

OTHER STORIES

TWO INDEPENDENTS
WITHDRAW FROM
BIENNIAL POLLSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 26

Two independent candidates withdrew their nominations to contest in biennial election to AP legislative council from two teachers' constituencies on Friday.

They are Didde Ambedkar from East-West Godavari teachers' constituency and Chandu Vijaya Lakshmi from Krishna-Guntur teachers' constituency.

There are 11 contestants in fray from East-West constituency and 19 from Krishna-Guntur constituency.

On the other hand, no nomination was filed to contest in biennial election to AP legislative council by MLAs to fill up five vacancies on Friday.

POLAVARAM
SPILLWAY BRIDGE
SLAB COMPLETEDDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 26

The multipurpose Polavaram irrigation project's spillway bridge slab at a length of 1,128 meters was completed.

Following the direction from the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to complete execution of whole project by end of 2021 and ensure supply of water to the farmers for cultivation of crops for kharif season in 2022, the project executing agency Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Limited expedite works on several key components of the project. The execution works on spillway bridge began on Sept. 9, 2020 and despite facing floods and Covid-19 pandemic, were completed by Friday. Nearly 5,200 cubic meters of concrete and 700 tonnes of steel was used for the spillway bridge.

Along with laying spillway bridge, hydraulic cylinders were set up at 29 crest gates so far and power pack rooms are also being set up to secure the power packs meant to operate the crest gates.

TD MANIFESTO
ASSURES BETTER
CIVIC AMENITIESDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 26

The Telugu Desam released its manifesto with ten promises for the ensuing municipal elections.

Party general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh, after releasing the manifesto on Friday, asserted that YSR Congress leaders had no moral right to ask for votes in the municipal elections as the Jagan Mohan Reddy government has ignored civic amenities like roads, drainage, drinking water, health and housing needs of the people across cities and towns.

Lokesh appealed to the people to realise what damage the YSRC had done to the State since coming to power.

Addressing a press conference, he maintained that they had framed the manifesto after conducting a three-month long survey to understand the expectations of the urban people. He explained that the manifesto contained 10 promises beginning with their commitment to reopen Anna canteens across the state.

BJP SEEKS FRESH
NOMINATIONS FOR
AP CIVIC POLLSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 26

Former BJP state president and senior party leader Kanna Lakshminarayana has sought that State Election Commission (SEC) give chance to file fresh nominations for the forthcoming municipal elections in Andhra Pradesh. In support of his suggestion, he alleged that ruling YSR Congress leaders had forcibly stopped many aspirants of opposition parties from filing their nominations when polls were originally announced last year before the Covid-19 pandemic. Lakshminarayana was speaking after a joint meeting of BJP and Jana Sena leaders on Friday over the municipal polls in Guntur district. Leaders of the two parties discussed how they should move forward in the upcoming municipal elections.

The senior BJP leader said many candidates belonging to opposition parties had been forcibly prevented by the ruling party leaders from filing their nominations in majority of the places.



Vizag-south MLA, Vasupalli Ganesh Kumar takes part in a campaign rally for the upcoming GVMC elections at the 35th Ward near Poorna Market in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

Civic polls: Tough time for
TD as leaders flock to YSRC

3 candidates who filed nominations for TD, shift to oppn

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, FEB. 26

Telugu Desam faces a tough situation in the municipal corporation polls here as the YSRC is seeing an influx of leaders and candidates from the TD in the context of differences between rival groups in the party.

Three candidates had filed nominations from TD prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. They have now quit Telugu Desam and shifted their allegiance to the YSRC. Lakshmi Reddy, sitting corporator from Third Road had filed nomination papers as TD candidate but quit the party and joined YSRC in the presence of urban MLA Ananta Venkatrami Reddy. Jolted, the Telugu Desam is reportedly unable to find another

AFTER YSRC ANNOUNCES LIST, MANY
QUIT DESAM, JOIN RULING PARTYDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 26

The YSRC high command on Friday released a list of 44 candidates who would be contesting from various wards of the corporation.

The list contained the names of candidates contesting in Anakapalle, Bhimili, Visakhapatnam North and Visakhapatnam West assembly constituencies. The list contained names of five candidates

candidate to field from the area. Meanwhile, internal bickering between Lok Sabha area in-charge JC Pavan Reddy and urban assembly in-charge V Prabhakar Chowdary

from Anakapalle constituency, 8 in Bhimili, 17 in Visakhapatnam North and Visakhapatnam West 14.

Meanwhile, 500 active members of Telugu Desam joined YSRC at a gathering held in Visakhapatnam north constituency and in the presence of Lok Sabha member MVV Satyanarayana. A group picture containing the new joining was circulated in the media on Friday.

worsened during the ongoing civic polls, as both groups tried to field their own candidates.

A senior leader from the 1st Road area of New Town area extended sup-

port to an Independent candidate, instead of the TD nominee, saying the decision by the in-charge was one-sided. "Voters in our division are against the former corporator as he had failed to serve the area well," the leader said and announced that his group would back an independent candidate.

Even after differences emerged in the party, the YSRC high command entrusted responsibilities to urban MLA Ananta Ventaktrami Reddy to select candidates from all divisions. Former MLA Gurnath Reddy, though a close aide of the YSR family, had shifted base to the TD during the last polls but re-joined the YSRC, saying he had not been heard during selection of candidates for mayor and various divisions.

Top YSRC leaders threaten
Independent candidateDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM,
FEBRUARY 26

Top leadership of the ruling YSRC allegedly threatened an independent candidate contesting in 21st ward where mayoral aspirant Vamsi Krishna Yadav was pitted against him in a one to one battle.

Observers said the independent Mohammed Ghouse is likely to win the elections as he has strong support from the local people. His wife Unnisa won as independent in 2007 elections and on the request of former chief minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy she supported Congress mayoral candidate Pulusu Janardhana Rao.

Family members of Mohammed Ghouse told this correspondent on Friday that a person belonging to a minority community claiming to be a police officer came to their house late in the evening on Wednesday asked Ghouse to accompany him to his car. After he sat in the car, the man called a person and put the phone in speaker mode.

Initially there was a gentle request to withdraw from the elections and support YSRC candidate. When Ghouse kept mum another person in a harsh tone warned him of consequences and said the election would be manipulated

MINISTER AVANTI CAMPAIGNS FOR DAUGHTER

DC Correspondent
Visakhapatnam, February 26: Minister for Tourism Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao (Avanti) campaigned for his daughter Muttamsetti Priyanka, who is contesting for ward no 6 in Visakhapatnam.

She is pitted against TD candidate Pothina Seetha, who is strongly backed by former mayor Sabbam Hari.

The minister took out a rally from the cricket stadium, Madhuravada and reached Gayatrinagar. On the way, the minister welcomed Pothina Prasad, a strong TD leader of Madhuravada, into the

party fold. A large number of party workers including women walked along with the minister and his daughter. Addressing people at different places, the minister said YSRC would win the majority of the wards in the corporation as the people were impressed with the welfare schemes launched by Jagan Mohan Reddy government during the last 21 months.

Balaraju said it would be a good advantage for the people if they elected Priyanka, who is a doctor by profession. The ward would also witness development, he added.

The ward has 17,830 votes and of them the strong community of Rellis having a voter strength of 1500 and minorities with 800 and a sizeable Yadavs would vote for him.

"My wife Unnisa won with a good majority and I will repeat the same," Ghouse said with a confident note.

Observers said for Vamsi Krishna Yadav it would be do or die battle. If loses, his political career and the dream of becoming first mayor of the capital designated city would come to an end.

Jagan tells town planners
to be ready for challengesDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 26

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has called upon town planners to come up with solutions for emerging challenges with a futuristic outlook, in accordance with sustainable development goals set up by the United Nations.

Inaugurating the 69th National Town and Country Planners Conference online at Vishakhapatnam on Friday, the CM said that he is looking forward to their recommendations on affordable housing for lower-income groups and reducing financial burden on the government owing to growing cost of land.

● **THE CHIEF MINISTER** reiterated that his government will take forward all suggestions and recommendations that the conference makes after deliberations and put them to best use.

He expressed confidence that the three-day meet will come up with solutions pertinent to the state and country vis-a-vis the 17 sustainable goals set by the United Nations for 2030.

Jagan Mohan Reddy said the issue of increasing greenhouse gases is a matter of serious concern. Water management is another issue requiring comprehensive planning, as cities are growing in

multiple directions. He stated that the government is looking forward to develop the coastal region, utilising the vast stretch of 974 km of seashore. Even Visakhapatnam will be one of the beneficiaries of an integrated coastal development plan, he stated.

The Chief Minister reiterated that his government will take forward all suggestions and recommendations that the conference makes after deliberations and put them to best use. The meeting, organised by the Institute of Town Planners of India, is being attended by town planners, academics, researchers and directors of institutes from across the country.



Ambati Rambabu

NAIDU FAILED TO
PROVIDE WATER
TO KUPPAMDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 2

YSR Congress state officials spokesperson and MLA Ambati Rambabu said that Chandrababu Naidu is frustrated after the Kuppam debacle in panchayat polls and termed Telugu Desam Party manifesto for civic polls a farce and impracticable as it cannot implemented by the Leader of Opposition.

Addressing a press conference on Friday, Mr Rambabu stated that in Kuppam, TDP had won only 14 of the total 89 seats as people were fed up with Chandrababu Naidu for four long decades. He commented that since TDP lost in the polls, Naidu came running to town ahead of Municipal polls, otherwise he would have never visited Kuppam even for filing nomination.

He recalled that Chandrababu Naidu had failed to implement the promises gave during the 2014 municipal elections while in power for five years, leaving people and welfare to winds. He stated that Chandrababu Naidu had failed to recognize the services of his party workers, including Jr NTR. He recalled that Chandrababu Naidu, who had earlier taken junior NTR for an election campaign, had sidelined him after the defeat. Mr Rambabu said that Chandrababu Naidu should be ashamed to demand water for Kuppam in spite of serving as a Chief Minister for 14 years.

Mr. Ambati Rambabu has also hit out at Nara Lokesh for his abusive comments made on Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, saying that people have faith in the Chief Minister and reminded him of the defeat in Mangalagiri.

People will turn
against YSRC
soon, says NaiduDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 26

Telugu Desam supremo Nara Chandrababu Naidu has objected to Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and YSRC leaders asserting that they have won big in Kuppam. Naidu retorted that TD cadres know how ruling party leaders tried to suppress them and will repay YSRC with interest by defeating it in the future.

As part of the three-day tour of his Kuppam constituency, Naidu asserted that he will stay put in Kuppam till the ZPTC, MPTC elections to ensure that ruling party candidates do not even get their deposit in the forthcoming civic body elections.

Charging YSRC leaders of intimidating his party candidates during panchayat elections in Punganur to make the elections unanimous, the former chief minister said he will ensure that minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy loses his deposit in the next election from Punganur.

"Peddireddy is not only illegally trading in precious red sanders but is also smuggling sand in an effort to amass more and more wealth. He has utilised his money earned through illegal activities



Chandrababu Naidu

to ruin democracy in Kuppam," Naidu observed.

He further said: "The capital issue has gone, special status and Polavaram project have become a thing of past and now Visakhapatnam is facing threat of closure. How YSRC can is continue under such circumstances," he asked.

The TDP chief visited Poduru village in Kadapally panchayat to console family members of TD activist Krishnappa, who had died in a road accident recently. He assured that the family of Krishnappa will be taken care of by the party. He also announced a financial assistance of Rs. 50,000 for the family of deceased.

R&B GUESTHOUSE IN KUPPAM HIT
BY POWER OUTAGE FOR 2 HOURSDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 26

The R&B guesthouse in Kuppam constituency, where Telugu Desam Chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu was staying as part of his three-day tour to Kuppam, has been allegedly hit by a power outage for almost two hours on Friday.

Former minister and TD leader N. Amaranth Reddy came down heavily at the ruling party, when he spoke to the media persons in Kuppam on Friday, alleging that the YSR Congress led government has intentionally cut the power to the R&B guest house in a bid to force the opposition to call off his tour to Kuppam.

"Jaganmohan Reddy's government was resort-

ing to vindictive and revenge politics by targeting the TD Chief Chandrababu Naidu and creating obstacles for his public tour and meetings. This is clearly visible in Kuppam today, as the power was cut to the guest house on purpose. At least they didn't even provide a generator or a battery", Mr Reddy alleged.

He warned of giving more shocks to the ruling party in the coming days. "The YSRC government is causing trouble to the TD leaders. Even the officials are not following protocol during the visit of the TD Chief and Kuppam MLA. These kinds of events never happened before, but they are happening now at the behest of the Jagan government", he said.

↑ RISING | TRADE Excise dept earned ₹1,473.91cr from Feb. 1 to 21, whereas it was ₹1,380.58cr last year

Liquor earnings soar during panchayat polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 26

Sale of liquor in the first three weeks of February, during the gram panchayat elections, has come as a blessing for the excise department, as the value of liquor sold went up by 6.76 per cent when compared to the same period last year.

Going by the sales report of the excise department, the overall consumption of alcohol and alcoholic bev-

erages has fallen drastically but the department earned ₹1,473.91 crore from February 1 to 21, whereas it was ₹1,380.58 crore during the same period last year.

Around 14.15 lakh cases of Indian made foreign liquor (IMFL) were sold, marking a 22 per cent decrease over the sale of 18.23 lakh cases during the same period last year. Similarly, 4.57 lakh beer cases were consumed this year – 22 per cent less than

● **ON THE OTHER** hand, the Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB), police and excise department personnel arrested over 5,000 bootleggers, besides seizing lakhs of liquor bottles, destroying fermented jaggery wash, ID liquor and other freebies, which were reportedly meant for distribution to voters.

the corresponding figure (5.89 lakh cases) last year.

In all, five districts – Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, Guntur, Krishna and West Godavari – accounted for nearly 53 per cent of all

liquor sold in the state during this three-week period, together marking a whopping sale of ₹793.71 crore. This is against last year's sales of ₹732.19 crore in the five districts.

On an average, liquor

worth ₹70 crore was sold in the state during the three-week election period. This is besides the locally made illicit arrack and liquor smuggled from Telangana state, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, that was supplied by candidates in rural areas.

On the other hand, the Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB), police and excise department personnel arrested over 5,000 bootleggers, besides seiz-

ing lakhs of liquor bottles, destroying fermented jaggery wash, ID liquor and other freebies, which were reportedly meant for distribution to voters.

Meanwhile, the gram panchayat election has thrown up a new trend with some people, especially youth, going to the extent of demanding liquor rather than money. This trend is expected to play a crucial role in the ensuing MPTC, ZPTC and civic body polls.

SHORT TAKES

HIKE AIMS AT
REDUCING
CONGESTION

From Page 1

All two-wheelers were exempted from payment of toll fee.

The TTD had, in February last year, sent a letter to the government seeking its approval for the classification of vehicles at Alipiri tollgate as per National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) regulations and fix the fee accordingly. It had also proposed a complete exemption of toll for two-wheelers.

The TTD has been operating two ghat roads between Tirumala and Tirupati and collecting toll fees as per rates approved by the state government in September 1996.

In pre-Covid times, about 8,000-10,000 vehicles passed through this toll plaza on normal days and 12,000 vehicles on special occasions and weekends.

The TTD has been netting a revenue of ₹2.5 lakh to ₹3.5 lakh on an average a day in the form of toll collections. Around 35.33 lakh vehicles have passed through this toll plaza in 2019 and a toll fee of ₹7.47 crore was collected, sources said.

The temple body had proposed to enhance the toll in December 2000 through a resolution 656, but TTD could not implement the revised rates. After a gap of many years, the TTD trust board, in February last year, again proposed to enhance the toll fee through resolution 300 and sent a letter to the government seeking its nod for the new rates.

In August last year, the special chief secretary to the government, revenue, suggested to the TTD board to further enhance the tariff for four-wheelers in a bid to reduce the congestion and pollution atop Tirumala.

The TTD trust board, in its second round of discussions on this subject, however, felt that its earlier decision was good enough and saw no reason to enhance tariff on four-wheelers and conveyed the same to the government.

In December last, the TTD executive officer again sent a letter to the government, seeking its approval for the first proposal.

In response, the principal secretary to government, Revenue, passed GO 45 on Friday, approving the TTD resolution to enhance the toll fee and give complete exemption to two-wheelers.

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NTR varsity without
executive council

Several projects held up as no council for two years

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 26

The Dr NTR University of Health Sciences (NTRUHS) has no Executive Council for the last two years, affecting its functioning and holding back the implementation of several academic programmes.

The Executive Council will be having 14 members with the Vice-Chancellor as its chairman, the registrar as convener and secretaries of finance and health, commissioner of health and family welfare, directors of health and medical education and some others as nominated members.

The term of the EC lasts three years. The

● University sources say lack of EC meant no major decision could be taken as in a change of curriculum and initiation of welfare schemes for students.

term of the last EC ended two years ago. Since then, no new EC was constituted by the state government due to various reasons.

University sources say lack of EC meant no major decision could be taken as in a change of curriculum and initiation of welfare schemes for students.

Though the university planned to come up with a plan to hold exams in remote mode for the university college and all its constituent and affiliated colleges, it was unable to do this for want of clear-

ance and sanction of funds from the EC. The project was estimated to cost more than ₹2 crore.

Similarly, the university proposed to enter into MoUs with several states as also national and international research institutes to share knowledge and expertise, facilitate good exposure to students and help them come up with innovative projects.

This too did not materialise as no EC existed for grant of nod.

The university planned to sign an MoU with the National Institute of

Nutrition in Hyderabad but that too remains on paper for the same reason.

Sources say that several programmes, projects, agreements and welfare activities for students are held back due to lack of mandatory clearance and financial concurrence of the EC.

State government sources conveniently sought to put the blame on the civic polls. They said though there was a move to constitute an EC for NTRUHS recently, the model code of conduct announced by the state election commission in the run-up to the gram panchayat and urban local body polls came in the way and delayed the process further.



Eastern Navy Flag Officer Commanding in chief, Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain and his wife Devina Jain met Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at the camp office on Friday.

CM lauds Velcheru on Sahitya Akademi Award win

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 26

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has congratulated Velcheru Narayana Rao for winning the Central Sahitya Akademi Award for his contributions to the literary field.

The CM pointed out that Narayana Rao has to his credit, translations of vari-

ous books and research works.

In a separate programme, endowment minister Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao and Srisailem temple executive officer K. S. Rama Rao called the Chief Minister and invited him for Mahashivaratri Brahmotsavam at Srisailem from March 4 to 14.

On the occasion, Jagan

Mohan Reddy released the book Srisailekhandam, which depicts the times and glory of the Srisailem temple.

Vice Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command (ENC), along with his wife Devina Jain, too called on the Chief Minister at his camp office here on Friday.

Commodore Raju new
AP naval in-chargeDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 26

Commodore M. Goverdhan Raju took over as the Naval Officer-in-Charge (Andhra Pradesh) from Commodore Sanjiv Issar at a ceremonial parade held in the Naval

Base in Visakhapatnam on Friday. Cmde Raju, an alumnus of Sainik School, Korukonda and National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla, was commissioned into Indian Navy July 1, 1989 and is a specialist in navigation and direction.

VSU INTRODUCES MBA PROGRAMME FOR STAFF

Tirupati: In-charge vice chancellor of Vikrama Simhapuri University, Prof. M. Chandraiah on Friday announced the introduction of a two-year executive MBA course for the employees by the business management department of the varsity.

Speaking to media persons, the in-charge VC said the new course will

help the employees to upgrade their skills and get promotions. Head of the department Dr J Vijetha said that any graduate in the cadre of executive having five years of experience are eligible for joining the course. She said they are conducting evening and week-end sessions for the convenience of the employees.



High Court Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami plays cricket to mark the inauguration of 1st South India Advocates Cricket Tournament at Mulapadu in Krishna district on Friday.

CJ PLAYS IN ADVOCATES CRICKET

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 26:

AP High Court chief justice Arup Kumar Goswami played cricket and enthralled audiences for some time during the first South India Advocates Tournament held in the ACA cricket stadium at Mulapadu on Friday. Justice Arup Kumar Goswami, with other judges, inaugurated the tournament and later showed his batting skills. HC judge justice Praveen Kumar donned

the role of a bowler and Justice Goswami turned batsman. Justice Goswami asserted the need for physical fitness to the advocates suggesting them to play sports to keep them mentally and physically fit.

The tournament was conducted by Andhra Pradesh Advocates Cricket Association in which advocates from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka states are participating.

VSP SIGNS 25
MoUs WORTH
₹30,000 CROREDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 26

Visakhapatnam Port Trust on Friday signed MoUs with various stakeholders for the upcoming Maritime India Summit, 2021, to be held from March 2.

VPT chairman K. Rama Mohan Rao said MoUs were signed with Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd worth ₹26,264 for expansion for which 110 acres of land was allocated, Arcelor Mittal Nippon Steel India Ltd worth ₹600 crore for expansion of pellet plant for which 167 acres of land was allocated, Dredging Corporation of India ₹125 crore for sand trap dredging and beach nourishment at RK Beach for five years, Department of Fisheries of Andhra Pradesh ₹100 crore for development of fishing harbour and ₹38 crore for harbour mobile crane.

AP witnesses surge in Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 26

As several states like Maharashtra and Kerala witness a surge in Covid-19 infections, Andhra

Pradesh is no exception as it is registering a similar trend in the last few days. A look at the daily reports on the number of persons tested and infections reported from Feb.

20 onwards show, rise in the number of cases. On Feb. 20, out of 26,436 persons tested, 54 found infected with the virus. On Feb. 21-31,680 persons tested-88 were positive.

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SHORT TAKES

CAMPAIGNING FOR GUJ LOCAL POLLS ENDS

Ahmedabad, Feb 26: Campaigning for polls to various local bodies of Gujarat ended on Friday evening with voting scheduled for February 28. Counting of votes for elections to 81 municipalities, 31 district panchayats and 231 taluka panchayats will take place on March 2, a release by the State Election Commission said.

While the BJP is riding high after winning all six civic corporation polls held recently, the Congress believes the hike in fuel prices and public disenchantment with the ruling party will turn the tide.

On the last day of campaigning, Gujarat BJP president C R Paatil led a road show in Navsari, while Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Paresh Dhanani, took part in a motorcycle rally in Amreli.

Aam Aadmi Party head and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal sought votes during a road show in Surat.

For the first time, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen has fielded candidates in minority-dominated seats in Godhra, Modasa and Bharuch municipalities, with party chief Asaduddin Owaisi holding public gatherings in Modasa and Godhra two days ago.

State Director General of Police Ashish Bhatia said over 44,000 policemen, including State Reserve Police and 12 companies of CAPF, along with 54,000 homeguards will be deployed on February 28 to ensure incident-free voting in 23,000 booths.

ON BIKE, IRANI LEADS RALLY FOR WB POLLS

Sonarpur (WB), Feb 26: Riding a scooter, Union minister Smriti Irani led a rally of the BJP on Friday as she campaigned for the upcoming West Bengal elections in the South 24 Parganas district.

Taking part in the BJP's state-wide 'Poriborton Yatra', Irani along with BJP MP Roopa Ganguly and Agnimitra Paul began the campaign in Gangajojara near Garia on the party's 'rath' - a bus decked up with slogans and photos of the leaders.

After covering a short distance, the minister got down from the 'rath' and took to a scooter, wearing a black helmet and a mask.

"When we began the 'rath yatra' on Friday, the administration deliberately tried to delay it. We will ride two-wheelers, walk on foot because West Bengal is on the march towards change," Irani said.

Enthused by the minister's spontaneity, scores of BJP workers followed Irani on two-wheelers, chanting "Jai Shri Ram" and "Khela Hobey", meaning 'game on' - a slogan first raised by the Trinamool Congress, which has now become the catchphrase of this election season.

EVERYONE ON POLL DUTY TO GET COVID-19 VACCINE

New Delhi, Feb 26: Everyone on election duty for the upcoming polls for five assemblies will be vaccinated against Covid-19 before polling day, the Election Commission said on Friday.

Voting will take place for 126 seats in Assam, 234 in Tamil Nadu, 294 in West Bengal, 140 in Kerala and 30 in Puducherry.

Nearly 18.68 crore electors will be eligible to vote at 2.7 lakh polling stations for 824 seats in five assembly elections, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora said at a press conference here.

Arrangements will be put in place for candidates to file their nominations online for the five assembly polls. Voting will be allowed for an additional hour, keeping in mind Covid-19 safety guidelines, he said.

Also, webcasting arrangements will be in place at polling stations in critical and vulnerable areas, while adequate CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) deployment will be ensured for the assembly polls, Arora said. All critical and vulnerable areas have been identified and advance teams have been already deployed across all four states and one union territory Puducherry going to the polls, he added.

He said door-to-door campaigning will be restricted to five persons, including the candidate, while roadshows will be allowed with a maximum of five vehicles.

Mamata questions 8-phase elections in West Bengal

Are poll dates announced as per suggestions of Modi, Shah, asks Didi

Kolkata, Feb 26: Questioning the eight-phase assembly elections in West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Friday that she suspects that the dates were announced as per the suggestions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah for better management of the BJP's poll campaign.

Addressing a press conference at her residence in Kalighat, Banerjee said the Election Commission should not look at the state "through the eyes of the saffron camp" a reference to the BJP.

"With all due respect to the Election Commission, I want to say that questions are being raised on why elections will be held in so many phases in Bengal while other states will be voting in one phase. If EC doesn't provide justice to the people, where will the people go," she said.

"I request the Election Commission to consider West Bengal as their own state," the Trinamool Congress chief said.

Banerjee also raised questions on the way the phases were divided.

"They have divided our stronghold districts such as South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas into three parts. This is unprecedented," she said.

Banerjee said that despite "all these tricks", she will win the elections.

"I have information from my sources that the poll dates are similar to the ones BJP wanted. Have the dates been announced as per Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah's suggestions? The PM and the home minister cannot misuse their power for the state elections," she



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addresses a press conference at Kalighat in Kolkata on Friday. She has taken exception over the EC appointing two special police observers for West Bengal. - PTI

added. Banerjee also urged the EC to stop the misuse of money power. "The Union home minister should work for the country. He cannot misuse his powers for the elections here. We welcome the PM, but he cannot misuse his powers for West Bengal polls," she said.

Her comments came just minutes after the Election Commission announced that voting for the five assembly elections will begin on March 27, with West Bengal having the maximum eight phases continuing till April 29, while counting of votes for the four states and one Union Territory will be on May 2. Cautioning the

● **ELECTIONS FOR the West Bengal assembly will be held in eight phases, up from seven last time.**

● **AFTER HAVING a limited presence in the politically polarised state for decades, the BJP has emerged as the TMC's main rival over the last couple of years, managing to win 18 out of 42 seats in the Lok Sabha polls of 2019 and following it with inducting popular TMC MLAs and ministers into the party**

Centre against "misuse of power", Banerjee said it would prove detrimental

for the BJP. "Centre can't misuse their powers for a state election. If they do it, then it will be a big blunder and they will have to face the music. We are common people, we will fight our battle. I request the EC to stop the misuse of money. BJP has sent money to all the districts through agencies," she alleged.

Banerjee also took exception over the EC appointing two special police observers for West Bengal - Vivek Dubey and M K Das. "Vivek Dubey is the same man who was the observer for Bengal during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. We all know the role he had then played then,"

she said. Banerjee said she is the daughter of the state and knows Bengal better than the BJP, exuding confidence about her party Trinamool Congress winning the elections.

Banerjee's allegations drew sharp reactions from the BJP, which alleged that she is perplexed over the eight-phase elections as her party won't be able to intimidate the voters.

"Why is she so worried about eight-phase elections? Is she worried because TMC goons won't be able to influence the elections? We welcome the EC's decision for eight-phase elections to ensure free and fair polls," BJP leader Rahul Sinha said.

AAP SETS EYES ON 2022 GUJ ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Surat, Feb 26: Buoyed by the Aam Aadmi Party's good performance in the recently-held Surat civic polls, party chief Arvind Kejriwal has now set his eyes on the 2022 Gujarat Assembly polls.

Kejriwal, who arrived in Surat on Friday, said that AAP would seek votes from the people of the state in the next Assembly polls based on the performance of the party's 27 newly-elected corporators in the city.

Polls to six civic bodies in Gujarat, including in Surat, were held on Sunday.

While the BJP retained power in the Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC) by winning 93 seats, the AAP bagged the remaining 27 seats. The Congress failed to win even a single seat.

During his address to the party corporators here, Kejriwal said, "The people of Gujarat are watching you with great hope. In our first attempt, AAP won 28 Assembly seats in Delhi and came to power. People trusted us because they knew that we are true patriots, as we were associated with Anna Hazare's agitation."

"In the 49 days of our rule, we did a lot of pro-people work. As a result, the people of Delhi gave us 67 seats in the second election. Now, six crore people of Gujarat will observe the work of 27 AAP corporators. If you perform well, I am sure there will be a huge revolution in 2022," the Delhi chief minister added.

Fearing a "poaching attempt", Kejriwal warned the elected representatives to inform the party leaders if "anyone from the BJP" contacts them over phone and gives an offer to switch sides. — PTI

Disengagement at all friction points necessary, says India

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 26

India has now told China clearly that the disengagement of troops "at all friction points" in the Ladakh sector alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility between the two countries, adding that "both sides should now quickly resolve the remaining issues along the LAC in eastern Ladakh" after the "successful" disengagement at the northern and southern banks of Pangong Tso lake. This was made clear by India's external affairs minister S. Jaishankar in a 75-minute phone call with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi on Thursday afternoon, when the two ministers also agreed to establish a hotline between them.

Jaishankar told the Chinese minister that "bilateral relations have been impacted severely over the last year, adding — in an obvious reference to the deadly Galwan Valley clash last June — that "disturbance of peace and tranquility, including by violence, will inevitably have a damaging impact on the relationship". But seeking to put the blame on India,

the Chinese foreign minister claimed that "there has been some wavering and back-peddalling in India's China policy, and practical cooperation between the two countries has been affected".

Significantly, while India stepped up the pressure on China to disengage from all friction points, Beijing — in a statement put out by the Chinese foreign ministry — only said "it is imperative for the two sides to cherish the hard-won relaxation... further ease the situation and improve the border management and control mechanisms". But China did say that "India wants more dialogue and consultation with China to realise quick disengagement at the remaining points".

In a statement on Friday, the external affairs ministry said, "The external affairs minister and the state councillor and foreign minister of China, Wang Yi, had a phone conversation yesterday afternoon. It lasted 75 minutes. The two foreign ministers discussed the situation along the LAC in eastern Ladakh and also issues related to overall India-China relations. EAM... noted that the bilateral relations have been

impacted severely over last year. EAM said that boundary question may take time to resolve, but that the disturbance of peace and tranquility, including by violence, will inevitably have a damaging impact on the relationship."

The MEA added, "Noting the completion of disengagement in Pangong Lake area, EAM emphasised that both sides should now quickly resolve the remaining issues along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh."

EAM said that once disengagement is completed at all friction points, then the two sides could also look at broader de-escalation of troops in the area and work towards restoration of peace and tranquility... It was therefore necessary that the two sides should work towards early resolution of the remaining issues. It was necessary to disengage at all friction points in order to contemplate de-escalation of forces in this sector. That alone will lead to the restoration of peace and tranquility and provide conditions for progress of our bilateral relationship."

In its separate statement on the conversation, the Chinese foreign minister said, "state councillor

and foreign minister Wang Yi ... noted that what had led to the situation last year at the China-India boundary was clear and that lessons from the past deserve deep contemplation. There has been some wavering and back-peddalling in India's China policy, and practical cooperation between the two countries has been affected. This does not serve the interests of either side. Decades of experiences have shown repeatedly that heightening differences does not help solve problems, and that it only erodes the basis of mutual trust."

Beijing added, "Wang said that the frontline troops of the two countries have recently completed disengagement in the Pangong Lake areas. The situation on the ground has been noticeably eased. It is imperative for the two sides to cherish the hard-won relaxation, and work together to consolidate the progress, keep up the consultation momentum, further ease the situation, and improve the border management and control mechanisms. The two sides also need to advance the boundary talks to build up mutual trust and realise peace and tranquility in the border areas."

RIGHTS ACTIVIST NAUDEEP KAUR GRANTED BAIL

Chandigarh, Feb. 26: Around six weeks after her arrest in a criminal case filed under several charges including attempt to murder, labour rights activist Naudeep Kaur was on Friday granted bail by the Punjab and Haryana HC.

"The court accepted the bail application of Naudeep Kaur. She has been granted bail by the High Court," her counsel Arshdeep Singh Cheema said. Kaur was arrested in Haryana's Sonapat for allegedly gheraoing an industrial unit. — PTI

FB SIGNS PAY DEALS WITH 3 AUSTRALIAN NEWS PUBLISHERS

Canberra, Feb. 26: Facebook announced on Friday preliminary agreements with three Australian publishers, a day after the Parliament passed a law that would make the digital giants pay for news.

Facebook said letters of intent had been signed with independent news organisations *Private Media*, *Schwartz Media* and *Solstice Media*. The commercial agreements are subject to the signing of full agree-

ments within the next 60 days, a Facebook statement said. “These agreements will bring a new slate of premium journalism, including some previously paywalled content, to Facebook,” the statement said. — AP

US strikes Iran militias in Syria

22 killed in first military action against Iran-linked groups in Biden’s presidency

Beirut, Feb. 26: The US military has struck Iran-backed militias in eastern Syria, killing at least 22 fighters according to a war monitor, in what the Pentagon said was a message from the new administration after recent rocket attacks targeting US troops in Iraq.

In its first military action against Iran-linked groups since Joe Biden became president five weeks ago, the Pentagon said it had carried out air strikes on Thursday at a Syria-Iraq border control point used by Iran-backed groups, destroying “multiple facilities”.

“At President Biden’s direction”, the US raids targeted “infrastructure utilised by Iranian-backed militant groups in eastern Syria”, spokesman John Kirby said in a statement.

“These strikes were authorised in response to recent attacks against American and coalition personnel in

Iraq, and to ongoing threats to those personnel,” he said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 22 fighters were killed when the strike hit three trucks loaded with munitions coming from Iraq near the Syrian border town of Albu Kamal.

Militia border posts were also destroyed, the war monitor said. It said all the dead were from Iraq’s state-sponsored Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary force, an umbrella group that includes many small militias with ties to Iran.

Kirby said the location was used by Kataeb Hezbollah and Kataeb Sayyid al-Shuhada, two Iraqi pro-Iran groups operating under the Hashed umbrella.

Kataeb Hezbollah has yet to formally comment but an official with the group said one of its fighters was killed.

“One of our fighters was killed and a small number wounded by two missiles targeting one of our points along the Syrian-Iraqi border” he said on condition of anonymity.

Syrian state television condemned the “American aggression” against the Iraqi fighters, who are allied with the Damascus government.

The US action followed three rocket attacks on facilities in Iraq used by US and coalition forces fighting the Islamic State group. One of those strikes, on a military complex in the Kurdish regional capital Arbil on February 15, killed a civilian and a foreign contractor working with coalition forces, and wounded several US contractors and a soldier.

The attacks in Iraq laid down a challenge to the new Biden administration just as it opened a door to resumed negotiations with Tehran over its nuclear programme. — AFP

US intel report to name MBS for Khashoggi killing

Washington, Feb. 26: The US director of national intelligence is expected to release a damning report on Friday that fingers Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for the brutal murder and dismemberment of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018.

● THE CLASSIFIED report is believed to say that, based on intelligence collected by the CIA and other spy bodies, the kingdom’s de facto leader directed the assassination of the respected US-based writer in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

The classified report is believed to say that, based on intelligence collected by the CIA and other spy bodies, the kingdom’s de facto leader directed the assassination of the respected US-based writer in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Ahead of the release, Biden spoke on the telephone Thursday with Saudi King Salman, Prince Mohammed’s father, in their first discussion since he became president five weeks ago.

A White House statement on the call did not mention the Khashoggi report, but Biden said Wednesday that he had read it. A respected veteran Saudi journalist and editor, Khashoggi was in self-exile and residing in the United States, writing articles critical of the crown prince when he was assassinated on October 2, 2018. — AFP

Nigeria gunmen kidnap 300+ girls

Lagos, Feb. 26: Hundreds of girls are missing after a large group of gunmen raided a school in northern Nigeria early Friday morning, residents say. The Government Secondary Jangebe School in Zamfara state was the scene of the latest mass abduction of school children in northern Nigeria.

Nasiru Abdullahi said that school records show 300 girls are missing. His daughters, aged 10 and 13, are among them. Resident Musa Mustapha said the gunmen also attacked a nearby military camp and checkpoint, preventing soldiers from interfering while the gunmen spent several hours at the school. It was not immediately clear if there were any casualties.

Several large groups of armed men operate in Zamfara state, described by the government as bandits, and are known to kidnap for money and for the release of their members from jail. “We are angered and saddened by yet another brutal attack on schoolchildren in Nigeria,” said Peter Hawkins, UNICEF representative in the country. “This is a gross violation of children’s rights and a horrific experience for children to go through.” He called for their immediate release.

The West African nation has seen several such attacks and kidnappings over the years, notably the mass abduction in April 2014 by jihadist group Boko Haram of 276 girls from the secondary school in Chibok in Borno state. More than a hundred of the girls are still missing.

Friday’s attack came less than two weeks after gunmen abducted 42 people, including 27 students, from the Government Science College Kagara in Niger State. — AP

IS bride loses bid to return to Britain

London, Feb. 26: The UK government on Friday won a major legal battle as the Supreme Court ruled against allowing a London-born 21-year-old woman of Bangladeshi descent, who ran away to Syria as a teenager to join the Islamic State (ISIS) terror group, to return and fight her citizenship case.

The unanimous decision — with all five top court justices in agreement — comes six years after the then 15-year-old schoolgirl, Shamima Begum, ran away with two other friends to join the Islamic State (ISIS) group in February 2015. Begum had her British citizenship revoked on national security grounds shortly after she was found in a Syrian refugee camp in February 2019. “The Supreme Court unanimously allows all of the Home Secretary’s appeals and dismisses Ms Begum’s cross-appeal,”

said Lord Robert Reed, the President of the Supreme Court. “The right to a fair hearing does not trump all other considerations, such as the safety of the public,” he said.

Begum was born in the UK to parents of Bangladeshi heritage. Begum, dubbed an ISIS bride in reference to her marriage to Dutch ISIS fighter Yago Riedijk, was one of three schoolgirls from Bethnal Green in east London who travelled via Turkey to ISIS headquarters in Raqqa. — AFP



Shamima Begum's sister holds her picture. — AFP

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పై చట్టంలోని సెక్షన్ 15 నుసరించి భూసేకరణకు ఏమైనా అభ్యంతరములు / ఆక్షేపాలు ఉన్న యెదర నంబందించిన వ్యక్తి వ్యక్తులు ఈ ప్రకటనలు ప్రచురించబడిన తేది నుండి 60 (ఆరువది) దినములలోగా క్రియత రెవెన్యూ డివిజన్ అధికారి, నాయుడుపేట వారి యెదురు అభ్యర్థనలు దాఖలు చేసుకొనవచ్చును.										
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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	36-10	0.53	0.23	కొటపాటి రామారావు నాయుడు S/o వెంకట్రావ నాయుడు	0.23	అయ్యపి రెడ్డి పాళం	36-9	వెంగళూరి లా పురం	36-11,	పం
2	36-11	0.54	0.05	కొటపాటి రామారావు నాయుడు S/o వెంకట్రావ నాయుడు	0.05	అయ్యపి రెడ్డి పాళం	36-8	36-10	37-6	పం
3	55-3	0.95	0.04	పి.వి.దాశరథి W/o వెంకటేశ్వర్లు	0.04	55-4, 55-6	54-1	55-1	55-5	పం
4	55-5	1.19	0.28	గట్టమనేని వెంకటేశ్వర్లు నాయుడు S/o కోయిల	0.11	55-6	54-1	55-3	55-7, 55-8, 55-11	పం
				Ch. గోపాల సతీశ Ch. మంగళాదేవదేవి	0.17					
5	55-8	0.11	0.02	కట్టూరు చింతల S/o రామయ్య	0.02	55-11	55-7	55-5	55-10	పం
6	55-10	0.11	0.03	పెనుగంటి.దశరథయ్య S/o రామయ్య	0.03	55-11	55-9	55-8	56-2, 56-5	పం
7	55-11	0.18	0.18	పొయ్యి కలకాండ రెడ్డి S/o చింతల కట్టూర రెడ్డి	0.18	55-12	55-8, 55-10	55-5	56-5	పం
8	56-2	0.27	0.10	పెనుగంటి.దశరథయ్య S/o రామయ్య	0.10	56-5	56-1	55-9, 55-10	56-4	పం
9	56-4	0.29	0.14	కట్టూరు. దశరథయ్య S/o వెంకటయ్య	0.14	56-5	56-3	56-2	56-8, 57-4	పం
10	56-5	0.46	0.38	పొయ్యి కలకాండ రెడ్డి S/o చింతల కట్టూర రెడ్డి	0.38	56-6	56-2, 56-4	55-11, 55-10	56-8	పం
11	56-8	0.46	0.31	పొయ్యి కలకాండ రెడ్డి S/o చింతల కట్టూర రెడ్డి	0.31	55-6	57-4	56-4, 56-5, 56-6	56-9	పం
12	56-10	0.11	0.02	దువ్వూరు పాము మహారాధ S/o వెంకట రెడ్డి	0.02	అయ్యపి రెడ్డి పాళం	56-9	56-11	160-6	పం
13	56-11	0.28	0.13	దువ్వూరు పాము మహారాధ S/o వెంకట రెడ్డి	0.13	అయ్యపి రెడ్డి పాళం	56-9	56-9	56-10	పం
14	57-4	0.73	0.23	కట్టూరు పిరయ్య W/o బలరామయ్య	0.23	56-8, 56-9, 159	57-3	56-3, 56-4	159	పం
15	158-7	0.34	0.01	లోకూర్ గుండయ్య W/o చింతల రామయ్య	0.01	158-5, 163	157-4	158-6	158-8	పం
16	158-8	0.50	0.16	కొటపాటి దామారావు S/o రామయ్య నాయుడు	0.16	163	157-4	158-7	164-1, 164-3	పం
17	160-1	0.09	0.09	య్యపి రెడ్డియ్య S/o వెంకటరావు	0.09	160-4	159	159	160-2	పం
18	160-2	0.06	0.06	య్యపి రెడ్డియ్య S/o వెంకటరావు	0.06	160-4	159	160-1	160-3	పం
19	160-3	0.03	0.03	య్యపి రెడ్డియ్య S/o వెంకటరావు	0.03	160-4	159	160-2	160-4	పం
20	160-5	0.20	0.04	నారయ రెడ్డి ప్రభాకరావు W/o కేదర రెడ్డి	0.04	160-7	160-4, 159	160-6	160-9	పం
21	160-6	0.54	0.05	దువ్వూరు చింతల కుమార S/o చంద్రశేఖర రెడ్డి	0.05	అయ్యపి రెడ్డి పాళం, 160-13	159	56-10	160-5, 160-7	పం
22	160-9	0.36	0.06	నారయ రెడ్డి ప్రభాకరావు W/o కేదర రెడ్డి	0.06	160-8	160-4	160-5	160-10, 160-11	పం
23	160-10	0.11	0.03	నారయ రెడ్డి ప్రభాకరావు W/o కేదర రెడ్డి	0.03	160-11	160-4	160-9	160-11	పం
24	160-11	2.38	0.08	దువ్వూరు చింతల కుమార S/o చంద్రశేఖర రెడ్డి	0.08	160-12, 160-13	160-4, 161-2	160-8, 160-9, 160-10	162-1	పం
25	161-2	0.43	0.10	దువ్వూరు చింతల కుమార S/o దశరథయ్య	0.10	160-11	161-1	160-4, 160-11	161-3	పం
26	161-3	0.32	0.03	దువ్వూరు చింతల కుమార S/o చంద్రశేఖర రెడ్డి	0.03	162-1	161-1	161-2	161-4	పం
27	161-4	0.19	0.02	దువ్వూరు పాము మహారాధ S/o వెంకట రెడ్డి	0.02	162-2, 162-4, 162-5	161-1	161-3	161-5	పం
28	161-5	0.19	0.01	మంగళాధికారయ్య S/o చంద్ర కట్టూరయ్య	0.01	160-5	161-1	161-4	162-5	పం
29	164-1	0.52	0.10	రామలక్ష్మిని దశరథయ్య S/o చంద్ర మహారాధయ్య	0.10	164-3	165-8	157-4, 158-8	164-2	పం
30	164-2	0.50	0.16	రామలక్ష్మిని దశరథయ్య S/o చంద్ర మహారాధయ్య	0.16	164-3	165-8	164-1	166	పం
31	164-4	0.08	0.06	మంగళాధికారయ్య S/o చంద్ర కట్టూరయ్య	0.06	163	165	158	166	పం
32	148-1	0.14	0.01	పెయ్యలూరు బాలరామయ్య మరియు బిల్లి సురేష్ S/o వెంకట	0.01	148-13	149-1, 149-3	151,154	148-3	దాం
33	148-2	0.19	0.18	కయ్యపి రెడ్డి వెంకట దశరథయ్య S/o వెంకటయ్య	0.005	148-13	148-1	154	148-3	ఇతరము లు, పంఖ
				కుమారాధికారయ్య W/o బాలరామయ్య	0.02					
				ఓం వెంకటయ్య S/o మహారాధయ్య	0.075					
				మంగళాధికారయ్య S/o చంద్ర కట్టూరయ్య	0.08					
34	148-8B	1.19 (గ్రామ కేంద్రం)	0.14	మద్యూరు లక్ష్మయ్య W/o గోపాల్	0.05	148-13	146-9A	148-6, 148-8A, 148-10A, 148-12	146-9B	ఇతరము లు, పంఖ
				పాతాళ	0.06					
				సిమిరం రేడ్డి	0.03					

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,099.99	-3.80
Nifty 50	14,529.20	-3.76
S&P 500*	3,853.11	0.62
Dollar (₹)	73.47	-1.42
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.83	0.80
Euro (₹)	88.76	-0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,599,342	0.75
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.13	-1.12
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.229	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.491	-0.024

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Inflation band okay for next 5 years: RBI report

With the next review of the flexible inflation target (FIT) framework coming up soon, the RBI said the current inflation target of 4 per cent with a +/-2 per cent tolerance band is appropriate for the next five years. India adopted the FIT framework in 2016, and the next review of the inflation target is due by March 31. "The current numerical framework for defining price stability...is appropriate for the next five years," it said.

PFC board okays ₹1 L cr borrowing plan for FY22



Power Finance Corporation said its board has approved a plan to borrow Rs 1 lakh crore under different debt segments. The borrowing will be made in one or more tranches in FY21-22, PFC said. The NBFC plans to raise a maximum of Rs 60,000 crore from long-term borrowing, Rs 20,000 crore from long-term foreign currency borrowing, Rs 5,000 crore from short-term borrowing and Rs 15,000 crore from commercial papers.

Brazil to buy 20m Covaxin doses from B. Biotech

Hyderabad: Bharat Biotech will supply 20 million doses of its Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin to Brazil during the second and third quarters of current year, the city-based vaccine maker said on Friday. It has signed an agreement with the Brazilian government for the supply of the vaccine. The company also said that several countries around the world have expressed strong interest in Covaxin.

RailTel Corp makes strong market debut

Telecom infrastructure provider RailTel Corporation of India Ltd made a strong debut with its shares zooming over 29 per cent on closing compared with the issue price. On the BSE, the scrip opened on a strong note of Rs 104.6 apiece against the IPO price of Rs 94. In intra-day trade, the stock touched a high of Rs 125.5 before settling at Rs 121.4, higher by 29.15 per cent. The RailTel IPO was subscribed 42.39 times.



■ Sensex sheds more than 1900 points US bombing, bond yields spook mkt

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB 26

Investors suffered notional loss of over Rs 6 lakh crore as the domestic stock market experienced its worst fall in the last 10 months after the US bombing in Syria and sharp overnight rise in bond yields in the US market.

Rising Covid cases in India also added to negative sentiments in the market, said analysts.

The Sensex fell 3.8 per cent, or 1939 points, closing at 49099 while the Nifty-50 fell 3.7 per cent, or 568 points, to close at 14529.

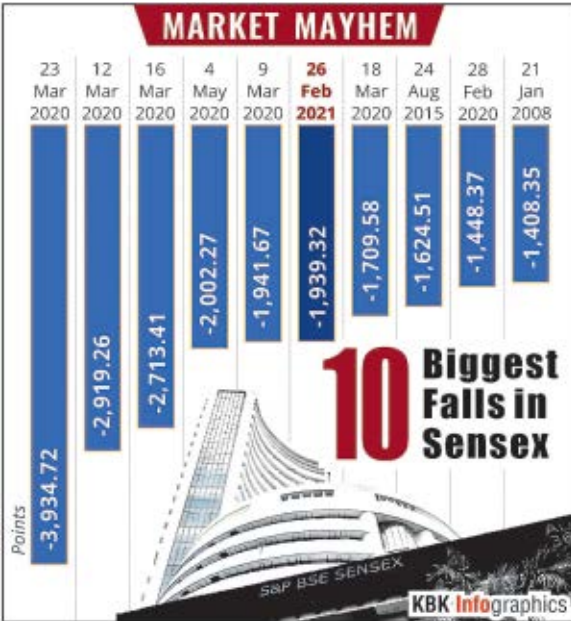
Intra-day the Sensex fell over 2000 points to a low of 48890.48. All the Sensex and Nifty constituents closed in the red.

Overnight US bond yield rose to a high of 1.61 and finally closed at 1.51 per cent, scaring the global investors. US benchmark indices Dow Jones fell 1.75 per cent and Nasdaq 100 fell 3.56 per cent, setting off negative opening for the Asian markets.

India's 10-year government bond yield also rose sharply intraday to 6.242 per cent and closed at 6.229.

As per provisional data, foreign portfolio investors were net sellers of equities worth Rs 8,295.17 crore.

Financials suffered the most among sectoral indices after the recent rally, with the Nifty Bank Index closing down 4.78 per cent. Other big losers were Nifty Auto (-3.12 per cent) and Nifty Metal (-2.70 per cent). NSE's volatility index



RUPEE DIVES 104 PAISE AGAINST \$

Mumbai, Feb. 26: The rupee on Friday posted its biggest single-day fall in nearly 19 months, tumbling 104 paise to close at 73.47 against the US dollar, as a rout in global bond markets weighed on investor sentiments. Besides, rising geopolitical tensions between the US and Syria also led to weaker appetite among investors in domestic forex markets, analysts said. At the interbank forex market, the rupee opened at 72.43 against the dollar, then lost further ground. It finally ended at 73.47. —PTI

India VIX shot up 22.93 per cent to 28.14, indicating a volatile market ahead.

The GDP data expected after the market hours also weighed on the market sentiments. "The Q3 GDP growth number at 0.4 per cent is lower than our esti-

mates of 0.8 per cent but quite short of some other estimates which were in the range of 1.4-2 per cent. The equity markets may be a tad disappointed with these data points," said Dhiraj Relli, MD & CEO, HDFC Securities.

Friday.

"Enhancement of sterilisation capacity may be necessary to deal with the possible surges in capital flows in the future," the report pointed out.

The RBI report recommended further strengthening foreign-exchange reserves, citing the swings in the rupee around the time of the global taper tantrum in 2013. India's stockpile is already close to \$600 billion and exceeds most standard metric requirements.

—Bloomberg

EMERGING MARKETS BRACE FOR CAPITAL FLIGHT

LIVIA YAP & LILIAN KARUNUNGAN
FEB. 26

Emerging markets are bracing for an exodus of funds as a surge in US treasury yields evokes memories of the taper tantrum of 2013.

After rallying at the start of 2021, developing-nation assets have slumped during the past two days as US treasury yields jumped to the highest level in more than a year, sounding a warning about the outlook for interest rates and inflation. The MSCI Emerging Market Index of shares tumbled as much as 2.8 per cent on Friday.

Emerging-market assets are falling out of favour as expectations for tighter global monetary policy and a revival of inflation reduce the relative appeal of risk assets. This week's surge in US yields is reminding many of the taper tantrum, when the Federal Reserve's announcement that it would start winding back its quantitative-easing policy led to a spike in bond yields around the world.

"It appears the market is pricing in a taper tantrum whatever the Fed says," said Alvin T. Tan, head of Asia foreign-exchange strategy at RBC Capital Markets in Hong Kong. "Like in 2013, it is generally negative for EM FX," he said. —Bloomberg

SBI readies MF arm for IPO

BAIJU KALESH & SIVASHREE GHOSH
FEB. 26

State Bank of India, the country's largest lender, is preparing for its mutual fund joint venture for an initial public offering, according to people familiar with the matter.

SBI plans to ask investment banks for proposals after discussions with its board and shareholder Amundi Asset Management and kick off the process in the next few months, the people said. The lender could raise about \$1 billion from the offering, one of the people said, who asked not to be identified, as the informa-

tion is private.

SBI's mutual fund is now valued at about \$7 billion, another person said.

At \$1 billion, the first-time share sale could be India's biggest since the \$1.4 billion listing by SBI Cards & Payment Services Ltd in March, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. The SBI mutual fund business would also be the third such listing of its kind in the country, joining rivals UTI Asset Management Co and HDFC Asset Management Co.

SBI's plan to list the mutual fund arm is part of its strategy to extract more value from its units after divesting some of its stakes in its life insurance

and cards businesses last year.

SBI's mutual fund is the largest in India with Rs 5 lakh crore (\$88.4 billion) of assets under management, according to its website. The fund house posted a net income of Rs 498 crore for the April-December period, according to an investor presentation. SBI holds a 63 per cent stake in the mutual fund business, while Paris-based Amundi owns the rest.

Deliberations are at an early stage and details of the share sale could still change, the people said. A representative for SBI did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

—Bloomberg

RBI report suggests issuing debt to mop up hot money

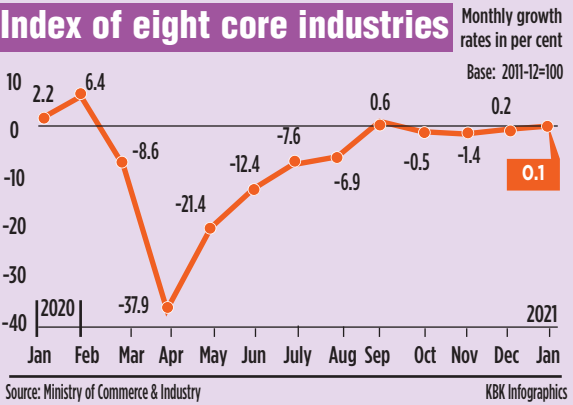
SUBHADIP SIRCAR & ASHUTOSH JOSHI
FEB. 26

The Reserve Bank of India may consider issuing its own bonds to help soak up a deluge of foreign money into stocks that threatens financial stability, according to a report published by its researchers.

Current laws forbid the RBI from selling its own paper, and budgetary constraints could prevent the government from issuing so-called market stabilisation

scheme, or MSS, bonds that authorities have used in the past. That's made it harder for the central bank to navigate what's known as the Impossible Trinity, i.e. maintaining an independent monetary policy while also allowing free flows of capital and ensuring a stable currency.

"Sterilised intervention is an effective solution to managing the trilemma in India," the central bank said in its annual Report on Currency and Finance, published on



Sony to open PS 5 for storage upgrades

TAKASHI MOCHIZUKI
FEB. 26

Sony Corp. is preparing to open up its PlayStation 5 for internal storage upgrades this summer, lifting a bottleneck that prevents gamers from having more than a few marquee games on their console at one time, people briefed on the plan said.

Adding support for additional drives will be enabled with a firmware update that also unlocks higher cooling-fan speeds to ensure the console doesn't overheat, the people said, asking not to be named because the plans are not yet public. The PlayStation 5 comes with a custom solid-state drive with around 667GB available for storing games,

apps and media—at a time when the latest Call of Duty game needs 133GB of installation space and most major titles take up at least 40GB each.

Sony's latest console has a customised architecture that accelerates loading and processing times, but makes it impractical to plug in an external hard drive, the typical way gamers add storage. Such a drive can only be used for older PS4 games. After the planned firmware upgrade, players need only take a plastic cover off the PS5 and attach a new storage unit to add space.

"We are working to enable M.2 SSD storage expansion for PlayStation 5. The timing has not been announced," a Sony spokesman said. —Bloomberg

MOBILE | TO MOBILITY

Firm in talks with carmakers to use their plants

Battered Huawei plans foray into EVs

JULIE ZHU, YILEI SUN
HONG KONG/BEIJING, FEB. 26

China's Huawei plans to make electric vehicles under its own brand and could launch some models this year, four sources said, as the world's largest telecommunications equipment maker, battered by US sanctions, explores a strategic shift.

Huawei Technologies Co Ltd is in talks with state-owned Changan Automobile and other automakers to use their car plants to make its electric vehicles (EVs), according to two of the people familiar with the matter.

Huawei is also in discus-

sions with Beijing-backed BAIC Group's BluePark New Energy Technology to manufacture its EVs, said a separate person with direct knowledge of the matter.

The plan heralds a potentially major shift in direction for Huawei after nearly two years of US sanctions that have cut its access to key supply chains, forcing it to sell a part of its smartphone business to keep the brand alive.

Huawei was placed on a trade blacklist by the Trump administration over national security concerns. Many industry executives see little chance that blocks on the sale of billions of dollars



Sanjiv Mehta

housing societies and commercial establishments to improve the collection of plastic waste.

The company is also working in partnership with the United Nations

Development Programme and the international organisation Xynteo.

Commenting on the development, HUL chairman and managing director Sanjiv Mehta said: "We believe that this is a collection of responsibility, and each stakeholder needs to play an active role in managing plastic waste to fulfil the vision of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan." —PTI



provider, enabling car OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) to build better vehicles."

Huawei has started internally designing the EVs and approaching suppliers at home, with the aim of officially launching the project as early as this year, the sources said.

Richard Yu, head of Huawei's consumer business group who led the company to become one of the world's largest smartphone makers, will shift his focus to EVs, said one source. The EVs will target a mass-market segment, another source said.

All the sources declined to be named as the discussions are private.

—Reuters

Soon, get discount on life premium paid in advance

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 26



Life insurance policyholders will soon be able to receive a discount if they pay the policy premium in advance. Also, from April onwards, those buying a personal accident cover would have the option to take a standardised cover, named Saral Suraksha Bima, from all general and health insurers.

Acting on representations from the industry, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) has decided to permit life insurers to offer discounts on regular premiums paid in advance.

As per the draft guidelines issued by the regulator, the discount rate shall be equal to interest rates on savings bank accounts of State Bank of India as on April 1 of each financial year. Further, an addition of at least 100 bps shall be applicable for advance premiums received during the entire financial year.

"The industry has been undertaking several measures to ensure that renewal premiums are paid on time, as persistency is a key metric. By paying premiums in advance of three months or more, the policyholder can get a discount on premium that is higher than the interest rate on a savings account. While the customer will get a discount, we will have the renewal premiums already in the books. We will have to deploy our resources for reminding

Irdai has asked general and health insurers to offer a standard personal accident insurance product with common coverage and policy wordings across the industry from April 1

only those people who have not made advance payment," said Atri Chakraborty, chief operating officer, IndiaFirst Life Insurance.

According to him, the discount will be calculated for the number of months the premium is paid ahead of the renewal date. Currently, around 10 to 12 per cent of the policyholders pay their renewal premiums ahead of the due date.

The regulator has, meanwhile, asked general and health insurers to offer a standard personal accident insurance product with common coverage and policy wordings across the industry from April 1, 2021. This product, Saral Suraksha Bima, will have the basic mandatory covers as

specified in Irdai guidelines and will be uniform across the market.

The insurer can determine the price according to the covers offered. The policy tenure of the standard product shall be one year. This policy would also be offered as a group product. Minimum entry age will be 18 years and maximum age shall be at least 70.

The base cover will have to provide a death benefit up to 100 per cent of the sum insured to the policyholder if the death occurs due to injury in an accident, or the person dies within 12 months from the date of accident. The insured will also get 100 per cent of the sum insured for permanent total disability and 50 per cent for permanent partial disability.

Hospitalisation expenses arising due to accident shall be indemnified up to 10 per cent of base sum insured. On death or permanent total disability of the insured person, a one-time educational grant of 10 per cent of the base sum insured, per child, should be paid to all dependent children.

INSTITUTIONAL INVESTMENTS IN REALTY SEEN RISING BY 14.6%



MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, FEB. 26

Investments in Indian real estate is expected to grow by 14.6 per cent to Rs 39,600 crore in 2021 from Rs 34,600 crore in 2020, as institutional investors continue to be bullish on domestic real estate asset classes such as offices, data centres and warehouses and are looking to deploy their existing dry powder, Colliers has said in its report.

In 2020, investments had dropped 23 per cent from 2019.

Between 2018 and 2020, an average annual supply of over 35 million square feet entered the top six Indian cities such as Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi NCR, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Pune, with the majority being snapped up by institutional investors.

Even though a similar level of supply is set to enter the market, some investment firms are increasingly looking towards developing their own greenfield office assets, the report said.

Investors remain bullish on the long-term prospects even as they target an internal rate of return of about 17-18 per cent.

"The investment climate in India is very buoyant with global investors' interest in real assets getting stronger," Piyush Gupta, managing director, Capital Markets & Investment Services (India) at Colliers, said.

Moreover, the resilience of the Indian market is also evident from continuing good housing sales across various markets, the large institutional investments in commercial office and industrial parks, and the listing of two REITs in the past six months, he pointed out.

SHORT TAKES

Hima inducted as DSP in Assam

Guwahati: Star sprinter Hima Das was on Friday inducted as Deputy Superintendent of Assam Police in the presence of chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and described the moment as a childhood dream coming true. Hima was handed the appointment letter by Sonowal, also a former Union Sports Minister, at a ceremony attended by the top functionaries of the state government as well as from the police department, including the Director General of police. “People here know and I am not going to say anything different. Since my early school days, I harboured a wish to become a police officer one day and my mother also wished that,” Hima said. “I got everything due to sports, I will try to work for betterment of sports in the state and try to make Assam one of the best performing states in the country, like Haryana,” Hima further added. — PTI

Deepak stuns world champion

New Delhi: Asian silver-winner Deepak Kumar (52kg) on Friday stunned Olympic and world champion Shakhobiddin Zoirov of Uzbekistan to storm into the finals of the 72nd Strandja Memorial Boxing Tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria. Deepak clinched one of the most memorable wins of his career with a 4-1 win over more fancied Zoirov, who had claimed the 2019 world championship title beating India’s Amit Panghal. In the quarterfinals on Thursday, Deepak defeated Bulgaria’s Darislav Vasilev 5-0. However, former youth world champion Jyoti Gulia (51kg) and Bhagyabati Kachari (75kg) bowed out of the women’s competition. With their loss, India’s challenge in the women’s draw has come to an end without anyone managing to secure a medal. — PTI

Charlotte to lead cricketers union

London: England great Charlotte Edwards has become the first female president of the Professional Cricketers’ Association. An outstanding top-order batsman, Edwards scored over 10,000 runs in more than 300 matches during an international career that lasted from 1996 to 2016. Edwards, who succeeds Graham Gooch, another former England captain, was elected for an initial two-year term at Thursday’s annual general meeting of the PCA, which represents all professional cricketers playing in England. “I’m hugely honoured to be given such a prestigious title in being the president of the PCA,” said Edwards. Edwards was England captain when they won both limited-overs World Cups in 2009, while she remains the country’s leading run-scorer in both women’s one-day internationals and Twenty20s. — AFP

Belinda sees off Coco, into final

Adelaide: Second seed Belinda Bencic battled for almost three hours before seeing off 16-year-old American Coco Gauff in three sets Friday to reach the final of the Adelaide International. Bencic set up a final showdown against Poland’s French Open champion Iga Swiatek with her 7-6 (7/2), 6-7 (4/7), 6-2 win. Fifth seeded Swiatek had a much easier passage to the final, beating Swiss player Jil Teichmann 6-3, 6-2. Bencic went into the semi-final against Gauff as favourite, but the young American has been in good form this week, winning through two rounds of qualifying just to make the main draw. — AFP

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Manchester City vs West Ham United from 6 pm; West Brom vs Brighton from 8.30 pm; Leeds United vs Aston Villa from 11 pm; Newcastle United vs Wolverhampton Wanderers from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD

Italian League: Spezia vs Parma from 7.30 pm; Bologna vs Lazio from 10.30 pm; Verona vs Juventus from 1.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2

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SURESHOT SPINNER

Match-winner Axar says confidence did trick

Ahmedabad, Feb. 26: It was a long wait for Axar Patel and it didn’t help that everyone around him had just one question for the past three years — “Why aren’t you in the Indian team?”. But Patel was unfazed as he knew, his time would come. “I think it’s all about confidence,” said the 27-year-old spinner from Anand in Gujarat. With his record 11 wickets in the day-night third Test against England, the left-arm spinner finally found his big moment in international cricket, seven years after he made his India debut in an ODI against Bangladesh.

Since that day, he has been in and out of the team with the spin all-rounder’s spot firmly with Ravindra Jadeja. In this series too, he made it because Jadeja was out injured. He hadn’t been in the national team since 2018 and made his Test debut in the second game against England last week in Chennai. “I have been out of the team for three years and at that time, I used to think about the areas of my game which need to be worked upon. So, I was working on my bowling and batting,” he told Hardik Pandya in a *bcci.tv* interview, thoroughly enjoying his good time. “When you are out of the team, many people, friends keep asking you ‘why aren’t you in the team despite doing well?’ These things keep coming in the mind,” he said. “So, I told myself ‘just wait for the right time and whenever I get an opportunity I will give my 100 per cent,’” he added. Captain Virat Kohli said England may have been “relieved” when Jadeja was injured. “But then this guy comes in. Bowls it quicker and from a bigger height as well.” It is a tribute to his hard work, his accuracy,” said Kohli. “It is impossible to sweep him, impossible to defend him all day. If the wicket gives him anything he is just a lethal bowler,” Virat added. — PTI



India’s star spinner Axar Patel appeals for a wicket during the third Test in Ahmedabad.

Rohit bats for batting intent

Ahmedabad, Feb. 26: Intent to score and not just survive was the key to flourish on the Motera pitch, asserted India opener Rohit Sharma who batted fearlessly on the “interesting but normal” pitch that was declared difficult and challenging by visiting England batsmen. Rohit attributed his sublime first innings half-century to the positive intent that he displayed during the day-night third Test in which England got thrashed by 10 wickets inside two days on the spin-friendly pitch. “When you are playing on a pitch like that, you need to have an intent and look to score runs as well. You can’t just keep blocking. You just need to be slightly ahead at times and try and find ways to score runs.” — ROHIT SHARMA India star batsman

When you are playing on a pitch like that, you need to have an intent and look to score runs as well. You can’t just keep blocking. You just need to be slightly ahead at times and try and find ways to score runs.



— ROHIT SHARMA India star batsman

England captain Joe Root and Zak Crawley had earlier described the track as challenging. The senior opener scored India’s only half-century of the game with the home side spinners accounting for 19 wickets. England batsmen were deceived by left-armner Axar Patel’s straighter deliveries that skidded straight instead of turning. Rohit felt that during

his innings of 66, he was a step or two ahead of England bowlers. “You just need to be slightly ahead at times and try and find ways to score runs. My intent was not just to survive but try and score runs as well, while respecting the good balls. That’s all I tried to do. “The pitch was an interesting one and odd ball was just coming in and

some were taking turns. On a track like this, you need to have a clear mindset, which I think I did until I played that sweep shot,” Rohit added. He felt that Patel’s strategy of attacking the stumps paid off well. The spinner ended the game with 11 wickets in his kitty. “Axar was simply brilliant,” Rohit said, lauding the bowler who had big shoes to fill. “Coming out from nowhere and performing is never easy. He was out injured, slightly down, came back and bowled very well in Chennai. He understands conditions well and how to vary the pace and what lines to bowl,” Rohit added. Coming wider off the crease was also another effective ploy used by Patel. — PTI

Allrounder Yusuf retires from all forms of cricket

New Delhi, Feb. 26: Out-of-favour India all-rounder Yusuf Pathan on Friday announced retirement from all forms of cricket, saying time has come “to put a full stop to this innings of my life.” The 38-year-old Pathan was part of the inaugural T20 World Cup-winning side in 2007 and also the one that triumphed in the 2011 ODI World Cup at home. “The time has come today for me to put a full stop to this innings of my life. I officially announce retirement from all forms of the game,” he said in a statement posted on *Twitter*. “I thank my family, friends, fans, teams, coaches and the whole country wholeheartedly for all the support and love,” he wrote. Pathan, elder brother of former India seamer Irfan, played 57 ODIs and scored 810 runs at a strike-rate of 113.60 with two hundreds and three



— YUSUF PATHAN after announcing his retirement

fifties. He also featured in 22 T20Is where he made 236 at a strike-rate of 146.58 and was also a part of Kolkata Knight Riders’ triumphs in the IPL. “I still remember the day when I wore the India jersey for the first time. I didn’t only wear the jersey that day, but I took upon my family’s, coach’s, friends the whole country’s and my own expectations on my shoulders as well,” Pathan recalled. “Winning two World Cups for India and lifting Sachin Tendulkar on my shoulders were some of the best moments of my career. I made my inter-

The time has come today for me to put a full stop to this innings of my life. I officially announce retirement from all forms of the game.

— YUSUF PATHAN after announcing his retirement

national debut under M S Dhoni. IPL debut under Shane Warne, Ranji debut under Jacob Martin and would like to thank them for believing in me,” he added. Meanwhile, veteran Karnataka medium pacer R. Vinay Kumar, who also represented India and led his state team to successive Ranji Trophy titles, also announced his retirement from international and first-class cricket. The 37-year-old Kumar played one Test, 31 ODIs and nine T20 Internationals for India, taking 49 wickets across the three formats. — PTI

INDIA CAN WIN AGAINST ODDS, SAYS HAYDEN

Chennai, Feb. 26: Indian team has all the markings of a great side as it can not only fight it out but win against the odds in all conditions, Matthew Hayden said. “India have shown that they are a modern team who can not only fight it out but win against the odds in all conditions. This is a mark of all the great teams in history. The ability to win both at home and away,” Hayden said. The wickets in Chennai and Ahmedabad came in for sharp criticism during the second and third Test of the ongoing series. Asked if too much was being made about the pitches especially when they were spin-friendly, Hayden said: “Provided the wickets are not unfairly groomed, reducing the game to only one type of cricket, I don’t have a problem with it at all. Conditions should promote an even game.” — PTI

Coach kills self after sex slur

Lansing (USA), Feb. 26: A former U.S. Olympics gymnastics coach with ties to disgraced sports doctor Larry Nassar killed himself, hours after being charged with turning his Michigan gym into a hub of human trafficking by coercing girls to train and then abusing them. John Geddert faced 24 charges that could have carried years in prison had he been convicted. He was supposed to appear in an Eaton County court, near Lansing, but his body was found at a rest area along Interstate 96, according to state police.

“This is a tragic end to a tragic story for everyone involved,” Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel said. Nessel earlier announced that Geddert was charged with a bushel of crimes, including sexual assault, human trafficking and running a criminal enterprise. The charges were the latest fallout from the sexual abuse scandal involving Nassar, a former Michigan State University sports doctor now in prison. Geddert, 63, wasn’t arrested and transported to court. Rather, Nessel’s office allowed him to show up on his own. “We had no indication that Geddert intended to flee or hurt himself or others. We had been in contact with his attorney and were assured of his cooperation,” Nessel spokeswoman Kelly Rossman-McKinney

● **US Olympics coach John Geddert faced 24 charges that could have carried years in prison had he been convicted. He was supposed to appear in an Eaton County court, near Lansing, but his body was found at a rest area along Interstate 96.**

said. Calls seeking comment from attorney Chris Bergstrom weren’t immediately returned. Geddert was head coach of the 2012 U.S. women’s Olympic gymnastics team, which won a gold medal. He was long associated with Nassar, who was the Olympic team’s doctor and also treated injured gymnasts at Twistars, Geddert’s Lansing-area gym. Among the charges, Geddert was accused of lying to investigators in 2016 when he denied ever hearing complaints about Nassar. But the bulk of the case against him involved his gym in Dimondale and how he treated the young athletes whose families paid to have them train under him. The charges against Geddert had “very little to do” with Nassar, said Assistant Attorney General Danielle Hagaman-Clark. — AP



Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang of Arsenal celebrates after scoring his side’s third goal against Benfica during their Europa League Round of 32 match at Georgios Karaiskakis stadium in Piraeus port near Athens on Thursday. Arsenal won the match 3-2. — AP

Auba nets brace to beat Benfica

Paris, Feb. 26: Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored twice including a late winner as Arsenal qualified for the last 16 of the Europa League on Thursday with a 3-2 victory over Benfica in Greece, while Manchester United and Rangers cruised through to the next round. The Gabon striker put Arsenal ahead at the Karaiskakis stadium in Piraeus in their home leg of a tie relocated due to Covid-19 travel restrictions between Portugal and the United Kingdom. Diogo Goncalves levelled the contest with a magnificent free-kick and Rafa Silva gave Benfica a 2-1 lead on the night when he took advantage of an error from Dani Ceballos on the hour. Kieran Tierney rifled in an equaliser and Aubameyang headed in the decisive goal from Bukayo Saka’s cross on 87 minutes, earning the Gunners a 4-3 aggregate victory and saving them from an unusual away goals exit following a 1-1 draw in the first leg in Rome. Leicester City, who are behind second-placed United in the Premier League only on goal difference, were knocked out after sliding to a 2-0 loss at

THE RESULTS	
Arsenal (<i>Aubameyang 21, 87, Tierney 67</i>)	3
Benfica (<i>Goncalves 43, Silva 61</i>)	2
Manchester United	0
Real Sociedad	0
AC Milan (<i>Kessie 9-pen</i>)	1
Red Star Belgrade (<i>Ben Nabouhane 24</i>)	1
Napoli (<i>Zielinski 3, Fabian Ruiz 59</i>)	2
Granada (<i>Montoro 25</i>)	1
Slavia Prague (<i>L. Provod 49, Sima 79</i>)	2
Leicester City	0

home to Czech champions Slavia Prague. Lukas Provod fired Slavia in front just after half-time following a goalless draw in the first leg, and Senegalese teenager Abdallah Sima ensured the visitors extended their run in the competition. Steven Gerrard’s Rangers progressed following their 5-2 win over Belgian side Antwerp at Ibrox, with five different players on target for the Scottish league leaders. — AFP