

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
ANANTAPUR | FRIDAY | 19 MARCH 2021

## WEATHER

Max: 37.0°C  
Min: 19°C  
RH: 23%  
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.  
Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 37/19 °C

## ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana  
Tithi: Phalguna Shuddha Shashti till 4.48 am (Saturday)  
Star: Kritika till 1.42 pm  
Varjyam: Nil  
Durmuhurtam: 8.48 am to 9.36 am  
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 pm  
HILARI CALENDAR  
Sha'ban 5,1442 AH  
PRAYERS  
Fajar: 5.08 am  
Zohar: 12.05 pm  
Asar: 4.11 pm  
Maghrib: 5.47 pm  
Isha: 7.02 pm  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.32 AM  
SUNSET TODAY 6.28 PM  
MOONSET 10.23 AM  
MOONRISE 10.17 AM

## COUNTER POINT



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## SHORT TAKES

### CENTRE OFFERS SOP TO DISCARD OLD VEHICLES

**Chennai:** The government proposes to provide incentives to customers who buy new vehicles after discarding their older ones as per the scrappage policy. The vehicle scrappage policy will double the automobile industry turnover to ₹10 lakh crore, said Union minister Nitin Gadkari. The state governments will be advised to offer a road tax rebate of up to 25 per cent for personal vehicles and up to 15 per cent for commercial vehicles for buying new ones after discarding the older ones, the minister said in a statement in the Parliament.

### Stone pelting declined: CRPF

**New Delhi:** The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) on Thursday said 226 terrorists were killed during operations in Jammu and Kashmir since 2020, while 296 were apprehended. CRPF Director General (DG) Kuldeep Singh said stone-pelting incidents in the Kashmir Valley have "reduced drastically", although they have not stopped completely. The stone-pelting incidents have now been reduced to 10 per cent of what it used to be earlier, he said.

## VOTE | POWER

### Representatives elect 11 mayors, chairpersons

## After 4 yrs, AP to get elected ULBs

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

After a gap of nearly four years, Andhra Pradesh is having democratically elected urban local bodies effectively putting an end to 'special officer' rule.

Based on directions from the State Election Commission and the municipal administration authorities, special meetings were held to conduct elections of presiding officers on Thursday. Accordingly, the following persons have been elected as mayors to the 11 municipal corporations. Golagani Venkata Hari

### KALPALATHA ELECTED AN MLC FROM KRISHNA-GUNTUR TEACHERS SEAT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

Krishna-Guntur teachers' constituency nominee T. Kalpalatha Reddy was elected as an MLC as she secured 6,153 votes.

Though the election was held on March 14 and counting of polled votes started on March 15, her

Kumari for Visakhapatnam civic body, Moka Venkates-

election was officially declared on Thursday as it took a long time to count the votes. As no nominee secured a majority in the first preferential votes, the authorities opted for counting of second preferential votes. With this, she secured 6,153 votes which were more than 50 per cent of total votes polled.

waramma for Machilipatnam, Rayani Bhagya Laks-

hmi for Vijayawada, Manohar for Guntur, Gangada Sujatha for Ongole, S. Amuda for Chittoor, Dr Sireesha for Tirupati, Mohammad Washim Saleem for Anantapur, Kottammadi Suresh Babu for Kadapa and Boya Yella Ramaiah for Kurnool. Similarly, one deputy mayor for each municipal corporation has also been elected indirectly by the corporators. The government intends to go for one more deputy mayor and one more vice-chairperson for each civic body by bringing in an ordinance shortly with an aim to ensure more accountability.

## NATION | 6

### Kerala polls turn key for Rahul Gandhi



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## WORLD | 7

### Pak army chief calls for India, Pak peace

## SPORTS | 8

### Shuttler Saina out of All England



## PM blames Mamata for sparking Maoist terror

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC  
KOLKATA, MARCH 18

Accusing the Mamata Banerjee government of "encouraging" Maoist violence and creating their "new generation" in West Bengal on the eve of the Assembly polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asserted that the countdown for the ruling Trinamul Congress' removal from power in the state had begun as the BJP has already reached the doorstep of its manzil (goal) of victory.

"A nirmam (heartless) government of Didi has created a new generation of Maoists who loot the money of the poor through the TMC. The whole of Bengal knows who protects the coal and sand mafia. The Didi government encourages the Maoist violence also for its political gains. You suffer the loss out of it," Mr Modi told a BJP campaign rally in Purulia, one of the key Jangalmahal districts with a thick tribal votebank now with the saffron party, that will go to the



The countdown has begun. Didi also realises it very well. That's why she is trying to appear that (she has) changed. But this is not real. This reflects her fear of losing."

NARENDRA MODI,  
Prime Minister

polls on March 27, in the first of the eight phases.

Tearing into Ms Banerjee's rule, the Prime Minister alleged: "A great injustice has been done with Purulia and Jangalmahal in the last 10 years. I can feel your pain and problems even

while living in Delhi. That is why I am giving you an assurance about eliminating it. I know very well how the rights of the youth were snatched away and given to someone else. I am also aware of how betrayal has been meted out to members of the poor belonging to the SC/ST and OBCs."

Confident of the BJP forming its first government in the state, Mr Modi added: "The days of the Trinamul Congress and its government are now numbered in Bengal. The countdown has begun. Didi also realises it very well. That's why she is trying to appear that (she has) changed. But this is not real. This reflects her fear of losing. Now the people are saying: Lok Sabha Mein Half, Is Bar Puri Saaf. We have reached our Manzil. Bhoy Aar Noy, Ebar Hobe Joy (No more fear, this time there will be victory)."

The Prime Minister teased Ms Banerjee, saying: "You have played with the people a lot. Now the game will be over."

## India level series..



Indian bowler Shardul Thakur (centre) with team celebrates the wicket of England batsman Eoin Morgan during the fourth Twenty20 match between India and England, at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, on Thursday. India beat England by 8 runs to level series 2-2.

— PTI

## Naidu moves HC to seek quashing of land case FIR

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

Former chief minister and Telugu Desam president N. Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday filed a petition in the Andhra Pradesh High Court urging it to quash a First Information Report (FIR) filed by the Crime Investigation Department (CID) against him in the Amaravati assigned land scam case.

On Tuesday, a team of the CID reached Naidu's Hyderabad residence and served him a notice to

join the probe.

The FIR was filed based on a complaint submitted by YSRC Mangalagiri MLA A. Ramakrishna Reddy submitted a complaint to additional director general of police of the CID, P.V. Sunil Kumar, on February 24.

The complaint claimed that some farmers from the Mangalagiri constituency had approached him with complaints that "influential persons" from the previous TD government had "cheated them by taking their lands illegally", fraudu-

lently, by keeping them "under confusion and fear" of insecurity about their lands.

Based on the inquiry report, the CID filed the FIR against Naidu and former minister Ponguru Narayana on March 12, under Sections 166, 167, 217 and 120B of the Indian Penal Code (Indian Penal Code), read with Sections 34, 35, 36 and 37 of the IPC, as well as relevant sections of the SC/ST Act and Section 7 of the Andhra Pradesh Assigned Lands (Prohibition of Transfers) Act, 1977.

## Jagan gets RBK channel on air to help farmers

### State to build permanent buildings for RBKs, offers e-cropping

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday launched a RBK channel for providing quality services to the farming community.

After launching the RBK channel from Tadepalli on Thursday, the Chief Minister said Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBK) were conceptualised to support farmers across activities from sowing of seeds to selling the crop.

He said that the RBK channel will provide all required information to farmers, including about the weather conditions.

The Chief Minister held a review meeting on procurement of Rabi crop produce of 2020-21 and preparations for Kharif 2021-22.

He said that new buildings are being constructed in villages as permanent RBK structures.

He said farmers should not be cheated on the purchase of seeds, fertilisers and pesticides through RBKs and added that the state government has been testing products at RBKs before issuing guarantee and quality certification.

He said the aim was to



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launches RBK channel from the camp office on Thursday. Minister K. Kannababu (centre) and agricultural mission vice-chairman M.S. Nagireddy (right) are also seen.

make available the orders of farmers in villages within 48 to 72 hours.

Reddy said that agriculture assistants are working from RBKs, which will also register e-cropping.

"If any farmer has to sell his crop for less than the minimum support price in any village, he can register in RBK and the agriculture assistant of that village should inform the govern-

ment by uploading the details in CMAPP," the Chief Minister said.

He said the marketing department would intervene and ensure the crop is sold at a fair price, failing which they should procure the crop directly. The entire process will be under the preview of the Joint Collector.

He stated that as Smart TVs are being set up in

RBKs, the channel would help farmers get continuous information on the precautions to be taken while farming and information on weather conditions. A toll-free number (155251) is set up to address specific problems raised by farmers at RBKs. He told the agriculture minister to come up with a system to address the doubts of farmers in RBKs.

# KAMA

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## IN BRIEF

## SEC LIFTS MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT IN URBAN AREAS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

The State Election Commission has lifted the model code of conduct in urban areas following completion of election process in all respects in the state from Thursday.

State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar issued an order here on Thursday, stating that the SEC issued notification for conduct of adjourned election process for 12 municipal corporations and 75 municipalities/nagar panchayats and enforced model code of conduct from February 15, 2021.

The SEC said that as election process for 11 municipal corporations and 75 municipalities/nagar panchayats and indirect election of mayors, deputy mayors, chairpersons and vice chairpersons were over, the SEC lifted the poll code in urban areas in the state with effect from 5 pm on Thursday.

## PLEA FILED IN HC, WANTS SEC TO END MPTC/ZPTC POLLS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

A petition was filed in the High Court with a plea to direct the State Election Commission to conduct deferred polls for MPTCs/ZPTCs.

Single judge bench, headed by D.V.S.S. Somayajulu heard the petition on Thursday.

Advocate-General S. Sriram argued that as the number of Coronavirus cases was going up, it would be appropriate to complete all elections to enable the state government to pay attention on conduct of Covid-19 tests and also Covid-19 vaccination to contain the spread of the virus.

SEC counsel N. Ashwani Kumar asked the court some time to respond.

The judge posted the next hearing in the case to March 20.

## PRIVILEGE PANEL ISSUES NOTICE TO NIMMAGADDA

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

The cold war between the state government and State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar, which was subdued during the panchayat elections, resurfaced after a notice was issued to Ramesh Kumar by the Assembly Privilege Committee on Thursday.

Earlier, ministers Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy and Botsa Satyanarayana lodged a complaint with the Assembly Privilege Committee against the orders of the SEC to keep them under house arrest. The committee which discussed the issue on Wednesday issued notices to Ramesh Kumar on Thursday. They were sent by email and post.

Interestingly, Ramesh Kumar is going on leave for four days from Friday and there are doubts about his response to the notice. It may be recalled that the Assembly Privilege Committee, which met on February 2, on a complaint lodged by the ministers, decided to take action against the SEC. It was announced that they would meet on March 17 and accordingly notice was issued to the SEC on Thursday.

Privilege committee chairman Kakani Govardhan Reddy clarified that Ramesh Kumar should attend the hearing whether he is in office or not. He clarified that the Privilege Committee has full powers to protect the rights of the legislators.

## Record created by giving top priority to BCs: YSRC

BC, SC, ST and minority nominees to head civic bodies

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

YSR Congress on Thursday claimed that choosing 78 of 86 nominees from those belonging to BC, SC, ST and minorities communities as heads of corporations and municipalities was unprecedented in the country's history.

Party general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said that BCs, SCs, STs and minorities constitute over 70 per cent of the population and the YSRC government was giving a proportionate representation to them. Speaking to the media here, Ramakrishna Reddy said that 40 posts of mayors and chairpersons were given to BCs, 12 for minorities while women were given 52 seats overall. He said it was unprecedented and way ahead of the so-called BC states.

He stated that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had made it clear that people in majority should be given due representation. He stated that unlike during the TD government, which used BCs as a vote bank, the Chief Minister had given recognition to weaker sections in tune with his contention that 'BCs are Backbone Class'.

Speaking of Mydukur municipality, Ramakrishna Reddy stated that the party had won because the Jana Sena councillor remained neutral and ex-officio members had backed YSRC. He said that they had not misused power anywhere. Recalling the 2014 local body elections, he said TD leaders abused their power to lure opposition candidates into TD, something which the YSRC would never resort to. On ZPTC and MPTC polls, Ramakrishna Reddy urged the SEC to conduct them as early as possible as there were no more legal hurdles.



New mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi is congratulated by TD corporator Kesineni Swetha after the former took charge at council hall in Vijayawada on Thursday.

— DC

## Women empowerment, Jagan shows the way

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

YSR Congress, which gives priority to women in welfare schemes, has continued the momentum while choosing nominees for mayor and municipal chairperson posts. Women have been offered 52 of the total 86 posts. They belong to BC, SC, ST and minority communities.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy gave the crucial home ministry to Guntur MLA Mekatothi Sucharita and gave cabinet berths to Taneti Vinatha and Pamula Pushpasreevani. Navaratnalu schemes, mainly Amma Vodi and housing schemes, attracted women and this helped YSRC in the gram panchayat and Urban Local Body elections.

In the recent past the government filled nominated posts of 56 BC Corporations under which 29 women appointed as chairpersons and 336 women were appointed as directors against the total available 672 posts.

YSRC leaders pointed out that 60.47% of mayor and chairman posts had been given to women. They stated that earlier also the government had made history by allocating 50% of temple boards, agricultural marketing committees, nomination posts, nominated contracts to SC ST BC minority social groups and allocating 50% of all posts to women.

Rayana Bhagyalakshmi was elected as mayor of Vijayawada city and Bellam Durga as deputy mayor. S Amuda is

Chittoor mayor, Golagani Hari Venkata Kumari (Visakhapatnam), Dr Sirisha (Tirupati), Moka Venkateswarama (Machilipatnam), Vijayalakshmi (Vizianagaram) and Gangada Sujatha for Ongole. The Visakhapatnam mayor post was reserved for BC (general) and YSRC selected Venkata Kumari from the Yadav community.

Vijayawada mayor Bhagyalakshmi said that Jagan Mohan Reddy was striving for empowerment of women in real earnest. She said she was confident that women would be promoted in all sectors by the YSRC government.

Home minister Sucharita said that in the not too distant future, women will emerge as main leaders in the state.

## YSRC rewards BCs to achieve social justice

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

By giving BCs a great deal, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is strengthening his BC vote bank, particularly by offering many posts to them reflecting social justice in the state. The ruling party gave high priority to BCs in the selection of mayors and chairman of corporations and municipalities.

In the undivided Andhra Pradesh, a majority of

posts in the party and government would be earmarked for upper castes. It changed when Telugu Desam founder N.T. Rama Rao began giving importance to BCs in the party and his government in 1983. The party continued the tradition of giving importance to BCs and the yellow party turned as BCs party due to support of a majority of BC communities. After facing defeat in 2014, YSRC changed its strategies and

started efforts to attract BCs, the otherwise traditional supporters of TD. The party offered tickets to BCs in the 2019 election and further passed a BC Declaration, which resulted in winning over BCs and their eventual support helped YSRC dethrone TD. Meanwhile, YSRC is also giving priority to minorities and other weaker sections.

The government formed 56 BC corporations and sent two BC leaders to the

Rajya Sabha besides giving berths in the State cabinet.

Around 78% of 86 top posts in municipalities and municipal corporations have been given to nominees from SC, ST, BC and minority communities.

BC Welfare Minister Ch. Venugopalakrishna said that the government has elected mayors and municipal chairmen to provide social justice in a way

## Nabard chief hails Jagan as 'Navaratnala CM'

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday reviewed infrastructural development works financed by NABARD. Earlier, he felicitated NABARD chairman GR Chintala who had called on the Chief Minister.

Speaking on the occasion, Chintala called Jagan Mohan Reddy as a 'Navaratnala Chief Minister' for the revolutionary initiatives he has launched across key segments. He said that the state would be transformed in the next 15 years, especially in educa-

tion and health sectors.

Chintala stated that NABARD was keen on the infrastructure projects being undertaken by the state government and offered their support for their implementation. He emphasised the need to develop food processing industry, making agriculture sector profitable, and according top priority to drinking water projects.

Meanwhile, the officials briefed about Nadu-Nedu works taken up in government schools and sought their support for the second phase of Nadu-Nedu works by providing ₹2,000 crore. NABARD has given ₹652 crore for infrastructure development in

schools in the first phase of Nadu-Nedu.

The authorities also explained about the works being undertaken in anganwadi centres under 'YSR Pre-Primary Schools', and activities in the medical and health sector. They sought financial assistance from NABARD to support the projects.

The authorities explained about revolutionary steps taken in the agriculture sector by bringing in RBK's, food processing units, Janata Bazaars and further elaborated on the water grid project that provides safe drinking water.

Ministers Peddireddy

Ramachandra Reddy, Kurasala Kannababu, chief secretary Adityanath Das, MP Vallabhaneni Balashouri, agriculture special CS Poonam Malakondiah, co-operation department special secretary Y.S. Madhusudan Reddy, school education chief secretary Budhithi Rajasekhara, panchayati raj and rural development chief secretary Gopalakrishna Dwivedi, medical and health chief secretary Anil Kumar Singhal, water resources secretary Shyamala Rao, women and child welfare director Kritika Shukla were present at the meeting.

## Seven municipalities to have new governing bodies in Kadapa

## 8 municipalities in Kurnool get chiefs

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, MARCH 18

Seven municipalities across the district and Kadapa Municipal Corporation (KMC) will have new governing bodies even as YSRC netted Mydukur municipality.

Kottamaddi Suresh Babu has been retained as the Mayor of Kadapa while Machunur Chandra was sworn in as chairman of Mydukur municipality. District collector Chevuru Harikiran administered the oath of office to the corporators here on Thursday. Deputy Chief Minister Amjad Bhasha and Kamalapuram MLA P. Ravindranath Reddy were present as ex-officio members.

The oath was administered in Telugu, Urdu and English as sought by the corporators. The mayor and deputy mayor were elected, subsequently. Kottamaddi Suresh Babu has been elected as the Mayor and Syed Muntaz Begum as the deputy Mayor.

Stating that Kadapa city should be brought on the path of development in all possible ways, he said Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy was according special attention to the city.

The YSR Congress chose Beemunipalli Lakshmedevi from the weavers community as chairperson of Proddatur municipality and Khaza will be the deputy chairman. Although, Ravikumar Yadav was declared the chairman candidate by MLA Rachamalla Sivaprasad Reddy, the Chief Minister decided to give the top post to the weavers' community.

M. Harshavardhan Reddy has been elected as municipal chairman and Jaibunnisa as his deputy.

Shaik Fayaz Basha and Dasaratha Rami Reddy were elected as Chairman and vice-chairman, respectively for the Rayachoti municipality. Chief Whip Gadikota Srikanth Reddy was present in the event.

Vakamalla Rajagopal Reddy was sworn in as Badvel Chairman and Y. Gopalswamy as vice chairman.

Velpula Shivamma is sworn as Municipal Chairperson for Jammalamadugu. Poreddy Ramalaxamma was the deputy Chairman. Palpuru Varaprasad from BC category is the chairman of Pulivendula Municipality while Y.S. Manohar Reddy will be

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL MARCH 18

Eight municipalities of Kurnool district got new chairmen and deputy chairmen on Thursday. As per the election schedule the officials conducted nomination process under indirect election system to elect the municipal chairmen and deputy chairpersons at all municipalities including Kurnool Municipal Corporation. Then they declared the first persons of all municipalities who later took oath. B.Y. Ramaiah was taken oath as the Kurnool Municipal Corporation mayor and Renuka Reddy as deputy Mayor. Saptasaila Rajesh was taken oath as chairman of Dhone Municipality and Kotrike Harikishan as vice chairman. Shaik Mabunni was sworn in as chairperson of Nandyal Municipality

and Gangishetti Venkata Naga Sridhar as vice chairman. B. Shantha was sworn as chairperson of Adoni Municipality and Mulla Mahammad Gouse as vice chairman. Dasi Sudhakar Reddy was sworn in as the chairman of Nandikotkur Municipality and Molla Mahaboob Rabbani as vice chairman. Raghu Kodiganti Shivanna was sworn oath as chairman of Yemmiganur Municipality and D. Nazeer Ahmad as vice chairman. K. Ramalinga Reddy took oath as chairman of Allagadda Municipality and Nayab Rasool Shaik as vice chairman. Dr Maroof Asiya was sworn in as chairperson of Atmakur Municipality and Puvvadi Divya as vice chairperson. J. Venkateswarlu was sworn in as chairman of Guduru Nagara Panchayat and P.N. Umar Aslam as deputy chairman.

## WILL MAKE KURNOOL CITY FREE FROM POLLUTION, SAYS RAMAYYA

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL MARCH 18

Kurnool Municipal Corporation got its first Mayor after a gap of 11 years. B.Y. Ramayya, a Valmiki, took oath of office as the Mayor. He said improving civic services, safe drinking water, pollution control and hassle free traffic on the roads are his priorities. Nandyal Municipal chairman Mabunni is a surprise pick as Silpa Nagini, wife of MLA Ravi Chandra Reddy was a front runner. All the eight municipalities in the district have now got their people's representatives.

BY Ramaiah has taken oath as mayor of Kurnool Municipal Corporation (KMC) on Thursday in the presence of district collector G. Veera Pandian, KMC commissioner D.K. Balaji, Kurnool MLA

the vice-chairman.

Meanwhile, YSRC captured Mydukur municipality when a winner from Telugu Desam went to the YSR Congress camp and did not participate in the chairman's election. With YSR Congress and Telugu Desam parties having 11 members each, Mydukuru MLA

S. Raghuramireddy and Kadapa MP Y.S. Avinash Reddy voted as ex-officio members and the lone Jana Sena councillor remained neutral. Machunur Chandra was elected as chairman and Fayaz Sharif his deputy. Kadapa sub-collector Prithvi Tej administered the oath of office.

## WASIM SALIM, SAHITYA ELECTED UNANIMOUSLY IN ANANTAPUR

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 18

Even as many influential senior leaders, including those close to YSR family, made serious efforts for the mayor and deputy mayor posts, the party decided to have a minority member as mayor and a woman as the deputy Mayor post.

Mohammad Wasim Salim, corporator from 38th division, was unanimously elected as mayor of Anantapur Municipal Corporation on Thursday while Dasari Vasanti Sahitya representing 13th division, will be the deputy mayor.

District collector Gandham Chandradu presided over the meeting and newly-elected corporators were administered the oath along with ex

officio members MLA Anantha Venkatrami Reddy and MLC Shamatakamani.

Salim Wasim was supported by 3rd division corporator A. Kumaramma and 4th division corporator Kogatam Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy. Dasari Sahitya was supported by 15th division's Guduru Mallikarjuna and 50th division's G. Shekhar Babu. Both Salim and Sahitya were elected unanimously.

MLA Anantha Venkatrami Reddy said that he would ensure all-round development of the city with the support of the corporators. He would take up development works like flyover and bio-mining plant sanctioned for the city at a cost of ₹311 crore.

## J.C. ELECTED AS TADIPATHRI CHAIRMAN

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 18

J. C. Prabhakar Reddy of Telugu Desam was elected as chairman of Tadipatri municipality. He was elected with a two-vote majority following the support of a CPI and an independent candidate. Later, Prabhakar Reddy expressed his gratitude to Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for not entertaining illicit acts. "YSRC could do anything to grab Tadipatri municipality but the election was held in a peaceful manner. I will meet Jagan Mohan Reddy and minister Botsa Satyanarayana for development of 'Tadipatri'", he said.

## LADY | LUCK

14th division corporator Mudra Narayana, who began his career as a private driver in 1980, swear-in as Deputy Mayor

## Former municipality attender's daughter-in-law becomes MCT mayor Woman is the first mayor of MCT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 18

A former municipality attender's daughter-in-law and a former private driver have taken the reins of Municipal Corporation of Tirupati (MCT) as Mayor and Deputy Mayor respectively. The YSRC government, led by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy once again proved that it is a pro-people government giving unexpected chances to common people to play their part in governance.

Dr S. Sirisha, MCT's 27th division corporator, was on Thursday elected as the first mayor of Tirupati. Her father-in-law Munnaiah was once an attender in Tirupati Municipality. After 30 years of service, he retired six years ago as a Dafedar in the Revenue Department. His daughter-in-law became the mayor of the MCT, where he worked as an attender.

Dr Sirisha was married to Munnaiah's elder son Dr Muni Shekhar, who is the head of the Vaishnavi chil-

dren's hospital. Born in 1980 in Korrpadu of Kadapa district, she completed her MBBS from SV Medical College in Tirupati and did her PG from Kuppam's PES Medical College in 2011. After getting married to Dr M. Shekhar, Dr Sirisha served as a gynecologist in their own pediatric hospital.

Meanwhile, 14th division corporator Mudra Narayana, who was sworn in as the Deputy Mayor, was born in 1963. Educated until the seventh grade, he began his career as a private driv-

er in 1980 and joined the Congress in 1985. In 1994, he served as the district vice-president of the Youth Congress. He later served as joint secretary of state for the Youth Congress.

In the 2002 Tirupati municipal elections, Narayana won as a councillor on Congress ticket. After the demise of Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, he joined the YSRC and now he was unanimously elected as the 14th division corporator and became the deputy mayor of MCT.

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 18

Dr R. Sireesha, the 27th division corporator of the YSRC, has been unanimously elected as the Mayor for the Tirupati Municipal Corporation. She is the first ever mayor of Tirupati after the city being elevated as a municipal corporation from municipal council.

The ruling YSRC swept the municipal polls in Chittoor district, winning the first Tirupati Municipal Corporation, Chittoor Municipal Corporation and Madanapalle, Punganur, Puttur, Palamaner and Nagari municipalities.

In Chittoor Municipal Corporation, S. Amuda was unanimously elected as the mayor and R.

Chandrasekhar from 16th division elected as the deputy mayor.

In the Madanapalle municipality, Varapana Manuja was elected as the chairperson and Sheikh Noor Azam as the vice-chairman.

In Puttur municipality, A. Hari was unanimously elected as the chairman and D. Shankar was elected as vice-chairman.

In Nagari, P.G. Neela Megham was elected as the chairman, while S. Balan elected as vice chairman.

In Punganur municipality, S. Aleem Basha was elected as chairperson and K. Nageendra was vice-chairperson. In Palamaner municipality, S.M. Pavithra was elected as chairperson and N.K. Channa was elected as vice-chairperson.



## SHORT TAKES

## AWARDS TO 13 EMINENT PERSONS FROM AP, TS

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

The Indo-American Global Peace Award 2021 were presented to 13 eminent persons from AP, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Odisha for their relentless services to society in various fields during a programme on Thursday.

Eminent scientist Prof. Madhu Krishan who was the chief guest to the programme presented awards with Philanthropic Society president Dr Addanki Raja to the selected eminent persons.

Prof. Madhu said that peace is the need of the hour for a good living to people and peaceful living helps towards the development of society, State and Country. People's lives would be devastated due to disturbance and violence hence people should opt for peaceful living which would help for effective work and output in all fields aiding the development of AP and India.

Prof Madhu and Dr Raja presented awards to Dr Muppidi John Deen of Nallamilli of East Godavari district, Dr S.M. Vali of Rajahmundry, Dr S.V. Ramesh Babu of Nellore, Dr A. Srinivasa Rao belongs to Hyderabad, Dr B. Swamy Kiran Paul of Machilipatnam, Dr J. Vijay Kumar belongs to Visakhapatnam and others.

## TD LODGES COMPLAINT ON FAKE VIDEO UPLOADING

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

The Telugu Desam Party has made a formal complaint at the Mangalagiri police station urging for serious action against those responsible for uploading the fake video on YouTube to taint the image of TDP National General Secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh.

The TDP leaders complained that the fake video was uploaded under the hashtags #YS Jagan, #YSRCP and #Newstoday Telugu. In a deliberate attempt to defame Lokesh, the miscreants have given the wrong video a highly objectionable title. The title ran as 'once again call leak and Nara Lokesh booked in an embriated condition'.

## PANCHAYAT RAJ OFFICIAL TRAPPED FOR BRIBERY

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

Anti-Corruption Bureau officials trapped a Panchayat Raj official working at Pedana in Krishna district while accepting bribe of ₹85,000 at his residence located in Machilipatnam on Thursday.

According to ACB authorities, M. Bala Subramanyam hailing from Penumalli village of Pedana mandal in Krishna district lodged a complaint with the ACB authorities stating that B.V.N. Prasad working as assistant executive engineer of Panchayat Raj at Pedana village, demanded ₹85,000 to process bill payment for construction of new gram secretariat building at Chowdavaram village of Pedana mandal.

Based on his complaint, the ACB authorities laid the trap and caught the official red-handed with the bribe amount. He was arrested and to be produced before the court.

## MARRIED WOMAN ATTEMPS SUICIDE, 3 CHILDREN DIE

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, MARCH 18

A married woman with three children has attempted suicide after she was offended by a minor dispute with her husband. Two sons, aged three years and two months, and a daughter aged one and a half years died.

The mother of the child is being treated at the Kadapa Rims hospital. The incident took place at Mittameedapalli village in Pendlimarri of Kadapa district. Information from the Police sub Inspector Ramireddy Venkata Kondareddy, Narasamma (23), a resident of the village, is staying with her husband Nithya Pujayya.

She consumed pesticide along with her children, while she was upset with the minor dispute that arose with her husband at night.

Pendlimarri SI visited the spot and filed case.

## Joyous occasion



Supporters of T. Kalpalatha celebrate her win in Krishna Guntur Teacher's MLC elections 2021 at AC College, Guntur city, during early hours of Thursday. — TEJO ROY ELETI

## AP records 218 fresh Covid cases, no deaths

## Chittoor continues to lead state with virus cases

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 18

Andhra Pradesh registered 218 fresh Covid-19 cases and no death in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported on Thursday that out of 31,165 samples tested, 218 persons were infected Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,46,42,664 samples tested so far in the state, 8,92,740 persons were infected with the virus and of them, 8,83,759 were recovered while undergoing treatment and 1,795 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Chittoor registered the highest number of 63 followed by 24 in Guntur, 23 in East Godavari, 21 each in Kadapa and Krishna, 18 in Kurnool, 13 each in Anantapur and Visakhapatnam, six each in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram, five in Nellore, three in West Godavari and two in Prakasam.

With regard to the cumulative active cases, Chittoor continued to lead the state with 496 followed by 235 in East Godavari, 231 in Krishna, 191 in Guntur, 142 in Visakhapatnam, 95 in Kurnool, 90 in Anantapur, 81 in Prakasam, 70

## RESTORE DIST. DEVELOPMENT GRANTS: TG

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL, MARCH 18

Rajya Sabha member T.G. Venkatesh demanded restoration of district development grants of ₹50 crores for each district in Rayalaseema region as they are most backward in the country.

Pitching for Rayalaseema development in Rajya Sabha on Thursday, T.G. Venkatesh said despite huge deposits of gold, diamond and iron ore, no new industries are coming.

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, MARCH 18

Sri Potti Sriramulu Nellore District Collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu has urged the state and central governments to fulfil the wish of the people of Nellore district to install the Photograph of Amarajevee Sri Potti Sriramulu in the Parliament Hall of New Delhi and also in the AP Legislative Assembly Hall.

He wrote a Demi Official (DO) letter to the union government and the state government to consider the request of the people.

He reminded that 120th Birth Anniversary of Sri

## Gear up for mass jabs, says Pandian

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL, MARCH 18

The district administration woke up to the fast enveloping Covid-19 pandemic and alerted the Covid control nodal officers to prepare an action plan in two days. The district magistrate G. Veera Pandian on Thursday said a coordinated effort is put up to check the spread of virus and directed materials management committee to ready masks and sanitisers.

He told officials to follow Government of India health department guidelines and send Covid patients to home isola-

## THE STATE health authorities discharged 117 patients after recovery in the last 24 hours in the state.

in Kadapa, 65 in Srikakulam, 53 in Nellore, 24 in West Godavari and 22 in Vizianagaram.

No new death was

## Balineni denies rumours over privatisation of power sector

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, MARCH 18

Energy and Forests Minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy made it clear that their government does not have any plans to privatise the power sector while stressing that some vested interests spread rumours on the subject.

He was addressing the media after inaugurating Block II building of Central Power Distribution Company's Superintendent Office built in 27,600 sq.ft at an

Potti Sri Ramulu was celebrated across the state on March 16, as per the directions of the government.

He said all the district officials and distinguished guests in the district have participated in the celebrations and hailed the role played by Amarajevee Sri Potti Sriramulu during the freedom movement.

"The participants recalled his imprisonment on three occasions, his participation in Salt Satyagraha, Quit India Movement, in Village Reconstruction Programmes and his three fasts during 1946-48 in support of Dalit rights to enter the temples of

## THE DMHO Dr Rama Giddaiah said RT-PCR tests are conducted in place of rapid antigen tests.

Recognised private hospitals have been authorised to offer Covid-19 vaccine with a charge ₹250 for each person. However, all the government hospitals would provide the vaccine without any charges.

In a statement released on Thursday, District Medical and Health Officer, Dr Rajya Lakshmi said the job is being given to those above 60 years old as well as people between 45 to 59 years old with comorbidities.

Advising people taking the jab to go for second round of vaccination after four weeks, she maintained that the postings in the social media against the side effects of the vaccine are nothing but rumours. She suggested that those having reservations against the vaccine should consult medical officers to clear their doubts.

According to the DMHO, 8,091 people took vaccination at 136 vaccination centres manned by 680 medical and health officials on Thursday.

reported and the toll remained unchanged at 7,186.

The state health authorities discharged 117 patients after recovery in the last 24 hours in the state.

AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,74,207 samples per one million population and registered a positive rate of 6.10

estimated cost of ₹7.63 crore in Ongole along with Ongole MP Magunta Srinivasa Reddy on Thursday.

The Minister expressed confidence in ensuring profits to Power Distribution Companies in the future while referring to ₹70,000 crore debt during the previous government.

He said tender process has been completed to establish 10,000 Mega Watts of Solar Power and works will commence shortly.

Two among them will come up in Rudra Samu-

Nellore, besides his ultimate self-sacrifice in the cause of formation of separate linguistic state, Andhra Pradesh," Chakradhar Babu noted.

The Collector said a senior Citizen and follower of Sri Potti Sriramulu, K.V. Chalamaiah of Nellore also expressed his long cherished wish to see the Photo of Amarajevee Sri Potti Sriramulu displayed permanently in the premises of Parliament, New Delhi and also in the premises of the State Legislative Assembly, Velagapudi in Commemoration of the services of the luminary during freedom movement.

Chakradhar Babu

## PVT HOSPITALS TO PROVIDE SHOT FOR A FEE

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, MARCH 18

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## AP GOVT SHIFTS MARITIME BOARD CEO RAMAKRISHNA ABRUPTLY

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 18

In a sudden move the Andhra Pradesh government moved Chief Executive Officer N.P. Ramakrishna Reddy out of AP Maritime Board on Thursday evening.

K. Muralidharan who is currently the CEO of Karikal Port Pvt Ltd was made the new CEO. Muralidharan was tipped to take over CEO Kakinada deep water port on behalf of Aurobindo Reality which bought the port operating company a few months ago. He was

in Kakinada for a few days and oversaw the operation in KSPL. But the government rewarded him with the post of CEO of APMB which is the nodal agency for the entire port sector in the state.

Ramakrishna Reddy, a septuagenarian, worked hard to bring the port sector which was neglected in the last one decade back on tracks ever since he took over as CEO of maritime board last year. He got Ramayapatnam port fast tracked and recently tenders were called.

## GOVT COMMITTED TO BRING CHANGE IN ENERGY SECTOR: APSECM CEO

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 18

The Andhra Pradesh government is strongly committed to bringing a rapid change in the energy efficiency sector in AP and would fully encourage energy efficiency investments in the industrial sector.

Addressing the Investment Bazaar for the Southern region, Andhra Pradesh State Energy Conservation Mission (APSECM), Chief Executive Officer, A. Chandra Sekhara Reddy, said that AP, along with generating and distributing the cost effective power to all sectors, had also set sights on saving energy which will lessen the burden on the

state coffers thus saving public money and also help improve the environment by curbing emissions.

Investment Bazaar was conducted by APSECM with support and coordination of Bureau of Energy Efficiency, Ministry of Power in Visakhapatnam on Thursday to promote investments in industrial energy efficiency.

"There is a huge opportunity for everyone to invest in energy efficiency projects, run business in AP," said the CEO A. Chandra Sekhara Reddy, inviting investors and several other stakeholders to visit Andhra Pradesh, understand the potential the state offers and grow together.

## JAPAN CONSUL-GENERAL VISITS VPT

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 18

Japan Consul General, Taga Masayuki, visited Visakhapatnam Port Trust on Thursday. K. Rama Mohana Rao, Chairman of VPT gave a warm welcome to Taga Masayuki.

Chairman Rao gave a Power Point presentation and briefed the Japanese

team about the Infrastructure facilities available, capacities in the handling of cargo, modernisation and mechanisation, covered storage facilities, solar power, sewage treatment plant for internal and industrial purpose, investment potential and zone of opportunities in exploring imports and export improvements in the Visakhapatnam Port.



N. Tulasi Reddy

## INCOMPETENCE OF GOVT OBSTACLE TO PROGRESS: TULASI

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, MARCH 18

PCC Working President Dr N. Tulasi Reddy said that the incompetence of the government has become an obstacle to the progress of the state. He was speaking at a press conference in Vempalle on Thursday.

The state government has not done land acquisition and Nonpayment of ₹2612 crores of its share, the construction of new rail lines and track doubling works not yet started. Four new railway lines of 841 km length have been sanctioned in the state at an estimated cost of ₹10,200 crore. Tulasi Reddy said the state government had to pay its share of ₹1,630 crore for this and the work was not progressing due to non-payment. He also said that doubling work of Vijayawada - Guduvada, Bhimavaram - Narsapur, Guduvada - Machilipatnam, Bhimavaram - Nidadavolu, Yelahanka - Penukonda railway lines doubling works has been sanctioned. He said the state government had to pay ₹976 crore and the work was not going ahead as it was not paid. Tulasi Reddy criticised the YSR Congress government for not following financial discipline. He said that it was spending unnecessarily extravagantly rather than where it was needed. Still he asked the state government to pay their share amount for new railway lines and track doubling works.

## NATIONAL ECONOMY WAS FRAGMENTED: MLC BTECH RAVI

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, MARCH 18

MLC Mareddy Rabindranath Reddy (BTech Ravi) criticised the central government and the state government for not paying attention to the construction of the Kadapa steel factory as stipulated in the 2014 State Partition Act.

The Joint Action Committee of student unions, on Monday, started a walk from the steel plant plaque at Kanyatheertham in Jammalamadugu mandal seeking to build the Kadapa steel industry and reverse the decision to privatize the Visakhapatnam steel plant. The padayatra reached Kadapa city on Thursday via Jammalamadugu, Poddutur, Mydukuru and Khajipet. MLC BTech Ravi participated in the padayatra from Vinayak Nagar in Kadapa city to ITI circle.

"After Modi came to power, every sector was privatized and the country's economy was fragmented and development was hampered," he said. He added that it would be ridiculous to bring privatisation today if the Visakhapatnam steel industry had more than one lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities. The event was attended by JAC leaders of student unions Venugopal, Shankar, Jaya Vardhan and others.

● The padayatra reached Kadapa city on Thursday via Jammalamadugu, Poddutur, Mydukuru and Khajipet.

## CHANGE OF NAME

I, Bhanugota Hanish Reddy (Old Name), M/o S. Shabana, Aged about 21 years, residing D.No. 19-2-284, Bhavani Nagar, Ananthapuram. Shall hence forth be known as **MOHAMMAID HANEEF** (New Name) by virtue of Aadhar Card No. 2913 52024232, vide Affidavit Dt. 2-2-2021, before Notary by V.Janardhan, Ananthapuram.

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DECCAN  
Chronicle

19 MARCH 2021

Rural surge scary, act now  
to stop second Covid wave

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has warned of a second peak of pandemic Covid-19 unless quick and decisive action was taken. In his meeting with chief ministers on Wednesday, Mr Modi listed out the points that need early action. On top of the to-do list is the time-tested “test-track-treat” formula with a focus on tracking the contacts of every person who contracted the virus. The Prime Minister also reminded the chief ministers of the need to conduct genome tests to track the variants of the virus. The share of RT-PCR tests should remain high and the states should guard themselves against vaccine wastage, he told them.

Mr Modi has flagged the issues that plague India's Covid fight at a time when the country finds itself in the throes of a second wave. The daily caseload has gone up for a seventh consecutive day on Wednesday, which reported 28,903 cases — the highest reported this year. India's active case load has reached 2.34 lakh on Wednesday against 1.84 lakh a week ago; test positivity rate has gone up from 2.3 per cent to 4.98 per cent in the same period.

According to Niti Aayog, while the first phase was in the metros and big cities of the country, the recent surge is reported from rural areas, too. As per the health ministry estimates, 70 districts in 15 states recorded 150 per cent rise in the number of cases in the last 15 days. The virus spread in the rural areas where the health infrastructure is weak and less attended will make the fight tougher.

The government should not wait anymore to take tougher decisions. It must immediately take a relook at the Covid controls which were in place last year and advise states to see which could be used the best to contain the virus spread. The Prime Minister has also warned against wastage of vaccines. Some states have reported a wastage figure higher than the national average of 6.5 per cent. There are nations that have little or no access to vaccines and India, having built its capacities in scientific research and pharmaceutical manufacturing over the decades, should not take its advantages for granted. The Union government must use technology to the optimum to ensure that wastage is brought to a minimum. Several states have reported about vaccine hesitancy. The Prime Minister led the inoculation campaign by taking the jab himself, sending the right message. Perhaps, he should have done the exercise sooner? Also, credible local faces, including religious leaders at the community level, should be roped in to break the “hesitancy barrier” and press the idea home.

This newspaper has been highlighting the point that public health is as much an issue of the public as it is of the government. It's next to impossible for governments alone to make a difference. There must be an aggressive campaign to promote Covid-appropriate behaviour and violators should be sternly dealt with. Reports say that passengers were deplaned on Wednesday and Thursday for their refusal to follow the protocol. Such defiance is unacceptable. The governments at the Centre and the states and the people must brace themselves for decisive and quick action to stop a second wave of the pandemic.

## Guns, racism &amp; crime in US

A series of shootings in Atlanta in which six Asian Americans were among seven women in eight fatalities in three different massage parlours have shaken up America. The investigation is yet to establish if the 21-year-old white youth's actions were racially motivated but the signs seem clear enough as the profiles of a majority of the victims reveal.

As an epidemic, hate crime is on the rise in the USA, its graph exploding exponentially since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. By calling it a “China flu” in his typically bigoted rhetoric, the former President Donald Trump may have ignited a wave of anti-Asian hate crimes. The attacker, on interrogation, had tried to rationalise his action as a way of eliminating an avenue to his own sex addiction. But, as a legislator said pertinently, such racially motivated crimes cannot be “rebranded as economic anxiety or sexual addiction”.

A diverse, multiracial society like America must own up that it has a huge racial problem in which visibly successful migrants are increasingly the victims of racial abuse, harassment and violent hate crimes, which have numbered close to 4,000 since the advent of the pandemic. The Black Lives Matter movement had highlighted shades of an even older form of racism rampant in the US but Covid-19 has enabled racism to spread so much as to create national insecurity, fear of foreigners and xenophobia in the US.

There is no such a thing as a perfectly equal society but one that turns on itself like this so easily and frequently must fear over where it is headed even as complexities arise in the modern age. Endemic violence is not so much an Asian American problem as an American problem, a major part of which can be traced to the Second Amendment and loose gun control. The perpetrator was able to buy a 9 mm handgun on the same day that he used it to exhibit his malefic intentions. Do we blame the trigger finger or unfettered access to deadly weapons in a country now notorious for mass killings?

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Subhani

Of Rahul, Indira and the  
‘mistake’ of Emergency

Karan Thapar

As I See It

One of the best tests of a politician's skill and talent is his ability to handle awkward and embarrassing moments. Amongst the worst is when you're asked to accept and admit your own mistake, that of your party or your family. It seems this is not Rahul Gandhi's forte. Actually, the truth is his family is rather poor at it. His grandmother was no better.

Earlier this month, when Kaushik Basu of Cornell University questioned Rahul about the Emergency, he claimed Indira Gandhi had called it a “mistake” and added: “The Congress at no point attempted to capture India's institutional framework.” He was utterly wrong on both counts.

The one that's a flagrant violation of the truth is the latter. Under the Emergency Indira Gandhi arrested at least 100,000 people, including most Opposition leaders. The press was censored. The judiciary and civil service tampered with. Elections postponed. The Constitution brutally amended. All of this should be known to Mr Gandhi, even if he was five at the time.

A less obvious error — actually it's an untruth — is the claim his grandmother Indira Gandhi considered the Emergency a “mistake”. Indira Gandhi accepted responsibility for the Emergency and the election defeat that followed. Of that there's no doubt. But that's very different to calling it a mistake. In fact, she found artful ways of responding to the errors and lapses of the Emergency, while exculpating the Emergency itself. When she spoke of it, she justified it.

Her first tactic was to accept excesses may have been committed. In an interview to Mary Carass, in July 1978, she said

“muzzling the press was too strong a step”. In other words, a less stringent form of control would have been preferable. But controlling the press was not a mistake.

A second tactic was to claim other people made mistakes but she was willing to take responsibility for them. Indian Express on January 24, 1978 reported her speech at Yavatmal: “Mrs Gandhi said even if others, who were responsible for the mistakes and excesses, were not willing to own up, she would own the responsibility for those mistakes.”

A third tactic was to actually minimise whatever errors or mistakes she was willing to acknowledge. To Mary Carass, she said: “Except for the detention of political persons and press censorship there was not much that was abnormal”. Of the killings at Turkman Gate, she had the effrontery to say: “There was no violence... just one or two isolated cases”.

Even on the critical issue of sterilisation, which, perhaps, traumatised North India, Indira Gandhi refused to accept the extent of what had happened. This is what she told Paul R. Brass on March 26, 1978: “The basic thing which defeated us was the false propaganda. It's not that we didn't make mistakes or any of those things, but they were blown out of all proportion. Even with regard to family planning, the way they spread things... frankly, I don't think it was sterilisation at all. It was a propaganda... no such thing took place on that scale. There were some cases, but most of the cases we followed up did not turn out to be true.”

In each of these instances Indira Gandhi was only referring to specific things that happened under the Emergency — censorship, arrests, Turkman Gate, sterilisa-

tion — but not the Emergency itself. She was trying to distinguish between the Emergency and mistakes that happened. You don't need forensic expertise to realise she had no problem with the actual declaration of the Emergency.

Indian Express reported on January 24, 1978, that, after accepting responsibility for other people's mistakes and excesses, Indira Gandhi justified the Emergency. “She, however, asked the audience to recall the situation in the country when the Emergency was declared, and said things were in a chaotic condition all around. If things were allowed to continue, the situation that developed in Bangladesh would have been repeated in India”. The paper adds Mrs Gandhi said “the situation just before the imposition of Emergency was very grave, and the very survival of the nation was threatened”. She described the Emergency “as a dose of medicine to cure the disease”.

When Paul Brass asked: “Would you have done anything differently in relation to the Emergency?” Her answer began with the word “No”. It couldn't have been more pointed. Thereafter she said her mistake was not to have “personally” looked into the suffering the Emergency caused. Her exact words were: “My mistake was not to have looked into these matters personally and discussed”.

So let's be clear, Indira Gandhi didn't think the Emergency was a mistake and she certainly didn't apologise for it. No doubt she accepted responsibility for the 1977 election defeat and accepted the biggest cause was the Emergency, but she never

**Rahul Gandhi alleged while the RSS today is stuffing institutions with its own people, the Congress' behaviour during the Emergency was 'fundamentally different'. He is wrong. Its behaviour was almost identical.**

said it was wrong. Sagarika Ghose, her most recent biographer, who helped immeasurably with my research, concurs. I've found no record of Indira Gandhi accepting and admitting the Emergency was a mistake.

Rahul Gandhi also alleged while the RSS today is stuffing institutions with its own people, the Congress' behaviour during the Emergency was “fundamentally different”. Again, he's wrong. His behaviour was almost identical — from the Supreme Court, where a junior judge was made Chief Justice, forcing H.R. Khanna to resign, to the civil service, where his grandmother publicly called for “committed” officers and Nirmal Mukherjee was removed as home secretary. The commitment required was to her and her family.

Now I can understand why Rahul Gandhi flubbed. First, he wanted to distinguish the Emergency from the situation prevailing today, and make the former seem nowhere near as bad. Hence his claim “the Congress at no point attempted to capture India's institutional framework”. Second, by asserting his grandmother called the Emergency a “mistake”, he wanted to ensure no further embarrassing questions would be asked. It was a way of conceding a point in the hope of ending the conversation.

But his answers have created a new controversy. There are now questions about his knowledge, his judgment, his truthfulness and, of course, his ability to handle awkward moments. On all these, he acquitted himself pretty miserably.

If this was a googy, Mr Gandhi got bowled. If it was a test, he didn't pass. If the intention was to impress his audience, he didn't succeed. So if he's going to be our Prime Minister one day, he needs to learn how to handle awkward situations, in particular those connected to his family's past.

*The writer is a television commentator and anchor*

## LETTERS

## VIRUS IN KURNOOL

With slow rise in numbers of Covid-19 cases in Kurnool, the district administration should take necessary precautions including closing of schools and restrict inter state border crossings (*Kurnool district witnesses spike in cases, DC, March 18*). Private schools which conducted online classes during the pandemic should have completed the final examinations by now instead of running full day classes in summer. The state education and health ministries should issue directions in this regard.

**Sajid Farooq**  
Kurnool

## RATION CARDS

The issue of scrapping of three crore ration cards for not linking Aadhaar has been taken seriously by the apex court and on which it asked the response of centre and states. If in the name of cancelling bogus cards, a real beneficiary is denied his due it would amount to be denial of his right to food security. As there are umpteen lacunae on the ground to ensure everyone an Aadhaar, it has not been made mandatory by the apex court to link it with welfare schemes. If crores of people are kept outside of food security zone on one reason or other, it leads to widespread starvation. The pandemic has already raised the number of poor exponentially. The government should fix the problem by making public distribution system universal and effective. India is not at bright spot on global hunger index.

**Dr D.V.G. Sankararao**  
Vizianagaram

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN  
ChronicleAI employees;  
management accord

BOMBAY, March. 18 Air-India today reached an agreement with the Air Corporations Employees' Union representing over 4,000 employees of the airline in full and final settlement of the union's charter of demands on revision of emoluments.

The agreement which would be valid till March 31, 1973 would have retrospective effect from April 1, 1969.

A Press release by Air-India here said the union had agreed to observe constitutional means and eschew agitational steps which might disrupt the operations of the airline.



Mahir Ali

Joe's 'moonshot':  
Afghan window  
for 'dignified' US  
exit closing fast

In recent years, as the negotiations phase in the 21st-century variant of the Great Game has gathered pace, every cliché in the diplomatic playbook has been trotted out to illustrate its sporadic progress.

There have been multiple windows of opportunity, open doors, seats at the table, options on the table — and inevitably some dealings under the table. Between the devil and the deep blue sea doesn't figure all that frequently in official statements, but it pretty much sums up the choices Afghanistan has faced for the past 40 years.

Among the latest options is a draft ‘peace’ agreement secretly proposed by the Biden administration, but much commented on since it was leaked last week. Some officials in Kabul have poured scorn on the US wish list — which is hardly surprising, given it effectively consigns the Ashraf Ghani administration to oblivion. The Taliban have been more reticent in their response so far, saying they are studying the document.

The entity that the US and its allies

dislodged from power nearly 20 years ago is being offered substantial representation in every tier of an interim government. A constituent assembly is envisaged, with elections to be held once it has completed its task. There are motherhood statements about education, intellectual freedom and women's rights.

As golden-throated philosopher Freddie Mercury once wondered: “Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?”

For many years now, the biggest fear among some Afghans has revolved around their nation's prospects once the foreign military forces exited. That apprehension highlights the crux of Afghanistan's abiding tragedy: since the late 1970s, its fortunes have largely been determined by outsiders. Of course, more broadly, that has been the case for centuries.

The tyranny of geography is an immutable fact, but what's particularly remarkable is the extent to which Afghanistan has resisted being swallowed up by neighbouring empires. Only time will tell whether that rugged exceptionalism serves it

well in this century.

When the US invaded in collaboration with the Northern Alliance in 2001, in the wake of the 9/11, the Taliban chose to melt away, reinforcing the impression of a Western-led cakewalk into Kabul. Once the botched effort to track down Osama bin Laden failed, the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld administration saw little reason to expend too much energy or too many resources on Afghanistan. Its attention shifted to Iraq.

Perhaps the Taliban realised even back then that they had time on their side — apart from sanctuaries in Pakistan, where bin Laden also found refuge. Over the years they steadily re-established their clout across the countryside. The US and its allies poured in tens of thousands of troops, and tens of thousands of people — mainly Afghans — have been killed since then. Both sides have committed innumerable war crimes that will likely go uninvestigated and unpunished.

And where are we today? The debate is over the exit of the remain-

ing 2,500 US troops in Afghanistan by May 1. Actually, the figure is closer to 3,500, according to the *New York Times* (which notes that the Pentagon routinely understates troop numbers). Then there are the 8,000 or so ‘contractors’ — unofficial military personnel, in effect — plus smaller contingents from the usual Western allies, which wouldn't stay behind once the Americans pack up. Joe Biden is under considerable pressure to postpone the pullout. Should he do so, as seems likely, the Taliban would have an excuse to renege on their part of the Doha bargain — whereby they have resisted the temptation to attack foreign forces. Beyond that, the violence has not significantly diminished in the past year. Apart from other atrocities, targeted killings of women in particular occur with brutal regularity. The Taliban deny responsibility, but no one else claims it.

It's reasonable to assume that the security situation would deteriorate in the immediate aftermath of a Western troop withdrawal, with

uncertain consequences. The alternative, however, is also fairly dire. What could a continued foreign presence achieve that has not already been attempted in the past two decades, with all too few worthy results?

Will a planned flurry of diplomatic activity — including talks in Turkey between Kabul representatives and the Taliban, and UN-sponsored conference of foreign ministers from Russia, China, the US, Iran, India and Pakistan tentatively scheduled for next week — achieve very much? Some commitments may be made, but what will they be worth?

The latter US plan is informally being referred to as a moonshot. But the original moonshot was backed by science. This one is riding on unsubstantiated hope. The Americans will only be postponing the inevitable if they linger. A ‘dignified departure’ won't be an option down the track, just as ‘peace with honour’ proved elusive in Vietnam.

*By arrangement with Dawn*



## TELANGANA STATE

### BUDGET BY NUMBERS

#### OUTLAY

₹2,30,825.96cr

#### REVENUE EXPENDITURE

₹29,046.77cr

#### CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

₹29,046.77cr

#### REVENUE SURPLUS

₹6,743.50cr

#### FISCAL DEFICIT

₹45,509.60cr

### OTHER ALLOCATIONS

- Panchayati Raj and rural development: **₹29,271cr**
- Agriculture: **₹25,000cr**
- Animal Husbandry: **₹17,030cr**
- Irrigation: **₹16,931cr**
- Aasara pension: **₹11,728 cr**
- Kalyam Lakshmi/Shadi Mubarak: **₹2,750cr**
- ST residential schools: **₹529.6cr**
- SC special development fund: **₹21,306.85cr**
- ST special development fund: **₹12,304cr**
- Gollakurumas' welfare: **₹3,000cr**
- BC welfare department: **₹5,522cr**
- BC Corporation and Most Backward Classes Corporation: **₹1,000cr**
- Overseas scholarship scheme: **₹294cr**
- Minority welfare: **₹1,602cr**
- Women and child welfare: **₹1,702cr**
- Musli rejuvenation project: **₹200cr**
- Metro rail project: **₹1,000cr**
- Drinking water for colonies within ORR: **₹250cr**
- Warangal municipal corporation: **₹250cr**
- Khammam municipal corporation: **₹250cr**
- MA&UD: **₹15,030cr**
- Health and medical department: **₹6,295cr**
- School education: **₹11,735cr**
- Higher education: **₹1,873cr**
- Industrial sector: **₹360cr**
- Transport: **₹3,000cr**
- Forest department: **₹1,276cr**
- Endowments: **₹720cr**
- New secretariat: **₹610cr**
- Roads and buildings: **₹8,788cr**
- Regional ring road: **₹750cr**
- Home department: **₹6,465cr**
- Civil supplies: **₹2,363cr**
- Tourism and culture: **₹726cr**

## OTHER STORIES

### BHAINSA CASE: BJP WOMEN HOLD RALLY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 18

BJP women leaders and workers held a dharna with their eyes blindfolded at LB Nagar crossroads on Thursday to protest the attempted sexual assault on a four-year-old girl near Bhainsa. The protest was led by BJP vice-president D.K. Aruna along with the party women leaders and workers. Aruna demanded that Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Nara Rao try the accused in a fast track court and that the guilty be given the most severe punishment. Referring to the blindfold protest, she said the Chief Minister had closed his eyes to the atrocities on the women. Aruna demanded that the government should give ₹10-lakh ex gratia to the family of the victim. She also said that the BJP woman leader who has rescued the girl was receiving threat calls and wanted security for her. The police had behaved in a negligent manner when the parents of the girl went to lodge a complaint. The police did not even provide treatment to the girl, Aruna said.

### BHAINSA CASE: BJP WOMEN HOLD RALLY

**Hyderabad:** The state government said that there had been only 1.22 per cent vaccine wastage in Telangana. Director of Health issued a note saying that 9,52,550 doses had been issued to the state by the Centre. Of these, 40,540 were issued to the armed forces and there were 25,680 buffer doses. The health department claimed that 8,86,330 vaccines had been used of which data regarding 8,75,478 were updated on the website.

# Hike in education budget 'not enough'

## Teachers' federations express disappointment over allocations for education

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 18

The state Budget proposed an allocation of ₹11,735 crore to the school education sector and ₹1,873 crore for higher education. The figures were ₹10,421 crore and ₹1,723.27 respective last year, apart from ₹100 crore to improve the literacy rate. The increases were not enough, stakeholders said.

In addition, a ₹4,000 crore scheme to benefit government schools was announced in the Budget by finance minister T. Harish Rao. Under this scheme, basic facilities in government schools will be revamped over the next two years. The minister stressed the importance of using modern technology in government schools to put classrooms on digital platforms. The government has proposed setting aside ₹33.6 crore for SC, ST welfare, and ₹1,602 crore for minorities welfare. Harish Rao said education with international standards is being provided free to the poor and backward class students. Parents are eager to send their children to study in residential schools, he said.

However, Telangana State United Teachers' Federation (TSUTF), Telangana Private Teachers Forum (TPTF), Students Islamic Organisation of India (SIO) among others expressed disappointment over the allocations. The TSUTF said these allocations were not enough to develop of schools, provide infrastructure, recruit teachers and improve online education. "Of the ₹2.3 lakh crore Budget, earmarking ₹11,735 crore for school education and ₹2,000 crore for infrastructure is unreasonable," said the TSUTF. It demanded that the state government allocate at least ₹5,000 crore a year for



Minister of MA&UD K.T. Rama Rao meets Telangana Finance Minister Harish Rao before the assembly budget presentation, in Hyderabad on Thursday.

## Ministers praise KCR, hail state Budget

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 18

State ministers claimed that the Budget was a testament to Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Rao's vision for a progressive state. "KCR has fulfilled his commitment to farmers once again by making huge allocations

infrastructure creation. The private teachers forum said the allocation for the education sector remains dismal which, they said, was discouraging. "In 2014-15, out of the ₹1,00,637 crore Budget, ₹10,963 crore was allocated for education, which was 10.89 per cent. The budget size has doubled to ₹2,30,825.96 crore for

for agriculture and allied sectors," they said.

Ministers Errabelli Dayakar Rao, Allola Indrakaran Reddy, Vemula Prashanth Reddy and Satyavathi Rathod said the Budget gave equal priority for employment, agriculture and welfare.

2021-22 but only 6.78 per cent or ₹15,608 crore is the allocation for education. Going by the Budget size, the government should allocate at least ₹23,000 crore," they said.

Students from minority communities said that the budget cuts in scholarships were responsible for minority enrolment

They said the allocations were higher than of the previous Budget, and this would contribute to the comprehensive development of tribals and women.

They said, ₹250crore has been earmarked for the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation

by way of development funds, which will give a fillip to the region's growth. On behalf of women and tribals, especially of the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation and of the people of the state, the ministers thanked the Chief Minister.

ana Azad Fellowship in the last six to seven years has resulted in this poor minority enrolment figure. The government should immediately hike the scholarships and take necessary steps in terms of policy intervention to provide reservation for select backward castes among minorities," they demanded.

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## BUDGET FOR COPS INCREASED BY ₹613 CR THIS YR

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 18

Finance minister T. Harish Rao allocated ₹6,465 crore to the police, an increase of ₹613 crore over the previous year. He allocated ₹725 crore for the construction of the police command control centre. The intelligence department got ₹30 crore more, from ₹11.02 crore last year to ₹41.16 crore proposed in the state Budget on Thursday.

Harish Rao said ₹230.61 crore will be allocated to the Hyderabad commissionerate, a drop of ₹6 crore from last year. Cyberabad and Rachakonda commissionerates have been allotted ₹20 crore and ₹15.86 crore.

Harish Rao allocated ₹20 crore for construction of toilets in police stations for women police and visitors as well as women in custody. While the Nirbhaya Fund gets ₹1 crore under the 'Safe City' project, ₹50 lakh each have been allocated for SHE Teams, and Bharosa centres. The budget for the DGP office was slashed by ₹86 crore to ₹234.85 crore (last year ₹321.59 crore). Prison and correctional services were given ₹18.52 crore, ₹1.5 crore more. The State Disaster Response and Fire Services budget was increased to ₹7.50 crore.

● **Nirbhaya Fund gets ₹1 crore under the 'Safe City' project, ₹50 lakh each have been allocated for SHE Teams, and Bharosa centres.**

## CARBIDE FREE MANGOES FOR SALE IN KHAMMAM

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, MARCH 18

Rythu Bandu Samithi (RBS) district coordinator Nalamala Venkateswara Rao inaugurated carbide free mango mela in Pavilion grounds in Khammam on Thursday. Banothu Laxman

## FISHERIES DEPARTMENTS TO GET ₹1,730 CR

SANJAY SAMUEL PAUL | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 18

The government will provide ₹3,000 crore for the sheep distribution scheme according to the state Budget. The animal husbandry, dairy development and fisheries departments will get ₹1,730 crore.

The government helped the state-owned Vijaya Dairy which had a debt of ₹30 crore but now has fixed deposits of

₹58.5 crore. With the government releasing fish seedlings in water bodies across the state, fish production, which was worth ₹2,479 crore at the time of the state's formation has risen to ₹4,670 crore, while fish production rose from 2,49,633 tonnes to 3,10,000 tonnes. The government is releasing fish seed in 18,355 reservoirs at a cost of ₹268.37 crore, finance minister Harish Rao said.

# Parents to go jail if minors found driving vehicles

DC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, MARCH 18

Warangal Commissioner of Police P. Promod Kumar warned parents that if they were found to have been providing vehicles for their minor wards to drive, they would be jailed.

The vehicle owners who give their vehicles to minors will also suffer a similar fate, he said. Releasing a 40-second awareness video clip about underage driving, here on Thursday, he said the move was aimed at curbing underage driving and mishaps, the Commissioner said. "This 40-second video clip is intended to enlighten the people about the possible risks if they allow the minors to drive the vehicles," Commissioner said. "By holding the parents responsible for allowing their children to drive we want them to feel extra cautious," he added.

As soon as the minor is found driving, their parents

would be notified and called to the police station. After conducting counselling, the case would be booked under section 199A of the motor vehicles (amendment) act 2019 and they would be produced before the court.

According to Section 180 of the Central Motor Vehicle Act, no person under the age of 18 shall drive a motor vehicle in any public place. However, a motor vehicle with an engine capacity not exceeding 50cc may be driven in a public place by a person after attaining the age of 16, provided they have parent's consent.

Whoever, being the owner or person in charge of a motor vehicle, causes or permits, any other person who does not satisfy the provisions of section 3 or section 4 to drive the vehicle shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months, or with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees, or with both.

# Y.S. Rajashekar had intense bond with Karimnagar: Sharmila

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KARIMNAGAR, MARCH 18

Former Chief Minister, late Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy had an intense bond with the Karimnagar district. The pulse of the entire Telangana can be felt by standing at the Kaman chowrasta of the Karimnagar city, said Y.S. Sharmila.

In view of establishing a new political party in Telangana, Sharmila held a Atmayee Sammelanam meeting with Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy fans of old Karimnagar district at Lotus Pond in Hyderabad on Thursday.

Addressing the gathering, Sharmila said that Karimnagar is the reflection for the Telangana state and Singareni, the 'city of energy' which is present in the district is a big asset for the entire region.

Karimnagar has given birth to talented people like Narayana Reddy and Gidde Rammulu. It is the weavers of the district who woven a saree which can be fixed in a match box.

Unable to see farmers problems, Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy introduced free current supplying scheme to the farming sector and sanctioned loans to farmers through banks. When people of weavers community committed suicide, ₹1.5 lakh exgratia was granted to their family members during the reign of Rajashekar Reddy. He is responsible for transforming the Karimnagar into a rice bowl of the state, she reminded. The credit for construction Yellampalli and Mid Manair Reservoirs, establish-

● **Unable to see farmers problems, Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy introduced free current supplying scheme to the farming sector and sanctioned loans to farmers through banks said Sharmila.**

ment of Satavahana University, construction of Rajiv Highway from Karimnagar to Ramagundam goes to Mr.Rajashekar Reddy, she added.

Criticising the TRS government for not paying compensation to the oustees of Mid Manair Dam (MMD) she alleged that TRS government betrayed the oustees without fulfilling its promise of ₹5 lakh compensation after grabbing lands from them.

"The government used third degree on dalits of Nerella who questioned it about the sand mafia. One can understand how much affection the TRS has towards dalits with such incidents.

It is very sad to know that the ruling party leaders are involved in the murder case of the High Court advocate couple.

Even after formation of separate statehood of Telangana, migration to Mumbai and Dubai not stopped because of failure of TRS government in showing employment opportunities to unemployed youth, she alleged. Sharmila said that her main intention is to establish Rajanna Rajyam and for the well being of all sections of people. "With the support of Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy fans, I am ready to face all hurdles and fight for good cause," she added.

# Budget proposals not rooted in reality: BJP

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 18

T. Raja Singh, BJP floor leader in the Assembly, alleged that the Budget would be limited to the books would not be implemented in the state. He said the proposals were not rooted in reality.

Singh asked how had the government spent ₹1,500 on the Musli river development project, as the results were not seen. He likened the Budget to the Musli river. He asked why there was no allocation for the Osmania General Hospital when the Chief Minister had promised ₹200 crore. He also pointed out no money had been given for sports.

BJP MLA M. Raghunandan Rao said the government had been promising ₹500 crore for Gulf

● **ARUNA POINTED out that ₹16,900 crore had been allocated for the irrigation sector while ₹1 lakh crore was required. No funds had been allocated to the Gattu and Palamuru Ranga Reddy lift irrigation schemes**

workers but no allocation had been made.

He asked why no allocation was made to Osmania University, which played a key role in the Telangana movement. He pointed out that the Budget had not provisioned for the unemployment stipend.

Elsewhere, BPP vice-president D.K. Aruna called the Budget a 'numbers game'. She wondered whether the government count reach

its Budget goals.

Aruna pointed out that ₹16,900 crore had been allocated for the irrigation sector while ₹1 lakh crore was required. No funds had been allocated to the Gattu and Palamuru Ranga Reddy lift irrigation schemes.

The former minister said the government had failed to waive loans of the handloom workers, insurance was not given to families of the deceased, and establishment of handloom parks had not progressed.

She ridiculing the announcement of funds to the panchayat raj and rural development department and said most of the development in the gram panchayats has been achieved from Central funds.

# No new schemes, ₹1,603 cr allocated for minorities

ATHER MOIN | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 18

The state government has provided ₹1,602 crore (₹1,513 crore in 2020-21) for minorities in the Budget of which two-thirds has been marked for education and academics. No new schemes were introduced for the minorities on Thursday.

Finance minister T. Harish Rao proposed an allocation of ₹561 crore for the Telangana Minorities Residential Educational Institutions Society which has 1 lakh students. He said the government had allotted 10 acres for the Islamic Cultural Convention Centre at Kokapet and works would commence very shortly, but it was not allocated any funds. The budget provided

● **THE GOVERNMENT has enhanced the budgetary allocation for the remuneration of imams and muezzins from ₹55.1 crore to ₹66 crore, while it has remained static at ₹300 crore for Shadi Mubarak. The Dawat-e-Ifar and Christmas Feast have been allocated ₹66 crore and ₹2.5 crore respectively.**

₹206.9 crore for reimbursement of tuition fee, ₹74.81 crore for scholarships and stipends, ₹5.51 crore for training and employment and ₹2.46 crore for scholarships for non-professional courses and ₹72.54 crore for overseas scholarships. The government has enhanced the budgetary allocation for the remuneration of imams and muezzins from ₹55.1

crore to ₹66 crore, while it has remained static at ₹300 crore for Shadi Mubarak.

The Dawat-e-Ifar and Christmas Feast have been allocated ₹66 crore and ₹2.5 crore respectively.

The Bank-Linked Income Generation Scheme was given ₹28.31 crore and the Christian Minorities Finance Corporation ₹2.5 crore.

The Urdu Academy will get cumulatively ₹12.5 crore, and the Haj Committee and Dairatil Maarif ₹1.5 crore each. The state government has allocated ₹42 crore for the Multi-Sectoral Programme for Minorities. For maintenance and repairs of Macca Masjid and Shahi Masjid, 2.5 crore were allocated.

Khammam had a huge demand in Mumbai and Delhi.

He said that Sureka, Himayat and Daseri, Mallika, Suvarnarekha and Banginapalli varieties are being raised in Khammam district. Mangoes are available at price of ₹100 rs per kilo.



## SHORT TAKES

## SC TO HEAR PLEA ON ROHINGYAS ON MARCH 25

PARMOD KUMAR | DC  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to hear on March 25 a plea for immediate release of Rohingya refugees detained in Jammu and to restrain the Centre from deporting them to Myanmar.

Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde heading a bench also comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramasubramanian agreed to hear the plea as lawyer Prashant Bhusan pointed out that the detained refugees may be soon deported to Myanmar where the Army has taken over and violence is taking place and policemen too are fleeing to India.

The application for the release of Rohingya refugees and to prevent their deportation has been filed by a fellow refugee Mohammad Salimullah. The plea has sought to protect rights of Rohingya refugees guaranteed under Article 14 and Article 21, read with Article 51(c) of the Constitution, against their deportation as they had taken refuge in India after escaping widespread violence and discrimination against their community in Myanmar.

"Release the detained Rohingya refugees immediately and direct the Union Territory government and the ministry of home affairs to expeditiously grant Refugee identification cards through the FRRO for Rohingyas in informal camps," says the plea.

## HC REFUSES TO STAY RELEASE OF 'MUMBAI SAGA'

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC  
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

The Bombay High Court on Thursday permitted the release of the Hindi film "Mumbai Saga" on March 19, after refusing to allow a plea seeking a stay to the release. The HC refused to grant any relief to gangster D.K. Rao, alias Ravi Bohra, and the family members of underworld don Amar Naik and his brother Ashwin Naik, who had approached the court.

The families sought stay on the release of the film on the grounds that the release, publication and telecast of the film would lead to violation of right to privacy, fair trial and liberty of the two.

One of the major reasons for seeking a stay on the release of the film was that the trial against Bohra and Naik was likely to begin soon and the film, if released, would cause a prejudice to their case. Both the persons have been charged under the provisions of stringent law Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA).

## INDIA HUNTS FOR DRONE INTERCEPTORS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

The home ministry has started a massive global search for "drone interceptors" since frequency of drones coming in from Pakistan has increased substantially in Punjab since October last when farmer agitation gained momentum.

The Punjab government has asked home ministry to take immediate corrective measures. Sources said Punjab Chief Minister Capt. Amarinder Singh had raised this specific issue during his meeting with Union home minister Amit Shah a few months ago.

## Kerala polls, a prestige issue for Rahul Gandhi

## Cong. leader has been actively working on poll strategy

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who skipped the joint rally with the Left following the 'controversial' alliance with the ISF is focussing more on Kerala. For Gandhi Kerala Assembly polls has become a "prestige" issue as the reports coming in show a slight edge to the ruling LDF. He is a Lok Sabha MP from Wayanad in Kerala. The Congress leaders were currently engaged in a public disagreement among themselves over Bengal Congress' decision to form a triangular alliance with the Left and the ISF, a new political outfit launched by Furfura Sharif's pizrada Abbas Siddiqui.

Attaching priority to Kerala, Gandhi has been visiting the state quite frequently. In fact, he launched the campaigning for the state polls even before any of the three top BJP leaders — Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah and party president J.P. Nadda did.

In the states going to polls this year Kerala seems to be the brightest option for the Congress. Historically the state has a cyclic tradition but this time the LDF may break this rule. If the Left succeeds in breaking the jinx and winning the ensuing elections, it would be an embarrassment for the Congress in general and Gandhi in particular because he is an MP from the state.

After the Jammu outing of some of the G23 writers the pressure is also on Gandhi to deliver positive results in the Assembly states. If the party loses in the state from where he is a Lok Sabha MP it will not look good on him.

With an eye on Assembly polls Gandhi in one of his statements in Kerala had said that politics in Kerala is mostly issue-based rather than on other issues that caused a sharp reaction from MPs of BJP of northern states. Insiders claim that Gandhi has been instrumental in ticket distribution and has actively worked in the election strategy too. In the coming days several other rallies of Gandhi across the state are planned to ensure maximum seats for the party.

## CONGRESS DIVIDED ASSAM IN ALL POSSIBLE WAYS, SAYS MODI

MANOJ ANAND | DC  
GUWAHATI, MARCH 18

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Thursday, blamed the Congress party for making Assam one of the most disconnected states in the country.

Addressing a massive public rally in Karimganj in poll-bound Assam, Mr Modi accused the Congress party of indulging in "corruption and vote-bank-based governance" which has caused immense damage to the state.

Asserting that the NDA government has overcome the injustice made to the state, he said, "Decades ago, this entire region was one that had better connectivity. Rail connectivity was very poor in Barak Valley, and people have continuously demanded for it. Quality of roads, too, was poor. People had to travel long distances to reach

different parts of Assam."

Pointing out as to how connectivity of the region has improved manifolds during the NDA regime, the Prime Minister while addressing his first election rally after the Election Commission announced poll schedule for the state, Modi said, "During its rule, the Congress party divided Assam in all possible ways. But the BJP government has been connecting it on all fronts. We are not just connecting the state just physically, but also culturally."

Launching a frontal attack on Congress that ruled the state for 15 years at a stretch before the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2016, the Prime Minister said that the situation within the Congress is such that it can do anything for votes.

## VOTERS BEING BRIBED: DMK

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR  
CHENNAI, MARCH 18

The penultimate day for filing of nominations to contest the April 6 Assembly elections saw a spate of papers being submitted across the State even as parties cracked the whip on rebels and also lodged complaints with the election authorities against rival candidates, seeking action.

DMK organisation secretary R.S. Bharathi wrote to the Chief Election Commissioner saying that his party candidate from Thondamuthur constituency Karthikeya Sivasenapathy had reliable information on AIADMK candidate S.P. Velumani gearing up to pay voters through Google Pay and other online money transfer plat-

● MANY CANDIDATES filed nominations to contest the Assembly elections on Thursday.

forms. Bharathi urged the Election Commission to take immediate steps to monitor such online money transfer, particularly in the constituencies where AIADMK Ministers were contesting. In Thondamuthur, Velumani's supporters were collecting phone numbers of the general public for making the money transfers, he alleged.

The AIADMK also removed its sitting MLA C. Chandrasekaran, representing Sethamangalam, for filing his nomination from the same constituency as a rebel candidate after the party denied him the ticket and also vowing to defeat the official party nominee.

## EVEN WITH CENTRAL FORCES, PRE-POLL VIOLENCE ERUPTS IN WB

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, MARCH 18

Pre-poll violence, a common scene in West Bengal, erupted on Thursday amid heavy

deployment of central paramilitary forces in the state.

In the afternoon, a BJP candidate Shital Kapat who is contesting from Ghatal in West Midnapore was

allegedly beaten with sticks and bamboo poles by angry TMC supporters when he visited Kotolpur village for a poll campaign with party workers.



## India records 35,871 new Covid-19 cases

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

India has so far detected 400 cases of Covid-19 infected with the highly contagious United Kingdom, Brazil and South Africa mutant variant of the virus. These three variants also have the potential to re-infect people who have been previously infected with Covid-19 though till now in India no such case of re-infection has been reported, minister of state for health, Ashwini Choubey, said in Rajya Sabha while citing findings from World Health Organisation (WHO).

Of these 400 cases, 158 were reported in the last two weeks and on March 4, there were 242 such cases across the country.

Meanwhile, the cumulative national positivity rate was 4.98 per cent on Thursday as India's daily Covid-19 cases surged to 35,871 — highest since early December. In the last 24 hours, 172 deaths too were reported due to the virus.

Five states — Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu — continue to report a surge in daily new Covid-19 cases and

## More Covid curbs to come in TN

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 18

Some of the earlier Covid-19 preventive measures like creation of containment zones, sanitising public places and setting up well equipped monitoring centres are all set to stage a comeback, now that the state was witnessing a rise in infections.

Expanding vaccination facility to mini-clinics, public health centres and newly set up temporary hospitals and extending it to private hospitals

79.54 per cent of the new cases are from these states. Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases at 16,620 (accounting for 63.21 per cent of the daily new cases). It is followed by Kerala with 1,792 cases, while Punjab reported 1,492 new cases. Despite daily high cases, Kerala is reporting a consistently declining trend over the last one month.

keen on coming on board over and above the existing 761 hospitals were among new efforts proposed at a review meeting, presided over by Chief Secretary Rajiv Ranjan on Thursday.

The meeting attended by senior officials from health department, Corporation and other related departments wanted to monitor the vaccination dose to ensure that the vaccine was not wasted and also rope in NGOs like the Rotary Club with experience in vaccination in the exercise.

Delhi too is witnessing a rise in cases after nearly two months. Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal said On Thursday that his government is prepared to open vaccination for all categories of people to break the chain of transmission and put an end to the cycle of waves. He said, if permitted, his government can vaccinate everyone in Delhi in three months.

## SPEAK | UP SC set aside the MP HC's order that created uproar

## Break the silence: SC tells victim

PARMOD KUMAR | DC  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

The Supreme Court on Thursday set aside a Madhya Pradesh High Court order directing an accused in a rape case to tie Rakhi on victim as a condition for bail as top court urged victim women not to suffer and break silence.

Noting that the actual number of cases of offences against women are much higher than that are reported, the court called upon women not to suffer in silence but and speak up. "This silence needs to be broken.

In doing so, men, perhaps more than women have a duty and role to play in averting and combating violence against women", said Justice S. Ravindra Bhat who authored the judgment.

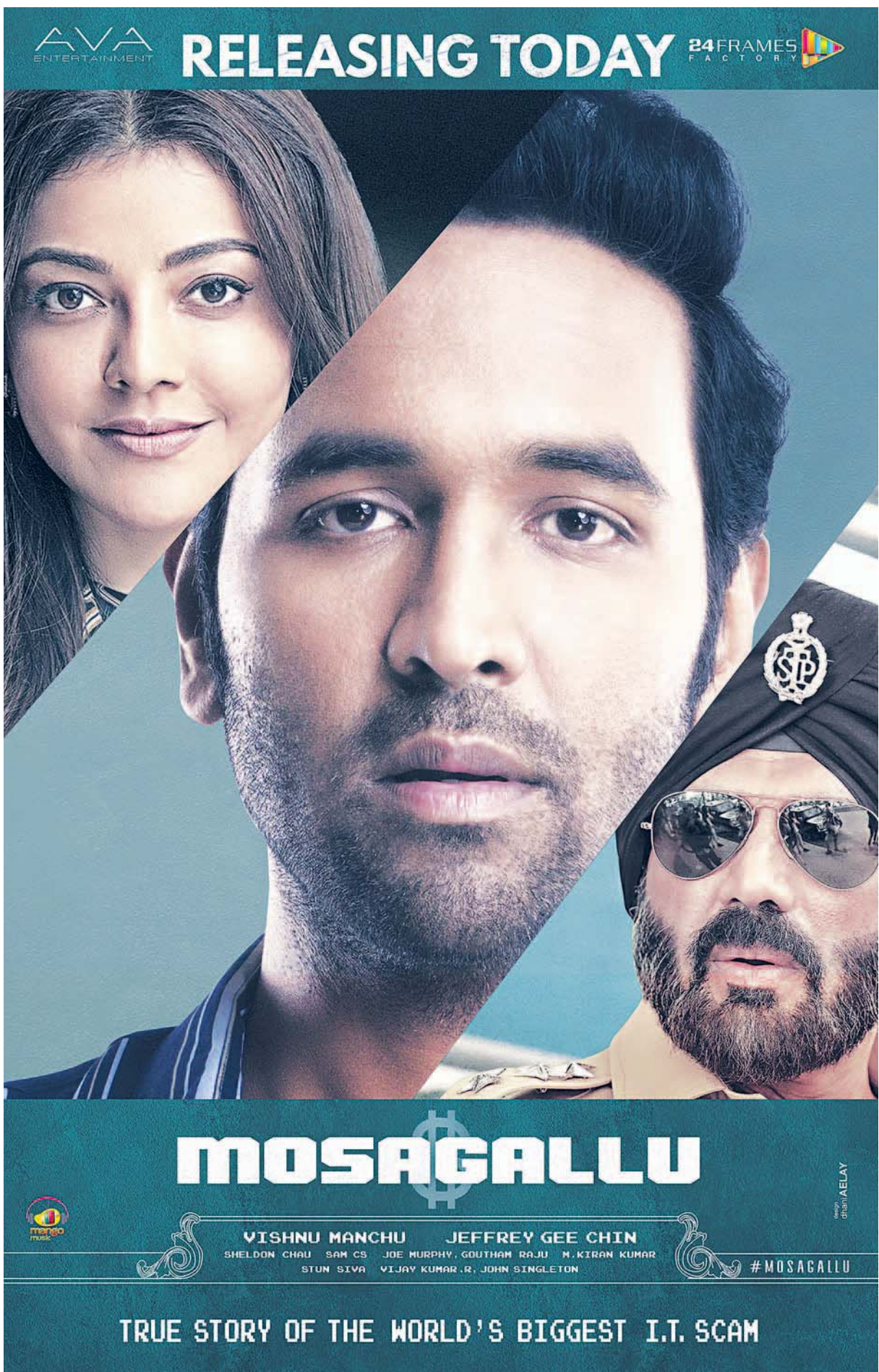
Having set aside the HC order that had created uproar, a bench comprising Justice A.M. Khanwilkar and Justice S. Ravindra Bhat in its judgment said, "The role of all courts is to make sure that the survivor can rely on their impartiality and neutrality, at every stage in a criminal proceeding, where she is the survivor and an aggrieved party."

"Judges play — at all levels — a vital role as teachers and thought leaders. It is their role to be impartial in words and action, at all times. If they falter, especially in gender related crimes, they imperil fairness and inflict great cruelty in the casual blindness to the despair of the survivors", the court said.

Saying that the judgment was not as much on the merits of the conditions of bail under challenge, Justice Bhat speaking for the bench said that a "wider canvas of (what appears to be) entrenched paternalistic

and misogynistic attitudes that are regrettably reflected at times in judicial orders and judgments."

Issuing a slew of directions to be followed by the subordinate judiciary while dealing with the cases involving offences against women, Justice Bhat said, "Gender violence is most often unseen and is shrouded in a culture of silence. The causes and factors of violence against women include entrenched unequal power equations between men and women that foster violence and its acceptability, aggravated by cultural and social norms."





## SHORT TAKES

## TANZANIA PREZ JOHN MAGUFULI PASSES AWAY

**Nakuru (Kenya), March 18:** President John Magufuli of Tanzania, a prominent Covid-19 skeptic in Africa whose populist rule often cast his East African country in a harsh international spotlight, has died. He was 61 years old.

Magufuli's death was announced on Wednesday by Vice President Samia Suluhu, who said the president died of heart failure. "Our beloved president passed on at 6 p.m. this evening," said Suluhu on national television.

"All flags will be flown at half-mast for 14 days. It is sad news. The president has had this illness for the past 10 years."

## COPTER CRASH KILLS NINE AFGHAN TROOPS

**Kabul, March 18:** A helicopter crash overnight has taken the lives of at least nine Afghan military personnel in a central province, the defence ministry said Thursday. In a statement, it said that four crew members of the Mi-17 helicopter along with five security personnel were killed in the crash, in the Behsud district of Maidan Wradak province. It gave no further detail except to say that investigations were ongoing.

Separately Thursday, a bombing killed four state employees commuting in a minibus in the capital Kabul, police said. Ferdaws Faramarz, spokesman for the Kabul police chief, said a woman was among the dead and nine other people were wounded in the attack in the city's north. No one immediately claimed responsibility.

## PARAGUAY'S PREZ SURVIVES IMPEACHMENT

**Asuncion, March 18:** President Mario Abdo Benítez survived an opposition attempt in Paraguay's congress to impeach him Wednesday over his handling of the coronavirus pandemic, while hundreds protested outside the legislature demanding his resignation.

The Chamber of Deputies, which is dominated by his governing Colorado Party, voted 42 to 36 to reject impeachment. Outside, hundreds of protesters threw stones at police who responded with water cannons and rubber bullets.

Some protesters smashed store windows and car windshields, while shouting anti-Abdo slogans.

Several people were arrested. Recent days have seen a series of protests against Abdo's government.

## RUTTE WINNING MOST SEATS IN DUTCH VOTE

**The Hague, March 18:** Dutch voters pushed PM Mark Rutte toward a fourth term in office in Wednesday's general election that bolstered his conservative party's position as the biggest in parliament and boosted a key ally into second place, an exit poll suggested.

With Rutte's bloc and other mainstream parties thriving, the far-right failed again to make a major breakthrough despite its hopes of appealing to populist sentiments and capitalising on the severe economic downturn and pandemic that has killed 16,000 people in the Netherlands.

Rutte, 54, has now won four elections in a row. He has been in power for more than a decade at the head of three different coalitions.

## STORMS LEAVE DAMAGE TRAIL IN DEEP SOUTH

**Birmingham (Alabama), March 18:** Storms that left splintered homes and broken trees across Alabama and Mississippi moved into Georgia and Florida on Thursday, rousing residents with early morning warnings as forecasters said the threat of dangerous weather would move up the south Atlantic seaboard.

About 20,000 homes and businesses were without power and the weather service said at least two people were hurt when an apparent tornado struck southwest Alabama, destroying a house, but the region appeared to escape the kind of horrific toll many feared after ominous predictions of monster twisters and huge hail. Forecasters issued a string of tornado warnings.

## Man held with gun outside US VP home

Kamala Harris currently doesn't live there

**Washington, March 18:** A 31-year-old man has been arrested outside United States' Vice President Kamala Harris' official residence in Washington, D.C. on weapons and ammunition charges, according to media reports.

The arrest comes as the district is in a state of heightened security following the Jan. 6 insurrection attempt at the United States Capitol.

Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff, do not currently live at the Naval Observatory, as the official residence of the United States' Vice President is undergoing renovation. The couple is living at Blair House, near the White House.

The Texas man was detained by United States Secret Service on Wednesday following an intelligence bulletin, a spokesperson for Washington's Metropolitan Police was quoted as saying by *CNN*.

Police said the officers arrested and charged Paul Murray, of San Antonio, and that a rifle and ammunition were recovered from his vehicle, it said.

A police report shows

**31** year-old man has been arrested outside US Vice President Kamala Harris' official residence in Washington, D.C. on weapons and ammunition charges, according to media reports.

**05** 30 round magazines, AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, 113 rounds of unregistered ammunition were in possession of Paul Murray of San Antonio and that was recovered from his vehicle.

officers allege Murray was in possession of an "AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, 113 rounds of unregistered ammunition, and five 30 round magazines." According to police, he's

been charged with several counts: Carrying a dangerous weapon, carrying a rifle or shotgun outside of a business, possession of unregistered ammunition and possession of a large capacity ammunition feeding device.

The United States Secret Service told *CNN* in a statement that Uniformed Division officers detained the man before Metropolitan Police arrived on the scene.

A Secret Service official said none of the agency's protectees were at the residence at the time of the incident.

Violent pro-Trump supporters, fuelled by the belief that President Biden and Harris had stolen the election from Donald Trump, stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, threatening lawmakers and law enforcement officers.

Five people, including a police officer, were killed in the violence. Since the violent incidents, security and intelligence officials have often warned about the dangers of home-grown extremism in America.

— PTI

## TIME FOR INDIA, PAK TO BURY THE PAST: BAJWA

**Islamabad, March 18:** Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa said on Thursday that it was time for India and Pakistan to "bury the past and move forward" as he asserted that the peace between the two neighbours would help to "unlock" the potential of South and Central Asia.

Addressing a session of the first-ever Islamabad Security Dialogue here, Gen Bajwa also said that the potential for regional peace and development always remained hostage to the disputes and issues between Pakistan and India — the two "nuclear-armed neighbours".

"We feel it is time to bury the past and move forward," he said, adding that the responsibility for a meaningful dialogue rested with India.

India last month said that it desires normal relations with Pakistan in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence. India has also told Pakistan that "talks and terror" cannot go together. — PTI

## Man charged for killings in Atlanta

**Atlanta (US), March 18:** A white gunman was charged with killing eight people at three Atlanta-area massage parlours in an attack that sent terror through the Asian American community, which has increasingly been targeted during the Coronavirus pandemic.

A day after the shootings, investigators were trying to unravel what might have compelled 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long to commit the worst mass killing in the US in almost two years. Long told police that Tuesday's attack was not racially motivated. He claimed to have a "sex addiction," and authorities said he apparently lashed out at what he saw as sources of temptation. But those statements spurred outrage and widespread scepticism given the locations and that six of the eight victims were women of Asian descent. The shootings appear to be at the "intersection of gender-based violence, misogyny and xenophobia," state Rep. Bee Nguyen said, the first Vietnamese American to serve in the Georgia House

● **AUTHORITIES SAID** they didn't know if Long ever went to the massage parlors where the shootings occurred but that he was heading to Florida to attack "some type of porn industry." of the Chief Ministers appeal to private schools to only collect tuition fees, and exempt all other fees.

and a frequent advocate for women and communities of colour.

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms said that regardless of the shooter's motivation, "it is unacceptable." Authorities said they didn't know if Long ever went to the massage parlors where the shootings occurred but that he was heading to Florida to attack "some type of porn industry." "He apparently has an issue, what he considers a sex addiction, and sees these locations as something that allows him to go to these places, and it's a temptation for him that he wanted to eliminate," Cherokee County sheriff's Capt. Jay Baker said. — AP

## Mars rover sends back driving sounds

**Cape Canaveral (US), March 18:** Nasa's newest Mars rover has sent back the first-ever sounds of driving on the red planet — a grinding, clanking, banging affair that by Earth standards would be pretty worrisome.

The noises made by Perseverance's six metal wheels and suspension on the first test drive two weeks ago are part of a 16-minute raw audio feed released Wednesday by Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

"If I heard these sounds driving my car, I'd pull over and call for a tow," Dave Gruel, an engineer

on the rover team, said in a written Nasa statement.

"But if you take a minute to consider what you're hearing and where it was recorded, it makes perfect sense." Perseverance — the biggest, most advanced rover ever sent to Mars — landed near an ancient river delta on February 18 to search for signs of past life.

Samples will be taken from the most promising rocks for eventual return to Earth. The rover carries two microphones.

One already has captured the sounds of wind and rock-zapping lasers, the other was meant to

record the descent and landing. This second mike didn't pick up any sounds of the rover's arrival at Mars, but managed to record the first test drive March 4.

The driving audio contains a unexpected high-pitched scratching noise, according to Nasa. Engineers are trying to figure it out. Before it starts drilling into rocks for core samples, Perseverance will drop off an experimental tag-along helicopter, named Ingenuity. The helicopter will attempt the first powered, controlled flight on another planet sometime next month. — AP

## TECH | SAWVY

100,000 women held rallies against misogyny, dangerous workplace cultures

## Oz police boss for app to prove sexual consent

**Canberra, March 18:** A senior Australian policeman suggested on Thursday a phone app be developed to document sexual consent in a bid to improve conviction rates in sex crime cases. New South Wales state Police Commissioner Mick Muller said dating apps have brought couples together and the same technology could also provide clarity on the question of consent.

"Technology doesn't fix everything, but ... it plays such a big role in people meeting at the moment. I'm just suggesting: Is it part of the solution?" he said. He said the number

of sexual assaults reported in Australia's most populous state was increasing while a prosecution success rate of only 2 per cent stemming from those reports showed the system was failing.

"Consent can't be implied," he wrote in News Corp. newspapers. "Consent must be active and ongoing throughout a sexual encounter." Responses to the consent app suggestion have been largely negative or skeptical. State Premier Gladys Berejiklian congratulated him on "taking a leadership position on having the conversation" about the sexual

● **THE PUBLIC** anger erupted after the Australian attorney general denied an allegation that he raped a 16-year-old girl 33 years ago, and a former government staffer alleged that she was raped two years ago by a colleague in a minister's Parliament House office.

assault problem, but declined to share her opinion on the app.

Lesley-Anne Ey, a University of South Australia expert on harmful sexual behaviour involving children, said she didn't think

## Protest against euthanasia in Spain



Anti-euthanasia protesters stand outside the Spanish Parliament in Madrid on Thursday. Spain has become the seventh country in the world and fourth in Europe to allow physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia for patients suffering long from incurable diseases or unbearable permanent conditions. The parliament's lower house on Thursday gave the final go-ahead to the euthanasia bill in a 202-140 vote with two abstentions. Banner in Spanish reads: Government of Death.

— AP

## Biden remark reflects US own past, says Putin

**Moscow, March 18:** Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that US President Joe Biden's remarks about him reflect US own past and current problems. Biden was asked in an interview whether he thought Russian President Vladimir Putin is a killer and said "I do."

Russia on Wednesday announced it's recalling its ambassador in Washington for consultations. Asked about Biden's remarks during a video call with residents of Crimea marking the anniversary of its 2014 annexation from Ukraine, Putin charged that they reflect the United States' own troubled past.

The Russian leader

## RUSSIAN FM LAVROV TO VISIT CHINA

**Beijing, March 18:** Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will visit China next week amidst the stepped-up efforts by the two countries to further solidify their close

ties to counter the Biden administration's plan to pursue a tough policy towards Beijing and Moscow on a host of issues including human rights violations. — PTI

pointed at America's past history of slaughtering Native Americans and slavery, arguing that the painful legacy has weighed on the United States. "Otherwise where would the Black Lives Matter movement come from," he said. He added that Russia would still cooperate with the United States where it answers Moscow's interests.

ties to counter the Biden administration's plan to pursue a tough policy towards Beijing and Moscow on a host of issues including human rights violations. — PTI

ties to counter the Biden administration's plan to pursue a tough policy towards Beijing and Moscow on a host of issues including human rights violations. — PTI

— AP

## N. KOREA'S NO TO U.S. OFFER FOR TALKS

**Seoul, March 18:** North Korea said Thursday it will ignore a United States offer for talks unless it withdraws its hostile policy on the North, days after Washington said it reached out to Pyongyang through various channels.

The statement by Choe Son Hui, the first foreign minister, came hours before the top diplomats and defense chiefs of the United States and South Korea meet in Seoul in their first joint talks in five years to discuss North Korea's nuclear programme.

We don't think there is need to respond to the US delaying-time trick again, Choe said in a statement carried by state media. We have already declared our stand that no (North Korea)-US contact and dialogue of any kind can be possible unless the US rolls back its hostile policy toward (North Korea). Therefore, we will disregard such an attempt of the US in the future, too. — AP

## US-China ties face new test in Alaska

**Washington, March 18:** The United States and China will face a new test in their increasingly troubled relations when top officials from both countries meet in Alaska. Ties between the world's two largest economies have been torn for years and the Biden administration has yet to signal it's ready or willing to back down on the hard-line stances taken under President Donald Trump.

Nor has China signaled it's prepared to ease the pressure it has brought to bear. Thus, the stage is set for a contentious first face-to-face meeting Thursday Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan will meet China's top two diplomats, State Councillor Wang Yi and Chinese Communist Party foreign affairs chief Yang Jiechi in Anchorage, Alaska.

Difficult discussions are anticipated over trade, human rights in Tibet, Hong Kong, China's western Xinjiang region, Taiwan, Chinese assertiveness in the South China

Sea, and the coronavirus pandemic. No agreements are expected.

"This really is a one-off meeting," said a senior administration official. "This is not the resumption of a particular dialogue mechanism or the beginning of a dialogue process." The official briefed reporters ahead of the meeting on the condition of anonymity. Blinken will attend the meeting having just come from Japan and South Korea, where he and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin were promoting the Biden administration's commitment to its treaty allies in Asia. Just a day before the meeting, Blinken announced new sanctions on officials over China's crackdown on pro-democracy advocates in Hong Kong.

In response, the Chinese stepped up their rhetoric opposing US interference in domestic affairs. China, not unexpectedly, slammed the US criticism of the move to give a pro-Beijing committee power to appoint more of Hong Kong's lawmakers. — AP

## TALK INDIA ON RUSSIAN S-400, AUSTIN TOLD

**Washington, March 18:** An top American Senator has urged US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin to take up with the Indian leaders the issue of India's plan to purchase Russian S-400 missile defence system and concerns on human rights issues during his visit to New Delhi this week. Austin, the first-ever US defence secretary to include India on his maiden foreign trip, is scheduled to meet his counterpart Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit K. Doval, during his New Delhi visit from March 19 to 21.

Getting the US-India partnership right is critical to addressing 21st-century challenges, and that includes urging the Indian government to uphold democratic values and human rights, Senator Robert Menendez, Chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, wrote in a letter to Austin. In meetings with Indian counterparts during your upcoming visit, I strongly encourage you to make clear that in all areas, including security cooperation, the US-India partnership must rest on adherence to democratic values, Menendez said in his letter, a copy of which was released to the press on Wednesday. In his capacity as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Menendez plays a key role in influencing the country's foreign policy and national security. — PTI

## NEPAL'S RULING PARTY FORMS PARL BOARD

**Kathmandu, March 18:** The parliamentary party meeting of Nepal's ruling CPN-UML, led by Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, formed a 24-member parliamentary board and three-member statute amendment task force on Thursday even as leaders of the rival faction boycotted the meet, according to media reports.

Over 100 lawmakers close to Oli, who is also the party's Chairperson, took part in the meeting held at the Prime Minister's official residence in Baluwatar.

The 27-member parliamentary board, which will be headed by Prime Minister Oli, includes leaders of the party's rival faction Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhala Nath Khanal, *myRepublica* newspaper reported.

The board will be full-fledged after three more members are added to it. Padam Giri, a lawmaker, said it was also decided to form a three-member task force to amend the party's statute. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## Tokyo ticket for safe bet Sharath

**Doha:** The seasoned Achanta Sharath Kamal on Thursday became the first Indian paddler to qualify for the Tokyo Olympic Games after a dominant win over Pakistan's Muhammad Rameez at the Asian Olympic Qualification tournament in Doha.

The veteran Indian thrashed Rameez 11-4, 11-1, 11-5, 11-4 in little over 22 minutes in the second men's singles round-robin match in the South Asia group. Kamal had lost his opening match 9-11, 13-15, 11-5, 11-7, 12-10, 9-11, 8-11 to compatriot Gnanasekaran Sathiyian. The win over Rameez ensured at least a second-place finish for Kamal and it was enough to secure a spot in the delayed Games, scheduled to begin in July.

One quota is awarded to the highest-ranked second-placed player in the event. Sharath being the top-ranked player in the group, secured the berth under the Asian quota. It will be his fourth appearance at the Olympic Games.

## Oly official quits after sexist mock

**Tokyo:** The creative director for Tokyo's Olympic ceremonies resigned on Thursday for suggesting a female comedian appear as a pig, just weeks after the Games' chief stepped down over insulting remarks about women.

Hiroshi Sasaki announced his decision after a report on Wednesday revealed his proposal that Naomi Watanabe, a popular celebrity and plus-size model, appear as an "Olympig" wearing pig ears at the opening ceremony.

In a statement released early Thursday, Sasaki apologised to Watanabe and said he understood his suggestion was inappropriate.

"My idea would be a huge insult to Ms. Naomi Watanabe. This can't be taken back," he said. "I regret this from the bottom of my heart, and I deeply apologise to her and everyone who felt discomfort over this," he added. Watanabe, in a statement issued through her agency, said she was "surprised" by the remarks. — *AFP*

## Mary's Dream project for boxers

**New Delhi:** Dream Sports Foundation (DSF) on Thursday announced partnership with the Mary Kom Regional Boxing Foundation (MKRBF) to support six talented female pugilists from Imphal. Through this partnership, DSF will facilitate training and provide educational and financial assistance to promising boxers for the next one year. The support to the boxers through this partnership will include year-round technical training, provision of apparel and equipment, accommodation, tournament exposure, diet and nutrition, education and tuition and other extracurricular activities, a release said.

"We are grateful for Dream Sports Foundation to partner with us and help these young athletes during one of the most important stages in their lives," Mary Kom said. — *PTI*

## Ex-NBA star hit by a car, paralysed

**Los Angeles:** Former NBA star Shawn Bradley has been paralysed after being struck from behind by a car while riding a bicycle near his home in January, he revealed Wednesday. Bradley, who stood 7-foot-6 (2.29m), was the second overall pick behind Chris Webber in the 1993 NBA Draft by the Philadelphia 76ers and played 12 NBA seasons, the last eight for the Dallas Mavericks. While pedaling a block from his home in St. George, Utah, on January 20, Bradley was struck from behind by an automobile, causing a traumatic spinal cord injury that has left him paralysed. Following neck fusion surgery, Bradley has spent the past eight weeks hospitalised and undergoing rehabilitation. In 12 NBA seasons for the 76ers, New Jersey Nets and Dallas Mavericks, Bradley averaged 8.1 points, 6.3 rebounds and 2.5 blocked shots a game over 832 appearances. — *AFP*

## Live on TV

## BADMINTON

**All England Open:** Quarterfinal matches from 3.30 pm on Star Sports 2 HD, Star Sports 3

## FOOTBALL

**Italian League:** Parma vs Genoa from 1.15 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

## SURYA SCORCHES

## Slams maiden T20 fifty as India force series decider

**Ahmedabad, March 18:** A determined India beat England by eight runs in the fourth T20 International to level the five-match series 2-2 here on Thursday.

Invited to bat first, India scored 185 for eight in the stipulated 20 overs, with Suryakumar Yadav (57) and Shreyas Iyer (37) doing the bulk of scoring at the Narendra Modi Stadium.

Suryakumar's 31-ball effort was his maiden half-century in international cricket and Iyer made his runs in just 18 balls, hitting five fours and a six, as India managed to put up a challenging total.

Suryakumar smashed three sixes and six fours during his stay in the middle.

In reply, England were stopped at 177 for 8 in their full quota of overs.

All-rounder Ben Stokes top-scored for England with 46 off 23 balls while Jason Roy smashed a 27-ball 40 at the top of the order.

Suryakumar, who replaced an injured Ishan Kishan, struck six fours and three sixes in his 31-ball 57 to top score for India after being asked to bat. He debuted in the second T20I but did not bat in that match. He did not play in the third game.

India did not have a big partnership but quickfire knocks from Shreyas Iyer (37 off 18 balls) and Rishabh Pant (30 off 23) took the hosts to their highest total of the series.

England again opened the attack with leg-spinner Adil Rashid but Rohit Sharma (12) clobbered him for a six in the first ball of the match and then followed it up with a four.

But Rohit's promising innings was cut short in the fourth over as he was caught and bowled by Jofra Archer, who took career-best figures of 4/33.



India's Suryakumar Yadav plays a shot against England during their fourth Twenty20 match at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Thursday. — *AP*

Suryakumar hit Archer for a six in the first ball he faced in international cricket, picked up the gaps and found the boundaries to keep the scoreboard moving, though the England bowlers were by no means wayward. India's 45 for 1 after the powerplay was not a top-notch effort but Suryakumar smacked Rashid for a six and a four

in the seventh over to overtake opener KL Rahul (14). The home side suffered a double blow in the form of Rahul and Virat Kohli as they were pegged back to 70 for 3 in the ninth over. Rahul continued his struggle as he offered a simple catch to Archer at mid-off off the bowling of Ben Stokes while Kohli was stumped out as he danced down the

track to smash Rashid in an uncharacteristic show of aggression early in his innings. India were 75 for 3 at halfway mark with Suryakumar going great guns. He reached his maiden international fifty from just 28 deliveries, with a four off Rashid in the 12th over.

Pant joined the party as he hit two fours off Stokes in the 13th over, taking

## SCORECARD

**India:** Rohit Sharma c & b Jofra Archer 12, K. L. Rahul c Jofra Archer b Ben Stokes 14, Suryakumar Yadav c Dawid Malan b Sam Curran 57, Virat Kohli st Jos Buttler b Adil Rashid 1, Rishabh Pant b Jofra Archer 30, Shreyas Iyer c Dawid Malan b Jofra Archer 37, Hardik Pandya c Ben Stokes b Mark Wood 11, Shardul Thakur not out 10, Washington Sundar c Adil Rashid b Jofra Archer 4, Bhuvneshwar Kumar not out 0, Extras (W-4, LB-5) 9. **Total (for 8 wickets in 20 overs) 185.**

**FOW:** 21-1, 63-2, 70-3, 110-4, 144-5, 170-6, 174-7, 179-8.

**Bowling:** A. Rashid 4-1-39-1, J. Archer 4-0-33-4, M. Wood 4-1-25-1, C. Jordan 4-0-41-0, B. Stokes 3-0-26-1, S. Curran 1-0-16-1.

**England:** Jason Roy c Suryakumar Yadav b Hardik Pandya 40, Jos Buttler c KL Rahul b Bhuvneshwar Kumar 9, Dawid Malan b Rahul Chahar 14, Bairstow c Washington Sundar b Rahul Chahar 25, Ben Stokes c Suryakumar Yadav b Shardul Thakur 46, Eoin Morgan c Washington Sundar b Shardul Thakur 4, Sam Curran b Hardik Pandya 3, Chris Jordan c Hardik Pandya b Shardul Thakur 12, Jofra Archer not out 18, A. Rashid not out 0, Extras (W-4, LB-2) 6. **Total (for 8 wickets in 20 overs) 177.**

**FOW:** 15-1, 60-2, 66-3, 131-4, 140-5, 140-6, 153-7, 177-8.

**Bowling:** Bhuvneshwar Kumar 4-1-30-1, Hardik Pandya 4-0-16-2, Shardul Thakur 4-0-42-3, Washington Sundar 4-0-52-0, Rahul Chahar 4-0-35-2.

India's score to 104 for 3.

But Suryakumar was unlucky to have been given out in the 14th over after repeated replays of Dawid Malan's catch off Sam Curran by the TV umpire. A part of the ball seemed to have touched the ground but the TV umpire did not overturn the on-field umpire's decision due to lack of conclusive proof. — *PTI*

## PAKISTAN HOPE TO HOST INDIA IN 2023 ASIA CUP

**Karachi, March 18:** Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Ehsan Mani is optimistic about hosting India in the Asia Cup in 2023 and hopes the political relations between the two neighbouring countries would improve by then. Mani informed that Sri Lanka will host the Asia Cup in 2022, ruling out any chances of the continental event being staged this year in June.

"In 2022 Sri Lanka will have it (Asia Cup) and in 2023 Pakistan will be hosting the regional event. I am optimistic that by time the political relations between the two countries would have improved and this would pave the way for the Indian team to come to Pakistan," Mani said. He also said that if the Indian team visits its neighbours, it will be a "big breakthrough" for Pakistan cricket. — *PTI*

## INDONESIA PULL OUT AFTER +VE COVID-19 CASE

**Birmingham, March 18:** The Indonesian badminton team has withdrawn from the ongoing All England Championships after all the players and the officials were forced to isolate themselves for 10 days following a Covid-19 positive case in their flight to London, the world governing body (BWF) said on Thursday.

"... a number of players and team members from the Indonesian team have been contacted by the UK Government's National Health Service (NHS) Test and Trace service and are required to self-isolate with immediate effect," the BWF said in a statement.

"In accordance with UK Government requirements, the entire team will self-isolate for 10 days from the date of their inbound flight after a person travelling onboard tested positive for Covid-19," BWF added.

The world body said results of the matches that have already taken place will stand and "the draw will remain unchanged."

BWF later said that a Turkish player Neslihan Yigit was also forced to withdraw as she was on the same inbound flight from Turkey to UK as the Indonesian team. — *PTI*

## Wrestler Ritika dies by suicide

**Chandigarh, March 18:** Wrestler Ritika Phogat (17), a cousin of the Phogat sisters, allegedly committed suicide in Haryana's Charkhi Dadri district after she lost the final bout of a tournament, police said on Thursday.

Ritika took the extreme step on the night of March 15, they said.

A native of Rajasthan's Jaipur village, Ritika was staying with her uncle and Dronacharya awardee Mahavir Singh Phogat in Charkhi Dadri's Balali village under Jhohhu Kalan police station for the past four years, said Station House Officer (SHO) Dilbagh Singh.

She was upset over losing to her rival by one point in the final bout of a championship, he said.

The championship was held in Rajasthan's Bharatpur from March 12 to 14.

Ritika was learning and practising wrestling at the Mahavir Phogat Sports Academy in Charkhi Dadri.

Wrestling star Geeta Phogat described Ritika,

● **Ritika Phogat, a cousin of the Phogat sisters, was upset over losing to her rival by one point in the final of a tournament, the police said.**

her maternal cousin, as a "talented wrestler".

"It's a very sad moment for my family. Ritika was a talented wrestler and I don't know why she took such a step. Victory and defeat are a part of an athlete's life. We should never take such a step," she said in a tweet in Hindi.

Former Union minister Vijay Kumar Singh also took to *Twitter* to condole Ritika's death.

"Terrible news that we lost #RitikaPhogat who had a brilliant career ahead. The world has changed from where it was some decades ago. Athletes are facing pressures which were not there earlier. An essential part of their training should be to deal with these pressures," he said. — *PTI*



Nikhath Zareen (in blue) is declared winner over World Champion Ekaterina Patseva of Russia 5-0 in the Bosphorus Boxing Tournament in Istanbul on Thursday.

## Nikhath stuns World No.1 to make Last 8

**New Delhi, March 18:** India's Nikhat Zareen stunned reigning world champion Paltceva Ekaterina to breeze into the women's 51kg quarterfinals at the Bosphorus Boxing tournament in Istanbul here.

The Asian Championships bronze medallist, Zareen caused a major upset on the second day of the tournament on Wednesday when she out-punched the Russian boxer 5-0.

The Indian pugilist will have yet another tough bout ahead as she takes on two-time world champion Kyzaibay Nazym of Kazakhstan in her last-eight round. Apart from Zareen, 2013 Asian champion Shiva Thapa, Sonia Lather and Parveen also registered victories in their respective categories to proceed to the quarterfinals. Thapa got the better of Kazakhstan's Smagulov Baghtiyov 3-2 in the men's 63kg division.

World championship silver medallist Lather (57kg) and Parveen (60kg) beat local favourites Surmeneli Tugcenaz and Ozyol Esra 5-0 in their respective women's second round matches.

However, it was curtains for Duryodhah Negi (69kg), Brijesh Yadav (81kg) and Krishan Sharma (+91kg) as they lost their preliminary round bouts.

The third day of the event will witness six Indian boxers fighting it out in their respective quarterfinal bouts. Lather, Zareen, Parveen and Jyoti (69kg) will be seen in action in the women's category while Thapa and Solanki will present Indian challenge in the men's competition. — *PTI*

## CHELSEA BLANK ATLETICO TO SAIL INTO CL QUARTERS

**London, March 18:** Thomas Tuchel said "super hungry" Chelsea have their sights set on reaching the Champions League final after Hakim Ziyech ended his goal drought to inspire a 2-0 win against Atletico Madrid in the Last 16 second leg on Wednesday.

Morocco forward Ziyech grabbed his first goal since October to put the hosts ahead in the first half at Stamford Bridge. Emerson came off the bench to score the late goal that sealed a comfortable 3-0 aggregate victory over the lacklustre La Liga leaders.

Adding to Atletico's misery, Stefan Savic was sent off in the closing stages for elbowing Antonio Rudiger in the stomach. While Chelsea were the superior side for long periods, Atletico could justifiably claim they should have had penalty for Cesar Azpilicueta's challenge on Yannick Carrasco when the score was 0-0.

Meanwhile, holders Bayern Munich also cruised into the quarterfinals as a 2-1 win over Lazio in the Last 16 second leg sealed a 6-2 aggregate victory. — *AFP*

## After Dutee, Dhanalakshmi humbles Hima in 200 race

**Patiala, March 18:** S. Dhanalakshmi of Tamil Nadu, who had stunned Dutee Chand in the 100m final, on Thursday beat another star athlete Hima Das in the 200m semifinal heats by running a meet record time of 23.26 seconds in the Federation Cup National Senior Athletics Championships here on Thursday.

Her victory over Hima

Das (Assam) in the semifinal heats lifted her to the top 10 of Indian all-time list. Archana Suseendran (Tamil Nadu) won her semifinal heats in 24.07 seconds to raise expectations of an interesting final. It must be stated that both Hima Das (23.10) and Archana Suseendran (23.18) have faster times than the one blazed by Dhanalakshmi on Thurs-

day. Dhanalakshmi's time bettered P. T. Usha's long-standing meet record of 22.80 seconds set in Chennai in 1998.

Having run 24.05 seconds when finishing third in the Federation Cup here two years ago, Dhanalakshmi had recorded a 23.47 in the Tamil Nadu State Championships in Sivakasi on January 24. — *PTI*



P. V. Sindhu in action on way to beating Malaysia's Soniia Cheah in their first round match of the All England Open Badminton Championships at Utilita Arena in Birmingham, England, on Wednesday. — *AP*

## Lakshya leaps into quarters

**Birmingham, March 18:** Lakshya Sen on Thursday became the youngest Indian male shuttler to reach the All England Championship quarterfinals, where Olympic silver medallist P. V. Sindhu joined him with an easy win at the Super 1000 tournament here.

Sindhu, the reigning world champion, recorded a dominant 21-8, 21-8 win over Denmark's Line Christophersen in a completely lopsided second-round match.

Earlier, Lakshya saw off France's Thomas Rouxel 21-18, 21-16 to make it to his maiden quarterfinals.

However, it was curtains for H. S. Prannoy and B. Sai Praneeth after the duo went down in the men's singles second round on Thursday.

Lakshya will next face Netherland's world no 36 Mark Caljouw.

Sindhu will take on Japan's third seed Akane Yamaguchi.

In the men's singles, Prannoy, a former top 10 player couldn't find his

way across World No.1 Kento Momota, the Japanese playing his first event since a horrific accident that saw him undergo an eye surgery last year.

The Indian lost 15-21, 14-21 in a 48-minute match to bow out of the competition. Olympic hopeful Praneeth then squandered a first-game advantage, losing 21-15, 12-21, 12-21 to second seed Viktor Axelsen of Denmark.

Also ousted from the tournament was the

mixed doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa, who lost 19-21, 9-21 to Japanese duo of Yuki Kaneko and Misaki Matsutomo in the opening round.

Saina Nehwal, who finished second best here in 2015, looked in considerable pain, troubled by her right thigh. She decided to retire after lagging behind (8-21, 4-10) in her opening round match against seventh seed Mia Blichfeldt of Denmark. — *PTI*