introduced a bill in the Rajya Sabha to increase the foreign direct investment (FDI) in the sector to 74 per cent from 49 per cent.

The Insurance Amendment Bill 2021 seeks to make changes in the Insurance Act 1938 to increase the permissible FDI limits. The bill has been cleared by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday.

Under the new structure, the majority of directors on the board and key management persons would be resident Indians, with at least 50 per cent of directors being independent directors, and a specified percentage of profits being retained as a general reserve.

Currently, most Indian promoters of insurance companies, namely public sector banks, NBFCs, corporates, need capital to fund their core businesses and would use the FDI opportunity to monetise their investments and sell their stakes to PEs, VCs or existing foreign joint venture partner.

In 2015, when the FDI limit was lifted from 26 per cent to 49 per cent, the



expectation was that the insurance sector would get fresh capital of Rs 25,000 crore, however, the actual infusion into the sector was just around Rs 5,400 crore, since the Indian promoters of existing companies monetised their investments by selling their stake to the foreign joint venture partners.

Also, the premise that higher FDI would increase insurance penetration appears faulty as despite 20 years of privatisation and raising the FDI limit, India's insurance penetration (life and non-life) languishes much below the world average. Life insurance premium as a percentage of GDP is 3.6 per cent in the country, way below the global average of 7.13 per cent, and in the case of general insurance, it is even worse at 0.94 per cent of GDP, against the world average of 2.88 per cent.

Karthik Srinivasan, senior vice president, group head-financial sector ratings, Icra said, "Instead of

promoters monetising their investments, if the capital is infused into insurance companies then that would help companies to scale up their business and increase insurance penetration.

"Barring a few companies, most other players have adequate regulatory capital as indicated by high solvency levels, but going forward since most are growing their protection business and with natural calamities and mortalities, pace of capital consumption can increase," added Srinivasan.

Ashvin Parekh, managing partner at Ashvin Parekh Advisory Services, said, "It is a long-awaited reform and should be welcomed as it would bring in about Rs 30,000 crore in the insurance sector over the next three years...Another important point is that since foreign capital can come in any form, we could also see activity from private equity, venture capital firms and FIIs."

MTAR TECH IPO INVESTORS STRIKE GOLD ON DAY 1

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 15

IPO investors in Hyderabad-based MTAR Technologies nearly doubled their investment on the company's market debut on Monday.

The company, which develops and manufactures precision components and critical assemblies for clean energy, nuclear, space and defence sectors, has raised Rs 597 crore in the public issue between March 3 and March 5.

MTAR shares listed at 82 per cent premium at Rs 1,063.90 on the BSE and at Rs 1,050 on the NSE against the public issue price of Rs 575. Later the share price rose further to more than double to Rs 1,154 in the intra-day trade, as there is no upper circuit filter applied on the debut day on any listing of shares through the initial public offering.

Finally, MTAR shares closed at Rs 1,082.25 on the BSE and at Rs 1,078.30 on the NSE, registering a gain of 88.22 per cent.

At the market close, the company's market capitalisation stood at Rs 3,328.96 crore on the BSE. Shares worth Rs 1637.79 crore were traded and on the NSE.

No proposal to bring petrol, ATF under GST: FM

New Delhi, March 15: Amid record-high fuel prices, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said there is no proposal before the government as of now to bring crude oil, petrol, diesel, jet fuel (ATF) and natural gas under the goods and services tax (GST).

When the GST was introduced on July 1, 2017, amalgamating over a dozen central and state levies, five commodities, crude oil, natural gas, petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF) were kept out of its purview given the revenue dependence of the central and state governments on this sector.

This meant that the central government continued to levy excise duty on them while state governments charged VAT. These taxes, with excise duty, in particular, have been raised periodically.

While the taxes haven't come down, a spike in global oil prices on demand recovery has pushed petrol and diesel to an all-time high, leading to demand for them be brought under the GST.

"At present, there is no

PRIVATISATION TO UNLOCK REAL VALUE OF PSUs: SITHARAMAN

New Delhi, March 15: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said efficient management and use of the latest technology by the private sector will help unlock the real value of CPSEs undergoing strategic sale and bring much higher dividends for the economy.

She said Niti Aayog had been mandated to identify and recommend CPSEs — which are not in the 'priority sector' — for strategic disinvestment, based on the criteria of national security, sovereign functions at arm's length, and market imperfections and public purpose.

These CPSEs are reckoned as 'low priority' for the government notwithstanding that they may be



Nirmala Sitharaman

profit-making companies. "The unlocking of real value through better/efficient management and use of latest technology by the private sector may bring much higher dividends for the economy as a whole in terms of growth, productivity and employment," Sitharaman said in the Lok Sabha.

— PTI

proposal to bring crude petroleum, petrol, diesel, ATF and natural gas under GST," Sitharaman said in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha.

She said the law prescribes that the GST Council shall recommend the date on which the GST be levied on petroleum crude, high-speed diesel, motor spirit (com-

monly known as petrol), natural gas and ATF.

"So far, the GST Council, in which the states are also represented, has not made any recommendation for inclusion of these goods under GST," she said.

The Council may consider the issue of inclusion of these five petroleum products at a time it considers appropriate keeping in view all the relevant factors, including revenue implication, she added.

Including oil products in GST will not just help companies set off tax that they paid on input but will also bring about uniformity in taxation on the fuels in the country.

Sitharaman has in recent weeks talked of inclusion of fuel under GST as well as Centre and states taking a joint call on cutting taxes to cushion consumers against the spike in retail prices.

To a separate question, her junior in the finance ministry, Anurag Singh Thakur said excise duty on petrol was Rs 19.98 per litre a year back and is Rs 32.9 now. Similarly, on diesel, the excise duty has been raised from Rs 15.83 to Rs 31.8.

— PTI

Market trims losses after sinking 1000 pts

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 15

The Sensex recovered from early blows partially after suffering close to 1000-points loss intra-day on poor domestic macro-economic data, surge in US bond yields and a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases in India.

The Sensex fell 993 points, drowning below the 50000 level to the day's low of 49,799.07, but later positive global cues from Asia and Europe helped in a pullback that helped the benchmark index to finally settle at 50,395.08, down by 397 points, or 0.78 per cent.

The Nifty-50 closed at 14,929.50, down by 101.45 points, or 0.67 per cent.

"Market was impacted adversely after February headline CPI inflation rose around 100 basis points to 5.03 per cent led by unfavourable base effect, higher vegetable



prices, higher energy and transportation prices and increase in core goods inflation," said Emkay Global Financial Services.

"Also the Index of Industrial Production lost momentum after rising for the previous two months, and in January 2021 contracted 1.6 per cent, dragged down by poor manufacturing activity and muted consumer demand."

Before the US Federal Reserve's Federal Open

Market Committee's scheduled meeting on March 16 and 17, the 10-year US treasury yield still ruled above 1.6 per cent, making equity investors cautious.

Both foreign portfolio investors and domestic institutions were net sellers of equities worth Rs 1,101.35 crore and Rs 749.71 crore, respectively.

"We saw selling pressure right from the word go and Nifty corrected sharply to breach 14,750 level during the day. The banking index was reeling under pressure and it seemed that bears have complete control today. However, the index started recovering gradually in the last couple of hours and managed to trim much of the intra-day losses and end well above 14,900," Ruchit Jain, senior analyst-technical and derivatives, Angel Broking said.

Govt to sell up to 16.12% in Tata Comm

New Delhi, March 15: The government on Monday said it will sell up to 16.12 per cent stake in Tata Communications Ltd (TCL) through an offer for sale (OFS) starting on Tuesday at the floor price of Rs 1,161 per equity share.

As part of its exit plan from Tata Communications (erstwhile VSNL), the government is initially offering to sell up to 2.85 crore equity shares representing up to 10 per cent of the total paid-up capital of the company.

The government may sell additionally over 1.74 crore equity shares representing 6.12 per cent of stake in Tata Communications as an over-subscription option.

The window for sale of shares for retail investors and for non-retail investors, including who choose to carry forward their unallocated bids, will be opened on March 17.

The government has reserved minimum of 25 per cent of the offer share for mutual funds and insurance companies sub-

ject to valid bids and 10 per cent for retail investors.

As per the shareholding pattern of TCL, the promoters hold 74.99 per cent in the company. Of this, the Government of India holds 26.12 per cent stake while Panatone Finvest holds 34.80 per cent and Tata Sons holds 14.07 per cent. The remaining 25.01 per cent is with the public.

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (Dipam) plans to sell its entire stake in TCL in the current fiscal. —PTI

Gail bifurcation plan dropped

New Delhi, March 15: The government is not considering any proposal to bifurcate state-owned gas utility Gail (India) Ltd, and the PSU is focused on a building pipelines to connect gas sources to consumers to accelerate gas usage, oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Monday.

Gail is India's biggest natural gas marketing and trading firm and owns 60 per cent of the country's 26,284-km gas pipeline network.

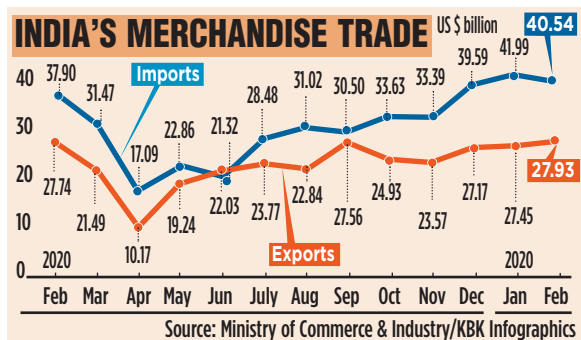
To resolve the conflict of a transporter also being the marketer, it was proposed that Gail's pipeline business should be hived

off into a separate entity. But the proposal has been dropped for now.

"There is no such proposal under consideration at present," Pradhan said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha. He said the share of natural gas in India's primary energy basket is targeted to be increased to 15 per cent by 2030 from the current 6.3 per cent.

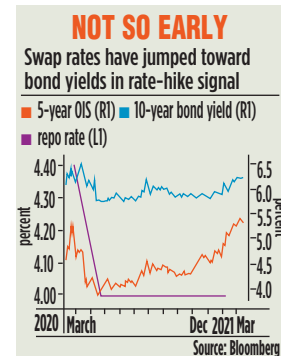
For this, the government is promoting the expansion of natural gas infrastructure—pipelines, LNG import terminals and city gas distribution network.

"GAIL is executing projects related to the expansion of gas infrastructure," he said. —PTI



Source: Ministry of Commerce & Industry/KBK Infographics

Market wrong on RBI rate-hike bets: Birla Sun

RAHUL SATIJA
MARCH 15

The growing market wagers about the most aggressive interest-rate tightening in India of any nation in Asia are wrong, according to Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC.

Five-year interest-rate swaps jumped to 5.42 per cent on March 8, the highest in more than a year, reflecting surging expectations of a tighter monetary policy, and were at 5.32 per cent on Monday. "Markets are mispricing quick rate hikes," said Maneesh Dangl, co-chief investment officer at Aditya Birla.

Dangl, who oversees Rs 1.8 lakh crore of debt assets (\$25 billion), expects the policy rates to remain low for longer as the central bank prioritises a nascent economic recovery over signs of perking inflation.

He also expects the Reserve Bank of India to keep the banking system awashed with liquidity to support the government's record borrowing programme.

The RBI's "compulsion is its inability to normalise its policy as markets have not adjusted to higher levels of government borrowings and are naturally demanding much higher term-premium than before," said Mumbai-based Dangl.

Rate-hike wagers are building around the world as expectations for growth and inflation gain ground. Swap rates are signalling India will see the most rapid tightening of any nation in Asia, according to Standard Chartered Plc.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Kapil is now PGTI board member

New Delhi: Legendary cricketer Kapil Dev was on Monday inducted as one of the board members of the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI), the sports body said.

Dev, who captained India to World Cup glory in 1983, said he would work for the development of golf in the country. "I thank PGTI for allowing me to be a part of their board. I am extremely happy to be a part of PGTI and will do my best to promote golf as a sport that is doing well and has the potential to become one of the most coveted tours in sports," Dev said in a PGTI release.

"...It is up to all of us to promote other sports including golf. I wish PGTI good luck for the upcoming events." Meanwhile, the Delhi-NCR Open Golf Championship 2021, to be jointly organised by the TATA Steel PGTI and Prometheus School, Noida, will begin at the Golden Greens Golf Club in Gurugram on Tuesday. The Pro-Am event will be staged on March 20. — PTI

Police hunt for Angel's robbers

Paris: French prosecutors have launched an investigation into a robbery at the home of Angel Di Maria after thieves broke in while the Argentina winger was playing for Paris Saint-Germain. Nanterre prosecutor's office secretary general Marion Chalaux told The Associated Press on Monday that the investigation is being handled by a special police unit dealing with armed robberies and serious burglaries.

The unit was already in charge of inquiries into similar cases linked to PSG players Mauro Icardi and Sergio Riccio, whose houses were also burgled during matches this year. Chalaux said intruders managed to sneak into Di Maria's home in the posh Parisian suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine on Sunday without being noticed.

According to *L'Equipe*, the thieves took watches and jewelry from a safe for an estimated loss of more than 500,000 euros (\$597,000). — AP

No fans at Oly torch relay start

Tokyo: Spectators will be barred from the start of the Tokyo Olympics torch relay, organisers said on Monday, announcing a pared-back launch as the countdown to the postponed Games begins in earnest.

Fans were told to stay away from next week's "simplified" starting ceremony and first leg of the nationwide relay, which was put on hold a year ago when the Olympics were delayed over the coronavirus. "The grand start ceremony and the first section of the Fukushima torch relay... Will not be open to the public," organisers said in a statement, adding that the festivities would be broadcast live online.

The announcement comes ahead of a decision on whether fans from overseas will be allowed to enter Japan for the postponed Games, expected to be taken before the torch relay begins on March 25. — AFP

B'day boy Curry lifts Warriors

Los Angeles: Golden State star Stephen Curry celebrated his 33rd birthday Sunday with a 32-point performance that propelled the Warriors to a 131-119 victory over the NBA-leading Utah Jazz and snapped a four-game skid. Curry got off to a sizzling start, connecting on 63 percent of his shots in a 14-point first quarter in which the Warriors seized a lead they wouldn't relinquish. He finished 10-of-20 from the field with six three-pointers. "It's like that ageing wine, right?" Curry said. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET
India vs England: Third T20 from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL
Champions League: Real Madrid vs Atalanta from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2; Manchester City vs Monchengladbach from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1

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ACTION REPLAY

Kohli & Co. look to take lead against England in 3rd T20

Ahmedabad, March 15: Their confidence soaring high after a resounding series-levelling win, India would look to build on their new approach of batting freely and fearlessly when they take on England in the third Twenty20, here on Tuesday.

The Men in Blue were off to a horrible start in the T20 series, suffering a demoralising eight-wicket loss in the opening match but turned the tables on England with a seven-wicket win in the second game.

In stark contrast from the first match, Virat Kohli and his men excelled in all departments.

The inclusion of Ishan Kishan, who made a sparkling debut with a 32-ball 56, allowed India to go ahead with their new approach that encourages batsmen to express themselves.

Despite losing K.L. Rahul in first over with no runs on the board, the 22-year-old was attacked from the word go, smashing Jofra Archer for a boundary in the very first ball he faced.

The hosts will also gain confidence from Kohli's unbeaten innings in the previous game as he took the side past the finish line, breaking a sequence of low scores.

The skipper did not have the best of times in the preceding Test series and also got out cheaply in the first T20. Both Kohli and Shreyas Iyer will target big scores.

The bowling department, which didn't have runs to defend in the opener, did a fabulous job to restrict England to 164. The biggest positive would be Hardik Pandya bowling four overs which allowed the hosts to go with an extra batsman.

The bowlers will look to replicate their good show from the last match where they found their rhythm.

What India would aspire is a better effort from Rishabh Pant, who has been promoted to number four ahead of Iyer. The big-hitting wicket-keeper has looked lethal in both outings but failed to capitalise on his starts.

India are unlikely to tinker with the winning combination save the return of star white-ball opener Rohit Sharma who is expected to be back in the side after being rested for a couple of games.

With Kishan faring well, Rahul, who looked out of sorts in both the outings, is expected to make way for Rohit.

The primary objective for India remains the same — to get an idea of the core group of players going into the ICC T20 World Cup in October.

England attack looked less threatening in the absence of Mark Wood, who missed the second T20 due to a bruised heel. However, skipper Eoin Morgan confirmed that the pacer will return in the next game. — PTI

India exposed our weakness: Eoin

Ahmedabad, March 15: India have exposed England's "weakness" in handling slow conditions but competing here will only prepare them well for the Twenty20 World Cup, feels skipper Eoin Morgan.

India drubbed England by seven wickets in the second T20 to level the five-match series 1-1 on Sunday night.

Morgan admitted they struggled to get used to the slow surface used for the second match.

"I suppose the difference was in the wicket we played and how we adapted. It was different wicket from the one we batted in the first game. The pitch was slow and low and one thing that does is expose our weakness on these surfaces a little bit," said Morgan at the post-match virtual media interaction on Sunday night.

"We don't play a lot on slow, low wickets and the more that we can do that, the better. You only become better in these conditions by playing in them and making mistakes."

The English skipper, however, said playing in such tough conditions ahead of the ICC World T20 later this year in India, will only help



India's K. L. Rahul at a practice session ahead of the third Twenty20 against England in Ahmedabad on Monday. — AP

IPL stint made Kishan fearless

Ahmedabad, March 15: Young batsman Ishan Kishan says having faced the best pacers from across the world during the IPL had given him the confidence to play fearlessly against England on his India debut.

Kishan's blistering 56-run knock at the top laid the platform for India's comfortable and successful chase in the second Twenty20 on Sunday night.

The 22-year-old left-hander acknowledged the contribution, the IPL stint has made in his growth as a batsman.

"It obviously helped to face the likes of Mumbai Indians teammates Trent Boult and Jasprit

In IPL you get to face quality bowlers from across the world and you start getting used to these bowlers. And I think that really helped me.
— ISHAN KISHAN
after his match-winning knock against England

Bumrah) in the nets. They are very pacy bowlers and to hit shots against them gives confidence," Kishan said at the post-match virtual press conference.

"In IPL you get to face quality bowlers from across the world and you start getting used to these bowlers. And I think that really helped me."

Kishan also said that the team management had backed him to play his natural game without feeling the pressure.

"Before the match I was told to go and open the innings and play freely the way I play in IPL. I was told not to take extra pressure. But it being my first game I was little nervous while going at the ground."

"But when you wear the jersey of your country that pressure simply goes away and you try to give your best."

The debutant was in awe of Virat Kohli during their 94-run stand and hopes to pick the brain of India skipper

NO SPECTATORS AS COVID CASES RISE IN GUJARAT

Ahmedabad, March 15: The remaining three T20 Internationals between India and England will be played here without spectators in the wake of rising Covid-19 cases, Gujarat Cricket Association vice-president Dhanraj Nathwani said on Monday.

"T20s on March 16, 18 and 20 will be played without audience at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. Refund will be given to the spectators who have purchased tickets," Nathwani stated.

"Due to rise in the number of Corona cases, we at GCA have decided, in consultation with BCCI, to hold the matches behind closed doors and not to allow spectators in the ground during T20 Internationals to be played between India and England at Ahmedabad," he added.

Nathwani said the GCA will form policy for refund of money to the spectators who have already purchased tickets for these three T20s.

"Those who have received complimentary tickets are requested, not to visit the stadium," he added. The BCCI and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) also issued their respective statements after the development.

"The BCCI will continue to comply with all the regulations put in place to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus and will always put the health and safety of its fans and stakeholders at the top," BCCI secretary Jay Shah said. — PTI

during the five-match series.

Chase master Kohli (73 not out off 49 balls) took charge after Kishan's dismissal to power India to victory with 13 balls to spare. "It was proud feeling for me because I had just seen him (Kohli) on TV, his attitude on the ground, but to see it from the other end is totally different. I think it is something which I can change in myself, his energy, his appearance on the ground, there is a lot to learn from him."

"The way he talks in the ground it takes pressure from you. I just want to make sure that I learn a lot from him in this series," Kishan said. — PTI

TON-UP BRAVO HELPS WINDIES SWEEP SERIES

North Sound (Antigua and Barbuda), March 15: Darren Bravo's fourth ODI century guided the West Indies to a five-wicket victory over Sri Lanka and a clean sweep of the three-match series here on Sunday.

Set another challenging target of 275, the home side's response was anchored by Bravo's innings of 102 off 132 balls highlighted by five fours and four sixes. He was the obvious choice as man of the match with Shai Hope the equally straightforward option as man of the series with the opener following earlier scores of 110 and 84 with an elegant 64 to set his team well on their way.

Sri Lanka, who made three changes to their team from the nail-biting loss in the second match two days earlier, fought to restrain a powerful West Indies batting line-up but in the end they were undone by the home side's wealth of talent and experience. — AFP

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 274/6 in 50 overs (W. Hasaranga 80 n.o.; A. Bandara 55 n.o.) lost to West Indies 276/5 in 48.3 overs (Bravo 102, Hope 64).

Escape to victory, MP archers' style

Kolkata, March 15: The brave-hearted Madhya Pradesh junior archers "achieved the impossible" by winning four medals in the Nationals Championships after miraculously escaping the Shatabdi Express train inferno on their way to Dehradun, their head coach said on Monday.

With less than an hour to reach Dehradun on Saturday, the eight-member recurve men's and women's team experienced the horror of being chased by black thick smoke and fire as they jumped to safety to the adjacent bogey.

But they lost all their belongings, right from their equipment to original documents including Aadhaar Card and birth certificates after their coach C5 was charred near Kansrao.

Starting from scratch with a new set of equipment that arrived in the wee hours of Sunday, the archers without any pre-match day practice concluded their campaign with two silver and one bronze in the recurve category and a team silver in the compound category earlier.

Class X student Sonia Thakur, who won two silver medals in the ranking round, went one step up advancing into the Olympic round on Monday as she nearly bagged a third but only to go down to her Haryana rival in a tightly-contested bronze playoff that was decided in a tiebreaker.

● **Madhya Pradesh archers miraculously escaped the Shatabdi Express train fire on their way to the national championships and, without any pre-match day practice, won three silvers and one bronze medal at the event.**

"They have achieved something impossible. Miracles like this do happen in sport," MP head coach Richpal Singh said from Dehradun.

Singh, who had reached with the compound team ahead of the recurve archers, remembers Saturday's ordeal vividly when he first learnt about the horrific incident.

"They were slated to reach in Dehradun at 12.55pm and we were to go for practice after grabbing a quick bite. But there was no phone calls as I dropped a message in our WhatsApp group and learnt about the trauma."

"The first thing I asked them was 'Are you all safe?' After hearing that they all are safe, our first job was to boost their morale and ensure that they stay focus on the competition the next day."

With a combined support from the MP state administration and Archery Association of India, they managed to get a new set of equipment ordered from Patiala. — PTI

Ronaldo hits back at critics with hat-trick

Milan, March 15: Cristiano Ronaldo hit back at his critics with a quick-fire hat-trick as Juventus brushed aside Cagliari 3-1 on Sunday, five days after their Champions League elimination, while Inter Milan moved nine points clear at the Serie A summit.

Portuguese star Ronaldo bore the brunt of the criticism for Juve's latest European flop after failing to score in either leg of the last-16 defeat by Porto, while also being partly at fault for what proved to be the goal which knocked them out. But the 36-year-old scored a header in the 10th minute at the Sardegna Arena, added a second from the penalty spot 15 minutes later, and completed a 'perfect' treble on 31 minutes with a fine left-footed strike.

Defending champions Juventus are 10 points behind leaders Inter Milan, who beat Torino 2-1 earlier Sunday, but with a game in hand.

Andrea Pirlo's side pulled just one point behind second-placed AC Milan, whose title hopes took a big hit following a 1-0 home defeat to Napoli.

"Our approach was spot on and it was important to get off on the right foot after being knocked out the other night," said Pirlo.

"Ronaldo was angry like the rest of the team. He reacted like a true champion." — AFP

ARSENAL EDGE SPURS, MAN UNITED ALSO WIN

London, March 15: Arsenal bounced back from Erik Lamela's stunning Rabona to open the scoring in the north London derby to beat Tottenham 2-1 on Sunday, as Manchester United and Leicester tightened their grip on a top-four finish in the Premier League.

United edged out fifth-placed West Ham 1-0 thanks to Craig Dawson's own goal to remain a point ahead of Leicester, who thrashed bottom-of-the-table Sheffield United 5-0. On a costly afternoon for Spurs' hopes of a top-four finish, Tottenham also lost Son Heung-min to a hamstring injury, while Lamela went from hero to villain for the visitors with a needless second-half red card.

Arsenal's afternoon did

not start well with captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang dropped to the bench for a breach of discipline, reportedly after turning up late for the squad's pre-match meeting.

West Ham missed the chance to move into the top four as former Man Utd boss David Moyes remains winless in 15 visits to Old Trafford as the opposition manager.

The Hammers' conservative approach was punished by one moment of misfortune eight minutes into the second half as Dawson turned a Bruno Fernandes corner into his own net.

Mason Greenwood also hit the post either side of half-time for United, who close the gap on league leaders Manchester City to 14 points. — AFP