

IN BRIEF

**BHATTI
CRITICISES KCR
OVER IRRIGATION
PROJECTS**

From Page 1

The CLP leader pointed out that during his “cycle yatra”, people are largely complaining about increasing fuel prices and the three farm acts. He said people have decided to teach a lesson to the NDA government whenever the occasion comes.

On TRS government’s rule, Bhatti Vikramarka said Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has designed irrigation projects not to give water but make money through the backdoor.

He addressed a meeting of Congress leaders and activists at the DCC office after completion of his cycle yatra on Friday. He cycled to the DCC office through Manchukonda, Buddampadu and Panditapuram.

**HIGH COURT
ISSUES WARRANT
AGAINST TAHSILDAR**DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 12

The Telangana High Court on Friday issued a bailable warrant against Hayathnagar mandal tahsildhar Prameela Rani for ignoring its orders to appear before the court.

“Taking a serious view of the “obstinate attitude” of tahsildhar for not appearing in court despite twice being ordered to do so, Justice M. S. Ramachandra Rao issued a bailable warrant. He directed district authorities to produce the tahsildhar before the court on March 19.

The High Court was dealing with a contempt case challenging inaction of the tahsildhar in inspecting and marking boundaries of a plot at Saheb-nagar village of Hayathnagar mandal in Ranga Reddy district.

The plot owner had approached High Court stating that revenue authorities had been stopping construction on his Plot No. 53 in Survey No. 7. However, authorities submitted that the petitioner’s plot was on land belonging to the government, which is adjacent to Survey No. 7.

Following that, the court directed the tahsildhar in 2019 to conduct a survey and demarcate the petitioner’s plot. Even after lapse of two years, the orders had not been implemented. Hence, the petitioner filed a contempt of court case, leading to issue of the bailable warrant.

**NIA FILES FRESH
CHARGE SHEET
AGAINST ISI MAN**DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 12

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

According to a press release issued by the agency, NIA has filed a supplementary charge-sheet against Imran Yakub Giteli @ Giteli Imran, a resident of Gujarat, for his involvement in raising funds for espionage activities in India.

The case was initially registered under various sections of IPC and UAPA at Counter Intelligence Police Station, Intelligence Department, Vijayawada. It pertained to conspiracy hatched by Pakistani ISI agents with their associates based in India to carry out terrorist acts in the country. In furtherance of this conspiracy, they were collecting sensitive and classified information relating to vital defence installations.

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

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

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

It’s time to welcome New India: Tamilisai

TS Governor inaugurates ‘Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav’

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 12

Heralding the celebrations leading up to the 75th year of India’s Independence, Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan inaugurated ‘Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav’ at the police parade ground in Hanamkonda where she hoisted the National Flag. Beginning her speech in Telugu, Dr Tamilisai wished the people of Warangal and said: “As the entire nation celebrates this momentous occasion, I take pride in eulogising the glorious era of Independent India from the soil of Telangana, which has a major partnership now in the country’s progress.”

She noted that when several countries across the world, including the most developed, are still struggling to overcome the worst-ever crisis created by the Covid-19 pandemic in the last one year, India has not only endured its wrath but also showed a new direction to the world by developing, producing, and supplying indigenous vaccines to combat the virus.

“We must all be proud that our country is supplying our indigenous



Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundarajan releases the Tricolour balloons to mark the inaugural of ‘Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav’ at the police parade ground in Hanamkonda on Friday.

Covid vaccines to more than 50 countries including many developed nations across the globe. This truly signifies the new and Atmanirbhar Bharat,” she stressed.

The Independent India has made tremendous progress on all fronts during the last 75 years. “In my opinion, the biggest success achieved by India in these 75 years is sus-

taining the parliamentary form of democracy braving all odds and it gave the country stability for so many years,” the Governor said.

Dr Tamilisai said the second biggest success story of Independent India is preserving unity and integrity despite diverse cultures, religions, languages, lifestyles and ethos.

“Azadi ka Amruth Mahotsav is not only an occasion to remember the freedom fighters and cherish our achievements, but also gives us an opportunity to vision and plan for India at 100 years of independence,” Dr Soundarajan observed. Later, she released Tricolour balloons into the air to mark the occasion.



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

— DC

AP CM presents ₹75L to Tricolour creator’s kin

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 12

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

The CM flew down to the remote town of Macherla in Guntur district in a helicopter, went to the house of Seetha Mahalakshmi at PWD Colony and offered cash aid of ₹75 lakh from the state government and interacted

with the family members.

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

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

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

department order on March 11. The money has been credited to her account on March 12.

The event was conceptualised and coordinated by special chief secretary Dr Rajat Bhargava, in which state ministers Muttamsetti Srinivas Rao, Mekathoti Sucharita, Ch. Ranganatha Raju, MLAs Kasu Mahesh Reddy, Bolla Brahma Naidu, Vidadala Rajani, Dr. G Srinivas Reddy and Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy, MLCs Dokka Manikyavaraprasada Rao, Janga Krishnamurthy and U m m a r e d d y Venkateswarlu, Collector Vivek Yadav and other officials participated.

SPYING | CASE

Giteli in contact with Pak-based handlers: Agency

NIA files fresh charges on ISI man raising funds

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

ED TIGHTENS NOOSE AROUND CITY-BASED NRI IN SAUDI

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 12

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has stepped up investigation into the alleged money laundering by Habib Abdul Razzaq Hadi Ali Baghdadi, a city-based non-resident Indian (NRI) presently living in Saudi Arabia.

The probe agency is said to have chanced up on property registration documents of Baghdadi in which both the quantum of sale consideration and the payment methods were questionable. In some documents it was merely mentioned that the sale consideration was received by him while the crucial data on mode of payment was missing from the records.

Sources said that in one instance, Baghdadi, representing his company Hira Multi Construction Ventures Pvt Ltd, executed two sale deeds in favour of Mohd Hadi Ali and Huda Hadi Ali in January 2018.

Devotee flow declines on Shivaratri

From Page 1

On special occasions and festival times, many devotees from within the state visit the bathing ghats at Kaleshwaram, Manthani, Godavari Khani, Velgatoor and Dharmapuri towns for a holy bath in the Godavari river. But due to pollution of water, very few devotees were seen coming in during the Maha Shivaratri on Thursday for a holy dip.

P. Prakash, secretary of the Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee, asked: “What is the use of such a massive project, constructed investing crores when foul smell is emitted from the backwaters of the project? The government is not taking any steps for cleaning the Godavari, he said. The Congress party Ramagundam assembly segment in-charge, MS Raj Takur alleged that with the negligence of the local MLA and the ruling establishment of the

Ramagundam municipal corporation, the sewage and drainage water from various colonies are released directly into the Godavari without any filtering. “Because of this, the water in the Godavari is polluted and this is resulting in the formation of fog. Consumption of such water will result in several health-related problems,” he said.

There is a need to clean the Godavari using modern technology along with setting up of sewerage treatment plants for filtering of the drainage water released from various towns, he proposed.

Youth Congress leader P. Arun Kumar alleged that the officials are not taking steps for preventing the release of effluents from factories and industries into the Godavari. They must not allow devotees to throw waste and immerse idols along with plastic into the river, he said.

Freedom struggle set an example, says KCR

From Page 1

Rao said that among all the struggles and fights for freedom, the Indian independence struggle is far more important since it set an example for others on what non-violence can achieve. Azadi Ka Amrut

Mahotsav is a series of events being organised by the Centre to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Independence.

The mahotsav will be celebrated as a Jan Utsav in the spirit of Jan Bhagidari.

The Telangana state government would organise

various programmes till August 15, 2022.

The Chief Minister recently allocated ₹25 crore for the Amrut Mahotsav events.

He formed a committee headed by adviser K.V. Ramana Chary to chalk out plans for various events.

Alert in state as Covid cases rise

KANIZA GARARI | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 12

A resurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic in neighbouring Maharashtra has put the Telangana state government on a special alert. Health minister Etala Rajendar ahs ordered an immediate stepping up of the testing process in the state.

Increased surveillance has been ordered for Nizamabad, Jayashankar-Bhupalapally, Jagtial and other districts bordering Maharashtra. Ground-level health care staff such as Asha workers and village officials have been asked to monitor the arrivals from outside and test them for Covid-19 before they mixed with the local population.

The minister, during a teleconference with district medical and health officers and superintendents of government hospitals, said the number of tests every day must be raised to 50,000. The daily testing count on March 11 was 21,340.

The testing of samples had been reduced as it was

SPEED UP WORK ON NEW MEDICAL COLLEGES, ETALA TELLS OFFICIALS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 12

Construction of medical colleges must be completed as soon as possible, health minister Etala Rajendar said at a meeting with health officials and senior government officials.

The Union health ministry has not sanctioned medical colleges to the state, and the state government is keen that clearances are received soon. The districts of Karimnagar, Khammam, Kothagudem, Asifabad,

Tandur and Sangareddy are to have medical colleges. Completing all the works will ensure that permission can be obtained soon, said Rajendar.

The minister said that the Aarogya scheme of the state government has to be linked with PM Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) so that more people can avail the benefits.

After the introduction of the new scheme, there are duplications and and it is important to prevent that, the state health minister said.

believed that the number of cases was coming down. Private diagnostic centres say the sample collections remain high. An official of a diagnostic chain here said, “We have 10 centers and each of them get more than 200 samples a day. The main centre gets 500 samples a day.”

The rise in cases across

different states has made it important for the government machinery to be re-activated. Aspects like the wards earmarked for Covid-19 treatment, safety protocols of healthcare workers and the preparedness to deal with serious cases were reviewed by the minister and health officials. A government doctor

KCR guides TRS leaders on strategy

From Page 1

To avoid the repeat of the 2015 MLC election, the party leadership has taken several steps.

TRS president and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao and working president K.T. Rama Rao on Friday held a tele-conference with all in-charge ministers and other leaders overseeing the elections and guided

them on the strategy to be adopted in the final hours before the polling to boost the party’s winning chances.

The data of each and every graduate voter, comprising their address and phone number was provided to all party election incharges. They were asked to share the data with booth-level party committees. Instructions were

given to booth committees to track each and every voter, reach out to them and ensure they cast their vote. Micro-level booth management became all the more important in the wake of fears about a poor voter turnout due to the long weekend.

All parties fear that the four-day holiday — Maha Shivaratri on March 11, Shab-e-Meraj on March 12,

Second Saturday on March 13 and Sunday on March 14 — would adversely impact the voting. Parties that secured mobile phone numbers of voters have shared the data with their booth-wise teams. These teams are calling up the voters, requesting them not to leave the city and urging those who already left the city to return by March 14 to cast their votes.

CM: Yadadri queue complex by April 15

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 12

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has instructed officials to complete giving final touches to renovation works at Sri Yadadri Laxmi Narasimha temple complex for quicker reopening of the temple.

Reviewing ongoing works at the temple premises in Pragathi Bhavan here on Friday, he suggested decorations at the queue complex. He wanted brass fittings along the 350-feet queue line. Officials showed the CM four designs of Kalash (metal pots) to be placed along queue lines. He then zeroed in on one. He wanted the compound wall on the northern side demolished for the queue complex, which he wants to be completed by

April 15. The Chief Minister desired that there be a brass Deepa Sthamba (light pole) and pedestal. Inquiring about Shivalayam, he said brass tridents should be erected along the compound wall. He wanted no obstructions for 360-degree view of the temple, which should be iconic.

Like display of Sudershan Chakra during Brahmotsavam, K. Chandrashekar Rao wanted tridents all along the Shiva temple and Radhasala. He suggested that a compound wall be constructed around the Vishnu Pushkarini Hills, which should be illuminated from both sides. He said an 80-feet lampost must be erected at the center of the lawn.

The CM appreciated construction of Addala Mandapam (mirror hall) and said it is

turning out to be very beautiful. He witnessed a demo of lighting around the temple complex during nights.

Speaking at the meeting, Chandrashekar Rao said, “After renovation, Yadadri should have an exclusive look compared to temples all over the world. The entire Yadadri temple, renovated with Krishna Sila (black stone), will become known for its uniqueness. After the reopening, devotees will visit the temple in lakhs. Measures should be taken to ensure that devotees do not face any difficulties during their holy visit.”

Government’s chief advisor Rajiv Sharma, adviser Anurag Sharma, chief secretary Suresh Kumar, CMO secretary Smita Sabharwal, CM’s special secretary Bhoopal Reddy.

SHORT TAKES

6TH PERSON HELD FOR ADVOCATE COUPLE'S MURDER

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, MARCH 12

Ramagundam police commissionerate personnel arrested one more person Kapu Anil, 33, who allegedly helped Bittu Srinu in the murder of the advocate-couple, Gattu Vaman Rao and P.V. Nagamani at Kalvacherla village of Ramagiri mandal in Peddapalli district on February 17.

Anil, the sixth accused to be arrested, is a native of Arukalagudem of Manthani and a cousin of Bittu Srinu. He reportedly accompanied Srinu and helped him in the execution of the murder plot.

Those arrested earlier include Srinu, Shivandula Chiranjeevi, Akkapaku Kumar, Udari Lachiah and Kunta Srinu.

Nine persons were produced before the Manthani magistrate as eye-witnesses, including a driver and conductor, and Gattu Kishan Rao, father of Vaman Rao.

NMC APPROVES BUDGET OF ₹390 CRORE FOR '21-22

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, MARCH 12

Nizamabad Municipal Corporation (NMC) has placed annual budget proposals for ₹390.92 crore for the financial year 2021-22 on Friday. A special budget meeting was conducted at New Ambedkar Bhavan, chaired by mayor Dandu Neethu Kiran.

The budget estimate projects income through taxes is at ₹62 crore. Deposits and loans at ₹60 crore and followed by non-plan, plan grants at ₹226.35 crore. Total revenue expenditure is estimated at ₹86.11 crore. The members unanimously approved the budget estimates for 2021-22 financial year.

Nizamabad urban MLA Bigala Ganesh Gupta, rural MLA Bajireddy Govardhan, MLCS V. Gangadhar Goud, Akula Lalitha, additional collector (local bodies) B.S. Latha, municipal commissioner Jithesh V. Patil, municipal corporators and officials were present.

Speaking at the municipal council meeting, urban MLA Bigala Ganesh Gupta said that a new shopping complex at the cost of ₹6.5 crore will be constructed at Ahmad Bazaar. The existing building is in a dilapidated condition, and to avoid any untoward incident, a new shopping complex is planned, he explained.

MLA assured that priority would be given to the existing traders in municipal shopping complexes at Ahmad Bazaar and Shambhu temple. He said that shops would be allotted on rate fixed by the corporation and open auction. Meanwhile, MLA Ganesh Gupta, mayor Neethu Kiran inspected the newly constructed municipal corporation building.

SWEEPING MACHINE INAUGURATED

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, MARCH 12

A sweeping machine was inaugurated at Rajiv Gandhi auditorium premises here on Friday. Nizamabad municipal corporation procured the sweeping machine at a cost of ₹60 lakh from Pattana Pragathi funds.

Nizamabad urban MLA Bigala Ganesh Gupta, Nizamabad rural MLA Bajireddy Govardhan inaugurated the sweeping machine on the occasion. Mayor Dandu Neethu Kiran, commissioner Jithesh V. Patil and others were present.

MAN THREATENS WITH PISTOL OVER LAND DISPUTE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIRMAL, MARCH 10

A person from Hyderabad allegedly threatened the members of a family with a pistol during heated arguments over a land dispute in Sofinagar in Nirmal town on Friday evening. Nirmal two-town police started an inquiry into the incident following the complaint lodged by Bishal Pasha Khadri.

The police are now searching for the person who allegedly threatened a family's members with a pistol. The person has been identified as Abdul Rasheed of Malakpet of Hyderabad. There was a dispute on the land ownership belonging to Sufi Dargah.

Tips on firefighting



Fire department personnel exhibit how to escape from sudden fire and give tips on firefighting at the women and child hospital in Karimnagar on Friday.

— DC

Cops change approach to end Bhainsa tension

Efforts on to control the spread of false information on social media

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, MARCH 12

The police department is in the process of identifying miscreants, who are often involved in communal clashes and inciting hatred among the people of Bhainsa in Nirmal district. Towards this, the police will keep a close tab on movements of such miscreants.

The state government

took a serious note of the frequent communal clashes in the town as they were impacting tranquility and denting the state's otherwise 'safe' image.

It has been noticed that some youngsters are notorious for whipping up communal passions even during petty issues. Bhainsa police are collecting information about such elements.

It has been noticed that some youngsters are notorious for whipping up communal passions even during petty issues. Bhainsa police are collecting information about such elements.

Adilabad Superintendent of police, and in-charge for Nirmal,

Vishnu S. Warriar said that they would use the PD Act against all individuals who foment trouble. Efforts are also being made to control the spread of false information on social media, which is considered a potent medium.

The police are also trying to find out policing lapses and be vigilant to nip problems in the bud. A step towards this is to

improve its intelligence network in and around Bhainsa.

Meanwhile, police arrested five persons on charges of setting fire to two autos and a hotel at Mahagan village in Bhainsa Rural mandal in the early hours of Friday. Reportedly, police rushed to the spot and put out the fire soon after receiving information about the incident.

Have faith in government, appeals minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 12

Proving all sceptics wrong, the Telangana state is heading towards development in just six years after the formation, said minister for panchayat raj and rural development, Errabelli Dayakar Rao.

Interacting with Telangana Gazetted Officers Association members here on Friday, he asked the people to note the petty politics of the opposition against the TRS government and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao is striving for a 'Bangaru Telangana.' The Central

Government is neglecting the coach factory and Steel plant in Bayyaram included in the state Reorganisation Act.

"The hard work of all the employees in building a better Telangana state is unforgettable. Chief Minister KCR is constantly reviewing the employees' work to keep the

state on the path of development. During the Coronavirus pandemic, the employees served as frontline warriors. I assure you that the problems of the employees will be resolved soon. Employees must refrain from making hasty decisions," he said.

Further adding, the

employee fitment was delayed due to coronavirus pandemic. However, employees are going to benefit more than expected. Employees will hear that good news in a few days. "We appeal the employees to stand by the government and cooperate," the minister said.

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SHORT TAKES

SHIVRAJ LIKELY TO GO FOR CABINET EXPANSION

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 12

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

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

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

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

VHP RAISES ₹2,500 CR FOR RAM TEMPLE

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 12

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOTICE TO CENTRE ON PLACES OF WORSHIP PLEA

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

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

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

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

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

Stalin's son to contest from Karuna's seat

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

KAMAL HAASAN TO CONTEST FROM COIMBATORE SOUTH

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

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

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

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

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

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

TMC delegation meets EC, demands high-level probe

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

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

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

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

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

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

The TMC also gave similar instances of other leaders.

— PTI



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

ED, CBI summon 2 TMC candidates

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

G 23 leaders not part of 'star campaigners'

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

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

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

Interestingly, however, the party has left out the names of most of the "G-23" letter-writers' group, including Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Kapil Sibal, Manish Tewari, Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Raj Babbar, among others.

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

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

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

MUSLIM LEAGUE FIELDS WOMAN CANDIDATE

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 12

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

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

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

Amrit mahotsav



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

PANDEMIC | BLUES

New date for state public service exam announced under political pressure

Lockdown back in several parts of Maha

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

several cities or districts in the state in a bid to prevent the spread of the virus. A week-long lockdown has also been imposed in Nagpur. Due to the increase in cases in Parbhani district, lockdown will be imposed from tonight 12 am till 6 am on Monday morning. "We appeal to the people of Parbhani and other neighbouring districts, to cooperate," said Nawab Malik, Maharashtra cabinet minister.

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

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

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 12

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

Gujarat and Tamil Nadu too continue to report a

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

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

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

Quad leaders to strive for 'free, inclusive' region

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

GURDEEP SINGH
TAKES OATH AS
PAK SENATOR

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

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

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

SA ZULU KING
GOODWILL
ZWELITHINI DIES

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

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

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

ISRAEL, GREECE,
CYPRUS HOLD
NAVAL DRILL

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

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

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

WOMAN HELD
FOR ASSAULT
ON UBER DRIVER

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

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

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

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

WHO says AstraZeneca is safe

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

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

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

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

Harris said that while a few countries had, as a

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

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

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

Conserving Wildlife



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

—AFP

Cuomo faces impeachment inquiry

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

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

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



Andrew Cuomo

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

An Albany Police Department spokesperson, Steve Smith, didn't immediately return a message, but told that police had reached out to a representative for the woman.

The possible involvement of police comes as more lawmakers called on Cuomo to resign over alleged misconduct with women and allegations that his administration concealed how many nursing home residents died of Covid-19.

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

should quit office now, according to a tally.

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

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

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

UK urges citizens
to leave Myanmar

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

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

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

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

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

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

conference on Thursday accusing her of corruption.

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

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

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

"I've never seen such an illegal mudslinging." Nobel peace laureate Suu Kyi faces other criminal charges including owning unlicensed walkie-talkies and violating Coronavirus restrictions by staging a campaign event in 2020.

Suu Kyi — not seen in public since being detained on February 1 — has a court hearing on Monday. —AFP

RUSSIA TO USE
PRISONERS FOR
ARCTIC CLEAN-UP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NEW | RESEARCH

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

Twin births at 'all-time high' worldwide

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

percent, the study found.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—AFP



Representational image.

—AFP

SHORT TAKES

No Canada, US Opens this year

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

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

Federer hopes for Wimbledon high

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

Muguruza enters Dubai last four

Dubai: Garbine Muguruza overcame Aryna Sabalenka in a tight three-setter for a second consecutive week to storm into the Dubai semi-finals for a third time in seven appearances. The Spaniard, a runner-up in Doha last week, bounced back from a set down to eliminate the third-seeded Sabalenka 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 and set up a showdown with Belgians Elise Mertens. Earlier on centre court, Mertens, the No.10 seed, pulled off a miraculous comeback, saving three match points en route to a 5-7, 7-5, 6-0 success over Jessica Pegula. The world No.18, who was down 5-7, 2-5 before she turned things around, is into the 15th tour-level semi-final of her career. "It's unbelievable to come back like this. I just didn't want to let it go, I just kept on fighting, and I think that was the spirit today," said Mertens. — AFP

India to play WC qualifiers in Qatar

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

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

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

UFC

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

Printed and Published from Karimnagar by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited at Deccan Chronicle Press, H.No. 1-21/12/1, Cherlabhatkur Road, Muggumpur Village, Karimnagar - 505 186 Telangana State Regd. No. H/SD-2/2K RNI Registration No. APENCN/2001/04766 Ph: 9121181123 Grams: CHRONICLE Editor: Kaushik Mitter

LIONS ROAR

Jason smashes 49 as England rout India in first T20



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

NUMBERS GAME

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

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

ing tough questions to the visitors.

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

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

— PTI

GCA GIVES NOD TO 50% CROWD FOR T20 SERIES

Ahmedabad, March 12: The Gujarat Cricket Association (GCA) has decided to allow 50 per cent spectators during the India-England T20 International series at the Narendra Modi Stadium here owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. The series, comprising five matches, is starting on Friday with the final fixture slated to be played on March 20. "We are going to use only 50% seating capacity at the Narendra Modi Stadium for all the T20 matches to be played here due to Covid-19 pandemic," Gujarat Cricket Association vice-president Dhanraj Nathwani said in a media release.

Nathwani said that all Covid-19 guidelines are being followed, adding that special task force committees have been formed to ensure the safety of the fans.

"The entire stadium has been sanitized considering safety of the spectators. All Covid-19 guidelines are being strictly adhered to and special task force committees have been set up to ensure that all required safety measures are implemented and followed," he added. — PTI

SCORECARD

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

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

BEDI DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL AFTER 24 DAYS

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

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

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

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

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

WOMEN'S | CRICKET

Raj first Indian to join 10k club

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

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

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

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

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

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



Mithali Raj

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

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

"Take a bow, @M_Raj03! What an achievement to be the first Indian woman cricketer to surpass the international 10,000-run mark. Absolute legend," Shah wrote on his Twitter handle.

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

Lee lords over India women in third ODI

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kjaers late leveller gives AC advantage

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

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

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

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

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

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

after a 1-1 draw away to Slavia Prague.

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

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

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

THE RESULTS

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

Giles feels IPL is very beneficial for England

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

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

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



Ashley Giles

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

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

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

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

"We have agreed for players to go to the IPL. Those two Test matches were arranged late, they didn't form part of the original schedule. We had agreed with the players and with the IPL that the players would be available right through the tournament and if they got to the later stages, they would be able to participate." — PTI

Battle of equals as Mumbai face Bagan

Margao, March 12: As many as 114 games, 295 goals, 87,811 passes and 7307 tackles later, the Indian Super League 7 will culminate with a heavyweight summit showdown between Mumbai City FC and ATK Mohun Bagan here on Saturday.

The match that lends meaning to every single touch taken so far, in what has been an exciting Hero ISL season, will be played at the Fatorda Stadium.

When Mumbai City FC take on ATK Mohun Bagan in the summit clash, there will be no more complex equations in play. The winner takes

home the trophy. Its as simple as that.

Few would argue that there is a better candidate for the final than these two -- both Bagan and Mumbai have been head and shoulders above the rest throughout the season.

Both the teams come into the final with identical records, 12 wins and just 4 defeats in the league stage.

Despite a nervy penalty-shootout win over FC Goa in the semifinal, it will be Mumbai who head into the final full of confidence.

They did the double over Bagan in the league stage,

ISL-7 | FINAL

● **Both teams come into the final with identical records, 12 wins and just 4 defeats in the league stage.**

the latter of those victories handing them the League Winners Shield.

For Mumbai, this will be a first-ever final, but coach Sergio Lobera, and a handful of his players have been here before when FC Goa lost to Bengaluru FC in 2018-19. The team though has

looked confident under Lobera.

"They (ATK Mohun Bagan) are a very good team with good players and have the momentum. But the most important thing now is to put the focus on ourselves and try to do our best.

"We have no specific plan, only small details about the opponent. We need to work 100 per cent on our style of play," said Lobera.

There will be few selection dilemmas for Lobera, with the exception of figuring out Mandar Rao Dessais replacement. The Goan will miss the final due to suspension.

In the other corner, there is Bagan, buoyed by Antonio Habas almost superhuman record in knockout games. He has already tasted glory twice and has a chance to create history by winning his second straight title and third overall.

On the eve of the final, the Spaniard sounded as focused as ever.

"We have to compete and our idea is to win against our opponents. My team is prepared for winning," he said.

Habas dismissed that previous results had no bearing on the match but that his side was braced for a tough test. — PTI