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U'khand CM Trivendra quits

State BJP legislators to meet today to elect new Chief Minister

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 9

Facing discontentment from a section of BJP MLAs and ministers over his style of functioning, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat on Tuesday tendered his resignation as the party's top brass did not want the growing dissonance to dent the party's poll prospects.

With the Assembly polls

MR RAWAT'S CABINET colleague Dhan Singh Rawat, who is also his batchmate from college, is said to be the frontrunner to succeed him.

THE NAMES of Union minister Ramesh Pokhriyal "Nishank", Rajya Sabha MP Anil Baluni and senior leader Ajay Bhatt are also doing the rounds.

just 10 months away and the Congress, the main Opposition party, now in disarray, the BJP leadership did not want to take any chance to give strength to the Opposition camp,

including the AAP, which has decided to contest the polls this time. Rawat would have completed four years in office on March 17.

Sensing that the CM's

resignation could upset his supporters and his constituency, Mr Rawat, who had held a meeting with BJP president J.P. Nadda in New Delhi on Monday, said it was a "collective decision" taken by the party leadership that someone else should lead the state now. Mr Rawat's Cabinet colleague Dhan Singh Rawat, who is also his batchmate from college, is said to be the frontrunner to succeed him.

CM seeks to meet PM to rescue VSP

Plans to suggest ways to revive Vizag Steel

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 9

In a fresh move to thwart the Central government's plan to privatise Vizag Steel, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is taking an all-party delegation to New Delhi to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and prevail on him to retain its present status.

The CM has sought appointment with the PM to personally explain the options to revive Vizag Steel. A meeting is proposed between the PM and the all-party delegation.

He referred to the announcement of Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Lok Sabha on March 8 that the government would go ahead with 100 per cent disinvestment of Vizag Steel equity in Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL) along with its stake in subsidiaries/joint ventures through strategic disinvestment by way of privatisation.

"This is a matter of great concern to the people of Andhra Pradesh as also to employees of RINL and other stakeholders," the CM has said.

In his letter to the PM,



the Chief Minister said VSP had a good performance between 2002 and 2015, earning profits with positive net worth.

"The plant was pragmatically turned-around in 2002 after it was reported to BIFR as a sick company. The company has around 19,700 acres of land and the valuation of these lands alone could exceed ₹1 lakh crore."

"RINL currently has a capacity of 7.3 million tonne and has taken up plant modernisation and capacity expansion. This has helped the plant take loans from banks for expansion. Owing to the unfavourable global steel cycle, the company was making losses since 2014-15 and it was having difficulty to service the debt."

"One of the major structural issues that also leads

to a high cost of production is the absence of captive mine, thereby affecting the profitability."

Jagan said the plant will again become a profitable venture if some support came from the Central government.

Instead of taking the disinvestment route, the Chief Minister suggested the Centre should around the company by allotting captive iron ore mines to bring down the input costs, swapping high cost debt with low cost debt, converting debt into equity through equity conversion and monetisation of vacant land.

He requested the PM to consider continuing the unit's operations as it is, to achieve a turnaround for a further period of two years. Allotting to it some captive mines in Odisha will go a long way in reviving the plant, as also conversion of loans into equity by the banks so as to remove the interest burden and listing the entity on the stock exchange, giving banks the exit option through the stock exchange route and through general public and monetising the land to make the company cash-rich.

COUNTER POINT



There is no room inside... we have to stop Operation Akarsh!

SHORT TAKES

357 arrested for fake GST invoices

New Delhi: GST officers have arrested 357 persons, including 12 chartered accountants, in about four months as part of its drive against fake invoices to check tax evasion, sources said. Since mid-November, 3,500 cases have been booked and 10,400 fake GSTIN entities have been unearthed by GST intelligence and Central GST officers so far.

Centre firm on privatisation

New Delhi: The scope for sale of minority stakes in public sector companies has reduced and strategic disinvestment would be the primary mode for disinvestment receipts going forward, MoS finance Anurag Singh Thakur said on Tuesday. He said the government has realised ₹20,627 crore as disinvestment receipts till March 3.

Mahanta won't fight Assam polls

Guwahati: Veteran AGP leader and two-time Assam CM Prafulla Mahanta has decided not to take part in the Assembly elections. Mr Mahanta, who was denied a party ticket from Barhampur, said he was "hurt because of the party's weak stand in defending regionalism, a cause that formed the very basis of the AGP".

SC REJECTS PLEA AGAINST SEC'S NOTIFICATION

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 9

The Supreme Court on Tuesday dismissed a petition seeking the issue of a fresh notification for urban local body polls after cancelling the earlier election notification issued by the State Election Commission (SEC) in Andhra Pradesh.

A division bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan heard the petition filed by a group of persons from Kadapa. Citing various reasons, the petitioners had appealed to the Supreme Court to set aside the SEC poll notification.

The apex court bench said the State Election Commission is empowered to conduct the urban local body elections and observed that it would be inappropriate for the court to disrupt the conduct of elections as all arrangements were made to do so.

Earlier, the petitioners had moved the AP High Court seeking the cancellation of the election notification for the urban local bodies. However, the High Court also refused to entertain the petition.

People to vote in urban body polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 9

Nearly 78 lakh voters are expected to cast their vote in urban local body elections to be held in 12 municipal corporations and 71 municipalities or nagar panchayats in the state on Wednesday. The voting will begin at 7 am and end at 5 pm.

Though the State Election Commission had notified elections for 12 municipal corporations and 75 municipalities, four municipalities — Punganur, Piduguralla, Macherla and Pulivendula — have elected their members unanimously.

Out of 2,794 wards in all urban local bodies — 671 wards in municipal corporations and 2,123 wards in municipalities — for which polls were announced, no election will be held in 580 wards, including 90 wards in municipal corporations and 490 wards in municipalities, as people in these wards have elected their representatives unopposed.

The election, therefore, will be held for 2,214 wards — 581 wards in municipal corporations and 1,633 wards in munic-

ipalities and nagar panchayats — on Wednesday.

Out of total number of 77,73,231 voters, 38,25,129 are men, 39,46,952 are women and 1,150 are others. The electorate will cast their vote at 7,915 polling stations. Officials have declared 2,468 polling stations as sensitive and 2,320 as hyper sensitive. They have made arrangements for webcasting, videography and placed micro observers in these polling stations to avoid untoward incidents.

There are 7,549 contestants in fray. Of this, 2,569 are contesting for 12 municipal corporations and 4,981 are for 71 municipalities and nagar panchayats. On an average, each ward in municipal corporations has four contestants, while there are three contestants in each ward of municipalities.

The officials have published electoral rolls updated up to March 9, 2020 and posted them on websites: cdma.ap.gov.in and sec.ap.gov.in and also on district portals so that the voters can access the websites to know their votes.

Jagan to officials: Avoid power cuts in summer

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 9

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed officials to ensure uninterrupted supply of power in this summer season. Jagan conducted a review meeting on the energy department at CM Camp Office at Tadepalli on Tuesday.

The Chief Minister called for speeding-up of works for the thermal units at Krishnapatnam and Vijayawada so that the cost for power purchase could be reduced.

He asked officials to prepare an action plan to ensure that adequate

JAGAN ASKED officials to prepare an action plan to ensure that adequate funds are released on time for supplying free electricity to farmers, as also subsidised power to aqua farmers and free electricity up to 200 units for SC and ST consumers.

funds are released on time for supplying free electricity to farmers, as also subsidised power to aqua farmers and free electricity up to 200 units for consumers belonging to Scheduled Castes and

Scheduled Tribes.

He said the Krishnapatnam and Vijayawada units would be a burden if their construction got delayed. "There should be no power shortage in the coming three to four months," he said.

The CM asked officials to ensure that there is no disturbance in generation at the 15 thermal units under GENCO. "Conduct regular reviews on coal supply."

Chief secretary Adityanath Das, energy ex-officio principal secretary G Sai Prasad, energy secretary N Srikanth and other officials were present.

AIR | LINKS

Passenger flow at airport close to pre-Covid levels

Tirupati to get air cargo soon

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 9

The temple city would soon find a place on domestic air cargo map. A full-fledged cargo terminal is all set for commissioning.

Considering the airport's potential for handling special cargo flights, the airport authority has put forward plans for domestic cargo operations from this airport. Accordingly, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security recently gave clearance to the airport for

TIRUPATI AIRPORT is directly connected to various destinations. Starting air cargo services from here would result in a passenger traffic rise and provide an impetus to the airlifting of perishable goods.

cargo service operations.

Following this, the airport authority mooted plans to create a designated domestic air cargo terminal. The old terminal building has

been converted in ways as to handle the cargo service. Around 320 sq metres of the old terminal building would be used for handling the incoming cargo and the other for the outbound cargo.

"We have received the BCAS clearances. The terminal works are going on fast and the service will be launched soon. The terminal would handle high value cargo such as electronic spares and it would later handle perishable cargo too. Initially, only the

belly cargo service will be handled. With the existing air services, belly cargo can carry goods upto 10 tonne a day," S. Suresh, director of Tirupati airport, told this newspaper.

Tirupati airport is directly connected to various destinations. Starting air cargo services from here would result in a passenger traffic rise and provide an impetus to the airlifting of perishable goods.

■ Page 2: Cargo service to help farmers in region



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OTHER STORIES

AP Budget Session from March 19

Vijayawada: The Budget Session of the AP's legislature to be held from March 19. The state government to present its annual Budget for 2021-22 in the legislature and Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy recently announced that they were going to introduce a Gender Budget for the first time in the country with specification of allocation of funds for welfare of women in the state. The Session is likely to continue till the end of March. The state government is likely to pass several key bills in the Budget Session.

AP TOLD TO FINISH PROBE ON FORMER INTELLIGENCE CHIEF

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 9

The Supreme Court directed the Andhra Pradesh government to take up departmental inquiry on a daily basis on former intelligence chief A.B. Venkateswara Rao and to complete the whole inquiry by April 30 and posted the next hearing to May 3.

A Division Bench comprising justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheswari held the hearing in New Delhi on Tuesday on a petition filed by the former intelligence chief Rao, challenging extension of his suspension to a year by the AP government. Rao said that as he was not facing any charges of graft, the review committee was not supposed to extend his suspension to a year from the earlier period of six months.

The judge Khanwilkar questioned the state government's counsel Chandar Udayasingh as to why they opted for suspension of the official as he was facing allegations of irregularities in purchase of security equipment and asked as to why he could not be given posting in another wing. The court opined that it would be good if action was taken after completion of the probe in the case.

Responding to it, the government's counsel asked six months time to complete the inquiry on the official.

However, the court asked as to how long a senior official could be placed under suspension without taking up inquiry and further asked as to why inquiry on a daily basis could not be taken up.

Petitioner Rao's counsel Adinarayana Rao informed the court that they were ready for a daily inquiry in the case.

The state government's counsel informed the court that the state government appointed an official for taking up the inquiry.

In a separate development, the apex court has struck down the petition filed by some persons from Kadapa seeking cancellation of notification issued by the State Election Commission for conduct of urban local body polls earlier and to issue fresh notification for conduct of polls. The court opined that the SEC was having the right to conduct polls and it would be inappropriate to disrupt the polls.

CARGO SERVICE TO HELP FARMERS IN THE REGION

From Page 1

This will boost the earnings of the farming community in the Chittoor district and ensure timely and efficient transport of their produce to other parts of the country, the official said.

"Tirupati is fast developing into a base for export of many products. There's scope to tap the agri sector in Chittoor and neighbouring districts from which perishable goods could be airlifted to other cities. This will benefit the catchment areas of Chittoor, Nellore, Kurnool and Kadapa districts of the Rayalaseema region," noted the airport director.

Meanwhile, domestic air passenger traffic at Tirupati airport showed a gradual recovery with a sequential growth in the passenger footfall from 29,978 in October last to 60,299 in February, slowly reaching the pre-Covid levels. Accordingly, the number of flights has also increased to 681 from 410 in October.

As per the AAI financial report, the number of flights operated at this airport in November last was 388 with 33,013 passenger footfalls, followed by December with 655 aircraft and 47,832 passenger footfalls, and January with 739 (688,51) aircraft and 58,148 footfalls.

Steel stir intensifies, NH blocked

Visakhapatnam Steel Plant workers lay siege to the RINL administrative office

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 9

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statement in Parliament that RINL-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) will be sold out with 100 per cent disinvestment intensified the on-going agitation against privatisation at the steel plant main gate in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

Vizag steel plant workers lay siege to the RINL administrative office and along with trade union activists and members of various political parties blocked the National Highway at the Kurmannapalem junction for the second day.

The police diverted the highway traffic at Anakapalle and Vizianagaram owing to the blockade. The stir, led by Visakha Utku Parirakshana Porata Committee, affected the polling staff movement to the booths.

The agitating workers raised slogans against the Centre and the state government and burnt copies of Nirmala Sitharaman's statement at the Kurmannapalem junction. In some places, effigies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi were also burnt.

Nearly 80 vehicles carrying polling staff, including presiding officers and APOs, and election material to Gajuwaka polling stations were held up due to the road blockade for some time. They were later diverted to alternative routes.

Meanwhile, the crew of vehicles had a harrowing experience as they were stranded for more than 16 hours in the traffic jam which ran several kilometres in both directions of the national highway due to the road blockade.

The protestors warned that they would intensify their protest if the Union government did not withdraw its decision to privatise the plant.

Trade union leaders urged the CM to pass a resolution against privatisation of VSP and lead an all-party delegation to the Centre. MPs should resign from their posts, the protestors demanded.

Tense situation prevailed at the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant as thousands of workers and trade union representatives picketed the administrative office building of VSP. CISF personnel and police arrived in large numbers to prevent the situation from getting out of control.

RINL's director (finance) Venugopal was gheraoed by the agitators. They stopped his car and made him stranded under a tree for a few hours but the CISF personnel formed a security cordon around him and later escorted him away from the crowd.

Chairman and managing director of RINL P.K. Rath left for New Delhi in the morning.

Trade union leaders announced that the agitation would be intensified into a state-wide movement by drawing all sections of the people.



Left party activists burn the effigy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in protest against the Central government's decision to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant near GVMC in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

— DC

AP will oppose RINL privatisation: Ministers

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 9

Ministers in the AP government strongly defended Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's stance on the Vizag steel plant and said the government would oppose tooth and nail privatisation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

Addressing a press conference in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday, tourism minister Muttamsetti (Avanti) Srinivasa Rao said Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy wrote another letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday to stop the privatisation and suggested

- Why is Naidu not writing letters to the Prime Minister to stop privatisation. Is he scared of him?" Kannababu asked.
- The steel plant with a capacity to produce 7.3 million tonnes is currently producing 6.3 million tonnes and making a profit of ₹200 crore every month.

two measures to make a turnaround for RINL. One was getting captive mines and the other converting debt into equity.

A resolution will also be passed in the Budget Session against the privatisation send the copies to the Prime Minister's Office, he said. The AP Budget Session is commencing on March 19.

Srinivasa Rao said the CM was ready to lead a delegation to New Delhi,

taking along all the political parties and leaders of various trade unions.

He said the Opposition was blaming the state government for the present situation and misleading the public that the CM knew the sinister designs of the NDA government.

Lok Sabha member M.V.V. Satyanarayana said Opposition parties were issuing conflicting statements on the issue and to clear the air he and Araku

MP Goddeti Madhavi raised a question in Parliament seeking a clarification on the status of the steel plant. The finance minister replied that there would be 100 per cent disinvestment.

"If we are aware of the central government's move on the privatisation why will we seek a clarification," Satyanarayana said.

Visakhapatnam in-charge minister K. Kannababu said TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu was trying to take political mileage out of the situation by blaming Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for the VSP privatisation.

Ganta asks YSRC to quit in protest

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 9

Former minister and Visakhapatnam North MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao on Tuesday asked all the elected representatives to tender their resignations and intensify agitation against the proposals to privatise steel plant. The move will draw the attention of the entire nation and put pressure on the Central government, he said.

Ganta sent his resignation to the Assembly Speaker; the day the Steel minister announced MoU between RINL and POSCO.

Addressing the media in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday, Ganta Srinivasa Rao assured that the TD would not field candidates in the constituencies where the YSRC leaders resign.

The MLA further said the ruling party should

LOKESH ACCUSES JAGAN OF TRYING TO BUY VSP AT SCRAP PRICE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 9

Telugu Desam national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh on Tuesday alleged that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is planning to buy the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) at the price of scrap. He expressed concern that despite protests the central government is going ahead with its plans to sell VSP in the absence of any resistance from ruling YSR Congress minis-

ters, MLAs and MPs from Andhra Pradesh. Lokesh alleged that all 28 YSRC MPs are doing nothing to save the steel plant in parliament.

He claimed that centre has clarified that it had prior approval from CM Jagan over privatisation of VSP.

The MLC advised the Chief Minister to stop his drama since people will not believe in his letter to Prime Minister Narendra

Modi expressing his fake opposition to the sale of steel plant.

Former Gajuwaka MLA Palla Srinivasa Rao said the agitation should take the shape of Jallikattu. He said never in the history has the National Highway been blocked for two consecutive days. More action was in the offing from TD cadre, he said.

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PAWAN KALYAN SHOULD OPPOSE PRIVATISATION, SAYS SAJJALA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 9

Reiterating that the state government will stand by the Vizag Steel Plant (VSP), the ruling YSR Congress has said the Opposition parties and a section of the media are spreading falsehood to mislead the people on this. Speaking to the media here on Tuesday, government adviser on public affairs Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy has written a letter to PM Modi seeking an appointment to discuss the options other than a privatisation.

Reddy criticised Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan for not fighting against privatisation of VSP despite his party being in alliance with the BJP. "He should oppose the decision rather than politicising it."

Refuting the allegations of Telugu Desam chief Chandrababu Naidu about Jagan planning to buy Vizag Steel for scrap price, he said as Naidu and his family was flush with cash, he should purchase Vizag Steel.

Ramakrishna Reddy said the Opposition has been politicising the statement of Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman with a view to hurting the image of the state. "Jagan is very clear that Vizag Steel should not be privatised and appealed to the PM for an appointment to meet an all-party delegation from the state."

Referring to the comments of Sitharaman, Ramakrishna Reddy said the minister has made it clear that the state government doesn't have equity in RINL and is only consulted on specific matters. He flayed a section of the media for distorting facts and spreading falsehood on VSP. He said POSCO has approached the state for the setting up of a steel plant and the CM has suggested Kadapa or Krishnapatnam for this. The representatives of POSCO also visited Krishnapatnam.

Referring to the comments of Sitharaman, Ramakrishna Reddy said the minister has made it clear that the state government doesn't have equity in RINL and is only consulted on specific matters. He flayed a section of the media for distorting facts and spreading falsehood on VSP. He said POSCO has approached the state for the setting up of a steel plant and the CM has suggested Kadapa or Krishnapatnam for this. The representatives of POSCO also visited Krishnapatnam.

● **GOVERNMENT ADVISER on public affairs Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy criticised Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan for not fighting against privatisation of VSP despite his party being in alliance with the BJP.**

● **RAMAKRISHNA REDDY said the Opposition has been politicising the statement of Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman with a view to hurting the image of the state.**

Annapareddy dies, CM expresses grief

Vijayawada: Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has expressed grief over the passing away of Annapareddy Venkateswara Reddy, who was adored in literary circles for his valuable translations and the way he brought out *Misimi* Telugu magazine as Editor.

AP EXTENDING SUPPORT TO FIRMS READY WITH INVESTMENT: CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 9

A delegation of Dixon Technologies (India) Ltd has called on Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy at the camp office here on Tuesday to discuss matters of fresh investment.

During the interaction, the Chief Minister said it's good that Dixon Technologies would invest in the Kopparthi electronic manufacturing cluster. He promised the firm that the government would extend its full support to all those who invest in AP.

The chairman and CEO of the company informed the CM that the firm would provide employment to some 2,000 to 3,000 people. It would manufacture mobile phones, variables, laptops, tablets, security equipment and cameras in Kopparthi in Kadapa district.

It has plans to expand the unit in Tirupati and create another 1,000 jobs. The firm will partner with Bosch company to set up a washing machine manufacturing unit under the home appliances division.

Dixon Technologies India chairman Sunil Vachani, CEO Pankaj Sharma and state industries minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy were among those who met the CM.

OZ TEAM KEEN TO PARTNER WITH AP MED TECH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 9

An Australian delegation has called on Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at the Camp Office here on Tuesday. The Australian delegation members Barry O'Farrell AO, High Commissioner of Australia to India, Sarah Kirlaw, Consul General of Australia to South India, Jay Sangani, First Secretary (Political) and Svetha Venkatram, Government Relations Manager, have discussed various topics during the meeting with Chief Minister.

The team discussed infrastructure, financing, exploring funding and opportunities for building the assets through infrastructure projects such as ports/industrial parks/desalination plants, which can then be monetised over the long term. The Government of Australia expressed interest in partnering with AP Med Tech zone in R&D.

The Australian team discussed asset recycling where government assets can be monetised for win-win partnership, collaboration in education and skill development under which Australian universities can tie-up with universities in the state (which are best among in India), Leveraging the collaboration to develop joint R&D Programmes, collaboration with the University of Curtin to setup university/CoE focussed on mining and Setting up a centre of excellence in collaboration with the Australian government in Visakhapatnam.

JUDICIAL CAPITAL

Around 250 acres to be allocated for construction

HC to come up at Jagannatha Gattu

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL MARCH 9

Andhra Pradesh government has finally zeroed in on the site for establishment of the AP High Court in the judicial capital of Kurnool city.

During his visit to Srisailem for offering silk clothes to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi on behalf of the state government, finance minister Buggana Rajendranath

Reddy disclosed that around 250 acres of land at Jagannatha Gattu on outskirts of the Kurnool city is likely to be allocated for construction of the AP High Court.

Orvakal Airport, which is scheduled to start operations from March 28, is very near to this place.

Earlier, Kurnool district administration had planned to accommodate the High Court either on the APSP Second

Battalion ground in the Kurnool city or in Kottam Tulasi Reddy College located on National Highway 44.

Some officials also recommended that the court could run from the Bala Sai Baba International School located at Munagalapadu village near NH 44.

However, district revenue officials said they have not yet received any official instructions from

the government on location of the AP High Court. Only after receiving formal orders can they start acquiring lands for construction of the High Court.

An official, who wished to remain anonymous, said even if the government decides to immediately shift the High Court from Amaravati to Kurnool, they are ready to identify suitable buildings to run the court.

DECCAN Chronicle

10 MARCH 2021

Speed up vaccinations, refresh awareness drive

India has of late been witnessing a surge in the daily caseload of Covid-19 infections with the numbers going up for the last six consecutive days; it is above 18,000 in the last four days. The number of active cases has also registered an increase for five consecutive days. At present, six states — Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu — together account for more than four-fifth of the total cases now. Given the pattern of the virus spread, it is not before weeks if not days that the pandemic will create another wave that could force the nation to go in for another shut down.

India had on January 16 rolled out an ambitious vaccination plan that, in its first phase, sought to inoculate three crore frontline workers, including healthcare professionals. The target has now been met by two-thirds, with the number of people who have received at least one dose standing at 2.26 crore. The second phase, launched on March 1, seeks to inoculate 27 crore people aged above 60 and those above 45 with co-morbidities. As of now, nine lakh people who belong to these categories have been given the jab.

Except the Union government and some states such as Kerala, none seems to have kept a tab on the numbers. Worse, the attitude of most states and the people there has been akin to a situation where the virus has ceased to be a threat.

A realistic assessment of the spread of the pandemic and the speed with which the vaccination programme progresses calls for increased efforts on both the counts — a massive awareness campaign to stop the spread of the virus and a revitalised vaccination programme. The daily caseload numbers reached their peak in October and then started a downward journey. Except the Union government and some states such as Kerala, none seems to have kept a tab on the numbers. Worse, the attitude of most states and the people there has been akin to a situation where the virus has ceased to be a threat.

The world in general, and India in particular, are better equipped to take on the virus than we were a year ago. Our knowledge base has improved, the protocols are in place and the healthcare professionals are trained to handle even extreme situations. However, the people's attitude has become less than acceptable. The government must re-launch on a war footing the campaign focussing on the importance of social distancing, wearing of masks and hand hygiene. It must also revisit the restrictions on gatherings, especially social, political and religious ones, which can turn super spreader events.

India vaccinated more than 16 lakh people on Monday, the highest since the programme started. At the present rate, India will take another year to vaccinate at least half of the population. This is unacceptable. There may be many hurdles, from the shortage of raw material for vaccine manufacturing to the logistical issues to the technical glitches in the CoWin app, and the government must meticulously strive to remove them. It must also open up the programme for all sections of the population, co-opt as many institutions, and make the process easier. Unless we speed it up and cover a reasonable share of the population, we can't say goodbye to the uninvited guest.

The royal underbelly

The world is horrified at Meghan Markle and Prince Harry's revelation that racism towards Meghan was the principal reason they fled their royal home to find freedom in California. But it should not be so because systemic racism is stark reality, more so in the world of privilege that British royalty lives in. Harry's indictment of his own family for not fighting the racist attacks hurled at his biracial wife Meghan and his multiracial son Archie, whose skin colour was a matter of concern to the palace even before he was born, is a pointer to how institutionalised royal reticence is. A disparaging term like 'The Firm' may have been seen as appropriate even for an insider.

Oprah Winfrey's skills at bringing the angst out of celebrities by playing the agony aunt may have helped smear British royalty and its stiff upper lip with hate while a more defensive UK might see the story of a second sensational interview by an ex-royal after Diana's expose on BBC in 1995 in a different perspective. His marriage may have helped liberate Harry from the trappings of power and privilege and the service Harry has rendered his family is to save it from racism though his flight to the US may be seen in the UK as pique since Archie was denied a princely role and a place in the queue to the crown.

The alacrity with which Buckingham Palace ordered an inquiry against Meghan on charges of bullying staff comes in sharp contrast to its reluctance to probe Prince Andrew's links to the convicted Jeffrey Epstein and his shenanigans with underage girls. This should give more grist to Republicans in Britain as well as the Commonwealth, which Queen Elizabeth II heads by virtue of her record years on the British throne. Diana and Meghan did the democratic world a favour in boldly exposing the underbelly of the royal family, which by itself is an anachronism in the modern age.

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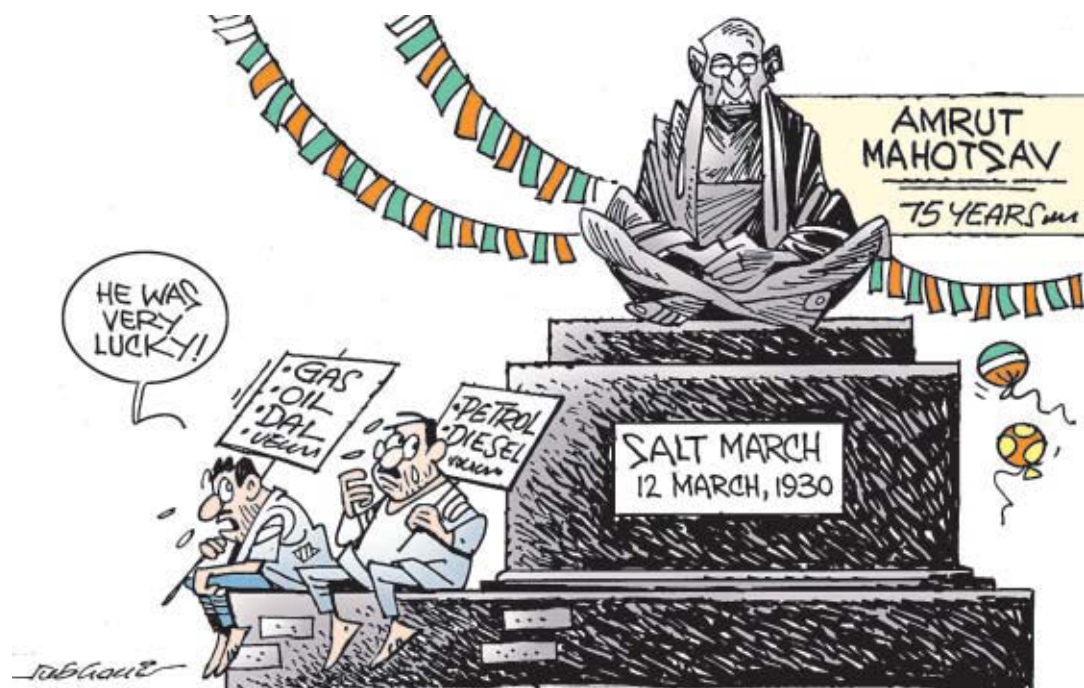
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Subhani



Modi's pan-Indian image won't help BJP win polls



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

The focus of the Assembly elections in four states and a Union territory — starting at the end of this month and spread over the whole of April — in West Bengal and Assam in the east, and Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala in the south — has centred around West Bengal and the big question is whether the BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi will breach the final barrier, as it were, for the right-wing saffron party. It has turned out to be a battle between West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamul Congress and Prime Minister Modi of the BJP. As has become the norm with the Modi-centric BJP in the past seven years, the laurels for the victory always go to Mr Modi because the party is but a symbol for the most domineering politician in the country today. The reality, of course, is much more complicated and the magic factor of Mr Modi has huge limitations.

Though the party had won Assam in 2016 for the first time, the right-wing majoritarian sentiment in that state was well represented by the Congress and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) from 1985 onwards. The breakthrough for the BJP in Assam in 2016 has nothing radical about it. Assam, however, poses its own set of challenges for the BJP this time round. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), with its vicious Hindutva slant, is a sore point in the state where Bangladeshi migrants — whether Hindu or Muslim — are the source of local resentment and discontent. The Hindutva rhetoric does not mean much here.

West Bengal remains the big prize in the east for the BJP. It has eluded the party with its majoritarian colours. The party considers this

election as the final push at the final frontier. That is why it has become much too loud and much too bitter. The CPI(M)-led Left Front and the Congress still remain marginal players. And the battle between Mr Modi and Ms Banerjee, despite the Prime Minister's pan-Indian standing, is reduced to a local tussle. If Ms Banerjee prevails, it will be a huge blow to Mr Modi. And the bets are hugely hedged in the matter.

In Tamil Nadu and in Kerala, the BJP is a small player. It is reconciled to play second fiddle to the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu and confined to the 20 Assembly seats allotted to it. It would have to ride to victory on the back of the AIADMK because it has no presence of its own. The BJP cannot hope to give wings to its Hindutva ideology in the state because the Dravidian politics — (anti-Hindi and indirectly anti-North Indian variant of Hinduism represented by the BJP) and the Hindutva nationalism, again a North Indian concoction — does not pass muster. Even the Congress, with its benign pan-Indian outlook, has become a small player in Tamil Nadu and it has been given just 25 seats in these elections by the dominant regional Opposition party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). After the death of the icons,

The CAA, with its vicious Hindutva slant, is a sore point in Assam where Bangladeshi migrants, whether Hindu or Muslim, are the source of local resentment. The Hindutva rhetoric does not mean much here.

Unlike in West Bengal, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) led by the CPI(M) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) led by the Congress in Kerala leave no space for a new player with a north Indian ideology

the DMK's Karunanidhi and the AIADMK's Jayalalithaa, it seemed the spell of Dravidian politics would end, and national parties like the Congress and new entrants like the BJP would become the big players. The seat allocation for the two national parties by the dominant regional parties is a clear indication that the local in terms of ideology outflanks the national in Tamil Nadu. Tamil and Dravidian nationalism are unlikely to fade away simply because the stars who represented them have died.

Unlike in West Bengal, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) led by the CPI(M) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) led by the Congress in Kerala leave no space for a new player with a north Indian ideology to break into the crowded political space in the country. Kerala is a complex mosaic of castes and communities, where the Naysars and Ezhavas on one hand, Christians and Muslims and the Communists jostle with each other. The Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh (RSS) has been fighting a fierce and bloody battle with the Marxists in parts of northern Kerala. Political violence is as rampant in Kerala as it is in West Bengal. The RSS and the Marxists have been hacking each other's cadres with ruthless regularity. The BJP has been trying to use the RSS' base to make headway, but it has not succeeded in any major way.

The dominant parties in all these poll-bound states are forced to reckon with the smaller political formations. In Assam, the BJP cannot afford to ignore the Bodos. When the Bodo People's Front broke away from the BJP-led

National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the BJP had to find place for the United People's Party Liberal, and the Congress has to accommodate the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and Rajjor Dal. India is infuriatingly diverse for hegemonic national parties like the BJP and the Congress.

The Assembly elections are a time for the rest of the country to know how each state has its own identity and politics and that it is not a referendum for the ruling party at the Centre. It is this entrenched democratic pluralism that checks the free run of parties such as the BJP with their regimented mindsets forged in RSS shakhas. The BJP is struggling to come to terms with the political diversity and pluralism of this country. The authoritarian populism as practised by Mr Modi and his second-in-command, Union home minister Amit Shah, serve only as a stumbling block in the Assembly elections, especially in places like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and to a great extent in West Bengal and Assam.

Even in Puducherry, after engineering defections from the ruling Congress, the BJP did not find it very easy to come to power. The right-wing party is learning the hard way that multitudinous India is a multipolar political field. And there is no option but to adapt to India's political multiverse. This is why the majoritarian tyranny of the BJP kind has to give way to rainbow coalitions. Assembly elections in India are always a lesson in democratic politics.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

The party is learning the hard way that multitudinous India is a multipolar political field. There is no option but to adapt to India's political multiverse. Majoritarianism has to give way to rainbow coalitions.

LETTERS

METRO HAWKERS

This is with reference to news report *Catch 20-20* (DC, March 9) to pick or drop a player for T20 matches from 19 eligible senior and junior stalwarts. It is going to be a tough musical chairs game where some have to drop out due to lack of luck factor. There was a time when only test matches were in vogue, several talented, brilliant players were selected for tours and never played a match due lack of place in team 11. Now, more players are able to don national cap as they can be selected for one of T20, one-dayers or test matches or India A team. It is not possible for a player to play all three formats, round-the-year, resulting in burn-out syndrome. The only mantra in cricket selection is "perform or perish" as the bench is getting overcrowded with young aspirants. .

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

FABULOUS THREE

Tennis fans of this generation are truly blessed to witness the fabulous three - Federer, Nadal and Djokovic — arguably the best players in Tennis history. The trio have dominated men's singles, winning 58 of the last 70 Grand Slam titles, with Federer and Nadal accounting for 20 each and Djokovic 18. After surpassing Federer's record of holding No.1 ranking and with age on his side, Djokovic has a good chance to surpass other records set by Federer and Nadal.

Sajid Farooq
Kurnool

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

K Asif dead

BOMBAY, March. 9

Mr. K. Asif, a well-known film producer-director died of heart attack in Bombay this evening. He was 48. He is survived by his wife and two daughters.

Mr. Asif who went to film actor Sanjeev Kumar's residence this evening complained of chest pain and before he could removed to hospital he passed away.

Mr. Asif had produced and directed a number of pictures including 'Phool' and 'Moghal-E-Azam' which was a box office hit. 'Phool' was his first film with the biggest star cast.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Coalition karma takes babu to chief secy spot

A coalition alliance government creates its own special dynamics, which affects the bureaucracy uniquely. In Maharashtra, which has a three-party alliance, this was seen when the 1985-batch IAS officer Sitaram Kunte was named the state's new chief secretary. Sources say that Mr Kunte was ignored by the previous BJP government during whose tenure he was commissioner of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

His fortunes changed for the better in the Shiv Sena-led government of chief minister Uddhav Thackeray. However, while the chief minister and the Congress Party were said to be keen on his appointment, the National Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar was reportedly less than enthusiastic, initially. However, Mr Kunte

managed to make it to the top post, although he snuffed the chance of his batchmate Praveen Pradash, who was widely expected to be appointed to succeed Sanjay Kumar.

Mr Pradesh had even returned from the UN in the hope of becoming the new chief secretary. Mr Kunte's elevation has led to the appointment of M.K. Srivastava, a 1986-batch IAS officer, in his previous office of additional chief secretary for home.

MIND THE 'S' WORD

A communique issued by T.M. Yanthan, commissioner and secretary to Nagaland governor R.N. Ravi, to chief secretary J. Alam, has directed the state government to warn officials that they could face penal and disciplinary action if they post "seditious or subver-

sive content" on social media. Apparently, it had come to the notice of the governor's office that "some government servants are indulging in seditious and subversive writings challenging the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country" on social media platforms.

Sources say that a copy of Mr Yanthan's letter has been also marked to Union home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla. This suggests, they say, that the governor has kept the Centre in the loop and may even have been directed by Delhi to take action against government officials posting seditious content.

Apparently, this is the second letter from the governor's office to the state chief secretary. Last year, he had directed the state government to prepare a database of state government employees' family mem-

bers and relatives who were in "underground organisations".

However, ominous though it may sound, some observers feel that Mr Ravi is merely reiterating the conduct rules for government servants and people should not read too much into this. Your thoughts?

TENURE ROW

Who has the authority to take a call on the posting of officers of the director-general of police rank in Haryana? This has become a point of contention between Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar and his home minister Anil Vij. The officer at the centre of it all is DGP Manoj Yadava, a 1988-batch IPS officer, reportedly hand-picked by Mr Khattar for the post.

It appears that Mr Vij wants a change of DGP despite Mr Yadava having over four years of service

left. The minister recently directed additional chief secretary (home) Rajeev Arora to send a panel of officers to the UPSC to be considered for the next DGP. According to sources, once the minimum tenure of two years ends, the state government has the option of deciding to continue with the current DGP or replace the officer. In the present case, the government has extended Mr Yadava's tenure beyond February until further orders.

Sources say that Mr Khattar is unlikely to seek a replacement for Mr Yadava, who has done a long 15-year stint at the Intelligence Bureau (IB) before returning to his parent cadre. But Mr Vij, say sources, is sticking to his stance.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

IN BRIEF

Al-Badr chief killed in gunfight

Srinagar: J&K police on Tuesday claimed that Al-Badr militant outfit chief Gani Khawaja has been killed in a gunfight raging in Tujar Sharif area outside the Valley's northwestern town of Sopore. Inspector general of police Vijay Kumar said Khawaja was one of the most wanted militants and termed his killing as "a major success" for the security forces combating a three-year-old insurgency in J&K. A report from Sopore said that, at least, two militants were trapped in the area after a joint team of security forces laid siege to it on Tuesday evening. Kumar was quoted by local news agency GNS as saying the operation was "carried cleanly on a very specific input which was received by the police earlier during the day."

Hiren's wife blames Vaze

Mumbai: The wife of Mansukh Hiren, the owner of the vehicle found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence, has alleged that her husband was murdered by assistant police inspector Sachin Vaze. In her complaint, she also said that the vehicle in question was also in possession of Vaze since November 2020. Hiran's wife Vimla also claimed in her statement, copy of which is with this newspaper, that her husband told her that Vaze had asked him to get himself arrested and he would ensure his bail in a few days. The officer had resigned from the police force in 2007 and joined Shiv Sena in 2008. He was reinstated in the police department on June 6 last year.

GOYAL REBUTS DIDI'S CLAIM OF NO RAILWAY HELP

DC CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, MARCH 9

Railway minister Piyush Goyal has refuted West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's allegation of non-cooperation by his ministry officials to the fire brigade in fighting the devastating fire which claimed nine lives at the Eastern Railways' office in New Koilaghat Building on Strand Road in Kolkata on Monday evening.

Four fire-fighters Girish Dey, Gaurav Bej, Aniruddha Jana, Biman Purakait, four railway staff RPF Constable Sanjay Sahni, deputy chief commercial manager Partha Sarathi Mondal, senior commercial clerk Shrawan Pandey and senior technician Sudip Das and an assistant sub-inspector (ASI) Amit Bhawal of the Kolkata Police boarded two lifts against the rule to reach the source of fire at the 13th floor of the high-rise.

Seven of them were charred to death in one elevator while two others died of suffocation inside another. Visiting the spot Banerjee accused "the railways of non-cooperation by not providing the building map to the fire brigade."

Early on Tuesday Goyal, mourning the loss of lives, tweeted, "Railway officials including the GM are at the site and are working in coordination with the state govt for rescue and relief efforts. We are committed to doing everything possible to ensure safety of all concerned. All possible assistance has been provided by the Railways to the state govt during this unfortunate fire accident. A high level inquiry consisting of four Principal heads of Railway departments has been ordered to ascertain the cause of the fire."

The inquiry report is expected in two weeks.



Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal along with BJP supporters arrives to file his nomination for the upcoming state Assembly elections in Majuli on Tuesday. — PTI

Didi warns BJP not to play Hindutva card in Bengal

Asks voters to make 'April Fool' of saffron party by defeating Adhikari

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 9

Warning the BJP not to play its Hindutva card against her in the West Bengal Assembly elections, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who is contesting from Nandigram in East Midnapore, on Tuesday asked the voters of the hot seat, going to the polls on April 1, to make an "April Fool" of the saffron party by defeating her nemesis Suwendu Adhikari.

At her first rally in Nandigram after the announcement of the Assembly polls and the candidates' lists of the TMC and BJP, Banerjee told the crowd, "Those who are playing the politics of Hindu-Muslim should know that I am also a daughter of a Hindu family. Do not try to play the Hindu card against me. If you do, explain first whether you are a good Hindu or not. The second phase of the polls, which includes Nandigram among many seats, is on April 1. She said, "*Khela Hobe* (Game On). Make 'April Fool' of them by your votes on that day."

Tearing into her opponent and former Cabinet colleague for branding her as an "outsider" in his home turf, the CM, who has coined the same slogan against the BJP, wondered, "Some people are calling me an outsider! I am from Bengal. How can I be an outsider? The only difference is my native place is Birbhum while yours (Suwendu) is Nandigram. Had I been an out-

Poll seizures: Assam breaks all records, items worth ₹18 cr seized

Guwahati, March 9: Assam broke all previous records in seizures of cash, liquor, drugs and other goods in the run-up to the Assembly polls with various agencies already confiscating over ₹18 crore worth of items and arresting around 110 people in the last 11 days, officials said on Tuesday.

The highest amount of seizures worth over ₹5.72 crore took place during the 24 hours, starting 9 am on Sunday, an official said. After the polls were

sider, I should not have been the CM! An outsider cannot be a CM here."

To strike a chord with the locals a day before filing her nomination in Haldia, in the district, the TMC supremo further explained why she has chosen to fight from Nandigram.

"Bhowanipore was my home seat. If I would have contested there, I would not have to do anything... When I last visited Nandigram, it was lying vacant. It had no MLA because he (Adhikari) had resigned. I then asked you if I could contest here. I wanted to know your stand. You said it would be great. I saw your enthusiasm. Nandigram lives in both my eyes. That is why I selected it," she said.

notified on February 26, all constituencies in Assam formed a minimum of three Static Surveillance Teams (SST) and Flying Squads (FS) each, with some even having six such teams each, he added.

"We have a minimum of 756 teams working across the state. The seizures by all state and central agencies along with SST and FS have crossed all figures of last elections," the official said.

Since the Model Code of

Conduct came into force, the agencies have seized an overall ₹18.31 crore worth of items till Monday, according to the daily seizure report of the Election Department, Assam.

It includes ₹4.27 crore in cash, liquor (3.58 lakh litres) worth ₹5.52 crore, ₹4 crore worth drugs and other narcotics substances, ₹1 crore worth precious metals such as gold and silver, and ₹3.52 crore of other items like different freebies. — PTI



PRAFULLA MAHANTA NOT TO CONTEST POLLS

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MARCH 9

In what has surprised many political observers, veteran AGP leader and two-time chief minister of Assam Prafulla Mahanta, has decided not to take part in the ongoing state Assembly election. Mahanta, who was denied the party ticket from Barhampur from where he won for six consecutive terms, said he was "hurt because of the party's weak stand in defending regionalism, a cause that formed the very basis of AGP."

According to the seat-sharing agreement between AGP and BJP, the Barhampur seat has gone to the saffron party which has fielded Jitu Goswami as its candidate.

Mahanta's decision of not contesting elections this time was conveyed by his wife and former Rajya Sabha member Joyshree Goswami Mahanta.

said that MNM would take a lion's share of 154 seats, while the IJK and AISMK will get 40 seats each.

The agreement, worded in English and have signatures of three witnesses, drew flak from many on social media as the general practice in the state is to have such deals written in Tamil with just the number of seats allotted for the parties mentioned in it.

But the MoU of Haasan spoke about objects and goals. It said that parties join together to bring in change in Tamil Nadu.

Kamal's MNM signs 'MoU' with allies

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 9

Actor Kamal Haasan's Makkal Neethi Maiam, which has been scouting for allies to face the April 6 Assembly elections as a combine, finally decided on an alliance with the Indhiya Jananayaga Katchi of T.N. Parivendhar and All India Samathuva Makkal Katchi, founded by actor Sarathkumar.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by leaders of the three parties, more in the form of a business deal,

DMK wraps up alliance with coalition partners

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 9

The DMK wrapped up its alliances with the various coalition partners on Tuesday by allotting three seats to the Kongunadu Makkal Desiya Katchi, led by E.R. Easwaran, whose candidates would be contesting the April 6 polls in the 'rising sun' symbol.

Party leaders were busy finalising the seat allotment, a laborious exercise since some of the constituencies are sought by more than one ally, with other party honchos too visiting Anna Arivalayam for the negotiations. "Though it might take a few more days for the seat allotment to be finalised, the DMK might announce its first list of candidates and constituencies on

Wednesday, it was rumoured.

Meanwhile, two small parties that were earlier in the AIADMK alliance, the Mukulathor Puli Padai led by actor Karunas and Manithaneya Jananayaga Katchi of Tamimur Ansari, expressed their displeasure over the DMK not offering them any seats. The two parties had given letters expressing support to the DMK-

led front after breaking away from the AIADMK coalition on the hope that the DMK would at least offer one seat each to the two leaders.

While rumours started floating that the two parties had withdrawn their letters of support given to the DMK as they felt neglected by the DMK, Tamimur Ansari denied it.

Another Muslim party, Indian National League,

whose emergent State executive met in Chennai on Tuesday, also decided to extend support to the DMK-led front. It accused the AIADMK government of being subservient to the BJP at the Centre.

Meanwhile, DMK MP S. Jagthrakshan, who is in charge of Puducherry, came out with a statement denying speculations on his switching over to the BJP.

Scindia 'dismisses' Rahul's CM offer

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 9

Rahul Gandhi's offer of post of chief minister of Madhya Pradesh to senior BJP leader Jyotiraditya Scindia if he returned to Congress on Tuesday kicked up a storm with the latter calling it a misplaced concern.

"I wish Rahul ji had shown similar concerns when I was in Congress", Scindia, who quit Congress and joined BJP in March last leading to fall of 15-month-old Kamal Nath government, retorted while seeking to dismiss Gandhi's offer as misplaced concern.

Scindia said he would not like to comment further.

Gandhi had recently told youth wing leaders of Congress that had Scindia remained in the party, he would have certainly become chief minister (of MP). Scindia was now a 'backbencher' in the BJP. "Scindia will be chief minister only when he is in Congress", the former Congress president said.

Scindia's supporters here called Gandhi's statement as 'immature'.

"Gandhi is known for making immature statements. He is not taken seriously by people and his credibility in public is at the rock bottom. He has now been left with three options to restore his credibility by making Sachin Pilot, chief

minister of Rajasthan, T.S. Singhdeo, chief minister of Chhattisgarh and Navjot Singh, chief minister of Punjab, as he had promised them earlier", Scindia loyalist Pankaj Chaturvedi who quit Congress and joined BJP in March last, told this newspaper.

Gandhi's remarks on Scindia have raised eyebrows in Congress circle here also with a section of party leaders wondering if he was throwing a bait (to make Scindia chief minister) to woo him back to the Congress fold.

"Gandhi's statement creates an impression that something is cooking up between Scindia and Congress. But, I think it is an immature statement and may cause damage to the party in Madhya Pradesh. This may alert and antagonise two key leaders of Congress in MP, Kamal Nath and Digvijay Singh, both of whom are considered arch rivals of Scindia", a senior Congress leader here said requesting not to be quoted.

Interestingly, Congress MLA and former Union minister Kantilal Bhuria, considered a staunch loyalist of Singh, said Scindia would be taken back into Congress if he apologised in public for quitting the party.

"Bhuria's statement is nothing but a joke since the question of Scindia returning to Congress does not arise", Chaturvedi said.

SIT probe into Delkar's suicide

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 9

As the BJP cornered the Maha Vikas Aghadi government over Mukesh Hiren death case, the state government announced investigations into the alleged suicide of Dadra and Nagar Haveli MP Mohan Delkar and 2018 suicide case of interior designer Anvay Naik.

Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh said that former chief minister Devendra Fadnavis has suppressed the investigation into Naik's suicide, while Delkar's suicide note mentioned administrator of the Union Territory Pratul Kheda Patel, who was earlier a minister in the Narendra Modi-led cabinet in Gujarat," he added.

Mr Deshmukh said Delkar's suicide note mentions that he was getting threats from Patel that he will be "finished off" from social life. "Delkar's wife and son have also written to me voicing the same concerns," he said.

Delkar had also stated that he was ending life in Mumbai as he had faith in Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and the Maharashtra Government, Mr Deshmukh added.

Mr Delkar, a seven-term Lok Sabha member from Dadra and Nagar Haveli, was found dead in a Mumbai hotel on February 22.

MIN. INDICATES CLOSURE OF NIGHT CLUBS IN MUMBAI

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 9

In view of the Covid-19 cases in Mumbai, minister Aslam Shaikh on Tuesday hinted that night clubs might be shut if the cases continued to rise. However, the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai said there was no proposal for partial or full lockdown, or closure of night clubs as of now.

Speaking with reporters in Vidhan Bhavan, the minister said that many districts of Maharashtra have witnessed the increase in Covid cases. "Mumbai has been witnessing a surge in the number of cases. So there is a possibility of imposition of lockdown. We may have to shut places like beaches and Gateway of India where people gather in the evenings for no reason." He also said that people need to take precautions in order to contain the spread of the virus. "The CM has already held a meeting regarding this. All municipal commissioners and district collectors have been instructed by him that they should take a decision," he said.

GANGSTER'S CUSTODY EXTENDED

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 9

A special court in Mumbai on Tuesday extended the police remand of gangster Ravi Pujari till March 15 after the accused told the court he wanted to share certain information with the investigation officer.

Pujari, who was extradited to India from Senegal in West Africa in February last year was in a jail in Bangalore.

The Mumbai police took his custody in a 2016 firing case and brought him to Mumbai on February 22. Upon production before a special Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) court the judge had remanded him to police custody till March 9.

When he was produced before the court again on Tuesday upon completion of his custody the police sought his further custody.

BILATERAL | TIES

New Delhi advises British MPs to refrain from practising vote bank politics

India fumes as UK House discusses farmers' stir

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 9

In a stinging rebuke against the recent discussion in the British Parliament on the ongoing farmers' protests, India on Tuesday summoned and issued a demarche to British High Commissioner Alex Ellis to "strongly oppose the unwarranted and tendentious discussion on agricultural reforms in India in the British Parliament" on Monday on the grounds that "this repre-

sented a gross interference in the politics of another democratic country."

In a message dripping with sarcasm, New Delhi also "advised British MPs to refrain from practising vote bank politics by misrepresenting events"

This is the second Western nation to which a demarche has been issued by India in the past three months on the farmers' stir. In December last, India had similarly summoned the Canadian High Commissioner in New Delhi and had issued a demarche to Can-

ada for its "unacceptable interference" in India's internal affairs in response to recent comments made there by some senior politicians there including Canadian PM Justin Trudeau on the farmers' protests in some states in India. New Delhi had also warned Canada then that "such actions, if continued, would have a seriously damaging impact" on bilateral ties.

In a statement on Tuesday, New Delhi said, "Foreign Secretary (Harsh Vardhan Shringla) summoned the British High Commissioner

(Alex Ellis) and conveyed strong opposition to the unwarranted and tendentious discussion on agricultural reforms in India in the British Parliament. The Foreign Secretary made clear that this represented a gross interference in the politics of another democratic country. He advised that British MPs should refrain from practising vote bank politics by misrepresenting events, especially in relation to another fellow democracy."

Just last week, the British High Commissioner had te-

rmed the farmers' protests against the recently-enacted three Indian farm laws as an "internal issue of India", even as New Delhi had said last week that Indian diplomats in the UK are apprising the British Government as well as Members of Parliament and members of the civil society there about the concerned three farm Bills and also about the Indian government's efforts to resolve the issue in talks with farmers.

"This is an internal issue of India. We look at it. That is for India to resolve," the

British High Commissioner had told reporters last Friday, in reference to the ongoing protests by farmers predominantly from some of the northern Indian states. "Things that happen in India have ripples in the UK," Ellis said, in an obvious reference to the large Indian-origin community and diaspora in the UK. He had also referred to a remark made by British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab in India in December last year that "your (Indian) politics are our (British) politics".



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,025.48	1.16
Nifty 50	15,098.40	0.95
S&P 500*	3,891.38	1.83
Dollar (₹)	72.92	0.46
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.35	-0.03
Euro (₹)	86.84	0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	43,996.35	0.07
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.77	-0.69
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.206	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.544	-0.050

* As of 8:30 PM IST

E-invoice must for biz with over ₹50 cr turnover

The Centre has made it mandatory for businesses with over Rs 50 crore turnover to generate e-invoices for B2B transactions from April 1. Under GST law, e-invoicing for B2B transactions has been made mandatory for companies with turnover of over Rs 500 crore and Rs 100 crore from October 1, 2020, and January 1, 2021. E-invoicing will be extended to companies with turnover over Rs 50 crore from April 1, the CBIC said.

GST fraud of over ₹20,100 cr found in Nov.-Jan.: FM



The government has detected GST fraud of Rs 20,124 crore between November 9, 2020 and January 31, 2021, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said. A special drive against unscrupulous entities for availing and passing on input tax credit (ITC) fraudulently on the strength of fake/bogus invoices is being carried out, she said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha. She said 2,692 cases were booked by the officers.

Anugrah Stock fined ₹90 lakh for fund abuse

The Sebi slapped a fine of Rs 90 lakh on Anugrah Stock and Broking Pvt Ltd for violations of norms. The order follows a joint investigation carried out by Sebi, BSE, NSE and CDSL between April 2017 and Sept. 2018. "It is established that the noticee failed to segregate client's funds inter-se and/or between clients' funds and its own funds, misutilised the funds of clients, pledged the securities of clients... Sebi said.

Nd for setting up plastic parks in two states

The Centre has given 'in-principle' approval for establishing two new plastic parks in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh, chemicals and fertilisers minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda said in Parliament. Gowda, in his written reply to the Lok Sabha, said the Centre had received requests from seven states—Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, UP, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Goa—for setting up new plastic parks.



Firms keen on hiring apprentices Worst-hit sectors back in job mkt

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 9

Some of the worst pandemic-hit sectors have re-entered the job market this year, but with a tight fist. Travel & hospitality and beauty & wellness, which were battered by the lockdowns and subsequent travel restrictions, are back in the job market with intentions to hire apprentices.

With companies focusing on cost optimisation, large-scale apprenticeship has become the new trend in the post-pandemic job market. Out of the 18 sectors reviewed by Teamlease Services for its Apprenticeship Outlook Report for January to June 2021, more than 16 were keen on hiring apprentices. This is because apprentices are paid stipends, and not wages as in case of regular employees, and usually stipends are far less than regular wages.

While manufacturing, automobiles and ancillaries and retail are the leaders in hiring apprentices, more services sectors are now taking baby steps in the job market.

The hiring intents of travel & hospitality and beauty & wellness were at 10 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively, in the previous half-year between July and December 2020. They have now made a remarkable turnaround with a growth of 34 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively.

"What is very interesting to note is the current pro-



jections, which not only indicates an overall increase in hiring, but the fact that sectors like travel and hospitality as well as beauty and wellness which were adversely hit by the pandemic, are now showing aggressive turnaround in their apprenticeship hiring sentiments," said Sumit Kumar, vice president-NETAP, TeamLease Skill University.

However, the hospitality industry is not in full agreement with the survey, dismissing it as a city-specific trend. "It is not a general trend. The hospitality sector is far from a significant recovery and that will happen when international travel and MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) segments pick up. But companies in places which have reported lesser pandemic cases and increased flow of domestic travellers could be hiring apprentices. With limited revenue and high operational cost, hospitality companies are looking at ways for cost optimisation by avoiding tradition-

al HR practices and going for apprentices," said Jaision Chacko, secretary general of the Federation of Hotels and Restaurants Association of India.

According to the Teamlease report, around 41 per cent of the employers are keen on hiring apprenticeships in the January-June period, 8 per cent higher compared to the previous half year. There is buoyancy towards the concept of apprenticeship and more than 58 per cent of the companies reviewed were keen on increasing their apprenticeship hiring.

More employers are realising the merit of the apprenticeship model to build a robust pipeline of employable talent, it said.

"In fact, from 2018, to now, we have seen a 2.5 per cent annual growth in employers, who are willing to increase their apprentice intake. This positive momentum has happened despite the dip in the labour market during the Covid-19 lockdown," said Kumar.

MUTUAL FUND AUM HITS ₹32.3 L CR DESPITE ₹10K CR EQUITY OUTFLOW

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 9

The asset under management (AUM) of the mutual fund industry touched a new all-time high of over Rs 32.29 lakh crore in February on continued bull run in the equity market post-budget and the return of investors to hybrid funds and ETFs amid divergent trends.

Data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi) shows despite higher outflow of Rs 10,468 crore (Rs 9,253 crore in January) from pure equity funds for the eighth month in a row and debt fund inflow of a mere Rs 1,734 crore, mark-to-market gains in equity-oriented funds and inflows from systematic investment plans (SIPs) helped the average AUM for February to rise to Rs 32.29 lakh crore.

Hybrid funds and exchange traded funds, including gold ETFs, saw inflows worth Rs 4,702 crore and Rs 3,898 crore, respectively.

N. S. Venkatesh, chief executive, Amfi said: "SIP AUMs as also retail equity folios, are at an all-time high at Rs 4.21 lakh crore and 8.07 crore, respectively, reflective of continued disciplined approach adopted by the retail mutual fund investors."

However, the monthly SIP contribution for February 2021 has come down by Rs 495 crore (to Rs 7,528.14 crore) owing to less number of working days in February and the shortfall would get accumulated and reflected in March 2021 monthly data, the Amfi chief executive said.

Foreign investment is good for women

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 9

Foreign investment is good not just for the economy but for women as well. Foreign direct investment (FDI) and the operations of multi-national enterprises (MNEs) tend to have a positive influence on the economic well being of women.

According to a UN study involving India and Bangladesh, increased FDI and operations of MNEs are associated with higher employment of women and positive social improvements in India.

MNEs influence gender equality in host countries directly through employment practices and indirectly through spillovers in local labour markets. On an average across developing countries, foreign affiliates employ about 5 percentage points more female administrative workers than local firms, finds a report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad).

In South Asia, multi-national enterprises have higher shares of female ownership, female managers and female workforce composition, especially for the production workforce, than local enterprises, basically because of lagged domestic policies toward women.

In South Asia, an area of the world with poor policies and practices regarding women, it appears that an expansion of foreign investment may help with female empowerment, says the Unctad.

The Geneva-based body studied the situation in



Bangladesh and India to understand this phenomenon. In the Bangladeshi textile and garment industry, firms with FDI hire significantly more female administrative workers and production workers than domestic firms. This is true even after controlling for firm size, location and industry type. The same holds in India, where FDI improves gender outcomes in terms of employment. This result is confirmed from both the household and firm-level panel data.

In India, increased FDI is associated with higher employment of women, particularly unskilled women. In addition to the positive impacts of foreign investment on female employment, research has shown important positive social improvements for women in terms of reductions in crime and delayed marriage and childbearing with the expansion of foreign investment.

Increased FDI decreases the probability that a woman is married or has children at age 20. This supports the argument that FDI can impact not only female employment but also women's family life decisions.

The report also looked at India's foreign investment liberalisation in the 1990s to explore the role global integration plays in enhancing female empowerment. Areas of the country with a stronger foreign presence reported declining number of rapes, showcasing a positive social spillover from multi-national enterprises.

Meanwhile, a Moody's report said closing gender gaps widened by the pandemic could help boost the recovery of emerging economies and improve their credit ratings.

Major emerging economies have increased measures to help women, who have been disproportionately hit by the pandemic as lockdowns forced many to leave their jobs to take care of their children. Help includes direct cash transfers, training and credit lines for female business owners, Moody's Investors Service.

Implementing similar measures coupled with more structural changes to secure women's access to education and employment could bring sustainable recovery with improvements in productivity and consumption in developing nations, it said.

Life insurers report strong growth in Feb.

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MARCH 9

A recovery in the demand for unit-linked insurance plans (ULIPs), led by a rally in the capital markets, and a strong demand for non-participating savings product helped private life insurance companies clock strong 23 per cent year-on-year (YoY) growth in individual new sales in February 2021, higher than 7 per cent YoY growth in January.

The industry posted a 17.8 per cent YoY growth and LIC grew at 9.4 per cent YoY in February compared to a decline of 45 per cent in the public sector behemoth's business in January 2021. For April 2020 till February 2021, private players' individual new business fell 1.6 per cent YoY to Rs 3.72 lakh crore. The same for the industry fell 7.5 per cent to Rs 6.34 lakh crore.

Private players market share on individual weighted received premium (WRP) basis (an



international formula that takes into account 10 per cent of single premium but gives 100 per cent weightage to regular premium) improved 270 basis points month-on-month to 64 per cent in February 21 versus 62 per cent in January 2021. LIC's market share stood at 40 per cent in FY21 YTD. During FY21 YTD, SBI Life (14 per cent) remained the largest private insurer in terms of Individual WRP, followed by HDFC Life (9.5 per cent), and ICICI Prudential Life at 7.2 per cent.

Among listed players, SBI Life Insurance posted a strong rebound of 53

per cent YoY growth in February after showing muted trends for many months.

ICICI Prudential Life too posted a growth of 6.3 per cent after reporting a consecutive decline for the past 13 months. The resilient performance continued at Max Life up at 32 per cent YoY. However, the growth momentum in HDFC Life slowed, up 16 per cent YoY versus 24 per cent in January 2021.

"We expect premium growth to rebound over FY22 after seeing tepid trends, with ULIPs showing a revival. Players continue to focus strongly on non-participating traditional plans and protection segment," said Motilal Oswal Institutional Equities in a report.

Mid-sized players reported strong growth, with Bajaj Allianz/Kotak Life reporting a growth of 43 per cent/29 per cent. Birla Sun Life grew around 13 per cent.

6,000 compliance norms identified for pruning

New Delhi, March 9: As many as 6,000 compliance norms have been identified so far at state and central level and the work is going on to reduce these barriers to further promote ease of doing business for the industry, a top official said on Tuesday.

Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Gurusprasad Mohapatra said that a systematic exercise across Centre and states is being undertaken to eliminate or reduce compliances, which have an adverse impact on time and cost of businesses.

The exercise is divided into two phases—March 31 and August 15, 2021.

In phase 1, work is underway for reducing regulatory burden across six areas, including renewal of licences; inspections to be assigned randomly; returns/ filings to be standardised and digitisation and simplification of all manual records or procedures.

In the second phase, the focus is on four areas, including decriminalisa-

tion of regulations; identify and repeal archaic laws and rules; and intensive use of new-age digital technologies.

Mohapatra said that as per data, maximum compliance burdens are in five ministries—commerce and industry; finance; health; corporate affairs; and mines. Of the 6,000 burdens, 1,500-2,000 are at the central level and the remaining at state level.

He also said that to promote investments, the government is working on creation of single-window system for approvals and clearances.

By April 15 this year, the system is expected for launch with 14 states.

The single-window system portal will integrate the existing clearance systems of various central and state departments.

When asked whether the government is clearing pending FDI proposals from countries which are sharing land border with India, he said the government has not banned or prohibited investments from those nations. —PTI

AIR INDIA EMPLOYEES BID DISQUALIFIED



RAGINI SAXENA MARCH 9

A group of Air India employees has been ruled out of a bidding process to take control of the loss-making national carrier, as the government moves ahead with its years-long attempt to offload the airline.

"I write to you with a heavy heart on the outcome of our bid to acquire Air India," the airline's commercial director Meenakshi Malik wrote in a letter to employees dated March 8. "We have been unsuccessful in qualifying to the next phase of the 'Disinvestment Acquisition process.'"

Citing a letter from EY (earlier Ernst & Young), which is advising the government on the sale, Malik said the group didn't meet eligibility requirements. They include submitting three years of audited financial statements for foreign consortium members and being an appropriately regulated foreign investment fund. The group of employees partnered with a Seychelles-based fund for the bid.

Tata Sons Ltd, the holding company of the conglomerate that owns an 84 per cent stake in AirAsia India, is among the remaining bidders. SpiceJet Ltd promoter Ajay Singh and two other investors have also shown an interest in acquiring Air India, a media report said last month. Singh is seeking a 100 per cent stake with support from investors, including a foreign fund, according to the report.

Debt-ridden Air India has been up for sale since 2017. The government extended a bid deadline last year. —Bloomberg

JUNKING | JUST-IN-TIME Suppliers require to stockpile chips for two-six months

How Toyota thrives when chips are down

NORIHIKO SHIROUZU MARCH 9

Toyota may have pioneered the just-in-time manufacturing strategy but when it comes to chips, its decision to stockpile what have become key components in cars goes back a decade to the Fukushima disaster.

After the catastrophe severed Toyota's supply chains on March 11, 2011, the world's biggest automaker realised the lead-time for semiconductors was way too long to cope with devastating shocks such as natural disasters.

That's why Toyota came up with a business continuity plan (BCP) that required suppliers to stockpile anywhere from

two to six months' worth of chips for the Japanese carmaker, depending on the time it takes from order to delivery, four sources said.

And that's why Toyota has so far been largely unscathed by a global shortage of semiconductors following a surge in demand for electrical goods under coronavirus lockdowns that has forced many rival automakers to suspend production, the sources said.

"Toyota was, as far as we can tell, the only automaker properly equipped to deal with chip shortages," said a person familiar with Harman International, which specialises in car audio systems, displays and driver assistance technology.



Two of the sources who spoke to Reuters are Toyota engineers and the others are at companies involved in the chip business.

Toyota surprised rivals and investors last month when it said its output would not be disrupted significantly by chip shortages even as Volkswagen, General Motors, Ford, Honda and Stellantis, among others, have been forced to slow or

suspend some production. Toyota, meanwhile, has raised its vehicle output for the fiscal year ending this month and jacked up its full-year earnings forecast by 54 per cent.

The source familiar with Harman said the company, part of South Korea's Samsung Electronics, was experiencing shortages of central processing units (CPUs) and power management integrated circuits as early as November last year.

While Harman doesn't make chips, because of its continuity deal with Toyota, it was obliged to prioritise the carmaker and ensure it had enough semiconductors to maintain supplies of its digital systems for four months,

or more, the source said.

The chips in especially short supply now are microcontroller units (MCUs) which control an array of functions such as braking, acceleration, steering, ignition, combustion, tire pressure gauges and rain sensors, the sources told Reuters.

However, Toyota changed the way it buys MCUs and other microchips after the 2011 earthquake, which caused a tsunami that killed more than 22,000 people. In the aftermath of the quake, Toyota estimated its procurement of more than 1,200 parts and materials might be affected and it drew up a list of 500 priority items that would need secure supply in the future. —Reuters

SHORT TAKES

Sharath downs world No. 16

Doha: Indian paddler Achanta Sharath Kamal stunned world number 16 Patrick Franziska to progress to the men's singles pre-quarterfinals of the World Table Tennis Star Contender series here on Tuesday. Sharath Kamal, ranked 32, beat his higher-ranked rival from Germany 12-10, 3-11, 11-7, 7-11, 11-9 in the second round match. He will now face the winner of the match between Egypt's Ahmed Saleh and German Dimitrij Ovtcharov in the pre-quarters on Wednesday. However, G. Sathyan and Manika Batra bowed out after suffering defeats in their respective singles second round matches. While world number 63 Batra lost 7-11, 6-11, 7-11 to Japan's Mima Ito, who is ranked third in the world, Sathyan was beaten by Japanese sensation and world No.5 Tomokazu Harimoto 4-11, 5-11, 8-11.

Delhi to bid for 2048 Olympics

New Delhi: The Delhi government aims to host the 2048 Olympic Games and it will create whatever infrastructure and facilities required for it, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Tuesday. Delhi hosted the first Asian Games in 1951, and the ninth edition in 1982. "Delhi will bid for the 2048 Olympic Games. We will create whatever infrastructure and other facilities are required for it," Kejriwal said during a post-budget press conference. Presenting the budget earlier in the day, Deputy Chief Minister Sisodia said, "There is another big dream related to sports which I am placing before this house... It is a dream to organise the Olympic Games in Delhi. "The 32nd Olympic Games are to be held in Tokyo. The next three host cities have also been decided. Our government aims to bring the sports facilities and the atmosphere towards sports competitions to such a level through the new Sports University that we can apply to host the 39th Olympic sports competitions for 2048," he further said. — PTI

WEIGHT & WATCH

Stokes reveals players had sudden weight loss during last Test

Ahmedabad, March 9: Ben Stokes has revealed that he and his teammates endured sudden weight loss during the fourth and final Test against India here after a stomach illness hit the tourists before the match. England lost the Test series 1-3 after going down in the final match by an innings and 25 runs last week.

"Players are totally committed to England and I think that was emphasised last week when a few of us went down with illness that made operating in 41 degree heat particularly taxing," Stokes told UK's *Daily Mirror*. "I lost 5kg in a week, Dom Sibley 4kg and Anderson 3kg among others. Jack Leach was ducking off the field in between bowling spells and spending more time than is ideal in the toilet."

Rishabh Pant and Washington Sundar scored 101 and 96 respectively to guide India to 365 in their first innings. The hosts then returned to dismiss England for 135 to win the match.

"This is in no way an excuse, because everyone was ready to play, and India and Rishabh especially produced a terrific performance, but I take off my hat to the effort that was put in by players who gave everything they had to try and win for England," Stokes said.

England drew a lot of flak from former players following their performance but Stokes said it is important to shut that out to focus on improving the game. "Pundits have a job to do and that's fine. But their responsibility isn't to make us better players and a better team. That is our job and that is what we have to focus on," said Stokes. — PTI

I lost 5kg in a week, Dom Sibley 4kg and Jimmy Anderson 3kg among others. Jack Leach was ducking off the field in between bowling spells and spending more time than is ideal in the toilet.

— BEN STOKES
England star all-rounder



Ben Stokes in this file photo. — AP

ASHWIN WINS PLAYER OF THE MONTH AWARD

Dubai, March 9: India's premier off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin was on Tuesday named the ICC men's Player of the Month (February) for his stellar show against England in a four-match Test series at home which his side won to qualify for the World Test Championship final.

England's Tammy Beaumont was adjudged the women's Player of the Month.

In the three Tests he played, Ashwin scored a 106 in the second innings of India's second Test victory over England at Chennai and took his 400th Test wicket in the third Test victory at Ahmedabad.

Besides the century, Ashwin scalped a staggering 24 wickets against England in February to help India pocket the four-match Test series 3-1 and help his team secure its spot in the WTC final against New Zealand at the iconic Lord's in June.

Scoring a total of 176 runs across these games and taking 24 wickets, Ashwin was the unanimous choice to win in the men's category for February and garnered the most votes in the fan vote, the ICC said.

England Test captain Joe Root and West Indies Test debutant Kyle Mayers, who scored a 210 to help his team successfully chase 395 and win the first Test against Bangladesh, were nominated alongside Ravichandran Ashwin for the honour. — PTI

Azhar flicks, says HCA mess is old

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 9



HCA president Mohammad Azharuddin addresses the press on Tuesday.

A day after being criticised for Hyderabad being ignored as a venue for the upcoming IPL, Hyderabad Cricket Association president Mohammad Azharuddin hit back at former secretary and BCCI interim president N. Shival Yadav saying his team is in the current situation because of the mismanagement of previous regimes.

Azhar was all aggression as he addressed the press flanked by Apex Council members at the Gymkhana ground on Tuesday. "I just cannot drag the IPL to Hyderabad," he burst out.

"I went all the way to Ahmedabad and spoke to the BCCI secretary, who said he would do his best but with Chennai and Bangalore already in, the BCCI was not in favour of a third venue in south India. It was tough but I tried my best. I tried to phone the Governing Council members also but they didn't answer my calls. However, I am still at it. If something were to go wrong at any of the venues, Hyderabad should be part of the back-up plan," he explained.

"Today, past officials are making a hue and cry about IPL not being played in Hyderabad, I would like to ask them why didn't they not have a match in the City during the 2011 World Cup?" he countered.

Taking a dig at past bodies, Azhar said: "The HCA was burdened when we took over. There were tax and PF issues with appeals and showcase notices pending. We somehow settled everything by paying heavy fines."

Then, "institutional clubs have been privatised, leading to court cases that have stalled a round of the league matches. How could Union Bank of India become Kun? Similarly, district teams are being

controlled by individuals," he continued.

"So much muck has gathered in the HCA over the years. If this goes on I may have to write to the Board and the Government and ask them to initiate inquiries with different agencies into the wrongdoings of the past that are having a cascading effect," he said.

However, Azhar conceded HCA league standard needed improvement. "I saw a batsman who said he scored a double century and two tons but he couldn't even connect a single ball at the nets," he revealed. For the record, all the teams play in the A-1, 2, 3 divisions.

Asked about the team selection controversy for the Vijay Hazare Trophy, Azhar said "we will definitely look into it. This has been happening for so many years."

He attributed the delay in conduct of AGM to Covid restrictions. "Now, we will make all pending appointments such as the selection committee, cricket advisory committee among others at the AGM this month-end. However, I spoke to a lot of senior players but they want money to be on the panel. Nobody wants to work for free," he said.

As a parting shot, Azhar reassured his team and cricketers that he is hands-on: "I am on the front foot, will always be."



Chelsea's Jorginho (left) celebrates after scoring against Everton in an English Premier League match at Stamford Bridge in London on Monday. — AFP

Chelsea blank Everton 2-0 as race for top-four heats up

London, March 9: Chelsea strengthened their hold on fourth place in the Premier League as Kai Havertz inspired a vital 2-0 win over Everton, while West Ham boosted their surprise top four challenge with a 2-0 victory against Leeds on Monday.

Havertz has endured a disappointing first season following his £70 million (\$96 million) move from Bayer Leverkusen last year. But the Germany forward was given a rare start by Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel and he responded by playing the key role in both goals at Stamford Bridge.

Havertz's shot was deflected into the Everton net for a Ben Godfrey own goal in the first half.

THE RESULTS

Chelsea (Godfrey 31-og, Jorginho 65-pen)	2
Everton	0
West Ham (Lingard 21-pen, Dawson 28)	2
Leeds	0

The 21-year-old has not scored in the league since October, but Tuchel entrusted him with an important role as Chelsea's false nine and Havertz's intelligent movement put him in position to earn the second-half penalty that Jorginho converted.

"I'm very happy with his performance, no doubt

about his quality, his talent and also his character," Tuchel said.

"He needs to adapt to the Premier League, he needs to be at a club where you play to win every game, where the highest standards are normal.

"That's a normal process for him to adapt to this mentality," Chelsea newly appointed coach added.

Chelsea are unbeaten in 11 games in all competitions — winning eight times — since Tuchel replaced the sacked Frank Lampard in January.

They are two points ahead of fifth placed West Ham, who have a game in hand in a tense race to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish. — AFP

PRITHVI SHOW TAKES MUMBAI TO SEMIFINALS

New Delhi, March 9: Skipper Prithvi Shaw blazed his way to an unbeaten 185 off just 123 balls as Mumbai stormed into the semifinals of the Vijay Hazare Trophy with a crushing nine-wicket win over Saurashtra in the fourth quarterfinal here on Tuesday.

Opting to bat, Saurashtra rode on Samarth Vyas' unbeaten 90 to post 284/5, but it was overshadowed by Shaw's blitzkrieg, as Mumbai chased the target in just 41.5 overs. Shaw smashed his third hundred in the tournament after slamming 105 not out against Delhi and 227 not out against Puducherry in the league stage.

Chasing 285, Shaw went on the offensive from the word go as Mumbai scored 67 for no loss after nine overs.

With Shaw in full flow, Yashasvi Jaiswal (75 off 104 balls) played the perfect second fiddle.

Meanwhile, a disciplined Uttar Pradesh put up a thoroughly professional performance to outwit Delhi by 46 runs in the quarter-final.

UP will now meet Gujarat in the first semi-final while heavyweights Mumbai will be pitted against Karnataka in the other Last four clash.

UP rode on Upendra Yadav's stroke-filled 112 off 101 balls and Karan Sharma's 83 to post a competitive 280/7. — PTI

BRIEF SCORES

■ Saurashtra 284/5 in 50 overs (Samarth Vyas 90 not out, Chirag Jani 53 not out; Shams Mulani 2/51; Tanush Kotian 1/30) lost to Mumbai 285/1 in 41.5 overs (Prithvi Shaw 185 not out, Yashasvi Jaiswal 75; Jaydev Unadkat 1/52) by 9 wickets.

■ Uttar Pradesh 280/7 in 50 overs (Upendra Yadav 112, Karan Sharma 83; Pradeep Sangwan 2/49, Simarjeet Singh 2/51) beat Delhi 234 in 48.1 overs (Lalit Yadav 61, Anuj Rawat 47, Akshdeep Nath 2/29, Shivam Mavi 1/32) by 46 runs.



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