

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | SATURDAY | 13 MARCH 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 36.0°C  
**Min:** 20.0°C  
**RH:** 73%  
**Rainfall:** NIL

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

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Magha Bahula Amavasya till 3.53 pm  
**Star:** Purvabhadra till 12.23 am  
**Varjyam:** Sunrise to 7.22 am  
**Durmuhurtam:** 6.29 am to 8.04 am  
**Rahukalam:** 9 am to 10.30 am  
**HJRI CALENDAR**  
**Rajab** 28, 1442 AH  
**PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)**  
**Fajar:** 5.40 am  
**Zohar:** 1.30 pm  
**Asar:** 4.30 pm  
**Maghrib:** 5.48 pm  
**Isha:** 8.30 pm  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW** 6.11 AM  
**SUNSET TODAY** 6.12 PM  
**MOONRISE TODAY** 6.15 AM  
**MOONSET TOMORROW** 7.04 PM

## COUNTER POINT



We should not have taken leaders of different factions of the same party!

## SHORT TAKES

### NEET for under grads on Aug 1

**New Delhi:** The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to undergraduate medical courses will be conducted on August 1, the ministry of education's National Testing Agency announced on Friday. "The NEET (UG) is going to be conducted by NTA for admission to MBBS, BDS, BAMS, BSMS, BUMS etc."

### Inflation rises to 3-month high

**New Delhi:** Inflation rose to a three-month high of 5.03 per cent in February mainly on account of higher food prices, government data showed on Friday. The Consumer Price Index based retail inflation stood at 4.06 per cent in January. The previous high was witnessed at 6.93 per cent in November 2020.

### File case against Kangana: Court

**Mumbai:** A Mumbai court has asked the city police to register an offence against actor Kangana Ranaut after the author of 'Didda: The Warrior Queen of Kashmir' accused her of copyright violation, an official said on Friday. The author, Ashish Kaul, accused Ranaut of copyright infringement.

#### FEAR | RETURNS



## NATION | 4

**Mamata discharged from hospital**



## WORLD | 5

**Turkey to host Afghan talks**

## SPORTS | 8

**Mithali Raj in 10K runs club**



# Jagan seeks Bharat Ratna for Tricolour's designer Pingali

**Congratulates Modi, says AP people are overwhelmed with joy**

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12**

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Friday appealed to the Central government to award Bharat Ratna to National Flag's designer and freedom fighter Pingali Venkayya.

Conveying his greetings to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his decision to celebrate the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' programme to mark 75 years of independence of our country, the Chief Minister, in a letter, explained the contribution of Pingali Venkayya in designing the National Flag and requested him to confer Bharat Ratna posthumously.

The Chief Minister said that the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav programme has overwhelmed five crore people of Andhra Pradesh with joy and patriotic fervour.

He stated that a journey, which our motherland India has gone through since independence, a journey made difficult by financial and economic challenges, a journey riddled by several unprovoked external aggressions, a journey where several seemingly impossible milestones have been achieved, a journey of more than seven decades, truly deserves a majestic and grand celebration.

■ **Page 2: Gandhiji recognised Pingali's efforts**



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy interacts with Seetha Mahalakshmi, daughter of Pingali Venkayya, at her house at Macherla in Guntur district on Friday. — DC

# Jagan felicilates Pingali's daughter, gifts her ₹75L

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12**

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Friday felicitated National Flag creator Pingali Venkayya's daughter Ghantasala Seetha Mahalakshmi and his other family members on the occasion of 75 years of the Flag, and announced the launch of Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav in Andhra Pradesh.

The CM flew down to the

remote town of Macherla in Guntur district in a helicopter, went to the house of Seetha Mahalakshmi at PWD Colony and offered cash aid of Rs. 75 lakh from the state government and interacted with the family members.

He garlanded the statue of Mahatma Gandhi and paid floral tributes to a portrait of Venkayya. He also felicitated Seetha with a shawl.

The CM said it was a

matter of great pride to the state that the National Flag was designed by Venkayya. The family members expressed happiness and gratitude towards the CM for taking time out to hail the patriotic works of Venkayya.

The financial aid that Jagan Mohan Reddy extended to Seetha has been sanctioned via a youth advance, tourism and culture (YATC) department order on March 11.

# BJP to contest Tirupati bypoll

**DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, MARCH 12**

Minister of state for external affairs V. Muralidharan, who is also BJP incharge of AP, announced that the party would field a candidate from Andhra Pradesh in the by-election to the Tirupati LS constituency.

The BJP leader, on Friday, tweeted that the candidate would have the support of Jana Sena.

The decision was taken unanimously at a meeting attended by party leaders, including party affairs in-charge Sunil Deodhar, BJP state president Somu Veerajulu and the JS chief Pawan Kalyan. He also exuded confidence that the BJP's victory march would start from the temple town.

"Leading the fight for the people and by the people, a BJP Andhra's can-

didate, backed by Jana Sena party, will fight Tirupati by-election. A unanimous decision was taken at a meeting attended by Pawan Kalyan and Somu Veerajulu", he tweeted.

The BJP leader also tweeted: "BJP" victory march will begin from Tirupati and BJP Andhra and Jana Sena parties will expose the shady designs of YSRC and TD that undermine the beliefs of devotees."

Jana Sena leaders and workers seemed heartbroken with the announcement. They were expecting their candidate, bolstered by the impact the party created in the recent panchayat elections. However, Veerajulu said they had a productive meeting with Pawan Kalyan. He said the name of the candidate would be declared by the BJP high command.

# Serving staff can't head EC, says SC

**PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 12**

In a major ruling aimed at upholding the independence of the election commission, the Supreme Court on Friday said that no person serving the government could be appointed as election commissioner as they have to be independent and act independently.

Having held that no person serving the government or associated with it could be appointed as an election commissioner, a bench comprising Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman, Justice B.R.Gavai and Justice Hrishikesh Roy said that independence of election commission cannot be compromised at any cost in a democracy and that giving additional charge of State Election Commission to a govt official is mockery of the constitution.

The top court gave a direction to all states to comply with the constitutional scheme of independent SEC if they are in default.

The strong observation from the court came as it took dim view of Goa government for giving additional charge of State Election Commissioner to a secretary serving under it.

Describing it a "disturbing feature" that an officer serving under the Goa government was given an additional charge as State election commissioner, the court noted that this officer attempted to overreach the HC in the holding elections to Panchayats in the State.

The court directed the State election commission to issue notification for Panchayat polls in Goa within 10 days and complete the election process by April 30.

# NIA files addl charges on Giteli

**DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 12**

National Investigative Agency (NIA) on Friday filed a fresh charge sheet against an ISI operative in Visakhapatnam Espionage Case in the NIA special court in Vijayawada.

According to the agency, NIA has filed a supplementary charge-sheet against Imran Yakub Giteli @ Giteli Imran, a resident of Gujarat, for his involvement in raising funds for espionage activities. The case was initially registered under various sec-

tions of IPC and UAPA at Counter Intelligence Police Station, Vijayawada. It pertained to conspiracy hatched by Pakistani ISI agents to carry out terrorist acts in the country.

■ **Page 2: Giteli was tapping Naval men for ISI**

# Officials blame people's negligence for spurt in Covid-19 cases

# State puts hospitals on Covid alert

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12**

Given the steady rise in number of Coronavirus cases in several districts of Andhra Pradesh, state health authorities have advised government teaching and district hospitals to be prepared with adequate number of beds, ventilators, medical oxygen and medicines to meet the challenge.

Though these hospitals are already running Covid-19 wards, health authorities want them to be fully prepared for meeting any sudden rise in number of cases. They want five to 10 beds kept ready exclusively for

coronavirus-infected patients in each health centre, especially in districts, where the number of Covid-19 cases are rising.

Reasons attributed for rise in number of Covid-19 cases are spread of infection from infected states like Maharashtra, people failing to comply with Covid-19 protocol by wearing face masks, maintaining social distance and sanitising hands frequently, especially the young generation visiting public places like shopping malls, film theatres and religious places, apart from conducting Coronavirus tests at the rate of 4,000 per district on an average.

One of the worst-hit districts in AP is Chittoor, where there are 85 virus-positive cases and 431 total active cases. The district already accounts for 856 of deaths.

Chittoor district medical and health officer Dr. M. Panchulaiah said, "We are conducting 5,000 to 6,000 Covid-19 tests per day unlike other districts, where the number of tests is relatively lesser. The district has a sizeable floating population from neighbouring states like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. We also have Tirupati, a popular pilgrim centre. This is resulting in a steady rise in number of cases. However, we are prepared

to meet any eventuality."

East Godavari too reported 41 cases in parts of Amalapuram, Kakinada, Rajahmundry and Ramachandrapuram. Deputy CM and minister for health Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas said that they were taking all requisite measures to provide medical treatment to the infected patients while some of them were kept in home quarantine as they were asymptomatic under supervision of health personnel. He said that containment zones were set up in affected areas.

In Amalapuram division alone, 14 cases were reported in Amalapuram urban,

Malikipuram and Kothapeta mandals.

Amalapuram sub collector Himanshu Kaushik said, "We are arranging health camps to provide treatment and taking up door-to-door surveillance in the affected areas to find out any fresh cases of the virus. As we are having MLC polls on March 14, we are taking all measures to strictly comply with Covid-19 protocol by ensuring that the voters should wear face masks, maintain social distance and sanitise their hands to avoid spread of the virus."

■ **Page 2: People allowed to walk-in for tests, vaccination**

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## OTHER STORIES

## SEC RULES OUT ANOMALIES IN GP VOTES COUNTING

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12

The State Election Commission (SEC) made it clear that no instances of results overturned due to power outages in any district during the counting of votes of recently concluded gram panchayat polls.

In a statement issued on Friday, the SEC said that elections were held to 10,890 positions of sarpanch and 82,894 positions of ward member recently. Referring to complaints of overturning of results due to alleged power outages during the counting process and entertaining of recounting even in case of double-digit lead margin, the commissioner of panchayat raj and state election authority submitted a report to the SEC after obtaining reports from all the district collectors.

The SEC said that no instances of results overturned due to power outages in any district based on the reports. However, it noticed four instances in Guntur district where results were overturned after recounting where the lead margin was in single digit. Based on direction from the SEC, the district collector conducted an inquiry and submitted a report stating that results were declared as per the norms.

Finally, the SEC said that no anomalies were found in the counting process of gram panchayat polls.

## CHINTA STARTS CAMPAIGNING FOR TIRUPATI LS BYPOLL

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 12

Former MP and CWC special invitee Dr P. Chinta Mohan launched his party campaign for Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election in Vakadu and Chittamur mandals of Nellore district on Friday, even as the regional parties and the BJP are yet to launch their electioneering.

The former MP went door-to-door at these two mandals and explained the development done by the previous Congress-led central and state governments.

Addressing the media in Vakadu, he came down heavily on the YSRC and Telugu Desam, accusing them of ruining the state. He also alleged that the BJP was putting the national unity at risk by creating a gap between various sections. He said the state is currently witnessing rowdy rule instead of the assured 'Rajanna Rajyam', as the ruling party is suppressing the people's voice, using police and administration. He also blamed TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu for neglecting the Dugarajapatnam Port to benefit his relatives and party workers. "Both Jagan and Naidu are selfish, who always consider the welfare of their kith and kin. Both were unsuccessful in securing the special category status to the state and that the state did not get funds from the Centre", he said.

He also charged the BJP for instigating regional and religious differences and maintained that the Congress was the only party that considers all sections of people's progress.

## GOVT RESPONSIBLE FOR AGRICULTURE DEBT CRISIS: TD

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12

Telugu Desam national general secretary Nara Lokesh on Friday held Jagan Mohan Reddy government responsible for agricultural debt crisis in AP, which led to the latest suicide by a farmer couple at Allagadda in Kurnool district.

He pointed out that Sanjeeva Reddy and his wife ended their lives at P. Chintakunta village after of Rs. 11 lakh following losses in agriculture.

Lokesh accused Jagan of immersing himself in his party foundation day celebrations while farmers are facing a life and death situation on account of worsening debts due to failure of crops. He hoped at least now, the Chief Minister will rise from his deep slumber and prevent suicides by farmers. He demanded that the CM immediately rescue the family of Sanjeeva Reddy.

Condemning the vindictive attitude of YSRC, the TD general secretary maintained that false cases have been filed against former Anaparthi MLA Ramakrishna Reddy after the latter started exposing the illegal activities of local YSRC legislator.



Adviser to government Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, ministers Botsa Satyanarayana, Vellampalli Srinivas, MP N. Suresh, MLA Jogi Ramesh and others cut the cake on the occasion of YSRC party foundation day celebrations at Central office in Tadepalli on Friday.

— DECCAN CHRONICLE

## Jagan thanks people and cadre for standing by YSRC

Values and credibility are pillars of YSRC, tweets Jagan

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12

The YSR Congress celebrated its 11th Foundation Day in a grand manner across Andhra Pradesh with several party leaders and workers taking part in various events.

On the occasion, Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy took to Twitter and shared his views on the journey of the YSRC. "Values and credibility are pillars of YSRC, which aims to achieve ideals of great leader Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy. I thank people who have stood by me in difficult times, the leaders who walked with me, and activists who followed me during the 10-year journey," he tweeted.

The YSRC leaders hoisted the party flag, cut a cake and paid floral tributes to the photograph of YSR at the party's central office in Tadepalli. Adviser to government Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy paid floral tributes to the former chief minister.

Speaking on the occasion, he recalled that after the sudden demise of Dr. Rajasekhara Reddy, Jagan Mohan Reddy had started his fight against all odds to bring YSRC to power. Though the party was disappointed in year 2014 elections, the party chief efficiently donned the role of Leader of Opposition, which brought immense popularity for the party. This gave the party a prominent place among people.

Terming the recent panchayat election results as people's victory, Ramakrishna Reddy asserted that the YSRC will also sweep the municipal and corporation elections.

Ministers Botsa Satyanarayana, Vellampalli Srinivas, MP Nandigam Suresh, MLAs Jogi Ramesh, Mondithoka Jaganmohan Rao, Andhra Pradesh Telugu Academy chairperson N. Lakshmi Parvathi and others were present at the programme.



MP Avinash Reddy cutting cake at Pulivendula party office

## YSRC would remain strong for 100 years, says Avinash Reddy

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, MARCH 12

Party leaders and activists celebrated the foundation day of the YSR Congress here on Thursday. Party flags were hoisted at all constituency centres across the district and cakes were cut. Party leaders garlanded the statues of former chief minister late Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy and paid tributes to the departed leader.

Kadapa MP Y.S. Avinash Reddy, Y.S. Manohar Reddy and other leaders hoisted the party flag at Pulivendula party office and the hometown of chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy. A cake was cut at the party office.

Avinash Reddy said the YSRC was formed 10 years ago in Idupulapaya on the foundations of values set by YSR. He said the YSR Congress would remain strong for a hundred years and the party would stand by every single member.

He said Jagan Mohan Reddy founded the YSR Congress Party for the people to carry forward his goals and aspirations after the untimely death of YSR.

"Welfare and development are the two eyes of the YSRC government. Jagan is continuing his rule in a transparent and ideal manner by introducing several welfare schemes.

Chief whip Srikanth

Reddy hoisted the YSRC party flag at the Lakkireddipalli party office on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, he said the YSRC was a party rooted in values. Deputy CM Amjad Bhasha, Kamalapuram

legislator P. Ravindranath Reddy and Kadapa parliamentary party chief Kottamaddi Suresh Babu cut the cake and hoisted the party flag at the party office in Kadapa on Friday.

They said the YSRC government was working towards solving the problems of the people.

YSRC town president Puli Sunil Kumar and party leaders Nityananda Reddy and Afzal Khan participated in the event.

## Revised groundnut seed procurement policy will help farmers, says officials

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, MARCH 12

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has been bringing in innovative changes in the groundnut seed procurement policy so that every rupee earmarked for the welfare of farmers goes directly to them and does not benefit any middleman.

In keeping with this, the department of agriculture is radically changing the groundnut seed procurement system. It is widely cultivated in Rayalaseema districts. The officials have been directed to carry out seed collection only at the district-level. And their responsibilities have been detailed through video conferences with the district agriculture officials. The district authorities have been urged to procure groundnut seeds that will be distributed in the upcoming Kharif season under Rythu Bharosa Kendrams (RBKS).

The Andhra Pradesh Seed Development Corporation (APSDC) and the ministry of Agriculture have directed them to collect seeds that were cultivated in Rabi under the AP Seed Village Programme.

The Corporation processes and stores the seeds,

● The officials have been directed to carry out seed collection only at the district-level. And their responsibilities have been detailed through video conferences with the district agriculture officials.

which are called certified seeds. They are to collect truthful labelling seed directly from the farmer. The government has fixed a base price of certified seed at ₹61 per kilo while it will be ₹60 per kilo for truthful labelling seed.

The district agriculture department estimates that Kadapa district will need 42,000 quintals of groundnut seeds. Under the current Rabi Seed Village program, 930 quintals of groundnut seeds have been distributed in the district with 62 per cent subsidy. Farmers in Rabi cultivated groundnut crop spread over 150 hectares.

Agriculture department estimates that this crop is likely to yield 3000 quintals. Another 39,000 quintals of truthful labelled seed will be procured from the farmers. Farmers from the district have cultivated groundnuts over an extent of 9,000 hectares this year and the production is estimated at 2,14,000 quintals.

Earlier, the department and Corporation invited tenders for the procurement of groundnut. The National Seed Development Corporation, AP Seeds Development Corporation stored the seeds in warehouses. Later, the seeds were supplied as per the district-wise indent by the department.

Subsequently, seeds would be supplied to farmers at subsidized rates. Now the government has put an end to that old policy and suggested that the State Corporation and the ministry should jointly collect and store seeds under RBKS.

Kadapa district agriculture joint director Juttiga Muralikrishna told Deccan Chronicle that arrangements have been made for seed collection at the district-level. The prices fixed by the government are only a base as the support price will be fixed by the sub-committee. The difference is the amount would be paid to the farmers directly, he said.

"We are taking all necessary steps to ensure that the supply of groundnut seeds in during the ensuing Kharif is not disrupted," he said.

## Gandhiji recognised Pingali's efforts

FROM PAGE 1

"In this context, I deem it appropriate to draw your kind attention towards the immense contribution made towards designing of our Indian National Flag by Pingali Venkayya who later came to be known as Jhanda Venkayya. Deeply influenced by Gandhian thoughts and ideology, he decided to dedicate his life to the service of the nation and take part in the freedom movement. Having seen the effect of a national flag on the mind and psyche of people, he decided to undertake a scientific study of different flags across the world.

This study went on to sharpen his acumen in designing India's national flag. In 1916, he published a booklet titled 'A National Flag for India' describing flags of different countries and also gave his ideas towards the Indian national flag. It had 30 different designs of Indian National Flag each with its rationale and explanation."

"On March 31, 1921, in Vijayawada, Pingali Venkayya gifted his designs to Mahatma Gandhi who in turn recognising his passionate efforts, noted in his journal Young India, "We should be prepared to sacrifice our lives for the sake of our

national flag. Pingali Venkayya, who was working in Andhra National College, Machilipatnam, has published a book describing the flags of countries and designed many models for our own National Flag.

I appreciate his hard struggle for the approval of the Indian National Flag," the Chief Minister said.

On July 22, 1947, the Constituent Assembly adopted the Flag as free India's National Flag. Thus he was credited as an architect or designer of the Indian National Flag. The flag designed by him came to be synonymous with the spirit of free and independent India. However, his life and works largely remain unrecognised. He breathed his last on July 4, 1963."

Reddy recalled that previously also the government of India has conferred Bharat Ratna posthumously upon many eminent personalities.

The Chief Minister appealed, "I again request your kind self to honour the aspirations of the people of Andhra Pradesh by giving a deserving acknowledgement to the life and contribution of Late Pingali Venkaiah by conferring Bharat Ratna (posthumously) upon him."

## GOV CALLS UPON CITIZENS TO TAKE PART IN 'AZADI KA AMRIT MAHOTSAV'

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan called upon the citizens to take part in 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav.'

In a statement issued on Friday, the Governor asked especially the educational institutions to encourage their students to take an active part in the celebrations to mark the 75th anniversary of India's Independence by organising exhibitions, competitions, workshops,

taking out rallies and by conducting several cultural programmes on the theme of freedom struggle and freedom movement.

He felt the need to facilitate the freedom fighters and their family members. He said that the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' was launched on March 12, coinciding with the 91st anniversary of the historic Salt Satyagraha march taken out under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership in 1930.

## PINGALI'S STATUE NOT REINSTALLED IN BAPATLA

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12

A statue of the creator of National Flag, Pingali Venkaiah, is lying unused in the backyard of the Bapatla Municipal office. Citing this, the secretary of the Forum for Better Bapatla, P.C. Sai Babu, has urged the government to initiate steps for reinstallation of the Venkaiah statue.

Sai Babu said Venkaiah's statue was lying unattended for the last 10 months along with a statue of Jawaharlal Nehru. "Both are covered with some dirty old banners," he said. These had been removed during the course of road widening in front of the railway station. The civic authorities have not reinstalled these statues despite repeated requests, Sai Babu said.

Sai Babu said Pingali Venkaiah's statue was set up near the railway station in 2009 by the Bapatla Arts College students. The students of BSc Computer Science saved their pocket money and set up the statue on January 21, 2009. Daughter Sitamahalakshmi was honoured at that meeting by Gade Venkata Reddy, the then MLA, M Seshagiri Rao, former MLC, and others.

The Forum For Better Bapatla has urged the authorities for immediate reinstallation of the two statues.

## GITELI WAS TAPPING NAVAL MEN FOR ISI

From Page 1

In furtherance of this conspiracy, they were collecting sensitive and classified information relating to vital defence installations.

The agency had earlier filed a charge sheet against 14 accused persons, including three civilians with business interests in Pakistan, on June 15 last year. It has re-registered the case and taken up investigation accordingly.

Investigations so far have established that accused Giteli Imran was in contact with Pakistani-based handlers. He also used to meet them during his visits to Pakistan. On instructions of Pakistani ISI agents, he was transferring money into accounts of Navy personnel for passing sensitive and strategic information. He was raising funds for terrorist activities in the garb of illegal cloth business.

Investigations further revealed that there is an organised network within Pakistan that is utilising services of operatives like Imran Yakub Giteli in India.

## BIFURCATION | BLUES

## Telangana officials wake up to grim realities post-HC verdict on Vijaya Dairy

## TS govt contemplates review petition in HC

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 12

The Telangana High Court judgment on the bifurcation of Vijaya Dairy on Thursday has alerted the Telangana state government to decide its future course of action on sharing of assets and liabilities of the common institutions listed under Schedule IX and X of the AP Reorganisation Act, 2014. Vijaya Dairy is listed

under Schedule IX. The High Court issued orders for sharing the assets and liabilities besides bank deposits of Vijaya Dairy, located in Hyderabad, between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in the ratio of 58:42 proportionate to the population of the two states.

Senior officials of the TS government on Friday briefed Chief Minister K. Chandrababu Naidu on the implications of the verdict

on the bifurcation of common institutions, mostly located in Hyderabad, which have huge assets and bank deposits, according to CMO sources.

The TS government wants to file a review petition in the High Court or approach the Supreme Court against the HC orders on sharing of assets and liabilities with Andhra Pradesh, sources added.

It is worried that AP

government might claim a share in all Schedule IX, X institutions based on the Vijaya Dairy verdict for which it has to shell out over ₹70,000 crore to Andhra Pradesh.

The bifurcation of common institutions could not be completed although the division of the state will complete seven years in June.

The court issued orders to seek the help of CAG

(Comptroller and Auditor General) to assess the market value of Vijaya Dairy assets to enable TS government to pay the AP government.

There are 91 institutions listed under Schedule IX and 142 institutions under Schedule X, which have huge assets and bank deposits in Hyderabad. The previous TDP government in AP and the TRS government here

were in a bitter fight to gain control over these institutions.

This led to legal tangles in High Court and Supreme Court and the cases are still pending. Andhra Pradesh had demanded division of assets of common institutions on the basis of population (58:42) but Telangana demanded that allocation should be on 'as is where is' (territorial) basis.



## OTHER STORIES

## AP RECORDS 210 COVID CASES, ONE DEATH

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12

Andhra Pradesh registered 210 fresh cases of Covid-19 and one death.

The state health authorities reported here on Friday that out of 44,709 samples tested, 210 persons were infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,44,48,650 samples tested so far, 8,91,388 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,82,981 were recovered while 1,227 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Covid-19 infections, Chittoor topped the state with 85, followed by 41 in East Godavari, 18 in Guntur, 16 in Visakhapatnam, 14 in Krishna, 12 in Anantapur, eight in Srikakulam, four in Kurnool, three each in Kadapa, Nellore and Prakasam, two in West Godavari and one in Vizianagaram.

## PEOPLE ALLOWED TO WALK-IN FOR VACCINATION

From Page 1

State health authorities maintain that to tackle the virus effectively, they are allowing people to walk in for both Covid-19 tests and Coronavirus vaccination, unlike the earlier practice of insisting on prior registration.

Medical education director Dr. M. Raghavendra Rao said, "Our teaching hospitals are running Covid-19 wards for treating infected patients. However, given the rise in number of infections, we have issued directions to them for organising additional beds and other requisites to treat infected patients."

Health director Dr. T. Geeta Prasadini said, "It is highly deplorable that you-nger generation is ignoring Covid-19 protocol while moving in public places, resulting in spread of the virus. We urge them to maintain self-restraint."

## 57 TTD'S VEDIC SCHOOL STUDENTS DOING WELL

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 12:

TTD trust board chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy reiterated that none of the students of TTD's Veda Patashala at Dharmagiri Veda Vignana Peetham in Tirumala, who are kept under observation in SVIMS hospital, showed any symptoms of Covid-19.

The Chairman made a spot inspection of all wings of Dharmagiri Veda Patashala on Friday. Speaking to the media later, the Chairman reassured the parents of students that none of them present at the Patashala had any Covid-19 symptoms and that TTD is taking all precautions and effective measures to ensure the health safety of all.

Although 57 students and one teacher had tested Covid-19 positive, all of them were asymptomatic and doing well. The TTD has been providing all the required medical care to those students. The Chairman also interacted with the faculty of the Patashala on the reasons for the incident. He went around the dining hall kitchens, hostel rooms and classrooms in Patashala and directed officials to accommodate only four students in each room.

The Chairman also instructed Patashala officials to observe mask wearing for all mandatory social distancing, keep toilets and bathrooms clean, seat students two meters apart in the dining hall, and locate a doctor and medical staff Dharmagiri 24x7.

## Mahashivratri celebrations



Illuminated chariot on Canal Road during Mahashivratri celebrations organised by Sri Kanyaka Parameswari Annasatram committee in Vijayawada on Friday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

## VSP will make profits like Heritage, says BJP

Privatisation won't cause any inconvenience to workers: Yedlapati

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12

Bharatiya Janata Party has accused political parties of spreading false propaganda against the central government over its decision to privatise Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

Addressing media at the BJP Guntur parliamentary office in Chandramouli Nagar, Tobacco Board chairman Yedlapati Raghunath Babu claimed privatisation of steel plant will not cause any inconvenience to employees and workers. "Like businesses run by (TD chief) Chandrababu Naidu and (Chief Minister) Jagan Mohan Reddy are making huge incomes, VSP too will start earning profits, he declared.

He pointed out that a lot of political leaders themselves run business but are opposing privatisation of steel plant.

Raghunath Babu said,

## CELEBRITIES SHOULD COME FORWARD FOR VIZAG STEEL PROTECTION: APUJAC

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12

AP Unemployed JAC state president and AU Students' Union leader Samayam Hemantha Kumar has asked celebrities belonging to various sections of society to come forward and protect Vizag steel plant from privatisation.

Welcoming support by Telangana minister K. Taraka Rama Rao and Telugu cine hero K.

"We should develop the Vizag Steel Plant, like Bharati Cement and Heritage company."

He maintained that the process of privatisation had been first started by Congress. TD followed suit and privatised many government and public sector institutions.

He said earlier Commu-

Chiranjeevi for protection of VSP, Hemantha Kumar feared families belonging to 20,000 employees of VSP will be on roads if the central government went head with privatisation of the plant.

He asked celebrities, political leaders and intellectuals from various sections of the society to come forward for the protection of Vizag Steel from privatisation menace.

nists used to oppose privatisation but they have been rejected by the people.

The Tobacco Board chairman maintained that both ruling YSRC and opposition parties including TD must welcome private investment considering the future of students in the state.

## RINL observes 50th National safety day

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 12

The employees of RINL-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant observed the 50th National Safety Day on Friday. The theme was "Learn from Disaster and Prepare for a Safer Future".

Guest of honour, DCS Varma, Director of Factories, appreciated RINL to increase the safety norms and statistics for securing a better future. He said employees should learn from the disasters and urged them prepare for the worst as a precautionary measure towards safety.

PK Rath, CMD, RINL, asked employees to focus on the right human behavioural aspect towards safety.

## SVBC HINDI, KANNADA SOON: TTD

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 12

Sri Venkateswara Bhakthi Channel (SVBC), which is airing spiritual programmes in Telugu and Tamil languages, will soon launch channels in Kannada and Hindi, said TTD additional executive officer A.V. Dharma Reddy.

The additional EO chaired his first meeting on the activities of all dharmic projects of the TTD and SVBC, after he assumed charges as in-charge of all projects of TTD in addition to MD of SVBC, at the SVBC office here on Friday.

Dharma Reddy said that all the dharmic projects of the TTD and SVBC should coordinate their activities for extended Hindu Sanatana Dharma propagation.

## THREE DEVOTEES DROWNED AS A CAR PLUNGED IN A CANAL

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 12:

Three devotees drowned as a car plunged in a Godavari Canal near Lolla, a village in Atreyapuram Mandal, on Thursday midnight. According to Atreyapuram Sub inspector, V. Naresh said that five persons (Chintalapati Srinivasaraju (46), Munduti Suresh Varma(36), Indukuri Venkata Satyan-

arayanaraju, Mudunuri Venkata Ganapathi Raju, Munditi Seetharama Raju) of Gollalakoderu village of Bhimavaram Mandal in WG district came to Vasantha vada village in East Godavari District to take a darshan of Lord Umamehswara Swamy on the eve of Maha Shivaratri festival. They have visited there relatives house, and later there were returning

to their native village. Meanwhile, the car which there were travelling plunged into the canal, three devotees (Chintalapati Srinivasaraju (46), Munduti Suresh Varma(36), Indukuri Venkata Satyanarayanaraju) drowned, and their bodies were found. The remaining two were rescued by the locals and the Atreyapuram police register a case.

## ₹50 LAKH EACH TO KAKIKNADA BLAST VICTIMS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 12

A probe has been ordered into chemical reactor blast at the pharmaceutical company in Autonagar area of Sarpavaram near Kakinada. Two employees died and another four were injured in the blast on Thursday.

The Factories Department had previously issued a show-cause notice to the company over safety measures while operating the reactors. Deputy chief inspector of factories V. Suresh said the industry did not meet all the requirements of plant safety. According to sources, as supervisors were changing their shift, they could not notice the increase in temperature of the reactor, leading to the blast.

Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board officials also inspected the plant. Board executive engineer A. Rama Rao Naidu said area in 50-metre radius of the factory is polluted. Meanwhile, relatives of deceased led by Jana Sena leader Chinta-kayala Bunny blocked traffic on Kakinada-Samalkot road near Madhavapatnam village for about three hours. The agitators demanded ₹1 crore compensation for families of the two deceased.

Agriculture minister Kurasala Kannababu, Mummdivaram MLA P. Satish, Peddapuram MLA Nimmakayala China Rajappa and others held discussions with the factory management. Subsequently, the management agreed to give ₹40 lakh to each family while government will pay a compensation of ₹10 lakh. A family member of each family will be given a job.

AITUC, CITUC leaders, apart from Jana Sena leader Pantam Nanji were present.

● Minister held discussions with the factory management. Subsequently, the management agreed to give ₹40 lakh to each family while government will pay a compensation of ₹10 lakh.

● The Factories Department had previously issued a show-cause notice to the company over safety measures.

## ANAPARTI FORMER MLA ARRESTED

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 12:

The Bikkavole police arrested Anaparti Former MLA Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy (TDP) on Friday in connection with the death of his brother-in-law Tethali Sathiraju Reddy alias Sathiraju. According to Bikkavole police, Sathiraju died in suspicious circumstances near Balabhadrapuram village on January 18. The postmortem report revealed that he consumed pesticides. The deceased's second wife Rama alleged that the father of the deceased, Sathi Reddy and his uncle Abbas Reddy and Ramakrishna Reddy are responsible for the death. Bikkavole sub-inspector said that Ramakrishna Reddy was arrested at his village Ramavaram of Anaparti Mandal and produced before Anaparti JPMC court, and was sent on 14 days remand.

## Cops crack kidnapper's native, family details

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 12:

In a major breakthrough in the kidnapping case of a six-year-old boy Sivam Kumar Sahoo, reported in Tirupati on February 27, the Alipiri police have identified the kidnapper was nearing his current location, where he is believed to have been hidden along with the kidnap victim.

As per the sources, the kidnaper was identified as one Sivappa, a native of Puttenahalli near Mulbagal in Karnataka. The Tirupati urban police wing has constituted special teams to trace the missing boy and to nab the abductor. However, their whereabouts are still unknown.

The missing boy Sahoo along with his parents, hailing from Chhattisgarh, arrived at Tirupati on Feb. 27. The family members were sitting on a platform at the Alipiri link bus stand to board a bus to Tirumala, when a person lured and abducted the boy. After noticing that their boy was missing, his family members searched in vain for him in the nearby areas.

Responding to the complaint lodged by the parents at the Alipiri PS, Tirupati Urban SP ordered for special teams and launched a search operation to trace the body and his abductor. The police, who collected various surveillance camera's footage, analysed the route which he took to get away from the city.

Sources said that the abductor and a boy boarded a Kuppam-bound bus in Tirupati and reached Gandaramakulapalli in V. Kota Mandal on the next day early morning. Taking the lead from here, the police speeded up their investigation and with the help of a picture grabbed from the CCTV footage, they cracked links of the abductor with the village and found that he married a woman from the nearby Karakunta village.

"We found out some details of the abductor and his native. We are nearing him, and he will be arrested soon. Special teams were also deployed to trace the missing child and to nab the kidnapper", Alipiri CI Mr Devendra Kumar told this newspaper.

## 3 PARKED CARS CAUGHT IN FIRE AT RAJAMPET

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, MARCH 12

Three cars parked at a private place in Rajampet urban area caught fire on Thursday night. According to Rajampet Urban Police Sub-Inspector M Chandrasekhar, a man named Radhakrishna Sharma had parked the cars in a vacant lot near his

house. There were also four other cars. However, three cars belonging to Radhakrishna Sharma were set on fire around 11 pm on Thursday. Attempts to extinguish the fire as soon as it was noticed were unsuccessful. The SI said that the case has been registered and it is being investigated whether it was an accident or someone did it on purpose.

## HIT AND RUN INCIDENT: TWO PEOPLE DIE ON THE SPOT AT SULLURPETA

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MAR. 12:

Two people died in a hit and run accident reported at Sullurpeta in Nellore district during the wee hours. Out of the two accident victims, one was identified as Deviredy Narasimhulu of Kaluvoya and the other one is yet to be identified.

According to reports, the two visited a local temple on Thursday in connection with Maha Shivaratri and took part in rituals the whole night.

The accident took place when an unidentified vehicle hit the two persons returning to their places in the early hours at the Holy Cross Circle. They both died on the spot.

One of the victims, D. Narasimhulu, has been working at Sri City SEZ located in Tada and another person has to be identified. Tada police shifted the dead bodies to the hospital for postmortem. SI K Srinivasulu said they had booked a case and were investigating.

## 27-YEAR-OLD MARRIED WOMAN COMMITS SUICIDE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 12:

A 27-year-old married woman, Seelam Renuka, committed suicide by consuming acid on Friday Morning. According to Amalapuram Rural Circle Inspector V. Suresh Babu, Renuka married Seelam Venkata Meera Ramesh eight years back, and the couple has a six-year-old

boy. But there were some discrepancies between Renuka and her husband. On Thursday Night, Renuka was scolding with a loud voice, her husband Ramesh reprimanded her. On Friday Morning, she consumed acid, and she was admitted to a government hospital in Kakinada where she died while undergoing treatment. The Amalapuram police registered a case.

## GREAT GAMBLERS

The minimum betting amount that is accepted is ₹1 lakh

## Betting picks up in Nandyal, Kurnool

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, MARCH 12

With the date of counting round the corner, punters are on a high even as betting on the Nandyal and Kurnool municipal election outcome has picked up here.

Candidates and their followers are keeping track of every bit of information with regard to the poll pattern.

In Nandyal town, betting is quite heavy on the ward councillor from 12th ward where TD and BJP have withdrawn and it is a straight fight between a rel-

ative of Silpa Mohan Reddy and a real estate developer.

Nichenametla Suresh, a local, said, "If you put ₹1 lakh in favour of a candidate, you will get an equal amount. This could double as the counting hour draws near". The candidate, a novice, has spurned money on voters besides offering gold nose rings to women voters.

Interestingly, the wife of Nandyal MLA, who is contesting from 36 ward and is tipped to be the Municipal chairperson is facing opposition from within. The candidate from ward 33, wife of

● Interestingly in Kurnool, BY Ramaiah, who contested from ward 19 that had the lowest polling at 37 per cent, is giving anxious moments to YSRC. He is tipped to become the Mayor of Kurnool. Ward-wise bets are also accepted by some agents.

Malkireddy Rajagopal Reddy, a Pulivendula native, is claiming that his wife will be the chairperson as Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had assured him. "Bets are being placed on

the likely municipal chairperson," said Ranganayakulu, another resident. He said the minimum betting amount that is accepted is ₹1 lakh and enthusiasts are pooling money by forming into groups of 10 by contributing ₹10,000 each as their consolidated bet.

Gudur municipality, which recorded the state's highest poll percentage of 86 per cent, is seeing bets that are in favour of TD candidates.

Incidentally, both Kotla Surya Prakash Reddy and Vishnuvardhan Reddy

groups joined together to ensure TD's victory, while YSRC is divided between the MLA and others in the party, said an observer.

Interestingly in Kurnool, B.Y. Ramaiah, who contested from ward 19 that had the lowest polling at 37 per cent, is giving anxious moments to YSRC. He is tipped to become the Mayor of Kurnool. Ward-wise bets are also accepted by some agents.

Bets are also placed here on the outcome in Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam municipal corporations.





SHORT TAKES

SHIVRAJ LIKELY TO GO FOR CABINET EXPANSION

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 12

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan may go for expansion of his cabinet after ongoing budget session of Assembly.

Chouhan held discussions with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leaders here in this regard a couple of days ago, a senior BJP leader in know of the development told this newspaper on Friday.

“The Chief Minister awaits nod from the Central leadership to go ahead with his plan to expand his ministry”, the BJP leader said unwilling to be quoted.

Sources said the Chief Minister has been lobbying hard with the Central party leadership and RSS to induct his loyalist and former minister Rajendra Shukla, an influential leader from the Rewa region, considered a stronghold of BJP.

VHP RAISES ₹2,500 CR FOR RAM TEMPLE

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 12

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has so far raised ₹2,500 crore through contributions from devotees across the country for construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya.

This was revealed by VHP national general secretary Milind Parande here.

Talking to reporters here late on Thursday, Parande said mobilisation of funds for construction of Ram temple have been carried out in different parts of the country and in some other countries.

However, details on funds mobilised in other countries were yet to be compiled, he added. VHP has mobilised ₹200 crore in Madhya Pradesh for construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya.

He said around 5.50 crore people belonging to 1.10 crore families in MP have made their contributions for the purpose.

The VHP volunteers have spread in around 45,000 villages in MP to seek contributions from people for construction of Ayodhya Ram temple.

NOTICE TO CENTRE ON PLACES OF WORSHIP PLEA

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

The Supreme Court on Friday issued notice to the Centre on a plea challenging the Places of Worship Act that mandates maintaining status quo on religious structures as it existed on August 15, 1947.

The law that was brought at the peak of the Ayodhya agitation led by octogenarian leader Lal Kishan Advani protected the status of all the religious structures as it existed on August 15, 1947, except then disputed Ram Janmabhoomi three-dome structure that was brought down on December 6, 1992.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde and Justice A.S.Bopanna issued notice on a plea by a lawyer and BJP's Delhi unit leader Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay.

The law under challenge had barred the courts from entertaining pleas questioning the character of the religious places.

Stalin's son to contest from Karuna's seat

DMK chief to contest again from Kolathur in Chennai, while son tries luck for first-time in polls

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 12

The DMK announced its full list of 173 candidates for the April 6 Assembly elections, which was a balanced mix of old and new faces, with the names of party president M.K. Stalin and Youth Wing secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin.

Stalin will be contesting again from Kolathur in Chennai, while Udhayanidhi Stalin will be trying his luck for the first time from Chepauk-Triplicane constituency, which once elected the late M. Karunanidhi to the Assembly.

The release of the list by Friday noon by Stalin evoked celebrations in several parts of the state even as party cadre and functionaries geared up for the campaign in their respective constituencies. Stalin arrived at Anna Arivalayam to make the announcement with thousands of party cadre and aspirants waiting eagerly.

Earlier in the morning, the DMK president went to the Gopalapuram residence to pay homage to the portrait of his father and also call on his mother Dayaluammal. He then drove down to the resting places of C.N. Annadurai and Karunanidhi.

Stalin expressed the hope that the DMK would win overwhelmingly the April 6 elections, repeating the results of the 1971



Udhayanidhi Stalin (L) DMK president M.K. Stalin's son and party's Youth Wing Secretary being greeted by senior leader A. Raja in Chennai on Friday. — PTI

elections that saw the 'Rising Sun' symbol emerging victorious in 184 constituencies.

Now, though the DMK is fielding only 173 candidates, a total of 187 candidates would be contesting in the 'Rising Sun' symbol.

Of the 173 DMK candidates, including 12 women, 124 of them will be directly confronting the AIADMK in the polls and 14 of them will be facing BJP nominees. Almost all senior party leaders and 74 sitting MLAs have been chosen to contest the elections, apart from fist timers.

Besides Udhayanidhi Stalin, the prominent among the first-time candidates are Dr N. Ezhilan, a doctor by profession who had been the voice of the party and the Dravidian movement in many platforms for quite some time, and Prabakar Raja, son of traders' association president Vikramaraja.

Handing over the Virugambakkam constituency to Prabakar Raja earned the ire of the local DMK leader, Danasekar, who visited Anna Arivalayam later in the day to express his resentment over the party decision.

KAMAL HAASAN TO CONTEST FROM COIMBATORE SOUTH

Chennai, March 12: Actor-turned politician Kamal Haasan would make his electoral debut, contesting from Coimbatore South constituency in the April 6 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.

The Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) president made the announcement here on Friday, releasing the second list of 43 party candidates which included veteran politician Pazha Karupiah and yesteryear actor Sripriya who had paired with Haasan in many films in the 70s and 80s.

The party also named candidates for 18 constituencies in neighbouring Puducherry which also goes to polls on April 6 for its 30-member assembly.

Haasan, whose party is heading a three-party coalition in Tamil Nadu, will be up against the nominees of BJP and Congress, partners in the AIADMK and DMK led alliances respectively, in Coimbatore South.

Three years after floating the MNM, the 66-year old Haasan is taking the electoral plunge.

He chose not to contest the 2019 Lok Sabha elections while his party polled 3.7 per cent votes, entering the fray in 37 constituencies. — PTI

MUSLIM LEAGUE FIELDS WOMAN CANDIDATE

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 12

Muslim League, the second biggest constituent in Congress UDF, announced its candidates list for the Assembly polls and Malappuram Lok Sabha bypoll on Friday.

The party is contesting 27 seats in the coming Assembly polls. The party fielded a woman candidate after a gap of 25 years. Noorbina Rashid will contest from Kozhikode (South ) constituency.

The last time the party gave a ticket to a woman was in 1996 when Khamarunissa Anwar had contested the elections.

TMC delegation meets EC, demands high-level probe

New Delhi, March 12: A TMC delegation met the Election Commission (EC) on Friday and demanded a high-level probe into an alleged attack on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram and claimed it was not an “unfortunate incident”, but a conspiracy.

The six-member delegation of the Trinamul Congress (TMC) met the full EC team, including Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sunil Arora, for over an hour and submitted a memorandum to it, highlighting how BJP leaders in West Bengal had threatened the Chief Minister through tweets and other remarks.

“Injuries to Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram were not a result of an unfortunate incident but that of a conspiracy. The events leading up to the attempt on her life leave no doubt that the attack was part of a deep-rooted conspiracy,” TMC MP Saugata Roy told reporters after meeting the EC.

In the memorandum, the TMC has made allegations against Suwendu Adhikari, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate from Nandigram in the upcoming state Assembly polls.

“When an attempt was made on the life of Banerjee, in which she was grievously hurt, to cover up the attack, eye-witnesses were planted, illustratively, eye-witnesses Chittaranjan Das and Debabrata Das, who testified that Banerjee's car was hit against an iron pillar, are associates of Suwendu Adhikari, BJP candidate from Nandigram,” the memorandum said.

The party said BJP's state president Dilip Ghosh had uploaded a caricature depicting that she would be hit at Nandigram. Around the same time, numerous complaints were filed by the saffron party with the EC seeking immediate removal of the then police chief and IGP of West Bengal, it said.

The TMC also gave similar instances of other leaders.

— PTI



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greets party activists as she leaves SSKM Hospital in a wheelchair after being discharged in Kolkata on Friday. — PTI

ED, CBI summon 2 TMC candidates

RAJIB CHOWDHURY | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 12

On the eve of West Bengal Assembly election, two central agencies have summoned two heavyweight Trinamul Congress candidates including a two-time minister of the Mamata Banerjee government with a key party post for their questioning in two separate chit fund scams.

One of them is Saradha Chatterjee who is contesting from his seat Behala West in Kolkata.

He has been called by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the multi-crore I-Core chit fund scam to appear at its office in CGO Complex of Salt Lake next week. Dr

Chatterjee is the state education as well as parliamentary affairs minister. He is also the TMC secretary general.

This is the first time Dr Chatterjee with a clean image came under the scanner of the CBI following a central vigilance commission's report over his suspected link with the collapsed ponzy scheme company.

Another is the Saradha chit fund scam accused former transport minister Madan Mitra who is again contesting from Kamarhati where he lost in 2016.

He has been summoned by the Enforcement Directorate in the same case to appear on March 18 at its office in Salt Lake.

G 23 leaders not part of 'star campaigners'

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

The Congress on Friday released a list of its “star campaigners” for the coming Assembly elections in West Bengal.

The party will have total of 30 “star campaigners”, including party chief Sonia Gandhi, Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi, AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, former Rajasthan deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot, Mohammed Azharuddin, R.P.N. Singh, Salman Khurshid, among others.

Interestingly, however, the party has left out the names of most of the “G-23” letter-writers’ group,

including Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal, Manish Tewari, Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Raj Babbar, among others.

The G-23 leaders had written to the Congress president Sonia Gandhi in August last year demanding sweeping changes in the functioning of the party.

A couple of weeks back, some of the change seekers addressed a programme in Jammu, including Mr Azad, Mr Sharma, Mr Sibal and a few others.

The high command loyalists had chided these leaders, saying that instead of being in Jammu they should be campaigning in the poll-going states.

Amrit mahotsav



Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays homage to Mahatma Gandhi at the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad on Friday. Modi flagged off a ‘Padayatra’ (Freedom March) from the Sabarmati Ashram on the occasion of the launch of ‘Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’ India@75. — PTI

PANDEMIC | BLUES

New date for state public service exam announced under political pressure

Lockdown back in several parts of Maha

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 12

Mumbai city reported 1,646 new Covid infections registered in the last 24 hours, recording the highest single-day spike in months. Maharashtra too sustained its surge with 15,817 fresh Covid infections, which was the highest single-day spike ever since pandemic was declared.

However, even as the state is experiencing the second wave of Covid, the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) on Friday announced a new date for its preliminary examination under immense political

pressure. The exam will be held on March 21. The announcement came a day after the BJP and Congress had expressed its opposition for postponing the exam. Earlier, the exam was scheduled on March 14.

The government sources said that the exams were postponed as lockdown has been imposed in several parts of the state in order to contain the spread of the virus. Since the outbreak of the Covid, the MPSC exam has been postponed five times affecting the lives of students. The new date was announced after Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's intervention.

Meanwhile, chief secretary of Maharashtra Sitaram Kunte held a review meeting of the districts via video conferencing. Kunte directed the district administrations to impose preventive measures to contain the spread of the infection.

Mumbai city has reported 1,500 plus new Covid cases for the third day in a row and more than 1,000 cases for the 10th straight day.

Not only Mumbai, Pune and Thane, but several cities and towns in Maharashtra, including Vidarbha and Marathwada regions, have been witnessing spike in cases. Lockdown or restrictions have been imposed in

several cities or districts in the state in a bid to prevent the spread of the virus.

A week-long lockdown has also been imposed in Nagpur. Due to the increase in cases in Parbhani district, lockdown will be imposed from tonight 12 am till 6 am on Monday morning. “We appeal to the people of Parbhani and other neighbouring districts, to cooperate,” said Nawab Malik, Maharashtra cabinet minister.

As many as 79 persons including students, teachers and staff of three residential schools in Maharashtra's Palghar district have tested positive for Covid in the last week.

MAHA, KERALA, PUNJAB, GUJARAT, TN ACCOUNT FOR 85.6% OF NEW CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

India reported 23,285 fresh Coronavirus cases and 117 deaths in the last 24 hours with Maharashtra alone detecting 14,317 new infections. It is followed by Kerala with 2,133 while Punjab reported 1,305 new cases. Punjab finance minister Manpreet Badal is among the latest to have tested positive for Covid-19.

Gujarat and Tamil Nadu too continue to report a

surge in the daily cases and all these five states cumulatively account for 85.6 per cent of the new cases reported in the past 24 hours.

India's total active case-load reached 1,97,237 on Friday and is 1.74 per cent of the country's total positive cases.

Union health ministry said the Centre is actively engaging with all states and UTs, especially those showing an upsurge in daily new cases and with a high case-load of active cases.

Quad leaders to strive for 'free, inclusive' region

Washington, March 12: The Quad leaders, including US President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Friday vowed to strive for a “free, open and inclusive” region unconstrained by “coercion, in an apparent reference to China which is flexing its military muscles in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

In a joint statement issued after the first Leaders' Summit of Quadrilateral alliance attended by President Biden, Prime Minister Modi, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, the leaders pledged to strengthen cooperation on the “defining challenges of our time.”

“We bring diverse perspectives and are united in a shared vision for the free and open Indo-Pacific. We strive for a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion, said the joint statement titled “The Spirit of the Quad.”

The virtual Quad summit took place as China and India are involved in a military standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh since May last year. After lengthy rounds of talks, the two sides simultaneously

● VIRTUAL QUAD summit took place as China and India are involved in a military standoff since May last year.

withdrew troops from the Pangong Lake area last month while talks are on for the withdrawal of soldiers from the rest of the friction points along the LAC. China is also engaged in hotly contested territorial disputes in both the South China Sea and the East China Sea. In the East China Sea, Japan has maritime disputes with China.

“Together, we commit to promoting a free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. We support the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity,” the joint statement said.

It said the Quad leaders will continue to prioritise the role of international law in the maritime domain, particularly as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and facilitate collaboration, including in maritime security, to meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

GURDEEP SINGH  
TAKES OATH AS  
PAK SENATOR

**Islamabad:** Gurdeep Singh from the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party took the oath on Friday as a Senator, becoming the first turban-clad Sikh representative in the upper house of Pakistan's Parliament.

Singh, from the party of Prime Minister Imran Khan became the first turban-clad Sikh representative from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan's Senate on March 3. He defeated rival candidates on a minority seat by a huge margin in the election to the upper chamber of Parliament.

Singh secured 103 votes in the House of 145 whereas Jamiat Ulema-e Islam (Fazlur) candidate Ranjeet Singh secured just 25 votes and Asif Bhatti of the Awami National Party received 12. Forty-seven other Senators also took oath on Friday.

SA ZULU KING  
GOODWILL  
ZWELITHINI DIES

**Johannesburg:** King Goodwill Zwelithini, the traditional leader of South Africa's Zulu nation, has died aged 72 after being hospitalised for more than a month, his family announced on Friday.

Zwelithini had health problems related to diabetes, according to local news reports. Zwelithini, the eighth Zulu king, reigned for more than 50 years, making him the longest-serving Zulu monarch. As the traditional leader of the Zulu nation, Zwelithini did not hold political office but had considerable influence over the country's estimated 12 million Zulus, the largest ethnic group of South Africa's 60 million people.

King Zwelithini was an outspoken critic of the government's planned land redistribution policy, which could affect large tracts of land belonging to the Zulu nation. The Ingonyama Trust controlled by the king owns 29 per cent of the land of the KwaZulu-Natal province, about 28,000 square kilometres, or 10,811 square miles.

ISRAEL, GREECE,  
CYPRUS HOLD  
NAVAL DRILL

**Jerusalem:** The Israeli military said on Friday that it has conducted a joint naval exercise with Greece and Cyprus, in the latest sign of increased cooperation among three countries that increasingly view Turkey as a rival in the Mediterranean Sea.

It said the "Noble Dina" exercise, which was led by Israel and also included France, covered "anti-submarine procedures, search and rescue scenarios, and a scenario simulating battle between ships." The exercise was concluded on Thursday.

"Over the past week, the Navy led a large-scale exercise in which it implemented capabilities in underwater warfare, search and rescue, convoy escort and surface combat," Rear Admiral Eyal Harel, the head of Israeli naval operations, said. "These exercises are of paramount importance in strengthening the Navy's connection with foreign fleets who share common interests," he added.

WOMAN HELD  
FOR ASSAULT  
ON UBER DRIVER

**San Francisco:** A woman was arrested on Thursday on suspicion of pepper-spraying an Uber driver in San Francisco who was coughed at and insulted after he demanded a passenger wear a mask, police announced.

Malaysia King, 24, was arrested in Las Vegas on suspicion of assault with a caustic chemical, assault and battery and other charges. She was being held without bail.

It wasn't immediately clear whether she had an attorney to speak on her behalf. Arna Kimiai, 24, who also was sought in connection with Saturday's attack, indicated through legal counsel that she intended to turn herself in soon, a San Francisco Police Department statement said.

"The behaviour captured on video in this incident showed a callous disregard for the safety and wellbeing of an essential service worker in the midst of a deadly pandemic," Lt. Tracy McCray, who heads the Police Department's Robbery Detail, said in the statement.

## WHO says AstraZeneca is safe

Severe allergy added to AstraZeneca vaccine side-effects, says EU regulator

**Geneva, March 12:** The World Health Organisation said on Friday there was no reason to stop using AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine after several countries suspended the rollout over blood clot fears.

The WHO, which said its vaccines advisory committee was examining the safety data coming in, stressed that no causal link had been established between the vaccine and clotting.

The UN health agency also said that after the injection of more than 260 million Coronavirus vaccine doses so far around the world, no deaths had yet been attributed to a Covid-19 jab.

Denmark, Norway and Iceland paused the use of the AstraZeneca jab as a precaution after isolated reports of recipients developing blood clots.

Italy and Austria have banned the use of shots from separate batches of AstraZeneca, and Thailand and Bulgaria said they would delay the rollout of the shot. A range of health authorities around the world have insisted the jab is safe, including the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and

Biden sets goal of July 4th to  
'mark freedom' from Covid-19

**Washington, March 12:** US President Joe Biden has announced that all adult Americans will be eligible for Covid-19 vaccination by May 1 under an ambitious plan to get the country, worst-hit by the pandemic, closer to normal by July 4th, Independence Day.

In his first prime-time address to the nation on Thursday since assuming office on January 20,

the WHO.

"AstraZeneca is an excellent vaccine, as are the other vaccines that are being used," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris told reporters at a briefing in Geneva.

"Yes, we should continue using the AstraZeneca vaccine," she added, stressing though that any concerns over safety must be investigated.

"We must always ensure that we look for any safety signals when we roll out

Biden offered an ambitious plan to lift the country from the worst health crisis using a pair of upcoming dates: May 1, by which he will order states to allow all adults to receive vaccines; and July 4, when he said Americans can again celebrate Independence Day in person.

"After this long hard year, that will make this Independence Day something truly special, where

vaccines, and we must review them," she said. "But there is no indication to not use it."

The EMA said on Thursday that there had been 30 cases of so-called thromboembolic events among five million people who had received the jab in Europe.

But European countries could still keep using the vaccine, the EU's drug regulator said.

Harris said that while a few countries had, as a

we not only mark our independence as a nation but begin to mark our independence from this virus," he said in his address, shortly after he signed a \$1.9 trillion Coronavirus relief package approved by the US Congress.

His speech also came a year after the outbreak was classified as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation.

— PTI

precaution, suspended the use of a specific batch of AstraZeneca vaccine distributed in Europe, based on reports of blood coagulation disorders, "a causal relationship has not been shown".

"Vaccination against Covid-19 doesn't reduce deaths from any other causes," she said.

"As of March 9, there have been over 268 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines administered since the start of the pandemic.

"No causes of death have been found to have been caused by Covid-19 vaccines to date," Harris said the WHO's advisory committee on vaccine safety, which meets at least every two weeks, systematically reviews any safety reports coming in.

Severe allergies should be added to the possible side-effects of AstraZeneca's Coronavirus vaccine after likely links were found to a number of cases in Britain, the EU's drug regulator said on Friday.

The development comes a day after the European Medicines Agency said it was investigating a separate issue of blood clots that prompted Denmark to suspend use of the jab, but said it remained safe to use. The Amsterdam-based EMA said it had "recommended an update to the product information to include anaphylaxis and hypersensitivity (allergic reactions) as side effects".

"The update is based on a review of 41 reports of possible anaphylaxis seen among around 5 million vaccinations in the United Kingdom," it said in the highlights of the EMA committee that assesses the risk of medications.

— AFP

UK urges citizens  
to leave Myanmar

**Yangon, March 12:** Britain on Friday advised its citizens to flee Myanmar, as ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's lawyer rejected junta corruption claims against her as 'groundless'.

The military authorities are cracking down with increasing severity on daily protests against their February 1 coup, with at least 70 people killed according to the UN's top rights expert on the country.

The turmoil prompted Britain, the former colonial ruler, to urge its citizens to get out if they could, warning that "political tension and unrest are widespread since the military takeover and levels of violence are rising".

"The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office advises British nationals to leave the country by commercial means, unless there is an urgent need to stay," the British foreign ministry said.

The military — which has defended its takeover by citing alleged voting irregularities in November elections won by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party — held a rare news

● **SUU KYI'S lawyer** Khin Maung Zaw on Friday rejected the junta corruption claims against her as 'groundless'.

conference on Thursday accusing her of corruption.

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said the detained chief minister of Yangon admitted giving Suu Kyi \$600,000 in cash, along with more than 11 kilograms (\$680,000 worth) of gold.

Suu Kyi's lawyer Khin Maung Zaw on Friday rejected the claims.

"This allegation against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the state counsellor, is groundless, especially regarding the dollars and gold bars — it is the most hilarious joke of all," he said.

"I've never seen such an illegal mudslinging." Nobel peace laureate Suu Kyi faces other criminal charges including owning unlicensed walkie-talkies and violating Coronavirus restrictions by staging a campaign event in 2020. Suu Kyi — not seen in public since being detained on February 1 — has a court hearing on Monday.

— AFP

RUSSIA TO USE  
PRISONERS FOR  
ARCTIC CLEAN-UP

**Moscow, March 12:** Russia said on Friday it was considering sending prisoners to help clean-up the Arctic after a massive diesel spill hit a remote Siberian territory last year. The head of Russia's Federal Prison Service (FSIN), Alexander Kalashnikov, said that an agreement to that effect had been reached with the administration of the Arctic city of Norilsk.

"Russia's FSIN is looking into the possibility of getting convicts involved in the cleanup of the Arctic zone," Kalashnikov said at a meeting in comments confirmed by the prison service. He asked prison management officials, who are in charge of penal colonies in the Arctic, to "continue" working on the issue.

Located above the Arctic Circle, Norilsk is one of the world's most polluted cities.

Last year a fuel reservoir collapsed at a power plant operated by a subsidiary of metals giant Norilsk Nickel outside the northern city, with more than 20,000 tonnes of diesel polluting the local ecosystem.

Environmentalists say the spill was the worst such accident ever in the Arctic region and it could take years to clean up.

In December, Russia's prison officials publicly discussed using convicts in the efforts at a forum in Saint Petersburg.

FSIN official Elena Korobkova said at the time that Norilsk authorities had already made available premises to house a "correctional centre" for up to 56 people. Convicts could also be used to clean-up illegal waste dumps in the northern Arkhangelsk region, authorities have said.

Officials made no mention of possible incentives for prisoners such as reduced sentences or higher wages.

— AFP

## Conserving Wildlife



People look at polar bears inside an enclosure at a newly-opened hotel, which allows guests a view of the animals from rooms in Harbin, northeastern China's Heilongjiang province, on Friday. Polar bears are listed as vulnerable species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

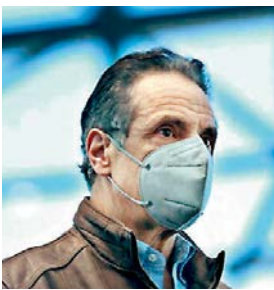
— AFP

## Cuomo faces impeachment inquiry

**Albany, March 12:** New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's grip on power appeared increasingly threatened on Thursday as a majority of state legislators called for his resignation. Democrats launched an impeachment investigation and police in the state capital said they stood ready to investigate a groping allegation.

The firestorm around the Democrat grew a day after the Times Union of Albany reported that an unidentified aide had claimed Cuomo reached under her shirt and fondled her at his official residence late last year.

The woman hasn't filed a criminal complaint, but a lawyer for the governor said on Thursday that the



Andrew Cuomo

state had reported the allegation to the Albany Police Department after the woman involved declined to do so herself.

"In this case the person is represented by counsel and when counsel confirmed the client did not want to make a report, the state notified the police

department and gave them the attorney's information," said Beth Garvey, the governor's acting counsel.

An Albany Police Department spokesperson, Steve Smith, didn't immediately return a message, but told that police had reached out to a representative for the woman. The possible involvement of police comes as more lawmakers called on Cuomo to resign over alleged misconduct with women and allegations that his administration concealed how many nursing home residents died of Covid-19.

At least 121 members of the state Assembly and Senate have said publicly they believe Cuomo

should quit office now, according to a tally.

The count includes 65 Democrats and 56 Republicans. The top Democrat in the state Assembly, Speaker Carl Heastie, on Thursday backed a plan for its judiciary committee to launch an impeachment investigation.

The committee can interview witnesses and subpoena documents and its inquiry could be wide-ranging: from alleged sexual misconduct to Covid-19 outbreaks at nursing homes.

It won't interfere with a separate inquiry of sexual harassment allegations being conducted by state Attorney General Letitia James, according to Heastie and James.

## NEW | RESEARCH

Study says that increased number of twins in poorer parts of the world is a cause for concern

## Twin births at 'all-time high' worldwide

**Paris, March 12:** More twins — one in every 42 children born — are coming into the world than ever before, according to new research citing the rapid rise in medically assisted reproduction as a key factor.

Some 1.6 million twins are born each year, about a third more than four decades ago, according to a study on Friday in Human Reproduction.

"The relative and absolute numbers of twins in the world are higher than they have ever been

since the mid-twentieth century and this is likely to be an all-time high," said lead author Christiana Monden, a professor at the University of Oxford. The rise of assisted reproductive technology (ART) in developed countries since the 1970s, especially the United States and Europe, has contributed significantly to the rise in multiple births, the study found.

Mothers giving birth at an older age — when twinning rates are higher — is also a factor, as are

increased use of contraception, women choosing to start families later in life and lower overall fertility. Researchers gathered data from 165 countries from between 2010 and 2015, covering 99 per cent of the global population. For 112 of those nations twinning rates were also available for the period 1980 to 1985, making it possible to track changes over time.

In three quarters of the countries with data for both periods, twin births increased by at least 10

percent, the study found.

In Asia, the rate at which twins were born went up 32 percent, and in North America it jumped by 71 percent.

"In both periods, Africa had the highest twinning rates, and there was no significant increase over time," Monden said.

"This was most likely due to genetic differences between African populations and other parts of the world, he speculated.

There was a decrease in the number of twin births in only seven nations.

The increased number of twins in poorer parts of the world raise concerns, the study cautioned.

"More attention needs to be paid to the fate of twins in low and middle income countries," said co-author Jeroen Smits, a professor at Radboud University in The Netherlands.

In sub-Saharan Africa in particular, many twins will lose their co-twin in their first year of life, some two to three hundred thousand each year according to our earlier research."

— AFP



Representational image.

— AFP



DECCAN Chronicle

13 MARCH 2021

Polls a serious business, spare us all the theatrics

Spectacles and theatrics are essential ingredients of Indian elections and our leaders never fail to deliver them. Most leaders, however, also see to it that such elements only add to the colour of the electioneering process and do not impact the democratic process adversely.

But the reports emanating from West Bengal of late have not been confidence-inspiring ones. Instead, they do the opposite. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday alleged that four to five men attacked her in Nandigram where she is contesting the Assembly election. She suffered injuries to her leg and neck. The picture of the woman Chief Minister with bandage and visuals of her describing the body pain went viral instantly, igniting passions all over the state. Her allegation that there was no security detail to protect her accentuated the situation.

That version, however, underwent a substantial change the following day when she explained what happened the previous day. There was no mention of an attack nor a conspiracy. But, by then, the state had witnessed a series of clashes between her followers and those of the BJP which has emerged as the principal opposition to her party, the Trinamul Congress, this time around. There was also an attempt to blame the Election Commission of India that has virtually taken over the state's administration and shifted the state police chief and his deputy recently.

**Ms Banerjee's account underwent a substantial change the following day. But by then, the state had witnessed a series of clashes between her followers and those of the BJP that has emerged as the principal opposition to her party.**

Fair and free elections where citizens vote peacefully and elect their representatives and rulers are one of the seminal pillars of a functioning democracy. Every institution of the state has a responsibility towards ensuring it; more so for politicians in power. Every election is fought in a highly charged atmosphere and party cadres would miss no chance to pounce on their opponents. It is for level-headed leaders to ensure that the ultimate goal is to create an atmosphere where every voter and her choice are respected. It is unfortunate that the West Bengal chief minister did not think through it before going public with a conspiracy theory.

In a democracy, people make their choices after processing information they receive. It is imperative that all those who are duty-bound to protect democracy and its institutions also ensure that the right information reaches the people and the wrong and fake do not. It is only in such a background that their decision would further the cause of democracy. Igniting passion based on religion or ideology or people's love for their leaders is easy but swaying people's opinion by good governance is not.

Politicians of all hues must be willing to place themselves for public scrutiny of what they have done or not done in the past while going to people seeking votes. Nothing should allow this process to be bypassed, for it will colour the very exercise and drain it of meaning. There must be no shortcuts to power.

The latest events send a reminder to the Election Commission, too: it is entering a minefield in the following days and no amount of caution and preparedness would be excessive in the conduct of the elections.

Biden shows the way

US President Joe Biden signed a historic US \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief package heralding a path breaking measure that sets very high standards for the world while showing it the way out of the pain of the pandemic as well as the economic recession that came in its wake. There is something for everyone in the plan, from vaccination eligibility for every American by May and the promise of normal family gatherings by July 4 and the reopening of schools. Considering how his predecessor Donald Trump had mishandled the Covid-19 crisis into making America the worst sufferer, Mr Biden has not just tread a truly effective path; he has chosen the best possible response to a global crisis.

The American Rescue Plan, passed despite partisan resistance from Republican legislators, would take total Covid-related expenditure on public health and the economy from December 2020 to nearly \$3 trillion or 14 per cent of pre-pandemic GDP. This puts in the shade what Barack Obama's administration did after the economic crisis of 2008. At a time when the Democrats were in a majority in the House as well as the senate, the US had come up with a less than US \$1 trillion response to the sub-prime induced economic crisis. This massive fiscal stimulus plan emphasises that the only way to get our life back and get the economy back on track is to beat the virus even if only time can tell whether the inflation risk is worth the gamble.

What Mr Biden left unsaid in his optimistic speech on the anniversary of the day Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic was what the US is going to do about the millions of doses of AstraZeneca vaccine sitting idle in its manufacturing facilities because it is yet to get FDA clearance whereas 70 countries have authorised its use already and many, including EU countries, desperately need vaccine doses. Also, the prioritising of the Pfizer vaccine has meant the US has clamped down on export of certain inputs that are inhibiting its manufacture in India, the world's largest vaccine "fill-finish" manufacturer. Mr Biden can do even more to help the world rid itself of the pandemic.

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Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages & Kings



*"Did the Lord God give us noses  
For people to rub in our mistakes?  
And did he grant us toeses  
So we could stub them, for goodness sakes!"*

*And yes, he gave us mouths  
To eat, drink and not be 'Loud'  
And concealed bits and bobs —  
Of which we are rightly proud."*

— From Kabhi Kabhi Merey  
Ghar Mey Polees Aajaatha Hein  
by Bachchoo

My adventures with Oprah, the real queen of Yankeeland

Interviews with royals are like a virus plague, you don't want to catch them, but you can't avoid hearing all about them. The Queen of America, Oprah Winfrey, interviews Prince Harry and the Duchess of Sussex, the American actress Meghan Markle. I didn't watch the interview, but bits of it were forced on me wherever I looked — even intercut with news of the atrocities in Myanmar.

The most prominent pronouncement that this interview seemed to have yielded was Meghan's claim that before her son Archie was born, some unnamed Brit royal wondered

aloud, perhaps with some alarm or derision, how dark the baby's skin would be. The remark, if Meghan reported it accurately and without malice towards the royals with whom she has fallen out, was prompted by the fact that Meghan's mother is a "woman of colour" — if that's an accepted term. This was interpreted by Oprah and very many other people, including some panjandrums of the Commonwealth and several black US commentators, as a deeply racist concern. It can certainly be interpreted as such.

As Indians, gentle reader, we know that every grandmother and mother-in-law — and yes, very many fathers-in-law — have expressed the same anxiety. Their remarks haven't resulted in flurries in the newspapers or flutters and ruptures in the constitution of the Commonwealth. We take skin colourism as a nasty ingredient of our prejudices — which we shouldn't.

Years ago when Princess Diana died with Dodi-al-Fayed in a car accident in Paris, his father claimed that they had been murdered because Diana was pregnant with Dodi's child and the Duke of Edinburgh did

n't want the future King William to have a Muslim stepbrother or sister.

It's highly probable that this Mohammed al Fayed was unaware that in the fourteenth century Isabelle of Castile, a direct descendant of Princess Zaida of Seville, a woman of colour, who in turn was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad himself, had married the Duke of York. From that Yorkist line, the present monarchy descends. So, Islam and Moorish skin colour are already somewhere in Archie's DNA.

The only royal interview I confess to watching was Prince Andrew being quizzed by the relentless Emily Maitlis about his paedophilia and association with the frolics and crimes of Jeffrey Epstein. My mild curiosity wasn't to do with royalty or how it would impact on the House of Windsor. I wondered if a British prince would face prosecution and jail and it was mildly amusing watching this idle icon of British tribalism sweat and squirm.

And now that poor Meghan, perhaps as a result of her "disclosures" in the Oprah interview, the victim in her own "confessions", has signed a \$100 million contract with Netflix, we

can all cry in chorus for her as she painfully stumbles and staggers all the way to the bank.

But enough of her — let's talk about me. I met Oprah or she met me when she was invited to a Channel 4 dinner and I worked there. It was a very select dinner and, I suppose, as the only editor of colour in the channel at the time, I was invited by our boss Michael Grade. We were served cocktails by uniformed barmen and then dinner in the boardroom by liveried waiters. No expense spared.

Oprah was seated at the head of the table with Michael and our beloved director of programmes, Liz Forgan. I was at the other end of the table and found myself sitting next to Oprah's press secretary lady. We chatted through the first course and she said they had watched a riveting programme the previous evening in which a white South African eleven-year-old had exchanged places and families with a black South African lad of the same age. I had to say it was my idea and my programme. She was fascinated and asked what else I planned.

I said one of the areas I wanted to venture into was to examine Jazz and

Soul as the classical music of Africa.

She was curious, if not hooked. "Which Soul and Jazz artists will you feature?"

"Depends on the thesis of the programme," I said. "We are working on it."

"Who are your favourites?"

"Today? I suppose Stevie Wonder and, by far the best for voice and technique belong, of course, to Aretha Franklin. Shame about her dress sense."

The lady laughed and put her hand on her mouth as she did. Was this sacrilege?

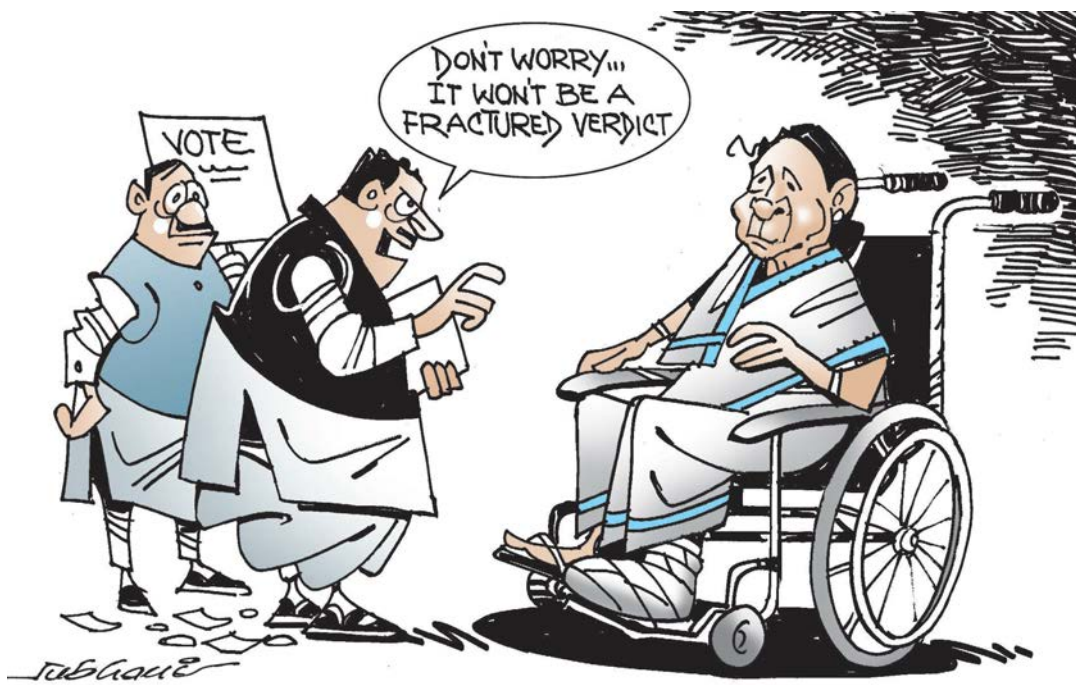
Then she shouted across the room to Oprah and walked over to her at the other end of the table and the two of them came rushing over to me.

"You must tell her what you just said," the press lady insisted, the amused shock still on her features. Oprah pulled up a chair. I repeated my, perhaps injudicious, remark.

Oprah laughed. "I won't say that's so cheeky, but right on the ball," she said — or words to that effect.

Our brief encounter didn't hit the headlines. Netflix hasn't offered me a cent.

Subhani



Gandhis have had it if Congress flops in May



Saeed Naqvi

Wide Angle

Mullah Narsuddin spread out his ornate carpet on the front lawn of his house. He did push-ups on the carpet to become strong enough to protect his house... Meanwhile, thieves from two separate gates behind him tiptoed into his house. Friendly neighbours at the front gate alerted Mullah that his house was about to be burgled by two gangs.

Mullah laughed at them with supreme nonchalance. "You are wrong that they are two gangs", he said. "They are together in this scheme and I know what they are up to."

"What are they up to?" asked the neighbours.

"If I run to chase out one group, the other will steal my carpet", said Mullah, rolling his eyes cunningly, and did another push-up.

The neighbours beat their breasts, even as they saw the burglars cart away every item in Mullah's house.

The Mullah story possibly has universal application, but caution may be in order before transposing it on Rahul Gandhi's athletic performance at the St. Joseph's Higher Secondary School in Mulgumoodubin, Tamil Nadu. He left a Class 10 student, Meroli Shenigha, panting for breath in a competition. Rahul, 50, did 14 push-ups in 10 seconds, something of a record.

A yen for physical fitness is in his DNA. For his great-grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, yoga was incomplete without an extended shishasana, or headstand. But while Nehru was private about his exercises, the great-grandson is demonstrative. Nehru may also have been proud of his Kashmiri Pandit heritage, but never of ritual religiosity. In his will, he wrote that he didn't want any rituals for his crema-

tion. His colleagues, more "Hindu" than him, thought it unwise to have the last rites of the country's first Prime Minister, a Pandit to boot, be concluded without the Vedic rituals.

Taking his cue from there, Rahul Gandhi's most reliable town crier, Randeep Singh Surjewala, declared him a "Janeudhari" Brahmin, a declaration that Rahul seems to have taken to heart, touching base with every temple in town. Not to be outdone, sibling Priyanka too has been wearing tilaks on her forehead, large enough for a "yogini". She has been dipping in holy rivers in severe cold. If her brother has added gymnastics to his repertoire, Priyanka has fallen back on ethnic tourism in fancy dress. With expert ease she plucked "two leaves and a bud" in Assam's tea plantations.

The Gandhi siblings are busting their guts to hold onto the carpet as in the Mullah story. As for the Congress Party (The House), senior members have already bolted and joined the BJP. The remainder are running helter-skelter because the Gandhi family is unwilling to show them the road ahead. It is possible that they themselves do not know.

The Gandhis' state of funk may have been enhanced last week by Gujarat where, contrary to the promise of 2017, the

**The G-23 are at the moment afraid to strike. These hesitations may well give way to a day of the long knives in May after the results of the elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry are out.**

**Anything of a leftist hue, with the capacity to mobilise the people on a platform of roti, kapda, makaan... healthcare, universal free education, etc must be thwarted. Going by this criteria, the Congress is no threat.**

Congress has been beaten to a pulp by the BJP in the local body elections. Indeed, new entrants like the AAP and Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM, have impressively opened their accounts.

The "G-23" Congress letter-writers are what rural folk in North India call "*Shiujji Ki Baraat*", representing all manner of fauna. Ghulam Nabi Azad has been grieving since at least the 2019 elections: "They are not asking me to campaign". Those were days when Rahul, as Congress president, had resorted to practical politics — he would not be seen with Muslims during elections because that would enable the BJP to polarise the vote. What Rahul appears not to have learnt since then is that policies and strategy, not tricks, build a party's elan. When in the 2019 general election, the BJP won 303 seats as opposed to the Congress' 52, Rahul owned up to his responsibility and resigned as party president.

A chapter in the Congress' and the nation's political history was over. Or so one had thought. But no, his cohorts like Mr Surjewala would dance around him with deafening chants of a "Congress revival".

*Kuchch to hotey hain Mohabbat mein junoon ke aasaaar/ Aur Kuchch log bhi deewana bana detey hain* (As it is, there are signs of monomania in obsessive love. Self-serving busybodies further enhance this streak).

Slowly, one saw him trek back from the political wilderness, to attempt, like Sisyphus, the climb again without ever bothering to ask — why is there so much focus on a leader with 52

members in a House of 545? Why does the media, which is owned by industrialists and controlled by the ruling party, heap such generous attention on the Gandhis?

Because they are no threat. Anything of a leftist hue, with the capacity to mobilise the people on a platform of *roti, kapda, makaan...* healthcare, universal free education, etc must be thwarted. Going by this criteria, the Congress is no threat. Policy differences between the BJP and the Congress are minimal. Foreign, economic, even social policies are more or less similar. The BJP's anti-Muslim stance is for Hindu consolidation. The Congress' studied neglect of Muslims serves the same purpose, only with better table manners. Also, the Gandhis and the residual Congress serve as an essential counterpoint in the BJP's musical score.

Essentially, the establishment has a high comfort level with two ruling class parties. One of them may be down and out, but it must remain in occupation of that slot. A vacuum will open up the chances of confusing, unknown amalgamations making a bid for power.

How long can the Mother, Son and his sister hang by a thread for sheer survival? The G-23 are at the moment willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike — just sending out hints but hesitating to go further.

These hesitations may well give way to a day of the long knives in May after the results of the elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry are out. If the Congress does well enough to preserve its self-respect in even two of these five states/UT, the Gandhis may yet be able to keep the carpet. But should they be trounced in all five, well, they had better look out. Little wonder that the all-round uncertainties are promoting a buzz about a "national government", an absurd thought unless the RSS and India Inc show interest.

*The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi*

LETTERS

FIGHT FOR VSP

It's the right move taken by the workers (*Vizag Steel workers serve strike notice, March 12*). They should also rechristen The Ukku Parirakhana Porata Committee as Sanyukta Karmika Garjana on the lines of Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) and run the agitation to its logical conclusion sans any political interference. The all-party delegation under Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy should fight for the RINL cause in tandem with the SKG. This will serve as a two-pronged attack on the Centre which is as adamant on privatisation as on the repeal of the contentious farm laws.

K. Nehru Patnaik  
Visakhapatnam

TRIVENDRA'S PLIGHT

This has reference to your editorial 'U'khand: Will BJP strategy work?' (March 12). At the fag end of Trivendra Singh Rawat's government, he has been asked by the ruling dispensation at the Centre to step down in order to pave the way for Tirat Singh Rawat as Chief Minister of Uttarakhand. This change of tack is perhaps dictated by the party's thinking wherein winning elections is of utmost importance. The change in leadership reeks of the limits of running a state from Delhi.

Dr C. Ghanshyam  
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Mujib's rule in E. Pak may be legalised

KARACHI, MARCH. 12 Unconfirmed reports circulating here suggest that President Yahya will offer, to legalise Sheikh Mujib's de facto rule in Bengal.

Former Defence Minister, Mr Mohammad Khurshid, Leader of the Punjabi (West Pakistan) Awami League Party, flew to Dacca yesterday ahead of the President, and had talks with Sheikh Mujib last night.

This solution could revitalise the country's flagging economy, but sceptics have pointed out that the legal obstacles are enormous.

The President's movements are still secret and no details are expected until he reaches Karachi.



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,792.08	-0.95
Nifty 50	15,031.00	-0.95
S&P 500*	3,917.60	-0.55
Dollar (₹)	72.79	0.17
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.26	0.44
Euro (₹)	86.74	0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,059*291	0.66
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	1.625	0.098
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.232	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.605	0.078

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Anti-dumping duty on Chinese ciprofloxacin Hcl

India has imposed anti-dumping duty on the Chinese antibacterial drug ciprofloxacin hydrochloride to guard the domestic industry against cheap imports following a recommendation by the Directorate General of Trade Remedies. The DGTR had concluded the product has been exported to India from China below its normal value. The duty imposed is in the range of \$0.91 per kg to \$3.27 per kg and will be levied for five years.

Ministry working on bringing jet fuel under GST



The civil aviation ministry is working on the airline industry's demand to bring aviation turbine fuel (ATF) under the ambit of GST and has taken up the matter with the finance ministry, civil aviation secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola said at a virtual event. ATF, which account for for 45-55 per cent of an airline's operating expenses, in India is among the world's highest and the industry has long been asking for its inclusion under GST.

PFRDA looking to sell assured return product

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority is working on plans to introduce innovative retirement benefit products, such as one providing minimum assured return, to attract more subscribers, its chairman Supratim Bandyopadhyay said. "Apart from NPS and Atal Pension Yojana (APY), we propose to have some innovative products to attract more and more customers," he said.

Survey for Mumbai-Nagpur bullet train starts

The Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey for the preparation of detailed project report for the proposed Mumbai-Nagpur High Speed Rail Corridor started from Friday. The 736-km bullet train project is likely to link Shahapur, Igatpuri, Nashik, Mehkar, Malegaon, Pulgaon, Wardha and Kharpi, the National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd said. It said the Li-DAR tech will provide data within four months.



■ Cites lack of benchmarks and losses to MFs, banks FinMin asks Sebi to pull back AT1 bond circular

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 12

The finance ministry has asked Sebi chairman Ajay Tyagi to withdraw the proposed valuation norms for debt funds that would treat all perpetual bonds/ additional tier-I (AT1) bonds issued by banks as having 100 year maturity, according to several reports on Friday. Perpetual bonds have no maturity date and, therefore, payments theoretically continue forever.

Experts say given the uncertainty around the issue there could be a rise in yields on AT1 bonds in the near-term and the appetite of the investors such as mutual funds could also get constrained thereby impacting issuance volumes.

AT1 bonds have in the past been fraught with troubles as seen in the Yes Bank AT1 bonds debacle, in which investors lost their entire investment.

Under the new guidelines issued by the Securities Exchange Board of India this week, mutual funds cannot invest more than 10 per cent of scheme corpus in debt instruments with special features such as perpetual bonds, and the exposure cannot not be more than 5 per cent to such debt instruments of the same company.

In addition, the maturity of all perpetual bonds needs to be treated as 100 years from the date of issuance of the bond for the "purpose of valuation". The Department of Financial Services, in its

FINMIN TO INFUSE ₹14,500 CRORE IN BANKS UNDER PCA SOON

New Delhi, March 12: The finance ministry is likely to infuse Rs 14,500 crore in the banks that are under the RBI's prompt corrective action (PCA) framework in the next few days to improve their financial health.

Indian Overseas Bank, Central Bank of India and Uco Bank are currently under this framework that puts several

restrictions on them, including on lending.

The ministry has almost finalised the names of probable candidates for capital infusion, sources said. The infusion will be made in the next few days, the sources said, adding the biggest beneficiary of this round of capital infusion would be the banks that are under the PCA.

—PTI

letter to the Sebi chief has argued that the guidelines could lead to large mark-to-market losses for mutual funds. No benchmark exists for 100-year bonds.

"Considering the capital needs of banks going forward and the need to source the same from the capital markets, it is requested that the revised capital norms to treat all perpetual bonds as 100-year tenor be withdrawn. The clause on valuation is disruptive in nature. Instructions that reduce concentration risks on such instruments in MF portfolio can be re-tailed, as MF have adequate headroom even with 10 per cent ceiling," the finance ministry said.

The government argued that the Sebi norms could also affect capital raising by state-owned banks, forcing them to rely more on the government for capital.

"Over the long run, for all banks, not just PSUs, more equity dilution will take place (due to Sebi circular). This will lead to further depressed valuations," the letter said. It said panic redemption by mutual funds would impact the overall corporate bond market as mutual funds would resort to raise liquidity in debt schemes which could lead to higher borrowing cost for corporates at a time when the economic recovery is still nascent.

Anil Gupta, vice president & sector head-financial sector ratings at Icrs Ltd said, "Given the uncertainty around the issue there could be a rise in yields on these instruments in the near-term and the appetite of the investors such as mutual funds could also get constrained, thereby impacting issuance volumes."

According to Icrs, public sector banks raised Rs 18,000 crore through AT1 bonds in FY21 and Rs 10,200 crore in FY20.

AT1 bonds were valued hitherto on the basis of a short-term instrument of similar G Sec. They will now be valued as 100-year bonds for which no benchmark exists, said the ministry.

"Banks issue perpetual bonds to meet their capital adequacy requirements. If the circular is implemented, the ability of banks to raise further capital by issuing perpetual bonds will be limited. Secondly, since Sebi has capped the limit to invest in these bonds, the headroom available to mutual funds to further invest in perpetual bonds will be impacted. Thirdly, there will be a spike in the yields of perpetual bonds if the proposed valuation methodology comes into effect," said S.P. Prabhu, chief investment officer at Ageas Federal Life insurance.

Meanwhile, mutual fund industry body Amfi has come out in support of the Sebi circular.

"Amfi fully supports the need and spirit of the circular in capping exposure to perpetual bonds. Most of the MF schemes are well below the cap specified in the circular. In few of the schemes, where perpetual bond exposure is higher than the Sebi prescribed cap, grandfathering is kindly permitted by Sebi to ensure that there is no unnecessary market disruption," the Amfi said.

TESLA IN TALKS WITH TATA POWER FOR EV CHARGING INFRA

Bengaluru, March 12: Tesla Inc is exploring an arrangement with Tata Power to set up charging infrastructure for electric vehicles in the country, a television report said on Friday, citing sources.

Shares of Tata Power rose 5.5 per cent to their best closing level since June 2014 after the report, which comes as the Palo Alto-based electric-car maker gears up for an India launch later this year with plans to import and sell its Model 3 electric sedan.

Tesla will set up an electric-car manufacturing unit in Karnataka, according to a government document seen by Reuters.

The talks between Tata Power and Tesla are in the initial stages and no arrangements have been finalised yet, the report said.

Tata Power's electric vehicle charging business constantly explores growth opportunities but has not finalised any new agreements, the company said in a statement to stock exchanges. It also said the CNBC-TV 18 report was "factually incorrect", but did not elaborate.

Tesla was not immediately available for comment.

In January, the US electric-car maker incorporated Tesla Motors India and Energy Private Ltd with its registered office in Bengaluru.

— Reuters

TS firm aims to create 20K farm entrepreneurs

FC BUREAU HYDERABAD, MARCH 12

Hyderabad-based farm tech major Our Food on Friday tied up with the Telangana government to set up village-level micro food processing units in partnership with rural entrepreneurs in the state.

"Post-harvest losses in India are as high as 30 per cent. Value addition at the farm level would cut down post-harvest losses and help farmers get better pricing. After the Covid pandemic, a lot of people have lost their jobs and have returned to their villages. They are looking to take up farming as a profession. Our initiative will also help such people by creating rural jobs in addition to helping farmers to earn more," Balareddy, the CEO of Our Food, told this newspaper.

The company, which entered into an MoU with the Telangana government on Friday, plans to set up 20,000 micro food processing units in the state. The company manufactures food processing units at its facility in Zaheerabad in Sangareddy district.

Under this initiative, the company would offer its franchise to rural entrepreneurs. The franchise holder needs to invest around 40 per cent of the sum that is

required to set up a micro food processing unit, while the company would help him or her to get a loan from the bank for the rest of the money. The company would train the entrepreneur and undertake to procure the entire processed food, which reduces the risk factor for the investors.

The total investment required for setting up 20,000 units is Rs1,535 crore. Apart from this, the company needs to invest exclusively in the expansion of its manufacturing lines and marketing network.

The Telangana government, meanwhile, would identify people who could be considered for awarding franchisees by the company and help the village-level entrepreneur and the company to get hassle-free permissions for setting up of the micro food processing units.

According to an estimate, Bala Reddy said this initiative would create direct employment for at least 40,000 rural youth and indirect employment for at least 60,000 people in the state.

"An investment of Rs 1,535 crore will generate a revenue of Rs 24,409 crore, a net profit of Rs 2,440 crore to the farmer franchisees and up to Rs 4,881 crore to farmers over a period of five years," he said.

Gaming firm Nazara Tech's IPO priced at ₹1,100-₹1,101

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 12

The initial public offering of Nazara Technologies, a gaming and sports media platform, opens on March 17 and closes on March 19.

The price band for the Rs 583-crore public offer has been fixed at Rs 1,100 to Rs 1,101 per equity share of Rs 4 face value.

The company, backed by ace investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, is known for its games on World Cricket Championship, Chhota Bheem and Motu Patlu series.

Apart from India, Nazara Technologies has a presence across emerging and developed global markets such as Africa and North America, and its offerings include interactive gaming, eSports and gamified early learning ecosystems.

The public offer of 52.94 lakh shares is an offer for sale by promoter selling shareholder Mitter Infotech LLP and a bunch of investors selling shareholders, including

SURYODAY SFB'S IPO OPENS ON WED.

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 12

Suryoday Small Finance Bank's initial public offering to raise Rs 582 crore opens on March 17. The price band for the IPO has been fixed at Rs 303 to Rs 305 per equity share of Rs 10 face value.

Suryoday SFB is a new age bank that went live in January 2017 after running as a micro finance institution and NBFC for eight years.

As of July 31, 2020, the company had 482 bank branches and a customer base of 14.3 lakh. The company operates predominantly in urban and semi-urban locations.

ing IIFL Special Opportunities Fund.

The shares will be listed on BSE and NSE.

Mittal puts Liberty's Gupta on cash & carry

EDDIE SPENCE MARCH 12

ArcelorMittal SA will ask for cash up front to supply Sanjeev Gupta's GFG Alliance with steel amid fears about the group's financial situation.

The company will change its payment terms for shipments to the finishing plants Gupta bought from it in 2019, according to a person familiar with the matter. It's likely to put further stress on GFG's cash flow as it tries to find alternative financing after the collapse of its biggest lender, Greensill Capital.

It follows a brief suspension of deliveries by the steel giant to some of GFG's plants, the person said. A spokesperson for the company's unit, Liberty Steel, said there was a "temporary issue" with one of its suppliers for some of its sites, but added it had been "successfully concluded using our normal commercial dispute procedures."

ArcelorMittal is constructively working with Liberty Steel "to ensure continuity of the contract," it said in a statement. A spokesperson for GFG said the company wouldn't comment on



commercial arrangements.

Greensill's collapse has raised questions about the financial health of Gupta's businesses, which were its biggest customer. GFG told Greensill in February that it would be insolvent without its funding, the financing firm

said in a filing. Worker unions have since raised concerns over the security of 35,000 jobs across Gupta's sprawling empire that has operations in 30 countries.

GFG has hired PJT Partners Inc and Alvarez & Marsal Inc. to help it secure new financing, Bloomberg reported on Wednesday. Their first task will be to secure a debt standstill on the \$5 billion that GFG owes Greensill and other funds that bought its financial products, a person familiar with the matter said this week.

—Bloomberg

Inflation up, industrial output down

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

With a rise in food prices, Consumer Price Index-based retail inflation surged to 5.03 per cent in February after falling to a 16-month low in January at 4.06 per cent while industrial output saw a contraction of 1.6 per cent in January. The poor performance of sectors like manufacturing and mining pulled down the Index of



Industrial Production that had registered a positive growth in December, gov-

ernment data released on Friday showed.

As per the National Statistical Office data, the rate of price rise in the food basket accelerated to 3.87 per cent in February against 1.89 per cent in the preceding month.

CPI inflation in urban areas was at 5.96 per cent in February while in rural areas the general inflation rate was 4.19 per cent.

The combined inflation rate was found to be 5.03

per cent.

While retail inflation continued its upward trajectory, the IIP contracted in January. "The Quick Estimates of IIP with base 2011-12 stands at 135.2," the release said.

As per the industrial output figure, electricity sector output grew 5.5 per cent while manufacturing contracted by 2.0 per cent. Likewise, mining output also contracted by 3.7 per cent.

Top performing pension funds to 'guarantee' negative returns

FRANCES SCHWARTZKOPFF MARCH 12

After almost a decade of negative interest rates, one of the world's best-run pension industries is about to start guaranteeing clients a negative return.

It's the latest sign that long-term subzero rates are forcing Denmark to reshape its finance industry. The country's banks have already taken a world lead in imposing negative retail deposit rates, while Danish homeowners have access to mortgages at negative

interest rates.

Denmark's pension industry, twice the size of its economy and ranked the best in the world alongside that of the Netherlands, is now taking another step into uncharted territory. The Danish regulator has decided it's no longer feasible for funds to promise savers in guaranteed-return products that they'll get at least 1 per cent. So from July 1, funds will only be allowed to guarantee savers minus 0.5 per cent (Savers opting for riskier pension plans that track market rates aren't affected by the

change.) A negative return guarantee "is a weird concept," said Per Ploughmand Baertelsen, assistant director general at the FSA in Copenhagen. But that's what savers need to accept, if they want to place their money into products "with zero risk."

The decision may accelerate a shift away from such guaranteed-return pensions in Denmark, which account for two-thirds of obligations to customers. The majority of premiums are now paid into products that are at the mercy of the market.

—Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## No Canada, US Opens this year

**New Delhi:** The Badminton World Federation on Friday announced that this years US Open and Canada Open will not take place due to the Covid-19 "restrictions and complications" across the globe.

The US Open, a Super 300 tournament on the HSBC BWF World Tour, was slated to be played from July 6 to 11, while the Super 100 tournament in Canada Open was schedule for June 29 to July 4. "The ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and complications left local organisers no choice but to cancel the tournaments," BWF said in a statement. "The respective decisions of USA Badminton and Badminton Canada were made in consultation and agreement with the BWF," it added. The cancellations follow the news that Badminton Asia has postponed its flagship event the Asia Championships. — *PTI*

## Federer hopes for Wimbledon high

**Doha:** Roger Federer admitted his goal was to be "100 per cent" back in business by the time Wimbledon rolls around after the 20-time Grand Slam title winner saw his comeback from 13 months out with injury end in Doha on Thursday. The 39-year-old squandered a match point and was knocked out of the Qatar Open by Georgias Nikoloz Basilashvili in his first tournament since losing to Novak Djokovic in the Australian Open semi-finals in January 2020. Federer, who underwent two knee surgeries last season, secured the first set against world number 42 Basilashvili but eventually wilted and lost the quarter-final tie, 3-6, 6-1, 7-5. It was just his second match of his return having also needed three sets to see off Britains Dan Evans on Wednesday. — *AFP*

## Muguruza enters Dubai last four

**Dubai:** Garbine Muguruza overcame Aryna Sabalenka in a tight three-setter for a second consecutive week to storm into the Dubai semi-finals for a third time in seven appearances. The Spaniard, a runner-up in Doha last week, bounced back from a set down to eliminate the third-seeded Sabalenka 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 and set up a showdown with Belgians Elise Mertens. Earlier on centre court, Mertens, the No.10 seed, pulled off a miraculous comeback, saving three match points en route to a 5-7, 7-5, 6-0 success over Jessica Pegula. The world No.18, who was down 5-7, 2-5 before she turned things around, is into the 15th tour-level semi-final of her career. "Its unbelievable to come back like this. I just didnt want to let it go, I just kept on fighting, and I think that was the spirit today," said Mertens. — *AFP*

## India to play WC qualifiers in Qatar

**New Delhi:** India will play their remaining three FIFA World Cup qualifiers in Qatar as the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) decided to host the matches in centralised venues owing to the coronavirus-related travel and quarantine restrictions. As per the original schedule, the Indian team would have played against Qatar at home, Bangladesh away and Afghanistan at home, but the global pandemic has forced radical changes in the fixtures. "FIFA World Cup 2022 host Qatar, will welcome Group E opponents Oman, Afghanistan, India and Bangladesh with Japan set to provide the stage for the matches in Group F comprising Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Myanmar and Mongolia," the AFC said. — *PTI*

## Live on TV

## FOOTBALL

**Indian Super League:** Final — Mumbai City vs Mohun Bagan from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

## UFC

**Fight Night:** Leon Edwards vs Belal Muhammad and other bouts from 6.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2

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## LIONS ROAR

## Jason smashes 49 as England rout India in first T20



England's Jason Roy in action against India in their first Twenty20 in Ahmedabad on Friday. — *AP*

## NUMBERS GAME

**A TRIPLE CENTURY OF T-20 GAMES FOR KOHLI:**  
● Virat Kohli became fifth Indian and 31st player overall to complete a triple century of Twenty-20 matches. The first match of the five-Twenty-20 match series was 300th match in this form of cricket for Indian skipper.  
● Kohli who made his T-20 debut for Delhi against Himachal Pradesh at Delhi on April 3, 2007 and took 13 years and 344 days to reach this landmark.  
● Rohit Sharma (340 matches), M.S. Dhoni (331 matches), Suresh Raina (324 matches) and Dinesh Karthik (310 matches) are the other Indian to play 300 T-20 matches before Kohli.

— *S. PERVEZ QAISER*

## SCORECARD

**India:** Shikhar Dhawan b Mark Wood 4, K. L. Rahul b Jofra Archer 1, Virat Kohli c Chris Jordan b Adil Rashid 0, Rishabh Pant c Bairstow b Stokes 21, Shreyas Iyer c Malan b Chris Jordan 67, Hardik Pandya c Chris Jordan b Jofra Archer 19, Shardul Thakur c Malan b Jofra Archer 0, Washington Sundar (not out) 3, Axar Patel (not out) 7. Extras (w-2) 2. **Total (for 7 wks, in 20 overs) 124.**  
**FoW:** 2-1, 3-2, 20-3, 48-4, 102-5, 102-6, 117-7.  
**Bowler:** Adil Rashid 3-0-14-1, Jofra Archer 4-1-23-3, Mark

Wood 4-0-20-1, Chris Jordan 4-0-27-1, Ben Stokes 3-0-25-1, Sam Curran 2-0-15-0.  
**England:** Jason Roy lbw b Washington Sundar 49, Jos Buttler lbw b Chahal 28, Dawid Malan (not out) 24, Jonny Bairstow (not out) 26. Extras (w-3) 3. **Total (for 2 wks, in 15.3 overs) 130.**  
**FoW:** 1-72, 2-89.  
**Bowling:** Axar Patel 3-0-24-0, Bhuvneshwar Kuma 2-0-15-0, Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-44-1, Shardul Thakur 2-0-16-0, Hardik Pandya 2-0-13-0, Washington Sundar 2-3-0-18-1.

**Ahmedabad, March 12:** Indian batsmen had little to offer in the face of a regimented English bowling effort on a two-paced track as the hosts received an eight-wicket hammering in the opening Twenty20 International here on Friday.

Indian batsmen struggled to score freely before Shreyas Iyer showed the way with a dogged 67-run knock that took Virat Kohli's men to 124 for seven at the Narendra Modi stadium. The home team could only manage 124 and in the absence of score-board pressure, England overhauled the target with ease in 15.3 overs to take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

The Indian batsmen never got the momentum going as England's pace-heavy attack, led by Mark Wood, used the extra bounce effectively to trouble them.

Most of the Indian batsmen went for flashy shots when placement would have served them well, as Iyer did later in the innings.

The world's biggest stadium played host to 67,000 fans, according to Cricinfo, way more than the 50 per cent capacity that was to be filled for the game in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Jason Roy scored a well-calculated 49-run knock while Jonny Bairstow's big hits showed there were no demons in the pitch as the Indians made it seem after being invited to bat by England skipper Eoin Morgan.

Roy struck the ball clean and hard to form a 72-run opening wicket stand with Jos Buttler (28), ending any hopes that the Indians harboured of getting back in the game.

The luxury of time allowed the England batsmen to play freely.

None of the Indian bowlers looked like ask-

ing tough questions to the visitors.

Roy was trapped by Washington Sundar but by that time England had

put 89 runs on the board. Bairstow (26) and Dawid Malan (24) took the side past the finish line.

— *PTI*

## PAKISTAN NOT IN FAVOUR OF ASIA CUP THIS YEAR

**Karachi, March 12:** Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Ehsan Mani has conveyed to the PSL franchise owners that the games governing body in the country is not in favour of having the Asia Cup T20 event this year.

A PCB source said this was conveyed by Mani to the Pakistan Super League franchise owners on Thursday, after it was announced that the remaining matches of PSL 6 would be completed in June. Mani spoke about the Asia Cup after the franchise owners sought to know if the dates of PSL were clashing with the continental tournament. "Mani made it clear that their was little possibility of the tournament being held this year and it would be moved to 2023 due to the commitments of the participating teams," the source said.

Mani told the new dates for the Asia Cup would be decided at the next meeting of the Asian Cricket Council. — *PTI*

## Giles feels IPL is very beneficial for England

**London, March 12:** The Indian Premier League has been extremely beneficial for us, says ECB managing director Ashley Giles, who feels English cricketers presence in the lucrative T20 tournament has helped the national team in achieving the number one rank in white-ball formats.

Earlier this week, England's star player Jos Buttler said that the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had never asked him to skip the popular T20 event to be available for the Test series against New Zealand, which is set to clash with the final stages of the IPL.

"In my briefings with the players, I have encouraged players to think very carefully about what their programmes are. I have not directed them," Giles told in a Sky Sports show.



Ashley Giles

"We aren't forcing either way. The IPL isn't going anywhere. It has extreme benefits to us. From this group here, I think, we have 12 of the 16 players going to the IPL."

"Years ago we found it very difficult for players to get into the IPL to experience that tournament. Now all of our players are in high demand and its probably the big reason why we are number one in world in both white-ball for-

mats," Giles said.

There are 12 England cricketers, some with million dollar contracts, playing in the IPL. The players include Buttler, Ben Stokes and Jofra Archer for Rajasthan Royals, Moeen Ali and Sam Curran for Chennai Super Kings and Dawid Malan for Punjab Kings.

The IPL is slated to begin from April 9 with the final scheduled to be played on May 30, while England's opening Test against New Zealand begins on June 2.

"We have agreed for players to go to the IPL. Those two Test matches were arranged late, they didnt form part of the original schedule. We had agreed with the players and with the IPL that the players would be available right through the tournament and if they got to the later stages, they would be able to participate." — *PTI*

## BEDI DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL AFTER 24 DAYS

**New Delhi, March 12:** Legendary former India spinner Bishan Singh Bedi has been discharged after spending more than three weeks at a city hospital here following a bypass surgery.

The 74-year-old former India captain had undergone a bypass surgery at the capitals Sir Ganga Ram Hospital last month after he suffered a heart attack.

He subsequently also underwent an operation to remove blood clotting in his brain.

"He was evaluated and was found to be having all three vessels of heart critically blocked," the statement from the hospital read.

"He was stabilised and underwent Coronary Artery Bypass Surgery, which was performed by Dr Ganesh Shivnani and his team on 18 February 2021. He has been discharged successfully in a stable condition on 11 March 2021," it added. — *PTI*

## WOMEN'S | CRICKET

## Raj first Indian to join 10k club

**Lucknow, March 12:** Veteran batter Mithali Raj on Friday became the first Indian woman cricketer and second internationally to complete 10,000 runs across all formats, drawing praise from some iconic names of the game and the BCCI.

The 38-year-old Mithali, who leads the Indian ODI team, joined England's Charlotte Edwards in the elite club.

Mithali achieved the feat with a boundary off Anne Bosch in the 28th over of Indias innings during the ongoing third ODI against South Africa here.

Mithali has amassed 663 runs in 10 Test matches with a best score of 214, while she has 6974 and 2364 runs from 212 ODIs and 89 T20 Internationals respectively. The figures add up to 10001.

"Heartiest congratulations Mithali on completing 10000 runs in International Cricket. Terrific achievement... Keep going strong!" master blaster Sachin Tendulkar tweeted.

After reaching the milestone of Friday, Mithali departed in the next ball, flicking a Bosch delivery



Mithali Raj

straight to Mignon du Preez at midwicket. She made 36 runs off 50 balls and hit five boundaries in the process.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah called the India captain an "absolute legend".

"Take a bow, @M\_Raj03! What an achievement to be the first Indian woman cricketer to surpass the international 10,000-run mark. Absolute legend," Shah wrote on his Twitter handle.

Earlier, the Board too congratulated the veteran cricketer on reaching the milestone. IPL franchises Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians also congratulated the seasoned cricketer. — *PTI*

## Lee lords over India women in third ODI

**Lucknow, March 12:** South African opener Lizelle Lee single-handedly destroyed India's chances with a career-best unbeaten 132 as the home team lost by six runs via the Duckworth-Lewis (DLS) method in the rain-marred third womens ODI of the five-match series here on Friday.

Chasing 249, Lee starred for the visitors with her breathtaking knock that came off 131 balls and had 16 fours and two hits over the fence. South Africa now lead the series 2-1.

Lee kept South Africa abreast with the required rate, which eventually proved crucial after rain played spoilsport with the visitors at 223 for four in 46.3 overs, six ahead of India via the DLS method. Earlier, Punam Raut

struck a second successive half-century — 77 off 108 balls — to power India to a fighting score.

South Africa were off to a decent start in their chase with the pair of Lee and stand-in skipper Laura Wolvaardt (12) adding 41 runs for the opening wicket. After Wolvaardt was cleaned up by off-spinner Deepti Sharma, Lara Goodall (16) and Lee took the innings forward with a 40-run stand for the second wicket. Mignon du Preez (37) too made a significant contribution as Lee kept South Africas chase alive by scoring the third century of her career. — *PTI*

**Brief Scores:** India 248/5 in 50 overs (Punam Raut 77, Deepti Sharma 36 not out, Mithali Raj 36; Shabnim Ismail 2/46) lost to South Africa 223/4 in 46.3 overs (Lizelle Lee 132 not out; Julian Goswami 2/20).

## Kjaers late leveller gives AC advantage

**Paris, March 12:** Simon Kjaers last-gasp equaliser gave AC Milan a dramatic 1-1 draw at Manchester United on Thursday, handing the Italian giants a great chance of reaching the Europa League quarter-finals.

Kjaer netted with a bullet header in the final seconds of stoppage time of the last 16, first leg encounter at Old Trafford, levelling the scores after Amad Diallo had opened in the 50th minute with his first United goal.

"This is a great result, we played really well, showed personality and I think we dominated," the defender told Sky Sport Italia after the match.

In a sign of the drop in standards at Old Trafford and the San Siro, the first meeting between two of the worlds most historic teams since 2010 was their first outside the Champions League knock-out stages.

Rangers, Ajax well placed Rangers are well placed to make the quarter-finals

● **Four-time European champions Ajax are almost guaranteed a place in the Europa League last eight after thumping Young Boys 3-0 in Amsterdam.**

after a 1-1 draw away to Slavia Prague.

Filip Helanders close-range finish in the first half left Steve Gerrards Rangers still in the hunt for a European trophy with the draw in Prague, days after winning their first Scottish League title in 10 years.

Four-time European champions Ajax are almost guaranteed a place in the last eight after thumping Young Boys 3-0 in Amsterdam through goals from Davy Klaassen, Dusan Tadic and Brian Brobbey.

Villarreal also look good to make the quarters thanks to a 2-0 win at Dynamo Kiev. — *AFP*

## THE RESULTS

<b>Manchester United</b> (Diallo 50)	1	<b>Granada</b> (Molina 26, Soldado 76)	2
<b>AC Milan</b> (Kjaer 90+2)	1	<b>Molde</b>	0
<b>Slavia Prague</b> (Stanciu 7)	1	<b>Tottenham Hotspur</b> (Kane 25, 70)	2
<b>Rangers</b> (Helder 36)	1	<b>Dinamo Zagreb</b>	0
<b>Dynamo Kiev</b>	0	<b>Olympiakos</b> (El-Arabi 58)	1
<b>Villarreal</b> (Torres 30, Albiol 52)	2	<b>Arsenal</b> (Odegaard 34, Gabriel 80, Elneny 85)	3
<b>Ajax</b> (Klaassen 62, Tadic 82, Brobbey 90+2)	3	<b>Roma</b> (Pellegrini 23, El Shaarawy 73, Mancini 77)	3
<b>Young Boys</b>	0	<b>Shakhtar Donetsk</b>	0