

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | SUNDAY 28 | MARCH 2021

WEATHER



Max: 38°C
Min: 22°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Panguni 15
Tithi: Pournami
Star: Uthiram
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
Yamagandam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.01 am
Zohar: 12.21 pm
Asar: 3.34 pm
Maghrib: 6.20 pm
Isha: 7.31 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.20 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.08 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 6.06 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 6.33 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+61,573)	(+307)
1,19,69,945	1,61,582

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+2,089)
TN: 8,77,279 12,659

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

12,70,43,458

DEATHS

27,83,819

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

No rigid standard for acceptance or rejection of dying declaration: SC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has said that there can be “no rigid standard or yardstick” for acceptance or rejection of dying declaration, which alone can form the basis for conviction if it has been made voluntarily and inspires confidence.It observed that if there are contradictions that create doubts about the truthfulness and credibility of the dying declaration then the benefit of doubt shall have to be given to the accused.

Militant killed by security forces in encounter in J&K's Shopian

Srinagar: An unidentified militant was killed and a soldier injured in an encounter between ultras and security forces in Shopian district of J&K on Saturday, police said.

COUNTER

POINT



Not Holi colours! That is the result of mudslinging by the voters!

Candidate promises trip to moon, helicopters, snow mountain

Madurai, March 27: It is the poll season and it's raining offers of freebies in Tamil Nadu — washing machines and digital tablets from the Dravidian majors AIADMK and DMK — but here is an independent candidate who is promising the moon, quite literally. His poll assurances may sound bizarre and next to impossible to achieve but R Saravanan is making all eye ball grabbing promises that one would, at the most laugh off, with the intention of creating awareness against the freebie culture and the tall claims politicians make. Saravanan, who calls himself by the moniker Thulam Saravanan, has assured to provide 100-day free trip to

the moon, free iphones and even a mini helicopter, should the people elect him as MLA and asserts all his promises are a pointer against the freebie culture prevalent in Tamil Nadu. The 33-year-old journalist's prospects from Madurai South may be low considering he has to take on the AIADMK, DMK and AMMK, all of whose candidates are leaving no stone unturned to secure a win, backed by strong party networks. Amidst a shower of freebies by several political parties, Saravanan has promised an annual deposit of ₹1 crore into the bank accounts of every family if he is elected as legislator.

● **“I want to create an awareness among the people that they should not fall prey to freebies,” Saravanan, laughing, said when asked if he himself believed whether his ideas were feasible should the local people elect him as their MLA.**

● **While the AIADMK has promised washing machines to all households, DMK said it would give away tablets to students, and have sought to woo the womenfolk with promises of monthly assistance. Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam has also promised cash assistance to the elderly and women among others**

His unimaginable 14 poll assurances also include free robots to home makers to help in their domestic chores, three-storied houses with swimming pool for everyone, a mini-helicopter,

100 sovereigns gold to women for their marriage, a boat for every family and Rs one crore to the youth to start their own business ventures. Perhaps what could take

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BJP manifesto silent on statehood for Puducherry: Ex-CM



STATE | 3

Anbumani seeks vote for CM

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Jonny to stick to his fearless shots



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SPORADIC VIOLENCE IN BENGAL

High turnout in Bengal, Assam first phase polls

DCCORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MARCH 27

Thirty Assembly constituencies in West Bengal and 47 Assembly constituencies in Assam on Saturday went to polls during the first phase of polling in the two states. While West Bengal recorded an estimated 79.79 per cent voter turnout till 6.30 pm, nearly 72.14 per cent voter turnout was recorded in Assam, with the polling largely peaceful in both states. West Bengal reported some stray incidents of violence.

In West Bengal, nearly 74 lakh electorate across 10,288 polling stations cast their votes. In Assam a total of 81 lakh electorates registered across 11,537 polling stations cast their

● **While West Bengal reported 79.79% voter turnout in the first phase of the 2021 Assembly election, nearly 72.14% voter turnout was recorded in Assam**

votes. Long queues were seen outside polling booths with voters and election officials adhering to Covid-19 protocols. In West Bengal, where ruling TMC and the BJP have been engaged in one of the fiercest electoral battles, the latter has deployed its senior leadership, including Union ministers, in the poll battle to oust the Mamata Banerjee-led party. In Assam, the BJP has been desperately trying to retain power as the Congress-led

Opposition is giving it a tough challenge. In Assam, chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal exercised his franchise around 11 am at Sahitya Sabha Bhavan, a model polling station, in his home town Dibrugarh in upper Assam. As many as 264 candidates were in the fray in the Phase-I polls, along with 23 women candidates and 78 Independents. The ruling BJP is contesting from 39 seats and its ally AGP on 10, with friendly fights in Lakhimpur and Naharkatiya Assembly seats. From the Opposition camp, Congress is contesting 43, while its partners in the Grand Alliance — AIUDF, CPI(M-L), RJD and Anchalik Gana Morcha (contesting as Independent) — are contesting one seat each. ■ **P4**



Sachin tests positive, India records 62,258 Covid cases in 1 day

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 27

Cricketer Sachin Tendulkar tested positive for Covid-19 as India recorded 62,258 cases and 291 deaths in one day. The latest figures are again the highest single-day spike in the last five months. While the Delhi government said lockdown was not the solution to contain the spread of the virus, the Maharashtra government announced night curfew in the entire state and banned all gatherings effective from Saturday. ■ **P4**

AIADMK complains to CEO against A. Raja's comments

■ **Stalin tells cadre to be careful with words**

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 27

DMK President M.K. Stalin cautioned his party members to be careful with their speeches during campaigns as there were attempts to twist their words by ‘cutting and pasting’ them to give wrong meanings. Prior to the victory it was important to watch out on the path to triumph, Stalin said in a statement without directly referring to some charges of party campaigners speaking ‘inappropriately.’ “Don't get emotional during campaigns and do not use undignified words. The party leadership will not approve the use of such words,” he said. Of the three principles enunciated by the party founder C N Annadurai —

● **AIADMK on Saturday petitioned the Chief Electoral Officer, TN to not allow DMK leader A. Raja to campaign for Assembly polls and direct police to file a case against him for his alleged offensive comments against Chief Minister K. Palaniswami**

duty, discipline and dignity — speakers of the party should give priority in maintaining dignity, Stalin said. Prior to that, AIADMK's State Joint Secretary of the Advocates Wing, C Thirumaran filed a complaint with the Chief Electoral Officer accusing DMK leader A. Raja of making adverse comments against Chief Minister

Don't get emotional during campaigns and do not use undignified words. The party leadership will not approve the use of such words — MK STALIN, DMK president



Edappadi K Palaniswami and using ‘vulgar and third rate’ language. Seeking action against Raja under election rules and also the provision of the Indian Penal Code, Thirumaran alleged that a similar case had been filed against Raja for undermining the reputation of Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam.

Biden invites Modi, world leaders to virtual climate summit in April

Washington, March 27: President Joe Biden has invited 40 world leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to a US-hosted virtual summit on climate next month to underscore the urgency and the economic benefits of

stronger climate action, the White House said. Biden will host a two-day climate summit of world leaders starting on Earth Day, April 22, in which he will outline the US goal for reductions of carbon emissions by 2030. — *PTI*

CM says container terminal won't be in K'kumari district

ARULOLI M | DC
KANYAKUMARI, MARCH 27

As the Opposition parties attempted to use fisher-men sentiment against the international container transhipment terminal at Kovalam in the district in their favour, Chief

Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami Saturday categorically declared that the port project would not take shape in any form. Campaigning for the AIADMK-BJP candidates for the assembly election in Kanyakumari district and for BJP veteran Pon

Radhakrishnan contesting in the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha byelection, Palaniswami charged the DMK-Congress combine of misguiding the electorates on an issue which has already officially been given up, and even the special officers

appointed for the project repealed. “Despite this, opposition parties are trying to create a fear psychosis among the people and are misguiding the people for political gain,” alleged the chief minister. He blamed the DMK and

allies stating that the three Congress and three DMK MLAs who were elected from Kanyakumari district, never approached him or any other ministers in the last five years since 2016, seeking any development works for the district. ■ **P2**

Smriti Irani challenges Kamal to open debate

Coimbatore, March 27 : Union minister Smriti Irani on Saturday challenged actor and Makkal Needhi Maiam founder Kamal Haasan to have an open debate with Vanathi Srinivasan, BJP's candidate for Coimbatore South constituency, after he took on the Centre on issues of development in his campaigns. Haasan is also contesting from this Constituency.

Addressing the ‘North India Community Outreach Programme’, organised at Gujarati Samaj here, the BJP leader recalled that she had participated in a debate with him a few years back. “I challenge Kamal Haasan to come for a debate with Vanathi Srinivasan, to prove to the people who really knows the issues well, gives solutions and implements policies,” Union minister Smriti Irani said



Union minister Smriti Irani during an election campaign in Chennai on Saturday. — *DC*

● **“I challenge Kamal Haasan to come for a debate with Vanathi Srinivasan, to prove to the people who really knows the issues well, gives solutions and implements policies,” Union minister Smriti Irani said**

The state received 1.25 crore drinking water taps of the five crore installed in India in the last two years, she said, speaking in Gujarati and Hindi. A central government scheme through which farmers get Rs 6,000 annually had benefited 10 crore of them and 50 lakh of them were in Tamil Nadu, the minister said. The Centre has also sanctioned 11 medical colleges and an AIIMS for Tamil Nadu, she said. “All this was possible because the people of India blessed and elected

Narendra Modi as Prime Minister... who chose to be the first public servant of the nation,” she said. Appealing the people to cast their votes for the BJP on April 6, she said “Lakshmi (goddess of wealth) is coming not with torch, but on Kamal (Lotus).” Later, replying to a question from reporters on why she targetted only Kamal Hassan when other parties, including Congress, were in the fray, she quipped “Congress is not at all in the picture.” — *PTI*



Actress Suhasini Maniratnam canvasses for Kamal Haasan in Coimbatore South constituency on Saturday. — *DC*

PM Modi meets Bangladesh prez in bilateral talks

Dhaka, March 24: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday called on Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid during which the two leaders discussed a wide range of issues pertaining to Indo-Bangla cooperation. Modi is on the concluding leg of his two-day visit to Bangladesh. It is his first trip to a foreign country since the outbreak of the coronavirus. “Had a wonderful meeting with

President Abdul Hamid. We exchanged views on a wide range of subjects pertaining to India-Bangladesh cooperation,” the prime minister tweeted. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in a tweet said Modi and Hamid had comprehensive discussions on all aspects of bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional and international issues. Before meeting the president, Modi held one-

on-one and delegation-level talks with his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina. The two countries also inked five MoUs to further boost their bilateral cooperation. On Friday, the prime minister attended the celebrations of the golden jubilee of the country's independence and the birth centenary of ‘Bangabandhu’ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Dhaka. — *PTI*

Myanmar forces kill dozens in deadliest day since coup

Yangon (Myanmar), March 27: As Myanmar's military celebrated the annual Armed Forces Day holiday with a parade Saturday in the country's capital, soldiers and police elsewhere reportedly killed dozens of people as they suppressed protests in the deadliest bloodletting since last month's coup.

A count issued by an independent researcher in Yangon who has been compiling near-real time death tolls put the total as darkness fell at 93, spread over more than two dozen cities and towns. The online news site Myanmar Now reported the death toll had reached 91. Both numbers are higher than all estimates for the previous high on March 14, which ranged in counts from 74 to 90. Figures collected by the researcher, who asked not to be named for his security, have generally tallied with the counts issued at the end of each day by the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners, which documents deaths and arrests and is widely seen as a definitive source. The Associated Press is unable to independently confirm the death tolls.

The killings quickly drew international condemnation, with multiple diplomatic missions to Myanmar releasing statements that mentioned the killing of civilians Saturday, including children. “This 76th Myanmar armed forces day will stay engraved as a day of terror and dishonour,” the European Union's delegation to Myanmar said on Twitter. “The killing of unarmed civilians, including children, are indefensible acts.” The death toll in Myanmar has been steadily rising as authorities grow more forceful with their suppression of opposition to the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The coup reversed years of progress toward democracy after five decades of military rule. — *AP*



SC dismisses plea to stay poll bonds sale

The Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a plea seeking stay on further sale of electoral bonds ahead of assembly elections. A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde declined to stay sale of the electoral bonds as sought in the application moved by the NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms

MANDATE 2021

TAMIL NADU

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OTHER STORIES

I'm on daily duty for 13 hrs, says CM

ARULOLI M | DC
TIRUNELVELI, MARCH 27

Commenting about his administrative efficiency during an election campaign here on Saturday, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami said that he works for 13 hours every day from 9:30 am to 10:30 pm.

"I am the only chief minister to attend all the assembly sessions, when in power," said Palaniswami.

Reacting to DMK leader M.K. Stalin's repeated narrative that the chief minister was not an efficient administrator, but managed to hold on to power only with the support of the BJP-led Centre, Palaniswami said, "As a chief minister, I'm well aware of the affairs of all the ministries and the departments functioning under them."

Reacting to the drizzle during his campaigning at Thovalai, Palaniswami called it 'a harbinger of victory from heaven', and added, "Nature stands by us, God stands by us, and above all the people stand by us."

CM: Welfare schemes for fishers implemented

From P1

"The state administration however implemented all the welfare and developmental schemes right from fishermen developmental schemes to the creation of 41 Amma mini-clinics in the district, said Palaniswami, and recalled key developmental works like the Marthandam flyover and the four-laning of the National Highway connecting Nagercoil and Trivandrum.

"Had he been elected your MP in 2019, Pon Radhakrishnan would have brought more projects for the development of the district," added the chief minister. Palaniswami also promised several fishermen welfare schemes and farmers welfare schemes if the AIADMK government was elected back to power.

The Chief Minister also campaigned for the candidates of the AIADMK-BJP combine in the assembly constituencies of Radhapuram, Nanguneri, A m a b a s a m u d r a m, Palayamkottai and Tirunelveli in Tirunelveli district, the same day.

BJP manifesto silent on statehood for Puducherry: Ex-CM

Puducherry, March 27: Senior Congress leader and former Chief Minister of Puducherry V Narayanasamy on Saturday questioned the silence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in its poll manifesto on the issue of granting statehood to the Union Territory.

Addressing reporters at the party office here, he said the Congress, DMK and even AINRC (now aligned with the BJP) had been demanding the statehood.

"At one stage, the AINRC leader N Rangasamy had made an appeal to all political parties to boycott the Assembly poll in case the Centre did not sanction statehood to Puducherry," Narayanasamy said.

"Now that the manifesto of the BJP has not mentioned its stand on statehood, I want to know what is the policy of the AINRC," he asked.

The BJP manifesto had also not made any promise to write off the loans totalling Rs 7,000-crore due from Puducherry to the Centre over the years, he said.

The saffron party has thus exposed its anti-people policies by remaining quiet, the former Chief Minister said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi too had not made any firm reference to the plea for statehood during his campaign here on February 25, he said.

Narayanasamy alleged the Centre was crushing the business sector through GST (goods and services tax).

Also alleging that the BJP was indulging in money power and misuse of authority in view of April 6 Assembly polls here, the former Chief Minister said the election authorities should be vigilant and prevent questionable practices of the BJP during the poll.

The present election is a fight between principles of democracy and misuse of power, he said. —PTT

Chennai streets throb with election activity

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 27

Streets of Chennai bustled with hectic electioneering on Saturday as DMK President M K Stalin went around his Kolathur constituency in an open red jeep and Union Minister Smriti Irani hit the roads of Harbour constituency, particularly in the areas inhabited by North Indians.

Stalin was accompanied by a sea of flag waving cadre and supporters as he sought the votes of the people and promised to convert Kolathur in a model constituency by developing infrastructure there.

Though Stalin has been on the campaign trail ever since election fever gripped the State, so long he was travelling in other places and canvassing for his party and alliance candidates.

Stalin was accompanied by a sea of flag waving cadre and supporters as he sought the votes of the people and promised to convert Kolathur in a model constituency by developing infrastructure there

While local DMK leaders had been keeping the tempo high in Kolathur, with even Stalin's wife Durga Stalin visiting the constituency to solicit votes, Saturday was the first time the candidate himself made an appearance and personally asked the people's support for him.

Similarly, another DMK leader, T R Baalu, too went around seeking votes for his party candidate in Ambattur constituency, while all the candidates in Chennai kept their spirit

and verve high. Actress Khusboo, who is a BJP candidate, was even making dosas at the homes of voters in Thousand Lights.

Smriti Irani sought votes in three constituencies in Chennai – Egmore for Tamil Nadu Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam leader John Pandian, who is contesting in the two leaves symbol, Thousand Lights for Khusboo and Harbour for Vinod Selvam.

Mostly taking part in roadshows in these constituencies, Smriti Irani waved at people gathered at the roadside and looked out from their homes, shops and offices.

Ahead of her vehicle, an announcer travelled in a vehicle alerting the people through loudspeaker announcements of the Union Minister's visit. The announcements were made both in Hindi and Tamil. Smriti Irani, too, made brief speeches in

both Hindi and English.

In fact, even Stalin's speeches were brief because the priority was to cover as many areas as possible in the run up to the April 6 elections. On Sunday Stalin would be going to Salem to attend the meeting in which Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, all leaders of the Secular Democratic Alliance and DK President K Veeramani are scheduled to address the people.

Rahul Gandhi is also addressing a meeting in Chennai at Adyar area that falls under the Velacherry constituency. The Congress has fielded J M H Hassan as its candidate in Velacherry.

Rahul Gandhi's sister Priyanka Gandhi is scheduled to visit Kanyakumari district on April 3 to canvass votes for the alliance candidates in the Assembly constituency and for the bye election to the Lok Sabha seat.



<<<<<<

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami addresses an election campaign in support of Bodi Assembly constituency candidate Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam in Theni district on Saturday.

— DC

Son of soil hopes to guard DMK fort in Egmore

A. ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 27

It's a clash between a son of the soil and outsiders in the DMK stronghold of Egmore (SC) constituency in Chennai.

DMK leader K. Anbazhagan was the first to win from Chennai (Egmore) when the party made its electoral debut in 1957. It remained a DMK fort for long. The constituency comprises areas like Egmore, Purasawalkam, Choolai, Pullianthope, Vepery, Pudukupet, Periamet, Kilpauk and Chetpet. The electorate includes business class and working class besides government and private sector employees.

In the 2016 election, Egmore constituency had 1,91,494 voters. DMK candidate K.S. Ravichandran won the seat with 55,060 votes. AIADMK nominee E. Parithi Ellamvazhuthi stood second, getting 44,381 votes.

The DMK polled 68,481 votes in the Egmore segment during the 2019 Lok Sabha poll in Chennai Central parliamentary constituency.

The PMK, which was in the AIADMK-led alliance, and MNM candidates polled over 20,000 votes and 11,000 votes respectively. Now, Egmore assembly constituency has total 1,92,265 voters and of this 95,253 are men and 96,959 women.

The DMK has fielded a young Madras high court advocate, I. Paranthanam, this time.

Devendrakula Velalar leader B John Pandian, originally from

Tirunelveli district, of Tamizhaga Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam is contesting as the candidate of AIADMK-led alliance.

Paranthanam told *Deccan Chronicle* during the campaign: "I am a son of the soil as I was born in Pulianthope, which comes under Egmore constituency. I know the pulse of the people. The issues of the people were neglected by the AIADMK government for the past 10 years and people are longing for a change. An anti-BJP wave and anti-AIADMK wave are sweeping not only in Egmore, but in other parts of the state too. Egmore has remained a DMK bastion for long. The DMK and alliance party leaders and office-bearers are rendering support to me in the campaign."

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B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, MARCH 27

Hitting the campaign trail for Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) candidates in the Nilgiris on Saturday, party founder president Kamal Haasan appealed to voters to support the MNM to lay a new path for a new political culture and development in the state.

Addressing a meet here, Kamal said that MNM candidate for Ooty constituency Dr Suresh Babu has entered the poll fray now to serve the public, as he had already seen many peaks in his illustrious career as a physician. Saying that his party candidates are in the poll fray after achieving laurels in their respective fields of vocation, Kamal said that the best way to serve the people is to enter politics,



MNM founder president Kamal Haasan campaigns in the Nilgiris on Saturday.

— DC

as political power would give them ample opportunities to serve the people, especially the poor and downtrodden and to lift them up and show them the path of progress.

Stating that the past five decades the state witnessed more corruption than any noticeable devel-

opment, Kamal said that the way to end corruption is to elect a new party and not by depending on another corrupt party.

"Now, the MNM gives the opportunity for the electorate to support it for the politics of honesty, integrity, good and transparent administration. This election, the electorate should opt for a change and support the MNM to usher in a new political culture and development, and put an end to corruption. Voters should sow the seeds for change of government and political culture. Showering of freebies at the time of polls is not the way to end poverty. What is needed is to generate employment opportunities and infrastructure for everyone to earn a decent livelihood to live happily," he added.

Touching upon some of the issues in the Nilgiris including issues related to tea and tourism industry, Kamal said if elected to power, MNM candidates would work to resolve these issues and added that his chopper travel was meant only to cover all constituencies in the state.

"We spend our money to fly in the air. Not like others who fly, using public money to visit areas affected by flood or other calamities," Kamal Haasan noted. Later talking to media persons, he said that IT raids were mainly aimed at the opposition parties. On the opinion polls which favoured the DMK to win, Kamal said that they would be proved wrong when the results are declared.

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G. Babu Jayakumar

Just spamming

What has the DMK MLA done to you during his tenure? So thundered actress Khusboo, rather passionately, addressing the people at the Thousand Lights constituency in Chennai, where the BJP has fielded her against DMK's Dr Ezhilan Naganathan. "Ask him, he is standing next to you," read the text in a meme having a photograph of Khusboo on a stage with sitting MLA Ku Ka Selvam. It's a rather old tale that Selvam, who won the seat in the DMK ticket, switched over to the BJP in the thick of the lockdown but continued to be the MLA. Even though the BJP got the constituency, Selvam was ignored and Khusboo was given the ticket. Selvam is now accompanying

his party candidate in the campaigns and was reportedly standing next to her when she angrily asked what the sitting MLA had done.

Such instances of party candidates and other leaders putting their foot in the mouth during their campaigns have become a regular feature. But those gaffes and even manifestos making a fool of the parties' ideologies are perhaps adding spice to the electioneering that is otherwise turning bitter and acrimonious. DMK's campaigner Leoni, a talk show host who draws crowds for his humorous speeches, drew the ire of women when he said modern day women were losing their shape and becoming like barrels because people were

consuming the milk of foreign cows. Perhaps, because he was canvassing votes for DMK candidate

Karthikeya Sivasenapathy, who is into protecting native breeds of cattle, in Thondamuthur constituency, Leoni thought that it would be funny to take a swipe at foreign breeds. But it boomeranged.

Not only was he slammed by those who openly want his party to lose in the elections but also by those from his own party for the tasteless, sexist remark. That and another remark by DMK MP A Raja also came handy for many to give a bad name to the DMK. But Raja's was a metaphorical statement on the political genesis of AIADMK.

Chief Ministerial candidate Edappadi K Palaniswami, which was twisted to sound as though he disparaged Palaniswami's mother. Raja did not bow to pressure, exerted mostly through social media, to apologise. But it was the social media that made the people laugh through a meme that juxtaposed a reply of Palaniswami to DMK President M K Stalin with

an old video clipping. In a valiant voice, Palaniswami was asking the people if he was a snake or a lizard to crawl, which was a straight retort to Stalin's remark that he got the Chief Minister's job by crawling. But the old video of Palaniswami touching the feet of V K Sasikala in gratitude soon after he was announced as Chief Minister was part of the meme, evoking laughter.

It is not laughter alone that campaign gaffes evoke on social media. A flippant remark of DMK candidate in Karur, Senthil Balaji, made Makkal Neethi Maiam founder Kamal Haasan turn angry. Senthil Balaji had said that once the DMK government was installed bullock cart owners can go to the river bed and mine sand. Haasan said that his party member had gone to court against sand mining but DMK was encouraging it. What Haasan was not aware of was that it is a long-time demand of the poor local bullock cart owners that they be allowed to take sand from the river bed, which is allowed in many other

places. The controversial mining that Haasan referred to was done through earthmovers and not in bullock carts. But the comments and replies were jocular and the people relished it all.

But not many relished one particular smart aleck's reply to a promise in the DMK manifesto – to provide free sanitary napkins to school and college girls. A candidate of the Naam Tamizhar Katchi, Dileepan Peravurani, in a fiery speech slammed the promise for provision of free napkins describing it as shameful and cheap and wondering if Tamil people were not capable of buying napkins for their family members. But it was Dileepan Peravurani who was finally shamed in social media, particularly by women. One particular post by an anonymous school teacher went viral as it poignantly explained how a move like the one envisaged by the DMK would actually be useful to school girls.

Another promise in the manifesto of the DMK was twisted out so much out of proportion

that the Election Commission of India itself intervened and asked the police to take action against an anonymous woman who had put out a video. The DMK's assurance to increase the financial aid given to inter-caste couple, if one of the partners is from a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe, under a good old scheme was deliberately misinterpreted as an incentive for 'love drama,' a term used by some leaders of caste-based organisations to describe a romantic relationship in which the boy hailed from a lower caste. The unknown woman had been so vocal in spreading the misinformation that the police are now on her trail.

However, the most outstanding faux pax is in the manifesto of the BJP. It wants the Justice Venugopal Commission report to be implemented in toto. The Commission that inquired into the communal riots in Kanyakumari district in 1982 had taken a tough stand against the RSS and had also suggested its ban. Is that what the BJP wants? Really?



Flowers showered on DMK Saidapet constituency candidate Ma Subramanian using a JCB machine during his campaign.

— DC



Thousand Lights constituency BJP candidate Khushbu Sunder making a dosa during her campaign on Saturday.

— DC



MNM Party Egmore assembly candidate Priyadarshini helping a roadside fruitshop vendor.

— DC

IN BRIEF

128 new Covid cases in Pondy

Puducherry, March 27: Puducherry clocked 128 fresh cases of coronavirus on Saturday, pushing up total infection count to 40,964.

The toll in the union territory climbed to 680 as one more fatality was reported during the last twenty four hours. The deceased, a male aged 72 years, had co morbidities and died of Covid pneumonia and acute respiratory disorder syndrome.

Director of Department of Health and Family Welfare Services, S Mohan Kumar said there were 846 active cases including 579 in home quarantine and as many as 39,438 patients recovered and were discharged so far.

The 128 new cases were identified at the end of examination of 2022 people and spread over Puducherry (94), Karaikal (32) and Mahe and Yanam regions (one case each). —PTI

Anti-Corona kits sent to poll centres

G. SRINIVASAN | DC
THANJAVUR, MARCH 27

Fourteen types of Corona prevention materials were sent on Saturday to the respective assembly segments for use during polling in the assembly election, to be held on April 6 in the district.

The materials kept at the Anna Centenary auditorium were packed and sent to each assembly segment. Collector M. Govinda Rao, inspected the transit of materials.

The collector said, the materials sent include face masks, hand sanitisers (100 ml) for polling and security personnel, single use rubber gloves (30) for polling and security personnel, surgical face masks, infrared thermometer with additional battery, PPE kits, hand sanitiser, LD PPE bag for

packing, D-cut bags, disposable polyethylene hand gloves, dust bins, cotton boxes, cloth masks, tape roll etc.

Polling will take place between 7 am and 7 pm on April 6. Corona infected persons will be permitted to vote between 6 pm and 7 pm, and they should come with PPE kits.

The collector said that Corona infection has been reported from two more schools in the district. School authorities were asked to close them for 14 days. "A total of 220 students were Corona infected so far in the district. Of them, 120 were treated and sent home," the collector added.

"As this election is held during the Corona period, people should take all preventive measures while exercising their franchise," he said.

Divya Darshini takes over as new Tiruchy collector

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, MARCH 27

S. Divya Darshini took over as Collector of Tiruchy and returning officer of the district on Saturday, following transfer of her predecessor S. Sivarasu, by the Election Commission of India (ECI) on Thursday. Prior to this, she was the first collector of the newly-formed Ranipet district.

It might be recalled that the election commission transferred Collector S. Sivarasu, Superintendent of police, Tiruchy, P. Rajan, Srirangam sub-collector,

Nishant Krishna, following the seizure of Rs one crore cash from a car near Pettavaithalai on the Tiruchy-Karur national highway on Tuesday night. There were four occupants in the car including sitting AIADMK MLA from Musiri M. Selvaraj.

Nishant Krishna, Srirangam sub-collector and returning officer of the Srirangam assembly constituency, held an enquiry over the seizure of cash by an SST team. Based on the recommendations of special observers, Malay Mallick, secretary, election commission, approved transfer of the three officers.

Anbumani seeks vote for CM



G. BABU JAYAKUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 27

PMK Youth Wing leader Dr Anbumani Ramadoss was at Edappadi constituency in Salem district soliciting votes in favour of AIADMK's Chief Ministerial candidate, Edappadi K Palaniswami, on Saturday, urging the voters to make him the Chief Minister once again.

Anbumani Ramadoss, who has been going around Salem district in a white campaign van, was received by a sea of party supporters waving PMK flags.

The PMK leader's campaign in the constituency is crucial for the victory of Palaniswami as it has a strong PMK support base. In the past elections, the PMK has proved its strength by winning the seat in 2006, 2001 and 1996.

Though Palaniswami had won the 2011 and 2016 elections from the constituency, the PMK candidate had come second in both the polls. So the PMK's support is imperative for the alliance's Chief Ministerial candidate to win his seat.

Calling upon the people to cast

their votes in the 'two leaves' symbol and ensure Palaniswami's victory, Anbumani Ramadoss said: "After 70 years a farmer has become the Chief Minister. We are all farmers and he is one of us. So he should become the Chief Minister again."

He said that he was happy to meet the people after a year when he could not go out in view of the Coronavirus crisis and lockdown.

Launching a scathing attack on the DMK, he said leaders like A Raja in that party were denigrating women in the land that worshipped Kannagi, Andal and Draupadi.

If anyone had spoken in such a disparaging manner against women, he would have been thrown out by now but DMK President M K Stalin was keeping quite or rather encouraging his party men to make such remarks, he said.

A good part of the speeches made at Jalakandapuram in the constituency was devoted to attacking Stalin and saying that women were safe only in AIADMK rule.

Better lives of fishers, HC tells Centre, state

J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 27

The Madras high court has requested both the union and state governments to look into the plight of fishermen, particularly during the 61-day fishing ban period, to augment the allowance given to every sea-fishing family during the period with a contribution from the Centre.

Disposing of the petitions of Fishermen Care, the first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy said it is also necessary to educate fisher-

men about hygiene, so that in addition to bettering their lives, the beaches become less of an eyesore than they are now. The petitioner can pursue for better rights for fishermen by carrying this order to the appropriate authorities, the bench added.

The bench said across the entire coast in the State, fishing activities have burgeoned in recent times and it is difficult to find a spot in the sea without immediately spotting a fishing boat. There are several laws pertaining to fishing, but either lack of awareness or a crass disregard for the rules make

fishing activities being conducted violating norms. At the same time, it is a completely unorganised sector and the state says that most of the fishermen are not even registered. It is also evident that though basic housing may have been provided by the state at some places, particularly in Chennai, at other places, there is no support for fishermen and they are left to go about their business, including selling their catch at much lower prices than what the ultimate consumer pays, the bench added.

The bench said the state was willing to re-look into

the quantum of pay-out during the 61-day ban period each year. An additional amount may be allotted by the Centre, since the fishermen are kept away from their only means of earning for a substantial period, pursuant to the laws of the Centre, the bench added.

The bench said the State and the Centre should undertake a census or a broader study to ascertain the number of persons engaged in fishing, so that, in the near future when over-fishing becomes much more of a problem than it is now, the number of persons may be limited.

HBL still sitting on tie-up proposals for vaccine

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 27

While the country is facing a high demand for Covid-19 vaccines, the management of HLL Biotech Limited (HBL), a state-run health infrastructure under the union ministry of health and family welfare at Chengalpet, is still sitting on the tie-up proposals submitted by private Covid-19 vaccine making companies to revive the ailing company and meet the demand at home.

According to sources, Bharat Biotech and Dr Reddy's Laboratories, which is producing Russia's 'Sputnik V', had submitted an expression of interest to tie up

with HBL a month ago. Dr Reddy's has now withdrawn from their HBL plan as the management did not respond. Meanwhile, the HBL management is still sitting on the Bharat Biotech proposal taking no decision.

The pandemic situation was a golden opportunity for the management to revive the company in association with private partnership. Now the government has put a temporary ban on export of Covishield being manufactured by Serum Institute of India due to shortage of the vaccine.

"Since the government decided to provide vaccine to all people aged above 45, the demand for the vaccine

will multiply and India with such a vast population can't depend on a sole producer. So the government has to persuade the HBL management to tie up with private players to ensure supply and revival of an ailing company that will change the fortunes of 275 employees," a source said.

"The HBL has already built an Integrated Vaccine Complex (IVC) to develop, manufacture and supply affordable life-saving vaccines to the government of India for its Universal Immunisation Programme. If the management ties up with private players, the IVC can ensure mass production of Covid-19 vaccine," source added.

HBL, commissioned in 2018, was expected to make the country self-sufficient in manufacturing vaccines for Japanese Encephalitis, Rabies, Measles and Hepatitis B apart from BCG, pentavalent combination vaccines under Universal Immunisation Programme. But even after two years, the unit has failed to produce even a single dose of vaccine, reducing to production of sanitisers and alcohol-based disinfectants.

Dr Rex Sargunam, president, Tamil Nadu Health Development Association, said the revival of HBL is needed as the country is fighting pandemic. Dr V. Vijayan, CEO, HBL, did not respond to DC's queries.

High Court reprieve for transport employee

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 27

The Madras high court has upheld the verdict of a single judge, which quashed an order of the state transport department, stopping the increment of a transport employee for four years with cumulative effect for not dispatching the registration certificates relating to nine motor vehicles to their owners in time.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy dismissed the appeal filed by the state government, challenging an order of a single judge dated September 18, 2017.

S.S. Senthil Arumugam was working as a junior assistant in the transport department. During a surprise check on September 10, 2003, by the officials of the vigilance and anti-corruption department, it was found that the registration certificates relating to nine motor



vehicles had not been dispatched for a period ranging from 8 to 42 days. On that basis, a charge memo was issued to him and after domestic inquiry, his increment was stopped for four years. Challenging the same, he moved the high court and a single judge allowed his petition. Aggrieved, the state government filed the present appeal.

The bench said upon perusal of the report of the inquiry officer, it was clear that the accused officer denied the charges by stating that these nine RC books could not be dispatched for want of necessary details pertaining to the mode of dispatch. In addition, he had stated that the RC books could not be dispatched in time due to burden of work.

Man murdered over illicit relationship row

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 27

A 25-year-old man was murdered for reportedly confronting a suspected illicit affair between his brother-in-law and his neighbor's wife in Pallavaram on Friday night.

According to police, the deceased has been identified as Fayas Ali (25) a native of West Bengal.

He worked as a construction worker in the city and lived with his wife in a rented place in Pozhuchalur near Pallavaram.

Police said Fayas Ali suspected an illicit relationship between his brother-in-law Ajijus (35) and his neighbor Adhimoolam's wife Amudha (40).

On Friday night, Fayas Ali confronted Adhimoolam at his

■ According to police, the deceased has been identified as Fayas Ali (25) a native of West Bengal.

residence over the issue. Irked by his suspicion neighbour Amudha and her 18-year-old son Nitish attacked him him with a knife.

Shankar Nagar police were informed by those nearby, after which they rushed Fayas Ali to the Chromepet Government hospital. He died on the way, the police said.

Shankar Nagar police arrested the couple Adhimoolam and Amudha. However, they 18-year-old son has absconded. Police have launched a search for him.

MRP ₹ 99 (incl. of all taxes) for 800ml bottle. Based on test conducted on select fabric and stains. Tested select dyes on the fabric under lab condition. Result may vary according to the amount of chlorine in the water and dyes of the fabric.

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Malai paneer frozen 200 g | ₹ 75*

Taaza 500 mL | ₹ 33*

Taaza 200 mL | ₹ 14*

Gold 200 mL | ₹ 15*

Calci+ 1 L | ₹ 75*

Mithai Mate 400 g | ₹ 106*

Mithai Mate 200 g | ₹ 56*

Fresh Cream 250 mL | ₹ 63*

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Sl. No	Name of Court	Case No and dated	Status of case(s)	Section(s) of Acts concerned and brief description of offence(s)
76	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 1432/2016	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
77	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 1431/2016	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
78	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 1430/2016	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
79	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 1429/2016	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
80	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 1428/2016	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
81	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 1427/2016	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
82	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 1426/2016	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
83	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 6537/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
84	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 3948/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
85	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 3947/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
86	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 3946/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
87	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 3945/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
88	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 3944/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
89	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 3943/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
90	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 2969/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
91	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 2968/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
92	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 2967/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
93	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 2966/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
94	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 2965/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
95	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 2964/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
96	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 2963/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
97	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 2962/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
98	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 2961/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
99	Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Egmore, Chennai	CC No. 2959/2015	Pending	Under Section 138 R/W 141 of the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 Case filed against return of cheque. Taken Cognizance
(B) Details about cases of conviction for criminal offences				
Sl. No	Name of Court & date(s) of order(s)	Description of offence(s) & punishment imposed	Maximum Punishment Imposed	
	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	

DECCAN Chronicle

28 MARCH 2021



Shreya Sen-Handley

Off the beaten track

Defend our freedoms, just connect the ‘dots’

Around the world in March, millions died from Coronavirus, cancer, and the many maladies we don’t seem able to prevent or cure. And with our new irrational rejection of vaccines, including the ones that have conclusively, over centuries, helped eradicate disease, millions more will perish. But, after rampaging diseases, our single biggest problem is male violence, surely, whether it manifests itself in full-scale warfare, environmental degradation, or the brutalisation of the vulnerable, including women?

This month (and every other in my long career as a woman), I have despaired over the widespread murder of women. As I lament the loss of London’s Sarah Everard, the six Asian women gunned down in Atlanta, and the rising tide of femicide of the past weeks in India, I am gripped by a terrible *déjà vu*. We’ve all been here before, reassured by our leaders that they’ll take firm steps to protect women, we watch history repeating as they blithely fail. And like a cracked record I find myself railing against our mistreatment again; fitfully hopeful that speaking up might make a tiny difference. Didn’t the Suffragettes’ dissent eventually garner votes for British women? Didn’t the recent Indian Farmers’ Protest, especially the tenacity of its women, focus the world’s attention on their predicament? Yet, over time, so little has changed for the better in man’s treatment of man, and indeed, Woman, that my faith in our voices being heard has been shaken.

What would our sagacious leaders suggest we do instead?

Talk less, say Japanese Olympics chiefs Mori and Sasaki. If women stopped airing their concerns, according to them, ‘women’s problems’ would simply evaporate (so negligible are they). And isn’t it a fact, such men point out, the moment women stop ‘nagging’, nobody hears about these issues again? Proving they never actually existed. All it requires then to solve ‘women’s problems’, is for women, or nags, hags, and “Olympigs”, as Sasaki would have it, to keep quiet.

Be seen less, spouts the Uttarkhand CM, in charge of an Indian state of around 5 million women. Bare female knees, sayeth he, will be the undoing of society. Leading to the collapse of morals, sense, and civilisation, ultimately. Haven’t we heard that (and similar) from the patriarchy, times without number? Nor can it be wrong, surely, if so many men agree? Women revealing anything at all, including their capabilities, are immoral, dangerous and destructive. The only women worth respecting are the ones you can’t see. Or hear. Because quiet, retiring women, whether locked in their homes, muzzled, or DEAD, can’t upset our perfectly inequitable planet.

Walk less too, we’re told often. Women shouldn’t go anywhere on their own, except in a straight line between work and home. Not that every place of work is acceptable! If you work in a spa for example, you might get bumped off by frustrated men, and the fat-cat-owned media will slaver over it, but have no sympathy to spare. And even less action will be taken. Taking the path that suits you – literally and figuratively as well – is not for women, you expect Dark Age patriarchy to proclaim. But no, this is the message from our modern judiciary and police: guardians of our wellbeing. In Britain this month, not only was it revealed that a policeman had murdered homeward-bound-after-sundown Sarah Everard, they then stymied multiple vigils to mourn her in the name of Lockdown. Like all stalwarts of the status quo, I suspect they’d suggest a woman’s place is at home if they could. The necessary Lockdown mantra of ‘stay home, stay safe’ has never been just a pandemic-protection slogan when it comes to women, but imposed rules to live by through history. It kept us so safe sometimes, we never felt pain again: as the reality of 137 women killed around the world DAILY by men intimately known to them attests.

But if staying home, staying covered, staying silent, hasn’t spelt safety for us, what will? Unlike the prized collection of exotic birds we’re sometimes perceived to be, safety is only a small part of our needs. We must continue to educate. Teaching women early to be free, to aspire to every wonderful opportunity this world has to offer, and young men to respect these same freedoms and aspirations in women, is key. But as the mother of both a son and a daughter, I’ve discovered that this is harder to achieve than I’d imagined. We encourage, support, and role-model the right behaviours for both, yet find that the occasional stereotype, or mild sexist trope, still wends its way home. Through conversations with our children, their friends and teachers, it’s become obvious that this is the influence of playground chatter, media and the Internet; as much of which we vet as possible, like all concerned parents. Yet, the trickle that filters into their lives is proof of the pervasive nature of prejudice, and how impossible that is to eliminate entirely. And is shielding from reality the right approach anyway? So, we discuss inequities with them instead, explain why they’re wrong, where they come from, and how best to address them. Thus teaching them both NOT to ‘know their place’.

That isn’t a complete solution either, is it? Just like protecting ourselves isn’t enough, nor protesting. What’s required, of course, is a major overhaul: systemic change that runs deep and wide through society, and belongs to us all. The answer then, though neither original nor revolutionary, lies in connecting the dots – literally! Because “dots”, funnily enough, is what middle-class India calls its daughters. Our political leaders and corporations don’t want upheavals, and activist organisations sometimes grow too big to make a deep-rooted difference. But if we can join, in small but ever-widening circles, our young women (and many peaceable men) – the dots – to work towards change, whilst providing support and the benefit of our experience, there’s hope yet. The possibility even of societal transformation. Then, no matter what our sex, sexuality, class, caste, colour, age or creed, we might finally walk, in darkness and in light, bare-kneed or bare anything-at-all, any which way we please.

Shreya Sen-Handley is the author of the recently published *Strange: Stories, the award-winning Memoirs of My Body, and a forthcoming book of travel misadventures*. Her *Twitter* and *Insta* handle is @shreyasenhana.

Subhani



India’s Gilded Age



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

One thing that stood out during the recently concluded session of Parliament was how ministers of the Union kept parroting ad nauseam “It is not the business of government to do business”. It left me wondering as to whether they really even understood the full import or implications of their utterances.

I could not help wondering every time the above proposition was articulated that the next inevitable and portentous consequence would be that it no longer would remain the business of government to be in government. By the time the grand garage sale of India’s public assets would be over economic and, by extension, political power would have become so intensely concentrated in the hands of chaebols and oligarchs that they would be the real overlords of India giving even the American gilded age a run for its money.

No government would in future either be able to challenge them meaningfully or deliver public goods and services for the teaming millions who make up the bulk of our populace and require them most.

The Gilded Age, 1870-1899, was a period in American history when a few people through gross chicanery and outright sophistry became vulgarly wealthy in a very short span of time.

The eminence grise of the gilded age were the quick-rich moguls namely John D. Rockefeller, Andrew W. Mellon, Andrew Carnegie, Henry Flagler, Henry H. Rogers, J.P. Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt and John Jacob Astor. However in the popular imagination of American people they are still the robber barons who had become affluent through illegitimate means.

The later iterations of the

gilded age have been periods in the history of nations when public assets created out of public money have been privatised on a mega scale.

The person who really put wheels under this large-scale privatisation of public assets in the penultimate decade of the twentieth century was Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. On becoming the Premier in May 1979, she sold off steelmakers, carmakers, aerospace firms, oil and gas giants, airlines and the telecoms monopoly in the face of robust protests by well meaning and sober public intellectuals, and even the directly impacted workers of these former state-owned enterprises. Even public housing was pawned of the tenants who lived in it.

However, in the ultimate analysis, this privatisation turned out to be more of a societal shock, rather than therapy for an ailing economy. It was a violent act of economic engineering enforced by resorting to the coercive powers of the state. Its social implications were colossal. Short sighted un-egalitarian, and antithetical to the notion of public investment, it did not lay the underpinnings for either sustainable or pervasive prosperity. It was a chimera.

In fact, a 2005 study by economists Blanden, Gregg and Machin found that: “The rapid increase in UK income inequality that began in 1979 is sometimes justified by the argument that society is now more meritocratic so that it is easier for the poor to become richer if they are willing and able to work hard. In fact, our research shows that the opposite has occurred – there has actually been a fall in the degree of social mobility over recent decades. Children born to poor families are now less likely to break free of their background and fulfil their

potential than they were in the past. Thus the only enduring legacy of the Thatcher years was that while the rich became richer the poor became poorer.”

Post the collapse of the Soviet Union in the mid and late 1990s, Russian President Boris Yeltsin launched a ruthless privatisation programme of the Soviet created and commanded economic model incubated public sector. In what became the hugest disposal ever of state-owned property, history enterprises were sold at a rate of over eight hundred per month. By time the process ended 77 per cent of Russia’s large and mid-size organizations and 82 per cent of the small ones were transferred to private owners. These 15,000 privatised assets accounted for two-thirds of industrial output and over 60 per cent of the industrial work force of Russia, the official successor state of the Soviet Union.

The auctions conducted to privatise these assets were completely rigged. The most lucrative enterprises did not even come up at these public sales. These were either simply farmed out to favoured businesspersons or were disposed of through opaque processes.

Productive establishments and other precious assets were simply pawned off at a fraction of their worth. A tiny clique of oligarchs and carpetbaggers simply took over much of Russia’s economy and became filthy rich. They snapped up valuable state assets at rock bottom prices. More often than not oligarchs just stripped their acquisitions of all value simply leaving a shell of a company behind.

They acquired natural resources and then re-sold them at hefty premiums and parked the money abroad. Another favoured modus operandi was the

A country that lifted 271 million people out of poverty between 2004 and 2014 is today staring at the spectre of a growing income and wealth inequality

acquisition of majority shareholding in valuable state properties. Having achieved that goal the minority shareholders that more often than not was the Russian State or provincial governments became putty in their hands. The bottomline was not wealth generation but wealth extraction.

As a consequence, billions of dollars of public money found its way into private hands as unearned income. The result was that there was hyperinflation, the bottom dropped out of the Russian currency and ordinary people were forced into the most extreme form of destitution. It was a plight far worse than even the years of Communism.

Similarly in India today there are capitalists who are benefiting from a very similar modus operandi. They are “growing fatter” by the hour cornering public assets at basement prices aided and abetted actively by a collusive state. Airports, airlines, public sector units, power utilities are all being put on the chopping block under a fallacious construct that it is not the business of government to be in business. The consequences of such a ill-conceived strategy in the name of privatisation and disinvestment would haunt India for decades to come.

A country that lifted 271 million people out of poverty between 2004 and 2014 is today staring at the spectre of a growing income and wealth inequality. Even before the pandemic hit India in all its ferocity India’s richest one per cent held more than four-times the wealth held by 953 million people who make up for the bottom 70 per cent of the country’s population. If there is a time to revisit the fundamental construct it is now. It must be reemphasised with all the force at our command that it is indeed the business of government to be in business or there would be hell to pay in the years ahead.

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal. Twitter handle @manishtewari.

LETTERS

MUMBAI HOSPITAL FIRE

The death of 11 Covid-19 patients due to a fire at midnight at Sunrise hospital located on the fourth floor of a shopping mall in Mumbai is shocking and bizarre. What is more shocking is that the Chief Minister of Maharashtra Uddhav Thackeray has apologised for the mishap and deaths and announced a compensation of ₹5 lakhs to the kin of the deceased. Human lives seem to be cheap with a very low price (especially in India) fixed by the politicians. The announcement, compensation and legal action would have been different if the kith and kin leaders of a (ruling) political party had perished in the fire. A thorough probe should be conducted and the guilty responsible, both government officials and hospital staff/authorities, should be given the strictest punishment under the law.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

SECOND COVID-19 WAVE

THIS IS in reference to a research report that the second wave of Covid-19 cases in Indian can last up to 100 days from February 15 and the total cases in our country is expected to cross 25 lakhs. If we take into account the violation of Covid norms by public and political leaders during their election meetings as also the alarming increase to more than 50k cases per day, we are afraid, the figure may cross even 50 lakhs in a couple of months. Ironically even Covid vaccination has not given any relief to the public, as some of them have tested positive even after taking the first vaccination. But it is heartening that the Tamil Nadu government has taken prompt steps to close all educational institutions.

Capt. N. Viswanathan, Coimbatore

KUDOS TO ENGLAND TEAM

WHEN OUR MIB posted a total of 337, probably our team got complacent and thought it was going to be another series victory for them. It is possible they would have forgotten that in this T-20 era, any score even above 400 is not safe to defend in 50 overs. The England team batsmen, especially Jonny Bairstow, Jason Roy and Ben Stokes took our bowlers to the cleaners to win the game in style. While Stokes missed a well deserved century, his whirlwind partnership with Bairstow took the wind out of our bowlers. It was a real six pack punch to Kohli and his boys. This victory goes to prove that cricket is a game of great uncertainties and no match is over till the last ball is bowled. Now it is going to be a do-or-die match on Sunday and let the best team on that day take the cup.

N. Mahadevan, Chennai

TRIUMPH FOR TATAS

THE SUPREME COURT ruling that the ouster of former Tata Sons executive chairman Cyrus Mistry was legal is an enormous triumph for Tata Sons. However, the apex court added it was open for Tata and Mistry to work out their terms of separation. One may recall that the Tata-Mistry dispute began when Mistry, who succeeded Ratan Tata in 2012, was ousted four years later. The Supreme Court ruling brings the curtains down on one of the most high-profile and bitterly fought corporate battles.

N.J. Ravi Chander, Bengaluru

Saeed Naqvi

Wide Angle



Acknowledge potential of Pope-Sistani historic tryst

Pardon my Lucknow chauvinism, but the benighted city once had intimate links with the centre of Shia Islam, Najaf, in Iraq, which Pope Francis visited early March in what must be counted among the pontiff’s most epoch making journeys. His 50 minutes conversation with Shia Islam’s highest spiritual authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, in his modest, rented house in a Najaf alley, must have enriched both.

“A humble and wise man”, the Pope said of Sistani. “It felt good, for my soul, this meeting.” This was no hyperbole; this seemed to reflect the tenor of the conversation, where only interpreters were present.

Yes, that Lucknow link: in 1850, the Begums of Oudh (Awadh) established what came to be known as a bequest, a trust, of ₹6 million to be spent on the maintenance of the shrines at Najaf and Karbala. Stipends for Indian scholars were also established. After the first war of Independence in 1857, the British administered the bequest, which gave them leverage over the Shia clerical authority from Najaf to Tehran. By default or deliberation, the system continued until 1979 when Saddam Hussein consolidated power in Baghdad. Saddam’s Ba’ath atheism would have been uncomfortable with

Indian indulgence of Shia sectarianism. What would Pope Francis have made of the fact that “Allah o Akbar” was inscribed on the Iraqi flag only after Operation Desert Storm in 1992?

Another Lucknow link would have come up tangentially: Awadh antecedents of Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Iranian revolution. Khomeini’s ancestors migrated from Kuntur, a *qasbah* not far from Lucknow, known for a line of Shia theologians.

The Pope would have been briefed on the vast difference between Sistani and Ayatollah Khamenei (Khomeini before him) on the role of the clergy in the affairs of the state. The issue had divided the Shia clergy down the middle. How can the Iranian revolution of 1979 be deemed to be an “Islamic revolution” without the second coming of the messiah who, in Shia theology, happens to be the 12th Imam who had “disappeared” in Samarra, Iraq. He would appear only on the Day of Judgement.

The clergy in Qom were at sixes and sevens. I was in Qom to meet Ayatollah Montazeri when this was a common topic of discussion. A revolution had come their way, pending Roz e Mahshar, Judgement Day. What label was to be pasted on the great happening? That is when the theory of Vilayat

e Faqih or Vali Faqih, the Intermediate Imam, was enunciated. Pending the return of the Imam, an Intermediate system, under the Supreme leader, would govern, guided by the teachings of Islam.

Sistani and a section of the clergy even in Qom see their role differently — as spiritual guides only. Was Francis comfortable with Sistani on this score? The different circumstance of Tehran and Baghdad must have been part of the briefs prepared for Francis.

In 1979, the Shah was eased out and the Ayatollahs ushered into Tehran. Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been moved from Najaf to the suburb of Neauphle-le-Chateau on the outskirts of Paris, was that very year flown to Tehran. Why this complicated trapeze act?

In the mid-1970s, the US had Communist parties coming out of their ears in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Chile, why, even in Afghanistan. Post Shah fervour in Iran would cause Persian Communist Parties, Tudeh and Mujahedin e Khalq, to surface from the underground. The Ayatollahs, the mosques filled with their cadres, would pounce on the Communists. That the Ayatollahs would be no friends of the Americans became apparent only when the siege of

the US embassy in Tehran lasted 444 days, an embarrassment on a scale the Americans had never experienced.

1979 also happened to be the year in which Saddam Hussein consolidated himself in Baghdad. Neither the Ayatollahs nor Saddam were buddies of the US, but each could easily be tempted to seek US help against the other. This suited US officials like Martin Indyk, former Ambassador to Israel, who devised dual-containment — supply arms to both and make them fight. The monkey-between-two-cats policy lasted eight long years.

More to the point for the Pope would have been the after-effects of the post 9/11 wars thrust on Iraq, Syria, Libya, leading to the trek of millions looking for havens in Europe which, in this instance, was fighting xenophobia at home, a creeping aversion to the outsider, resulting in avowedly illiberal politics. True they are religious leaders whose mission was not to discuss politics, but rampaging identity politics are nothing but putrefied religious ideas.

Islamic terror, for instance, is cited as a cause for increasing Islamophobia by politicians like, say, Marine Le Pen in France. Such examples are strewn across Europe and other parts of the world. What was at fault was a one-sided media focus on Islamic terror,

fuelling a Muslim sense of helplessness and anger, there being no outlet for his point of view.

Some of this Sistani must have addressed during their conversation. I hope he reminded the Pope that the first act of occupying forces was to vandalise the National Museum, the great storehouse of artefacts, books, scrolls representing one of the world’s great river civilisations.

It might be something of a hyperbole that his meeting with Sistani, laden with peaceful intent, reversed the Jihad or crusade launched in 1095 by one of his earlier predecessors Pope Urban II. The eleventh century Pope was rattled by the Muslim occupation of the holy lands. Also, within a hundred years of Prophet Muhammad’s death, the Muslims had established their rule over Spain and beyond. The pace of Muslim spread was unnerving. Pope Francis’ expedition, on the other hand, provides a soothing touch to a people battered and bruised, having been on the declining side of the civilisational giant wheel for too long, a far cry from the days of Pope Urban.

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

SHORT TAKES

INDIA RECORDS 62,258 COVID CASES AND 291 DEATHS IN ONE DAY

FROM PG 1

The state has also closed malls, restaurants and gardens from 8 pm to 7 am though home delivery of food at night has been exempted.

With several festivals lined up in the coming days, the government is keeping its fingers crossed. Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan on Saturday chaired a high-level meet with 12 states and UTs reporting a surge in cases during which they were advised to focus on stringent containment and public health measures in 46 high-burden districts. These states are Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Punjab and Bihar.

HIGH TURNOUT IN BENGAL, ASSAM FIRST PHASE POLLS

FROM PG 1

In West Bengal, among the five districts that went to polls in the first phase, East Medinipur recorded the highest voter turnout of 82.42 per cent till the end of voting time. Purulia recorded the lowest voter turnout of 77.13 per cent. Jhargram recorded 80.55 per cent, Paschim Medinipur 80.16 per cent and Bankura 80.03 per cent voter turnouts.

While Assam will witness three phase polls, West Bengal will have eight-phase elections. The counting of votes will take place on May 2. According to a press statement by the Election Commission, the first phase of polling in both states was conducted "peacefully and successfully" across 21,825 polling stations spread over 77 Assembly constituencies. The EC said it has "laid great emphasis on ensuring transparent and vigilant mechanism for inducement and intimidation free elections."

The Trinamool Congress, eyeing re-election in West Bengal for the third consecutive term, alleged "discrepancy" in poll turnout and malfunctioning of EVMs as voting began for 30 of the 294 Assembly seats on Saturday morning. A letter was written by MP Derek O'Brien to the Election Commission and a party delegation met the poll panel in the afternoon, ANI reported.

In a tweet, TMC shared voting turnout figures from East Medinipur district and asked, "What is happening @ECISVIEEP? Could you explain how voting percentage drastically reduced to half within a gap of just 5 minutes?!" Shocking! @CEOWestBengal, please look into this urgently!"

In another post, the party talked about claims that people were not able to vote for Trinamool.

■ Leader surrounded, clothes torn by protesters in Punjab BJP MLA thrashed by farmers

Chandigarh, March 27: A BJP MLA in Punjab was allegedly thrashed and his clothes torn by a group of farmers at Malout in Muktsar district on Saturday, the police said.

When Abohar legislator Arun Narang reached Malout along with local leaders to address a press conference, they got surrounded by a group of protesting farmers and black ink was thrown at them, officials said.

Some police personnel took the MLA and local leaders to a shop. But later when they came out of it, the protesters allegedly thrashed them and tore Mr Narang's clothes, the police said.

Mr Narang was later

escorted to a safer place by the police, officials said.

Deputy superintendent of police (Malout) Jaspal Singh said the protesters were adamant that they would not allow the BJP legislators to hold the press conference. A police official sustained a minor injury in the incident, he said.

A video has surfaced on social media, purportedly showing the MLA in torn clothes being shifted to a safer place by the police.

Later, Narang told PTI that he was "punched" by some people.

"I was punched a lot and my clothes were also torn off," he alleged.

The BJP legislator said he had gone to Malout to

address a press conference but the protesters did not allow it. They got violent and surrounded him, the MLA claimed.

Asked whether he has lodged a complaint in this matter, Narang said he will talk to the party leadership over this issue.

Darshan Pal, the leader of Samyukta Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of farmers' union, spearheading the agitation against the central agri laws, said, "Today, farmers protested against BJP MLA from Abohar. Under adverse circumstances, it turned violent and the MLA was physically assaulted."

"It is a matter of regret that an elected representa-

tive was treated this way. We do not encourage such behaviour. We strongly condemn this act," he said in a statement. Mr Pal also said the Samyukta Kisan Morcha appeals to all protesters to remain peaceful and disciplined.

The ruling Congress in Punjab, the BJP, as well as the SAD condemned the incident.

Such "unlawful behaviour" has no place in a democracy and the farmers' protest will be weakened by these incidents, state Congress chief Sunil Jakhar said.

BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh slammed the Amarinder Singh-led government over the incident. — PTI

Bangladeshi ingress into India dip to zero in Mar.

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 27

Border guarding forces deployed along the India-Bangladesh have achieved a huge success as not a single incident of infiltration, illegal migration or cattle smuggling has been reported in almost a month ever since security forces were put at an all-time high following Assembly elections in West Bengal.

Before the crucial election process started in Bengal, the Union home ministry in consultation with Election Commission had deployed an additional 10,000 troops to completely seal the nearly 2,200 km Bangladesh border with the state. Intelligent inputs had warned that subversive elements from Bangladesh could cross over into Bengal to disrupt election

process.

Sources claim that additional deployment and increase surveillance using gadgets like drones and high-density night vision cameras and vigilance devices have helped greatly improve the overall security situation along the Indo-Bangladesh border.

"In the past almost one month, there has been no instance of either illegal human or cattle trafficking along the border. Similarly, no major seizure of narcotics or arms and ammunition has been made. This is a huge achievement for our security forces. Now going forward we will make some changes in our deployment along the Bangladesh border even after the election process is over," a senior BSF official told this newspaper.

Shivraj starts scheme for domestic abuse victims

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, MARCH 27

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Saturday announced to launch a scheme to rehabilitate victims of domestic violence in the state.

The announcement comes in the wake of public outrage triggered by the three recent incidents in the state in which the husbands chopped off the hands of their wives following a tiff.

Mr Singh convened a high-level official meeting to discuss the issue and firm up plans to curb the disturbing trend witnessed for the first time in the state.

The meeting has taken a series of measures to check domestic violence of such barbaric nature.

"A welfare scheme will be launched to rehabilitate victims of

such incidents. Besides, it has been decided to bring an amendment to appropriate sections of Indian Penal Code to make provisions dealing with domestic violence more stringent", he told reporters here.

He said currently, offenders of domestic violence of such nature are booked under section 307 (attempt to murder) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). But, this is inadequate considering the brutal nature of the attack on women by their husbands in such cases.

"We are planning to amend the law to make it more stringent in such cases", he added.

Mr Chouhan said the government has decided to establish women desks in 700 police stations in different districts in the state to deal exclusively with cases of violence against women.

Cong will rethink support to MVA govt, says Patole

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, MARCH 27

The row over the Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut's statement that NCP chief Sharad Pawar should lead the United Progressive Alliance has not died down as the Maharashtra Congress has once again issued a threat to Shiv Sena saying the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in the state is in power because of its support. State Congress chief Nana Patole said that if Sena leader Sanjay Raut does not stop criticising Congress leadership, they will have to think over their decision of supporting the government.

"The MVA government exists due to Congress' support. A time has come to make them understand that they (Sena and NCP) are not the government. If Sanjay Raut continues to speak against the Congress, we will have to take our own decision," said Mr Patole in Bhiwandi on Saturday.

Mr Raut had said in New Delhi that the UPA is 'paralysed' now and hence a non-Congress

leader like Mr Pawar should lead it at the national level. His statement has invoked an angry reaction from the Congress leaders, which asked whether the Sena leader was a spokesperson of Mr Pawar.

Reiterating his support the NCP chief, Mr Raut said that "some people in Delhi" are preparing to form UPA-II, which is why the existing UPA needs to be strengthened if the Opposition is to fight the BJP.

Objecting to him, Mr Patole said the criticism of Congress leaders will not be tolerated by his party. "One should not forget that Sharad Pawar was a minister in the Manmohan Singh-led UPA government, which was in power at the Centre for 10 years under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi," he added.

The Congress leader also hit out at Mr Raut saying he should stop advocating Mr Pawar for the post of UPA head. Those who are not a part of the UPA should not talk about its leadership, he said.

In Maha, eateries, bars to shut at 8 pm

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MARCH 27

In a bid to contain the spread of the Coronavirus, the Maharashtra government has increased the fine ₹500 from ₹200 for not wearing a mask. Gathering of more than five people would not be allowed between 8 pm to 7 am from the midnight of March 27 till April 15. All restaurants, malls and theatres will also remain shut during the period. However, home delivery will be allowed.

The relief and rehabilitation department issued an order in this regard on Saturday evening. The order is issued in the wake of rising numbers of cases of more than 71,000 positive cases in Maharashtra in the last two days.

The order also said that listing of contacts shall be carried out in respect of

all persons found positive, along with their tracking, identification, quarantine and follow up of contacts for 14 days (80 per cent of contacts to be traced in 72 hours).

"Gathering of more than five people will not be allowed from 8 pm to 7 am effective from midnight on 27th March, 2021. Violation of the same will attract a penalty of ₹1,000/-per head on the offenders," it said.

All Public places including Garden and beaches closed from 8 pm to 7 am effective from midnight March 27, 2021. Violation of the same will attract a penalty of ₹1,000/-per head on the offenders. Any person found to be without masks shall be fined an amount ₹500. Any person found spitting in Public place will be fined an amount ₹1,000.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES

FIVE KILLED, 24 HURT AS EGYPT BUILDING FALLS

Cairo: A nine-story apartment building collapsed in the Egyptian capital early on Saturday, killing at least five people and injuring about two dozen others, an official said.

Rescue workers were searching for any survivors trapped under the rubble of the building in the el-Salam neighborhood, said Khalid Abdel-Al, the administrative head of Cairo governorate.

At least 24 others were injured and taken to hospitals, he said in a statement. Police cordoned off the area, keeping back the curious and people apparently looking for relatives in the building. Workers were seen using bulldozers to clear away debris.

LANKA RELEASES ALL 54 INDIAN FISHERMEN HELD

Colombo: Sri Lanka has released all 54 Indian fishermen arrested this week for allegedly poaching in the country's territorial waters, Indian officials confirmed on Saturday.

The Indian official sources here said that 40 of them were released on Friday and the remaining 14 have been released this morning.

The 54 Indian fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy on March 24 at two different locations in the north and northeastern seas. The Navy also seized their five trawlers. Upon their arrest, the Indian High Commission here said that they were providing consular assistance to the arrested fishermen.

BRIT SPY PLANE SPOTS RUSSIA TESTING MISSILES

Moscow, March 27: A British reconnaissance plane that monitors Russian war games in the Arctic and Moscow confirmed it has now completed initial tests of Vladimir Putin's deadly new missile.

Reports say that the 6,100 mph Zircon hypersonic weapon has now been fired a total of four times from the Admiral Gorskov frigate and will go into service next year.

Putin sees the Mach 8 Zircon as his missile of choice to target American cities in the event of a nuclear conflict, it is claimed.

A British RC-135W reconnaissance aircraft was circling the skies where the Gorskov this week sailed off the Kola Peninsula, reported the Barents Observer.

It was the second time in a week that a British spy plane had buzzed an area of the Barents Sea to snoop on Russian conducted missile tests, said the report. The Gorskov had been expected to fire the "unstoppable" weapon this week, but the defence ministry only specifically confirmed supersonic Oniks missile launches from the frigate which hit a target off Novaya Zemlya.

— Agencies

Iran, China ink 25-year alliance

Tehran, March 27: Iran and China signed a 25-year "strategic cooperation pact" on Saturday in the latest expansion of Beijing's flagship trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative as the US rivals build closer ties.

Negotiations for the deal, launched five years ago, sparked controversy in Iran last year and virtually no details of its contents have been released.

China is Iran's leading trade partner and was one of the biggest buyers of Iranian oil before then US president Donald Trump reimposed sweeping

unilateral sanctions in 2018 after abandoning a multilateral nuclear agreement with Tehran.

The China-Iran pact, which Tehran said included "political, strategic and economic" components, was signed by the two countries' foreign ministers, Wang Yi and Mohammad Javad Zarif, reported.

"We believe this document can be very effective in deepening" Iran-China relations, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said, recalling that the pact had first been proposed during a visit to Tehran by

● **CHINA IS Iran's leading trade partner and was one of the biggest buyers of Iranian oil.**

Chinese President Xi Jinping in January 2016.

Xi and his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani agreed then to establish a roadmap for "reciprocal investments in the fields of transport, ports, energy, industry and services." Xi has championed the Belt and Road Initiative, a plan to fund infrastructure projects and increase China's sway overseas.

In July last year, controversy erupted over

the proposed deal after former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad charged that negotiations were being held for a "new, 25-year agreement with a foreign country" without the knowledge of the Iranian people.

The foreign minister was heckled in parliament when he assured lawmakers there was "nothing secret" in the proposed deal, which he promised would be publicly announced "once it has been finalised".

The government has yet to honour that promise and few details have been made public. — AFP

N. KOREA VOWS MILITARY BUILDUP

Seoul, March 27: North Korea threatened a further military build-up on Saturday in response to Joe Biden's condemnation of this week's missile launches, a weapons test that marked Pyongyang's first substantive provocation since the US president took office.

The nuclear-armed North has a long history of using weapons tests to ramp up tensions, in a carefully calibrated process to try to forward its objectives. — AFP

Biden attacks Georgia's new voting limits

Washington, March 27: Georgia's sweeping new voting restrictions came under attack on Friday, with civil rights groups challenging them in court and President Joe Biden saying the U.S. Justice Department was examining what he called an "atrocious" law.

Among other limits, the Republican-backed law enacted on Thursday imposes stricter identification requirements, limits drop boxes, gives lawmakers the power to take over local elections and shortens the early voting period for all runoff elections. It also makes it a misdemeanor for people to offer food and water to voters

here in line, in a state where people sometimes wait for hours in the heat to vote.

The legislation has alarmed Democrats, who just months ago celebrated historic wins in the presidential election and two Senate campaigns in Georgia that helped deliver the White House and U.S. Senate control to their party in Washington.

Biden, the first Democratic presidential candidate in three decades to win Georgia, on Friday accused Republicans there and in other states of mounting a broad assault on voting rights.

It's an atrocity," Biden told

reporters, shortly after comparing the restrictions for a second straight day to racist "Jim Crow" laws, which were put in place in Southern states in the decades after the 1861-65 U.S. Civil War to legalise racial segregation and disenfranchise person of colour citizens.

Biden said it was unclear what, if anything, the White House could do to address the law but added that the Justice Department was "taking a look." He again urged Congress to pass Democratic-backed legislation that would require automatic registration, expand absentee voting and temper

voter ID laws.

Thus far, Republican opposition in the U.S. Senate has stymied that effort. A coalition of civil rights groups sued the state in Atlanta federal court just hours after Republican Governor Brian Kemp signed the legislation into law on Thursday, arguing that the measures are intended to make it harder for people — particularly Black voters — to cast ballots.

Marc Elias, a Democratic lawyer who spearheaded the party's election legal efforts last year, is representing the groups, which include The New Georgia Project, Black Voters Matter Fund and

Rise, Inc.

"These provisions lack any justification for their burdensome and discriminatory effects on voting," the lawsuit said.

Kemp issued a statement on Friday in response to Biden's comments, saying the law "ensures election integrity." "There is nothing 'Jim Crow' about requiring a photo or state-issued ID to vote by absentee ballot — every Georgia voter must already do so when voting in-person," he said. "President Biden, the left, and the national media are determined to destroy the sanctity and security of the ballot box." — Reuters

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SHORT TAKES

Maiden I-League title for Kerala

Kolkata: Gokulam Kerala FC on Saturday clinched their maiden I-League title in spectacular fashion as they came back from a goal down to beat TRAU 4-1 in the final match of the season here.

Bidyashagar Singh's 23rd minute strike did little to stop the Gokulam juggernaut as goals by Sharif Mohamed (69th), Emil Benny (74th), Dennis Antwi (77th) and Mohammad Rashid (90+6) handed them the trophy. With Churchill Brothers winning 3-2 against Punjab FC in the day's other match held simultaneously at another venue here, Gokulam shared points (29) with the Goan side but were crowned champions on head-to-head record.

In the two matches the two sides had played in the season, Churchill had won 3-2 once while Gokulam had emerged 3-0 victorious in the other.

— PTI

Verstappen takes Bahrain GP pole

Sakhir: Red Bull's Max Verstappen took a superb pole position for the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix on Saturday and will start the race immediately ahead of Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton.

Verstappen earned his fourth career pole to deny Hamilton his 99th, edging out the world champion by .39 seconds on his final attempt.

Hamilton's teammate Valtteri Bottas was .59 behind Verstappen in third, while Charles Leclerc qualified in an encouraging fourth for Ferrari. Verstappen clinched the season-ending Abu Dhabi last December from pole and now goes for the 11th win of his career. Hamilton seeks a record-extending 96th win. Verstappen led the first part of qualifying, known as Q1, ahead of AlphaTauri's 20-year-old Japanese driver Yuki Tsunoda. Both cars use Honda engines and the Japanese manufacturer is in its final season. — AP

Medvedev, Osaka through in Miami

Miami: Daniil Medvedev celebrated his rise to second in the world with a seamless entry into the Miami Open on Friday, trouncing Taiwan's Lu Yen-Hsun in less than an hour. Russia's Medvedev needed just 56 minutes to subdue Lu 6-2, 6-2, firing nine aces with just one double fault as he advanced to a third-round meeting with Australian Alexei Popyrin, a 6-4, 6-2, winner over 30th-seeded American Reilly Opelka. Women's world No. 2 Naomi Osaka, seeded second behind top-ranked Australian Ashleigh Barty, had a tougher time, but conquered her nerves in her first match since winning the Australian Open to beat Aussie Ajla Tomljanovic 7-6 (7/3), 6-4. Men's third seed Alexander Zverev, ranked seventh in the world, became the biggest upset victim so far in the prestigious ATP Masters and WTA hardcourt tournament, falling 1-6, 6-3, 6-1 to 83rd-ranked Finn Emil Ruusuvuori. — AFP

'MVP' Harden hits 44 to spark Nets

Washington: James Harden delivered game highs of 44 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists Friday to power the Brooklyn Nets over Detroit 113-111 while Boston ended Milwaukee's eight-game NBA win streak.

Harden missed Wednesday's loss at Utah with neck soreness but returned with a vengeance at Detroit, hitting 14-of-30 from the floor.

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: Third ODI from 1.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

European Qualifiers for 2022 World Cup: Kazakhstan vs France from 6.30 pm on Sony Ten 2

FORMULA ONE

Bahrain Grand Prix: Race from 8.25 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

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DECODING DECIDER

India, England look to end series on high in winner-takes-all game

Pune, March 27: Indian cricket team may like to revisit its 50-over template while picking up pieces from the Friday carnage with an aim to complete a hat-trick of series wins against England in the third and final ODI here on Sunday.

On batting belters that's been on offer at the Gahunje Stadium, England hit an astounding 20 sixes in a 337-run chase which became a cakewalk, thanks to inpet bowling from spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Krunal Pandya.

Never before has captain Virat Kohli missed Ravindra Jadeja as much as he would have on Friday when Jonny Bairstow and Ben Stokes took the mickey out of India's left-arm wrist and orthodox spinners.

In the bowling department, Kuldeep scripted an unwanted record when he conceded 8 sixes, most by an Indian bowler. He leaked 84 runs in the second game after giving 64 runs in the first. And, so did Krunal Pandya, who gave 72 runs in six overs with an embarrassing average of 12 per over.

So, in all probability, the duo could be replaced by leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal and Washington Sundar, who can also chip in with the bat, if needed.

From team's perspective, it would be impossible to ignore Yuzvendra Chahal's inclusion in the playing XI even though the Haryana leg-spinners hasn't been in the best of forms.

Pandya senior would still make it to the team because of his batting skills but the apology of left-arm spin has certainly ensured that he won't be considered as a long term option.

In terms of batting, a total of 337 is certainly not bad by any standards but perhaps India can now look to have strategic shift in terms of innings building process.

The Men In Blue are the only team that always believes in accelerating in the last 15 overs, a template that was set by their illustrious former captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

It has worked on most occasions but of late, England with a world title has shown the world that attacking up front on batting tracks is the way forward.

— PTI



India captain Virat Kohli (left) congratulates England's Jonny Bairstow after the second ODI at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Friday.

— AFP

Jonny to stick to his fearless shots

Pune, March 27: The reigning world champions would continue to stick to their aggressive and fearless brand of cricket, opening batsman Jonny Bairstow said after the tourists chased down 337 in just 43.3 overs to set up a series decider here on Sunday.

The opening batsman followed up 94 from 66 balls in the first match with 124 from 112 as England plundered 20 sixes to make the stiff chase a complete mismatch. "To be honest, I think it's just happening that way. There hasn't been a conversation saying we must hit more sixes," Bairstow said after Friday's series-levelling second ODI.

Bairstow smashed seven sixes, while Ben Stokes hit cleared the ropes 10 times before falling for 99. Opener

ARCHER TO UNDERGO RIGHT HAND SURGERY ON MONDAY

Pune, March 27: Injured England speedster Jofra Archer, who has already been ruled out of the Indian Premier League, will undergo a surgery on his right hand on Monday.

Archer played in two Test matches and five T20 Internationals against India before returning home a few days ago after the completion of the shortest format. "England fast bowler Jofra Archer will undergo a procedure to his right hand following a scan and subsequent Consultant review since he returned to the UK on Tuesday," the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said on Saturday.

"He has also had a further injection for the right elbow injury that had seen him declared unfit for selection for the current ODI series versus India."

"The procedure on Jofra's hand will take place on March 29 so he can recover during the planned break following his elbow injection."

— PTI

Jason Roy (55) and debutant Liam Livingstone (27 not out) also added to India's misery as they conceded 20 sixes in total

— the joint most by them in an ODI. They had conceded a similar 20 sixes against South Africa in 2015.

"If you look at where the game is going around the world, whether that be in T20, or 50-over cricket the team that hits the most boundaries generally wins the game. And if you're hitting boundaries that are going for six rather than four, then the numbers are going to stack up slightly more."

"There's 20 today — now, that's an extraordinary number in one game... If we can keep hitting boundaries, keep putting bowlers under pressure, they know if they miss their lengths, then that potentially could go for six."

The reigning world champions are however aware of their high-risk approach, having lost the series-opener by 66 runs despite Bairstow and Roy getting the team off to a similarly spectacular start.

— PTI

Squash Challenger delayed after two Indians test +ve

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 27

The opening leg of the HCL SRFI Indian squash Tour has been postponed after two players tested positive for Covid-19. The event, the first international challenger tournament since the onset of the pandemic, was scheduled to start at the Indian Squash Academy here on Saturday afternoon.

The two Indian players who tested positive — Abhishek Pradhan and Abhishek Agarwal — have been withdrawn from the draw and the start of the tournament has been delayed until

● **The two Indian players who tested positive have been withdrawn from the draw and the start of the tournament has been delayed until Monday.**

Monday. There will be another round of RT-PCR testing on Monday morning.

"If the next round of testing finds no positive Covid-19 tests, then the tournament will take place from March 29 to April 1, with both the second round and quarter-finals taking place on Tuesday, March 30," a

statement from the organisers said.

All players are in a bio-bubble at a city hotel and they have been told not to step out of the room until they receive a negative test result. The tournament has participants from Egypt, Russia, France, Canada and the USA. If it starts, the tournament will now be held behind closed doors. The Professional Squash Association which is in close contact with the Squash Rackets Federation of India has given players an option to withdraw from the tournament and also reimburse the cost for the extended stay.

Tendulkar Covid +ve, in home quarantine

New Delhi, March 27: Legendary Sachin Tendulkar has tested positive for Covid-19 and is currently in home isolation.

The former India captain confirmed the news on his social media handle.

One of the biggest names to have tested positive for the virus in recent times, Tendulkar, however, informed that all his other family members have tested negative.

"I have been testing myself and taking all the recommended precautions to ensure Covid is kept at bay. However, I have tested positive today following mild symptoms," the 47-year-old wrote on his twitter handle.

"All others at home have



tested negative. I have quarantined myself at home and I am following all the necessary protocols as advised by my doctors. I want to thank all the healthcare professionals who are supporting me and many others across the country. Take care all of you," he further wrote in his official statement.

— PTI

SIDHU-TEJA BAG GOLD IN RAPID FIRE PISTOL

New Delhi, March 27: India's Vijayveer Sidhu and Tejaswani claimed the gold medal in the 25m rapid fire pistol mixed team event to extend the country's dominant run in the ISSF World Cup here on Saturday.

In an all-Indian gold medal match, Sidhu and Tejaswani comfortably beat the duo of Gurpreet Singh and Ashok Abhidnya Patil 9-1 at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range.

In the Qualification 2, Gurpreet and Patil finished at the top with a total score of 370 while the team of 16-year-old Tejaswani and 18-year-old Sidhu aggregated 368.

On Friday, Sidhu won the individual silver medal in the 25 rapid fire pistol event ahead of Anish Bhanwala and Gurpreet.

However, the Indian pair of Kynan Chenai and Shreyasi Singh missed out on a podium finish as they settled for the fourth place in the trap mixed team final of the prestigious tournament.

The home team lost to Turkey's Safiye Saritürk and Yavuz Ilnam 35-38.

Kynan, who finished fourth in the individual men's trap on Friday, began badly but improved as the mixed final progressed, even as Shreyasi too missed a few shots while finding the target on other occasions.

The Indian duo shot 141 in the qualifications to qualify in the fourth place for the bronze medal match behind Saritürk and Ilnam (143), who made up for his partner's off-colour outing with his consistent showing.

The Italian team of Alessia Iezzi and Valerio Grazini topped the qualifications with 145 while the Slovakian pair of Zuzana Rehak Stefecekova and Adrian Drobny was second with 143.

In the final, Iezzi and Grazini prevailed over the Slovaks Stefecekova and Drobny 39-36 on the shotgun range. The medal-less outing in trap notwithstanding, a dominant India continued to lead the standings with 13 gold, eight silver and six bronze for a total of 27 podium finishes.

SAINA BOWS OUT OF ORLEANS BADMINTON

Paris, March 27: Saina Nehwal bowed out in a straight games in the women's singles semifinals but unheralded duo of Krishna Prasad Garaga and Vishnu Vardhan Goud Panjala kept India in the title hunt by storming into men's doubles final at the Orleans Masters here on Saturday.

Saina lost 17-21, 17-21 to Denmark's Line Christophersen in 28 minutes, while Ashwini Ponnappa and N. Sikki Reddy also faltered 18-12, 9-21 to top seeded Thongkolphat Kititharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai at the semifinals.

Denim, Lakshanya emerge ITF junior champions

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 27

Top seed Denim Yadav got the better of third seed Yuvan Nandal 6-3, 1-6, 6-2 in a two-hour long final to win the boys' title in the TVS ITF juniors under-18 tennis tournament.

The girls' singles title was annexed by second seed Lakshanya Vishwanath. She prevailed over Sonal Patil 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

Results: Final: Boys' singles: Denim Yadav (1) bt Yuvan Nandal (3) 6-3, 1-6, 6-2. **Girls' singles:** Lakshanya Vishwanath (2) bt Sonal Patil 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

Shrikrishna on a roll

Shrikrishna of Petroleum Sports Promotion Board entered the semifinals of the Saleem Snooker Academy-Jhilmill all-India open snooker tournament by beating Ishpreet Singh.

Results: Quarterfinal: Laxman Rawat (PSPB) bt Pandurangiah (RSPB) 4-0; Shrikrishma (PSPB) bt Ishpreet Singh Chadda (MAH) 4-1; Saurav Kothari (PSPB) bt Shivam Arora (PSPB) 4-2; Dhvaj Haria (PSPB) bt Rafath Habib (RSPB) 4-0.

Round of 16: Laxman Rawat (PSPB) bt Peter Paul (RSPB) 4-1; Pandurangiah (RSPB) bt Faisal Khan (RSPB) 4-2; Shrikrishma (PSPB) bt Kriesch Gurbaxani (MAH) 4-2; Ishpreet Singh Chadda (MAH) bt Anuj Uppal (Delhi) 4-1; Saurav Kothari (PSPB) bt Himanshu Jain (Telangana) 4-0; Shivam Arora (Pune) bt Digvijay Kadian (Haryana) 4-2; Rafath Habib (RSPB) bt Dilip Kumar (RSPB) 4-2; Dhvaj Haria (PSPB) bt Varun Kumar (TNBSA) 4-0.



(From left) Lakshanya Vishwanath, winner of the girls' singles title in TVS ITF juniors under-18 tennis tournament, and runner-up Sonal Patil. (Second from right) Denim Yadav, winner of the boys' title and runner-up Yuvan Nandal.

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