

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | SATURDAY 6 | MARCH 2021

WEATHER



Max: 37°C
Min: 21°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Maasi 22
Tithi: Ashtami
Star: Kettai
Rahukalam:
9 am to 10.30 am
Yamagandam:
1.30 pm to 3 pm
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.14 am
Zohar: 12.27 pm
Asar: 3.34 pm
Maghrib: 6.18 pm
Isha: 7.29 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.19 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.23 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 12.17 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 11.59 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+17,632)	(+109)
1,11,91,204	1,57,693

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+ 543)
TN: 8,53,992 12,513

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

11,64,42,309

DEATHS

25,84,910

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

TN clocks 543 new infections, 5 fatalities

Chennai: Tamil Nadu on Friday saw its daily new infections crossing the 500 mark once again, the last being in early February, with 543 people testing positive for the virus, pushing the tally to 8,53,992 while five more deaths took the toll to 12,513. Recoveries, however, eclipsed new cases with 562 patients being discharged taking the cumulative number to 8,37,525, leaving 3,954 active cases in the state, a health department bulletin said. — PTI

Cumulative number of Covid vaccine doses given crosses 1.90 cr: Govt

New Delhi: The cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in India has crossed 1.90 crore with 10,34,672 vaccine jabs being given till Friday evening, the Union Health Ministry said. The countrywide vaccination drive was rolled out on January 16 with healthcare workers getting inoculated and vaccination of frontline workers starting from February 2. — PTI

PM calls for stepping up manufacturing in India

New Delhi: Bullish on the production linked incentive (PLI) scheme, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that the scheme which is aimed at boosting domestic manufacturing and exports, is expected to increase the country's production by \$520 billion in the next five years. Addressing a webinar, Mr Narendra Modi said that the Centre is continuously carrying out reforms to boost domestic manufacturing.

COUNTER

POINT



We have a tie up with one party, a secret pact with another, and an understanding with the rest!



RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATTA, MARCH 5

TMC'S LIST OF 291 RELEASED

Mamata to contest only from Nandigram

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATTA, MARCH 5

With high winnability rate in mind, Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee on Friday released a list of 291 candidates, that include actors, sportspersons and a former cop for the 294 Assembly polls that begin from March 27. The polls in West Bengal will be held in eight phases. The West Bengal chief minister is looking for a third term in the office and will contest from Nandigram. TMC has left three seats — Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong — for ally Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (Bimal Gurung faction).

Confident that her party will be back in power, as she gave out of an interesting list of candidates that include actors, sport-spersons and a former cop, Ms Banerjee challenged Prime Minister Narendra Modi led Bharatiya Janata Party campaigners saying: “*Khela hobey, dekha hobey, jita hobey*” (game is on: we will contest, will fight, will win).

The TMC has dropped 27 sitting MLAs mainly over the age of 80 leaving out finance minister Amit Mitra and minister for tech-



West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC Supremo Mamata Banerjee interacts with media during announcement of her party candidate list for upcoming State Assembly elections, at Kalighat in Kolkata, on Friday.

— PTI

nical education Purnendu Bose.

“I will contest from Nandigram only. I always keep my words. I won as MLA from Bhowanipore twice. If needed, I will fight from there again but later. Bhowanipore in any case remains in my grip. So it does not matter if I do not fight from here now,” Ms Banerjee said while announcing the name of her Cabinet colleague and state power minister Sovande Chatterjee as her replacement.

ment from Bhowanipore constituency.

Mr Chatterjee is a two time MLA from adjoining Rasbehari constituency.

The TMC candidates list has 51 women, 79 Scheduled Caste, 17 Scheduled Tribe, and 42 Muslim candidates who represent different sections of the society. Among the prominent names is retired IPS officer Mr Humayun Kabir, who had arrested 3 BJP workers for raising “*Goli Maaro*” slogans at a rally in Chandan Nagar. ■ P4

Corporal punishment is abuse: HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 5

The Madras high court has said corporal punishment amounts to abuse and militates against the freedom and dignity of a child.

Justice N. Anand Venkatesh made the observation while awarding ₹10 lakh as compensation to the father of a child, who died while undergoing corporal punishment of duck walk in a government aided school on January 17, 2018 in the city.

The post-mortem report stated that the death was due to natural cause and no exact cause of death can be opined.

However, the humane judge by applying his conscience theory awarded the compensation.

“When the matter came up for hearing on February 24, 2021, this court found that the materials collected by the prosecution did not make out any offence against the petitioners. It was a battle between the mind and the conscience. The conscience was not willing to

send away the 2nd respondent (father) with empty hands since he has lost his son in this case. This court felt that even though the petitioners may not have a legal obligation towards the 2nd respondent, the conscience of this court was insisting for at least imposing a moral obligation on the petitioners for the death of the son of the 2nd respondent”, the judge said and made the physical training teacher, head master and the correspondent of the school to pay the compensation. ■ P4

Pant hits century as India seize control

Ahmedabad, March 5: Rishabh Pant changed his game-plan and in turn India's fortunes with a magnificent century, helping the side snatch control from England's grip to finish the second day at a robust 294 for 7 in the final Test in Ahmedabad on Friday. England dominated the first two sessions and India looked in all sorts of trouble before Pant (101 off 118 balls) suddenly decided to catch the opposition by the scruff of their necks, effortlessly changing gears in company of Washington Sundar (60, 117 balls, 8x4). ■ P8

Rishabh Pant en route to his century against England in the fourth Test at Ahmedabad on Friday. >>> — BCCI



Path to Nasa started with watching Star Trek: Swati

Washington, March 5: Dr Swati Mohan, the Indian-American aerospace engineer, who played a pivotal role in the successful landing of Nasa's Perseverance rover on Mars, has told President Joe Biden that her path to the premier US space agency began when she watched the first episode of Star Trek as a child.

Swati is the guidance and controls operations lead for the Perseverance rover mission, acting as the “eyes and ears” for Nasa's most sophisticated spacecraft to date.

She played a key role in landing the US space agency's historic Perse-

rance rover on the Martian surface on February 18.

Swati was also the first to confirm that the rover had successfully touched down on the Martian surface after surviving a particularly tricky plunge through the atmosphere of the Red Planet.

Mohan, who emigrated from India to the US when she was only a year old, told Biden that her path actually started way back when she was a child, watching the first episode of Star Trek, the popular TV show.

“In addition to those fantastical scenes of space, what really captured my attention was this really

● **Interacting with Biden, Swati said, “You know, Perseverance is my first mission at JPL (Jet Propulsion Laboratory), where I've gotten to work from the very beginning of formulation, all the way through operations, and it made me feel like I was part of that crew”**



close-knit team which was working together, manipulating this technological marvel with the sole purpose of exploring space and understanding new things and seeking new life,” Swati told Bidenduring a virtual interaction on Thursday.

President Biden congratulated the Nasa team respon-

sible for the successful landing of the six-wheeled rover on Mars and for giving the country a “dose of confidence” at a moment when the nation's reputation as a scientific leader has been battered by the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden, speaking during a video conference call with

the leadership of Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) team led by Dr Michael Watkins, expressed awe over the landing of the Perseverance.

Interacting with Biden, Swati said, “You know, Perseverance is my first mission at JPL, where I've gotten to work from the very beginning of formulation, all the way through operations, and it made me feel like I was part of that crew.” “Being able to work with this incredibly diverse, talented team that has become like a family, spending years creating our own technological marvel has been a privilege,” she said. — PTI

the leadership of Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) team led by Dr Michael Watkins, expressed awe over the landing of the Perseverance.

DMK gives CPI ally six seats

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 5

The CPI signed a pact to contest in six constituencies for the April 6 State Assembly elections even as the DMK's tough bargaining continued on Friday with the other allies who are keeping their fingers crossed while remaining out of the negotiating table.

Hopes were expressed that all the allies will come around by Saturday as the coalition partners would be announced at a grand public meeting that the DMK is holding near Tiruchy on March 7, when functionaries at all levels would congregate to devise the strategy for the elections, but indications are there that the Congress was not happy with the low number of seats offered to them.

Even the MDMK and the CPM would be considering the proposals of the DMK only after holding meetings with their functionaries and cadre on Saturday. The series of meeting at the TNCC headquarters remained inconclusive with a tug of war between two groups

One group in the Congress did not mind the party making a compromise and settling down for a smaller number of seats, while the other group took a belligerent stand, saying that self-respect and honour were more important

● **The series of meeting at the TNCC headquarters remained inconclusive with a tug of war between two groups**

that winning a few Assembly seats in the elections.

The disenchanted cadre wanted their party to go it alone rather than accept the crumbs thrown at them by the DMK, though they were conscious of the results if the party went alone. However, TNCC president K S Alagiri and also MDMK general secretary Vaiko put up a brave front saying that the coalition was intact and that the hitches would be ironed out, though many Congress members felt shortchanged by the offer of the DMK.

Soon after signing the pact with the DMK, CPI State secretary R Mutharasan told the media that ideology was more important for his party than the number of seats and hence they agreed to contest in six constituencies.

As of now, the DMK has allotted two seats to the Manithaneya Makkal Katchi, three to the IUML, six to the VCK and another six to the CPI. The Kongu Makkal Katchi, the CPM and the Congress are yet to finalise the alliance. ■ P2

EPS sticks to his Edappadi seat, OPS to keep Bodi

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR
CHENNAI, MARCH 5

Amidst the ongoing hectic parleys to finalise the seat-sharing arrangement among alliance partners, the AIADMK officially announced its own first list of six candidates along with the constituencies in which they would be contesting the April 6 Assembly elections on Friday.

The announcement by the AIADMK head honchos, coordinator O Panneerselvam and co-coordinator Edappadi K Palaniswami, looked like the party cocking a snook at allies who were still haggling over the numbers and the constituencies of their choice with the coalition leader.

Piqued over the dimly small number of seats offered to the party, DMDK, the party founded by actor Vijayakanth, has almost suspended negotiations. The BJP was unable to arrive at a settlement as the AIADMK would not give the seats that it would like and the coalition leader taking six seats for itself came as a surprise.

All the six seats are the bastions of the party's top leaders: Bodinayakanur for Panneerselvam, Edappadi for Palaniswami, Royapuram for Fisheries Minister D Jayakumar, Villupuram for Minister C Ve Shanmugham, Srivakundram for SP Shanmuganathan MLA and Nilakottai (reserved) for S Thenmozhi MLA.

The early announcement of the constituencies was, perhaps, aimed at sending across a message to the alliance partners not to ask for them during negotiations. For the AIADMK's biggest headache has been the BJP demanding the seats that the ruling party has nurtured over the years and consider as its pocket boroughs.

The BJP feels that by grabbing the seats that are citadels of the AIADMK, they could easily win them and thus start their account in the State Assembly. But the AIADMK leaders who



AIADMK co-coordinator Edappadi K. Palaniswami and coordinator O. Panneerselvam come out of the party office in Chennai on Friday after announcing the first list of candidates for the Assembly polls. — DC

had taken the pains of endearing themselves to the voters in the last five or more years are not ready to hand them over to the BJP in a platter.

It is the tug of war that is delaying the finalising of the alliance pact between the AIADMK and BJP. The other parties, apart from the PMK that took the 23 seats given to it and quietly went away, are finding it difficult to accept the low sea allocation.

Be it the DMDK or the GK Vasan-led Tamil Maanila Congress, the small parties are particular about getting a certain number of seats in double digits, which is being declined by the AIADMK that wants to contest in a large number of seats like the DMK.

However, it is said that the BJP, playing Big Brother, was putting pressure on the AIADMK not to let any of the parties walk out on the alliance as it considers all the votes precious and imperative for the victory of its candidates, too.

It was due to such a view that every vote counted that the BJP wanted the AIADMK to let TTV Dhinakaran and VK Sasikala into the alliance. But the AIADMK managed to thwart that move effectively. Now the pressure is on to accommodate the DMDK, which refused to come for talks.

PMK promises 80% quota for locals in private companies

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 5

All government jobs would be for the people of the State, where private companies would be made to reserve 80 per cent of the jobs for Tamil Nadu youth, the PMK said on Friday.

The party that is contesting in 23 of the 234 constituencies in the State in the April 6 elections in alliance with the AIADMK would usher in revolutionary changes in various fronts, its manifesto said.

Listed under a plethora of categories, the manifesto had 167 promises for the people that included free education till 12 standard, the government bearing the cost of overseas education of eligible students, increasing the education budget and so on. It said IITs, IIMs, national law schools and such central institutions will have to reserve 50 per cent of the seats for the State's students.

Promising more government medical colleges, it said free health care would be provided for all, particularly women.

SHORT TAKES

Unaccounted cash seized near Ariyalur

DC CORRESPONDENT
ARIYALUR, MARCH 5

A flying squad seized unaccounted money of ₹5 crore at Sathamangalam near here on Friday, during a routine vehicle check. Official sources said the squad intercepted a State Bank of India vehicle which was proceeding to Ariyalur from Kumbakonam. On examination of the vehicle, the team found Rs 5 crore currencies kept without any valid documents, except the denomination details. Hence, they handed over the vehicle and the seized cash to RDO, Ariyalur, the sources added.

Stalin calls Tiruchy meet as 'a clarion call for a new dawn'

From P1

Meanwhile, DMK President MK Stalin gave a call to his cadre to put up a united fight against communal forces and invited his functionaries to the Tiruchy public meeting, which he has termed as 'a clarion call for a new dawn'.

Stalin said that the State had gone to ruin in the last 10 years of AIADMK rule and stressed on the need to revive it. He would also unveil a plan for the development of the State in the next 10 years, he said in a letter to cadre.

"The future of the darkened State of Tamil Nadu can be brightened only by the Rising Sun," Stalin said metaphorically referring to his party symbol. He listed out the various campaigns that the cadre should undertake to usher in DMK rule in the State.



A social activist creates awareness on the importance of 100 per cent voting with a huge index finger board in his hand at Goripalayam in Madurai. — DC



Chennai District Election Officer and Commissioner of the Greater Chennai Corporation G. Prakash distributes applications (Form 12B) for postal ballot to Covid-19 patients and those aged above 80 and people with disabilities on Friday. —DC

Chennai corporation commissioner issues strict warning

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 5

Corporation Commissioner G Prakash on Friday issued a strict warning to remove all wall writings, posters, cutouts, hoardings, banners and flags from the government and private property in the city limits ahead of TN

assembly elections.

The civic body which is the district election office for Chennai said the defacement of public property and misuse of public space with political advertisements in railway stations, bus stands, roadways, government buses, electric, telephones, local body build-

ings shall be prohibited. The commissioner in a press release said the defacement of private property including all advertisements displayed, subject to local law and court directions if any, shall be removed or stringent actions will be taken against the party, he said.

Old allies in Nellai district now turn AIADMK's foe

ARULOLI M | DC
TIRUNELVELI, MARCH 5

The traditional Mukkulathore and Thevar vote bank which remained loyal to the AIADMK since its inception by ex-chief minister late M.G. Ramachandran in 1972, is now drifting away from the AIADMK, thanks to the Edappadi K. Palaniswami-led government's hasty move to accord internal quota to the castes in the Vanniyakula Kshatriya fold from the 20 percent reservation of the Most Backward Communities (MBC).

The internal quota of 10.5 percent reservation given for a few castes in the Vanniyakula

Kshatriya fold without conducting a caste-based census has been done so, with an eye on the Vanniyar vote bank in the northern districts, alleged state coordinator of the Denotified Communities Rights Movement (DCRM), Seeni Pandian.

The major group of around 68 castes are in the denotified communities' group among the MBCs, for which only seven percent of internal quota was allotted, and around 25 castes that includes some from the Thevar community, were given just 2.5 percent. "This is nothing but injustice meted out to around 100 communities in the MBC category," rned Seeni Pandian, who

led an indefinite black flag protest of members of the Mukkulathore community in around 10 villages in Srivaikundam constituency.

"We have decided to vote against the AIADMK this time," said advocate Muthuraj, youth association, Thevar community, in Tirunelveli district, where black flags were hoisted to condemn the state government's internal quota arrangement for the MBC communities.

Over 20 villagers in the Vilathikulam constituency announced a poll boycott protesting the Palaniswami government's internal quota plan for Vanniyars, without proper caste enumeration.

Ezra Sargunam's church to support AIADMK?

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 5

Are lakhs of Christian faithfuls of the Evangelical Church of India (ECI), founded by an ardent DMK supporter Ezra Sargunam, all set to switch loyalties and support the AIADMK in the April 6 Assembly elections?

Yes, if one were to go by the letter written by Minister of Tamil Culture K Pandiarajan to Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami on Friday, seeking an appointment from him for Sargunam's

daughter Kathirol Manickam, five bishops and 50 pastors of the ECI.

Pandiarajan has made it clear in the letter that Sargunam had been the head of the State's Minorities Commission thrice during the DMK rule and that he is the chief bishop of the ECI, which has 8436 churches all over India, 720 of them in Tamil Nadu alone, with a total congregation of six lakh.

The church management was presently being taken care of by Kathirol Manickam, who wanted to express her gratitude to the Chief Minister for his

pro-minorities stand in the last four years of his rule, Pandiarajan said.

Since Kathirol Manickam was ready to extend support to the AIADMK, she would like to call on the Chief Minister, the Minister said.

Sargunam, an enduring DMK supporter and avid critic of Hindutva, had shared the stage several times with DMK leaders like the late M Karunanidhi and spoken critically of the present government at the Centre.

It is not known if Sargunam, who is 82 years now, has the approval of his daughter's move to op-

only support the AIADMK and also take along with her the clergymen of the church to meet the Chief Minister.

Sargunam had criticized even Prime Minister Narendra Modi and had landed in trouble due to his remarks on Hinduism that many Hindutva supporters found to be offensive.

It is also not clear as to how his daughter became the head of the ECI that was founded painstakingly by Sargunam, who took it all over the country. An evangelist since his youth, he started the first church in 1958 in Porur near Chennai.

EC's flying squad seizes ₹4.35 lakh in cash in election-bound TN

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 5

Ahead of Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, the Election Commission flying squad seized ₹4.35 lakh unaccounted money from an auto under Somangalam Police limits on Friday morning.

According to the police, the flying squad and the Somangalam police seized the cash from an auto during the vehicle checks near Sriperumbudur Sipcot.

The occupants of the auto, identified as Sakthivel (34), Sathyamoorthy(35) and Manikandan (27) did not possess documents to support the reason for carrying the cash.

"The amount is related to building a house," they told the police. However, the sum was seized from them. All the three along with the auto driver, Suresh (38) was also arrested.

The squad seized the auto rickshaw and initiated an investigation.

The election commissioner himself has pointed out that Tamil Nadu is a very sensitive state when it comes to expenditure.

Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu are due on April 6. Elections will be held in a single phase. The counting of votes will take place on May 2. The nomination is scheduled to start on March 12.

"Flying squad and the Somangalam police seized the cash from an auto during the vehicle checks near Sriperumbudur Sipcot. The occupants of the auto, identified as Sakthivel (34), Sathyamoorthy(35) and Manikandan (27) did not possess documents to support the reason for carrying the cash"

ZAKEER HUSSAIN|DC
SALEM, MARCH 5

Participating in an election meeting held in a marriage hall at Alagapuram here in the city on Friday, CPM national general secretary, Sitaram Yechury, addressed party cadres and listed out the alleged anti-people policies of the Centre, and explained the means to tackle the BJP.

Yechury said, "Democratic rights are being denied by the BJP government. By bringing the CAA, the BJP government is trying to grab the citizenship of the people. The MSME sector was completely ruined with the Centre's wrong policies. Prime Minister Modi aimed only to develop the corporate, and did not handle the farmers' protest properly. We are protesting against privatization of the Salem steel plant. We should defeat the AIADMK-BJP alliance in Tamil Nadu. The state government supports the anti-people policies of the Centre. Unemployment has increased manifold. A



change should happen in Tamil Nadu and the DMK-led alliance should win."

Later, speaking to media persons, Sitaram Yechury said that the Election Commission (EC) announced postal votes for senior citizens more than 80-years-old. The EC should ensure no others voted on behalf of these senior citizens. The EC announced a single phase election in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, and three-phase election in Assam. But they announced an eight-phase election for West Bengal.

In a democratic country, we should accept the decision of the Election Commission. But I also have a question, why an eight-phase election for West Bengal, he added.

"The BJP leaders and cadres in West Bengal are imported and their numbers are less. So, it will be easy for the BJP to move its leaders and cadres from one phase of election to the other phase. In Tamil Nadu, every new born baby has Rs. 62,000 debt over its head. This is what they achieved by supporting the Centre. The BJP now is adopting the 'stealing democracy' policy, which it has implemented in Karnataka, Goa and Arunachal Pradesh. It topples the ruling government and now they have toppled the Pudhucherry government. To beat the AIADMK-BJP combine in Tamil Nadu, a strong alliance is needed, and it is the DMK alliance. Actor Kamal Haasan is my friend, but it is politics. Now, the third front is not enough to beat the BJP alliance," Sitaram Yechury added.

Asked about the DMK's stand to allocate a single digit number of seats to the CPM, Yechury said, "Talks are on between the DMK-CPM, and we will sort it out mutually."

Rahul Gandhi, a joker in politics, says BJP's Ravi

B. RAVICHANDRAN|DC
OOTY, MARCH 5

"When the country is looking for good leaders, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is proving himself to be a joker in politics," commented C.T. Ravi, BJP national general secretary and party in-charge, Tamil Nadu.

Participating in the BJP's 'Vetri Kodi Endhi Velvom Thamizhagam yatra' here, Ravi told the media that he was confident of NDA in Tamil Nadu led by AIADMK winning all 234 seats in the coming polls. When his attention was drawn to the campaign of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Ravi said, "The country is always looking for good leaders, but Rahul Gandhi is proving himself to be a joker in politics."

Participating in the BJP's 'Vetri Kodi Endhi Velvom Thamizhagam yatra' here, Ravi told the media that he was confident of NDA in Tamil Nadu led by AIADMK winning all 234 seats in the coming polls

Playing the DMK and the Congress for promoting family and dynastic politics, Ravi said the AIADMK was basically a party with laudable inner party democracy. Stating that it was during the UPA government comprising the Congress-DMK combine at the Centre, that 'jalikattu' was banned in Tamil Nadu, Ravi said the NDA government only revoked that ban paving

way for resumption of the sport.

"The BJP-led NDA government took action to start 12 government medical colleges in Tamil Nadu, including one in Ooty. For the metro rail project, the Centre allotted ₹63,000 crore. This apart, various schemes at an estimated cost of ₹1.30 lakh crore had been launched in Tamil Nadu during the BJP-led NDA rule at the Centre. The BJP had always been giving prime importance to Tamil Nadu and Tamil language," he said.

Hoping that the BJP will soon clinch a deal with the AIADMK for allotment of seats for the TN polls, Ravi said that the Centre is looking at the option of bringing fuel prices under the Atma Nirbhar scheme," he added.

Awareness on 100 per cent voting



Tiruvannamalai Collector and district electoral officer Sandeep Nanduri, on Friday inaugurated a 'Reaching out to every voter' drive organised in the Meesanallur Irular hamlet, Vandavasi assembly constituency, Tiruvannamalai district, to impart the concept of 100 per cent polling. Besides explaining the concept of voting as a citizen's basic right, the collector also demonstrated the use of EVMs and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT). He also inspected an expo organised by the Irular community using bricks from kilns they own, in which they had drawn 100% polling slogans, and the importance of voting. Later, the collector visited Thellar village and explained both EVM and VVPAT operations to women workers of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme (MGNREGS). — K. Senthil Nathan

HC nod for archakas' selection process in Arunachaleswarar temple

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 5

The Madras high court has directed the authorities to proceed with the selection process for the posts including archakas, in respect of Arunachaleswarar temple in Tiruvannamalai, strictly in accordance with the customary practice of the temple as well the dictum laid down by the Supreme Court.

Justice R.Mahadevan gave the directive while disposing of a petition filed by D.Senthilkumar, challenging the employment noti-



cation dated February 20, 2021 issued by the Thakkar/Deputy Commissioner/Executive Officer, Aru-

PIL to provide sufficient exam centres for Neet-PG 2021

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 5

A Public Interest Litigation has been filed in the Madras high court to direct the National Board of Examination to provide sufficient additional examination centres and seats therein in the state of Tamil

Nadu for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test-PG 2021 (Neet-PG 2021) enabling the candidates from Tamil Nadu to exercise their option of the centres in Tamil Nadu.

A division bench comprising Justices R.Subbiah and Sathikumar

Kurup before whom the PIL filed by advocate Veerapillai Ramesh, came up for hearing ordered notice to the Union and Tamil Nadu governments, National Board of Examination and National Medical Commission and posted to March 8, further hearing of the case.

issued by the Executive Officer of Arulmighu Arunachaleswarar Thirukoil inviting applica-

tions to the posts of archakas, sthanikam, paricharagam, parivaragam and meikaval in respect of the temple, which is a preliminary stage of the selection process. It is well settled that the government cannot interfere in matters of religious affairs of a religious denomination and deny the right to manage the religious affairs and administer the properties of the religious institutions, subject to public order, morality and health.

However, the relief sought herein cannot be entertained, as the petitioner,

who not even made an application to the posts in question and the last date for applying the same was already over, is admittedly, a third party to the advertisement. Further no concrete materials other than the copy of the advertisement published in a Tamil daily, were filed by the petitioner along with this petition, so as to substantiate his claim. Hence, he has no locus standi to file this writ petition, the judge added.

The judge said it may not be out of place to point out the observation of the Supreme Court in

Seshammal Vs.State of Tamil Nadu to the effect that "the trustee is not bound to make the appointment on the sole ground that the candidate is the next-in-line of succession to the last holder of office". The said view was further clarified by the Supreme Court in the subsequent decision in Adhi Saiva Sivachariyargal Nala Sivanam Vs State of Tamil Nadu to the effect that "any person, who is a Hindu and possessing the requisite qualification and training, can be opted as an archaka in Hindu temples.

OTHER STORY

QS ranks VIT among top 12 institutions in engg and tech

DC CORRESPONDENT
VELLORE, MARCH.5

Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) is ranked one among the top 12 institutions of India in Engineering and Technology and within the top 450 Universities in the World as per QS subject ranking, 2021.

Seven subjects of VIT are in the list published by QS this year.

Four subjects namely Computer Science & Information Systems, Electrical and Electronics Engineering (EEE), Mechanical Engineering and Chemistry have moved up 50 positions as compared to last year, according to a press release.

Among them Computer Science & Information Systems and Electrical and Electronics Engineering (EEE) are ranked within the top 10 in India.

VIT's Mathematics and Biological Sciences have entered in QS Subject Ranking for the first time and are ranked within the top 500 and 600 in the world respectively.

QS World University Rankings by Subject are compiled every year to help prospective students to identify the leading universities in a particular subject.

25 temple artistes honoured

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH.5

Rotary Club of Madras Heritage took an initiative to honour artistes connected with temple performing arts. It honoured temple arts/artistes connected with rituals from Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

These art forms are very precious and are treasures of Tamil Nadu and people. There are very few practitioners of this art form, said Prakash, DM president Rotary Club of Madras Heritage Chairpersons of this project, Violin Sisters Dr M Lalitha and M Nandini said that 25 artistes from temples arts / performers were honoured in an event on Thursday in the city.

TN records 795 child missing cases since last February

T. SUDHEESH I DC
CHENNAI, MARCH. 5

Despite the pandemic which necessitated stringent travel restrictions and movement of people across the country, Tamil Nadu has reported at least 795 child missing cases since February last year although 586 children were restored by the police.

The data provided by 'Track Child 2.0', a website being operated by the ministry of women and child development, which updates state-wise cases of missing children, revealed that there is no information on the whereabouts of at least 209 children in the state.

While the number of cases of missing children in the state in February last year was 14,233, it now stands at 15,028. The number of traced cases in February last year

was 11,448 and it has reached 12,034 this month.

Out of 60 missing cases registered in the state in last 30 days, 58 children were traced by the police.

Tamil Nadu now has 2,782 missing persons. The state had a total of 16,018 missing person cases, of which 13,236 were tracked.

In Puducherry, 395 children remain untraced. When 659 cases were reported, 264 were traced by the police. Last year, 424 cases were registered. Out of this, only 112 were restored.

Compared to other southern states, the performance of Tamil Nadu in tracing missing children remains better. In Karnataka at least 780 out of 4,872 children who went missing last year still remain incommunicado. In the last 30 days, 518 missing cases were reported while

only 445 were recovered. Telangana has recorded four untraced cases in the last 30 days. The state has recorded 851 cases of missing children last year, but only 287 cases were traced. The number of untraced cases in the state is 1,527. While the state registered 3,230 missing cases, 1,703 children were restored.

In Andhra Pradesh, out of 44 children who went missing in the last 30 days 16 were traced. But the outstanding cases of untraced children are 1,999. The total cases of missing children registered in the state are 6,018 while 4,019 children were traced. Last year, 651 cases registered while 449 were recovered.

Kerala has the least number of missing cases recorded in the last 30 days. Only 7 missing cases were regis-

tered while 5 were traced. In terms of total cases, Kerala had recorded 4,052 missing cases and 3,389 were restored. 663 cases remain untraced. Last year, Kerala reported 189 cases. However, the police were able to recover 218 children in the same period.

The union ministry of home affairs had in 2015 launched a district-based 'Operation Smile' across the country in association with the child protection units, child welfare committees and childline. The operation was aimed at tracking the missing children and help them reunite their parents. However, an increasing number of missing children points fingers on the poor impact of operations which were launched with much fanfare.

Anomalies of Omani's aorta cured in single stage

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH. 5

A 35-year-old Oman citizen has got a new lease of life after a surgery curing three complex anomalies of his aorta in a single-stage at a city hospital. The patient was airlifted from Oman in an emergency condition, after he developed severe chest pain.

The surgery was conducted after a team of doctors headed by Dr V. V. Bashi, director, Institute of Cardiac & Aortic Disorders, SIMS Hospital found that aorta, the main artery that carries blood from the heart to other parts of the body, had a tear on the ascending part, leakage in the aortic valve, and a tear in the lower region of the descending part.

Dr Bashi said the patient had developed severe chest pain that started radiating to the back and abdomen. We diagnosed him with acute type A dissection along with a leaking aortic valve and a tear in the lower end of the descending aorta. It was a life-threatening condition that required an emergency surgery. The patient was then rushed in for surgery within half an hour. Such complex surgical interventions are performed only in a few medical institutes in the world. The multi-stage surgeries over years leave the patient and family in a state of fear and anxiety due to the persistent risk of interim mortality. However, the single-stage correction of all the problems gives the patient confidence to live longer, he said.

Father arrested for sexual assault

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH.5

A 56-year-old man has been arrested by the Tambaram women police on the charges of sexually abusing her minor daughter, in an inebriated condition.

The accused identified as Madan, has been booked under Pocco Act, a senior police official said. According to the police, the accused lived with his wife and two daughters aged 16 and 14.

The incident happened on Wednesday when the mother went to work and the elder daughter went to the school, leaving the 14-year-old alone at their house in Old Perungalathur with Madan.

While the victim was studying, Madan came home drunk and allegedly sexually abused her. The victim however managed to escape from the house and narrated the incident to her neighbor. When the victim's mother came home at night, she informed her about the incident. Following this, the mother and the daughter approached Tambaram all women police station and lodged a complaint against the accused.

On hearing about this, Madan went absconding. Meanwhile, the women police on Thursday night arrested the accused from Tambaram.

Madan was booked under Pocco act for abusing her minor daughter. He was produced in Tambaram court and lodged at prison.

History-sheeter hacked to death in Chennai

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH. 5

A notorious history-sheeter was hacked to death in Chennai's Ashok Nagar by a rival gang on Thursday night.

The city police have formed special teams to trace the suspects who killed history-sheeter, identified as 'Mylapore'

Sivakumar (42), a resident of Postal Colony in West Mambalam.

According to city police, 'Mylapore' Sivakumar, wanted in several criminal cases in the city, was classified as an 'A Plus' category rowdy. He has 35 cases, including three murder charges, 10 attempt to murder charges and 22 other other offences registered against him.

Sivakumar was the main accused in the murder of his rival Thottam Sekar in 1997, and the key suspect in the attack on Thottam Sekar's wife executed as a revenge for the Azhaguraja, in killing Thottam Sekar.

Theatre on October 10, 2019.

According to the police, the murder happened on the second Street, Postal Colony on Thursday night when Shivakumar was there to meet Justin, a real estate agent to collect an amount of ₹10 lakh, which Shivakumar had given him during the pandemic.

The gang had f o l l o w e d Shivakumar to the real estate office and hacked him, said police.

Three of his associates, who attempted to prevent the attack, were also stabbed. He suffered grievous injuries and died on the spot. The assailants fled the spot.

Ashok Nagar police rushed to the spot based on the information. The body was sent to government Royapettah hospital for a post-mortem. Police suspect the murder could have been executed as a revenge for the Azhaguraja, in killing Thottam Sekar.



Students of Stella Maris College for Women create awareness on environment by painting on their college compound wall .

—DC

MDMA tablets worth ₹4.75 lakh seized by Chennai air customs

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH.5

The Chennai Air Customs seized MDMA tablets worth ₹4.75 lakhs

seized at Foreign Post Office here on Friday.

According to the Airport sources, Based on information, Chennai Air Customs

detained one unregistered postal parcels suspected to contain some narcotics substance, which arrived from Netherland at

Foreign Post Office, Chennai.

The parcel was addressed to a Kanyakumari based person.

On cut opening, one

transparent polythene packet containing pink colour tablets suspected to be MDMA was found inside.

Total 95 MDMA tablets

valued at ₹4.75 lakhs were recovered and seized under NDPS Act,1985. Further investigation is in progress.

Mother and daughter die in auto collision

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH.5

A mother-daughter duo died near Chennai after an auto they were travelling in collided with another three-wheeler on Thursday night.

According to police, the deceased have been identified as Kannagi alias Nadihya (38), a resident of Sunguvarchatram near Sriperumbudur and her 15-year-old daughter Janani.

Police sources said, on Thursday night, the duo was travelling in an auto from Maduramangalam to Sokandi in the Kanchi district. The auto was driven by Lakshman (38)

from Thirupanthiyur. When the auto was near Maduramangalam check-post, it collided with another three-wheeler.

All four suffered grievous injuries in the collision. On being informed by the passersby, the local police rushed to the spot. They have shifted them to Sriperumbudur government hospital, where Kannagi passed away. As Janani's health condition was deteriorating, she was transferred to Chengalpet hospital, where she died late on Thursday night. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem.

Sunguvarchatram police registered a case and began an investigation.

Homage paid to ex-DMK minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, MARCH. 5

DMK workers who assembled in large numbers led by party's Tiruchy south district in-charge and Tiruverumbur MLA Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi to pay homage to Anbil Dharmalingam, party's legend and former DMK minister, on his 28th death anniversary on Friday, took a vow in front of the portrait of

Dharmalingam to work for the victory of the party and its allies in all the nine assembly segments across the district. Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi said, party cadres have already commenced their field work in their respective assembly segments in the district, and party president M.K. Stalin's proposed mega public meet in suburb Sriuganur near here on Sunday would provide them the necessary boost to proceed further.

Three fishing boats seized in Nagai

DC CORRESPONDENT
NAGAPATTINAM, MARCH. 5

Officials of the fisheries department impounded three mechanized fishing boats at the fishing harbour here on Friday for allegedly because they were fitted with high horsepower motors which violates the Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act 1983.

An official release said, a team of officials comprising

Additional superintendent of police, Sugumar, Assistant director of fisheries, G. Jayaraj, inspected the anchored boats at the fishing harbour here.

They also found some of them using trawling nets, and three boats fitted with high horsepower motors without proper registration. They impounded all the three boats, the release added. They warned dealers of legal action if they sold high horsepower motors to fishermen.



Chennai airport domestic terminal gets new bus lounge

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH.5

The new domestic arrival bus lounge at AAI Chennai airport was commissioned by A.S. Rajan IPS, Special Director, SIB, Chennai and Rajan Chaudhary IRS, Commissioner of Customs in the presence of Suneel Dutt Airport Director on Friday.

An official press release from the airport listed the salient features of the newly inaugurated domestic arrival bus lounge.

The new bus lounge is built on 2500 sq.m with arrival hall at ground floor Level and connecting to the aerobridge arrival corridor at Mezzanine level. It has been constructed for the capacity enhancement of the domestic security hold area. With the New Bus Lounge, the present entry to the arrival area from the airside

will be closed and the security Hold area for departure shall be connected end to end for free movement of passengers to all the departure gates at ground floor level. The shifting of operations helps in providing additional space for the remote arrival passengers and more space for parking of coaches.

The release read that the transit passengers can also access the departure security

Hold the area directly. This facility also enables the separation of passengers and coaches for arrival and departure flights. The new bus lounge has arrival hall with toilets for ladies, gents and for physically challenged passengers, three elevators, one escalator, drinking water fountain, fire fighting systems, display systems, PA systems and security camera.



The 50th National Safety Day observed at Win(India) Exports, Guindy, with staff taking an oath in the presence of chief guest A. Kavitha, Joint Director of Industrial Safety & Health - III, on Thursday.

IN BRIEF

RAPE SURVIVOR SET ABLAZE IN RAJASTHAN

Jaipur, Mar 5: A 33-year-old rape survivor was set afire in Rajasthan's Hanumangarh district, police said on Friday. The woman has been admitted to a hospital in Bikaner with serious burn injuries, Golupura Station House Officer (SHO) Omprakash said, adding that Pradeep Vishnoi, who was accused by the woman of raping her in 2018, has been detained for questioning. The incident occurred in the early hours of Thursday. The victim, who has a daughter, was living with her maternal grandmother following a dispute with her husband, the police said. A man entered their house premises in the early hours of Thursday, sprinkled kerosene on the floor, knocked on the door and called the woman by her name. As she opened the door, the man dropped a burning stick on the floor, resulting in serious injuries to her, the SHO said. He said the victim's maternal grandmother has accused Vishnoi of committing the crime and the latter has been detained for questioning.

BRIDE DIES OF HEART ATTACK DURING BIDAAI

AKSHAYA AKUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 5

Marriage celebrations turned into mourning in Odisha's Sonepur district on Friday morning as a newlywed bride collapsed and died after suffering a massive heart attack during the 'bidaai' ceremony. The bride Guptaeswari Sahoo (Rosy), daughter of Murali Sahoo and Menaka of Julunda village, was declared dead by the doctors at the Dunguripalli Community Health Centre before admission. Rosy tied the knot with Bisikesan Pradhan of Tentulu village in a simple ceremony at the bride's parental house on Thursday evening. On Friday morning when the family members were preparing for the 'bidaai' (bride leaving father's house for in-law's place) ceremony, Rosy who was crying inconsolably, suddenly fainted and collapsed on the ground. Family members and relatives of the newlywed couple present at the spot tried to wake up Guptaeswari by sprinkling water on her face. However, she did not gain consciousness. Subsequently, the bride was rushed to the Dunguripalli CHC in a vehicle but the doctors declared her brought dead. The doctors later confirmed that Rosy had died due to cardiac failure.

OVER 16,000 NEW COVID CASES REGISTERED

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

India has registered a cumulative figure of more than 1.9 crore Covid-19 vaccination doses so far and on Friday alone 10.34 lakh vaccine doses were administered. Out of this, 8.25 lakh beneficiaries were given the first dose while 2.09 lakh healthcare and frontline workers received the second dose of the vaccines. Six states, Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi, have reported high daily new cases in the last 24 hours, with 84.44% of the new cases coming from these. India on Friday had 16,838 fresh cases and 113 new deaths. **● Out of this, 8.25 lakh beneficiaries were given the first dose while 2.09 lakh healthcare and frontline workers received the second dose of the vaccines.**

Swapna's 'revelations' put Kerala CM in dock

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAR. 5

The statement filed by Customs Preventive Commissionerate in Kerala High Court disclosing that gold smuggling accused Swapna Suresh has given a confidential statement alleging chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan's involvement in dollar smuggling, has triggered a political storm in the poll bound state.

Sumit Kumar, Commissioner of Customs, informed the court that in the statements recorded under section 164 CrPC and 108 of the Customs Act, Swapna revealed about the involvement of chief minister, speaker of Kerala and three ministers. She alleged that smuggling of foreign currency was done at the instance of Mr Vijayan and Assembly Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan with the help of the UAE

● THE PRIME accused in gold smuggling case revealed Mr Vijayan's close connections with the previous Consul General of UAE and the 'illegal' monetary transactions. Consulate. Swapna also revealed Mr Vijayan's close connections with the previous Consul General of UAE and the 'illegal' monetary transactions, Kumar added. The statement was filed

in response to a petition filed by the DG Prisons Kerala, against certain remarks in the order of the Additional CJM (Economic Offences) Court's on providing security to Swapna who is lodged in Women's Prison, Thiruvananthapuram. The observation in the order will affect the credibility and bonafide of the jail department, argued the state. The Customs officer said Swapna's statement exposed highly illegal,

improper and immoral activities by those occupying high offices. The customs was prepared to produce the copies of the statements before the court in a sealed cover. The statement said Swapna's apprehensions regarding her safety in jail were totally justified. "They being high profile politicians and holding high positions in the government are capable of hitting back by all means," it added.



Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav being presented a model of plough during the party's 'Kisan Mahapanchayat' at Tappal, in Aligarh district, Friday. — PTI

Three farm laws now 'internal issue of India', says UK

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, MARCH 5

Just days ahead of an expected discussion in the British Parliament on Monday over the ongoing farmers' protests in India, the new British High Commissioner (HC) to India Alex Ellis on Friday termed these protests against the recently-enacted three Indian farm laws as an "internal issue of India", even as New Delhi on Friday evening said Indian diplomats in the UK are apprising the British Government as well as Members of Parliament (MPs) and members of the civil society there about the concerned three farm

Bills and also about the Indian Government's efforts to resolve the issue in talks with farmers. "This is an internal issue of India. ... We look at it. That is for India to resolve," the British High Commissioner told reporters on Friday, in reference to the ongoing protests by farmers predominantly from some of the northern Indian states. "Things that happen in India have ripples in the UK," Mr. Ellis said, in an obvious reference to the large Indian-origin community and Diaspora in the UK. He also referred to a remark made by British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab in India in December last year that "your (Indian)

politics are our (British) politics". Mr. Ellis said that the forthcoming discussion on the Indian farmer protests in the British Parliament was due to the "process of petitions". He added, "If you get a sufficient number of signatures, you can debate an issue in Parliament. And issues related to India are quite regularly debated in our Parliament. ... So this is something that is done by our Parliament, not the Government. The (British) Government has to participate. It has to answer but it is really the (British) Parliamentarians raising issues of concern to them and their constituents." The new British High

Commissioner further said, "As the Indian Diaspora grows and it is really very successful in many countries of the world, you are going to see more of this. As India becomes ever so significant in the world, there will be more (such) debates ...". Meanwhile, MEA Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said that the Indian High Commission in London and Indian consulates in Birmingham and Edinburgh are apprising the UK's Government, MPs and civil society about the concerned three farm Bills and also about the Indian Government's efforts to resolve the issue in talks with farmers.

BJP ANNOUNCES TO CONTEST 92 OUT OF 126 SEATS IN ASSAM

FROM PAGE 1

Assam health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, a key BJP strategist for the Northeast, will contest from Jalukbari, a seat that he currently holds. If insiders in the BJP are to be believed, Mr Sarma was not keen to contest the election, but the party decided that Mr Sonowal would not be

projected as the chief ministerial candidate and the BJP would fight the election under the joint leadership of Mr Sonowal and Mr Sarma, sources have said. The BJP has denied ticket or changed candidates in 11 of the constituencies so far. After the approval of the central party committee, the BJP also

announced the names of candidates for 70 seats. In a significant development that may lead to a split in the regional AGP, ahead the Assembly polls, the Barhampur seat of AGP stalwart and two-time chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta has gone to the BJP quota. The decision for the final list of candidates was taken on

Thursday night during the core committee meeting held in New Delhi in the presence of top notch BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah and party president J.P. Nadda among others. The names for the 70 seats announced on Friday will contest in the first and second phases.

Mamata to contest only from Nandigram

FROM PAGE 1

About 27 sitting MLAs were not given tickets as the TMC has decided not to field candidates above 80 years of age in view of COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, finance minister Amit Mitra and minister for technical education Purnendu Bose have been dropped though Ms Banerjee promised to accommodate them in the proposed 'Bidhan Parishad' (Legislative Assembly). "We will set up Bidhan Parishad this time and include them in it. Mr Bose, now in Nandigram to supervise my poll preparation there, will get a berth. Along with him will be Dr Mitra, who could not contest the polls this time due to bad health. We will also try to rehabilitate many others including Manish Gupta (former minister and ex-Rajya Sabha MP), Singur MLA Rabindranath Bhattacharjee, Jatu Lahiri and Sonali Guha there," Ms Banerjee said while announcing the TMC candidates' list at her residence in Kalighat

(South Kolkata). Those, who did not get tickets this time, were replaced by film director Raj Chakraborty and actors Soham Chakraborty, Kanchan Mullick, June Mallah, Koushani Mukherjee, Sayoni Ghosh, Sayontika Banerjee, Lovely Moitra and Aditi Munishi from the Tollywood. Former footballer Bidesh Bose and ex cricketer Manoj Tiwari, some doctors, a judge are among the new faces. The TMC has also fielded Mrs Ratna Chatterjee, the estranged wife of BJP leader Mr Sovan Chatterjee, from Behala Purba — a constituency presently held by Sovan Chatterjee — while Mrs Sujata Mondal Khan, the estranged wife of Bishnupur BJP MP Saumitra Khan will contest from Arambagh in Hooghly. Dissatisfied with her step, Ms Guha and former TMC MLA of Bhangar in South 24 Parganas and local strongman Arabul Islam later broke down and vented anger against Ms Banerjee.

Corporal punishment is abuse: Madras HC

FROM PAGE 1

Allowing the petitions filed by S.Jai Singh, Arul and Joseph Fernandez, the judge quashed the criminal proceedings pending against them before the V Metropolitan Magistrate, Egmore, Chennai. The judge said the Constitution of India under Article 21 protects the right to life and the same has been modified by way of insertion of Article 21A to include the right to education for children under 14 years of age, and the right to life with dignity. "It follows, therefore, that corporal punishment amounts to abuse and militates against the freedom and dignity of a child. It also interferes with a child's right to education because fear of corporal punishment makes children more likely to avoid school or to drop out altogether. Article 14, 15 (3), 39 (e) and (f) of the Constitution, guaran-

● The use of corporal punishment was not a novel phenomenon in Indian society and its educational system

tee equality and protection directing states to work progressively to protect children from abuse", the judge added. The judge said however, despite the legislative framework that by all means seek to eliminate corporal punishment, the practice has been persistently followed by schools and institutions across the country. The use of corporal punishment was not a novel phenomenon in Indian society and its educational system, where it was accepted as a convenient form of punishing and disciplining children. What was perhaps novel was the growing understanding that corporal punishment was an act of violence on children, the judge added.

'Owner' of car in Ambani case found dead in Thane

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 5

Amid the demand of the opposition BJP to hand over the investigation into the case of explosives planted near Mukesh Ambani's house Antilia on February 25 to National Investigation Agency (NIA), the Maha Vikas Aghadi government on Friday handed over the enquiry to the state Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS). Meanwhile, Mansukh Hiren, whose car was found outside Mukesh Ambani's residence in Mumbai, was found dead at Retibunder creek in Thane district. He was missing since Thursday and his kin had registered a missing complaint. An official of Thane police informed "The body of one Mansukh Hiren whose car was found outside Mukesh Ambani's residence (with gelatin inside it), died by suicide by jumping into Kalwa creek. Accidental Death Report (ADR) registered."

News of his death came within hours after BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis demanded that Hiren be provided police protection. Later, the state home minister informed in the legislative Assembly that Hiren was not the actual owner of the car. "Car's owner was Sam Muten who had given it to Mansukh

Hiren for maintenance of its interior. Hiren had kept the car in his custody when Sam didn't pay for it," he said. Mr Fadnavis demanded NIA investigation into the case of explosives planted near Reliance Industries chairman's house. However, state home minister Anil Deshmukh rejected the demand saying the state police are competent to investigate it and subsequently in evening, he informed the state Assembly that Maharashtra ATS has been entrusted the responsibility to investigate the case. Speaking with the reporters on Friday, Mr Deshmukh said that the government has decided to hand over the investigation to the ATS in connection with the case of explosives planted in scorio near Mukesh Ambani's house Antilia on February 25. Earlier in the afternoon, Mr Fadnavis expressed his suspicion over API Sachin Vaze's role in the Antilia bomb scare case and therefore, he demanded the probe into it by the NIA. He also raised a question over the several co-incidences pertaining to the presence of Mr Vaze at several places in connection with this case. He said, "Mr Vaze was the first police officer to reach the spot even before local police. Mr Vaze also spotted the threat letter."

FLIGHT TEST OF SFDR TECHNOLOGY SUCCESSFUL

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BALASORE, MARCH 5

India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Friday successfully carried out a flight demonstration based on Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology from Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur off the coast of Odisha. The SFDR was fired at around 10.30 am. "All the subsystems, including the booster motor and nozzle-less motor, performed as expected. During the test, many new technologies were proven, including Solid Fuel based Ducted Ramjet technology," an official release of DRDO said. Successful demonstration of Solid Fuel based Ducted Ramjet technology has provided DRDO with a technological advantage which will enable it to develop long range air-to-air missiles. At present, such technology is available only with a handful of countries in the world. During the test, air launch scenario was simulated using a booster motor. Subsequently, the nozzle-less booster accelerated it to the required Mach number for Ramjet operation. The performance of the missile was monitored using the data captured by Electro Optical, Radar and Telemetry instruments deployed by ITR and confirmed successful demonstration of the mission objectives. Defence minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the scientists of DRDO, Indian Air Force and the industry on the successful flight test of SFDR.

Mirwaiz Umar not allowed to offer prayers in Srinagar

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MARCH 5

Angry crowds on Friday held protests at and outside Srinagar's Jama Masjid after the police prevented chief Muslim cleric and separatist leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq from relocating to the historic place of worship to offer prayers and deliver a sermon. The authorities had on Wednesday announced that the Mirwaiz is no longer in house detention following which the cleric-cum-politician said he would be addressing the Friday congregation at the Grand Mosque, for the first time in 19 months during which he remained under house arrest. His party activists and supporters had decorated the passage to the mosque and nearby streets by erecting arches and placing emerald fabric crisscross. The Mirwaiz who heads a faction of Kashmiri separatist parties' amalgam All Parties Hurriyat Conference was among hundreds of politicians, human rights activists, civil society and trade union leaders and lawyers placed under house arrest or jailed by the authorities ahead of or soon after

Jammu and Kashmir was stripped of its special constitutional status and split up into two union territories on August 5, 2019. Most of them have been set free since. The police used 'mild force' including firing pellet shotgun to disperse a slogan chanting crowd in the outer compound of the Grand Mosque. Though the police said no one was injured, the local sources said that a woman was hit in the action. The witnesses said that a police officer caught a press photographer by his collar and a policeman hit another with the gun butt on the back, triggering a protest by media persons covering the incidents. Kashmir Press Club condemned the "assault" on Shafat Farooq and Saqib Majeed, while discharging their professional duties. It urged the police authorities to "sensitize" their ranks or it would be assumed that such intimidation, harassment and assaults are meant to stop journalists from doing their duties". The Mirwaiz later told this correspondent over the phone that police officials visited him late Thursday evening to say he continued

to be under house detention and won't be allowed to go to the Grand Mosque on Friday. He said that it was quite in contrast to junior Union Home Minister's recent statement in Parliament that no politician is under house arrest in Kashmir now and also gave lie to the J&K police announcement that "I'm a free man now and can go anywhere." He said, "Whether under house arrest or free, I would continue to call for resolving the Kashmir dispute as per the wishes and aspirations of its people. The entire world from USA to Russian to China is asking for addressing this issue amicably but India is turning a blind eye on the reality of Kashmir". The police privately justified the move of imposing curbs on the Mirwaiz and preventing him from relocating to the Grand Mosque. They said that it was done "as a precautionary measure to prevent breach of peace". Earlier during the day, police reinforcements laid siege around the Mirwaiz's residence in Nigen area and also places vehicles cross-crossing the approach road to prevent him from coming out of his home.

ED summons Mehbooba Mufti for questioning

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MARCH 5

Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and president of People's Democratic Party (PDP), Mehbooba Mufti, has been summoned by Enforcement Directorate (ED) to its headquarters in Delhi for questioning in connection with an alleged money laundering case. While reacting to it, Ms. Mufti tweeted, "Government of India's tactics to intimidate and browbeat political opponents to make them toe their line has become tediously predictable. They don't want us to raise questions about its punitive actions and policies. Such short sighted scheming won't work". The ED has asked the former chief minister to present herself before its officials on March 15. The case in connection

with which she would be questioned was filed by the ED under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) some time ago, reports said. Earlier this year, J&K police's Criminal Investigation Kashmir (CIK) wing had arrested PDP youth leader Waheed Ur Rehman Parra in connection with an alleged with politicians-militants nexus and terror funding case. This was soon after a special court of National Investigation Agency (NIA) at Jammu had granted him bail in the case which is being probed by it and also ED separately. The NIA had arrested Mr. Parra on November 25 last year for his alleged "close links" with Kashmiri lawyer Irfan Shafi Mir, who was arrested by the police along with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen commander Syed Naveed Mushtaq alias Naveed Babu, another militant Asif Ahmed Rather

and tainted J&K police officer Davinder Singh in January 2020. The NIA and J&K police have claimed that Mir had during his interrogation claimed Mr. Parra sought his support during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections for his party candidate Ms. Mufti. Meanwhile, National Conference president and three time chief minister Farooq has challenged the ED's order attaching his six properties worth ₹11.86 crore including his residential houses in twin capitals of Srinagar and Jammu in connection with a probe into alleged scam in Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) in the high court. Mr. Abdullah has in his plea said that the properties were either ancestral or acquired before the alleged offence took place and were therefore not involved in any illegal or criminal activity.

SHORT TAKES

TURKEY BLAMES WEATHER FOR CHOPPER CRASH

Istanbul: Turkey's defence minister on Friday blamed bad weather for a military helicopter crash that killed 10 soldiers and a senior commander in the country's restive south-east.

Lieutenant General Osman Erbas, who headed the army's 8th Corps based in the eastern Elazig province, was among those killed in Thursday's accident. The crash was the deadliest since 13 soldiers died in the southeastern Sirtak province near Turkey's border with Syria and Iraq in 2017.

"Based on initial information and witnesses' statements, we determined that the accident occurred due to suddenly changing adverse weather conditions," the Anadolu state news agency quoted Defence Minister Hulusi Akara as saying. Akara and Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu took teams of senior military figures to the crash site in the southeastern Bitlis province on Thursday.

Defence officials said a formal investigation into the incident had been launched.

The European Union and the United States immediately offered their condolences to the NATO ally. A Turkish diplomatic source said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also expressed his support in a telephone call with Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

ISRAEL BOOSTS PLANS FOR IRAN ATTACK

Tel Aviv: Israel's defense minister said his country is upgrading contingency plans to strike Iranian targets if Tehran shows signs of nuclear escalation, the latest sign of rising tensions between the two archenemies.

Benny Gantz told the American cable network *Fox News* that Israel is still working on its plans, but that "we have them in our hands of course." His comments came as President Joe Biden considers re-joining a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers to limit Iran's nuclear program, with some changes to toughen curbs on Tehran's activities. Former President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the atomic accord in 2018 and imposed a so-called campaign of maximum pressure, including sanctions, on Tehran.

Since then, Iran has stepped up uranium enrichment. The U.N. atomic watchdog agency said earlier this week that Iran nearly tripled its stockpile of enriched uranium since November in violation of its deal with world powers. Iran and the Biden administration are deadlocked over how to revive the deal, with Tehran demanding an immediate lifting of sanctions and the U.S. calling on Iran to first return to full compliance with the restrictions of the nuclear agreement.

CHINA HIKES DEFENCE BUDGET TO \$209 BILLION

Beijing: China on Friday hiked its defence budget for the first time to more than \$200 billion, over three times higher than that of India, maintaining a single-digit growth for the sixth consecutive year with a 6.8 per cent increase in 2021.

The hike in defence spending was announced by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on the opening day of the National People's Congress, China's Parliament, amidst a military standoff with India in eastern Ladakh and growing political and military tensions with the United States. This year's planned defence spending will be about 1.35 trillion yuan (about \$209 billion), state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported, adding that the annual defence budget maintains a single-digit growth for a sixth consecutive year.

China's defence budget is about one quarter of the US figure, which is \$740.5 billion for the 2021 fiscal year, it said. Friday's increase is over three times higher than India's defence budget of about \$65.7 billion (including pensions). Last year, China allocated 1.268 trillion yuan (about \$196.44 billion), according to the state-run *Global Times*.

In his 35-page work report outlining China's achievements in 2020 and tasks for 2021, premier Li described last year as a "major success" for the armed forces without mentioning China moving over 60,000 well-armed troops who were mobilised for annual exercises.

Pope's historic Iraq trip



An Iraqi girl in a traditional dress offers Pope Francis a bouquet of flowers at Baghdad airport upon his arrival on Friday. Pope Francis is honouring the victims of one of Iraq's most brutal massacres of Christians by Islamic militants by saying their deaths are a reminder that violence is incompatible with religious teaching. — AFP

China claims veto over HK lawmakers

Beijing, March. 5: China moved on Friday to grant itself veto powers over selecting Hong Kong's lawmakers, part of a campaign to eliminate dissent and ensure a "patriotic" government in the city following huge democracy rallies in 2019.

Legislation to allow China's communist rulers to vet all election candidates in Hong Kong was tabled at the opening of the nation's rubber-stamp parliament in Beijing.

It came a day after dozens of democracy campaigners in the financial hub — including former lawmakers — were jailed under a security law that was passed during last year's parliamentary ses-

● **THE INTRODUCTION** of the vetting legislation — expected to be approved next week — was quickly interpreted as one of the final nails in the coffin of Hong Kong's democracy movement.

sion. The new legislation includes a "qualification vetting system" that will promote "orderly political participation", parliamentary spokesman Wang Chen told reporters.

China had committed to giving Hong Kong a degree of autonomy when it reverted from British colonial rule in 1997.

But it began moving quickly to dismantle the financial hub's democrat-

ic pillars in response to huge and sometimes violent democracy rallies that paralysed the city throughout 2019.

The introduction of the vetting legislation — expected to be approved next week — was quickly interpreted as one of the final nails in the coffin of Hong Kong's democracy movement. "If the measures are passed, as I'm sure they will be, then the voice of the opposition will be effectively silenced," said Willie Lam, China analyst at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

"This will effectively wipe out any remaining opposition." The measure had been widely expected with Beijing officials stat-

ing in the lead-up that only "staunch patriots" — those loyal to the Communist Party — should be involved in governing Hong Kong.

But the proposed rules drew swift condemnation from the European Union, which warned that it may expand existing sanctions on exports to China if the situation worsens.

"The EU calls on the authorities in Beijing to carefully consider the political and economic implications of any decision to reform the electoral system of Hong Kong that would undermine fundamental freedoms, political pluralism and democratic principles," an EU spokesperson said. — AFP

One shot dead in Myanmar

Yangon, March 5: A protester was shot dead in Myanmar on Friday, in the latest round of blood-letting at anti-coup demonstrations as the UN Security Council prepared to meet on the escalating crisis.

Despite an increasingly brutal crackdown by the military authorities that has seen more than 50 people killed, protesters took to the streets again in towns around the country to denounce the February 1 coup.

The violence has brought condemnation from around the world, with the UN rights chief

demanding the junta "stop murdering and jailing protesters", and the Security Council is set to discuss the crisis later Friday.

But despite the mounting international pressure, the generals have shown no signs of heeding calls for restraint.

In Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, hundreds of engineers took to the streets crying "Free our leader" in reference to ousted State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, detained by the military since the first night of the coup. A 26-year-old man helping at barriers set up

in the city to slow security forces died after being shot in the neck, medical officials said.

The killing follows the deadliest day of the crackdown so far on Wednesday, when the UN said at least 38 people were killed as graphic images showed security forces firing into crowds and bloodied bodies dragged away.

There were also protests Friday in the central town of Bago and the San Chaung district of the commercial capital Yangon — a hotspot for rallies — where groups of demonstrators sang a song of defiance. — AFP

Huge quake sparks Pacific-wide tsunami alert

Wellington, March 5: Tens of thousands of coastal residents in New Zealand, New Caledonia and Vanuatu fled for higher ground on Friday as a cluster of powerful earthquakes sparked a Pacific-wide tsunami alert.

Warning sirens sounded across Noumea as authorities ordered evacuations amid fears that waves of up three metres (10 feet) were headed towards the French territory.

"People must leave beach areas and stop all water activities, and should not pick their children up at schools to avoid creating traffic jams," emergency services spokesman Alexandre Rosignol told public radio.

In New Zealand, communities along stretches of the North Island were warned to flee as tsunami alert sirens wailed after an 8.1-magnitude quake, which followed earlier tremors in the same region measuring 7.4 and 7.3. "Do not stay at home," the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) said.

"People near the coast... must move immediately to the nearest high ground, out of all tsunami evacuation zones, or as far inland as possible." The largest of the quakes struck around 1,000 kilometres (640 miles) off the New Zealand coast at 8:28 am (1928 Thursday GMT), the US Geological Survey said.



A man looks out onto a beach following a tsunami warning in Orewa, north of Auckland, on Friday. — AFP

It was preceded by two seismic jolts that were also enormously powerful, in an unusually strong cluster even for the Pacific

Prez Biden pats Indo-Americans

Appoints over 55, says they are taking over US

Washington, March 5: Indian-Americans are "taking over the country", US President Joe Biden said on Thursday, referring to the large number of "incredible" professionals from the community holding key positions in his administration.

In less than 50 days of his presidency, Biden has appointed at least 55 Indian-Americans to key leadership positions in his administration ranging from his speech writer to the Nasa, to almost every wing of the government.

"Indian of descent Americans are taking over the country: you Dr Swati Mohan; my Vice President (Kamala Harris); my speech writer, Vinay (Reddy). I tell you what. But thank you. You guys are incredible," President Biden said during a virtual interaction with scientists at Nasa who were involved in the historic landing of Perseverance rover on Mars on February 18.

Indian-American scientist Swati Mohan leads the guidance, navigation, and control operations of Nasa's Mars 2020 mission. Biden, who was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on January 20, has created history by appointing at least 55 Indian-Americans to key positions in his administration.

This does not include Vice President Harris,

which is an elected position, and Neera Tanden, who a day earlier withdrew her nomination from the position of Director of White House Office of Management and Budget.

Nearly half of them are women and a sizable number of them are working in the White House. So far, the Obama-Biden administration (2009-2017) has the distinction of appointing the largest number of Indian-Americans in any administration, the previous Donald Trump administration was not lagging far behind as it appointed the first ever Indian-American with a cabinet rank and inside the National Security Council.

The Biden administration has for the first time appointed such a large number of Indian-Americans in the first 50 days of his administration. This past week, Dr. Vivek Murthy testified before a Senate Committee for US Surgeon General and Vanita Gupta is all set to appear for her confirmation hearing for Associate Attorney General Department of Justice.

"It is impressive to see how many Indian-Americans were ready to go into public service. There have been so many additions since we launched our Government Leaders list last month on Presidents' Day. I am so proud to see our community is going from

strength to strength!," eminent Indian-American philanthropist and Indiaspora founder M. Rangaswami said.

While the community is disappointed that Tanden had to withdraw her nomination because of stiff opposition from the Republicans, Indian-American women have reached a new height in the Biden administration. Biden sought to speak with Swati Mohan, Guidance and Controls Operations Lead, Mars 2020. She is not a political appointee though.

Indian-American women appointed by Biden include Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, State Department; Mala Adiga: Policy Director to Dr Jill Biden; Aisha Shah: Partnership Manager, White House Office of Digital Strategy; Sameera Fazili, Deputy Director, US National Economic Council (NEC); Sumona Guha: Senior Director for South Asia at the National Security Council, White House; and Sabrina Singh: Deputy Press Secretary, Vice President White House.

Shanthi Kalathil has been appointed as Coordinator for Democracy and Human Rights, National Security Council, White House; Garima Verma has been named as Digital Director of the Office of the First Lady and others. — PTI

Spain's king seeks to steady crown

Madrid, March 5: Families are frequently a source of embarrassment, but the recent troubles caused by Spanish King Felipe VI's relatives belong to an entirely different realm.

From expedited Covid vaccinations to tax offences and shady financial dealings by family members, Felipe has found himself in a royal mess sabotaging his efforts to clean up the image of Spain's scandal-tainted monarchy.

It has in some ways left him tilting at windmills. Earlier controversies led to him cutting off his own father's allowance, among other steps, but now more may be on the way as he seeks to balance family concerns

with understandable outrage in Spain.

Last week his father, former king Juan Carlos, announced he had settled debt of nearly 4.4 million euros (\$5.3 million) with the Spanish tax office due on the value of previously undeclared private jet flights paid by a foundation based in Liechtenstein.

It was the second such tax settlement in less than three months for Juan Carlos, who went into self-exile in the United Arab Emirates in August as questions mounted over the origins of his fortune.

The former king is the target of three separate probes into his financial dealings. — AFP

US RECORDS FEWEST COVID CASES IN FIVE MONTHS

Washington, March 5: The United States recorded fewer than 40,000 new daily cases of Covid-19 for the first time in five months on Thursday, a piece of promising news as countries across the globe struggle to hold off another infection surge before inoculations become widespread.

With frustration over restrictions having long weighed on populations worldwide, leaders were seeking to balance demands for easing rules while not unleashing another explosion in cases.

In the United States, the world's hardest-hit country, the number of daily cases peaked at nearly 3,00,000 in early January following the Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's holidays.

With cases declining and vaccines rolling out, several US states have begun jettisoning mask-wearing rules — much to the chagrin of President Joe Biden, who called the move "Neanderthal thinking." While his administration says its promise to vaccinate 100 million people in its first 100 days is ahead of schedule, Europe is facing heavy criticism over delays in its inoculation campaign.

The EU drug watchdog said Thursday it had started a "rolling review" of the Sputnik V shot, meaning Russian Coronavirus vaccines could soon be doled out across Europe. — AFP

FILM | FEST

Germany's Maren Eggert wins first 'Gender Neutral' award for her role in 'I'm Your Man'

'Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn' takes the Golden Bear

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 5



Berlinale, or the Berlin International Film Festival, is considered the most political of Europe's Big 3 (Cannes, Venice and Berlin), and on Friday it again burnished its reputation by handing over the festival's top award, the Golden Bear, to Romanian writer-director Radu Jude's film, *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*. The film, which opens with a naughty, kinky pornographic

scene, is a dark, funny, disturbing autopsy of a nation that is living in haughty denial of its past while embracing prejudice and bigotry with smug sanctimony.

Celebrating the film's "rare and essential quality of a lasting art work," the six-member jury said in a statement that *Loony Porn* "captures on screen the very content and essence, the mind and body, the values and the raw flesh of our present moment in time. Of this very moment of human existence."

The Silver Bear for Best

Director went to Dénes Nagy for the Hungarian World War II drama, *Natural Light*. Calling it "appalling and beautifully shot", the jury said the film was "a portrait of war in which the observant gaze of the director reminds us again of the need to choose between passivity and taking individual responsibility."

German actor Maren Eggert won the first ever gender-neutral Silver Bear Best Performance award (replacing best actor and actress prizes) for her leading role in Maria Schrader's *I'm*

Your Man.

In the film Eggert plays Alma, a scientist at the famous Pergamon Museum in Berlin. To get a research fund, she accepts an offer to participate in a bizarre experiment. For three weeks Alma has to live with a rather handsome humanoid robot, Tom (Dan Stevens), who is programmed as her perfect life partner.

If she has a shot at a successful, happy relationship, she is told that it is with Tom, a sum total of Alma-specific algorithms. He can romance, do the dishes, and will always be

available for exhilarating sex. Shot in beautiful Berlin, *I'm Your Man* is about the pursuit of happiness and explores how far humans will go to find love. Every year the Golden and Silver Bears are handed out at a glitzy ceremony at the 1,600-seater Berlinale Palace theatre. But for this year's 71st edition of the festival, which was truncated and online-only, the trophies will be presented in person, in June, when organisers hope to invite stars for red carpet events and screen films for the public.

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C102/21

DECCAN Chronicle

6 MARCH 2021

To draw votes, Khattar’s quota sacrifices growth

The move by the Haryana government to force the private sector to reserve 75 per cent jobs in their establishment for the people of the state is a regressive move. It also appears to be unconstitutional since our Constitution does not discriminate on the ground of place of birth. The decision of the Manohar Lal Khattar government announced last Tuesday is, in fact, shot through with political cynicism.

The ongoing farmers’ agitation, which has had a special impact in some northern regions, including Haryana, has left the Khattar government reeling and the so-called “sons-of-the-soil” policy seems a desperate bid to recover some lost ground. Needless to say, it militates against the very thought of “Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat” which Prime Minister Narendra Modi injects into his speeches on a frequent basis.

The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act 2020 requires companies and other private entities — including trusts and societies — that have more than 10 employees to reserve three-fourths of all jobs where salaries will be below Rs 50,000/- per month for residents of the state or domiciles of Haryana. This is far from being a welfare move as it does not even pretend to efface iniquity. But even if it did so, it will be open to questioning. The basic reason is that such a step impinges on the right of individuals or a group of individuals to choose their business and profession in an open society.

If the government forces companies to take steps that may impact employee productivity, then it forces companies to be less than competitive. That goes against the grain of capitalist development. The idea of positive discrimination in a sociologically iniquitous context is for the state to promote through education and employment policies by enlarging opportunity following on appropriate investments, and not to be thrust down the gullet of private players. Indeed, obliging the non-government sector to enter the realm of states is a step in the wrong direction as it undermines the legitimacy of the state.

If all states were to follow suit, the mobility of labour and the freedom of Indians to compete anywhere in the country in search of work will be comprehensively stymied as one state will become like another country to other states, requiring work permits and visas. The people of Haryana, too, will be barred from working in other states. The dangerous principle on which such moves rest will also make a mockery of all-India services since India will cease to be common territory for the purpose of employment. If the idea is extended to the field of education, and other sectors, then we may conceivably be looking at the vivisection of India.

Andhra Pradesh has mandated 75 per cent reservation for locals and Karnataka seems to be contemplating quotas for locals in blue collar employment. The Andhra Pradesh Bill has been challenged in the high court. It is time for the constitutionality of the matter to be settled by the Supreme Court. Caste and class are bad enough to divide society and the country. Motivated moves to catch votes by insecure political parties are something we can do without.

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Spectrum auction a failure?

The department of telecommunications (DoT) has recently completed yet another auction of radio spectrum or airwaves that raked in ₹77,800 crores. The government dubbed the auction successful claiming that it had raised more money than it had expected on account of uncertainties created by the Covid pandemic and the general financial situation of the telecom sector. However, as always there are varied opinions about spectrum pricing.

Citing the phenomenally higher base price of ₹3,92,000 crores that the government set for the auction, some experts claim that the current spectrum auction is a failure as it managed to fetch merely one-fifth of its reserve price. Out of 2,308.8 megahertz airwaves that were on offer, just a little more than one-third — 855.6 MHz — was purchased. The bidders have once again shunned more efficient 700 MHz, which could have helped them to address network issues, because of its prohibitive reserve price.

Ever since the 2010 3G spectrum auction that fetched a fantastic amount for the government because of the shortage of airwaves and bullish outlook of telecom companies, the government has been fixated only on the ways to milk the telecom sector. Precisely this attitude has got several telecom companies shut down and made others sit on mountains of debt.

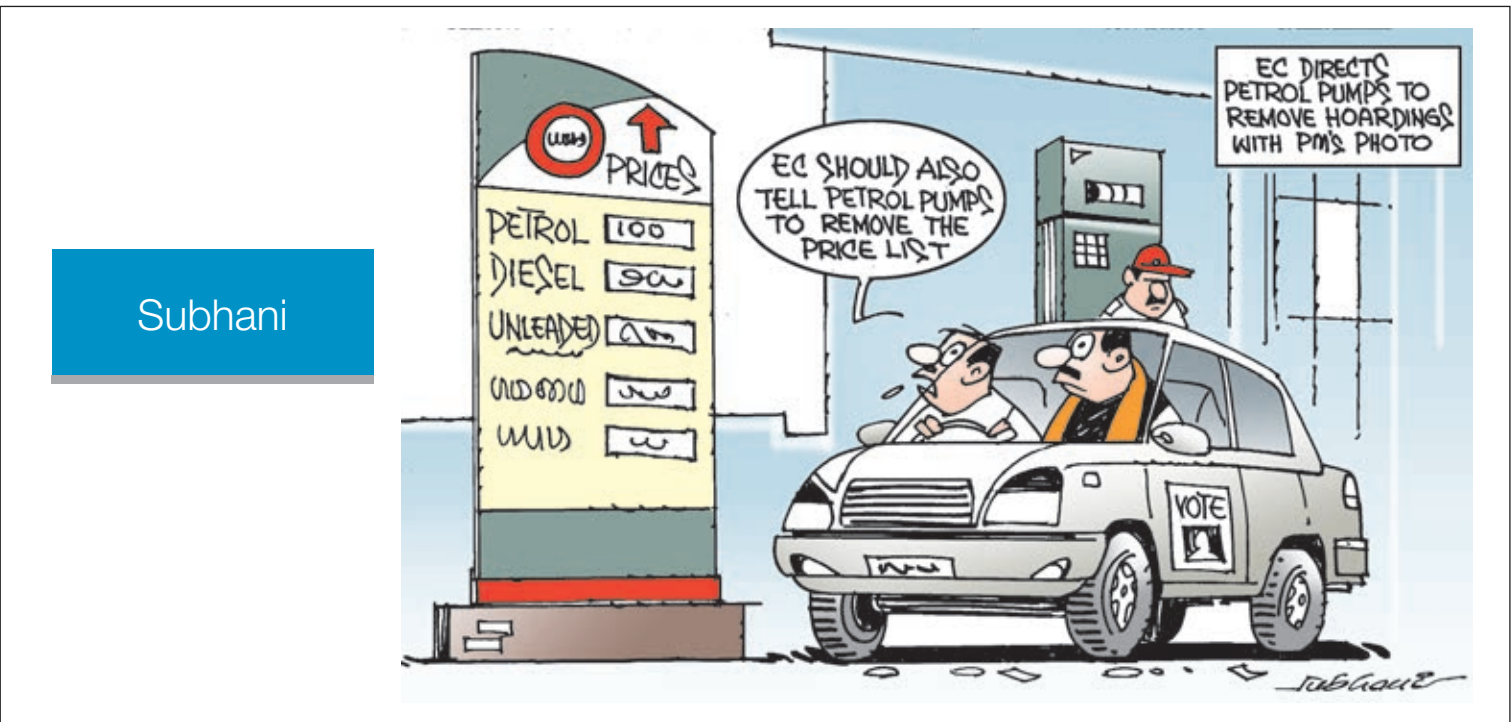
Though there has been a rapid adoption of 4G networks in India, around 45 per cent of Indian mobile customers continue to use 2G networks. It is high time that the government rationalises the reserve price of airwaves for the auction or finds out another mechanism unfettered by the controversies created by the 2G spectrum sale during the UPA regime. The government should have a relook at the national telecom policy guided by the interests of the country’s development, and the financial health of the telecom sector and its lenders.

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Subhani

I’ve vaxxed... Have you? ‘Jab’ as a status symbol



Shobhaa De

Everyone, but everyone, has been “vaxxing” eloquent since March 1. The “Jab” has become the biggest status symbol of the season. If you have taken the shot before anybody else in your circle — your *bhav* goes up instantly! The moment you roll up your sleeve and flash a victory smile for the camera, you feel that you have arrived! You start working the cellphone and messaging all the groups you are on, to brag that you’ve done it! Scored! Sure enough, half a dozen others will text back in a flash — “Oh ... we got ours earlier!” Game on!

Our beloved leader — *arrey baba*, why are you acting thick and asking, “Which one?” ... There is only one beloved leader in our vast country, get it? Anyway, we were most impressed to note Prime Minister Narendra Modi had opted for the “Made in India” vaccine (Covaxin, indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech). It established his “Atma Nirbhar” convictions and sent out a powerful message to the watching world. Good move. Well played! Besides, by opting for the Dr Krishna Ella-led Covaxin, the PM boosted the image and confidence of the makers and became the ninth world leader to get the jab, which was administered at New Delhi’s All India Institute of Medical Sciences by nurse P. Niveda from Pudu-cherry. Adar Poona-wala, the dynamic CEO of the Serum Institute of India (the makers of Covishield, the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine)

was quick to congratulate the Prime Minister, in a generously worded tweet which was widely appreciated by the pharma industry. Soon after, Adar’s fetching and gorgeous wife Natasha (who could give many movie stars a run for their money), posted a yummy picture of herself getting “vaxxed”. She was, as always, impeccably dressed for the important occasion, in pristine white.

A close friend came back from a public hospital after the deed was done. She was in a euphoric state, as she recounted the super-efficient procedure at Mumbai’s Sion Hospital, which was handling the huge number of vaccination seekers very briskly. I asked her for the historic “vaxxie” (selfie while taking the vaccine), and she sheepishly confessed that she didn’t click one! I was surprised, given her vast following on Instagram — no pic of a bared arm! *Hai!* Wasted photo-op! Look at how aggressively some veteran cricketers and other semi-famous folks have been publicising their jabs! The only thing missing in the pics is a winner’s cup. Or a medal. People are so focused on beating everyone else to the shot, we have happily forgotten minor irritations like petrol prices zooming to a hundred bucks a litre. Or key Assembly elections that are taking place in five states/UTs, with all eyes on West Bengal, where, for the moment, Mamata Didi seems to be having an edge — despite her crazy stunts and tantrums. The sight of her being carried down the street astride a

two-wheeler was almost as hilarious as the sight of Rahul Gandhi jumping into the sea for a quick swim with Kerala fisherfolk! Both performed stunts for the cameras — but Rahul looked cuter — sorry Didi! The things that politicians do! Now if only someone could persuade Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to take the plunge into shark-infested waters, voters would instantly perk up and take more interest in the outcome of the state elections.

We are waiting for the Sonia jab. Unless, of course, she has already taken it, *chhup chaa se!* Given the severe style of her saree blouses, with fitted, elbow-touching sleeves, we are curious to know how exactly the jab will be administered, when and where. This whole jab thingle has developed an independent life of its own, with people obsessing over their own vaccination schedule and even more so about which stranger will get it next and be in the news for beating rivals to it. Such a silly race of one upmanship, na? But sooooo entertaining!

Meanwhile, Bollywood is all a-flutter dealing with the income tax raids on handpicked filmwallahs. Don’t be silly! They are not being targeted for speaking up on the farmers’ protests and other national issues even if 90 per cent of Indians have a problem with the same issues! Bollywood is not being targeted or har-

assed, okay? That is just an assumption. Didn’t you read what the good minister had to say about the raids? He assured everybody that these were routine raids on movie people who had been on the radar of the agencies for months. Tax evasion is a serious concern! They must be investigated and punished in case they have failed in their duty to pay up — that’s called cheating the exchequer. Naughty! Prakash Javadekar, the information and broadcasting minister, thundered: “This is too much! Probe agencies undertake investigations based on credible information and the matter later goes to the courts as well.” Egg-exactly! Anurag Kashyap and Taapsee Pannu should rest assured that they are not being victimised for their political views, theek hai? 20 crore *ka* tax evasion is no joke! As for the much bigger economic offenders who may have evaded 200 crores in taxes and have not been subjected to raids — do keep up the good work of being loyal spokespeople. The cutlery tray in India never falls short of *chamchas*, that’s for sure. Besides, raids on movie people receive the sort of publicity for our agencies that most marketing gurus would compute at millions of rupees worth of prime-time coverage. Why not maximise the publicity value of the great work done by these wonderful people by thoroughly probing the tax returns of the Anurag-Taapsee type of people? Which type? Don’t act dumb, *yaar*. Meaning, high-profile, well-known showbiz names. Of course, there are many others on the list — but *aaram se!* No hurry. This is just the trailer, *bhai*. Picture *abhi baaki hai*.

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

Anyway, we were most impressed to note Prime Minister Narendra Modi had opted for the ‘Made in India’ vaccine’. It established his ‘Atma Nirbhar’ convictions and sent out a powerful message to the watching world

LETTERS

SASIKALA SWINGS BACK

Your edit page caricature lampooning VK Sasikala is hilarious (March 5). I think Sasikala is saying goodbye to politics only temporarily. She will get back with a vengeance if the AIADMK loses the assembly election. It is simply unbelievable that a mercurial Sasikala who vowed to come back to politics could suddenly step aside from politics and public life. It is perhaps BJP’s game plan to storm the AIADMK citadel in the event of the AIADMK being defeated at the hustings. Indeed Sasikala and an obliging O. Panneerselvam could be willing partners of the BJP in taking full control of the AIADMK. BJP leader C.T. Ravi’s statement welcoming Sasi’s move and saying that it will pave the way for the formation, not of EPS government but Jayalalithaa’s government could be a sign of things to come!

Kangayam R. Narasimhan, Chennai

NO SURPRISE

EVEN WHEN Sasikala has not entered the electoral fray so far, her decision to stay away from politics does not come as a surprise at all. Moreover, when she has not tested the choppy waters of politics when party supremo was alive, therefore her claim to quit politics only to ensure the votes of supporters of Amma do not get split is superfluous because the fact remains that it is only after AIADMK categorically ruling out accommodating Sasikala in any capacity. Sasikala took the decision after knowing there was little chance for her to fight alone and come back.

K.R. Srinivasan, via e-mail

BIRTH OF THIRD FRONT?

WITH THE unexpected turn of events, like VK Sasikala announcement to quit politics and public life, DMK being unrelenting in seat talks with Congress and AIADMK’s reluctance to include AMMK in their alliance and the seat discussion failures with DMDK, the door for a Third Front coalition is in the offing. The Third Front is to be led by MNM chief Kamal Haasan and it is a pity that the century old Congress party is keen to tie up with MNM as the DMK is unwilling to give more seats to Congress. It is a matter to be seen as to whether the MNM chief, who is critical of the corruption charges against DMK & Congress, would be keen to align with the Congress. Of course, in Indian politics anything is possible as everyone is keen only to be in power, by hook or crook, and Tamil Nadu is no exception.

N. Mahadevan, Chennai

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



“If reality is a reflection. Don’t smash the mirror in a rage If reality is just a fiction, Don’t rip up the offending page If reality is a nightmare. Ride the white horse into the dawn If reality is a game of chess Face the fact — Oh sacrificial pawn!”

— From Bachchoo’s Bickerings

Of ‘patriotism’ & ‘nationalism’: It may be time to do a rethink

Some decades ago, Norman Tebbit, a former pilot turned politician (just like our own Rajiv Gandhi?) and a minister in Margaret Thatcher’s government, devised what became known as the “Tebbit test”. It wasn’t put to any practical or political use but was at the time accepted as a measure of British patriotism applied to its ethnic population.

The test was an observation of who was cheering which team when the MCC, or now England, were playing a game of cricket against the West Indies, Pakistan, India or Bangladesh. If you were of Pakistani ancestry living in Bradford or Huddersfield, even if you, and perhaps even your parents, had been born and brought up in Britain,

would you cheer for the Pakistani XI or for the British team?

The Tebbit test was never passed into law — unlike the strictures that today’s home secretary, Pritti “Clueless” Patel, has introduced about measuring earning capacity and only admitting those in the upper brackets, banning those whose potential earnings would classify them as “hoi polloi” (I am sure Clueless doesn’t use the Latin term!). Tebbit’s test was simply a conduit for antagonism.

I confess that I pass and fail the Tebbit test regularly. In the recent series of Test matches between India and England, I was all for Joe Root’s team in the first Test, when “we” were winning, and then switched allegiance in the second and third, with patriotic support for Virat Kohli’s team and achievement. No, gentle reader, in democratic Britain, this admission can’t lead to Clueless sending MI5 to knock at my door at dawn.

The Tebbit test is basically moronic. Cricket isn’t war, it’s just a game and those blue-blooded British who place a bet on India winning the latest Test have used their judgment of bowling and batting, rather than

betrayed their country by making money through its defeats.

And yet the idea of patriotism, in the wake of the assault by American “patriots” on their own legislature, and in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, can perhaps do with some examination, or at least discussion. The arguments for so doing are, forgive me, not rocket science — though I’ve found dealing with rockets quite easy to master when I light them placed in empty wine bottles and turn them away from gathered family and friends each Diwali.

Were the neo-Nazis who attacked the Capitol in Washington really “patriots”? Other columnists have been examining the word, perhaps for the same reasons that I feel impelled to. I publicly admit, gentle reader, to being a regular subscriber to a right-wing British magazine called *The Spectator*. Its columnists and editorials are always vitriolic against something they call “the left” — a label they affix to anything that the writers disagree with. Some of their columnists, with one token exception, are apologists for disastrous Brexit; many of them for Donald Trump when he was in power and some plainly eccentric. One of

their columnists, who in recent issues has been an ardent opponent of the UK government’s “lockdown”, is called Lionel Shriver. I believe that she is a novelist of sorts and won a prize for a book called something like — I’m sorry, memory fails — “We must ask Johnny why he killed his classmates”. Her arguments against lockdown said she was in possession of research which showed that lockdowns didn’t work. I would have written a letter to the magazine pointing out that they didn’t work because idiots didn’t obey the lockdown and gathered together at every opportunity and spread the wretched disease. They wouldn’t have printed it.

I’ve picked on this particular columnist and this particular foolishness because last week Ms Shriver quotes Webster’s dictionary to contend that patriotism and nationalism used to be interchangeable until, surprise, surprise, the villainous, shadowy left “hived off” the definition of patriotism to distinguish it from nationalism. “Patriots” can advocate open borders. While ‘nationalists’ are selfish bigots who throw children in cages. Putting a neo-Nazi stink on the word ‘nationalists’ also puts a stink on the desire

for more effective border control.” Ms Shriver, an American immigrant herself, wants to use dodgy semantics to slam the door behind her. *Hypocrite lecturer, ma semblable, ma sœur!*

Perhaps Ms Shriver has never read George Orwell and ought to. Here’s his definition of ‘nationalist’: “The nationalist does not go on the principle of simply ganging up with the strongest side. Nationalism is power hunger tempered by self-deception. Every nationalist is capable of the most flagrant dishonesty, but he is also unshakably certain of being in the right.”

Ms Shriver should also note that the patriots who attacked the Capitol were neo-Nazis, some of them wearing printed T-shirts saying 6MNE — “Six million not enough”. They were there in support of Mr Trump who was, like her, an ardent advocate of “effective border control”.

In any democratic country today, patriotism ought to mean love for and loyalty to a country that defines itself, as did the exemplary founders of Independent India, as one with cast-iron guarantees of freedom of speech and social and political equality for all.

SHORT TAKES

Sindhu marches into semifinals

Basel: Olympic silver medallist P. V. Sindhu advanced to the semifinals of the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament with a straight-game win over Thai Busanan Ongbamrungphan. World champion Sindhu took a minute less than an hour to see off a fighting Busanan, seeded fifth, 21-16, 23-21 to set up a clash with fourth seed Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt. Meanwhile, B. Sai Praneeth lost 14-21, 17-21 to Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia in 45 minutes to bow out of the tournament. Ajay Jayaram's campaign ended after a demoralising 9-21, 6-21 loss to eighth seeded Thai Kunlavut Vitidsarn in another last eight men's singles match. Earlier, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa fought hard before going down 17-21, 21-16, 8-21 to fifth seeds Tan Kian Meng and Lai Pei Jing in quarterfinals of mixed doubles. — PTI

Goa hold Mumbai in 1st leg of semis

Margao: FC Goa missed the chance to enter the second leg of the Indian Super League semifinals with an advantage as they squandered a lead twice in their 2-2 draw against Mumbai City FC here on Friday. Goa broke the deadlock through Igor Angulo's penalty (20') before his goal was cancelled out by Hugo Boumous (38'). The Gaurs then took the lead again through Saviour Gama (59') but Mourtada Fall (62') soon netted a vital equaliser to help the Islanders escape with a vital point. Mumbai dominated the proceedings after the break but it was Goa who scored against the run of play around the hour mark, after a stunning solo goal from Gama. — PTI

Boxers Satish, Ashish in semis

New Delhi: Olympic-bound Indian boxers Satish Kumar (+91kg) and Ashish Kumar (75kg) entered the semifinals of the 35th Boxam International Tournament in Castellon, Spain with impressive victories. Also advancing to the last-four round was Sumit Sangwan (81kg) after a 4-1 triumph over Mohor El Ziad of Belgium. Satish, the first super heavyweight from the country to qualify for the Olympics, defeated Denmark's Givskov Nielsen 5-0 in his last-eight bout late on Thursday. Asian silver-winner Ashish, on the other hand, got the better of Italy's Remo Salvati in a split 4-1 verdict to make the medal rounds. Earlier, Mohammed Hussamuddin (57kg) and the duo of Manish Kaushik (63kg) and Vikas Krishan (69kg) advanced to the medal rounds. — PTI

Rijiju tells coach Boe to mind duty

New Delhi: Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Friday reacted sharply to foreign badminton coach Mathias Boe's comments on the Income Tax raid at properties of his actor partner Taapsee Pannu, saying the Dane must stick to his professional duties instead of commenting on matters which are not his domain.

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: Fourth Test, Day 3 from 9.30 am on Star Sports 1

BADMINTON

Swiss Open: Semifinals from 3.30 pm on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Second Semifinal, 1st leg — North East United vs Mohun Bagan from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, HD

English Premier League: Burnley vs Arsenal from 6 pm on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Italian League: Juventus vs Lazio from 1.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

UFC

Fight Night: Jan Blachowicz vs Israel Adesanya and other bouts from 8.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2

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PANTHER ATTACK

Pant's splendid ton puts England under the pump

Ahmedabad, March 5: Rishabh Pant changed his game-plan and in turn India's fortunes with a magnificent century, helping the side snatch control from England's grip to finish the second day at a robust 294 for 7 in the final Test here on Friday.

England dominated the first two sessions and India looked in all sorts of trouble before Pant (101 off 118 balls) suddenly decided to catch the opposition by the scruff of their necks, effortlessly changing gears in company of Washington Sundar (60, 117 balls, 8x4).

The duo added 113 runs in 26 overs but more importantly, landed an exquisite 'left-hook' on England's hopes of turning party-poopers, having already conceded a first innings lead of 89 runs.

At stumps, Washington was still at the crease with Axar Patel (11).

For someone, who has always been panned for his lack of game awareness, it was Pant 2.0 at play where he defended when it was necessary but unlocked his brutal attacking instincts when required.

The first 50 came off 82 balls and the next off 33 balls with Washington being the ideal foil, holding one end well en route to his third half century in Test cricket.

Just like playing a single spinner in the third Test was a blunder, England paid the price for playing a bowler short as their main four got tired during the final session.

In Virender Sehwag style, Pant deposited Dom Bess into the 'cow corner' of the stands against the turn, to complete his third Test hundred, first at home, having missed at least five in recent years.

When he finally got out, Root's frustrated expression was a dead giveaway that the match was now out of hand for England, having conceded as many as 141 runs in a single session. Pant had hit 13 fours and two sixes during an innings which, in all likelihood, will earn him the 'Man of the Match' award.

Ben Stokes (22-6-73-2) troubled the Indians with reared up deliveries, one of those got skipper Virat Kohli (0), but there was no trouble for Pant, who would gleefully pull the



India's Rishabh Pant celebrates his century against England during the second day of the fourth Test at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Friday. — PTI

England all-rounder.

The audacity with which he came down the track against Anderson (20-11-40-3), depositing him over extra cover for a boundary, could have taken anyone's breath away.

It was one fascinating day of Test cricket where flamboyant players like Rohit Sharma (49 off 144 balls) and Pant traded

their natural attacking instincts for a more conservative approach.

Earlier, Cheteshwar Pujara (17 off 66 balls) and Kohli's (0 off 8 balls) dismissals brought England back in the game. Ajinkya Rahane (27) hit a flurry of boundaries to get the scoreboard moving but Anderson had him caught at second slip.

NUMBERS GAME

VIRAT KOHLI'S SECOND DUCK OF THE SERIES:

● England's right-arm fast-medium bowler, Ben Stokes dismissed Virat Kohli for duck in India's first innings on the second day of the fourth and final Test match at Ahmedabad on Friday (March 5).

● It was second duck in the series for Indian skipper Virat Kohli. The first one was in the first innings of the second Test match at Chennai. It was second time when Virat Kohli received two ducks in a series. The first occasion when Indian skipper received two ducks in a series was also against England in the five Test series in England in 2014.

● Virat Kohli also equalled Mahendra Singh Dhoni's record of most ducks as Indian skipper by getting eighth duck in 98 innings of 50 Tests. Mahendra Singh Dhoni received same number of ducks in 96 innings of 60 Tests as skipper.

● The 113-run stand between Rishabh Pant/Washington Sundar was the ninth seventh wicket century stand for India against England. Syed Kirmani and Ravi Shastri's 235-run stand is the best for seventh wicket for India against England in Tests.

● Rishabh Pant made his maiden century at home in eighth innings of sixth Test match by making 101 off 118 with 13 fours and two sixes. It was his third century in 33 innings of 20 Test matches.

● Rishabh Pant also became the third Indian wicket-keeper to score three or more hundreds in Tests. Mahendra Singh Dhoni holds the record of scoring the highest number of hundreds as wicket-keeper. He scored six hundreds in 144 innings of 90 Tests. Wriddhiman Saha made three hundreds in 50 innings of 37 Tests.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

SCORECARD

England 1st innings: 205

India 1st innings (Overnight 24/1): R. Sharma lbw b Stokes 49, C. Pujara lbw b Leach 17, V. Kohli c Foakes b Stokes 0, A. Rahane c Stokes b Anderson 27, R. Pant c Root b Anderson 101, R. Ashwin c Pope b Leach 13, W. Sundar (batting) 60, A. Patel (batting) 11. Extras (B-8, LB-5, NB-3) 16. **Total (for 7 wickets in 94 overs) 294.**

FoW: 1-0, 2-40, 3-41, 4-80, 5-121, 6-146, 7-259.

Bowling: Anderson 20-11-40-3, Stokes 22-6-73-2, Leach 23-5-66-2, Bess 15-1-56-0, Root 14-1-46-0.

Aussies pack off Kiwis to force T20 series decider

Wellington, March 5: Australia crushed New Zealand by 50 runs in a low-scoring fourth Twenty20 international in Wellington Friday to level the series at 2-2.

The result sets up a winner-takes-all blockbuster in the final match at the same venue on Sunday, with Australia in red-hot form after struggling early in the series.

The Australians scored 156 for six in their 20 overs after winning the toss and electing to bat.

In reply, New Zealand were all out for 106 after 18.5 overs.

Captain Aaron Finch anchored the tourists' innings with a gritty 79, making him Australia's most prolific T20 international run scorer on 2,310, ahead of David Warner's 2,265.

Finch chiselled out his 14th T20 half-century off 55 balls before cutting loose with four sixes in the final over, in which Kyle Jamieson conceded 26 runs.

But he struggled for partners as the Black Caps pinned back Australia's batters with accurate bowling and a steady flow of wickets.

Despite his man-of-the-match batting performance, Finch singled out his bowling attack for praise, saying they were outstanding on a wicket that did not play as expected.

"I thought we adapted really well, it was a really polished performance with the ball," he said.

Kyle Richardson ended with the best figures of



Australia captain Aaron Finch plays a shot against New Zealand during their fourth Twenty20 match in Wellington on Friday. — AFP

three for 19, but spinners Ashton Agar, Adam Zampa and Glenn Maxwell all contributed with two wickets each.

Leg-spinner Ish Sodhi was the pick of the New Zealand bowlers, claiming three for 32.

The Black Caps made a slow start, with openers Martin Guptill and Tim Seifert managing just one boundary apiece in the opening three overs on a spin-friendly wicket.

Guptill departed cheaply for seven but it was only the beginning of New Zealand's woes as they lost a further six wickets for 30 runs.

Meanwhile,

Zealand fast bowler Tim Southee has been reprimanded for showing dissent at an umpire's decision. Southee was found to have breached "Article 2.8 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel", a Level 1 breach. In addition to this, one demerit point has been added to the disciplinary record of Southee, for whom it was the first offence in a 24-month period.

— AFP

Brief scores: Australia 156/6 in 20 overs (Finch 79; I. Sodhi 3/32) bt New Zealand 106 in 18.5 overs (K. Jamieson 30; K. Richardson 3/19)

National athletics coach found dead

Patiala, March 5: India's middle and long distance coach Nikolai Snesarev of Belarus was on Friday found dead in his hostel room at the National Institute of Sports here, the Athletics Federation of India said.

The dead body of the 72-year-old Snesarev, who returned to India after a gap of two years to be at the helm till the end of September, has been sent to a government hospital for post mortem.

"He had come to NIS for the Indian Grand Prix 3 (from his Bengaluru base) held today. But when he did not turn up for the meet, the coaches checked for him in the evening and his room was found locked from inside," AFI President Adille Sumariwalla said.

"When the door was broken, he was found lying on his bed. The Sports Authority of India doctor at the NIS declared him dead and the ED (team) of the SAI has referred the body to the government hospital for post mortem.

"We don't know the cause of death. We will know, it later after post mortem."

Snesarev was coaching 3000m steeplechaser Avinash Sable, who has qualified for the Olympics, and other middle and long-distance runners in their bid to qualify for the Tokyo



Nikolai Snesarev

He had come to NIS for the Indian Grand Prix 3 (from his Bengaluru base) held today. But when he did not turn up for the meet, the coaches checked for him in the evening and his room was found locked from inside. When the door was broken, he was found lying on his bed.

— ADILLE SUMARIWALLA
Athletics Federation of India president

Games. He had quit as Indian athletics' long and middle distance coach in February 2019 after Sable opted to leave him and train under Army coach Amrish Kumar. His contract then was till the end of the Olympics, postponed by a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. — PTI

NEERAJ SETS NEW NATL JAVELIN THROW RECORD

Patiala, March 5: Olympic-bound star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra smashed his own national record with a throw of 88.07m, which is also the best of the year so far, in a sensational return to action during the third Indian Grand Prix meet here on Friday.

Competing for the first time in more than a year after the Covid-19 pandemic wiped out the whole of 2020 calendar, Chopra hurled the spear to a distance of 88.07cm in his fifth attempt to obliterate his earlier national record of 88.06m, sealed during the gold-winning effort at the 2018 Asian Games.

Chopra opened the competition with an effort of 83.03m before having two foul throws. After a fourth throw of 83.36m, Chopra sent the javelin to 88.07m amid loud cheers from a sizeable audience at the NIS Patiala. His final throw was 82.24m. "I was prepared and today it was windy. I used my favourite javelin which helped me. Pandemic did affect training and preparation but we managed to hold on," said Chopra. — PTI



Chelsea's Cesar Azpilicueta (left) challenges for the ball with Liverpool's Diogo Jota (center) during their English Premier League match at Anfield stadium in Liverpool on Thursday. Chelsea won 1-0. — AP

Mount stars as Liverpool crash

London, March 5: Mason Mount fired Chelsea into fourth place in the Premier League as the midfielder's superb strike clinched a 1-0 win against troubled Liverpool, while Everton boosted their top four bid with a 1-0 victory at West Brom on Thursday.

Mount's first half goal was enough to see off lacklustre Liverpool and extended Chelsea's impressive renaissance under new boss Thomas Tuchel. Chelsea are unbeaten in 10 games in all competitions since Tuchel replaced the sacked Frank Lampard in January.

The Blues sit one point clear of fifth placed Everton, who have a game in hand on the west Londoners.

While Chelsea are on the up, injury-hit Liverpool crashed to a fifth successive home defeat for the first time in their illustrious history, leaving the spluttering champions without a win at Anfield since before Christmas.

Reds are languishing in seventh place, four points behind Chelsea after losing five of their last six league matches. — AFP

BILBAO TOPPLE LEVANTE, MEET BARCA IN FINAL

Madrid, March 5: Athletic Bilbao could win two Copa del Reys in two weeks after beating Levante 3-2 on aggregate on Thursday to book their place in this season's final against Barcelona.

Bilbao's 2-1 win after extra-time means they will face Barca on April 17 at La Cartuja, shortly after playing Basque rivals Real Sociedad in the postponed final of last season's tournament at the same venue on April 3.

Levante had already beaten Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid this season and they made the perfect start to the second leg when Roger Marti found the corner on the turn in the 17th minute.

But Garcia equalised for Bilbao from the penalty spot after being pulled down by Duarte before Berenguer scored the winner in extra-time. — AFP