

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | TUESDAY 16 | MARCH 2021

WEATHER



Max: 39°C
Min: 21°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Panguni 3
Tithi: Thrithiyai
Star: Ashwini
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
Yamagandam: 9 am to 10.30 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.06 am
Zohar: 12.23 pm
Asar: 3.38 pm
Maghrib: 6.20 pm
Isha: 7.30 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.20 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.16 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 8.09 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 8.44 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+24,214)	(+128)
1,14,09,372	1,58,890

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+836)
TN: 8,60,562 12,551

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

12,06,28,225
DEATHS
26,68,439
COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219
worldometers.info

Nationwide strike impacts banking services of PSBs on day one

New Delhi: Banking services such as cash withdrawals, deposits, cheque clearances and remittances were impacted across public sector banks (PSBs) on Monday, with around 10 lakh staffers joining a two-day strike to protest against the government's policy to privatise more public sector lenders, union leaders said.

Don't let guard down, Covid-19 continues to be big threat: Rahul Gandhi

New Delhi: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday said the COVID-19 virus continues to be a big threat and people should follow all precautions and not let their guard down.



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‘Mank’ leads Oscars race with 10 nominations

Los Angeles, March15: In a year defined by the the coronavirus pandemic, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences unveiled its list of Oscars nominees on Monday. The announcement, made by Indian actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas and her singer-actor husband Nick Jonas, focused on recognising a diverse set of talents and movies.

The 93rd edition of the award ceremony will take place on April 25, after being postponed from its usual February date in the wake of the pandemic. In a year in which the pandemic shut-



tered movie theaters for months, Academy Awards nominations went to two female filmmakers for the first time and a historically diverse slate of actors Monday but, ultimately, David Fincher's "Mank" — a very traditional contender about Hollywood itself —

took the lead.Here are the nominations in all the 23 categories:
Best picture: *The Father*, *Judas and the Black Messiah*, *Mank*, *Minari*, *Nomadland*
Promising Young Woman, *Sound of Metal*, and *The Trial of the Chicago 7*,
Best international feature

Actor Gary Oldman (left) appears with director and David Fincher on the set of *Mank*.
— Netflix via AP

film: *Another Round* (Denmark), *Better Days* (Hong Kong), *Collective* (Romania), *The Man Who Sold His Skin* (Tunisia) *Quo Vadis, Aida?* (Bosnia and Herzegovina).
Best director: Thomas Vinterberg (*Another Round*)
David Fincher (*Mank*), Lee Isaac Chung (*Minari*), Chloe Zhao (*Nomadland*)
Emerald Fennell (*Promising Young Woman*).
Best actor: Riz Ahmed (*Sound of Metal*), Chadwick Boseman (*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*)
Steven Yeun (*Minari*), Anthony Hopkins (*The Father*), Gary Oldman (*Mank*).
— PTI



Vanathi's Valimai update goes viral

CITY | 2



Biden declines to call for Cuomo to quit

WORLD | 5

SPORT | 8

IPL stint made Kishan fearless



India to raise racism with UK, says Jaishankar

New Delhi, March 15: India will take up with the UK when required the alleged incidents of racism in Britain, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said in the Rajya Sabha on Monday. He also described India as the land of Mahatma Gandhi and said it can never turn its eyes away from racism.

Responding to concerns raised by a BJP MP over racism and cyberbullying that forced Indian-origin Rashmi Samant to resign as president of the Oxford University Students Union, the minister said New Delhi has strong ties with the UK and will take up such matters with great candour when required.

"I note the sentiments of the House," he said. "I do want to say that as a land of Mahatma Gandhi, we can never ever turn our eyes away from racism wherever it is," he added. — PTI

Arrested in Ambani bomb scare case Mumbai cop Sachin Vaze suspended

Mumbai, March 15: The Mumbai Police Monday suspended Crime Branch officer Sachin Vaze, a day after he was sent to the National Investigation Agency's custody in connection with the inquiry into the explosive-laden car found outside industrialist Mukesh

BATLA HOUSE ENCOUNTER CASE Delhi court awards death penalty to Ariz Khan

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

A Delhi court on Monday awarded death sentence to Ariz Khan, convicted for the murder of police inspector Mohan Chand Sharma and other offences in connection with the 2008 Batla House encounter. The court also imposed a fine of ₹11 lakh on Khan and directed ₹10 lakh be immediately released to deceased inspector Sharma's family.

During the hearing, the police sought the death penalty for Khan, a suspected member of the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen, saying it was not just any killing but a murder of a law enforcement officer who was a defender of justice.

On March 8, the Additional Sessions Judge Sandeep Yadav had convicted



Khan stating that the evidence produced by the prosecution duly proved the case beyond reasonable doubt.

The judge had said that it was "duly proved that Ariz Khan and his associates caused murder of police official and fired gunshot on the police official." "The evidence adduced on record, including ocular, documentary and scientific, prosecution has proved beyond reasonable doubt that Khan along with accomplices with common intention obstructed inspector Sharma in discharging public function," the court had said.

Amit Shah mocks Mamata's wheelchair campaign

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 15

Rubbing salt into the wound of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, Union home minister Amit Shah on Monday raised his doubts on her claim — attack in a conspiracy — behind her injuries during

her Assembly Election campaign at Nandigram in East Midnapore last week. He also teased the injured Trinamul Congress supremo for resuming her poll campaign in a "wheelchair" and then wished her a quick recovery.

Mr Shah however cancelled his attendance

in person at the first of his two campaign rallies, for the BJP candidates in the first phase of polls on March 27, blaming a snag in his helicopter in wake of a miserable turnout in Jhargram and addressed it virtually.

Mocking Ms Banerjee in his second rally at Ran-

ibandh in Bankura he said, "At the outset, I apologise to you for my delay in reaching here. My helicopter developed a glitch. But I am not going to complain that there was a conspiracy in it. Helicopter malfunctions sometimes."

Mr Shah added, "I have seen Mamata's suffered

leg injuries. Didn't you see it? How she got injured is yet to be ascertained. A probe is underway. TMC is crying of a 'big conspiracy' to leave her injured. But the Election Commission already called it an accident, not an attack. God knows who is speaking the truth!"

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— *T. Sudheesh*

OTHER STORY

Thanjai food tech institute bags national tag

New Delhi, March 15: The Rajya Sabha on Monday approved a bill that declares two food technology institutes at Kundli in Haryana and Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu as national institutes.

The Rajya Sabha passed The National Institutes of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management Bill, 2019 by voice vote. The Bill declares National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management Kundli, and the Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology, Thanjavur as National Institutes of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management.

Clarifying members' doubts about implementation of reservation policy in these institutions, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said while replying on the Bill in the House that all policies of national importance would be implemented in these institutions and reservation would be applicable in these institutes. He also assured that all people working in food technology have representation in these institutes.

—PTI

Bus conductor dies in tiff with cop: SHRC orders ₹3 L damages

A. ARUL PALANI | DC CHENNAI, MARCH. 15

The State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) has directed the state government to pay ₹3 lakh as compensation to the wife of a TNSTC conductor who died two years ago in an altercation with a head constable in the bus.

Based on a report published in 'Deccan Chronicle' on September 4, 2019, the commission initiated suo motu proceedings and directed the government to

pay the compensation within a month and provide suitable employment to the legal heir of the conductor.

On September 2, 2019, a TNSTC bus was proceeding to Cuddalore from Trichy and when conductor Gopinathan asked head constable K. Palanivel to buy the ticket, the cop, who was in plain clothes, refused to do so saying he was a policeman.

He also refused to show his identity card and in an altercation between them Gopinathan collapsed in

DC IMPACT

the bus. The conductor was rushed to a private hospital in Neyveli, where doctors declared him dead. He had suffered a heart attack and died in the bus.

The Superintendent of Police, Cuddalore, in his report admitted that the incident as stated in the newspaper was true and departmental action was taken against Palanivel and he was transferred to

another police station and his increment was deferred for three years.

SHRC member D Jayachandran said the commission is of the opinion that Palanivel's behaviour is the main cause for the death of Gopinathan. The government should pay ₹3 lakh to G. Kalaivani, wife of Gopinathan, within a month.

The SHRC asked the government to ensure that policemen should not travel without ticket in TNSTC buses except under warrant.



Corporation Commissioner P.Kumaravel Pandian conducts an inspection and fines people without mask at Gandhipuram in Coimbatore on Monday. —DC

Court asks Sasikala to file reply to AIADMK counter

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH. 15

A civil court in Chennai on Monday directed V.K. Sasikala, former interim general secretary of the AIADMK, to file her response to a counter filed by the party in a civil suit instituted by

her challenging her removal from the ruling party.

Sasikala who served a jail term in Bengaluru in connection with a disproportionate assets case returned to the state to a rousing welcome recently. Weeks later, Sasikala, a close aide of former chief mi-

nister J. Jayalalithaa, announced her retirement from politics.

Sasikala filed the civil suit in 2017 seeking to declare that AIADMK leaders Edappadi K. Palaniswami, O. Panneerselvam, Dindigul C. Srinivasan, S. Semmalai and

E. Madhusudan were not members of the party. She said that all actions taken by them as the party office-bearers removing her from the post of the interim general secretary were illegal and against the by-laws of the party. The case was taken up for

hearing by IV city civil court judge A.R.V. Ravi.

Sasikala's counsel informed the court that he would file a counter after getting instructions from his client.

The counsel representing Palaniswami and Panneerselvam had argued to dismiss the petition filed by her.

Two-day stir halts bank work 13,86,379 vaccinated in TN

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUCHY, MARCH. 15

Banking activities came to a standstill across the central districts of Tiruchy, Karur, Perambalur, Ariyalur, Pudukkottai, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam, and Mayiladuthurai districts on Monday, as the members of the All India Nationalised Banks Officer's Federation (AINBOF) and United Forum of Bank

unions, (UFB) consisting of nine bank unions, commenced their two-day strike in response to a nationwide strike call to protest the Centre's move to privatize the nationalised banks.

In a press release here, general secretary, AINBOF, G.V. Manimaran said that the Centre's move to privatize nationalized banks not only affected bank employees but also the common man, as the

private sector do not follow reservation formula, and socio-economic schemes linked to the livelihood of the crores of backward class people living in the country.

In Tiruchy, members of the Tiruchy district unit of the AINBOF, led by district secretary S. Subash staged a demonstration in front of the regional office of the Canara bank. Among others including R. Rajagopal, L. Thiagarajan,

Krishnan, and R.V. Venkatasubramanian (RVS), regional secretary, district secretary, regional committee member and PRO, respectively of the Canara Bank Officers Association, and others spoke.

Similarly, members of the UFB led by G. Ramaraj, general secretary, Tiruchirappalli district bank employees' union, staged a demonstration in front of the State Bank of India's main branch here.

G. SRINIVASAN | DC THANJAVUR, MARCH. 15

A total of 13,86,379 persons have been vaccinated for Corona in Tamil Nadu till March 14, said Narayana Babu, director, medical education, here on Monday.

Babu visited Thanjavur medical college hospital and enquired about the treatment given to 43 students

of a government-aided private school at Ammapettai who tested positive for Corona and were recently admitted to the TMCH.

In Thanjavur district alone, 8,391 persons have been vaccinated.

"Corona is well under control in Tamil Nadu. We should follow precautionary measures and prevent its spread. More cases have been reported

from four districts like Thanjavur, Chengalpatt, Chennai and Coimbatore. In other districts, cases are fewer. Only 350 persons are taking treatment in a day in the state," he said.

In Tamil Nadu, a total of 8.58 lakh persons tested positive for Corona. But 98 percent got cured.

"With one year of experience in Corona prevention and treatment in

Tamil Nadu, now medical and paramedical staff and district administrations are doing well in containing Corona. People should cooperate with them by wearing face masks, maintaining social distancing, and using sanitizers," he added.

Dr. G. Ravikumar, dean, TMCH, Maruthur Durai, superintendent, TMCH, were present.

10-year-old student develops solar power charger

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC TIRUCHY, MARCH. 15

A 10-year-old student studying class-4 has developed a solar power charger that can charge power banks and mobile phones.

The student P. Aniruth Appar, son of a software engineer couple from Bengaluru, who came to his grandfather's house here, recently demonstrated his invention to the public in Varanasi area, to the applause of all.

P. Gunaseelan, the boy's grandfather, a retired bank official, said the boy was basically interested in experimenting and creating new things with innovative ideas. As we have abundant solar energy, Gunaseelan encouraged his grandson by suggesting him to develop the mobile phone charger with solar energy.

According to the boy's parents Prasanna and Deepika Prasanna, their son studied the details to build that model and designed a simple work-



had already developed a wind energy-based traffic signaling system and placed the same in school-level science exhibitions in Bengaluru, and received appreciation certificates and medals.

She also said her son was very keen to develop new things using renewable energy resources, and already is in the process of developing solar energy-based ceiling and table fans. "We are going to inform the concerned ministries of the Central and state governments about our son's new inventions," she added.

ing charger with the help of just two things, namely Solar panel and buck module. The buck module is a circuit that has a capacitor, resistor, and

diodes.

His mother is an engineering graduate working in a private school teaching science and English. She said her son

IIT-Madras establishes institute advisory board

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 15

The Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M) has established an Institute Advisory Board (IAB) comprising members from various fields including business, academia and philanthropy across the globe.

The board will provide guidance to the institute on the best global practices to make it a top educational and research institute in the world.

Prof. Bhaskar Ramamurthi, director, IIT-M, said the IAB members will bring tremendous amount of experience and knowledge related to the nurturing of world-class universities. "They share our dream that IIT-M should grow and become one of the leading technical universities in the world. Among the key

goals of the board will be to help devise strategies to implement global best practices that enable acceleration of research programmes, establishment and growth of world-class research centres, encouragement of innovation and entrepreneurship, and recruitment of top faculty members and students from across the world," he said.

The board will help IIT-M to implement its plan of action outlined under the 'Institution of Eminence' (IoE) project of the government of India. A key aspect of the IoE initiative is that public institutions selected for this recognition will be provided financial assistance of up to ₹1,000 crore, over a period of five years to become on par with international standards.

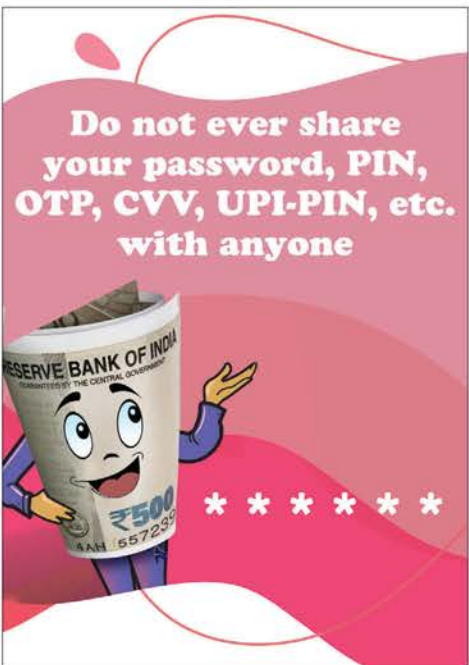
PUBLIC NOTICE

My client M/s.Confin Homes Ltd. Having office at Lawrence Complex, Gandhipuram, Coimbatore- 12, have proposed to extend housing loan to 1.Prithiviraj and his wife 2.Jude Subashini both residing at Door No:1177/1Dr.Radhakrishnan Street, Gandhipuram, Coimbatore - 641012. 1.Prithiviraj and his wife 2.Jude subashini have offered house sites measuring 2160Sq.ft of vacant land in SE.No.82/2 in Site no.50 Villankurichi Village, Ganapathy SRO, Coimbatore. Acquired by R.Palanisamy, S/o. Rayappa Gounder by way of Sale deed Doc.No.5044/2007dated 24.09.2007. They alleged that original parent documents 1.Sale Deed Doc.No.6394/2005 dated 27.10.2005 at the Ganapathy SRO, 2. General power of attorney doc.no.863/2005 dated 05.10.2005, 3.Original sale deed Doc.No.3464/1993 dated 14.06.1993 at the Gandhipuram SRO hasbeen misplaced/lost & untraceable. Anybody in possession of the documents or having objection in M/s.Confin Homes Ltd extending loan to him, may inform me within 10 days from today. Any objection after that period would not bind my client in any manner.

S.SIVADAS, MBA,ML, Advocate No.204, Law Chambers, District Court Campus, Coimbatore-641018, Ph:9842234869.

Advt. No. 26/2021

Government of India
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SHORT TAKES

AMARNATH YATRA LIKELY TO SEE HEAVY RUSH: CRPF

Jammu, March 15: This year's Amarnath Yatra is likely to witness heavy rush of pilgrims, a top CRPF officer here said on Monday, and asserted that all necessary arrangements will be made to ensure it passes off peacefully.

Inspector General (IG) of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Jammu sector, P.S. Ranpise said all units and formations have been briefed about the threat posed by sticky bombs, and asked to remain on high alert.

The 56-day yatra to the 3,880-metre-high cave shrine of Amarnath in the South Kashmir Himalayas is scheduled to start from the twin routes of Pahalgam and Baltal on June 28 and culminate on August 22.

Talking to reporters after inaugurating a free medical camp organised by the 166th Battalion of the force in Sidhra here, the CRPF IG said, "It is likely that the yatra this year will attract heavy rush, and keeping this thing in mind, we will study the requirements, and all necessary arrangements will be made for the success of the pilgrimage."

"We already had a meeting with civil police and projected the requirement... We will study the logistic requirements needed at the Yatri camps and might require more forces," he added.

To a question on the number of troops required for the pilgrimage, the IG said, "That will be decided by the government after a review of the overall situation."

ARMS IMPORTS TO INDIA DOWN, SAYS REPORT

**PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 15**

India's arms import decreased by 33 per cent between 2011-15 and 2016-20, according to a report by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on Monday.

Russia was the most affected supplier, although India's imports of US arms also fell, by 46 per cent. "The drop in Indian arms imports seems to have been mainly due to its complex procurement processes, combined with an attempt to reduce its dependence on Russian arms," said SIPRI report. It said India is planning large-scale arms imports in the coming years from several suppliers.

Globally, United States remained the largest arms exporter, increasing its global share of arms exports from 32 to 37 per cent between 2011-15 and 2016-20. Russia and China both saw their exports declining.

The arms exports by Russia, which accounted for 20 per cent of all exports of major arms in 2016-20, dropped by 22 per cent (to roughly the same level as in 2006-10).

"The bulk around 90 per cent — of this decrease was attributable to a 53 per cent fall in its arms exports to India," said the report.

ODISHA MAN, SON HELD FOR SETTING FOREST ABLAZE

**AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 15**

A man and his son were on Monday arrested for allegedly setting a forest ablaze at Madhapur in Odisha's Boudh district. The accused duo, identified as Assan Majhi and his son Shyanghan, were caught red-handed while setting dry leaves on fire in Mundeswar reserve forest under Madhapur range.

Saroj Mishra, the local Madhapur range officer, said the forest department personnel found smoke emanating from four to five places Mundeswar reserve forest during patrolling.

"Our personnel immediately rushed to the spot where the accused father and son were setting the forest afire. The duo started running to escape the forest patrolling team. Our squad chased them and arrested the father, son-duo. Later, they were produced before a court," said Mishra.

Earlier, on March 13, four persons were arrested on similar charges in Purunkatak range in the district while two others were arrested from Subarnagiri forest under Manamunda range. A gun was also seized from them.

In a similar crackdown on March 11, three persons had been arrested on charges of setting fire at Ranjagada reserve forest in Dhenkanal district.



Students wearing masks attend morning prayers at school in Srinagar on Monday. Most of the primary schools reopened in the Kashmir valley from today amid strict Covid-19 guidelines imposed by the government. — PTI

Vande Bharat Mission world's largest repatriation drive: EAM

Exercise saw the return home of over 45 lakh people from 98 countries

**DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 15**

The Vande Bharat Mission ordered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last year was the "largest repatriation exercise in the history of the world" carried out by India and saw the return home of over 45 lakh people from 98 countries, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar informed both Houses of Parliament on Monday, in a statement "pertaining to the welfare abroad of Indians, non-resident Indians and Persons of Indian Origin in the Covid situation". He said that among the states, Kerala received the maximum returnees, followed by Delhi, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. He also said that the United Arab Emirates was the country from where the maximum number of stranded Indians returned, followed by Saudi Arabia, USA and

MP: 5 MLAs test +ve for Covid

Bhopal, March 15: With five MLAs contracting Coronavirus infection, the ongoing Budget session of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly may be cut short this week, an official said.

The session started on February 22 and was scheduled to end on March 26.

Five legislators and four marshals have contracted Covid-19 since the session

started.

The EAM also said that India has "reason to expect" that "partner governments in the Gulf would be helpful in facilitating the early return of many who were compelled to go back because of the pandemic".

The EAM said this huge exercise "could not have

started and there is growing concern among members, said an official of the Assembly secretariat.

Therefore the session might conclude this week after transacting the scheduled business, he said.

Earlier in the day, as soon as the proceedings started,

Legislative Affairs Minister Narottam Mishra rose and informed that five members of the

House have contracted the virus so far. Coronavirus cases have increased after a lull, the minister said.

Senior Congress leader Govind Singh said he had a discussion with Leader of Opposition Kamal Nath on the issue.

Speaker Girish Gautam said he talked to the MLAs who tested positive. "I request the members again to undergo tests," he said. — PTI

MODI TO HOLD MEET WITH CMs TOMORROW

**DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 15**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold a meeting with the Chief Ministers of all states on Wednesday to discuss the surge in Coronavirus cases in several states and review the containment measures to check the rapid spread of the virus.

India on Monday reported 26,291 new cases, which is its highest single-day spike in the last 85 days, while 118 fresh deaths were recorded in the 24 hours.

India currently has 2,19,262 active cases, which is 1.93 per cent of the total infections in the country.

Vaze moves HC against arrest, claims its illegal

Mumbai, March 15: Suspended police officer Sachin Vaze on Monday filed a 'habeas corpus' petition in the Bombay High Court, challenging his arrest by the NIA in connection with the recovery of an explosives-laden SUV near Mukesh Ambani's house.

The NIA, on the other hand, denied before a lower court that he had been detained illegally before the arrest.

Vaze, an assistant police inspector with Mumbai police, was arrested by the National Investigation Agency on Saturday for his alleged involvement. The petition, filed through his brother Sudharm, claimed that Vaze (49) was made a "scapegoat" by "certain political powers".

A Habeas Corpus petition is usually filed to challenge 'illegal' detention or arrest. The plea, moved by his lawyer

Sunny Punamiya, sought a direction to the NIA to produce Vaze before the HC and to prove that due procedure was followed during the arrest.

The police officer was not provided a copy of the FIR and he was also not explained the reasons for arrest, nor was his family informed, the petition said. The haste with which he was arrested showed that the central agency acted with mala fide intentions, it alleged. The NIA is probing the recovery of an explosives-laden Scorpio near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's multi-storey house 'Antilia' here last month.

The case was taken over by the NIA after the mysterious death of Thane-based businessman Mansukh Hiran who had claimed the vehicle had been stolen from his possession. — PTI

SENA CALLS VAZE'S ARREST INSULT OF MAHA POLICE

**BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, MARCH 15**

Maharashtra's ruling party Shiv Sena has reacted strongly to the arrest of police officer Sachin Vaze by the NIA calling it "an insult of the Maharashtra Police." It has also condemned the BJP saying those who are celebrating the arrest are hurting the state's autonomy.

An editorial named "Atak Karun Dakhavi" (They finally arrested him) in the party mouthpiece 'Saamana,' the Sena on Monday alleged that Vaze's arrest by the NIA was to settle the scores for his act of exposing the TRP scam of journalist Arnab Goswami.

Rajnath urges talks between Govt. and farmers

Lucknow, March 15: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Monday urged dialogue between the protesting farmers and the Centre while addressing a meeting of BJP office-bearers, during which he also invoked the border clashes with China and the construction of the Ram temple.

Making an appeal to farmers upset over the new agri-marketing laws, the senior BJP leader said any problem can be resolved through talks.

"The BJP resolve is to double the farmers' income, and in no case the MSP will end, he said, referring to the apprehension among farmers camping at Delhi's borders for months now. We are all from farmers' families and we are ready for amendments and solutions, whatever is needed in the interest of agriculture," Singh said at the inaugural meeting of the Uttar Pradesh BJP executive committee.

He highlighted the role of grassroots workers in the Bharatiya Janata Party and said this was the only party which has not seen a split so far.

This is not a crowd of workers aiming to gain power but a lively party which has a political vision, he said. He referred to the recently begun construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya, after the historic verdict in the Ram Janna-bhoomi-Babri Masjid land dispute.

"People used to say that whenever elections come,

DELHI-GHAZIABAD ROAD OPENED FOR TRAFFIC

New Delhi, March 15: The carriageway of NH-24 going towards Ghaziabad from Delhi, which was closed since January 26, was reopened for commuters on Monday, police said.

The carriageway from Ghaziabad towards Delhi, however, remains closed, they said.

In view of the prevailing law and order situation at the Ghazipur border and keeping in mind the aspect of public convenience, the carriageway of NH-24 going towards Ghaziabad from Delhi has been opened in due consultation with the police officials of the district, a senior official said.

The stretch had been closed since January 26, when violence broke out in the national capital during a tractor parade by farmers.

The carriageway was briefly opened on March 2. The Tikri and the Singhu borders continue to be closed due to the farmers' agitation. — PTI

BJP leaders speak about construction of the Ram temple, he said, referring to the foundation laying ceremony last year. — PTI

Pinarayi to contest from Dharmadom

**GILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
MARCH 15**

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan filed his nomination papers from the Dharmadom Assembly constituency at the Collectorate in Kannur on Monday.

The Chief Minister, who is contesting for the second time from Dharmadom, took all Covid-19 safety measures including face shield, mask and gloves while filing the nomination papers. He was accompanied by senior CPM leaders including CPM Kannur district secretary M.V. Jayarajan.

Vijayan, 75, was elected from Dharmadom constituency in 2016 Assembly polls with a big margin of 36,905 votes. While he secured 87,329 votes,

his nearest Congress rival Mambaram Divakaran bagged 50,424 votes. The BJP candidate was way behind with just 12,763 votes.

While the Congress-led UDF is yet to finalise its candidate, the BJP has fielded its former state president C.K. Padmanabhan this time with the objective of putting up a better show.

Earlier the UDF had planned to field Forward Bloc national secretary G. Devarajan against the Chief Minister.

However, the Forward Bloc leadership refused to contest from Dharmadom constituency citing ideological issues involved in taking on the top Marxist leader. Moreover, Forward Bloc is a constituent of the Left Front comprising CPM, CPI, RSP at the national level.

Top Jaish commander killed in J&K encounter

**YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, MARCH 15**

A senior commander of Jaish-e-Muhammaad (JeM) is among two militants killed in a nearly three-day long unforgotten with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's southern Shopian district. The slain JeM commander is Wilayat Lone alias Sajad Afghani who, the officials said, figured in the list of most wanted militants by security forces combating a decades old insurgency in J&K. His close associate from Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) identified as

Jahangir Ahmad Wani was also gunned down after he turned down the security forces' offer to lay down weapons and surrender.

Several people were injured after the security forces used live ammunition to contain protests by locals near the encounter site, the witnesses said. The police said "some miscreants" were injured when they tried to disrupt the operation against the militants holed up in a private house. The locals accused the security forces of torching and damaging residential houses.

HISTORIC | MOMENT

Iconic bridge will soar 359 metres above the bed of Chenab river in J&K's Reasi district

Lower ends of arch of rly bridge in J&K connected

Jammu, March 15: In a historic moment, the railways has connected the two ends of the main arch of the world's highest bridge on the Chenab river in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district which will provide direct connectivity to Kashmir Valley.

The iconic bridge will soar 359 metres above the bed of the river and will be 30 metres higher than the iconic Eiffel Tower in

Paris. Railway officials termed the development a "historic" one.

Railway minister Piyush Goyal had recently shared the news on Twitter. "In a historic moment, the arch bottom of the Chenab bridge has been completed today. Next, the arch upper of the engineering marvel in making will be completed," he said. The minister, who also shared a video of the achievement, had said

it was set to become the world's highest railway bridge.

Facing grave challenges and life-threatening hazards posed by rough terrain and geological thrust zones, engineers and workers are toiling overtime to meet the last extended deadline set for completion of the world's highest railway bridge connecting Kashmir with the rest of the country.

The Northern Railway will be completing the most difficult 111-kilometre long section of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link by December 2022, which would connect Kashmir to the rest of India through the railway network, officials said.

The 272 km railway line is being undertaken at an estimated cost of ₹28,000 crore by the Northern

Railway. The first section connecting Udhampur to Katra and the third section between Banihal and Baramulla have been completed with both sections operational.

The work to complete the most difficult Katra-Banihal section is going as per schedule, they said. The Udhampur-Katra (25 km) section, Banihal-Qazigund (18 km) section and Qazigund-Baramulla (118

km) section have already been commissioned.

The last remaining section, the 111 km Katra-Banihal section is currently under execution, officials said, adding that 126 km out of 174 km of tunnels on this section has already been completed. They said the project is, perhaps, the most difficult new railway line project undertaken in the entire Indian subcontinent.

The terrain passes through young Himalayas, which are full of geological surprises and numerous problems. For execution purposes, the project has been divided into three sub-sections, they said. Katra-Qazigund leg, the most difficult stretch of the project, and its alignment of this stretch which is 129 km long, passes through Patni and Pir Panjal ranges, they said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

JUSTICE FOR WOMEN: AUSSIES RALLY AT PARL

Canberra, March 15: Australians rallied in the capital and other cities Monday demanding justice for women and calling out misogyny and dangerous workplace cultures as the government reels from two rape allegations.

Outside Parliament House in Canberra, the crowd of hundreds was mostly female and most wore black. They carried placards, including "Justice for Women" and "Men, Own Your Guilt." Prime Minister Scott Morrison refused organisers' demand that he address the crowd. He agreed to meet a delegation of protesters in his office, but a meeting didn't take place.

ASTRAZENECA VAX: FRANCE STOPS USING IT

Paris, March 15: French President Emmanuel Macron says that France is suspending the use of the AstraZeneca Coronavirus vaccine out of precaution. Macron told a news conference Monday that French authorities have decided to suspend shots at least until Tuesday afternoon, when the European Medicines Agency will issue its recommendation over the vaccine. He didn't elaborate on the reasons for the decision. He said France hopes to be able to vaccine again with AstraZeneca shots "soon." Other countries, including Germany, on Monday said it would temporarily halt its use as a precaution amid reports that some people developed blood clots after receiving the shot. AstraZeneca and global health authorities insist the shot is safe.

WOMAN REJECTS MASK AT BANK, TO BE NABBED

Galveston (US), March 15: An arrest warrant was issued for a woman who refused to wear a mask at a Texas bank, saying to a police officer: "What are you going to do, arrest me?" Police have issued a warrant for the arrest of Terry Wright, 65, of Grants Pass, Oregon. The incident on Thursday at a Bank of America in Galveston was captured by the officer's body camera. Police say they've obtained an arrest warrant on resisting arrest and criminal trespassing charges. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott on Wednesday ended statewide orders requiring people to wear face masks in public places, declaring that businesses should decide for themselves what Covid-19 precautions to take on their properties.

SANDSTORM IN CHINA: FLIGHTS CANCELLED

Beijing, March 15: China's capital and a wide swath of the country's north were enveloped Monday in the worst sandstorm in a decade, leading to the cancellation of hundreds of flights. Skyscrapers in the centre of Beijing appeared to drop from sight amid the dust and sand. Traffic was snarled and more than 400 flights out of the capital's two main airports were cancelled before noon. Such storms used to occur regularly in the springtime as sand from western deserts blew eastwards, affecting areas as far as northern Japan. Massive planting of trees and bushes in fragile areas has reduced the storms' intensity, but the expansion of cities and industries has put constant pressure on the environment.

PRACHANDA TO DROP PARTY'S 'MAOIST CENTRE'

Kathmandu, March 15: Chief of Nepal's CPN-Maoist Centre (MC) Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" has proposed to drop "Maoist Centre" from the party's name to make it acceptable for communist forces in the country, who do not like Maoism, to join it, according to a media report on Monday.

CPN-MC member Shiv Kumar Mandal said that Prachanda was always in favour of unity among all communist forces of the country and suggested that if dropping "Maoist Centre" from the party's name could unite these forces, then the party should be ready for that. The proposal came as CPN-MC faces the heat after the Supreme Court nullified its merger with CPN-UML led by PM K.P. Sharma Oli.

Martial law in 6 Yangon townships

Security forces have killed dozens in crackdown on resistance to last month's military coup

Yangon, March 15: Myanmar's ruling junta has declared martial law in six townships in the country's largest city, as security forces killed dozens of protesters over the weekend in an increasingly lethal crackdown on resistance to last month's military coup.

State broadcaster MRTV said Monday that the Yangon townships of North Dagon, South Dagon, Dagon Seikkan and North Okkalapa have been put under martial law. An initial announcement was made late Sunday saying two other townships Hlaing Thar Yar and neighbouring Shwepyitha were being placed under martial law.

At least 38 people were killed Sunday and dozens were injured in one of the deadliest days of the crackdown on anti-coup protesters, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, or AAPP, an independent group tracking the toll of the violence. Several estimates from other sources gave higher figures.

Complicating efforts to organise new protests as well as media coverage of the crisis, mobile internet service has been cut, though access is still available through fixed broadband connections. Mobile data service has been used to stream live video coverage of protests, often showing security forces attacking demonstrators.

It had been turned off only from 1 am to 9 am for



Anti-coup protesters display cards and shout slogan as they protest against the military coup in Mandalay, Myanmar, on Monday.

several weeks, with no official explanation.

The blockage of internet service forced postponement of a court hearing in the capital, Natpyitaw, for Myanmar's detained leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who was supposed to take part via a video conference, said her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw.

Suu Kyi and President Win Myint were detained during the February 1 military takeover, and have been charged with several criminal offences that their

eir supporters believe are politically motivated to keep them locked up.

Since the takeover six weeks ago, Myanmar has been under a nationwide state of emergency, with its civilian leaders ousted and detained, and military leaders in charge of all government. But Sunday's announcement was the first use of martial law since the coup and suggested more direct military control of security, instead of local police.

The announcement said

that the State Administrative Council acted to enhance security and restore law and order, and that the Yangon regional commander has been entrusted with administrative, judicial and military powers in the area under his command. The orders cover six of Yangon's 33 townships, all of which suffered major violence in recent days.

Thirty-four of the deaths were in Yangon. Video from Hlaing Thar Yar township showed people running away after gun-

fire was heard at night-time. Those fleeing carried one injured person and tried to revive two others, one who seemed to be dead or dying, the footage from independent Democratic Voice of Burma showed.

Hlaing Thar Yar was the location of 22 civilian deaths Sunday, according to the AAPP, which said more than a dozen civilians were wounded and described a large number of junta forces engaged in the township.

— AP

— AP

Women power at Grammys as Beyonce, Swift win big

Los Angeles, March 15: Women artistes were the big winners in the usually male-dominated top categories at the 63rd Grammy Awards was Beyonce, Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish made history with their trophy haul. The pandemic may have dimmed some of the lustre of the ceremony, held in a hybrid manner at the Los Angeles Convention Center with Covid-19 protocols in place, winners and performers ensured entertaining evening.

The ceremony, considered to be music's biggest event, has often been criticised for sidelining female artistes in top categories, but the 2021 edition turned out to be a departure from that as Beyonce became most awarded female artiste in Grammy history. With 28 Grammy wins in

● **THE NOMINATIONS** were announced by Chopra Jonas and her pop star husband Nick Jonas from London. Chopra Jonas, 38, said announcing the nomination herself "made it so much more special". "So so proud," she added.

● **ACTORS PRIYANKA** Chopra Jonas, Rajkumar Rao and Adarsh Gourav on Monday celebrated the nomination of their film "The White Tiger" in the best adapted screenplay category at the upcoming 93rd edition of Academy Awards.

total, Beyonce broke the record set by veteran singer Alison Krauss. She trails only classical conductor Sir George Solti, who still holds the all-time record with 31 Grammys. She was nominated in nine categories and won in four, including best rap song with Megan Thee Stallion for "Savage" remix, Best R&B perform-

ance for "Black Parade" and best music video for 'Brown Skin Girl'.

"As an artist, I believe it's my job and all of our jobs to reflect the times. And it's been such a difficult time. And so, I want to uplift, encourage, and celebrate all the beautiful Black queens and kings that continue to inspire me and inspire the whole

world," she said. Beyonce also congratulated her nine-year-old daughter Blue Ivy Carter, credited as a collaborator on the song, for becoming the second youngest act to win a Grammy in the show's history following Leah Peasall's win at the age of eight in 2002.

"I know my daughter is watching. ...Blue, congratulations, she won a Grammy tonight. I'm so proud of you. And I'm so honored to be your Mommy," she added. Swift, who gave her first ever Grammy performance in five years singing a medley of songs from her albums 'Evermore' and 'Folklore', had a memorable year at the music gala. She won the album of the year for 'Folklore', becoming the first female artiste to win the top honour thrice. — PTI

IRAN OPENS UNDERGROUND MISSILE FACILITY

Tehran, March 15: Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard on Monday inaugurated a new underground facility designated for missile storage, the country's state TV reported.

The report quotes Guard commander Gen. Hossein Salami as saying that cruise and ballistic missiles will empower the force's navy even more. The TV report showed footage of scores of missiles in an enclosed space resembling an underground corridor. It did not say where the facility is located nor how many missiles are stored there.

Since 2011, Iran has boasted of underground facilities across the country as well as along the southern coast near the strategic Strait of Hormuz. Iran claims to have missiles that can travel 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles), placing much of the Middle East, including Iran, within range.

The US and its Western allies see Iran's missile programme as a threat, along with the country's nuclear programme — particularly after Tehran gradually breached its commitments to the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

— AP



Andrew Cuomo

BIDEN DECLINES TO CALL FOR CUOMO TO QUIT

Washington, March 15: President Joe Biden on Sunday passed up an opportunity to join other Democrats calling for the resignation of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who is under investigation after multiple allegations of sexual harassment.

Asked by a reporter if Cuomo should resign, Biden responded, "I think the investigation is underway and we should see what it brings us." Biden, who made the comments upon returning to the White House from a weekend at his home in Delaware, had not previously spoken publicly about the allegations against Cuomo.

However, his comments reflect the wait-and-see position the White House has taken regarding Cuomo's future. White House press secretary Jen Psaki would not say whether Biden believes Cuomo should resign. She said every woman who has come forward "deserves to have her voice heard, should be treated with respect and should be able to tell her story." She has said that the president supports the investigation. Several prominent New York Democrats, including Sens. Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, have called on Cuomo to step down.

— AP

US, Japan in China-centric talks

Tokyo, March 15: Shared worry about China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region will take centre stage when President Joe Biden's defence chief and secretary of state visit Japan for their first in-person talks with their Japanese counterparts.

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived Monday, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken to join him later in Tokyo for meetings meant to reaffirm America's commitment to the region and to the two nations' alliance following former President

Donald Trump's more confrontational approach.

The two secretaries are holding so-called "two plus two" diplomatic and security talks on Tuesday with their Japanese counterparts, Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi. "The United States is now making a big push to revitalize our ties with friends and partners — both in one-to-one relationships and in multilateral institutions — and to recommit to our shared goals, values, and responsibilities," Blinken and Austin

said in a piece published Monday in *The Washington Post*.

The US and others share the values and principles of keeping an open Indo-Pacific region, but China is "all too willing to use coercion to get its way," the two ministers said. "Here again, we see how working with our allies is critical."

The United States will lead with diplomacy, maintain America's military might "and renew our alliances and ensure they're fit for purpose to address the threats and

opportunities of our time," Blinken and Austin wrote.

Together they can hold China accountable for its human rights abuses and other problems in Xinjiang, Tibet, as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan, they said. In a move meant to signal his intention for the US to return to the Asia-Pacific region, Biden on Friday held a first summit of the leaders from Australia, Japan, India and the US known as the "Quad" virtually and emphasised Washington's commitment to the region. — AP

FORMAL | RESPONSE

Catholic teaching holds that marriage is intended for the sake of creating new life

Vatican bars gay union blessing, says God 'can't bless sin'

Rome, March 15: The Vatican decreed Monday that the Catholic Church cannot bless same-sex unions since God "cannot bless sin". The Vatican's orthodox office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued a formal response Monday to a question about whether Catholic clergy can bless gay unions. The answer, contained in a two-page explanation published in seven languages and approved by Pope Francis, was "negative". The decree distinguished between the church's welcoming and blessing of gay people, which it upheld, but not

their unions since any such sacramental recognition could be confused with marriage.

The Vatican holds that gay people must be treated with dignity and respect, but that gay sex is "intrinsically disordered." Catholic teaching holds that marriage, a lifelong union between a man and woman, is part of God's plan and is intended for the sake of creating new life. Since gay unions are not intended to be part of that plan, they cannot be blessed by the church, the document said.

"The presence in such relationships of positive

● **POPE FRANCIS** has endorsed providing gay couples with legal protections in same-sex unions, but that is in reference to the civil sphere, not within the church.

elements, which are in themselves to be valued and appreciated, cannot justify these relationships and render them legitimate objects of an ecclesial blessing, since the positive elements exist within the context of a union not ordered to the Creator's plan," the response said. God "does not and cannot

bless sin: He blesses sinful man, so that he may recognise that he is part of his plan of love and allow himself to be changed by him," it said. Francis has endorsed providing gay couples with legal protections in same-sex unions, but that is in reference to the civil sphere, not within the church.

Those comments were made during an interview with a Mexican broadcaster, *Televisa*, in 2019, but were cut by the Vatican until they appeared in a documentary last year. While the documentary fudged the context, Francis was referring to the posi-

on he took when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires and the country's lawmakers were considering approving gay marriage, which he and the Catholic Church opposed.

Then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio instead supported providing legal protections for gay people in stable unions through a so-called "law of civil cohabitation." Francis told *Televisa*: "Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God." Speaking of families with gay children, he said: "You can't kick someone out of a family, nor make their life miserable

for this. What we have to have is a civil union law; that way they are legally covered." In the new document and an accompanying unsigned article, the Vatican said questions had been raised about whether the church should bless same-sex unions in a sacramental way in recent years, and after Francis had insisted on the need to better welcome and accompany gay people in the church. In the article, the Vatican stressed the "fundamental and decisive distinction" between gay individuals and gay unions, noting that "the negative judgment on the blessing

of unions of persons of the same sex does not imply a judgment on persons."

But it explained the rationale for forbidding a blessing of such unions, noting that any union that involves sexual activity outside of marriage cannot be blessed because it is not in a state of grace, or "ordered to both receive and express the good that is pronounced and given by the blessing".

And it added that blessing a same-sex union could give the impression of a sort of sacramental equivalence to marriage.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

16 MARCH 2021

Why does SC need relook at Places of Worship Act?

The Supreme Court's decision to seek the opinion of the Union government on a public interest litigation petition (PIL) challenging the validity of certain provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991 appears to be a legitimate legal procedure but one that calls for meticulous handling by all stakeholders.

The petition contends that Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the Act create an "arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date" for retaining the character of the places of worship or pilgrimage. Section 3 of the Act bars conversion of any place of worship of any religious denomination into a place of worship of a different section of the same religious denomination or of a different religious denomination; Section 4(e) says any legal proceeding with respect to the conversion of the religious character of a place of worship shall abate and that no such proceedings shall lie on or after such commencement in any court, tribunal or other authority. In effect, the religious character of all religious places in India is fixed as per their character on the day of Independence and no person can alter it, nor can a court entertain a petition seeking an alteration. The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute was the only exception the law mentions.

Going by the petitioner, the law has closed the legal options of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs against illegal encroachment on their places of worship and pilgrimage. Interestingly, the petitioner, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, raises the point that the law is ultra vires several key Articles of the Constitution which deal with equality, discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, protection of life and personal liberty, freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion, freedom to manage religious affairs and protection of interests of minorities. Moreover, the PIL argues, it violates the principles of secularism, which is an integral part of the Preamble and the basic structure of the Constitution.

From the looks of it, the PIL is an innocent demand for justice but in fact it stands logic and the Constitution on their heads. Parliament had passed the law in the backdrop of the demolition of the Babri Masjid by a group of religious fundamentalists and vandals (who were last year absolved of their crime by the trial court). The P.V. Narasimha Rao government, that was accused of being a silent spectator to one of the most barbaric acts Independent India has witnessed, enacted the law to prevent a repeat of the same. This was because the same elements which brought down the Babri Masjid, showing scant regard for the basic concepts of democracy such as respect for the rule of law and the sanctity of judicial orders were targeting other such structures as well.

Civilisations survive and thrive not by going back to history and righting everything that went wrong. After all, the scale changes with time. India definitely doesn't have the luxury to engage its several future generations on issues religious with a scale that surpasses time, ignoring poverty, ignorance and disease. The Supreme Court will do justice to itself, and to the people, by remembering this simple point.

Jagan is South's big star

From being a political upstart who intrepidly challenged the mighty Sonia Gandhi at the height of the United Progressive Alliance's stint in power at the Centre to the latest founder of a powerful regional party in the South, to one of India's youngest chief ministers, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has traversed an exciting and peerless journey, lickety-split, with remarkable ease.

With a sweeping win even before his first term as chief minister reaches its mid-point, reducing the Opposition Telugu Desam led by an experienced political giant of another era, N. Chandrababu Naidu, to rubble, Mr Reddy is now the undisputed political czar of Andhra Pradesh. But is he actually more than just that?

A cursory scan of South India's political map — read hot in parts because of the ongoing Assembly election campaigns — will find the answer is yes. At a time when several incumbent CMs and their challengers are fighting to etch the next episode of their career and destiny, Mr Reddy is sitting pretty on his people-gifted throne.

Karnataka's B.S. Yediyurappa is past his prime and Telangana chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao is battling intense anti-incumbency and an exceptional political challenge from the BJP. Kerala's incumbent chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan may be on the verge of making history as a rare instance of a front retaining power in that state, but as part of a political party and ideology without any larger national salience or relevance, he will remain a state-level leader.

In Tamil Nadu, M.K. Stalin's long wait may finally be over and his tryst with power may bring upon him the status of being a new icon in national politics from the south. But a big "if" stands between Mr Stalin and the results on May 2. In the context, Mr Reddy is now bigger and more than just the chief of the YSR Congress or the CM of Andhra Pradesh; he is the most powerful political leader in South India. He's also the creator of a new brand of politics whose best times may still be ahead: far, far ahead.

Subhani



As Afghan mess grows, India must be cautious



Anand Sahay

Far & Near

It is becoming apparent that the Americans are finding it hard to orchestrate their plan to get out of the Afghan quagmire. The way things are going, an outcome satisfactory to all is unlikely from the set of ideas that Washington has lately advanced.

In these circumstances, India must learn to do its own sums even as it seeks to be collegial. Its abiding interests in the Afghan theatre are self-evident. Its best bet is to align with the people of Afghanistan at a crucial juncture, and to develop working relations with key constituencies, banking on the goodwill it has earned.

The Biden administration's ideas were projected in a letter by secretary of state Antony Blinken to President Ashraf Ghani, and the so-called draft peace proposals canvassed by Zalmay Khalilzad, the US special envoy for Afghan Reconciliation, to enable constitution-making afresh (in a new order), shape post-US governance through an interim government to start with and pave the way for a comprehensive ceasefire.

Practically rejecting this line, President Ghani declared on March 6: "Transfer of power through elections is a non-negotiable principle for us." He said that he was ready to discuss free and fair elections "under the auspices of the international community".

"We can also talk about the date of elections and reach a conclusion," the Afghan President added, showing readiness to forgo more than half his term. His words were pithily reaffirmed by vice-president Amrullah Saleh, a redoubtable former intelligence chief, suggesting that this is a deliberated position — indeed, the articulation of an alternative formulation to America's.

While the response of the key Afghan political elites like former President Hamid Karzai, chairman of the country's reconciliation process Abdullah Abdullah, and others to the US proposals isn't developed yet, President Ghani's interjection can leave little doubt that the US plan is facing rough weather inside Afghanistan.

There are indications that the Karzai group gives little credence to guarantees for peace the regional powers may offer at America's behest at the proposed UN-led conference in Turkey. Also, it is not enamoured of the idea of an unelected "guidance council", or shura of theologians, to exist alongside government structures in the US scheme — virtually a vetoing authority that may give the Taliban a further edge.

After Mr Ghani's public stance, taken in the Afghan Parliament, on March 8, a US state department spokesman was quoted as saying that it was "too early to say how the peace process is going". This seemed a dose of realism after Mr Blinken's hectoring letter.

President Ghani is neither widely popular, nor known to be a consensus-builder, but he does represent the current Afghan Constitution which the US had helped fashion (along with then interim President Hamid Karzai) in 2004, and which New Delhi had gone to considerable lengths to back. The gains arising from this Constitution at the popular level are backed by the new generation of Afghans, the largest constituency.

The Blinken epistle favours a UN-routed conference in Turkey (a "Bonn 2" of sorts) of leading countries that ring Afghanistan (India included, though it doesn't have a border with that coun-

try), presumably to get them to agree to a "unified approach" on Afghanistan's future.

This is not only wispy, it is self-serving. Does the US seriously believe that Pakistan, China, Russia, Iran and India, besides America itself (the six countries Mr Blinken envisages will be at the table), can project a "unified approach" as "these countries share an abiding common interest in a stable Afghanistan"?

While Pakistan and China may be expected to be favourable to the Taliban outright, what the US is perhaps really saying is that Iran, India (and Russia) should lump it and accept the Taliban's hegemony in Afghanistan once the remaining American troops have exited. Even if India or Iran can develop a functional relationship with the Taliban in time, how realistic is this prospect in the immediate future?

The US of course already accepts the Taliban as the hegemon. That indeed was the basis for the earlier Trump administration to reach the Doha agreement with this Pakistan-nurtured politico-military outfit in February 2020, and the reason why the Biden administration is being openly solicitous of the group which continues to rain violence on the Afghan people.

In the American scheme, half of all official positions will go to the Taliban in the envisaged interim government. Not to put too fine a point on it, the logic of things suggests that so long as the last US soldier exits unharmed, it will matter little to Washington if the Taliban (with Pakistan's and China's support this time) seeks to

bludgeon the country into submission yet again.

Disregarding the promises it had given the US of a negotiated peace with the Afghan government, as a condition for the final withdrawal of American troops under the Doha agreement, the Taliban went on a spree of violence, killing thousands in the course of the past year, along with targeted assassinations.

This was to project its military prowess to strengthen its negotiating stance vis-a-vis fellow Afghans, and to suitably impress the Americans further. And yet, astonishingly, Mr Blinken's letter to President Ghani speaks of a "revised proposal" for a 90-day "reduction in violence" — not "ceasefire" — to pre-empt the Taliban's "spring offensive", an annual feature, presumably so that peace parleys (to aid the US) are not prejudiced.

The question to ask is whether the Doha accord survives as an instrument of any merit after a year of bloody Taliban violence. If not, are there lessons in this for the future? But uninterested, the US is headed for "Bonn 2", probably on March 27. Besides, with the participation of the US, Russia, China and Pakistan, and invitations to senior Afghan figures, including government leaders, an earlier "peace" conference is due on March 18, hosted by Moscow. There is unseemly hurry.

Negotiated settlement or not, a May 1 withdrawal agreed by the former US President is not off the table. On the first anniversary of the Doha accord, the Taliban threatened that "any attempt against the agreement" will end in "failure of talks". The thought must terrify the Americans.

Equally, Afghan national security adviser Hamdullah Mohib has said that Kabul was against "imposing" the Doha accord on the people. Completely split perspectives.

Afghanistan is said to be the graveyard of empires, but it is also proving to be the breeding ground of ironies. Trophies are sought to be handed out to the most violent.

While Pakistan and China may be expected to be favourable to the Taliban outright, what the US is perhaps really saying is that Iran, India (and Russia) should lump it and accept the Taliban's hegemony.

LETTERS

SECOND WAVE OF PANDEMIC

Apropos your editorial *Enforcing mask rules is vital* (March 15). Going by the spurt in Covid-19 cases in India, the fear expressed in your editorial that a second wave is around the corner is absolutely true and seems inevitable. The central and state governments which spent several hundred crores in bringing down the infection rate by November 2020 successfully have failed to prevent a surge again due to their lackadaisical attitude in strictly implementing the pandemic protocols. A lockdown is not possible especially in the states going to Assembly elections. It would not be a bad idea if lockdown is introduced (at least in Tamil Nadu and Kerala) after the elections on April 6 till April 30 as many people would have contracted the virus due to the election process and the spread could be prevented by imposing a 2 or 3-week lockdown.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

COMPETITIVE POPULISM

EVEN THE cursory reading of the poll manifestos of both the major Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu, the ruling AIADMK and the opposition DMK for the upcoming April 6 state assembly polls could not help but feel strongly about the abysmal extent to which both of them can go to woo the voters with freebies. It is no more an exaggeration to say that competitive populism has now emerged as a big bane of the politics of Tamil Nadu. It should also be noted here that the fiscal profligacy of both parties over the years had changed the status of state from being a fiscal surplus to fiscal deficit after 2012-13.

M. Jeyaram, Sholavandan

BANK STRIKE

THE YEARLY bank strike seems to have become normal and that too for two days succeeding two bank holidays. The employees, of course, would lose two days' salary but it's the poor customer who has no access to e-banking would get affected as they don't even know how to use the debit card. The government and management are not taking the strike seriously and the customers are getting punished. If the yearly strike is turning normal, why not management and unions come to an understanding on dates when they want to go on strike so that those days can be added to the yearly list of bank holidays as it would help the customers to plan bank work accordingly.

N. Nagarajan, via e-mail

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Aakar Patel



BJP has never spelt out what 'parivartan' it hopes to bring

In 2019, the BJP won 18 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal. It is hard to see why it will not win the Assembly elections now because it has so much more resources than the rest (more than 90 per cent of electoral bond money, which is the anonymous but legal funding by corporates to political parties, according to RTI reports) and also the power of the Central administration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised he will bring real change to West Bengal. Perhaps he will. The interesting thing to me is that his party has never defined what this "change" is.

Formed in 1951, the Jan Sangh/BJP manifestos move effortlessly back and forth from grand and formless expression like "national rejuvenation yagna" directly to things like running more trains with third-class compartments as opposed to air-conditioned ones, pushing the benefits of cow manure and asking linguists to introduce technical and scientific terms based on Sanskrit to replace English.

The party's ideology, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, did not want the states to exist. In his Integral Humanism lectures, he had said: "According to the

first para of the Constitution: 'India that is Bharat what is a federation of states', that is Bihar Mata, Banga Mata, Punjab Mata, Kannada Mata, Tamil Mata, all put together make Bharat Mata. This is ridiculous." He did not tell us that if we removed the states, what mechanism of administration would come between the Union government and the village.

In the first manifesto, the party identified blackmarketing, profiteering and nepotism as the country's key problems. Over time, the Jan Sangh dropped all references to these problems without saying whether they had been solved or had become less relevant to the party.

On agriculture, the party was for "encouragement of the use of mechanical appliances in agriculture". However, later it said that "tractors will be used only to break virgin soil. Their use for normal ploughing purposes will be discouraged". (1954). This was because it was trying to protect oxen from slaughter.

In 1971, the Jan Sangh resolved to limit the maximum income of all citizens to ₹2,000 per month and the minimum to ₹100, maintaining a 20:1 ratio. It would continue working on reduc-

ing this gap till it reached 10:1, which was the ideal gap and all Indians could only have incomes inside this range based on their position. Additional income earned by individuals over this limit would be taken by the government. Residential houses in cities would be on plots that did not exceed 1,000 square yards.

In 1954, the party said that it would repeal the Constitution's first amendment that curbed freedom of speech by imposing "reasonable restrictions". However, after 1954, this demand disappeared from the manifestos.

Interestingly, the Jan Sangh also said that it would repeal preventive detention laws which it said were absolutely in contradiction to individual liberty. This promise was made repeatedly in the 1950s. In time, both the Jan Sangh and the BJP became the most enthusiastic champions of preventive detention and laws like UAPA.

Even though the idols were smuggled into the mosque in December 1949, there was no reference to Ayodhya or a Ram temple there in any manifesto from 1951 to 1980.

In defence policy, it wanted compulsory military training for all boys and girls, removal of licences for possess-

ing muzzle-loading guns (an eighteenth century weapon) and expansion of the National Cadet Corps.

Like "Atma Nirbhar Bharat", the Jan Sangh's swadeshi meant giving subsidies to local industries and tariff protection. Import of consumer goods and luxury goods would be discouraged. Labour rights, including strikes and lockouts, would be discouraged.

Culturally, the party was against alcohol consumption and called for nationwide prohibition. It wanted English to be abolished and replaced in all spheres by local languages, and especially Hindi.

There is no comment whether positive or negative on the Constitution, which was adopted months before the first Jan Sangh manifesto, or even about the ideals it represents. Dr B.R. Ambedkar had proposed modest changes to Hindu personal law, especially on the question of inheritance for women. He identified two dominant forms of traditional inheritance law and modified one of them to make inheritance fairer for women. In its 1951 manifesto, the Jan Sangh opposed this reform.

While it signals anti-Muslim intent, the Jan Sangh did not have the trans-

parency of the BJP and its open dislike of Muslims. The Jan Sangh was unable to express its majoritarianism as clearly and in as full-throated a fashion as the BJP was later able to.

This was because it lacked a specific programme on the back of which to mobilise anti-Muslim sentiment, such as the campaign against the Babri Masjid. It was not important as an issue all this time. The lack of a mass-mobilisation issue meant that the Jan Sangh remained a minor player, getting only a few seats in each election. In the last election it contested under its own name, in 1971, the Jan Sangh won 22 seats and seven per cent of the vote, making it only the fourth largest party in Parliament. It was only under Lal Krishna Advani, and then especially under Narendra Modi, that the BJP became the mass-based electoral force it has become, from the cadre-based party that was the Jan Sangh. It is remarkable that this should have been achieved in the absence of a coherent, consistent ideology and even a definition of what "parivartan" it stood for and would bring.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	50395.08 -0.78
Nifty 50	14929.50 -0.68
S&P 500*	3,940.39 -0.07
Dollar (₹)	72.47 0.45
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.11 0.14
Euro (₹)	86.68 0.05
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,364.61 0.13
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.56 -0.95
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.201 0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.607 -0.028

* As of 8:30 PM IST

₹2,000 notes not printed in last 2 years: Govt in LS



The Rs 2,000 currency notes have not been printed in the last two years even as the quantum of the note has come down, the Lok Sabha was informed. In a written reply, minister of state for finance Anurag Singh Thakur said 3,362 million currency notes of Rs 2,000 denomination were in circulation on March 30, 2018, constituting 3.27 per cent and 37.26 per cent of the currency in terms of volume and trade respectively.

■ Sector set to see PE/VC, FII interest Bill to hike insurance FDI cap placed in RS

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MARCH 15

In a move that would open further avenues for investors of insurance companies and attract considerable activity from private equity, venture capital firms and foreign institutional investors (FIIs), the finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday introduced a bill in the Rajya Sabha to increase the foreign direct investment (FDI) in the sector to 74 per cent from 49 per cent.

The Insurance Amendment Bill 2021 seeks to make changes in the Insurance Act 1938 to increase the permissible FDI limits. The bill has been cleared by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday.

Under the new structure, the majority of directors on the board and key management persons would be resident Indians, with at least 50 per cent of directors being independent directors, and a specified percentage of profits being retained as a general reserve.

Currently, most Indian promoters of insurance companies, namely public sector banks, NBFCs, corporates, need capital to fund their core businesses and would use the FDI opportunity to monetise their investments and sell their stakes to PEs, VCs or existing foreign joint venture partner.

In 2015, when the FDI limit was lifted from 26 per cent to 49 per cent, the



expectation was that the insurance sector would get fresh capital of Rs 25,000 crore, however, the actual infusion into the sector was just around Rs 5,400 crore, since the Indian promoters of existing companies monetised their investments by selling their stake to the foreign joint venture partners.

Also, the premise that higher FDI would increase insurance penetration appears faulty as despite 20 years of privatisation and raising the FDI limit, India's insurance penetration (life and non-life) languishes much below the world average. Life insurance premium as a percentage of GDP is 3.6 per cent in the country, way below the global average of 7.13 per cent, and in the case of general insurance, it is even lower at 0.94 per cent of GDP, against the world average of 2.88 per cent.

Karthik Srinivasan, senior vice president, group head-financial sector ratings, Icrs said, "Instead of

promoters monetising their investments, if the capital is infused into insurance companies then that would help companies to scale up their business and increase insurance penetration."

"Barring a few companies, most other players have adequate regulatory capital as indicated by high solvency levels, but going forward since most are growing their protection business and with natural calamities and mortalities, pace of capital consumption can increase," added Srinivasan.

Ashvin Parekh, managing partner at Ashvin Parekh Advisory Services, said, "It is a long-awaited reform and should be welcomed as it would bring in about Rs 30,000 crore in the insurance sector over the next three years... Another important point is that since foreign capital can come in any form, we could also see activity from private equity, venture capital firms and FIIs."

MTAR TECH IPO INVESTORS STRIKE GOLD ON DAY 1

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 15

IPO investors in Hyderabad-based MTAR Technologies nearly doubled their investment on the company's market debut on Monday.

The company, which develops and manufactures precision components and critical assemblies for clean energy, nuclear, space and defence sectors, has raised Rs 597 crore in the public issue between March 3 and March 5.

MTAR shares listed at 82 per cent premium at Rs 1,063.90 on the BSE and at Rs 1,050 on the NSE against the public issue price of Rs 575. Later the share price rose further to more than double to Rs 1,154 in the intra-day trade, as there is no upper circuit filter applied on the debut day on any listing of shares through the initial public offering.

Finally, MTAR shares closed at Rs 1,082.25 on the BSE and at Rs 1,078.30 on the NSE, registering a gain of 88.22 per cent.

At the market close, the company's market capitalisation stood at Rs 3,328.96 crore on the BSE. Shares worth Rs 1637.79 crore were traded and on the NSE.

Market trims losses after sinking 1000 pts

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 15

The Sensex recovered from early blows partially after suffering close to 1000-points loss intra-day on poor domestic macro-economic data, surge in US bond yields and a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases in India.

The Sensex fell 993 points, drowning below the 50000 level to the day's low of 49,799.07, but later positive global cues from Asia and Europe helped in a pullback that helped the benchmark index to finally settle at 50,395.08, down by 397 points, or 0.78 per cent.

The Nifty-50 closed at 14,929.50, down by 101.45 points, or 0.67 per cent.

"Market was impacted adversely after February headline CPI inflation rose around 100 basis points to 5.03 per cent led by unfavourable base effect, higher vegetable



prices, higher energy and transportation prices and increase in core goods inflation," said Emkay Global Financial Services.

"Also the Index of Industrial Production lost momentum after rising for the previous two months, and in January 2021 contracted 1.6 per cent, dragged down by poor manufacturing activity and muted consumer demand."

Before the US Federal Reserve's Federal Open

Market Committee's scheduled meeting on March 16 and 17, the 10-year US treasury yield still ruled above 1.6 per cent, making equity investors cautious.

Both foreign portfolio investors and domestic institutions were net sellers of equities worth Rs 1,101.35 crore and Rs 749.71 crore, respectively.

"We saw selling pressure right from the word go and Nifty corrected sharply to breach 14,750 level during the day. The banking index was reeling under pressure and it seemed that bears have complete control today. However, the index started recovering gradually in the last couple of hours and managed to trim much of the intra-day losses and end well above 14,900," Ruchit Jain, senior analyst-technical and derivatives, Angel Broking said.

Govt to sell up to 16.12% in Tata Comm

New Delhi, March 15:

The government on Monday said it will sell up to 16.12 per cent stake in Tata Communications Ltd (TCL) through an offer for sale (OFS) starting on Tuesday at the floor price of Rs 1,161 per equity share.

As part of its exit plan from Tata Communications (erstwhile VSNL), the government is initially offering to sell up to 2.85 crore equity shares representing up to 10 per cent of the total paid-up capital of the company.

The government may sell additionally over 1.74 crore equity shares representing 6.12 per cent of stake in Tata Communications as an over-subscription option.

The window for sale of shares for retail investors and for non-retail investors, including who choose to carry forward their unallocated bids, will be opened on March 17.

The government has reserved minimum of 25 per cent of the offer share for mutual funds and in insurance companies sub-

ject to valid bids and 10 per cent for retail investors.

As per the shareholding pattern of TCL, the promoters hold 74.99 per cent in the company. Of this, the Government of India holds 26.12 per cent stake while Panatone Invest holds 34.80 per cent and Tata Sons holds 14.07 per cent. The remaining 25.01 per cent is with the public.

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (Dipam) plans to sell its entire stake in TCL in the current fiscal. —PTI

COFFEE-BREAK

Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



Aries: Favourable planets bring many reasons to feel pleased. Deserving sportsmen and artists find recognition/rewards. It's a good day for implementing plans.



Taurus: Seniors' harsh and unpleasant attitude lowers your morale. Expect short trips. Avoid putting more money than you can afford into speculative ventures.



Gemini: You'll take more interest in politics. Stress kills your calm today. Foreign shores bring financial gains and recognition. Your illnesses show no signs of ending.



Cancer: Your rivals seem well entrenched and they'd win over you in a direct confrontation. Business runs into some snags; your perseverance will get it back on top.



Leo: You might suddenly decide to act on an idea you've considered, but don't move too quickly and overriding others' opinion. Expect emotional well-being and contentment.



Virgo: Expect physical injuries; remain careful while on wheels. Seminars and exhibitions help you improve business relations. Discussions with influential people will bring new ideas and plans.

You share your b'day with

Ranvijay Singh Singha, Bollywood actor, television personality and VI. He is known for his appearance in MTV Roadies, where he won the show. He has been part of the show from 2004 till current season. He is also the host of MTV Splitvilla.



Libra: Developing new contacts enhances career. Timely efforts in business bring steady growth. Worthwhile speculation helps money matters.



Scorpio: Friends and relatives bring happy times and do you many favours. Expect monetary gains from more than one source. A pleasure trip is in the offing.



Sagittarius: At work, you may prove you're a special asset to the organisation. When in groups, avoid saying anything that could hurt anyone's feelings.



Capricorn: Improve your knowledge base to keep pace with changing times. Students must strike a balance between studies and outdoor activities. Work towards improving finances.

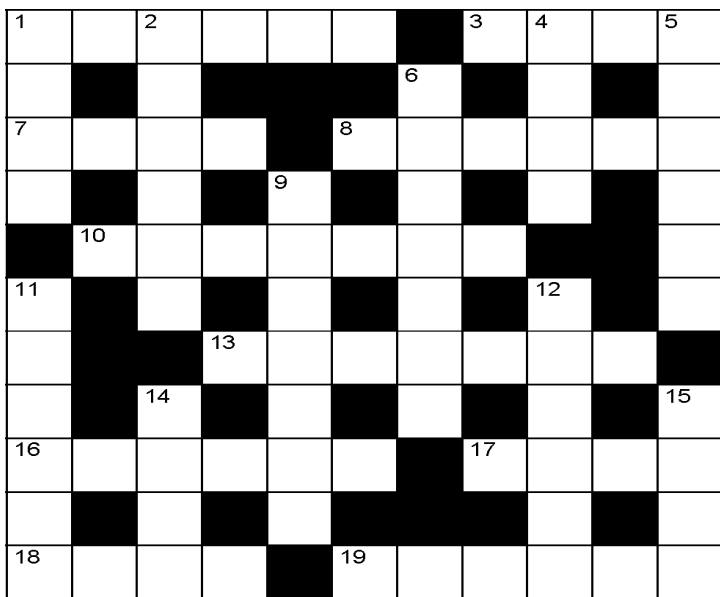


Aquarius: Desired growth in business may be difficult. Continuously neglecting family life could force someone to take drastic steps. Much-expected financial gains may be delayed.



Pisces: Today, new friendships and long-lasting contacts are the highlights. Stay alert at all times — any lapse on your part may prove costly. Be thorough when planning a trip.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across

- Dance company (6)
- Soft cheese (4)
- Refuse to obey (4)
- Made ready (6)
- Sale document (7)
- Diluted (7)
- Hard-backed insect (6)
- Explosive device (4)
- Relieve (4)
- Obstruct, thwart (6)

Down

- Neat (4)
- Counterbalance (6)
- Frolic (4)
- Bear (6)
- No paper (anag) (7)
- Door aperture (7)
- Economically practicable (6)
- Twist out of shape (6)
- Precious stones (4)
- Competent (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

Across: 1. Difficult, 6. Bleed, 7. Caper, 9. Lots, 10. Decant, 12. Outset, 14. Lima, 17. Numbs, 18. Heart, 19. Committee.

Down: 2. Inept, 3. Fade, 4. Cycled, 5. Libya, 6. Balloon, 8. Retract, 11. Jetsam, 13. Tempo, 15. Image, 16. Shot.

Word Mine

H
D
U
M
T
C
A
N
E

TODAY'S RATINGS: 30 AVERAGE: 34
GOOD: 38 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used once only. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

North: 1. H 2. D 3. U 4. M 5. T 6. C 7. A 8. N 9. E
West: 1. H 2. D 3. U 4. M 5. T 6. C 7. A 8. N 9. E
East: 1. H 2. D 3. U 4. M 5. T 6. C 7. A 8. N 9. E
South: 1. H 2. D 3. U 4. M 5. T 6. C 7. A 8. N 9. E
Dealer: West: 1. H 2. D 3. U 4. M 5. T 6. C 7. A 8. N 9. E
South: 1. H 2. D 3. U 4. M 5. T 6. C 7. A 8. N 9. E
East: 1. H 2. D 3. U 4. M 5. T 6. C 7. A 8. N 9. E
West: 1. H 2. D 3. U 4. M 5. T 6. C 7. A 8. N 9. E
Opening lead: ♦ A

jumble

ATTOL
IDVIV
NRAENM
LAPLOW



Yesterday's Jumbles: WEIGH VINYL JACKET AGENDA

Answer: When she had the feeling that she'd seen the movie before, she experienced — DEJA VUE

North used Roman Key Card Blackwood. South showed four key cards (here, three aces and the spade king), and North signed off in six spades. This contract should go down if West leads the club ace or either singleton six! At this table, South took the second trick with the club king, drew trumps ending in hand and led the heart six. Now you would expect West to have split his honors, playing the jack or the

queen. Then, sooner or later he would have taken the setting trick with his other heart honor. We are lacking in imagination. West covered the heart six with his seven, and declarer played the two from the board! So the heart seven won the trick — down one!

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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



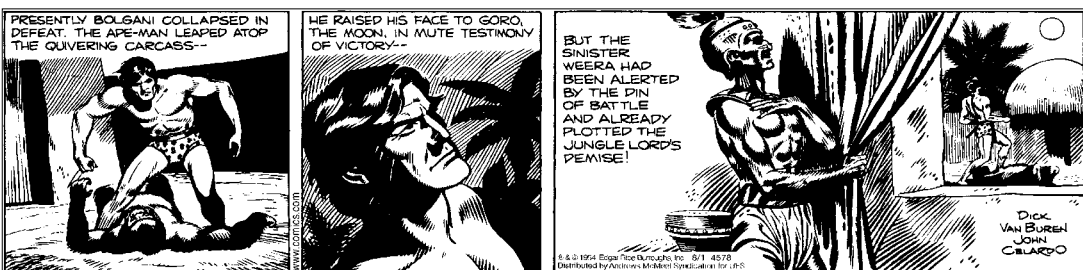
BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs

bridge
PHILLIP
ALDER

THE ROBOTS ARE WEIRD AT TIMES

Wade Lnenicka of Smyrna, Georgia, sent in this senryu: Bridge is a tough game / Most who try it fail badly / Then why is it loved? The robots at Bridge Base Online usually play reasonably well but occasionally do something truly inexplicable.

Look at today's deal. The final contract of six spades went down one after West led the club ace and continued with a second club.

Which card won the setting trick? If you guess this correctly, you should go to Las Vegas as soon as it reopens; do not pass Go, do not collect \$200. In the auction, after South opened two clubs, West intervened with three clubs. (He did not have a way to show a heart-club two-suiter.) North passed, not having a five-card suit to bid or a club stopper for no-trump. But after East raised clubs, and South rebid four spades,

North used Roman Key Card Blackwood. South showed four key cards (here, three aces and the spade king), and North signed off in six spades. This contract should go down if West leads the club ace or either singleton six! At this table, South took the second trick with the club king, drew trumps ending in hand and led the heart six. Now you would expect West to have split his honors, playing the jack or the

SHORT TAKES

Kapil is now PGTI board member

New Delhi: Legendary cricketer Kapil Dev was on Monday inducted as one of the board members of the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI), the sports body said.

Dev, who captained India to World Cup glory in 1983, said he would work for the development of golf in the country. "I thank PGTI for allowing me to be a part of their board. I am extremely happy to be a part of PGTI and will do my best to promote golf as a sport that is doing well and has the potential to become one of the most coveted tours in sports," Dev said in a PGTI release. "...It is up to all of us to promote other sports including golf. I wish PGTI good luck for the upcoming events." Meanwhile, the Delhi-NCR Open Golf Championship 2021, to be jointly organised by the TATA Steel PGTI and Prometheus School, Noida, will begin at the Golden Greens Golf Club in Gurugram on Tuesday. The Pro-Am event will be staged on March 20. — PTI

Police hunt for Angel's robbers

Paris: French prosecutors have launched an investigation into a robbery at the home of Angel Di Maria after thieves broke in while the Argentina winger was playing for Paris Saint-Germain.

Nanterre prosecutor's office secretary general Marion Chalaux told The Associated Press on Monday that the investigation is being handled by a special police unit dealing with armed robberies and serious burglaries.

The unit was already in charge of inquiries into similar cases linked to PSG players Mauro Icardi and Sergio Rico, whose houses were also burgled during matches this year.

Chalaux said intruders managed to sneak into Di Maria's home in the posh Parisian suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine on Sunday without being noticed.

According to *L'Equipe*, the thieves took watches and jewelry from a safe for an estimated loss of more than 500,000 euros (\$597,000). — AP

No fans at Oly torch relay start

Tokyo: Spectators will be barred from the start of the Tokyo Olympics torch relay, organisers said on Monday, announcing a pared-back launch as the countdown to the postponed Games begins in earnest.

Fans were told to stay away from next week's "simplified" starting ceremony and first leg of the nationwide relay, which was put on hold a year ago when the Olympics were delayed over the coronavirus.

"The grand start ceremony and the first section of the Fukushima torch relay... Will not be open to the public," organisers said in a statement, adding that the festivities would be broadcast live online.

The announcement comes ahead of a decision on whether fans from overseas will be allowed to enter Japan for the postponed Games, expected to be taken before the torch relay begins on March 25. — AFP

B'day boy Curry lifts Warriors

Los Angeles: Golden State star Stephen Curry celebrated his 33rd birthday with a 32-point performance that propelled the Warriors to a 131-119 victory over the NBA-leading Utah Jazz and snapped a four-game skid. Curry got off to a sizzling start, connecting on 63 percent of his shots in a 14-point first quarter in which the Warriors seized a lead they wouldn't relinquish.

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: Third T20 from 7.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

FOOTBALL

Champions League: Real Madrid vs Atalanta from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2; Manchester City vs Monchengladbach from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1

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ACTION REPLAY

Kohli & Co. look to take lead against England in 3rd T20

Ahmedabad, March 15: Their confidence soaring high after a resounding series-levelling win, India would look to build on their new approach of batting freely and fearlessly when they take on England in the third Twenty20, here on Tuesday.

The Men in Blue were off to a horrible start in the T20 series, suffering a demoralising eight-wicket loss in the opening match but turned the tables on England with a seven-wicket win in the second game.

In stark contrast from the first match, Virat Kohli and his men excelled in all departments.

The inclusion of Ishan Kishan, who made a sparkling debut with a 32-ball 56, allowed India to go ahead with their new approach that encourages batsmen to express themselves.

Despite losing K.L. Rahul in first over with no runs on the board, the 22-year-old attacked from the word go, smashing Jofra Archer for a boundary in the very first ball he faced.

The hosts will also gain confidence from Kohli's unbeaten innings in the previous game as he took the side past the finish line, breaking a sequence of low scores.

The skipper did not have the best of times in the preceding Test series and also got out cheaply in the first T20. Both Kohli and Shreyas Iyer will target big scores.

The bowling department, which didn't have runs to defend in the opener, did a fabulous job to restrict England to 164. The biggest positive would be Hardik Pandya bowling four overs which allowed the hosts to go with an extra batsman.

The bowlers will look to replicate their good show from the last match where they found their rhythm.

What India would aspire to is a better effort from Rishabh Pant, who has been promoted to number four ahead of Iyer. The big-hitting wicket-keeper has looked lethal in both outings but failed to capitalise on his starts.

India are unlikely to tinker with the winning combination save the return of star white-ball opener Rohit Sharma who is expected to be back in the side after being rested for a couple of games.

With Kishan faring well, Rahul, who looked out of sorts in both the outings, is expected to make way for Rohit.

The primary objective for India remains the same — to get an idea of the core group of players going into the ICC T20 World Cup in October.

England attack looked less threatening in the absence of Mark Wood, who missed the second T20 due to a bruised heel. However, skipper Eoin Morgan confirmed that the pacer will return in the next game. — PTI



India's K. L. Rahul at a practice session ahead of the third Twenty20 against England in Ahmedabad on Monday. — AP

IPL stint made Kishan fearless

Ahmedabad, March 15: Young batsman Ishan Kishan says having faced the best pacers from across the world during the IPL had given him the confidence to play fearlessly against England on his India debut.

Kishan's blistering 56-run knock at the top laid the platform for India's comfortable and successful chase in the second Twenty20 on Sunday night.

The 22-year-old left-hander acknowledged the contribution, the IPL stint has made in his growth as a batsman. "It obviously helped (to face the likes of Mumbai Indians teammates Trent Boult and Jasprit

Bumrah) in the nets. They are very pacy bowlers and to hit shots against them gives confidence," Kishan said at the post-match virtual press conference.

"In IPL you get to face quality bowlers from across the world and you start getting used to these bowlers. And I think that really helped me." Kishan also said that the team management had backed him to play his natural game without feeling the pressure.

"Before the match I was told to go and open the innings and play freely the way I play in IPL. I was told not to take extra pressure. But it being my first game I was little nervous while going at the ground."

"But when you wear the jersey of your country that pressure simply goes away and you try to give your best."

The debutant was in awe of Virat Kohli during their 94-run stand and hopes to pick the brain of India skipper

REMAINING T20s TO BE PLAYED WITHOUT SPECTATORS

Ahmedabad, March 15: The remaining three T20 International matches between India and England will be played here without spectators in the wake of rising COVID-19 cases, Gujarat Cricket Association vice-president Dhanraj Nathwani said on Monday.

"T20s on March 16, 18 and 20 will be played without audience at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. Refund will be given to the spectators who have purchased tickets," Nathwani said in a statement.

"Due to rise in the number of Corona cases, we at GCA have decided in consultation with BCCI, the matches will be played closed door and not allow the spectators in the ground during T20 Internationals to be played between India and England at Ahmedabad."

He said the GCA will form policy for refund of money to the spectators who have already purchased tickets for these three T20Is. "Those who have received complimentary tickets are requested not to visit the stadium," he added.

The first two games at the world's largest cricket stadium had attracted more than 60,000 spectators, raising questions over the safety of the fans amid the pandemic. Crowds had returned for international cricket matches in India during the preceding Test series barring the opening game which was played behind closed doors. — PTI



India pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah on Monday married TV sports presenter Sanjana Ganesan at a private ceremony in Goa, where a limited number of people were present. Bumrah tweeted the pictures of his wedding with a poem. — Twitter

Escape to victory, MP archers' style

Kolkata, March 15: The brave-hearted Madhya Pradesh junior archers "achieved the impossible" by winning four medals in the Nationals Championships after miraculously escaping the Shatabdi Express train inferno on their way to Dehradun, their head coach said on Monday.

With less than an hour to reach Dehradun on Saturday, the eight-member recurve men's and women's team experienced the horror of being chased by black thick smoke and fire as they jumped to safety to the adjacent bogey. But they lost all their belongings, right from their equipment to original documents including Aadhaar Card and birth certificates after their coach C5 was charred near Kansrao. — PTI

TN's Rosy vaults to Federation Cup gold

Patiala, March 15: Annu Rani bettered her own javelin throw national record but still missed the Tokyo Olympics qualification mark by more than half a metre on the opening day of the Federation Cup Senior National Athletics Championships here on Monday.

Rani clinched the gold with a best throw of 63.24m which she came up in her third attempt, obliterating her earlier national mark of 62.43m which she had recorded during the World Championships in Doha in 2019. The Tokyo Olympics qualification mark for women's javelin throw is 64m.

The 28-year-old, who had won a bronze in the 2014 Asian Games and a silver in the Asian Championships in 2019, was representing Uttar Pradesh in the national event. Sanjana Choudhary of Rajasthan was a distant second with a best throw of 54.55m while Haryana's Kumari Sharmila was third with a best effort of 50.78m in the eight-athlete field. Rani led Uttar Pradesh to a three-gold show from four finals on the day.

The ball was set rolling by 21-year-old Savita Pal, who made her debut 10000m race a memorable one by sprinting past Sanjvani Jadhav (Maharashtra). Shot putter Kiran Balian accounted for the third gold with a

Results (finals)
Women: 10000m: 1. Savita Pal (Uttar Pradesh) 33:59.35; 2. Sanjvani Jadhav (Maharashtra) 34:01.26; 3. Kavita Yadav (Uttar Pradesh) 34:04.45.
Pole Vault: 1. Rosy Paulraj (Tamil Nadu) 3.90m; 2. Pavithra Venkatesh (Tamil Nadu) 3.80; 3. Mariya Jaison (Kerala) 3.70.
Shot Put: 1. Kiran Balian (Uttar Pradesh) 16.45m; 2. Manpreet Kaur (Punjab) 15.65; 3. Sonal Goyal (Delhi) 15.09.
Javelin Throw: 1. Annu Rani (Uttar Pradesh) 63.24m (New National & Meet Records. Old National Record: 62.43, Annu Rani, Doha, 2019; Old Meet Record: 62.34, Annu Rani, 2019); 2. Sanjana Choudhary (Rajasthan) 54.55; 3. Sharmila Kumari (Haryana) 50.78.

CITY CLIPS

Ramnath hits a ton

L. Ramnath hit 114 as Team-IV scripted a five-wicket win over Team-III in the TNCA Round Robin under-19 one-day tournament at Magna College 'A' Ground. **Brief scores:** At Stag Ground: Team-I 181 in 38.5 overs (V.S. Karthick, Manikandan 88, A. Mohammad Aadil Shaan 30; Sanjay Vembu 3/27, R. Raja Giri 3/30) bt Team-II 178 in 45.5 overs (Akash Dev Kumar 61, K. Ajaya Shankar 42). **At Magna College 'A' Ground:** Team-III 261/9 in 50 overs (B. Sachin 95, Arjun P Murthy 44, S.R. Athish 41; Govind Sharma 3/46) lost to Team-IV 263/5 in 47.5 overs (L. Ramnath 114, S. Sri Abisek 44, Govind Sharma 33; A. Ranjan 3/34). **At Magna College 'B' Ground:** Team-VI - 216 in 47.5 overs (M. Boopathi Vaishna Kumar 57, K. Vijay Priyadarshan 40, S. Mohammed Ali 39) lost to Team-V 217/4 in 49.5 overs (A. Badrinhad 61, Shubhan Krishnan Sridhar 42, J. Ajay Chethan 40 (not out); P. Bharathwaj 3/31).

TN women go down to Vidarbha

Tamil Nadu women went down to Vidarbha by 53 runs in the BCCI Elite 'E' group of the women's senior one-day trophy at TI-Murugappa ground. **Brief scores:** Vidarbha 207 in 49.2 overs (Bharti Fulmali 94, Krutika Pophali 46; N. Niranjana 3/38, L. Nethra 3/43) bt Tamil Nadu 154 in 45.2 overs (Eloksi Arun 30, N. Niranjana 41; Vaishnavi Khandkar 4/36).

Hindustan emerge champs

Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science's basketball men and women's team emerged winners in the state-level inter-college tournament organised by Tamil Nadu Physical Education & Sports University. **Results: Men: Final:** HITS (70) bt HCAS (51). **Semifinal:** HITS (53) bt Saveetha University (27). **Women: Final:** HITS (70) bt YMCA College of Physical Education (31). **Semifinal:** HITS (27) bt TNPESU (04).



INWTC Team (Navy) receives the offshore regatta Rolling Trophy from Sarath Reddy of UNIFI Capital.

India exposed our weakness: Eoin

Ahmedabad, March 15: India have exposed England's "weakness" in handling slow conditions but competing here will only prepare them well for the Twenty20 World Cup, feels skipper Eoin Morgan.

India drubbed England by seven wickets in the second T20 to level the five-match series 1-1 on Sunday night.

Morgan admitted they struggled to get used to the slow surface used for the second match.

"I suppose the difference was in the wicket we played and how we adapted. It was different wicket from the one we batted in the first game. The pitch was slow and low and one thing that does expose our weakness on these surfaces a little bit," said Morgan at the post-match virtual media interaction on Sunday night.

"We don't play a lot on slow, low wickets and the more that we can do that, the better. You only become better in these conditions by playing in them and making mistakes."

The English skipper, however, said playing in such tough conditions ahead of the ICC World T20 later this year in India, will only help



England captain Eoin Morgan in action during the second Twenty20 against India at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Sunday. — AP

them. "I thought the other night, the pitch really suited us because it had more pace in it — similar to a wicket at home, a Cardiff wicket or somewhere like that, that was a little bit uneven and maybe stood up a little bit.

"But this took us out of our comfort zone and really was a typical Indian wicket that we would play on in an IPL game. Again, your accuracy has to be on," Morgan said.

"You tend to learn quicker if you're winning

and confident and everything goes reasonably smoothly — you can integrate the learning quite quickly — but equally, if we have to learn the hard way, we're still going through that process of trying to learn game-on-game so when it comes to the World Cup in seven months' time, we can be as best prepared."

Morgan said England were below-par in all departments of the game on Sunday, compared to their eight-wicket win in the series opener.

"We did a lot of the structure of our innings really well. I thought we were right in the game, we established partnerships and got to the point where we tried to accelerate but managed to lose wickets at different stages," he said.

"I thought we could have been a bit more accurate in the lines and lengths that we bowled. When we went back to the basics of taking pace off the ball, we didn't do that well enough."

"Your accuracy has to be on as you are bowling to guys on their home patch so the bowlers are up against it. India managed to get away from us quite quickly."

— PTI