


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
ANANTAPUR | FRIDAY | 26 MARCH 2021

WEATHER

 **Max:** 39.0°C
Min: 17°C
RH: 23%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Cloudy sky. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 39/17 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalgun Shuddha Dwadasi till 8.18 am; Trayodashi till 6.10 am (Saturday)
Star: Magha till 9.33 pm
Variyam: 10.08 am to 11.39 am; 4.58 am to 6.27 am (Saturday)
Durmuhurtam: 8.44 am to 9.32 am; 12.46 pm to 1.34 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon
HJRI CALENDAR
Sha'ban 12,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.32 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.28 PM
MOONSET 2.39 AM
MOONRISE 3.14 PM

COUNTER POINT



I don't trust these surveys...
I trust our bogus voters
and vote riggers!

SHORT TAKES

Driving test to get tougher

New Delhi: Those seeking driving licences are now required to pass a set of stringent skill tests that include reversing a vehicle with reasonable accuracy to qualify for it, Parliament was informed on Thursday. Passing percentage in order to be eligible to get a driving licence in all regional transport offices has been fixed at 69 per cent, said road transport minister Nitin Gadkari.

Suez Canal to remain choked

Cairo: The owners of a giant container vessel blocking the Suez Canal said on Thursday that they were facing "extreme difficulty" refloating it, prompting Egypt to suspend navigation through one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. Analysts warned the suspension could last days or even weeks.

■ Full report on Page 6

Heat waves likely to turn common

New Delhi: Potentially deadly heat waves will likely become more commonplace in South Asian countries, including India, in the coming decades even if global warming is limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a new study said.

RIPPLE EFFECT

Hot winds from the north could raise temperature

AP coast to feel heat next week

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 25

Coastal Andhra Pradesh and interior plain areas of Rayalaseema are likely to face severe heat conditions from April 1. Hot winds blowing into the coast from north might shoot up the temperatures in both the regions as per the forecast given by IMD, Amaravati on Thursday.

"Tuni, Bapatla and parts of Visakhapatnam are facing heat conditions with rise in the temperatures by

● Tuni, Bapatla and parts of Visakhapatnam are facing heat conditions with rise in the temperatures by 2 to 3 degrees Celsius above normal, said IMD director S. Stella.

2 to 3 degrees Celsius above normal," IMD director S. Stella said.

She said if the temperature goes up by 4.5 to 6.4 degrees above the normal, it will be declared as heat

wave conditions and if it is seven degrees above normal, it will be termed as a severe heat wave condition.

In the coastal region, the average maximum temperature is around 37 degrees Celsius and Rayalaseema around 40 degrees. Under heat wave conditions, all the stations would cross above 40 in coastal Andhra Pradesh and 45 to 48 in Rayalaseema.

Given the intensity of the hot winds blowing from north, most of the places

would cross 40 and above and in some places 45 to 50 degrees Celsius.

On Thursday, Nandigama, Tuni, Anantapur recorded 38.6 degrees Celsius, around 2.5 degrees above normal temperature and Visakhapatnam registered a temperature of 34.2 degrees Celsius. Humid and high temperature might give a tough time to the people of coastal Andhra Pradesh till the onset of southwest monsoons in the first week of June.



Drivers, assigned to election duty, collect their documents before leaving towards their respective polling booth, ahead of the first phase of Assam assembly polls, in Dibrugarh, on Thursday. — PTI

WB poll campaign for 1st phase Assembly seats ends

Kolkata, March 25: Curtains came down at 5 pm on Thursday on the high decibel campaign in 30 Assembly seats in West Bengal where polls are scheduled in the first phase on March 27.

The 30 seats are spread across tribal-dominated Purulia, Bankura, Jhargram, Purba Medinipur (Part 1) and Paschim Medinipur (Part 1) districts which were once considered the citadel of the Left in the state.

The campaign for the seats saw high-profile leaders of the BJP, which has emerged as the main

opposition to the ruling Trinamool Congress, addressing poll rallies in Purulia, Jhargram and Bankura districts promising "ashol poriborton" (actual change) to build "Sonar Bangla" (prosperous Bengal).

The star BJP campaigners for the seats going to poll in the first phase were Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah. The other star campaigners of the saffron party were Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath, party president Jagat Prakash Nadda, top

leader Smriti Irani who repeatedly harped on the various scams.

On the other hand, West Bengal chief minister held poll rallies in each of the 30 constituencies, her injured leg notwithstanding. The TMC supremo in her campaigns described the Modi government as "anti-people" and the Prime Minister a "liar".

The 30 constituencies going to polls on Saturday had overwhelmingly voted for TMC in the last two state elections but BJP had swept them in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. — PTI

SC: WOMEN SSC OFFICERS ARE DISCRIMINATED

New Delhi, March 25: The evaluation criteria set by the Army for granting permanent commission (PC) to women SSC officers constituted systemic discrimination which has caused an economic and psychological harm and an affront to their dignity, the apex court said on Thursday.

The court said the administrative requirement imposed by the Army authorities while considering the case of women Short Service Commission (SSC) officers for PC, of benchmarking them with the officers lowest in merit in the corresponding male batch, is arbitrary and irrational.

A bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah said this administrative requirement shall not be enforced while implementing the last year's verdict of the top court which had directed that women officers in the Army be granted PC.

The evaluation deployed by the Army, to implement the decision in last year verdict affects women, the bench said. — PTI

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Pawar must head UPA, says Sena



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Philippines intensifies patrol against China

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Olympic torch relay begins in Japan



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COVID NEGATIVE REPORT MUST FOR BENGALURU

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

In one of the biggest single-day spikes in five months, India on Thursday recorded 53,476 new cases of Covid-19 in 24 hours along with 251 deaths. Due to the surge, the Kumbh Mela was curtailed to one month and Covid negative report as mandatory for pilgrims. Besides, several states started imposing restrictions on movement of people and all passengers to Bengaluru will now need to have a Covid-19 negative report from April 1.

The Rajasthan government has issued orders for no functions during Holi and Shab-e-Barat while two-day lockdown is expected to be imposed in Indore on Holi due to rising cases. In Chhattisgarh's Raipur, all tourist places have been shut down and restrictions for Holi have been imposed. Six states — Maharashtra, Punjab, Kerala, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat — are reporting a surge in daily new cases and together they account for 80.63 per cent of the cases reported in the last 24 hours. Given the situation in India, the government has decided to pause "Vaccine Maitri", its diplomatic initiative.

It's Uyyalawada airport in Kurnool

CM names airport after fighter who fought British

D. SIVA RAMI REDDY | DC
KURNOOL MARCH 25

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday said that the Kurnool Airport would be named as Uyyalawada Narasimha Reddy Airport. The airport will open for commercial services from March 28 and Indigo Airlines will fly from Kurnool to Vishakhapatnam, Bengaluru and Chennai.

The CM, while inaugurating airport near Orvakal, said Uyyalawada Narasimha Reddy has fought against the British even before the first Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 and had laid down his life for the cause self rule.

Jagan pooh-poohed former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, in a

● The CM said Uyyalawada Narasimha Reddy has fought against the British even before the first Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 and had laid down his life for the cause self rule.

derisive tone, for inaugurating the airport in 2019 just before elections even though it was not ready for operations. "We spent ₹100 crores to make it operational", he said.

Extolling the spirit of independence of Narasimha Reddy that lead to a rebellion against the British, the Chief Minister said, "Mahatma Gandhi came only in 1915 and the freedom struggle was largely around the time of Gandhi's entry across the

country. But the Kurnool region waged a struggle 100 years before that and Uyyalawada was the name still reverberates in the hearts of the people of the region."

Thanking the electorate for giving a resounding victory to YSRC in the gram panchayat and municipal elections, Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy said his government is dedicated for the welfare of the people.

The Chief Minister said Kurnool is connected so far by rail and road ways and with the airport which sixth airport in the state, will transform the region for better.

As Kurnool has been declared as the judicial capital of the state, the airport will enhance its reputation, he said.

JUDICIAL COMMISSION TO SCRUTINISE POLAVARAM WORKS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 25

The water resources department has submitted tender documents pertaining to Polavaram irrigation project's additional works costing ₹683 crore to


the Judicial Preview Commission for its clearance. Project superintending engineer CK Narasimha Murthy said in a statement here on Thursday that in order to ensure transparency in tendering process, all documents

related to the additional works of the project head works were uploaded on the websites of AP Judicial Preview and irrigation department on March 22.

■ Page 2: Commission seeks suggestions from public

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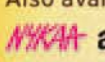


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SHORT TAKES

CBI REGISTERS CASE AGAINST RAGHU RAMA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 25

The CBI booked a case against MP K. Raghu Rama Krishna Raju on charges for taking loan of Rs 237 crore by submitting forged documents and defaulting to clear it.

Based on a complaint lodged by Chennai SBI deputy general manager, the CBI registered the first information report against the MP.

The case was booked on Ind Bharat Power Limited director and MP Raghu Rama and other directors, including K. Ramadevi, Ganta Raj Kumar, Dumpala Madhusudhana Reddy, Narayana Prasad Bhagavathula and Ramachandra Iyer.

CHAMBERS SEEK PERMISSION FOR LCL CONTAINERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 25

Former president and AP Chamber of Commerce and Industry Federation G. Sambasiva Rao and vice-president K.R.B. Prakash on Thursday submitted a representation to Dr D.K. Srinivas, principal commissioner of customs, Visakhapatnam, requesting permission for Lower than Container Load (LCL) cargoes at Visakhapatnam for the container freight stations.

In the representation, Sambasiva Rao said that the container facilities started at the Visakhapatnam Port in 2002. Since then the container movement picked up slowly and started the growth stage in 2010. Due to efficient services by the trade partners and the cooperation of customs authorities, so far nine container freight stations are operating under Visakhapatnam customs jurisdiction.

Central Warehousing Corporation, the lone LCL operator, is not doing aggressive marketing. In view, our EXIM trade is operating much of the LCL cargoes from Chennai and Hyderabad.

In addition to that VSEZ, APSEZ, and RINL, many MSME units are facing problems in connection with LCL cargoes both export and import purposes. There is a need to develop LCL cargoes in order to encourage the MSME sector in this area.

This will also benefit students settled in the US, Australia, Europe and other parts of the world as they need a lot of Indian products for their consumption purpose especially sweets, pickles, local handicrafts, wooden furniture and a lot of toys from the locally manufactured units.

'COLLEGES AREN'T RELEASING SSC CERTIFICATES'

From Page 1

Another parent from East Godavari, whose son is in Inter second year, said, "We have paid ₹1.6 lakh and no classes were held from April to December due to Covid-19. Classes commenced in January. Now we are getting calls to send my son back to the campus and also to clear pending dues with a threat of withholding the certificates, Class X marks memo that is with them."

Many parents alleged that Intermediate examinations are slated for May, management fear that the students would not pay the dues if classes were not held causing revenue loss to them. Faculty members from these private colleges admitted that they were also being forced to take classes and if they wanted to take leave on medical grounds, they were asked to show proof of their health condition. They said that they were threatened to miss out on salary if they failed to take classes.

Meanwhile, BIE authorities maintain that they have asked colleges to submit details of the Covid-19 tests and their results. They asked the colleges to maintain Covid-19 protocol by ensuring proper sanitation, making the students to wear masks and maintaining social distance.

AP Private Teachers and Lecturers Union state president D. Ambedkar said, "Except a few, most private junior colleges are violating Covid-19 norms. There is no social distancing in any classroom. Students coming from long distances could be carrying the virus. We want both the BIE and the state government to step in and take necessary measures."

AP scraps self-preparation of exam question papers

Task to prepare the papers has been entrusted to JNTU

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 25

In a major development in higher education, the state government has annulled the self-preparation of question papers for annual exams by the autonomous colleges in the state.

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has, in a meeting held at his camp office here on Thursday, called for changes in conduct of examinations in the higher education institutions in the state. Accordingly, the autonomous colleges can no longer prepare their question papers for annual exams unlike the present practice.

The task to prepare question papers has been entrusted to the JNTU and these papers are to be accepted by both the autonomous and non-autonomous colleges in

● **THE CM** said the students who secure professional degrees should be in a position to face interviews and get jobs.

● **HE ASKED** what was the utility of degrees if students lacked knowledge in their subjects of study and do not have minimum experience.

● **THE CM** said there is the need to set up a good degree college in Visakhapatnam with relevant subjects in the arts stream.

the state. Moreover, the valuation of answer scripts of these question papers would again be done by the JNTU.

The CM said the students who secure professional degrees should be in a position to face interviews and get jobs. "This is possible only when they have requisite knowledge in their subjects of study and skill." He asked what was the utility of degrees if students lacked knowledge in their sub-

jects of study and do not have minimum experience.

Underlining the importance of launching new courses of study and subjects, the CM asked the authorities to allow students select their subjects for study while pursuing degree courses. He wanted the authorities to check the education system in advanced countries to adopt the best model in the state.

The CM said there is the need to set up a good

degree college in Visakhapatnam with relevant subjects in the arts stream.

With regard to a review on the filling up of vacant posts, the CM asked officials to release a calendar on Ugadi festival day giving information on the posts to be filled this year. He called for taking up recruitment of 6,000 police personnel this year and asked officials to release funds to IIITs in Ongole and Srikakulam for developing infrastructure expeditiously.

On Jagananna Vidya Deevena and Vasanthi Deevena schemes, the officials informed the CM that 10 lakh mothers got money deposited in their bank accounts this year. The number of admissions in degree colleges had gone up by 50,000 taking total number of admissions to 2.7 lakh from 2.2 lakh the last year.

Amma Vodi scheme



Did you get the Amma Vodi scheme: Minister Velampalli Srinivas interacts with students at the inauguration of AP Open school classes at SAS college in Vijayawada on Thursday.

State sets new record, creates 25 crore mandays

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 25

Minister for Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy said that a new record has been set by Andhra Pradesh, by creating the highest 25 crore mandays under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme in the current financial year. Under this head, the government spent ₹9,734 crore.

The minister, while taking part in a programme held here on Thursday, said that out of the total amount spent, an amount of ₹5,724 crore was paid as wages to the workers while ₹3,658 crore was spent for providing wages for skilled labourers and for procurement of material.

The minister called for developing basic infrastructure in the villages under the job scheme by availing the funds under material component to take up construction of 10,929 village secretariat buildings, 10,408 Rythu Bharosa Kendras, 8,585 YSR Arogya Kendras,



● **THE MINISTER** said AP should become a role model in implementation of the job scheme. He asked the ombudsmen to take complaints from the people on the scheme and submit reports to the government regularly.

9,144 Anganwadi Centres and 9,899 Bulk Milk Cooling Centres by end of September.

Addressing the MGN-REGS council members, the minister urged them to take up inspection of works under the job scheme in the rural areas at regular intervals and felt works should be based on the needs of the local people. He asked them to identify any lapses in implementation of the scheme and bring them to the notice of the state government so that these shall be solved.

He said AP should become a role model in implementation of the job

scheme. He asked the ombudsmen to take complaints from the people on the scheme and submit reports to the government regularly.

Panchayat raj and rural development special chief secretary Gopal Krishna Dwivedi said that under the job scheme, they had spent a record ₹10,000 crore in the state in the current fiscal and asked the council members to keep a watch on the nature of works being taken up and ensure such works are done without corruption.

He asked them to do the needful in case of any delay in payment of wages to workers.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy addresses the gathering during the inauguration of airport near Orvakal on Thursday.

AAI: Assembly has to pass name-change resolution

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MARCH 25

On being asked how an airport's name could be changed after IATA code had been allotted, an airport official said that a resolution has to first be passed by the state Assembly. Subsequently, it has to be passed by the Union Cabinet and finally notified in the Gazette of India.

He further said that in the past 10 years, six airports have been renamed. Five of them have been renamed after personalities. In the sixth, the government decided to insert the word Maharaj to the existing Chhatrapati Shivaji International airport in Mumbai. Of the six changes, two have been

REDDY WELFARE ASSN HAILS CM VERDICT

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MARCH 25

The AP Reddy Welfare Association thanked Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for naming Kurnool airport after Uyyalawada Narasimha Reddy, a legendary fighter who fought against the oppression of the British in the 18th century.

Convener of Reddy Association, Prathap Reddy, said that it was a longstanding demand of the Reddys to suitably honour Uyyalawada. The state has been celebrating birth anniversary for the

● **KURNOOL AIRPORT** is the only airport in India which is named after a Reddy.

past three years, he said. Kurnool Airport is the only airport in India which is named after a Reddy. AP Reddy Association hailed Jagan Mohan Reddy for perpetuating the name of Uyyalawada. YSRC leaders said Jagan Mohan Reddy's government is committed to the development of all communities in the state.

done by the Narendra Modi government and four during the tenure of Dr Manmohan Singh.

GANTA CALLS ON SPEAKER AT SRIKAKULAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
SRIKAKULAM, MARCH 25

In an unexpected move, former minister and Visakhapatnam North MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao called on Speaker Thammineni Seetharam at his residence in Amadalavalasa in Srikakulam district.

Though Ganta did not specify the exact reason for his visit, the political observers said that the status of his resignation letter sent to the Speaker twice. One was a hasty handwritten letter while the other in specified format.

The senior TD leader has been staying away from the party activities and did not evince much interest in campaigning for the municipal corporation elections. Most of the key leaders from his constituency resigned after filing nominations and joined the ruling YSRC.

He sent in his resignation letter the day the privatisation proposal of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant was announced. He told the media recently that he would not resign from the party but instead focus on the steel plant issue.

Commenting on the visit, Seetharam said that Ganta has been his friend for years. "We worked together in TD and PRP. Now Ganta met me on his resignation matter. I will look into it after going to Amaravati in a week's time. It is too early to comment now," Seetharam told the reporters.

BJP picks Ratna Prabha for Tirupati bypoll

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 25

Former chief secretary of Karnataka, K. Ratna Prabha, is the BJP candidate for by-election to the Tirupati parliamentary constituency. She had worked in the AP and Karnataka cadre.

Sunil Deodhar, the national secretary of BJP and co-in-charge of party affairs in the state congratulated the former IAS officer through a tweet on his official Twitter wall on Thursday.

The Tirupati parliament (SC reserved) seat fell vacant last year following the death of sitting MP Balli Durga Prasad, who died of heart attack while recovering from Covid-19 in September.

As several retired bureaucrats were aspiring for party ticket, the BJP that entered into an alliance with Jana Sena has struggled hard to finalise its candidate.

A native of Prakasam district, Ratna Prabha served in various government departments and retired from the service in 2018 after serving 37 years in AP and Karnataka. Her father K. Chandrayya, her husband Vidya Sagar and brother Pradeep Chandra had also served as AP cadre IAS officers.

The 1981 batch IAS officer served as collector of several districts in Karnataka, as secretary of various departments and finally as chief secretary. She also served as secretary to the IT and communications department in AP.

Notably, she had won the Woman of the Year award



K. Ratna Prabha

from American Biographical Institute Inc, USA, for two successive years, in 1999 and 2000.

She is known for launching a literacy campaign in a big way as a pilot project in 1991. During her term as the additional CS, Ratna, a Dalit, played a vital role in paving the way for the legislation that gives reservations in promotions to SC/ST state government employees.

She joined the BJP in April 2019 in the presence of BJP state president BS Yeddyurappa in Kalburgi.

Meanwhile, CBI had framed charges against Ratna Prabha in the illegal assets case of Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. CBI charged her for allegedly extending undue favours to Indu Tech Pvt Ltd in allotting land in her capacity as secretary to the IT and communication department.

However, the Hyderabad high court quashed the charges framed against her by the CBI in June 2014.

COMMISSION SEEKS SUGGESTIONS, OBJECTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

From Page 1

Suggestions and objections have been sought from the public. Any suggestion and objection on the tendering process may be sent to the Commission by 5 pm on March 31.

Details of works to be taken up include: diaphragm type end cut

off the wall at the junction of spill channel and pilot channel; vibrio stone columns and deep soil missing in clay portion from Ch 915 to Ch 1425; concrete dam gap-III and ECRF dam gap-I and protection works to cut slopes of left-right flanks of the spillway and spill channel excluding 902 hills.

GOVERNMENT | ORDER

JAC leaders submitted memorandum to Dr Ashok Vardhan

Merger will violate rights of Adivasis

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 25

Several Adivasi organisations under the banner of Andhra Pradesh Adivasi Joint Action Committee (APAJAC) has asked the assistant director of National Commission for Scheduled Tribes Dr Ashok Vardhan to exclude merger of several villages with Visakhapatnam Metro Regional Development Authority. JAC leaders submitted a memorandum to Dr Ashok Vardhan during his visit to Paderu in

Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

The GO 20 said, only mandals of "non-Apatnam areas" of Visakhapatnam district will be included in the VMRDA. However, six villages in Nathavaram mandal — Dharmavaram A g r a h a r a m , C h a m a c h i n t a , Sarugudu, Kuruvada, K a l a v a d d h u Sarabhavaram and Pottinagannadora Palem that are clearly mentioned as Scheduled villages have been included. This is not permissible according to the Constitution. Including these villages

● **MERGER** OF these villages in the VMRDA directly infringes upon the Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) as well as The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, (FRA of 2006).

would mean they are deprived of rights and authorities bestowed upon them by the Constitution. In other words, merger of these villages in the VMRDA directly infringes upon the Panchayat

(Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) as well as The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, (FRA of 2006) that grant special and exclusive powers to Adivasi gram sabha. GO 20 is plainly violative of these seminal statutes.

JAC Visakhapatnam district convener Rama Dora said they were concerned that a total of 91 villages, that are predominantly Adivasi and are justifiably seeking inclusion in the Fifth Schedule since many decades, have also been

included in the list of mandals to be merged in the VMRDA. It is worth recalling that there are a total of 553 such Adivasi villages in AP that ought to have been included many decades ago in the Fifth Schedule but were kept out due to political indifference and bureaucratic recklessness. Consequently, these villages have been rendered 'Non-Scheduled' and Adivasis residing there have been deprived of Constitutional protections meant for tribals all these years. This is immense historic injustice.

SHORT TAKES

AP RECORDS 758 FRESH COVID-19 CASES, 4 DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 25

Andhra Pradesh continues to witness a surge in fresh cases of Covid-19 in the last few days and registered 758 fresh cases and four deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported here on Thursday that out of 35,196 samples tested, 758 people were infected with Covid-19. Out of a total of 1,48,75,597 samples tested so far in the state, 8,95,879 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,85,209 were recovered while 3,469 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Chittoor recorded the highest 175 followed by 127 in Guntur, 98 in Visakhapatnam, 80 in Krishna, 56 in Anantapur, 45 in East Godavari, 33 in Nellore, 30 in Prakasam, 27 each in Kurnool and Srikakulam, 24 in Kadapa, 23 in Vizianagaram and 13 in West Godavari.

Chittoor registered the highest number of cumulative active cases at 647 followed by 516 in East Godavari, 434 in Krishna, 383 in Visakhapatnam, 343 in Guntur, 259 in Kurnool, 222 in Anantapur, 155 in Nellore, 147 in Prakasam, 138 in Srikakulam, 83 in Kadapa, 72 in Vizianagaram and 70 in West Godavari.

CHITTOOR DIST. CONTINUES TO SEE SURGE IN CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 25

Chittoor district recorded its biggest 24-hour spike in Covid-19 cases in the last two months, after 175 people tested positive to Covid-19 on Thursday morning. Among the fresh Covid-19 cases, Tirupati recorded the highest number of cases of 59 under its urban limits, while 10 cases were reported in the rural limits in the last 24 hours.

According to the data, the second highest number of cases in the last 24 hours was recorded at Madanapalle — 29 cases, followed by Chittoor — 12, Renigunta — 9, Srikalahasti — 6 and others. The district currently has 647 active cases. The total number of cases recorded till date was 88,799, in which 87,291 have recovered and 861 succumbed to the virus. Speaking to media, district collector M. Harinarayanan appealed to the public to continue following the 3-point formula to contain the spread. "Positive cases have been reported in all 58 mandals in the district. People have to follow a three-point formula — wearing masks, using hand sanitisers and maintaining social distance, for at least 15 days to contain the spread of virus", he said.

Explaining about the various measures taken up by the district administration to contain the spread of Covid-19, the collector said they have been constantly organising special camps and rallies to create awareness among the public on safety protocols.

FIGHT ON FOR KAKINADA BAR ASSOC. POSTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 25

Two leading advocates — Yeluri Subramanyam and Kotikalapudi Srinivasa Rao — are contesting for top Kakinada bar association president posts. The elections will be held on March 30.

Five advocates — Sanku Singh for secretary post, S. Srinivas for Joint Secretary, Y. Kutumba Rao for Sports and Culture Secretary, Salar for senior committee member and K.V.V.S.N. Murthy for executive member post — have been elected unanimously. The elections are scheduled for the remaining posts.

Incumbent president K. Srinivasa Rao is contesting again by focusing his achievements during his three-year tenure.

The senior and non-controversial advocate Y. Subramanyam is campaigning for votes by promising to enhance the reputation and image of the Kakinada Bar. Srinivasa Rao said that under his term, he made several positive contributions to the Kakinada bar and for the advocates fraternity. He has made an attempt to move POCOS court from Rajahmundry to Kakinada and four new court buildings are under construction.

11-year-old calls for change in lifestyle

Czaana Saxena bags gold finalist award in QCEC-2020

AVINASH P.
SUBRAMANYAM | DC
TIRUPATI, MARCH 25

Czaana Saxena, a 11-year-old Indian origin girl bagged the prestigious gold finalist award in the junior category of the Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition (QCEC) 2020 — the world's oldest international schools' writing competition.

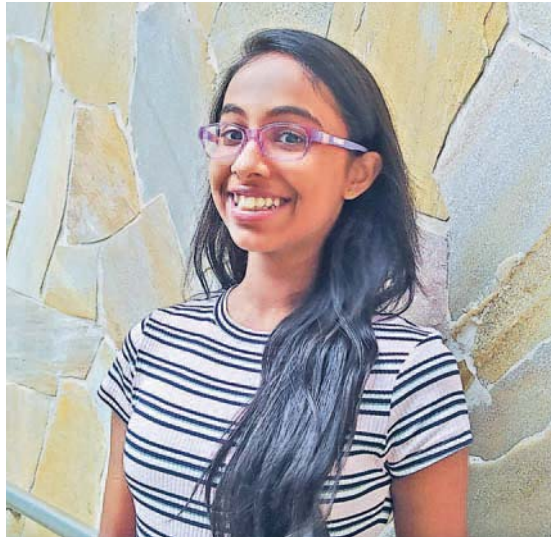
Run by the London-based Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) since 1883, the international writing competition is the world's largest such contest. Out of 13,000 students from 58 countries, Czaana managed to secure the gold finalist award for her essay 'Intimations of Immortality', which gives optimistic solutions to the climate crisis.

The Singapore-born Indian girl from Temasek Primary School is now in a unique league. She speaks to *Deccan Chronicle* about her essays and achievements.

Excerpts:

Tell us about your passion for writing and your plans for the future?

I developed interest in reading and writing at an early age. As an eight-year-old, I wrote a story on my favourite comic character — "Suppandi", which was published in Tinkle. This was a huge boost to my confidence levels. Since then, I have been representing the school team in debates, co-authored a children's book, did theatre and voice-overs. I was elated when I was also listed in the '25 young creators' across Singapore and had the opportunity to present my innovation to Singapore's Minister



Czaana Saxena

for Communications and Information, S. Iswaran. Winning gold in the Singapore performing arts festival, securing a gold finalist award in the international writing competition, are timely morale-boosters for my onward march. I hope I can follow my love for reading, writing and theatre in secondary school too.

What inspires your writings?

I am hugely inspired by Dorothy Vaughan and Jhansi-ki-Rani who were both very progressive and challenged many contemporary norms. I am blessed to have great parents, teachers and mentors, who praise my work and encourage me to write more. I also read many of my dad's articles, although I don't understand the topics he writes about. I like his style.

How did you get into this competition?

When we did some research during the circuit breaker, we came across the Commonwealth essay

competition. Initially, we thought it would be a big deal if I could ever win this. However, we decided to give it a try. The essay was not written in one go but it took a lot of time.

What was the topic of your essay?

The 700-word essay — 'Intimations of Immortality' — entails optimistic solutions to the climatic crisis, in which I have put together lessons and experiences from Covid-19 pandemic. The main objective was that if we change our lifestyles a little bit, we could make earth a lot better place, if we remain as we are, then the earth won't be habitable soon.

I wanted to ensure that we don't just talk about the issue but actually do something about it. Real change comes from discussing solutions, not problems. Hence, the book involved topics on how amazing the earth was in the future when we (kids) decided to build real solutions.

Tell us about your family and what was

their feeling when you won the award?

I'm blessed to have a great family. My mother (Sandhya Saxena) always kept us excited about stories from India and the world, and my father (Anuraag Saxena) is involved and encourages me to write and debate more often. My brother (8-year-old Kaizer Saxena) is quite a funny and annoying character, the stereotype you find in books, but I know he is elated when I do well. They are all so happy that I have won laurels at Queen's Commonwealth Essay Contest

Do you have any Telugu connections?

Of course. My father grew up in Vizag and my mother in Hyderabad. My grandparents still live there and we visit every year. My mother loves shopping there, and my father loves eating mirchi-bajji all the time.

What is your favourite part of Vizag and Hyderabad?

Both places are great. Telugus are blessed that way. Vizag has amazing beaches, the submarine and aircraft museum, and street-side food. Hyderabad weather is great in winters, movie theatres are huge, and of course my favourite restaurant, Sage Farm Cafe, is also there. But mostly I just love hanging around with my grandparents.

On being asked what the most powerful words are, Czaana replied, "You're good!" is really powerful. To both receive it and offer it can be highly motivating."

Only team from India to bag honour

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM,
MARCH 25

Local lad Ashish Kumar Karanam, his brother-in-law Surya Narayana Murthy Pappala and a close friend Amareswara Prasad Chunduru won the third prize as a team in the NASA's Lunar Delivery Challenge.

Sai Ashish Kumar Karanam, a student of Visakh Valley School, obtained his masters degree in machine design from the Mechanical Engineering Department of Andhra University this academic year. He has commercial experience and is passionate about product life cycle management, industrial robotics, and Internet of Things devices. Ashish's father KSSSK Kannababu works in a corporate company in Hyderabad and his mother K. Karuna Devi is a house wife. His brother-in-law Surya Narayana Murthy moved to Australia where his wife Swati Karanam works as data scientist. His other friend Amareswara Prasad after working for eight years in Vizag moved to Tenali recently.

Surya Narayana Murthy Pappala, the team captain, has a Masters degree in information technology with 12 years of experience and is passionate about problem-solving and optimisation. Amareswara Prasad Chunduru has a degree in computer applications and expertise in electro-mechanical engineering and is passionate about non-linear dynamics, machine design, and metaheuristics.

The team AA-Star designed Lunar-Transporter and Gantry, an inflatable gantry crane deploys to unload the payload. In the second phase, the transporter vehicle is responsible for carrying the payload to the lunar base, which can travel at a speed of 200 metres per hour on rugged lunar terrain. The crane and vehicle can move a mass of 12



Karanam Sai Ashish Kumar



A. Prasad Chunduru



A. Prasad Chunduru

metric tonnes, which is important when considering larger payloads, such as hardware needed to build lunar habitats. A deployable shield around the vehicle protects the payload from lunar dust and micro-meteoroid impacts.

"This is not our first project with Nasa. Earlier we worked on ALLGO and we were among the finalists. We as a team are now designing satellites for Isro," Ashish told this correspondent on Thursday. He said the team has been invited by Nasa but they are in two minds whether to visit or not due to the pandemic situation. The team won the cash prize of \$2,000.

The first place was won by Lauren Fell for his lightweight inflatable delivery system. Fell got \$10,000. The second position was bagged by Team FRD which won a prize of \$4,500. Around 224 teams from 100 countries participated in this challenge, Ashish said.

ATTACK ON TRIBALS: NHRC ORDERS ACTION

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 25

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has directed the district higher officials to take action against the Mandal tahsildar and other responsible officials who harassed the tribal people in the Polavaram project affected areas.

According to sources, the officials led by Devipatnam tahsildar tried to demolish the houses of tribal people of Sitara village recently. However, the victims opposed the move and they demanded that the officials settle their Rehabilitation and Resettlement package before asking them to vacate.

The officials reportedly warned them, harassed them and tried to demolish the houses. The Rights Watch Organisation founder Balu Akkisa approached the NHRC demanding justice for the victims. The NHRC directed the officials to act against the officials concerned and submit a report on the incident within eight weeks.

● **OFFICIALS REPORT-EDLY** warned them, harassed them and tried to demolish the houses.

Cycle rally



Youngsters and volunteers take part in a cycle rally to conclude Centenary celebrations of Indian Red Cross society in Vijayawada on Thursday. — DC

Micro artist invents electrical device to curb Coronavirus

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 25

A miniature artist, Aripaka Ramesh, claims to have invented an electrical device namely "Body and Blood electrification system," called "Corona Killer" and it will kill or reduce the impact of Covid-19 virus in the body.

Ramesh, who studied ITI (Electronics Grade), has made many micro and miniature articles

like keeping 18 idols of different gods in a hole of a needle and also a device with sound of the boy or girl who fall down into open bore wells, previously.

He secured several awards and his name was listed in many record books.

Now, he invented a device by arranging electro wires. Ramesh said that when the electro wires are fixed on the wrists for 30 or 60 min-

utes, the electrified blood can kill any viruses including Corona and other fungal viruses that kill in the body and also cancer cells in the body.

He said that he was applying to get patent rights for his device. After getting the patent rights, he said he would apply for medical research for the authorised institutions for the functioning of the device.

TEMPLE HEIST

Thieves had lunch in Polamamba temple

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM,
MARCH 25

The thieves, who made heist in the Polamamba temple taking away 35 tolas of gold and 5 kg of silver, had a luncheon in the temple during the

annadanam that is held regularly by the devotees.

Executive officer of the temple Neelima told *Deccan Chronicle* on Thursday that the crime sleuths of the Three Town police station showed her four pictures

of men, which were recognised by the staff members.

They told her that people were in the queue for some time and had their lunch. This was a week before the robbery which took place in the wee hours of March 21.

The police said they suspected that the robbery was executed by professionals from neighbouring Odisha or Chhattisgarh. Hours before the robbery, they came to the temple and asked the watchmen in Hindi whether they could

spend the night. When he turned them away, the four members sped away on motorcycles.

So far, the police did not find any breakthrough in the investigation. Not a single clue was left by them, a senior police officer said.

MALLADI TAKES OATH AS TTD SPL INVITEE

Tirupati: Vijayawada Central MLA and YSRC leader Malladi Vishnu on Thursday took oath as a special invitee of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) trust board at Srivari temple in Tirumala.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, LAKEGAR SHAKEER (Old Name), S/o. Kalegar Shaik Abdul Rehman, residing at D. No. 10-514, Jamiya Masjid Street, Kadiri Town, Ananthapur Dist. Holder of Passport No. **J7877611**, Shall hence forth be known as **KALEGAR SHAIK SHAKEER** (New Name) by Virtue of Aadhar Card No. **7885 3214 5857** Vide Affidavit Dt. **21-3-2021** before Notary by Sheikh Allabakash Saheb, Advocate, Kadiri.

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TENDER NOTICE NO.: GTL-TRSO-4-eTN-1-2-3-4-2020-21 dated 23.03.2021

Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer/ Traction/ Guntakal acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders for the following works.

SI.No :- 01, Tender No. & Name of work :- Tender No. GTL-TRSO-4-eTN-03-2020-21 Outsourcing of Running Room activities at Dharmavaram for a period of Two years (24 months). **Period :-** Two Years (24 months). **Estimated value of work (Rs.) :-** 1.73,99,631.38/-

Closing date and time: 19.04.2021 at 11.00 hrs. For Bidding the tender and other details login to <http://www.ireps.gov.in>. If any Corrigendum to the tender is to be issued, the same will be issued online only.

Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (TR), Guntakal

Corrigendum to e-TENDER NOTICE No. 09/Div/CSTC/CSC/2020-21, Dated 18.03.2021

1. TENDER DOCUMENT:

SI.No.:-1 Existing :- No Price variation shall be applicable in this Contract across all schedules (As per para 3.38.1 of Special conditions of contract of Chapter-3 in tender document) **To be read as:-** Price variation is part of GCC 2020 and applicable for S&T tenders.

2. The tenderer should submit as made documentation within the period of 15 days after commissioning of stations.

Deputy Chief Signal & Telecommunication A0299 Engineer, (Const.-II), Secunderabad

For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at <http://www.ireps.gov.in> or www.scrindianrailways.gov.in

KONKAN RAILWAY CORPORATION LTD. (A Government of India Undertaking)

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

Chief Engineer, Konkan Railway Corporation Ltd., invites Open Tender in Single bid system through E-Tendering on IREPS portal from eligible contractors for the following work. **Tender Notice No.: KR-W-01-58-2020-16.** **Name of Work :** Supplying and stacking of ballast at Murudeshwar ballast depot, loading of ballast into KRCL hoppers and Supply of ballast at nominated locations on coss between Shiroor-Murudeshwar sections for CTR (P) works under the jurisdiction of Senior Regional Engineer, Karwar region of Konkan Railway. **Estimated Cost:** ₹ 530.44 Lakhs excluding GST. **Completion Period :** Nine months including monsoon. **Closing Date/Time:** 16/04/2021 up to 15:00 hrs. for submission of online Offers/Bids. Manual offers shall not be accepted. Please visit <https://ireps.gov.in> website for details / participation. Corrigendum / addendum will be hosted in this website only.

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DECCAN Chronicle

26 MARCH 2021

Calling the cops on Opp.? Bihar ruckus probe must

Legislators are not above the law, but legislatures — the place where laws are made — a House of Parliament or a state Assembly or Legislative Council chamber — are privileged sites, where the law and order machinery of the State, as embodied in the police force, may not intervene — and interfere with proceedings. The legislature, therefore, has marshals who obey the Speaker or Chairman and have been known to deal with unruly situations with firmness.

The logic is if elected representatives of the people were to be interfered with in the performance of their constitutionally mandated duties, then why bother having elections? A despotic executive may then do as it pleases.

In a democracy, these are matters that lie in the realm of first principles. If this were not the case, the majority party which runs the government will be at liberty to send the police in to silence opponents though force, pass unhindered any laws it likes and in the manner it likes, without fear of criticism. Then law-making may be conducted with the peace of the graveyard reigning.

If the Speaker called in the police, did he act on his own or did he act on advice? The circumstances are murky, to say the least.

Such a state of affairs will produce order and harmony of a kind that behoves a police state even if it masquerades as a democracy. Such examples are not unknown in the world. In India, however, we have been proud to run a noisy democracy. This has given us prestige even among autocracies which may sometimes denounce us but also envy us.

In light of this, what was witnessed in the Bihar Assembly last Tuesday can only fill every Indian with shame. MLAs of Opposition parties, men and women, were dragged on the ground by the police who had been called in. The scene that was telecast was one of brutality. Legislative decorum was being

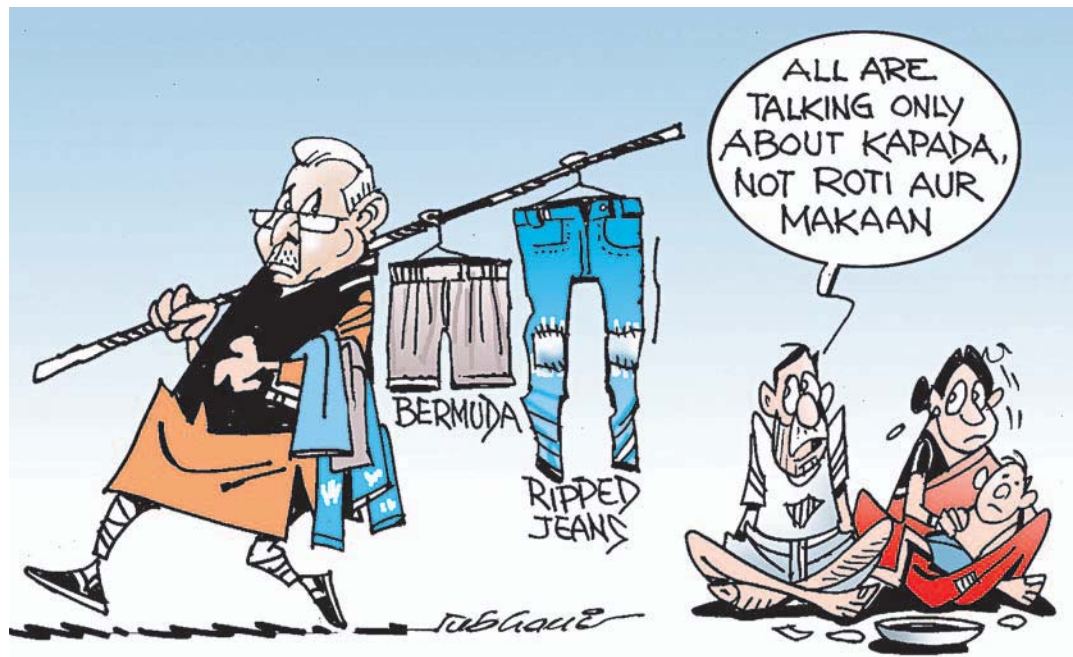
given a severe beating.

Chief minister Nitish Kumar appeared later to justify the police action, referring only to the bedlam his party's opponents were creating. Does he remain his own master, or is he dancing to the tune of his alliance partners who now appear to direct his every action and place him in the position of a puppet? On a subsequent day, standing up to speak in the Legislative Council, the CM, according to one report, "quivered" with anger as he continued to denounce the conduct of the Opposition. Not one word about the rights and wrongs of the police entering the legislative chamber.

The Opposition MLAs, led by RJD, had indeed been unruly in mounting their criticism of the Bihar Special Armed Police Bill, 2021, at the introduction stage. This is to be a state paramilitary force apparently on the lines of CISF, with the difference that it will have the power to arrest. In India, only civil police in a state have been given this power. Such a Bill is weighted against citizens. Some reports suggest Opposition parties tried to prevent the Speaker from coming out of his chambers. This is crossing the line. In such situations, marshals are known to be resourceful and vigorous, and are trained to deal with legislators.

If the Speaker called in the police, did he act on his own or did he act on advice? The circumstances are murky, to say the least, and deserve to be enquired into without delay. The CM, for his part, should be contrite, not brazen.

Subhani



Bengal to trigger domino effect in Indian politics?



Shikha Mukerjee

The 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections are more than just a contest between a regional party, the Trinamul Congress, and the challenger, which is a national party, the BJP. It is a battle that may well trigger a limited, yet crucial, domino effect in Indian politics.

The battle for West Bengal which begins on March 27, the first day of the eight-phase election, will be a test like no other. This contest is not a verdict on the performance of the Trinamul Congress government led by Mamata Banerjee over the past 10 years or the prospects of the state under a new untested regime of the BJP. It is a confrontation between two ideological positions that are fundamental to the future form of India's polity.

If the Trinamul Congress manages to retain power, then the war for federalism, multi-party democracy and secular politics will get a shot in the arm against the BJP's vision of a one-nation, one-identity, one nation-one party model or, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi explains it at every one of the many public meetings he has addressed in West Bengal as another unit of the "double engine sarkar" model. The conquest of this border state for the BJP would significantly strengthen its ideological and popular appeal as the defender of the Hindu majority and its legitimacy to discriminate on the basis of religious identity against the Muslim minority through a process that cancels the status of Muslims as citizens by deploying the Citizenship Amendment Act as an instrument of exclusion.

It will not be an easy election for any of the three blocs that are competing for the voters' hearts and minds. Because elections are about choosing a party for running a government, ideology and policy matter in equal measure. It boils down to weighing two things — first, which party will do more or give more to the voter; second, which party can be trusted to keep its election promises. Every voter will decide based on his or her priorities, which is a complex mix of basic needs, aspirations and sentiments.

And then there is the Samyukta Morcha, a combination of the CPI(M)-led Left Front, the Congress and the newly hatched Indian Secular Front headed by a Muslim cleric, Abbasuddin Siddiqui. Put together as a survival and restoration strategy for the Left parties and the Congress, on its performance will depend the fate of the BJP and to an extent the Trinamul Congress.

The first and second phases, on March 27 and April 1, will set the stage as the 60 seats cover constituencies in East and West Midnapore, Jhargram, Purulia, Bankura, West Burdwan and South 24 Parganas districts where the BJP has pinned its hopes of beating the Trinamul Congress. Nandigram, in East Midnapore, is the crucial constituency; Mamata Banerjee is contesting against Suwendu Adhikari, once her blue-eyed boy now with the BJP, and it will be the key to this election. It defines the nature of the contest between the dominant Trinamul Congress and its leader, and the BJP led by Narendra Modi and defectors from the Trinamul Congress. It will be definitive in

another sense; it will give a clue of how the Samyukta Morcha's appeal, especially that of the CPI(M) and the ISF's appeal works. Will the CPI(M) cut into the BJP's vote share by taking back the support it lost in 2019? Will the ISF cut into Trinamul Congress' Muslim vote share? Any reduction in the BJP's vote share will make its position, as the main challenger, precarious.

The options for the voter boils down to this — the Trinamul Congress, which as the party of the incumbent government has a lot to live down, but has a leader who remains the most popular choice as chief minister; the BJP, that does not have a chief ministerial candidate and is banking on the Narendra Modi mystique to hoist it to power and then install a face to lead the government, should it succeed in winning; or, the newly formed Samyukta Morcha, which is in the running as the alternative to the party in the Opposition.

This is also a fight between Mamata Banerjee and the rest. Can she be dislodged from her position of dominating the political landscape of West Bengal? Her campaign slogan "Bangla nijer meyeke chai", that is, Bengal wants it own daughter, underlines the centrality of Mamata Banerjee.

The BJP's campaign has swung between "Ashol Poriborton", or real change, which is a makeover of the Trinamul Congress' 2011 slogan calling for "poriborton", "Sonar Bangla", that is restoration of Bengal to an

imaginary unspecified golden age, and "Aar Noy Anyay", that is "no more oppression, wrongdoing, abuse, violation and a host of grievances", as it tests the public response and calibrates its appeal. By projecting itself as the only party in West Bengal which does not have legacy issues, since it was a nonentity till the 2016 Assembly elections and zoomed to principal challenger position after the 2019 Lok Sabha elections winning 18 seats out of the state's 42, the BJP has crafted a narrative of being a newly minted choice. For the BJP, West Bengal is like the final frontier; it has positioned itself as defending the nation from being overrun by Muslims crossing over as illegal immigrants, of bringing the periphery into the centre by imprinting Hindutva trademarks on the wayward margin through adoption of "Jai Shri Ram" as a unifier and the Ganga Arti as a sacred practice.

The CPI(M)'s campaign does not have a single defining slogan; instead it has updated its appeal by delivering its messages in the language of urban young adult voters, selling itself through reusing a mix of advertising slogans in Hindi, flash mobs and songs that are a takeoff on popular lyrics.

Inserting itself in between the spaces separating the parties in the fray, a platform has emerged that has one unequivocal message — "No Vote to BJP". It is an appeal for tactical choices in every constituency to keep the saffron tide at bay. It's also a call to Bengali voters to use their choice to shut out the "principal enemy", even if it means voting to bring back the Trinamul Congress for a third term.

West Bengal has to decide to be its whimsical wayward self or join the gang.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

DISTASTEFUL

In a democracy, political leaders may find fault with the policies, governance and performance of opponents (BJP leader's 'wear Bermudas' remarks distasteful: O'Brien, DC, March 25). However, decency and decorum needs to be observed and should not stoop so low.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

COVID RISING

The sharp rise in Covid cases is alarming (Covid double mutant surfaces, DC, March 25). The discovery of the 'double mutant' virus and other strains in India reveals the complexity in deciphering the changing nature of the virus. It's not established now if there are more virulent and drug resistant variants. The key to success in this fight lies with social vaccine, i.e. appropriate behaviour.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararo
Vizianagaram

COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

It's in the fitness of things that the government extended the vaccination drive to 45+ age group for April 1. With the second wave of Covid-19 along with its mutations looming large and lockdown untenable anymore, the only infallible course is vaccine since people have put the nation on ransom with their lackadaisical attitude towards Covid-19 protocols.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Over 50 die in clashes: E. Pak at flash-point

NEW DELHI, MARCH. 25

With a renewed reign of terror by West Pakistani troops leaving at least 55 dead and more than 200 injured and with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declaring that the killing of unarmed civilians would not go unchallenged, Bangla Desh was at flash-point today despite President Yahya Khan's reported acceptance of all the four demands of the Awami League Chief.

Reacting to the conduct of the troops, which was seen as provocative bid to sabotage a constitutional settlement, Mr. Rehman asked Gen. Yahya Khan to order "an immediate cessation of Military operations."

Balochistan.

By then the military chief in Pakistan was Gen. Tikka Khan, a former military governor of East Pakistan. It was under his aegis that the Army had claimed in March 1971 that it could "restore order" within 72 hours or so. That particular delusion came a cropper some nine months later, albeit only after India had openly pitched in.

The lessons of history are difficult, if not impossible, to learn without acknowledging the facts. All too many nations, including Pakistan and India, are often shy of facing up to their past. Not long ago, Poland made it a crime for anyone to suggest that some Poles had collaborated with the Nazis in perpetrating genocide against Jews. And so it goes...

As far as Pakistan is concerned, it may now be too late to atone for what had happened half a century ago, but remembering it accurately might suffice as a warning against repeating the experience.

By arrangement with Dawn



Mahir Ali

Remembering the bloodbath 50 yrs ago which broke Pakistan into two

It would be tricky to designate the starting point of the sub-continent's second partition. The seeds, it could be argued, were sown during the late 1940s and fertilised through much of the succeeding two decades. There can be little question, though, that the point of no return was reached around midnight on March 25-26 half a century ago.

That was the night the massacres began in what was then East Pakistan and is today Bangladesh. The initial targets stretched from Awami League stalwarts and strongholds to the intelligentsia more generally — among them university students, professors, writers, journalists, doctors and engineers. All too many of an incipient nation's best minds were obliterated before its birth.

That could be described as Pakistan's parting blow in the aftermath of the nation's first properly democratic exercise the preceding December. The elections had been postponed from October after floods wreaked havoc in East Pakistan. They were followed in

November by a cyclone and tidal wave remembered as one of the deadliest natural catastrophes anywhere in the world.

The estimated death toll hovered around a million. Pakistan's military ruler, Gen. Yahya Khan, stopped over in Dhaka on his way home from a state visit to China, witnessed the devastation during a helicopter ride, then promptly resumed his journey home to Islamabad.

He returned in due course, purportedly to oversee the relief effort, but by then the eastern wing was already fluttering in the wind, poised to take solo flight. Much of the assistance in its hour of dire need had come from foreign countries. This inevitably reinforced the impression among the Bengalis that their "brethren" in West Pakistan couldn't care less about their trials and tribulations.

This sense undoubtedly fed into the December elections — the first to be based on universal adult franchise, 23 years after independence. The nationalist Awami League, with its six-point agenda for

provincial autonomy, won 160 of the 162 directly elected seats in East Pakistan — an absolute majority in any putative national parliament.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party surpassed expectations in Punjab and Sindh, but its total seats were barely half that of the Awami League — and, much to Bhutto's consternation, Yahya effectively designated Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the next Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Within less than four months, though, Mujib was designated a traitor (not for the first time) and taken into custody, the Awami League was banned, and voters in East Pakistan faced a bloodbath. The ferocity of the military action was all but unprecedented in the postwar decades.

Through the remainder of 1971, the denizens of West Pakistan were kept uninformed by the local media, official as well as "independent". With the start of the military action on March 26, complete censorship was imposed, and only official versions of the events were

allowed. The "trouble" in the eastern wing, Pakistanis were relentlessly told, was an Indian plot. Sure, there were some "traitors" and a lot more "miscreants", but they were all being adequately dealt with by our fearless "jawans". The implication was that in due course all would be well, the "patriotic" Bengalis were anyhow in a majority, and the necessarily harsh treatment would bring the rest to their senses.

In the 50 years since then, this kind of nonsense has never entirely been superseded by a more objective narrative. The recent cancellation of a seminar on the topic reinforces the impression that the sources of power in what was once deemed the rump state still can't handle the bitter truth.

Perhaps Pakistanis don't wish to be reminded of the fact that for all its foibles, follies and inherited flaws, Bangladesh is doing much better than Pakistan on a number of economic indicators. Or, for that matter, to recognise that the pattern began to be repeated, soon after the bifurcation, in

SHORT TAKES

PARLIAMENT
BUDGET SESSION
ENDS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

The Budget session of Parliament was on Thursday adjourned sine die much ahead of its April 8 scheduled closure owing to the Assembly elections in four states and one Union Territory.

The month-long second part of the Budget session began on March 8 and was scheduled to end on April 8.

Several MPs at the behest of their parties had earlier approached parliamentary affairs minister Prahlad Joshi, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and chairman of Rajya Sabha M. Venkaiah Naidu to curtail the session, citing elections as the reason.

Trinamool Congress leaders Sudip Bandyopadhyay and Derek O'Brien had written respectively to the Lok Sabha Speaker and the Rajya Sabha chairman, requesting them to adjourn the proceedings.

The first part of the Budget Session commenced with the address of President Ram Nath Kovind on January 29 and concluded on February 29.

Elections are due to be held in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry from March 27 to April 29. The results will be announced on May 2.

The session witnessed several protests by the Opposition and repeated stalling of proceedings over the three contentious farm laws, rising fuel prices and the passage of the controversial NCT of Delhi Bill which provides greater powers to the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi in matters related to administration of the city.

WILL NO LONGER
CALL RSS 'SANGH
PARIVAR': RAHUL

New Delhi, March 25: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said it is not right to call the RSS and its associated groups 'Sangh Parivar' as a family has women, respect for elders, compassion and affection, and the organisation has none of these.

Gandhi's remarks come a day after he said the alleged harassment of nuns belonging to a Kerala-based congregation in Uttar Pradesh was a result of the Sangh Parivar's "vicious propaganda" to pitch one community against another and trample on minorities.

In a tweet in Hindi on Thursday, he said he will no longer refer to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh as 'Sangh Parivar', united family.

"I believe it is not right to call the RSS and associated organizations Sangh Parivar - there are women in the family, there is respect for the elderly, a sense of compassion and affection - which is not there in the RSS," he said on Twitter.

"Now I will not call RSS 'Sangh Parivar'" the Congress leader added.

RAUT BATS FOR
PAWAR AS
UPA CHIEF

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

Shiv Sena MP Mr. Sanjay Raut on Thursday said that NCP Chief Mr. Sharad Pawar should take over the reigns of the UPA.

Speaking to reporters Mr. Raut said, "The UPA is paralysed now. I think NCP chief Sharad Pawar should lead the UPA at the national level. When asked whether other parties support his demand," he said, "I don't think any regional party in the country has objection to Sharad Pawar heading the UPA. All of us are opposing the BJP at the moment."

This statement drew sharp criticism from the Congress with leaders asking Mr. Raut to keep his views with himself. Maharashtra Congress chief Mr. Nana Patole complained about Mr. Raut to the Maharashtra Chief Minister Mr. Uddhav Thackeray.

Mr. Patole said, Raut is a Shiv Sena MP. Shiv Sena is not a part of UPA. We told this to the Chief Minister also. He said that he will take up this issue." Insiders say that since the UPA chairperson is not keeping well there needs to be change in the top leadership of the UPA to fight the BJP effectively. Congress leader Husain Dalwai said, "Sena got more seats (in the last election), hence, it got the Chief Minister's post. But the Sena is still not part of the UPA. There is no need to take Mr. Raut's statement seriously."

I-T raids on DMK candidate cause flutter in Tamil Nadu

Premises raided included college properties of Velu, his offices

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR &
D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

Income-Tax sleuths stormed into 18 premises of DMK senior leader E.V. Velu, including the guest house of Arunai Engineering College in Thiruvannamalai where party president M.K. Stalin had stayed overnight and left for campaign just then, on Thursday, evoking strong political reactions, suggesting that the fear of loss in the elections has gripped the BJP and AIADMK.

That the I-T officials even searched the room in which Stalin was staying earned the wrath of DMK leaders. General Secretary of the party, Duraimurugan, called the media to say that the raids were politically motivated and the AIADMK was instigating the BJP to unleash I-T officials to intimidate the DMK leaders.

Duraimurugan even said that he suspected the Election Commission of India to have a role in the raids. However, Chief Electoral Officer, Satyabrata Sahoo, when asked about it, told the media that the ECI has nothing to do with it. I-T officials raid premises based only on prior information, he said.

The various premises that were raided included the college properties of Velu, his offices in Chennai and Karur, his home and homes and offices of his friends and relatives. Since Velu, the DMK district secretary of Thiruvannamalai, is also contesting from the same constituency, Stalin was there to campaign for him.

The raids also created a flutter among the local people in Thiruvannamalai, where Velu is a popular politician, having won the constituency in 2011 and 2016 and running the engineering college since 1993.



DMK Youth Wing leader Udhayanidhi Stalin addresses an election campaign in support of DMK candidate Geetha Jeevan, ahead of Tamil Nadu Assembly Polls in Thoothukudi on Thursday.

Reacting to the searches, TNCC president K.S. Alagiri said that it was an attempt to paralyse Velu's campaign. Calling it a witch hunt, Alagiri said that the rise in popular support to the Secular Progressive Alliance had prompted the BJP to unleash I-T officials on candidates.

Calling it a murder of democracy, Alagiri said the BJP, having control over the I-T, ED and CBI, had misused the agencies in a bid to put down the Secular Progressive Alliance but would not succeed in its attempts.

MDMK general secretary Vaiko said such raids would not stop the victory of the alliance. Describing it as a joint conspiracy by the AIADMK and BJP, he condemned the raids and it was aimed at intimidating the political rivals.

Despite the news of the raids spreading, Stalin addressed a meeting describing Velu as a DMK leader who had earned the

Plea to close liquor shops in TN till polls dismissed

Chennai, March 25: The Madras High Court on Thursday dismissed a plea seeking a direction to the Tamil Nadu government to close all TASMAL liquor shops till April 6, when Assembly elections will be held in the state, to enable voters choose the right candidate without the influence of alcohol.

The petitioner and simi-

lar minded persons can very well abstain themselves from consuming intoxicant materials to take the right decision, the first bench of the court said while dismissing the plea of advocate AP Sooriyaprakasam of Royapettah here.

A blanket direction cannot be issued in this regard, the bench of Chief

Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy said.

Liquor is sold through retail outlets of state-run Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAL).

It may be recalled that Single phase polling to 234 Assembly seats in Tamil Nadu is scheduled on April 6.

praise of the late M. Karunanidhi. However, he did not make any mention of the raids. Velu is facing BJP's S. Thanigaivel in the polls.

Thursday's raids assume significance and they came soon after I-T sleuths searched several premises

of SRMU general secretary N. Kanniah and his son on Wednesday. Though nothing is known about any seizures made during the raids, the searches went on till the small hours of Thursday.

Both Kanniah and Velu have risen from humble

origins and are known for their dealings in money transactions through the companies they own.

While Kanniah is a trade union leader of railway workers' union, Velu, before entering politics during the MGR era, was a bus conductor.

Aasu calls people to reject BJP in Assam

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, MARCH 25

On the day when the electioneering for the first phase of assembly polls came to an end, the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) asked the people of Assam to "reject the BJP that seeks to divide the people on communal lines and impose the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which threatens the existence of the Assamese people".

In fact the Congress led grand alliance and regional forces Asom Jatiya Parishad and Rajior Dal have been defining the ongoing assembly polls as a referendum on controversial CAA, whereas the ruling BJP has chosen to remain silent on the issue in its election campaign and decided to counter the opposition with its devel-

opment plank.

The implementation of the controversial law, which the BJP says it is committed to, is not part of the 10 promises it gave to the people of Assam in its election manifesto.

If the BJP leaders are confident and claims to have gained the ground that the party had lost during the anti-CAA movement in Upper Assam, going to poll in first phase of polling on March 27, the opposition Congress led grand alliance and two regional outfits are also equally hopeful and leaving no stone unturned to refresh and remind the anger that people had expressed during the anti-CAA movement that started in December 2019 and turned violent in Assam.

The Congress has promised a rollback of the CAA through a state legislation

● **THE HIGH-PITCHED campaign for the first phase of poll in Assam in 47 assembly constituencies slated for March 27 came to an end on Thursday evening.**

● **THE POLL will decide the fate of 264 candidates.**

● **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 was the central issue in the state, which was rocked by violence and protests against it, but BJP maintained a studied silence on it.**

in Assam, if voted to power.

The voice of the opposition was further boosted as hitting out at the BJP leaders for their statements on the implementation of CAA, the Aasu said

that the people of Assam would respond to the injustice and humiliation caused to them. "It's time to make progressive regionalism our guiding spirit to protect Assam and the Assamese," the Aasu, two days before the polling for the first phase, said.

The student activists also staged protest demonstrations at prominent locations of the state, district and sub-divisional headquarters asserting that the CAA would never be accepted by the people of Assam. The Aasu was also instrumental in formation of a new political party — Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) contesting the ensuing assembly polls against BJP.

"BJP national president J.P. Nadda on Tuesday had declared in Guwahati that the Act would be imple-

mented in letter and spirit. The party which came to power with the promise to protect the 'jati-maati-bheti', betrayed the people by paving the way for legalising lakhs of Hindu Bangladeshis."

AASU president Dipanka Nath said. The students' union alleged that despite knowing that the implementation of the CAA would pose grave threat to the existence of the indigenous population, Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal, an ex-Aasu leader, confirmed that the CAA would be implemented in the state.

Meanwhile the stage is set for the first phase of polling in 47 constituencies of Upper and North Assam.

The electioneering for these constituencies came to an end on Thursday.

Bengal tops in political ad spend on Facebook

Kolkata, March 25: The four states and one union territory that are going to polls from March 27, West Bengal emerged as the topper in spending for political advertisements on Facebook this year, according to data available with the social media platform.

Besides West Bengal, assembly elections will be held in three other states Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and in the union territory of Puducherry.

The Facebook ad spend of the Trinamool Congress which seeks to return to power in West Bengal for the third consecutive term, exceeds that of the BJP, the main rival of the Mamata Banerjee-led party, in 90 days till March 22, the data revealed.

During the period, political parties of West Bengal spent about ₹3.74 crore on poll-related campaigns which fall under Facebook's advertisement category of 'social issues, election or politics'.

In ad spend under this category, West Bengal is followed by Tamil Nadu (₹3.3 crore), Assam (₹1.77 lakh), Kerala (₹38.86 lakh) and Puducherry (₹3.34 lakh) during the period, as per the data.

The Trinamool Congress has spent the maximum amount among parties, around ₹1.69 crore, of West Bengal during the period on campaigns such as "Banglar Gorbo Mamata" (Bengal's pride Mamata).

It also has constituency

● **POLITICAL PARTIES of West Bengal spent about ₹3.74 crore on poll-related campaigns which fall under Facebook's advertisement category of 'social issues, election or politics'.**

level versions such as "Dum Dum-er Garbo Mamata".

The TMC's digital advertisements are handled by the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) which runs other campaigns also for the party on the social media platform.

During the period under review, another Facebook page run by the name of "Khotikarok Modi" (Harmful Modi), has spent ₹33.12 lakh in political ads, according to the data. The state BJP's Facebook ad spend is around ₹25.31 lakh. It is advertising campaigns such as *Amar Paribar BJP Paribar* (My family is BJP family) and *Aar Noi Annay* (No more injustice).

The Facebook page of the TMC has 1.3 million followers while that of the West Bengal BJP has 1.7 million followers.

The state Congress spent around ₹5 lakh in advertisements on Facebook while the amount spent by Left parties is negligible.

According to an analyst, the total spending on digital advertisements of political parties would be more as they do not always pay directly for campaigns.

Centre to send 50,000 troops to WB for May 2

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

After a record deployment of nearly one lakh troops for elections in West Bengal, Home Ministry sources claim that more than 50,000 central security personnel will be deployed at more than 30,000 counting centres across Bengal on May 2.

This massive deployment on May 2 counting day would be in addition to the one made by the local state police.

Top Home Ministry sources claimed that apart from violence during the elections, violence was also expected on the counting day, particularly in closely contested seats.

Hence a detailed blueprint for security of counting centres has been prepared by the Election Commission in consultation with the Home Ministry.

Bengal is witnessing an unprecedented eight-phase polling in Assembly elections this time which starts on

March 27 and the last phase of polling will be on April 29. Counting will be held across all five states on May 2.

Election Commission has deployed the highest number of central security forces this time with over a lakh para-military personnel to be on election duty this time around in Bengal.

However, both Home Ministry and election Commission admit that not just the elections but even counting in the "extremely sensitive state" was also extremely critical this time. Even elaborate security arrangements are being made for the protection of EVMs that will be kept at different strong rooms across the state.

Securing EVMs is also a challenge for the Election Commission and security forces since the first phase of polling will be held on March 27 while the last and eight phase of polling will be held almost a month later on April 29.

KERALA | POLLS

Former technocrat has vowed to make Palakkad city the best in the country in five years

BJP hopes to chug into Palakkad with 'Metroman'

Palakkad, March 25: In a literal young versus old battle, BJP's 'Metroman' E. Sreedharan will take on sitting Congress MLA Shafi Parambil here for the April 6 Kerala Assembly elections, seeking to convert his technocrat charisma into votes.

A fierce triangular contest is expected this time in Palakkad, held by the United Democratic Front (UDF) since 2011, as the ruling LDF has also fielded a first timer, to take on the Congress and the BJP.

The BJP, buoyed by its success in Palakkad in the recent civic polls, has fielded the 88-year old Sreedharan to fight it out with the 38 year-old Parambil, seeking a hatrick of terms.

Clad in a pastel colour shirt and traditional dhoti, Sreedharan moves swiftly from one voter to another with folded hands and his trademark gentle smile. At

88, age seems to be no barrier for Sreedharan to fit himself into the garb of a seasoned politician, as stated by his critics.

Talking to people gathered around and reminding them to cast their votes on April 6 Assembly polls, the technocrat-turned-political leader travels from one place to another quickly, mingling with the crowd at ease.

With the unexpected entry of Sreedharan in the poll fray as BJP nominee, Palakkad, the land of palmyra, paddy fields and chariot races in central Kerala, has now captured national attention.

While UDF has once again reposed faith in Parambil, the ruling CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF), fresh from its good show in the recent civic polls in the state, aims to upset the plans of the two national parties. It has fielded a new face, C.P.

Pramod to take on the other two.

The UDF is banking on the popular image and personal influence of Parambil in the constituency and on various development and welfare initiatives implemented by him. Of the total 1.37 lakh votes polled during 2016 Assembly elections, Shafi had garnered 57,559 votes while his nearest rival Shobha Surendran of BJP got 40,076 votes and CPI(M) candidate N.N. Krishnadas received 38,675 votes.

A constant presence in the constituency, the young Parambil could successfully establish close personal ties with different walks of people including those in various Hindu communities during his 10-year stint.

The Congress Legislator said he was sure the voters in Palakkad were happy with his performance in



● **THE PALAKKAD ASSEMBLY constituency has 1,88,534 registered voters including 96,774 women and three transgenders.**

the last 10 years and would give him another chance to represent them in the Assembly.

Known for his firebrand speeches, Shafi is also the state president of Youth Congress. However,

Sreedharan seems unfazed by the youngster's popularity and is making all attempts to reach out to maximum number of voters in limited time.

He also seemed to be unperturbed about the controversies and criticisms raised by his political opponents.

The octogenarian recently hit headlines after photos of some voters washing his feet and others prostrating at his feet, went viral. Though his critics alleged that the photos reflected his 'feudal mindset', an unfazed Sreedharan said washing elders' feet reflected Indian culture.

The former technocrat, who has vowed to make Palakkad city the best in the country in five years, talks more development and less politics during the campaign meetings.

"My main focus and priority is development. The

BJP is fighting the polls on the plank of development," he said.

The BJP is pinning hope on its increasing vote share in the constituency, which comprises Pirayiri, Kannadi and Mather village panchayats and Palakkad Municipality.

Palakkad Municipality is one of the two civic bodies in which the saffron party is in power in the state.

If the BJP's vote share in Palakkad was 19.86 per cent in 2011 Assembly polls, it increased to 29.08 per cent in 2016 and touched 29.76 per cent during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

The saffron party hopes that Sreedharan's high profile persona and clean image would bring it rich electoral dividends.

It also wants to make a mark among the various Hindu communities, who seem have a soft corner for the UDF candidate,

through Sreedharan's candidature. Meanwhile, LDF nominee Pramod, entrusted with the task of taking on two big players, is making all possible efforts to reach out to maximum number of voters.

During the campaign, he highlights the development programmes implemented by the Pinarayi Vijayan government in various sectors, especially in health, education and infrastructure during the last five years.

His hopes lie on the votes garnered by the Left front in Palakkad Assembly segment during the last Parliamentary elections.

LDF candidate M.B. Rajesh had polled 32.83 per cent votes during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

The Palakkad Assembly constituency has 1,88,534 registered voters including 96,774 women and three transgenders. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

MYANMAR
PROTESTS AGAIN
MET WITH FORCE

Yangon, March 25: Protesters against last month's military takeover in Myanmar returned to the streets in large numbers on Thursday, a day after staging a silence strike in which people were urged to stay home and businesses to close for the day.

Security forces sought to break up protests by force. Social media accounts and local news outlets reported attacks on demonstrators in Hpa-an, the capital of Karen state, as well as the eastern Shan state's capital Taunggyi and Mon state's capital of Mawlamyine.

BALLISTIC
MISSILES FIRED
BY N. KOREA

Seoul, March 25: North Korea test-fired its first ballistic missiles since President Joe Biden took office on Thursday, as it expands its military capabilities and increases pressure on Washington while nuclear negotiations remain stalled.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said the launches threaten peace and safety in Japan and the region, and that Tokyo will closely coordinate with Washington and Seoul on the North's testing activities.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missiles were fired at around 7:06 a.m. and 7:25 a.m. from an area on the North's eastern coast and flew 450 kilometres on an apogee of 60 kilometres before landing in the sea.

ISRAELI POLL:
ARAB LEADER IS
KINGMAKER

Jerusalem, March 25: Mansour Abbas, an Arab leader in Israel seems to have emerged as the unusual "kingmaker" whose possible support has split open differences not only in the ruling Likud party, but also in its right-wing coalition, making the road to the government formation even more bumpy for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu's Likud party has emerged as the largest party, with all votes counted in Israel's unprecedented fourth election in less than two years. It still does not have a clear path to a 61-seat majority needed to form a coalition in the 120 member Knesset. The anti-Netanyahu bloc, comprising left, right and centrist factions, is also short of a majority in a highly-divided Israeli political spectrum.

CHINA RIFT: MORE
SHIPS DEPLOYED
BY PHILIPPINES

Manila, March 25: The Philippine military has ordered more navy ships to be deployed for sovereignty patrols in the South China Sea, where a Chinese flotilla has swarmed around a disputed reef and ignored Manila's demand to leave the area.

Philippine Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana has asked about 200 Chinese vessels he described as militia boats to immediately leave Whitsun Reef, a shallow coral region about 175 nautical miles (324 kilometers) west of Bataraza town in the western Philippine province of Palawan. China ignored the call, insisting it owns the offshore territory and that the vessels were sheltering from rough seas.

Military chief Gen. Cirilito Sobejana ordered the deployment of additional navy ships to beef up the country's maritime sovereignty patrols.

GIANT | VULTURES | Yurok tribe considers species a sacred animal

Calif. condor can return to northwest

San Francisco, March 25: The endangered California condor could return to the Pacific Northwest for the first time in 100 years. The US Fish and Wildlife Service plans to allow the release of captive-bred giant vultures into Redwood National Park as early as this fall to create a nonessential experimental population for California's far north, Oregon and northwestern Nevada, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported Wednesday.

The project will be headed by the Yurok tribe, which traditionally has considered the California condor

a sacred animal and has been working for years to return the species to the tribe's ancestral territory. Certainly within a year we hope to have birds in the sky, Tiana Williams-Claussen, director of the wildlife department of the Yurok tribe, said.

Not having him here for 100 years now, we as a people are wounded without having that spirit flying in our skies, she said.

The California condor is the largest native North American bird, with a wingspan of nearly 10 feet (3 metres). The scavenger was once widespread but

had virtually disappeared by the 1970s because of poaching, lead poisoning from eating animals killed by hunters and destruction of its habitat. In the early 1980s, all 22

condors remaining in the wild were trapped and brought into a captive-breeding programme that began releasing the giant vultures into Southern California's Los Padres National Forest in 1992. That flock has been expanding its range while other condors now occupy parts of California's Central Coast, Arizona, Utah and Baja California, Mexico. The total wild population now numbers more than 300 birds.

A dozen adults and two chicks died last summer when a wildfire ravaged their territory in Big Sur.

— AP

Suez traffic suspended

Facing 'extreme difficulty' refloating stuck vessel: Owners

Cairo, March 25: The owners of a giant container vessel blocking the Suez Canal said Thursday they were facing "extreme difficulty" refloating it, prompting Egypt to suspend navigation through one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

Shipping analysts warned the suspension could last days or even weeks, forcing businesses to consider diverting their cargos to the much longer route round the tip of Africa in a blow to global supply networks. The Suez Canal Authority (SCA) said it was doing all it could to refloat the Panama-flagged MV Ever Given, a 400-metre (1,300-foot) long vessel which veered off course and ran aground in a sandstorm on Tuesday.

Satellite pictures released by Planet Labs Inc show the 59-metre wide container ship wedged diagonally across the canal.

Japanese ship-leasing firm Shoei Kisen Kaisha said it owned the giant vessel and was facing "extreme difficulty" trying to refloat it. "In co-operation with local authorities and Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, a vessel management company, we are trying to refloat (the ship), but we are facing extreme difficulty," Shoei Kisen Kaisha said in a statement on its website.

"We sincerely apologise for causing a great deal of worry to ships in the Suez Canal and those planning to go through the canal."

As shipping specialists warned it could take weeks to budge the vessel, the Suez Canal Authority announced it was "temporarily suspending navigation".

— AFP

400 mtr -long MV Ever Given, from the class of so-called "megaships", veers off course in the canal as duststorm hits Egypt's Sinai Desert, Middle East.

59 mtr wide Taiwan-run, Panama-flagged vessel is stuck at about 0540 GMT near southern end of the canal, blocks the man-made waterway.

25 crew unhurt, hull and cargo undamaged, and there is no oil leak, say the vessel's managers, Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement.

100 vessels are forced to wait at either end of the canal or midway, at Egypt's Great Bitter Lake, as a result of the accident, says canal service provider Leth Agencies.

1869 Suez Canal was opened. It has been widened since and is a crucial shortcut between Asia and Europe that saves ships from having to navigate around Africa.

Entire crew is Indian

Cairo, March 25: The entire crew of Ever Given, the container ship that is stuck in the Suez Canal since Tuesday blocking traffic in one of the world's busiest waterways, is Indian and is safe, said the company managing the container.

In a report, news agency *The Associated Press* said Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, the company that manages the Ever Given, said the ship's 25-member crew is safe and accounted for.

Apart from the Indian crew, the ship had two pilots from Egypt's canal authority aboard the vessel to guide it when the grounding happened around 7:45 am on Tuesday.

Shoei Kisen Kaisha, the company's owner, said, "All the crew came from India", adding that it is safe and the company is

"trying to resolve the situation as soon as possible, but it proving to be extremely difficult".

On Tuesday, the 400 metre-long Ever Given got stuck diagonally across the Suez Canal, reportedly due to a major dust storm and strong winds.

According to a report in the BBC, at least 150 ships are currently waiting to pass through the Suez Canal. The significance of the Suez Canal for international trade can be understood from the fact that nearly 12 per cent of global trade passes through this narrow canal connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea.

The canal provides the shortest sea link between Asia and Europe. In case traffic in the canal isn't restored soon, expert say ship operators will have little option other than to

take the alternative route that involves travelling around the cape of good Hope, Africa's southernmost tip, and then to Europe. This route would increase the travel time by approximately two weeks.

Peter Berdowski, CEO of Dutch company Boskalis, which is trying to free the Ever Given, said it was too early to say how long the job might take. "We can't exclude it might take weeks, depending on the situation," Berdowski told the Dutch television programme "Nieuwsuur".

The Ever Given is a Panama-flagged ship that carries cargo between Asia and Europe. On Tuesday, it ran aground in the narrow, man-made Suez Canal, dividing continental Africa from the Sinai Peninsula.

— AP

INDIA HAS LONGSTANDING TIES WITH RUSSIA: U.S. ADMIRAL

Washington, March 25: India has had a longstanding relationship with Russia for security cooperation and for armaments and the Biden administration should

encourage New Delhi to move away from Moscow rather than take the route of sanctions for the purchase of major defence equipment like the S-400 missile

system, Admiral John Aquilino, said during his confirmation hearing on Tuesday to be the next commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command.

— PTI



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,440.12	-1.51
Nifty 50	14,324.90	-1.54
S&P 500*	3,894.83	0.15
Dollar (₹)	72.62	-0.06
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.39	0.24
Euro (₹)	85.74	0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,347.44	0.09
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	62.12	-3.56
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.131	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.598	-0.016

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Automakers say production plunged in 2020

Global production of automobiles tumbled by 16% last year to a level last seen in 2010. With less than 78 million units sold, the auto sector faced "its worst crisis ever," said Fu Bingfeng, president, International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers. A breakdown of the organisation's data showed that in Europe, the drop in output was 21%, while in North America it fell by 20% and in South America by 30%.

67 coal blocks offered in second tranche of auction



The government offered 67 coal mines for sale, launching the second tranche of commercial coal mining auction. The blocks on offer are a mix of mines with small and large reserves, coking and non-coking mines and fully and partially explored blocks spread across six states—Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, MP, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. This is the highest ever number of mines on offer in a tranche.

Khatabook takes over Biz Analyst for \$10 million

Bengaluru-based fintech start-up Khatabook acquired Biz Analyst, a SaaS business management application, for \$10 million in a cash-and-equity deal. With this acquisition, Khatabook seeks to enter the next phase of growth and offer its over 10 million active merchants clientele premium value-added services. Biz Analyst provides solutions to SMEs using Tally accounting software to automate operations.

BMW launches motorcycle M1000 RR at ₹42 L

German luxury vehicle maker BMW Group launched its premium performance motorcycle model, BMW M1000 RR, in India with price tag starting at Rs 42 lakh, ex-showroom. Available as completely built-up units, the first 'M model' from BMW Motorrad in India can be booked now. The motorcycle is available in two variants—BMW M 1000 RR priced at Rs 42 lakh and BMW M 1000 RR Competition priced at Rs 45 lakh.



Policy mandatory for top 1,000 firms Dividend policy scope extended

FC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MARCH 25

In a move to further strengthen corporate governance practices and disclosure requirements, markets regulator Sebi on Thursday decided that the top 1,000 listed companies should put in place a dividend distribution policy.

"Requirement for formulation of dividend distribution policy by the existing top 500 listed entities has been extended to the top 1,000 listed entities on the basis of market capitalisation," the Securities and Exchange Board of India said in a statement after its board meeting.

In case companies hold their board meetings for more than one day, the financial results should be disclosed by them within 30 minutes of end of the board meeting for the day on which such results are considered, the Sebi said.

Also, the regulator has decided to do away with the requirement to seek stock exchange's approval for change of name of a listed entity.

Further, the requirement to publish newspaper advertisements for the notice for board meetings where financial results are to be discussed and for quarterly statement on deviation or variation in use of funds, has been dispensed with.

The timelines for submission of periodic reports—statement of investor complaints, corporate governance report and shareholding pattern—will be



ANALYST CALL RECORDINGS TO BE MADE PUBLIC IN 24 HOURS

New Delhi, March 25: In order to address information asymmetry among shareholders, the Sebi on Thursday decided that listed firms should make available audio and video recordings of analyst and investor meet on their websites as well as stock exchanges within 24

hours or before the next trading day.

It also decided that written transcripts of post-earnings conference calls should be made available on websites of listed companies and respective stock exchanges within five working days after such calls. —PTI

harmonised to 21 days from the end of each quarter, Sebi said.

Frequency of submission of compliance certificates relating to share transfer facility and issuance of share certificates within 30 days of lodgement for transfer, sub-division, among others, have been revised from half-year period to one year.

The Sebi board has also cleared amendments to LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations.

"These amendments are

aimed at ensuring gender neutrality and maintaining consistency within the LODR Regulations, harmonising certain provisions of the LODR Regulations with Companies Act, in addition to strengthening the corporate governance practices and disclosure requirements and easing the compliance burden on listed entities," it said.

The provisions of LODR norms, based on the market capitalisation criteria, should continue to apply even if such entities fall below the thresholds.

SOLAR PANELS TO COME UP ALONG NATIONAL HIGHWAYS

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

In a move that will support India's electric charging infrastructure, the government has proposed to install solar panels along the national highways.

"The ministry has decided to explore solar energy generation potential on National Highways and it is proposed to install solar panels in available places that are not earmarked to be used for any transport/highway related services/plantation and meets the requirements for installation of solar panels," minister of road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari informed the Lok Sabha.

Further, solar panels have been installed on roof tops of toll plazas in the projects of Pune-Solapur NH, Nagpur bypass, Wainganga Bridge to Chattisgarh Border and Solapur-Yedishi highway.

As per data from the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, grid connected rooftop solar PV systems have been installed in 82,487 residential houses totalling 358 MW capacity as on November 18, 2019. An aggregate capacity of 477.2 MW of rooftop solar plants has been installed at 7448 government buildings as on March 15, 2021. With an average generation of 1.5 million units per year per MW, about 715.8 million units per year are being generated from these plants.

Urban women employment remains static in February

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

Urban female employment rate has remained static at 5.4 per cent last month, the same as in February 2020. Only 7.3 per cent of urban women of 15 years or more were employed in fiscal 2019-20, says a survey.

According to CMIE's Consumer Pyramids Household Survey, urban female employment rate was at 8.4 per cent in 2019-20.

In an earlier report, the Asian Development Bank had found that the pandemic had shrunk the women labour force in India by 10.5 per cent against 2 per cent shrinkage in case of men between October 2019 and October 2020.

Participation of women



in the labour market itself remains very low. According to the official Periodic Labour Force Survey in 2018-19, while 73.7 per cent of urban men participated in the labour markets, only 20.4 per cent of urban women did so. The situation prevails despite the fact that 50 per cent of all fresh graduates were women between 2011-12 and 2015-16. In 2018-19, 53 per cent of all fresh graduates were women.

"Indian women work a lot. But, their work is predominantly at home... Their participation in the labour markets outside their houses in urban India is very low in spite of their superior education," said Mahesh Vyas, CEO of CMIE.

"There are only three cases under which this can happen. Either Indian women are not willing to go out to work or they are not allowed to go out to work or people are not willing to give them work in spite of their education," he said.

According to a paper presented at the World Economic Forum earlier, increasing participation of women in labour force to the same level as men can boost India's GDP by 27 per cent.

MARKET BLEEDS ON FRESH LOCKDOWN FEARS

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 25

The steep rise in fresh daily Covid-19 cases, which recorded the biggest single day jump in five months at 53,476 and thus raising the possibility of fresh lockdowns, led to continued heavy selling in the stock market in consumer-focused sectors like Auto, FMCG and Realty for the second day.

The local market underperformed Asian peers by a big margin, losing more than 1.5 per cent as major Asian markets closed mixed. Weak European markets experiencing a third wave of Covid infections also added to selling

pressure, as that may drag down global growth.

The Sensex closed 740 points, or 1.51 per cent, down at 48,440 while the Nifty-50 shed 224.50 points, or 1.54 per cent, closing at 14,324.90; both indices are at two-month low levels.

As a government spokesperson talked about the presence of new mutant variants of Covid-19 virus, daily cases in Maharashtra surged to 31,855 while daily cases in other states also were rising, forcing local authorities to announce fresh restrictions.

The broader market took a bigger hit, with the BSE Mid-cap Index down 2.22 per cent and the BSE

Small-cap Index down by 1.85 per cent.

Consumer focused stocks were the worst impacted by the fresh lockdown fears. The top losers among the sectoral indices included BSE Auto (-2.80 per cent), FMCG (-2.37 per cent), Power (-2.83 per cent) and Consumer Durables (-2.28 per cent).

Investors suffered a notional loss of close to Rs 3 lakh crore as the BSE market capitalisation dropped below the Rs 200-lakh crore mark to Rs 198.75 lakh crore.

FPIs were net sellers to the tune of Rs 3,383.60 crore while DIIs were net buyers by Rs 2,267.69 crore.

Inflation goal worked well, says Subbarao

New Delhi, March 25: Inflation targeting has worked well and the government must stay with it, and it is going to work well in the period ahead also, former RBI governor D. Subbarao said on Thursday. He also said low inflation contributes to sustainable growth.

Addressing a media event virtually, Subbarao further said the government's proposal to privatise some public sector undertakings (PSUs) is not akin to selling family silver but it is a route for putting India on a sustainable growth path.

"There is indeed no tension between growth and inflation in the medium term. A low inflation contributes to sustainable growth as it allows consumers and investors to make informed decisions. "...So, I believe inflation targeting has worked well and we must stay with it and it is going to work well in the period ahead," he said.

Under the current dispensation, the Reserve Bank of India has been mandated by the government to maintain retail



D. Subbarao

inflation at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. The monetary policy committee decides on policy rates keeping this target in mind.

The current medium-term inflation target, notified in August 2016, ends on March 31, and the inflation target for the next five years starting April is likely to be notified this month.

Commenting on the government's privatisation and asset monetisation programme, Subbarao said at the time of independence, there was a logic to invest in the public sector units because there was no private capital. Now, when there is no dearth of private capital, the government should focus its energies on investing in education, health and other people-centric areas. —PTI

India will have a four-tiered banking sector in a decade

Mumbai, March 25: The Reserve Bank foresees a "competitive, efficient and heterogeneous" banking sector with four distinct sets of banks dominating the landscape over the next decade, its governor Shaktikanta Das said on Thursday.

There will be large banks having presence across the country and the world; mid-size banks present across the economy; small finance banks/regional rural banks/cooperatives to take care of the small borrowers; and digital players, he said.

The comments come days after the RBI appointed a panel headed by former deputy governor Shyamala Gopinath on bank licences to evaluate applications for universal banks and small finance banks. An internal panel had recently recommended allowing deep-pocketed corporates into the banking fray, something the RBI had been averse to for long. A final view on the controversial proposal is yet to be taken.

"The Reserve Bank is striving towards a more



Shaktikanta Das

LOCKDOWNS UNLIKELY: DAS

Mumbai, March 25: The rising Covid-19 cases are a matter of concern, but it may not impact the ongoing economic revival as one does not foresee lockdowns, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said.

The economic revival will continue "unabated", Das said. "We have 'insurance' to protect economic revival like a fast-paced vaccination drive, greater ability among people to follow Covid protocols", and one does not see lockdowns as well. —PTI

competitive, efficient and heterogeneous banking structure. The licensing policies for universal banks, small finance

banks (SFBs) and payments banks are a step in this direction," Das said at an event.

He said at present, there are ten small finance banks and six payments banks which are operational. "I foresee four distinct sets of banking landscapes emerging in the current decade. The first set will be dominated by a few large Indian banks with domestic and international presence," Das said.

The second will be mid-sized banks with economy-wide presence, while the third set would encompass smaller private sector banks, SFBs, regional rural banks and co-operative banks, which may specifically cater to the credit requirements of small borrowers.

The fourth segment would consist of digital players who may act as service providers directly to customers or through banks as their agents or associates, he said, stressing that such players would increasingly emerge as "critical pieces" across all segments. —PTI

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

E-commerce companies expressed divergent views on FDI policy for the sector at a meeting with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Thursday. While the FDI-funded e-commerce entities sought policy stability, some of the other players wanted changes and more clarity in the policy.

The ministry had called the meeting with the e-commerce players to understand if there was a need for clarity on the foreign direct investment policy in e-commerce.

FDI-funded e-commerce companies, including PepperFry, Swiggy, Amazon, Grofers and Flipkart asserted they did not need further changes in the FDI policy. Instead they needed stability in the policy.

On the other hand, players like Reliance Retail, Jio, Snapdeal, Tata Cliq and Nykaa wanted changes to be made in the policy. They sought clarification on the changes already made in the policy and its implementation.

The ministry asked the

players to file their recommendations within a week for a decision on the issue.

Earlier, minister of commerce and industry Piyush Goyal had informed Parliament that he had received complaints about the operations of some of the e-commerce companies.

The Confederation of All-India Traders had complained to the ministry that some of the FDI-funded e-commerce companies have been flouting the FDI norms. It wanted the government to ensure that the current e-commerce norms provide a level-playing field for all stakeholders. It also asked the government to take corrective actions to ensure that no e-commerce company, big or small, Indian or foreign-funded, should violate the law under any circumstances and treat India as a dumping yard.

However, the Retailers Association of India, representing the organised retailers, wanted the FDI rules applicable to retail to be the same across channels and formats. Also, the rules for products should be the same for all channels with no special rules.

Mega infra DFI NaBFID gets House nod

New Delhi, March 25: Parliament on Thursday

passed a bill to set up the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) to fund infrastructure projects in the country, with finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman asserting that its audited accounts will be placed before both the Houses every year and they will have "oversight" of the institution.

The Rajya Sabha passed the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) Bill, 2021 by a voice vote on Thursday. The bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Later, financial services secretary Debasish Panda said at an event that the development finance institution (DFI) should be

operational in the next four-five months.

Participating in a debate on the bill in the Upper House, some members raised the issue of lack of parliamentary oversight of the institution and demanded that the proposed legislation be sent to a select committee for scrutiny.

Replying to the debate, Sitharaman explained, "Every year audited accounts (of this bank) will come to each House of Parliament... so Parliament oversight (of the institution) is in-built in the bill."

Section 26 of the bill provides, "The Institution shall furnish to the Central Government and the Reserve Bank within four months from the date on which its accounts are closed and balanced, a

copy of its balance-sheet and accounts together with a copy of the auditor's report and a report of the working of the Institution during the relevant year, and the Central Government shall, as soon as may be after they are received by it, cause the same to be laid before each House of Parliament."

Thus, the NaBFID will be answerable to Parliament. The bank will support the development of long-term non-recourse infrastructure financing in India, including development of the bonds and derivatives markets necessary for infrastructure financing.

Sitharaman said a five-year tax break is provided to private development finance institutions to ensure enhanced flow of funds. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Saina makes Orleans quarters

Paris: Saina Nehwal advanced to the quarterfinals of the Orleans Masters badminton tournament after prevailing over France's Marie Batomene in the women's singles second round here on Thursday. Running against time to make it to her fourth Olympics, Saina recovered from the opening game reversal to see off world No. 65 Marie 18-21, 21-15, 21-10 in a 51-minute clash in the Super 100 event, which is part of BWF's revised Olympic qualification period. Ira Sharma, ranked 162, also made it to the quarterfinals after beating Bulgaria's world no. 71 Mariya Mitsova 21-18, 21-13 in 32 minutes. The 21-year-old Indian is likely to clash against Denmark's Line Christophersen next. — PTI

Vasek loses cool, match in Miami

Miami: Vasek Pospisil's anger boiled over in a foul-mouthed rant referencing ATP Tour chairman Andrea Gaudenzi on Wednesday as the Canadian went down in three sets in the first round of the Miami Open. American qualifier Mackenzie McDonald advanced with a 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 victory over Pospisil, who swatted a ball out of court, smashed a racket and incurred a verbal abuse point penalty on set point of the opening set — a display that had him later offering an apology on Twitter. Pospisil pulled himself together to win the second set, but McDonald, ranked 120th in the world, bounced back to seal the match and set up a second-round meeting with 18th-seeded American John Isner. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

FORMULA ONE

Bahrain Grand Prix: First Practice from 4.55 pm; Second Practice from 8.25 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

TIGERS ON PROWL

Kohli's men aim to seal series in 2nd ODI against England

Pune, March 25: The immensely talented Suryakumar Yadav is likely to get a chance to showcase his '360 degree' hitting skills when a rampaging Indian team takes on a rather clueless England, aiming to seal another series victory in the second ODI here on Friday.

Shreyas Iyer's dislocated shoulder has once again brought Yadav in focus and his ODI debut, after a blockbuster T20 first outing, looks imminent after an all-round show by the hosts ensured an easy victory in the first game.

Iyer has been one of India's most prolific 50-over batsman before the Covid-19 enforced lockdown but such is the team's strength that a debutant looks more formidable for a world champion opposition, who are no less menacing but seem utterly confused at this point.

Being spoilt for choices is always a good headache to have for the think-tank and skipper Virat Kohli will be more pleased than anyone else.

Kohli has not had Ravindra Jadeja's services for close to three months but neither Axar Patel in Tests, and now Krunal Pandya in the ODIs, have let the team miss him.

Meanwhile, England will look to level the series and stay alive in the contest. England have a lot to ponder on and injuries to skipper Eoin Morgan and batsman Sam Billings, have only added to their woes. Morgan has been ruled out of the remaining matches while Billings will miss Friday's game. All-rounder Ben Stokes was firm in his belief that England do not have too many reasons to worry despite the disappointments. — PTI



Suryakumar Yadav (left) and India captain Virat Kohli celebrate an England wicket during the One-Day International series in this file pic.

I will be back stronger, says sidelined Shreyas

Pune, March 25: Injured India batsman Shreyas Iyer has left the bio-secure bubble here after he was ruled out of the ongoing ODI series against England as well as the entire IPL starting next month even as he vowed to come back even stronger.

Iyer dislocated his left shoulder while fielding during the first ODI against England on Tuesday and he is set to undergo surgery, which will rule him out of action for a minimum four months.

"Shreyas iyer has exited the bio-bubble," the BCCI

said on Thursday ahead of the second ODI here.

Earlier in the day, Iyer vowed to come back from the injury even stronger.

"You know what they say, the greater the setback, the stronger the comeback. I shall be back soon," Iyer tweeted.

"I've been reading your messages and have been overwhelmed by all the outpouring of love and support. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to everyone," he said.

The 26-year-old Iyer is also unlikely to play for English county side Lancashire in their one-day tournament.

Lancashire had on Monday announced the signing of Iyer for the tournament starting on July 23.

Iyer suffered the injury in the eighth over of the England innings when he dived on a drive hit by Jonny Bairstow off pacer Shardul Thakur.

He looked in tremendous pain as he left the field clutching his shoulder.

On Tuesday, the BCCI had stated, "Shreyas Iyer subluxated (partially dislocated) his left shoulder in the 8th over while fielding. He has been taken for further scans." — PTI

NUMBER GAME

INDIA HAVE WON THREE OUT OF FIVE ONE DAYERS AT PUNE:

● India have won three and lost two in five one day internationals at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, Pune where the second match of the series will be played on Friday (March 26).

● England, on the other hand, have lost both one day internationals played here. They lost to India by three wickets with 11 balls remaining in the first encounter between the two sides on January 15, 2017. In the first one day international match of the current series, hosts defeated England by 66 runs on Tuesday.

● Virat Kohli's 122 off 105 balls with eight fours and five sixes against England on January 15, 2017 is the highest individual score at this ground.

● Jasprit Bumrah took four wickets for 35 runs against West Indies on October 27, 2018 is the best bowling performance at this ground. Prasidh Krishna's four for 54 on debut in the first match of the series is the second best bowling here. In five previous matches, the team batting first have won three times while two victories were achieved on chasing the target.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER



Manu Bhaker (from left), Rahi Sarnobat and Chinki Yadav pose with their medals after winning the women's 25m pistol team gold at the Shooting World Cup in New Delhi on Thursday.

Golden girls top pistol team event

New Delhi, March 25: The Indian juggernaut remained unstoppable at the ISSF shooting World Cup with the country's women shooters grabbing the spotlight by clinching the 25m pistol team gold medal following a silver in the 50m rifle 3 positions team event on Thursday.

The seventh competition of the day was marred by the Hungarian team's pull-out from the men's rifle 3 position final — against India — after a dispute with its seasoned shooter Peter Sidi over a bipod that was attached to his rifle, leading to a postponement of the event to Friday.

The host nation's team will take on third-placed USA in the final.

There was positive news for India after that unprecedented act, as the triumvirate of Chinky Yadav, Manu Bhaker and Rahi Sarnobat shot a total of 17 to beat Poland's Joanna Wawrzonowska, Julita Borek and Agnieszka Korejwo, who managed to score 7.

"In individual competitions if we make mistakes, we are losing the points, nobody else. But here, we feel a little more responsible. It is very different from qualification, it is hit or miss here, but, in qualification, every shot counts in a different way," Sarnobat said.

The team gold came only a day after Yadav, Bhaker and Sarnobat swept the individual final by winning all the medals on offer on Wednesday.

The victory in this event consolidated India's position at the top of the pecking order with 21 medals, including 10 gold, six silver and five bronze.

Earlier in the day, India's Anjum Moudgil, Shreya Saksena and Gaayathri Nithyanadam claimed the silver medal in the 50m rifle 3 positions team event.

The Indian rifle team shot 43 in the gold medal showdown to finish behind the Polish team, which scored 47 to grab the top prize.

— PTI

Olympic torch relay begins

Iwaki (Japan), March 25: The Tokyo Olympics torch relay got underway on Thursday after a year's Coronavirus delay, with officials hoping it will be a "ray of light" after the problems caused by the pandemic.

Spectators were barred from the departure ceremony and first leg over ongoing fears about the coronavirus, which forced the 2020 Games' historic postponement a year ago.

But they will line the rest of the route during the 121-day relay, which will criss-cross Japan and involve 10,000 runners before the torch lights the Olympic cauldron on July 23.

Organisers are hoping the relay will dispel doubts about holding the Games during a pandemic, and Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto called the flame "a ray of light at the end of the darkness".

"This little flame never lost hope and it waited for this day like a cherry blossom bud just about to bloom," she told the ceremony at Fukushima's J-Village sports complex, which was a base for responding to the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Azusa Iwashimizu, one of Japan's 2011 World Cup-winning women's footballers, was the first to carry the rose-gold, cherry blossom-shaped torch, accompanied by former teammates.

She passed the flame to Fukushima high school student Asato Owada, who like all the runners wore an official white tracksuit with a red diagonal stripe.

A handful of fans, wearing their compulsory masks, watched the relay from its second section. But with cheering and large crowds banned for virus safety, the loudest sound came from clicking cameras. "I think it somewhat lacks excitement because there are rules. I think more people would have come and there would have been more excitement if there wasn't coronavirus," Tetsuya Ozawa said in the town of Naraha.



Above: The torch is lit by a member of Japan's women's football team during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Torch Relay Grand Start in Naraha, Fukushima prefecture, on Thursday. The torch relay began its 121-day journey across Japan and is headed toward the opening ceremony in Tokyo on July 23.

Below: Members of the Spa Resort Hawaiians Dancing Team 'Hula Girls' perform during an opening performance on the first day of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic torch relay. — AP



But 10-year-old Tsuzumi Sugeno was thrilled nonetheless. "This will be a great memory. I want to become a professional baseball player and play at the Olympics," he said.

Organisers were making final preparations for the relay last year when the virus prompted the unprecedented decision to postpone the Games, as sport around the world

ground to a halt.

A year on, the pandemic is still in full swing despite vaccine roll-outs, and many in Japan fear the Olympics will cause a spike in cases.

Overseas spectators are barred from the Games, and limits are likely on domestic fans, so the relay is seen as a vital opportunity to build positive momentum.

The Fukushima launch also puts the spotlight back

on the northeastern region of Tohoku that was affected by the 2011 quake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

The Games were initially billed as the "Recovery Olympics", showcasing reconstruction in the region. The relay will pass through some towns that remain only partially open to the public, as radiation decontamination continues. — AFP

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