

OTHER STORIES

IT'S YSRC EVERYWHERE IN ANDHRA PRADESH

From Page 1

It won Narsapur, Nidadavole, Kovvur and Jangareddygudem in West Godavari district, Madanapalle, Punganuru, Palamaneru, Nagari and Puttur in Chittoor district, Nuzvid, Pedana, Nandigama and Tiruvuru in Krishna district, Tenali, Chilakaluripet, Repalle, Macherla, Sattenapalli, Vinukonda and Piduguralla in Guntur district.

The ruling party pocketed Chirala, Markapuram, Addanki, Chimakurthy, Kanigiri and Giddalur municipalities in Prakasam district, Adoni, Nandyal, Yemmiganur, Dhone, Nandikotkur, K. Gudur and K. Atmakur in Kurnool district, Venkatagiri, Atmakur N., Sullurpet and Naidupet in Nellore district, Hindupur, Guntakal, Gooty, Dharmavaram, Kadiri, Rayadurg, Kalyanadurgam, Puttaparthi and Madakasira in Anantapur district and Proddutur, Pulivendula, J a m a l a m a d u g u , Yerraguntla, Badvel and Rayachoty in Kadapa district.

Among municipal corporations, YSRC won Greater Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Machilipatnam, Vijayawada, Guntur, Ongole, Anantapur, Kurnool, Kadapa, Chittoor and Tirupati.

14 EFLU STUDENTS ON STRIKE TAKEN INTO CUSTODY

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 14

Fourteen students of English Foreign Language University (EFLU) were briefly taken into preventive custody by the Osmania University police Sunday evening when they were on a hunger strike near the campus entrance seeking its reopening.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, a student said that they were on a 24-hour hunger strike with a demand to open the campus and the library. The demand was based on a survey conducted by EFLU students with a total of 845 respondents, in which 522 had said they were in urgent need of hostel accommodation.

“As per the administration’s request, the students had submitted a detailed proposal seeking that students should be allowed to return to the campus considering that only 50 per cent of the students can be called back as per the UGC guidelines. Even after we submitted our proposal on February 18, the administration did not want to meet us and gave no follow-ups on the proposal,” said a representative of the EFLU students’ action committee.

“Moreover, they released a circular about ‘in-person classes’ on February 18. We never demanded the resumption of in-person classes in the first place. We are only seeking hostel and other facilities which students need,” the representative said. On Sunday, around 5:30 pm, a team from Osmania University police, including women constables, arrived at the university gates and picked up the students for detention.

“They were blocking the road with their dharna and we had to detain them as their protest was affecting the election bandobast. We detained 14 students under preventive custody,” said OU police inspector L. Ramesh Naik. They were all released after some time.

SIX KILLED AS LORRY RAMS INTO AUTO

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 14

Four members of a family, including two children, were killed and four others injured on Sunday when a truck rammmed into an auto rickshaw they were travelling in Sangareddy district on National Highway 161.

The deceased have been identified as Chenna Sravan (40) and his two children Chenna Sai Vignesh (13) and Chenna Sai Charan (7), who died on the spot. Patnam Venkatesham (39) died while being shifted to Osmania General Hospital (OGH).The accident took place when eight members of a family were on their way to Medak from Sangareddy to attend a cradle ceremony. When their auto reached Almaipet culvert around 12:30 p.m.

BJP is confident that party will win both the MLC seats

BJP only credible alternative to the ruling TRS in state, say leaders

IREDDY SRINIVAS REDDY
IDC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 14

BJP leaders are confident of pocketing both MLC Graduate constituency seats. It was a three-cornered fight in the Hyderabad-Ranga Reddy-Mahbubnagar segment. Party sources said that it will be one up over last election’s second finish in Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda constituency.

BJP state president Bandi Sanjay is hopeful of clinching both seats despite the crores allegedly distributed by the ruling party. Its prospects have been dented in the Warangal segment where several independents and separate statehood crusaders are also in the fray. They can split votes to substantial levels, sources said.

In Hyderabad, it will be a close fight with the TRS. Candidates from both parties belong to the same

community and there is every possibility of the votes being split. Party sources pointed out that in spite of a TRS wave in the previous election, BJP topped in first preference votes but this time there is an anti-incumbency factor working against sitting MLC N. Ramchander Rao of the BJP.

The impressive showing in Dubbak and GHMC elections has boosted the cadre’s morale and a perception among the people is that BJP is the only credible alternative to the ruling party in the state.

A fear that haunts BJP is with regard to the candidature of Telugu Desam’s L. Ramana, who can split votes considerably. It may be noted that in the previous elections, the TD and the BJP were alliance partners.

Two-time MLC Prof K. Nageshwar, who is contesting as an independent candidate, will certainly split votes in Hyderabad.

Voters rejected TRS in MLC polls, says Bandi

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 14

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar said he was confident of the party’s victory in the elections to the two Legislative Council seats from the graduates quota on Sunday. Voters in both constituencies rejected the ruling party, he claimed while speaking to the media after the conclusion of voting.

Sanjay said all the opinion polls were in favour of the BJP and alleged that the TRS had distributed crores while the police merely watched. He alleged that intellectuals had rejected the TRS.

“The TRS has learned that the intellectuals are not submissive despite distributing money all night. Even today, BJP leaders were trying to prevent the distribution of ₹10,000 per vote, he claimed.

Sanjay alleged that fearing a loss, TRS activists had attacked BJP leaders. Their cadre did not launch a counter-attack due to their respect for the Constitution. Sanjay demanded that the Election Commission take action immediately against ruling party leaders who attacked the BJP leaders.

He condemned the alleged attacks on BJP candidate G. Premender Reddy and ST Cell president Hussain Nayak at

Nellikuduru in Mahbubabad district. He alleged that police are watched the attack and not taken any action against culprits.

Sanjay, the Karimnagar MP, also demanded that the police release the Vishwa Hindu Vahini Bhainsa leaders Santosh and Lingoji by 8 am Monday. If not, the BJP would “show its strength”.

He alleged that Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao and his government had failed to protect a minor girl who was raped in Bhainsa.

The senior party leader accused that the government and police of not even given medical treatment to the victim.

President calls to take up yoga for well-being

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD MARCH 14

President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday called on people to take up yoga, calling it an approach to holistic well-being that includes physical and mental fitness.

Kovind, said yoga is not associated with any religion, region, or people but belongs to the entire world and all of humanity. “As the world moves to attain progress through science and technology, there is a need to restore the balance between human beings and nature through sustainable methods. The concept of health according to yoga goes beyond physical wellbeing. The benefits from yoga lead to freedom from psychological

stress and bodily ailments. It results in a high level of positive energy. It is also a path to spiritual calmness,” Kovind said.

The President was speaking after a virtual unveiling of ‘Yoga for unity and well-being’, an initiative of the Shri Ram Chandra Mission. The programme aims to unite people across the world by practising yoga and meditation for 100 days for a healthier and happier life.

Kamlesh Patel, guide of the Heartfulness movement that the mission runs, along with Baba Ramdev of Patanjali Yogpeeth, Rajesh Kotecha, secretary, ministry of Ayush, Dr H.R. Nagendra, founder Chancellor, Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana,

were present to show their support for the initiative.

People from around the world can tune in every morning into a virtual session to learn asanas by instructors of leading yoga institutes possessing a combined legacy of hundreds of years, all under the banner of the ‘Yoga for Unity and Well-being’.

Additionally, attendees can listen in to the lecture series on Wednesday and Saturday evenings. Kamlesh Patel, who heads the Shri Ram Chandra Mission, and popular as Daaji, will conduct special meditation sessions for seekers to experience “Transformation through Transmission (life energy)”. The series will come to an end on the much-celebrated International

Kishan slams TRS, MIM for violence at Bhainsa

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 14

Union minister of state for home G. Kishan Reddy slammed the TRS government and the MIM for the violence at Bhainsa last week, and alleged that both the parties were involved in the incidents. He alleged that Hindus’ properties had been damaged in the violence.

Addressing a press conference at his residence in Delhi, Kishan Reddy alleged that TRS government had neglected a series of similar incidents in Bhainsa and ignored the MIM’s role in attacking Hindus in the town.

Kishan Reddy alleged that the police were acting as if they were handcuffed without taking any action against the culprits. The police did not care about the videos of sectarian strife and did not file cases against the MIM in the issue of the rape of a minor girl. He asked why the TRS

leaders and ministers were supporting the MIM and blocking the police, and why the attacks were taking place in areas where the MIM was strong. Kishan Reddy questioned the government for not granting compensation to the victims. Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao and the TRS had failed to protect the people and were diverting attention away from the Bhainsa incidents by raising other issues during the elections, he said.

“Whenever the elections come, the Chief Minister and K.T. Rama Rao criticise Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP government at the Centre,” he said.

Kishan Reddy stated that the Union home secretary had asked the state government to submit a full report on the Bhainsa incidents. The minister accused Chandrashekar Rao of governing the state on the ideals of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. He alleged that

Drinking water problem in villages as groundwater table dips

PILLALAMARRI SRINIVAS
IDC
ADILABAD, MARCH 14

The interior areas are faced with a serious drinking water problem this summer due to the rising temperatures. The groundwater levels have come down drastically due to scanty rainfall in the old Adilabad district.

Villagers say this has resulted in poor groundwater recharge and hence the tanks, rivulets and streams were not fully recharged. This meant early drying-up of tanks, streams and rivulets, unlike last year. The inhabitants of these areas are thus forced to depend on polluted water for their drinking and cooking purpose.

Women are trekking hills despite the summer heat to reach rivulets and streams on the other side to fetch drinking water. Some of them have fainted while there were others who fell sick due to sunstroke.

The drinking water

● **VILLAGERS SAY** this has resulted in poor groundwater recharge and hence the tanks, rivulets and streams were not fully recharged. This meant early drying-up of tanks, streams and rivulets, unlike last year.

problem is acute in tribal and other areas in Narnoor, Gadeguda, Sirpur (U), Tiryani and Lingapur mandals in the Old Adilabad district.

Evidently, there is a lack of coordination between officials of RWS and Mission Bhagirata. No official or people’s representative is responding when people complain about the water problems. At many places, there are leaks in the pipelines. Pipeline laying works are going on at various places under Mission Bhagirata.

Villagers say officials failed to supply drinking water to them in tankers, unlike previous years.

MIGRATORY BIRDS WHICH STAYED AT ZOO RETURN HOME

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH IDC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 14

As the migratory season comes to an end, many birds that had made the Nehru Zoological Park their holiday home are beginning to make their way back. This, bird-watchers say is an annual affair as the zoo is the middle ground for birds to call their home. Since the zoo already has greenery coupled with the presence of a large water body, it becomes a viable nesting place. The Deccan Birders group, on Sunday, had a bird-watching trip.

“In the midst of buildings, the only green space that migratory birds or domestic birds find is in the zoo. Also, the different kinds of trees and the close proximity to Mir Alam Tank draws the birds towards the zoo. The presence of the two make the birds think of the zoo as a viable nesting place,” said Shafath Ulla, a former secretary of the Deccan Birders Group.

These birds actively avoid the city and prefer the guarded and protected environs of the Nehru zoo, he said. On their excursion on Sunday, the group saw some rare birds like the crows, wagtail, bee-eater and paradise flycatcher, to name a few.

J.V.D. Moorthy president of Deccan Birders, told *Deccan Chronicle*: “These birds are drawn to the zoo and they have made it a part of their flyway. The zoo plays a home away from home for them, as there is no disturbance to the ecology over there. Also, since it is the end of the migration season, many birds are flying back. They go to places like China, Tibet, Europe, Mongolia, and more.”

However, this is not just a time to see the migratory birds. Courtesy of the instinct, carnivorous birds like hawks and eagles.

SAVE | LIFE **Tiger reserve forest areas report continuing human-animal conflicts**

Attacks on wildlife at a high in Kawal

BALU PULLPAKA IDC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 14

The Kawal tiger reserve spread over Adilabad, Nirmal, Komaram Bheem-Asifabad and Mancherial districts along with reserve forest areas in Asifabad and Mancherial districts, has seen the highest number of wildlife offences during 2020-21.

Notably, the reserve forest areas in Asifabad and Mancherial districts are also scenes of continuing human-animal conflicts, particularly between

tigers moving into Telangana from Maharashtra.

According to the yearly progress report on offence cases involving wildlife for 2020-21, as on March 11 this year, the Kawal tiger Reserve has reported 21 such cases. This was followed closely by 15 offences from the forests outside of the tiger reserve in Adilabad, Echoda, Kagaznagar, Asifabad and Uttnoor forest divisions.

The killing of two people, a young man and a girl

in Asifabad district, by a tiger identified as A2 that moved between Maharashtra and these two districts, has led to an uproar among villagers demanding that the tiger be caught.

The tens of thousands of cattle driven into the forests for grazing and farming in encroached forest areas, as well as poaching of wildlife, particularly prey species such as deer on which big cats, the tiger and leopard usually depend on, has meant that these big cats increasingly

relied on cattle kills for their meals.

A2, the tiger, has already made its presence felt on this front, killing cattle often — and sometimes more than one within days — and not feeding on its kills. Typically, when in undisturbed forest areas, tigers make approximately one kill a week and feed on the carcass over that period before making their next kill.

As per the forest department’s data, of the 21 wildlife offences in Kawal tiger reserve this year, five

were within the protected area, while the rest were in the adjoining reserve forest areas. At the end of the last fiscal year, meaning March 2020, as many as 180 wildlife offences were pending in the reserve area. With none of them having been disposed of, the total pending cases as on March 11 have risen to 201. In the Kagaznagar and Asifabad forest divisions, along with the non-tiger reserve forest areas of the former united Adilabad district, there were 15 cases this year.

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOMARAM BHEEM ASIFABAD, MARCH 14

The police distributed five cycles to Kolam Adivasis of Kursiguda in the Maoist affected Govenra Grampanchayat in Tiryani mandal on Sunday.

The village Kursiguda has 40 population with 12 families and is located on the hillock, and villagers have been facing transport problems due to a lack of road connectivity.

Tiryani SI Ramarao took the initiative when the village headman Tekam Jaithu about their hardships due to lack of road connectivity to their village.

With the help of the ‘Robin Hood Army’



Tiryani police led by Additional SP Sudheendra and DSP Acheswar Rao distributes cycles to villagers of Kursiguda in Maoist affected Tiryani mandal in Komaram Bheem Asifabad district on Sunday.

—BY ARRANGEMENT

organization, the Tiryani police distributed five cycles to the villagers for their transportation to reach out to

AZHARUDDIN INAUGURATES CRICKET TOURNAMENT IN MANCHERIAL

DC CORRESPONDENT
MANCHERIAL, MAR.14

Former Indian Cricket player, congress party leader and Hyderabad Cricket Association president Mohammed Azharuddin formally inaugurated the Cricket tournament at Mancherial town on Sunday evening.

Hundreds of youth and party workers attended the event in which CLP leader Bhatti Vikramarka, and MLA Seethakka and MLC Jeewan Reddy and others participated.

Former Congress MLC K. Preamsagar Rao is

organising a cricket tournament in memory of his father late Raghubapati Rao. Addressing on the occasion, Azharuddin said they are taking steps on behalf of HCA to encourage the youth in cricket from rural areas and provide them opportunities to play at the state level.

Azharuddin said he will certainly come next time to Adilabad to enjoy the forest and nature but sure not for hunting. Mancherial district Congress president Surekha and other senior leaders were present.

OTHER STORIES
KHAMMAM TOPS
IN MLC POLLING
WITH 74.35%

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 14

More polling percentage has been registered in Khammam and Bhadradi districts than the other districts within Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduate constituency.

The overall polling percentage is 64.70 in this constituency. But, 74.35 percent of voters turned out in Khammam district, while their percentage was 73.37 in Bhadradi district. 64,816 votes were polled in Khammam district against the total 87,150 votes. The corresponding numbers in Bhadradi district were 31,313 and 42,616.

Khammam and Bhadradi polled 9-10 percent more votes than in Nalgonda and Warangal districts.

Interestingly, all parties have claimed that increased polling percentage will go in their favour. TRS candidate Palla Rajeswar Reddy said that he has received a good response in Khammam district during his campaigning. TJS candidate M. Kodandaram said as per his information, more votes have been cast in his favour.

WILL WIN BOTH
THE SEATS, SAYS
KESHAVA RAO

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 14

TRS parliamentary party leader K. Keshava Rao on Sunday sounded confident that the party would win both graduate seats of the Legislative Council and their nominees Surabhi Vanidevi from the Hyderabad-Ranga Reddy-Mahabubnagar constituency and Palla Rajeswar Reddy from the Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda constituency would romp home. Keshava Rao expressed satisfaction over the polling pattern. He supervised the voting and the arrangements provided at polling stations.

TRS, BJP men come to blows in Mahbubabad

TRS showering money to turn voters in its favour is a sign of its weakness, says TJS MLC candidate prof. Kodandaram

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 14

While voting for the graduate MLC council seat has been peaceful in most of the erstwhile Warangal district, there have been reports of clashes between TRS and BJP leaders in Bhupalpally and Mahbubabad districts.

TRS leaders allegedly attacked BJP MLC candidate G. Premender Reddy and Girijana Morch leader Hussain Naik in Nellikuduru of Mahbubabad district. Both the TRS and BJP groups clashed near a polling booth. Police managed to disperse them.

BJP leaders later sat on dharna demanding action against TRS leaders. Saffron party candidate Premender said he and some party workers went to a function hall in Nellikuduru following information that ruling party leaders were distributing money to influence voters.

"We red-handedly caught them distributing money. But they attacked us and destroyed our cameras and phones with which we filmed them. These attacks have the backing of Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao, who is desperate to win this election," Premender remarked.

However, panchayat raj minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao maintained that it was the BJP leaders who started the fight. "The BJP leaders were actually going inside a polling booth with party scarves. Our party workers told them that it is against the election code, which led to a scuffle. Police must investigate and take unbiased action against those responsible for the unrest," the minister maintained.



BJP and TRS activists clash at the polling station in Nellikuduru of Mahbubabad on Sunday. —BY ARRANGEMENT

Khammam rural witnesses more voting than urban

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 14

Rural graduate voters gave a surprise to poll experts by turning out in more numbers than their urban counterparts in Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduate constituency. About 30 mandals in Khammam and Bhadradi districts registered a voting of above 75 per cent.

In Chintakani mandal, 83.79 percent graduate voters participated in polling, with 1,510 of total 1,802 exercising their franchise. Poll percentage was 75.99 in Vemsoor mandal, 77 in Mudigonda mandal and 81 per cent in Aswaraopet mandal. Kallur mandal witnessed 2,406 voters

In another incident, CPI and TRS activists clashed in Mahbubabad over leaders of ruling party allegedly distributing money to win vot-

● A PERSON had cast another person's vote and left the polling booth. The issue came to light after the actual voter turned up. Following this, he lodged a complaint with the polling officer circle inspector concerned.

against total 3,163, accounting for 76.06 percent. In Nelakondapalli, the poll percentage registered was 79.06 percent, while in Kamepalli, it was 79.47 percent. 81.11 percent votes were polled in Dummugudem mandal and 77.35 percent in Garla mandal. 889 of 1,090 graduate voters cast their votes in Aswapuram mandal. These numbers were

ers. Telangana Jana Samithi candidate Prof. M. Kodandaram said the practice of influencing voters with money

1,833 and 2,232 in A Penuballi mandal. In Kusumanchi mandal, 1,416 voters from among total 2,710 voters turned up.

A case of impersonation was recorded at Kusumanchi. A person had cast another person's vote and left the polling booth. The issue came to light after the actual voter turned up. Following this, he lodged a complaint with the polling officer circle inspector concerned.

Transport minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar said graduate voters showed more awareness in Khammam and Bhadradi districts. He expressed confidence that TRS candidate Palla Rajeswar Reddy will win the election.

should be avoided. He said TRS showering money to turn voters in its favour is a sign of its weakness. "They are resorting to such meas-

TRS IS USING POLICE AGAINST ITS OPPONENTS, SAYS BHATTI

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MARCH 14

Congress Legislature Party leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said that Minister for Transport Puvvada Ajay Kumar uses police to win in graduate elections.

Bhatti rushed to the Khammam police station after hearing the arrest of congress leader Mikkilineni Narendar. He said that Puvvada and the TRS government had no values and freely used the police against their opponents. He said that the TRS uses all the government machinery to check the Congress candidate in graduate elections.

He argued with the circle inspector Tumma Gopi on the illegal arrest of Narendar. He said that the police showed high-handedness on Congress leaders. "The police allowed political parties leaders to appeal the voters to cast their votes, but not Congress. What is the basis of his arrest," he said.

Later, the circle inspector Gopi released the Narendar from police custody.

● BHATTI ARGUED with the circle inspector Tumma Gopi on the illegal arrest of Narendar. He said that the police showed high-handedness on congress leaders.

VOTERS TURNED OUT IN LARGE NUMBERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MARCH 14

Voters turned out in large numbers to exercise their franchise in the Nalgonda-Warangal-Khammam graduates' MLC constituency on Sunday.

The poll percentage was 83.37 in Jangaon, 65 in Warangal Urban, 77.78 in Warangal Rural, 78 in Mahbubabad, 79.38 in Mulugu and 69 in Jayashankar Bhupalpally. Long queues were witnessed outside the polling centres even though the sun was searing hot. Speculations about a poor voter turnout were thus put to rest. Voting though started at a slow rate during early hours. But it pick-

ed up in the afternoon. Voters complained of poor facilities as they stood in scorching heat. They complained that administration could have made provision for water and shade for voters.

With the ballot paper being too big with 71 candidates, voting process took a long time. Expressing their impatience, voters protested that more polling booths should have been arranged to avoid such inconvenience.

Chief electoral officer Shashank Goel inspected the voting process in Warangal. He said cases will be booked against those who have been spreading fake news regarding various candidates on social media.

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SHORT TAKES

KERALA MAHILA CONGRESS CHIEF RESIGNS

Thiruvananthapuram, March 14: In an embarrassment to the Congress in Kerala, party's women's wing president Lathika Subhash on Sunday resigned from the post hurt over the denial of Ettumanoor seat to her, shortly after the candidates list for the April 6 Assembly polls was released in New Delhi.

The 56-year-old senior leader also shaved her head sitting in front of the Congress office here as a mark of protest.

Subhash, who met reporters at the party headquarters Indira Bhavan here, soon after the KPCC chief Mullanpally Ramachandran announced the party list at New Delhi, said it was short of women candidates.

Of the list of 86 candidates released today by the Congress, only nine are women. It may be for the first time that any leader in any political party in Kerala has taken such a drastic step in protest against the party leadership for denial of poll ticket.

A known woman face among party leaders and activists, Lathika Subhash had taken over as the head of Mahila Congress in 2018 from Bindhu Krishna, now a party candidate in Kollam.

A weeping Subhash said she tonsured her head as a symbol of protest for all the women in the party, who have been toiling hard for the success of other candidates, but have been sidelined and ignored by the leadership for years.

She also said she does not want to continue in a position which could not earn her even a deserved election ticket.

YOGENDRA YADAV SAYS GOAL IS TO DEFEAT BJP

Guwahati, March 14: Activist Yogendra Yadav met jailed Rajiv Dal president Akhil Gogoi on Sunday and appealed to the people to defeat the ruling BJP in Assam.

Yadav and Kisan Sangharsh Samiti leader Sunilam met Gogoi at the Gauhati Medical College Hospital. "Gogoi has put up 19 candidates in the 86 seats in the first two phases. His goal is to ensure that the BJP is defeated," Yadav said.

"We have come with one message that the BJP should be ousted for the way it has treated farmers and taken decisions against their interests and welfare," the Samyukt Kisan Morcha leader said. Yadav said that he had met Gogoi in jail in February last year and his health condition has deteriorated considerably since then.

"He has been subjected to considerable mental torture and his medical condition has deteriorated but still the ideological clarity, mental resolve and the courage shown by him is a model," he said.

Yadav alleged that Gogoi has been put in jail to ensure that he cannot interact with the people during the elections.

"This is not a criminal trial but a political trial," he alleged. Yadav said that he had not gone to discuss politics but Gogoi was very interested to know how the farmers' agitation was progressing.

BJP POLARISING HINDUS, SAYS AIUDF CHIEF

New Delhi, March 14: Asserting that unlike in 2016 there is "no Modi wave" in the Assam Assembly polls this time, AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal on Sunday alleged that the BJP was attempting to polarise the Hindus by pointing at him, invoking the 'Mughals' and portraying the Muslims as enemies, but said the ruling party will not succeed.

Dismissing as "baseless" the BJP's charge of communalism against his All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), Ajmal claimed "no outfit was more secular" than his party in Assam, and cited the AIUDF giving substantial representation to non-Muslims in elections in the past.

Ajmal said the Assam election would be a "turning point" for the country as the BJP's defeat will begin from the state. The grand alliance, of which it is a part of along with the Congress, is fighting hard for it, he said.

The BJP will be defeated in the polls in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, and this will send a message to the entire country, he said, exuding confidence that "secular forces" will win.



West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee addresses a rally while sitting on a wheelchair to observe Nandigram Diwas at Hazra Crossing in Kolkata on Sunday. — PTI

Didi shuns bedrest, renews campaign in 'wheelchair'

Warns the saffron party of prowess of a "wounded tiger" than a dead one

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 14

Within two days of returning home from hospital against doctors' advice, and ignoring their prescription of a two weeks of bed rest, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, sitting on a wheelchair with a plaster on her left ankle, resumed her campaign for the Assembly elections on Sunday, warning the BJP of the prowess of a "wounded tiger" than a dead one.

The Trinamul Congress supremo was speaking after she led a party rally from Gandhi statue on Mayo Road to Hazra in South Kolkata. The rally took place hours before Union home minister Amit Shah's arrival on a two-day state tour and his roadshow for actor-turned-BJP candidate Hiran Chatterjee in Kharagpur of West Midnapore in the evening.

The BJP, however, suffered a massive jolt when Behala East MLA and TMC defector Sovan Chatterjee, alongwith his close friend Baishakhi Banerjee, decided to quit the BJP soon after it announced Tollywood actor Payel Sarkar's name as its candidate against his estranged wife Ratna Chatterjee of the TMC in his Assembly constituency. Chatterjee, who was the BJP (Kolkata Zone) observer, wanted a ticket either for himself or Baishakhi, a co-convenor in his wing, at the seat.

Mamata Banerjee told the crowd, "We have a big responsibility to protest democracy from the autocrats and bring it back to the common people. Evil power should be defeated and destroyed. Good power must arise. The conspiracy and ploy encircling Bengal shall cease to exist. May people of Bengal conquer all. Live peacefully and take care. Have restraint. Have faith in me. I will tour Bengal in

ECI suspends 2 IPS officers, shunts DM for Didi's injury

DC CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, MARCH 14

Cracking the whip for alleged dereliction of duty, the Election Commission of India on Sunday suspended two IPS officers, Vivek Sahay and Prawn Prakash, and transferred East Midnapore district magistrate Bibhu Goyal, an IAS officer, after the incident that left West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamul supremo Mamata Banerjee, also Z-plus category protectee, injured in Nandigram on March 10.

The ECI took the decision based on state chief secretary Alapan

Bandopadhyay's report and a joint report by special general observer Ajay Nayak and special police observer Vivek Dube. While Sahay, an additional director (security), was the director general, was the director (security) and incharge of the CM's security, Prakash was the district's superintendent of police.

On Sahay, the ECI stated, "The charges must be framed against him with-

in a week for grossly failing in discharge of his primary duty as director (security) to protect the Z+ protectee" while directing Bandopadhyay, in consultation with DGP Nirajayan Pandey, to appoint Sahay's successor and

inform the central poll panel by 1 pm on Monday.

It also instructed the state government to "identify within next three days the other proximate security personnel below director (security), who failed in their duties to prevent the incident and protect the Z+ protectee VVIP and take suitable action for their failure."

Appointing Sunil Yadav as SP (East Midnapore) the ECI added on Prakash: "...charges shall be framed against him for major failure of bandobast."

It made Smita Pandey DM (East Midnapore), shunting Goyal to a non-election post.

SHAH: BJP WILL BRING BACK 'SONAR BANGLA'

Kharagpur (WB), March 14: Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday promised that after coming to power, the BJP will be successful in ushering in "true change in West Bengal and turn the state into 'Sonar Bangla' (Golden Bengal) again."

The senior BJP leader held a colourful roadshow at Kharagpur town in Paschim Medinipur district in support of BJP candidates contesting the West Bengal Assembly election.

Shah claimed that the huge turnout in the roadshow underscored that people want change in the state under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"I promise that the BJP government will be successful in bringing 'asli parivartan' (true change) and 'Sonar Bangla' will be created again," Shah said in a brief speech at the end of the roadshow.

The roadshow, held between the local BJP office 'Premhari Bhavan' and Malancha petrol pump, took over an hour to cover the less than one kilometre stretch, as the huge gathering made it almost impossible for the motorcade to move ahead.

Shah was accompanied by BJP national general secretary in-charge of West Bengal Kailash Vijayvargiya and the party's state president Dilip Ghosh.

Thousands of people took part in the roadshow, which began after sundown, while people also gathered on rooftops and balconies in buildings on both sides of the road to watch it. Shah waved at the spectators and threw rose petals at the participants of the roadshow. — PTI

BJP fields Supriyo, Locket Chatterjee

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 14

The BJP on Sunday released a star-studded list of its candidates for the West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala Assembly polls including Union minister Babul Supriyo, actor-politician and sitting MP Locket Chatterjee, among others.

Malayalam actor Suresh Gopi, who is also a Rajya Sabha MP, has been

fielded from Kerala's Thrissur.

The BJP announced the names of 63 candidates for the West Bengal polls, including that of Union minister Babul Supriyo from Tollygunge, nominated Rajya Sabha MP Swapnan Dasgupta from Tarakeswar, former chief economic adviser to the government Ashok Lahiri from Alipurdhar and sitting MP Nishit Parmanik from Dinhat.

bigger than physical pain. So is the pain of democracy if it is trampled. I am someone who can walk 20-25 kms regularly. When my legs walk, my heart and brain also walk. It is not only my legs which are injured. My body was hurt with black marks all over it. I did not care about

these. I thank the doctors for treating me and doing the plaster. They will check my condition after seven days. I also took their permission. Besides, a team will accompany me." The CM later flew in a helicopter to Durgapur for her poll campaign in Purulia on Monday.

BACK | HOME

The ex-union minister had quit JD(U) in 2013 and formed RLSP

Kushwaha merges RLSP with JD(U)

NAYEAR AZAD | DC PATNA, MARCH 14

Putting an end to speculations, former union minister and Rashtriya Lok Samata Party (RLSP) chief Upendra Kushwaha on Sunday announced his party's merger with JD(U).

While making an announcement he said, "I firmly believe that all like-minded forces should come on one platform in the interest of the nation. So we have decided to merge RLSP with JD(U) and will work under the leadership of Nitish Kumar. It is also the demand of the current political situation".

Replying to a query



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar felicitates RLSP president Upendra Kushwaha after the party merged with JD(U) in Patna on Sunday. — PTI

about his role after the merger he said that he has left it to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar to take a

decision but hinted that he would continue to work for the improvement of education in the state.

BJP women's cell chief to face Haasan in polls

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 14

The BJP announced a list of 17 candidates for the Tamil Nadu Assembly poll out of the 20 seats allocated to it in the AIADMK-BJP alliance.

Candidates for three seats — Thali, Udhagamandalam and Villavangode — are expected to be announced soon. The BJP has already named former union minister Pon Radhakrishnan as the candidate for the Lok Sabha byelection in the southern Kanyakumari constituency. BJP state president L. Murugan will be contesting from the Dharampuram (reserved) constituency where he will be facing the DMK's Kayalvizhi Selvaraj.

The 'ghar wapsi' Saravanan, who returns to the BJP as the sitting DMK MLA from Thiruparankundram, has been rewarded with a ticket to contest the Assembly poll from the Madurai North constituency. He had been denied a ticket by DMK which led to his defection.

Actor-politician Khushboo has been given the ticket to contest for the Thousand Lights seat where she will be taking on DMK's N. Ezhilan. The much anticipated fight for the Chepauk constituency where DMK chief M.K. Stalin's son Udhayanidhi is standing as a debutant with Khushboo, which had been speculated upon, becomes a non-starter.

BJP women's cell chief Vanathi Srinivasan is the candidate for Coimbatore South, where she will be facing actor-politician Kamal Haasan and Congress' Mayura Jayakumar. She is prominent face in the Tamil Nadu BJP. Nainar Nagendran, who had surprised everyone by filing his nomination two days ago for the Tirunelveli seat, has been given the constituency. He will be facing DMK's Lakshmanan. Former IPS

'AMMA WASHING MACHINES' IN AIADMK'S POLL MANIFESTO

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 14

Among the many promises that the AIADMK has made in its poll manifesto is not only a scheme of affordable housing for all poor people but also a washing machine. This addition to the "Amma Housing Scheme" would have pleased the late chief minister J. Jayalalitha no end as she believed that the way to a woman's heart lay in reducing her household work.

Travel concessions to women, doorstep delivery of all ration items besides six free gas cylinders in a year already announced during chief minister Edappadi Palaniswami's poll campaign and a solar-powered kitchen and free Arasu cable for television connections too would be very much to the liking of women voters.

On the political front, there is also a promise to release all seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case besides pushing for dual citizenship of Sri Lankan refugees.

officer K. Annamalai is being fielded at Aravakurichi against DMK's R. Elango.

Vinoj P. Selvam will contest from Harbour, Thanigavelu at Tiruvannamalai, ex-MLA Kalivarathan at Thirukovilur, C.K. Saraswathi at Modakurichi, D. Periyasamy at Thittakudi (Reserved), Poondi S. Venkatesan at Thiruvayaru, H. Raja at Karaikudi, G. Panduranga at Virudhunagar, D. Kuppuram at Ramana-thapuram, M.R. Gandhi at Nagercoil and P. Ramesh at Colachel.

'Metro Man' in fray from Palakkad

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 14

Battlelines have been drawn for the forthcoming Assembly elections in Kerala with the Congress and BJP announcing their candidates for majority of the 140 seats on Sunday.

The BJP on Sunday announced candidates for 115 seats. 'Metro Man' E. Sreedharan will contest from Palakkad, former Mizoram governor Kumanman Raja-shekharan will fight from Nemon, the only seat held by BJP in 140 member Kerala Assembly.

In a surprise move BJP state president K. Surendran has been fielded from two seats; Manjeshwaram in Kasargod district and Konni in Pathanamthitta district.

Meanwhile, KPCC president Mullanpally Ramachandran announced the list of candidates at a press conference in Thiruvananthapuram.

Former chief minister Oommen Chandy will contest from his traditional seat Puthupally in Kottayam district. Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala will seek re-election from Haripad constituency.

In a significant move the Congress decided to field sitting MP and former chief minister late K. Karunakaran's son K. Muraleedharan from Nemon, the only constituency represented by BJP in the state. The Congress decided to field Muraleedharan from Nemon to send out a message to the electorate that it is serious about fighting the BJP.

SHORT TAKES

BODIES OF 6 PAK MINERS RECOVERED

Quetta, March 14: The bodies of six coal miners who were killed in a methane gas explosion in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province have been recovered. The explosion occurred on Friday at a depth of 1,000 feet in the Marwar area near the Afghanistan border, said Director-General of the Provincial Disaster Management Authority Naseer Khan.

He said eight workers were on duty at the time of the explosion. It is believed that the mine had collapsed due to a build-up of methane gas. "One worker, who went down to rescue his colleagues, also died after inhaling the deadly gas," Khan said.

2 KILLED, 13 HURT AT PARTY IN CHICAGO

Chicago, March 14: Gunfire erupted at a party on Chicago's South Side early Sunday, killing two people and wounding 13 others, authorities said.

Officers responded at around 4:40 a.m., police spokesman Jose Jara said in a statement. Those shot were between the ages of 20 to 44.

Jara earlier said 12 people had been shot, but police later raised the figure to 15. Seven of the wounded were taken to hospitals in serious to critical condition, fire department spokesman Larry Merritt told the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

Speaking to reporters near the scene of the shooting in Chicago's Park Manor neighbourhood, Police Superintendent David Brown said investigators were still seeking a possible motive.

IVORY COAST PM'S BODY FLOWN HOME

Abidjan, March 14: The body of Ivory Coast Prime Minister Hamed Bakayoko was flown home on Saturday, two days after he died in Germany.

Bakayoko, who turned 56 last Monday and died following cancer treatment in Germany, was popular for reaching across the political spectrum in the bitterly divided West African country. His death came just days after a rare trouble-free election in which all sides took part.

President Alassane Ouattara, dressed in a dark suit and wearing a black hat, welcomed the coffin at Abidjan's international airport.

Hundreds of supporters of Bakayoko looked on from the sidelines as the coffin was taken to a funeral home.

'COUP' PROBE: BOLIVIA EX-PREZ ANEZ ARRESTED

La Paz, March 14: Bolivia's former acting president Jeanine Anez was arrested Saturday on terrorism and sedition charges linked to the ousting of her predecessor and political rival Evo Morales.

Police were also rounding up former ministers who backed the conservative politician's caretaker government, which was in place for a year after Morales fled the country in November 2019 amid disputed elections, media reports said.

The arrests came months after Morales returned to Bolivia from exile on the back of a fresh election victory in October 2020 for the leftist Movement for Socialism (MAS) party he founded. The presidency and congress are now under the control of MAS.

POLLS: MERKEL PARTY BRACES FOR DRUBBING

Stuttgart, March 14: Germans headed to the polls in two key regional elections on Sunday, with Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives bracing for a drubbing on anger over a corruption scandal and a series of pandemic setbacks.

The votes for new regional parliaments in the states of Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Wuerttemberg are seen as a bellwether ahead of September 26's general election — which will be the first in more than 15 years not to feature Merkel. Recent surveys have shown that support for Merkel's CDU/CSU alliance has fallen to a one-year low at around 30 percent as Germans sour on its coronavirus crisis management.

"Merkel's CDU is facing a disaster," the top-selling *Bild* tabloid said.



Well-wishers turn on their phone torches as they gather at a band-stand where a planned vigil in honour of murder victim Sarah Everard was cancelled after police outlawed it due to Covid-19 restrictions, on Clapham Common, south London on Saturday.

— AFP

Crackdown on vigil for woman murdered: UK cops criticised

London, March 14: Police in London drew widespread criticism on Saturday after handcuffing mourners at a vigil for a woman who was murdered after setting out to walk home, in a case that has sparked a national debate about violence against women.

Officers scuffled with some members of the hundreds-strong crowd that gathered despite Coronavirus restrictions for a candlelit tribute close to the spot where 33-year-old marketing executive Sarah Everard disappeared on March 3.

Reclaim These Streets — who initially organised the event in south London's Clapham — condemn-

ed the actions of officers "physically manhandling women at a vigil against male violence."

Social media footage showed police restraining and handcuffing some mourners, leading to an outpouring of criticism from across the political spectrum.

Both Home Secretary Priti Patel and London mayor Sadiq Khan said they had asked for explanations from the Metropolitan police over how the vigil was handled.

And Liberal Democrats leader Ed Davey called for Metropolitan police chief Cressida Dick to resign, having "lost the confidence of millions of women in London".

The murder of Everard, who vanished after setting out to walk home from a friend's flat, has shocked the country and brought discussion around women's safety to the fore once again.

Organisers had cancelled the vigil after police outlawed it because of Covid-19 restrictions, but hundreds still turned out, with tensions overspilling as Saturday night fell.

Mourners shouted "shame on you" at police, with tensions running high as a man arrested in connection with Everard's murder is an officer.

In the hours following the vigil, rage mounted with pressure groups and politicians condemning

police actions.

Opposition Labour MP Harriet Harman condemned the "terrible" scenes at Clapham in a tweet, adding: "Met mishandled vigil plan from the outset. They should have reached agreement."

Labour leader Keir Starmer called the scenes "deeply disturbing" and also criticised the way the vigil was policed.

Caroline Nokes, the conservative chair of the women and equalities committee, said she was "truly shocked at the scenes from Clapham Common — in this country we police by consent, not by trampling the tributes and dragging women to the ground" — AFP

SNOWSTORM: 2K FLIGHTS OFF IN DENVER

Denver, March 14: More than 2,000 flights have been cancelled over the weekend at Denver International Airport as a major snowstorm strikes the region.

The National Weather Service has issued a winter storm warning, saying it expects 18 to 24 inches (46-61 cm) of heavy, wet snow to fall in Denver and Boulder from Saturday afternoon through Sunday night.

The Colorado Department of Transportation warned that road closures are likely and asked people not to make unnecessary trips. — AP

China, N. Korea loom as Blinken, Austin head to Asia

Washington, March 14: Threats from China and North Korea will loom large over the Biden administration's first Cabinet-level trip abroad, part of a larger effort to bolster US influence and calm concerns about America's role in Asia.

A senior administration said Saturday that US officials have tried to reach out to North Korea through multiple channels since

last month, but have yet to receive a response, making consultations with the reclusive country's neighbours, Japan, South Korea and China.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin are heading to Japan and South Korea for four days of talks starting Monday as the administration seeks to shore up partnerships with the two allies.

Blinken and Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, will then meet with senior Chinese officials in Anchorage, Alaska. Their first official overseas visits are intended to restore what Biden hopes will be a calming and even-keeled approach to ties after four years of transactional and often temperamental relations under the previous president, Donald Trump. — AP

WATER VISION

It will rival Ice Cube, an observatory under the Antarctic ice at a US station

Russia deploys space telescope in Lake Baikal

Lake Baikal, Russia, March 14: Russian scientists on Saturday launched one of the world's biggest underwater space telescopes to peer deep into the universe from the pristine waters of Lake Baikal.

The deep underwater telescope, which has been under construction since 2015, is designed to observe neutrinos, the smallest particles currently known. Dubbed Baikal-GVD, the telescope was submerged to a depth of 750-1,300 metres (2,500-4,300 feet), around four kilometres from the lake's shore.

Neutrinos are very hard to detect and water is an

effective medium for doing so. The floating observatory consists of strings with spherical glass and stainless steel modules attached to them.

On Saturday, scientists observed the modules being carefully lowered into the freezing waters through a rectangular hole in the ice. "A neutrino telescope measuring half a cubic kilometre is situated right under our feet," Dmitry Naumov of the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research said while standing on the lake's frozen surface.

In several years the telescope will be expanded to

● ON SATURDAY, scientists observed the modules being carefully lowered into the freezing waters through a rectangular hole in the ice.

measure one cubic kilometre, Naumov said.

The Baikal telescope will rival Ice Cube, a giant neutrino observatory buried under the Antarctic ice at a US research station at the South Pole, he added.

Russian scientists say the telescope is the largest neutrino detector in the Northern Hemisphere and Lake Baikal — the largest

Myanmar: Four people shot dead

Will oust junta: Leader of govt in hiding

Yangon, March 14: At least four people were shot dead during protests in Myanmar on Sunday, as security forces continued their violent crackdown against dissent following last month's military coup. Two of the victims were killed in Yangon, the country's largest city. One of them was shot in the head and another was shot in the abdomen in Hlaing Thar Yar Township.

A third person died in the northern city of Hpakant when police fired into a crowd of demonstrators, local media reported. A fourth victim, a woman, died after being shot in the head in Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, as security forces were conducting clearance operations.

In Yangon, video posted on social media showed crowds of people, some wearing hard hats and gas masks, running down a street amid sounds of gunfire. The demonstrators quickly sprayed vapour from fire extinguishers as they retreated. The use of fire extinguishers common now in protests across Myanmar is intended to smother tear gas and also create a vapour screen that makes it harder for police to pursue or shoot demonstrators. There were also reports of injuries from live rounds and rubber bullets

● IN YANGON, video posted on social media showed crowds of people, some wearing hard hats and gas masks, running down a street amid sounds of gunfire. The demonstrators quickly sprayed vapour from fire extinguishers as they retreated.

in other parts of Yangon, including Insein district, where billows of black smoke could be seen after security forces reportedly set roadblocks on fire.

On Saturday, the civilian leader of Myanmar's government in hiding vowed to continue supporting a revolution to oust the military leaders who seized power in the February 1 coup. Mahn Win Khaing Than, who was named the acting vice president by Myanmar's ousted lawmakers and is a member of deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi's political party, addressed the public for the first time since the coup. This is the darkest moment of the nation and the moment that the dawn is close, he said in a video posted on the shadow government's website and social media.

In order to form a federal democracy, which all ethnic brothers who have been suffering various kinds of oppressions from the dictatorship for decad-

es really desired, this revolution is the chance for us to put our efforts together," he said.

He added: We will never give up to an unjust military, but we will carve our future together with our united power. Our mission must be accomplished.

At the end of the messenger salute that has become a symbol of resistance to the military rulers. Also Saturday, security forces again opened fire on demonstrators, killing four in Mandalay, two in Pyaw in south-central Myanmar, and one in Twante, a suburb of Yangon. Details of all seven deaths were posted on multiple social media accounts, with some accompanied by photos of the victims.

The actual death toll is likely to be higher, as police apparently seized some bodies, and some of the victims suffered serious gunshot wounds that doctors and nurses working at makeshift clinics would be hard-pressed to treat. Many hospitals are occupied by security forces, and as a result are boycotted by medical personnel and shunned by protesters.

The independent UN human rights expert for Myanmar, Tom Andrews, said last week that credible reports indicated that at least 70 people had died so far. — AP

COVID CURBS: 2 ARRESTED AT DENMARK STIR

Copenhagen, March 14: Two people were arrested on the sidelines of a weekend protest against anti-Coronavirus restrictions in Denmark's capital Copenhagen, the police said Sunday.

One person was arrested for throwing fireworks at police during the Saturday march, while another was detained over violent behaviour, the police said.

The rally was organised by a group calling itself "Men in Black Denmark" which has called regular demonstrations since the end of last year against what it calls the "dictatorship" of the country's Covid-19 restrictions. Walking through firework smoke, the protesters held torches as they moved through the city centre chanting "Freedom for Denmark" and "Mette Ciao," a reference to Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen.

Local media reported that the march took place in a "sometimes intense" atmosphere, but without major incident. The protest came a day after a 30-year-old woman was sentenced to two years in jail for calling for violence during a previous "Men in Black Denmark" rally against Covid-19 restrictions in January. The case provoked a debate about the sentence which commentators deemed unusually harsh for her at times ambiguous comments.

"Are you ready to walk around and smash the city in a non-violent way?" she had told the crowd during an impromptu speech. — AFP



DECCAN Chronicle

15 MARCH 2021

Quad still regional body, but headed towards ‘near-Nato’

It is a testimony of sorts to the probable durability of the Quad — the loose, informal, association of the US, Japan, India and Australia which began life in 2007 with political criticism in India for New Delhi entering into an “alliance” with the US and its Cold War allies — that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US President Joe Biden, Australia’s PM Scott Morrison, and the Japan PM Yoshihide Suga should pen a joint article in the *Washington Post* on Sunday — just days after their virtual summit last Friday — in which they played the Quad as a conglomerate of democracies to ensure “freedom of coercion” in the Indo-Pacific, the stretch from the Indian Ocean region to Japan.

This area has borne the brunt of the all-too-visible rise of China as an economic and military power that aims to challenge the supremacy of the US on the world stage, much like the former Soviet Union had done for four decades after the Second World War.

If that was a fight against Communism and encompassed the world, with the Nato — a military alliance of the US and its West European allies — in the lead role, the Quad is projected as a “regional” institution which purports to oppose “autocracy” from the standpoint of “democracy”.

The China focus is hard to miss as none of the summitters had ‘any illusion about China’. If it weren’t for this, Mr Sullivan is unlikely to have presented the Quad summit as ‘a great day for American diplomacy’.

This is the formulation US national security advisor Jake Sullivan offered to the media in Washington after the virtual summit last Friday. He specifically rejected the “propaganda” that the Quad was the “new Nato” by noting — rightly — that the Nato was a military alliance while the Quad would work on “fundamental issues” of the economy, technology, climate and security — in particular “maritime security”.

Come to think of it, such a remit does not differ so greatly from the avatar into which Nato has evolved in the post- Cold War era, except that the Quad is posited for the present as a regional entity.

If North Korea and the military takeover in Burma are autocracy-democracy contestations in the American readout of the Sullivan press conference, there can be little question that Hong Kong, Taiwan, Xinjiang, the Senkaku Islands where China militarily rubs up against Japan, and the Chinese military intrusion into eastern Ladakh, relate squarely to China.

The China focus is hard to miss as none of the summitters had “any illusion about China”, Mr Sullivan reported. If it weren’t for this, Mr Sullivan is unlikely to have presented the Quad summit as “a great day for American diplomacy”. The US sees itself pitted against China in competition in which it intends “to prevail”. The US NSA noted that the highest-level meet of the Quad was President Biden’s first summit since he was elected fifty days ago, underlining the unusual significance of the meet. The Quad was also extolled as an “emergent institution” that was a “critical” part of the “architecture” of the Indo-Pacific region, and the leaders agreed to adopt coordinated positions on China.

The focus of the summit was not China, however. That may have made the summit uni-dimensionally adversarial. It was the common fight against Covid-19 in which American technology, Indian manufacturing, Japanese and American finance, and Australia’s “logistics” support are to contribute one billion doses of vaccines by 2022 for the Indo-Pacific area and beyond.

After the near “coup” in America this January, and the derisive calling of India an “elected autocracy” by a Swedish institution, the autocracy-democracy trope could well be under debate.

Enforcing mask rules is vital

With the fears of a second wave of the pandemic lurking around, the government seems to have decided to crack down on violators of Covid-appropriate behaviour. While the director-general of civil aviation has directed airline companies to deplane passengers who refuse to wear masks properly and even put them on a no-fly list for a certain period of time, the Maharashtra government has hired Covid marshals to impose the practice on public places, including public transport.

The sudden spurt in the number of cases being reported every day has made India once again the country with the second largest number of people infected by coronavirus, surpassing Brazil. Experts have not singled out a reason for the potential second wave but one reason can arguably be the lackadaisical approach people have towards the pandemic. People in most states have long stopped wearing masks while social gatherings go on uninterrupted as if there was no pandemic around. The opening of educational institutions and recreation avenues would have only accentuated the scene. Elections in five states scheduled for March and April are unlikely to help the situation either.

At present, six states together contribute more than four-fifth of the total number of active cases but there is no guarantee that it will not spread further. The government will have to revisit the restrictions it had imposed last year when the pandemic began spreading if it were to avoid a total national lockdown. True, there is Covid fatigue among the people but we are left with few options.

The government must re-energise the vaccination programme in the meanwhile. Reports suggest that it could take years to vaccinate at least 70 per cent of the population and attain herd immunity. This is unacceptable. India has exported more vaccines than it has used to inoculate its people. It must work with the vaccine manufacturers and the private sector in healthcare to speed up the process. A comprehensive multi-pronged approach is needed to stop a second wave, if it is in the offing.

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Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

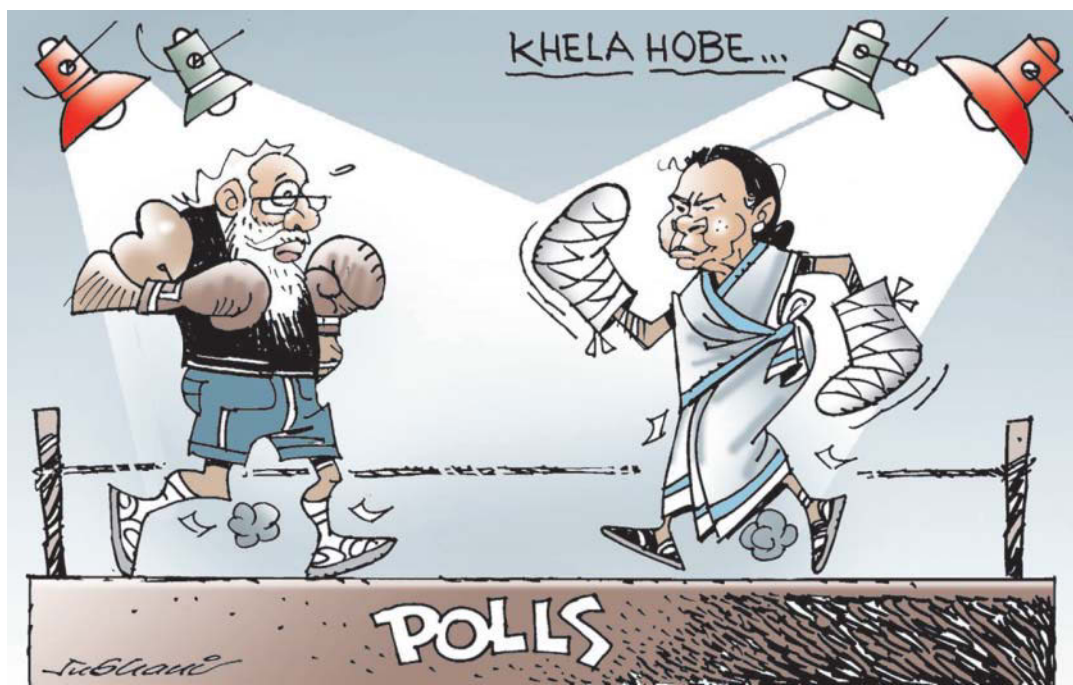
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Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burrupur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemmudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

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Subhani



To fulfil Quad promise, will India ‘self-correct’?



K.C. Singh

President Joe Biden’s decision to hold the first-ever “leaders’ summit” of the Quarilateral, or “Quad”, hosted “virtually” with the Prime Ministers of India, Japan and Australia, early in his tenure on March 12, days before his secretary of state Antony Blinken visits Japan, South Korea and China, sent a clear and unmistakable message to Beijing. Mr Biden wanted the group, with a nebulous agenda so far, to get more focused on meeting a number of contemporary challenges, many emanating from China.

The Quad has a chequered history, shaped by political developments in each country, amid unsettled debate in each nation on whether China was best managed through engagement or containment or a subtle mix of the two. The group was born in May 2007, on the sidelines of a Asean Regional Forum meeting in the Philippines. The then leaders of the four nations favoured closer engagement between the major democracies of the Indo-Pacific. Japan’s PM Shinzo Abe was a strong proponent; Australia had a right-wing Liberal Party government and US President George W. Bush was in the penultimate year of his second term. It was only in India that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh faced resistance from the Communists, who were giving “outside support” to the ruling UPA.

Thus, the preponderance of opinion favoured a low-profile meeting at the additional or assistant secretary level. I had the privilege to represent India at that historic meeting, which built on a rudimentary engagement between the four nations for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief during the deadly 2004 tsunami. China immediately understood that, the criteria for

membership being a democracy, it stood excluded, if not targeted. It made strong demarches in all the capitals opposing it.

But the favourable domestic factors altered when Prime Minister Abe lost power in September 2007 and the Labour Party won in Australia in the following December. New Australian PM Kevin Rudd, former diplomat and Sinologist, chose engagement with China over light containment or regional balancing.

Chinese assertiveness is generally traced to the 2008 financial crisis which rattled the Western financial markets. China saw itself as the bulwark that stabilised the global economy. The Chinese leadership began its power grab in a world in which the United States seemed weakened and distracted by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, it took another decade before the four nations again had their domestic politics align in the hands of right-wing parties. Prime Minister Narendra Modi won power in May 2014, President Donald Trump took charge in January 2017, Liberals trounced the Labour Party in Australia in 2013 and Mr Abe was back in office in Tokyo in 2012, to rule till 2020. The scenario was thus ripe and the Quad reincarnated in 2017. It matured gradually with meetings elevated to the ministerial level, including one hosted by Japan in person in 2020 despite the pandemic. Moreover, the China problem became clear after four years of Trumpian trade sanctions and fist-waving. Despite Chinese responsibility in letting the Covid-19 virus spread abroad, it was silent in the crucial initial phase, and after its quick economic rebound turned more aggressively to gain strategic advantage. Both its maritime ambitions and its continental territorial claims, such as the Ladakh intrusions into

Soft power is at the root of the Quad. Will the government finally realise, as foreign parliaments debate whether democracy is degrading in India, that denial is not the answer?

Indian territory in mid-2020, were pursued ruthlessly.

All that remained to be seen, before the Quad could be rallied to reach the next level, was the China policy of President Joe Biden. He showed early that with decades of experience as a senator and later as vice-president, he was for continuity with smarter calibration. The Quad leaders’ summit last week displays this new China policy. The US realises the European powers are unwilling to rock the Chinese boat as they are dependent on the Chinese market, especially the Germans and French. The British, having detached from the European Union, have little leverage to rouse their erstwhile partners and risk Chinese ire by taking up its clear violations of the Hong Kong handover agreement, contemptuously abandoning treaty obligations.

The Quad leaders delivered their statements and then interacted. The joint statement, poetically titled “The Spirit of Quad”, spells out the immediate agenda in five paras. It opens by stating two nostrums: desirability of “free and open Indo-Pacific”; and the region “anchored by democratic values”. The first addresses the core anxiety of most Asean nations on whose maritime space China has unilaterally encroached. The second was always the raison d’etre for the Quad, including at its birth in 2007. Both send a powerful signal to the region as indeed China that, unlike President Trump who used rough instruments like trade sanctions, Mr Biden will use an eclectic mix of moves to corral and undercut China.

Three working groups are to cover vaccinations, which posits the Quad as the saviour of the region from what Mr Trump

called “China flu”, climate change and critical technologies. It is realised that developed nations can’t or will not decouple from China by cutting off all trade. The strategy now is to undermine what Chinese President Xi Jinping calls “dual circulation”, a version of self-dependence on itself for markets and critical technologies. China controls over 58 per cent of the global supply of rare earths like neodymium and lithium, needed for batteries of electric vehicles or wind turbines for clean power generation. Four years ago, China controlled 90 per cent of that supply. On February 24, Mr Biden issued an executive order for a 100-day review of critical product supply chains. China continues to be critically dependent on imported advanced chips.

Therefore, in para 3 of the joint statement, the common goals and global challenges adumbrated are: economic and health impacts of Covid-19, climate change, cyber space, critical technologies, counterterrorism, quality infrastructure development and disaster relief. The need for a Quad plan for infrastructure development is a recognition that China has managed to embed its influence all across Eurasia by its Belt and Road Initiative, which need to be countered. India’s prowess in vaccine manufacturing has been recognised and financing and knowhow promised to multiply India’s vaccine exports.

But as soft power is at the root of the Quad, even Mr Modi conceded that the Quad members were “united by democratic values”. President Biden echoed that strongly. Will the BJP government finally realise, as foreign parliaments debate whether democracy is degrading in India, that denial and anger is not the answer? Nor is an agitated media counterattack or new laws to control independent news platforms. Self-correction is the answer. Otherwise, the Quad will merely be a limping Triad-plus.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

LETTERS

MASKS MUST

The DGCA needs a round of applause for the new mask rules (*No Mask: Flyers to be put on ‘no-fly’ list for 3 months, DC, March 14*). Action must be taken against people in other public places such as malls, restaurants and cinema halls where people spend some time. People are simply ignoring the mask rules.

Dr Syed Ataullah Hussaini
Secunderabad

PRIVATISATION

The government often officially declares that banks and PSUs will be privatised/disinvested. This is a matter of serious concern and causes panic among the employees and customers. The government must clarify and make it transparent the provisions and security provided for staff and customers.

G. Murali Mohan Rao
Secunderabad

JAB FOR SENIORS

I am an 81-year-old senior citizen with comorbidities and have undergone bypass surgery four months back. I had my Covid jab on March 3 and doing absolutely fine (*Rumours worry elders about taking Covid jab, DC, March 14*). There are no side-effects whatsoever. So, let not people get scared about getting vaccinated.

K.S.M. Sarma
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

People against separation, says C.M

HYDERABAD, MARCH. 14 The Chief Minister, Mr. K. Brahmananda Reddi, here today said that the Telangana issue should not be viewed in isolation of other national issues.

Addressing the general body of the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee in Gandhi Bhavan he said that only 25 per cent of the total electorate had voted in favour of separation. The meeting was called to thank the people for their massive support to the party in the recent mid-term election to the Lok Sabha.

The Chief Minister and the APCC President, Mr. P. Narasa Reddi, had expressed their satisfaction on the performance of the party in the Telangana region, the General Secretary of the party, Mr. S. Jayapal Reddi, who briefed the press.

Kishwar Desai
London Diary



Women’s Week: Meghan vs Kate, let-down nurses & Sarah Everard

Hell hath no fury than a woman scorned? Right or wrong? Those of us who had seen Meghan Markle blow into the UK, play the princess and then storm out may find it a little difficult to take everything on Oprah’s show at face value. Luckily I can’t be called a racist as I am probably as brown as her. My background in television also ensures that I automatically discount some of all “reality TV” especially if there is big money at stake. The reality is that the moment the camera is switched on, everyone acts just a little bit — because no one wants to come out looking like the bad guy or gal. I have seen it far too often — there are no re-takes in life, but plenty in television. No one “lies” but everyone has a version of what happened. And if you have an axe to grind — do the hatchet job before the opponent can step in.

International Women’s Day was on Monday last but the storms had already gathered. In sunny California, Oprah Winfrey interviewed Meghan Markle and Harry Sussex last Sunday night West Coast time on CBS. Even before the ITV showed it on

Monday, it was all over the newspapers and TV and has not gone off the air all week. That is real global TV clout. Eleven million people watched it in UK and apparently 70 million (roughly as many as UK population) worldwide.

Harry has not featured very much in the subsequent discussions. It is all about Meghan and Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge with the Queen in the background. It would be an ideal Ekta Kapoor serial — multi-generation, multi racial family with dogs and horses and palaces and international locations. May be Netflix will come back with Crown: the American sequel.

It was the apparent mention about the possible colour of the baby Meghan was carrying — which seemed to have shocked the TV audience; they should know that in India most people — without even knowing the meaning of racism — prays for a ‘gora’ child! But this one will run and run. When the wedding took place, everyone was impressed by the choir with Black British singers, the dignified presence of Meghan’s mother and the Bishop from Chicago giving his

radical sermon. At the time the Palace bathed in praise about its modern attitude. But then as we know in Indian movies, it is after interval that the tragedy sets in.

The tabloids are having a great time with the *Daily Mail* doing scores (literally) of items on Meghan every day. Piers Morgan ex Tabloid editor and TV pundit stalked off his “Good Morning Britain” show when his fellow presenters upbraided him for badmouthing Meghan. But then Meghan officially complained he had called her a liar. ITV shares fell that afternoon and Morgan went permanently next day. The Royal Family has launched a retaliatory barrage of talking up the Queen, their best weapon. There are reminiscences from round the Commonwealth as to how non-racist she is and what a sense of humour she has. All in a week’s work.

Despite the success of reaching 24 million vaccinations, Boris Johnson seemed to lose the plot, again. The week after the Budget saw millions of pounds being given away to all and sundry, he announced unapolo-

getically that nurses on the NHS will only get one per cent increase in their pay. There was widespread consternation. These are the Carona warriors — who had been applauded every Thursday evening during the first lockdown by everyone including Boris and his fiancée Carrie Symonds and their dog. And now this.

In the meantime, there is news that Carrie has refurbished the living rooms in 10 Downing Street lavishly. But the British government is so mean that there is no budget for spending any money on interior decoration of the official residence; neither at Downing Street nor Chequers the weekend home of Prime Minister which is a private donation run on private charity money. Carrie seems to have raised the money from Conservative Party donors which has caused even more mockery than if she had won it in a lottery. The moral of the story is there are those who know how to get the money — and the others can wait.

Women remained in the news, in tragic circumstances. Sarah Everard, a young woman grad-

uated from Durham University and working in a middle managerial position in London was walking across Clapham Common in South East London, not far from where we live, around 9 pm. She was returning to her home in Brixton on the other side of the Common. She never reached home and her mobile phone went silent. This was around ten days ago. On Friday the police confirmed abduction. Even worse news followed. Her body was found in the rural areas of Kent. Shockingly, the man responsible was a police officer in a senior responsible position.

On Thursday both Houses of Parliament had set aside all other business to celebrate International Women’s Day. The murder dominated the discussion, including the radical suggestion that men should be banned from stepping out after 6 pm.

What do you think?

Kishwar Desai is an award winning author and playwright. Her latest book 'The Longest Kiss: The Life And Times of Devika Rani has just been published.

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	50,792.08 -0.95
Nifty 50	15,031.00 -0.95
S&P 500*	3,943.34 0.10
Dollar (₹)	72.79 0.17
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.26 0.44
Euro (₹)	86.74 0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,059*291 0.66
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	1.625 0.098
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.232 0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.605 0.078

* As of Friday/Saturday

All-India tourist permits to be given in 30 days

In a bid to promote tourism, all-India tourist permits will be provided to operators within 30 days of online application submission, the government said. The new rules will be applicable from April 1. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has announced a new scheme, under which any tourist vehicle operator may apply for an "All India Tourist Authorisation/Permit" through online mode.

Restoration of MSME status for traders sought



The Confederation of All India Traders (Cait) has demanded restoration of the MSME status taken away in 2017 from 8 crore retail and wholesale traders who are part of the service industry. The government in June 2017 removed retail and wholesale traders from the MSME category forcing the players either borrow at a higher rate or from informal financial sources, Cait secretary general Praveen Khandelwal said.

Limit independent directors liability, CII tells Govt

Industry body CII has suggested putting in place safe harbours for independent directors, calling for proceedings against them to be initiated only when there is prima facie evidence of their involvement in a matter. The government recently concluded the exercise of decriminalising the Companies Act, 2013. The chamber said it is necessary to expressly exempt independent directors from vicarious criminal liability.

Applications invited for electronics PLI

The government has started inviting applications for the second round of large-scale electronics manufacturing under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme with a focus on electronic components like motherboards, semiconductor devices, among others. The application window for the scheme has been opened till March 31, which may be further extended, as per guidelines issued by the Meity.



■ MPC may opt for status quo in April meeting Rising inflation unlikely to trigger rate tightening

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MARCH 14

Excess liquidity in the banking system combined with volatility in fuel prices could pose an upward risk to inflation. This has led to speculation in some quarters that the Reserve Bank of India could soon be shifting into a tightening mode in tune with its global peers.

But experts feel that even with upward risks to inflation, the monetary policy committee (MPC) of the RBI may continue with the rate pause in April policy as well, given that the economic growth is faltering and Covid-19 cases are rising again. However, they expect the RBI to take some measures to drain excess liquidity in the system which has been above Rs 4-lakh crore throughout the pandemic.

Retail inflation (CPI) inched up from 4.1 per cent in January 2021 to 5.03 per cent in February. Separately, the Index of Industrial Production declined unexpectedly by 1.6 per cent in January 2021, after turning positive in December in stark contrast to market expectations.

The entire decline was led by the manufacturing sector, which saw broad-based worsening—more than two-thirds components declined. The continued contraction in manufacturing showed that there is still some distance to cover before the economy recovers.

The rate setting panel/



RAJAN CAUTIONS AGAINST DRASTIC CHANGES IN MONETARY POLICY

BIJAY KUMAR SINGH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 14

As the economy slowly comes out of the pandemic blues, former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan on Sunday cautioned that "drastic changes" in India's monetary policy framework can upset the bond market as the current system has helped in containing inflation and promoting growth.

"I believe the (monetary policy) framework has helped bring inflation down, while giving the RBI some flexibility to support the economy. It is hard to think of what would have happened if we had to run such large fiscal deficits without such a framework in place," Rajan said in an

interview.

His remarks were in response to a query on whether he was in favour of reviewing the 2-6 per cent target band for inflation under the monetary policy framework.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has the mandate to maintain retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. The current medium-term inflation target, which was notified in August 2016, ends on March 31. The inflation target for the next five years starting April 1 is likely to be notified this month.

Against this backdrop, Rajan said, "We risk upsetting bond markets if we make drastic changes in the framework". —PTI

MPC mainly factors in the retail inflation while

arriving at its monetary policy. The MPC is sched-

Govt to offload remaining stake in privatised airports

JOYEETA DEY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 14

The government plans to sell its residual stake in already privatised Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad airports as part of the ambitious Rs 2.5 lakh crore asset monetisation pipeline identified to raise additional resources, sources said.

Sale of Airport Authority of India's (AAI) remaining stake in the four airports as also 13 more airports have been identified for privatisation in 2021-22 fiscal, two people aware of deliberations at empowered committee of secretaries last month said.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation will obtain requisite approvals for divestment of equity stake of the AAI in the respective joint ventures running Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad airports, they said adding the issue is likely to go to the Cabinet for approval in the next few days.

For the 13 AAI airports identified for privatisation, the possibility of clubbing of profitable and non-profitable airports will be

BIDS INVITED FOR 392 ROUTES UNDER NEW UDAN

New Delhi, March 14: The civil aviation ministry has invited bids for 392 routes under the regional air connectivity scheme to improve domestic connectivity and make flying more affordable.

Under the Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik (Udan), which will complete four years this year, as many as 325 routes and 56 airports have been operationalised till now.

On the commencement of the Union government's 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (India@75)', around 392 routes have been proposed under Udan 4.1 bidding process, the ministry said in a release on Sunday. —PTI

explored to make more attractive packages, sources said.

In the first round of airports' privatisation under the Narendra Modi government, the Adani Group bagged contracts for six airports Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Mangaluru, Thiruvananthapuram, and Guwahati last year.

The AAI, which works under the Ministry of Civil Aviation, owns and manages more than 100 airports across the country.

While in Mumbai International Airport, Adani Group holds 74 per cent stake, the remaining 26 per cent stake is with the AAI.

In the Delhi International Airport, GMR Group holds 54 per cent and the AAI holds 26 per cent while Fraport AG and Eraman Malaysia hold 10 per cent stake each.

The AAI along with the Government of Andhra Pradesh holds 26 per cent in Hyderabad International Airport Ltd. It holds a similar stake in Bangalore International Airport along with the Karnataka Government.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had last month said the government is targeting monetising 100 assets. —PTI

888 HIGHWAY PROJECTS HANGING

New Delhi, March 14: Unhappy over delayed highway projects which amount to Rs 3.15 lakh crore, a parliamentary panel has asked Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to prioritise their completion instead of announcing new projects.

The delayed 888 projects pertain to construction of 27,665 km of national highways.

The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture, in its latest report tabled in Parliament also asked the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to prioritise its delayed road projects.

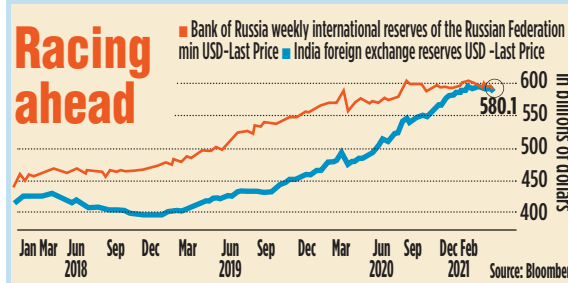
"The committee is anguished to note that 888 road projects under the Ministry are delayed at present, which amount to Rs 3,15,373.3 crore involving a length of 27,665.3 km," the 31-member panel chaired by T.G. Venkatesh said.

It also expressed concern that against a target of 6,469 km during the current fiscal, the ministry has been able to award only 2,517 km till January 2021.

Similarly, the ministry could complete construction of only 2,273 km as against the target of 4,571 km under the scheme, it said.

"The committee feels that if this trend continues, it would not be possible for the Ministry to meet the targeted timeline for completion of Bharatmala Pariyojna Phase-1 by 2025-26, which is already lagging four years behind. —PTI

India FX reserves surpass Russia's, now 4th biggest



ANIRBAN NAG & SUBHADIP SIRCAR
MARCH 14

India's foreign exchange reserves surpassed Russia's to become the world's fourth largest, as the nation's central bank continues to hoard dollars to cushion the economy against any sudden outflows.

Reserves for both countries have mostly flattened out this year after months of rapid increase. India pulled ahead as Russian holdings declined at a faster rate in recent weeks.

India's foreign currency holdings fell by \$4.3 billion to \$580.3 billion as of March 5, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday, edging out Russia's \$580.1 billion pile. China has the largest reserves, followed by Japan and Switzerland on the International Monetary Fund table.

India's reserves, enough to cover 18 months of imports, have been bolstered by a rare current-account surplus, rising inflows into the local stock market and foreign direct investment.

Analysts say a strong reserves position gives foreign investors and credit rating companies added comfort that the government can meet its debt obligations despite a deteriorating fiscal outlook and the economy heading for its first full-year contraction in more than four decades.

"India's various reserves adequacy metrics have improved significantly, particularly in the last few years," Kaushik Das, chief India economist at Deutsche Bank, said before the latest data were released. "The healthy FX reserves position should give enough comfort to RBI for dealing with any potential external shock-driven capital-stop or outflows in the period ahead."

The RBI bought a net \$88 billion in the spot forex market last year, central bank data show. That helped make the rupee the worst performer among Asia's major currencies last year and earned India a place on a US Treasury watchlist for currency manipulation. —Bloomberg

Insurers to migrate to IFRS 17 by 2023

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MARCH 14

Insurers are gearing up for implementation of the International Financial Reporting Standard 17, or IFRS 17, and risk-based capital (RBC.) Standardising the insurance accounting IFRS 17 will improve the global comparability of insurers books and increase transparency while the RBC will ensure better solvency capital for the insurers.

Irdai chairman Subhash Chandra Khuntia said in a virtual event said the regulator is working on the implementation of the IFRS 17 and the RBC

regime, urging actuaries to drive this plan.

A senior Irdai official told Financial Chronicle that an exposure draft in this regard has been shared by the regulator among the insurers, and is still in the discussion stage. Besides, the Institute of Actuaries of India (IAI) has also set up an advisory group on IFRS 17 (Ind AS 117). "It will provide users of accounts with the information they need to meaningfully understand the insurer's financial position, performance, risk exposure etc.," the official said.

The chief of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India further asked the insurers to develop products that provide cover after superannuation, saying, we find that people live longer and they need financial protection for their longer age. "How to develop some interesting products in this area should also be the focus of insurers. Some of you can develop such standard products," he said.

Subhendu Kumar Bal, IAI president and chief actuary & chief risk officer, SBI Life Insurance, said actuaries are committed to play pivotal role in driving implementation of IFRS 17.

"The effective date of IFRS 17 implementation is January 1, 2023, internationally. However, neighbouring countries like Indonesia and the Philippines would transition to new norm in 2025 and unlisted insurers in China will transition in 2026. The IAI has requested Accounting Standards Board (ASB) for deferring the implementation at least by a year," Bal said.

The IFRS 17, issued by the International Accounting Standards Board in May 2017, is supposed to replace IFRS 4 on accounting for insurance contracts on the effective date of January 1, 2023.

Anti-digital monopolies rules may hit e-com biggies

SARITHA RAI
MARCH 14

India's draft e-commerce rules to prevent creation of "digital monopolies" and aid local startups may raise costs and stymie expansion plans at companies such as Amazon.com Inc and Walmart Inc.

The draft rules seek to prescribe a code of conduct

for online retailers and define cross-border flow of user data, according to a note titled Draft E-commerce Policy.

The Narendra Modi government—beset by complaints from its vote base of small retailers—has been framing rules to reduce the dominance of Amazon and Walmart-owned Flipkart in estimat-

ed \$1 trillion overall retail market. The latest proposals build on laws that curb the two US companies from offering deep discounts, deter exclusive arrangements with preferred sellers and investing in merchants offering products on their websites.

The new e-commerce policy will address growth

and aim to "reduce prevalent market distortions," the note said. The nine-page document formed the basis of a discussion by officials of various ministries at a DPIIT meeting on Saturday.

The draft proposals seek to ensure algorithms created by e-retailers do not discriminate against sellers. —Bloomberg

SEARING | HEAT Firms expect to clock double-digit growth ACs to become costlier this summer

New Delhi, March 14: Leading AC manufacturers are betting on high double-digit growth this year even as they are firming up plans to increase prices of residential air conditioners by 5 to 8 per cent before the crucial summer season starts.

Leading players such as Voltas, Daikin, LG, Panasonic, Haier, Blue Star and Samsung are expecting a high double-digit growth, as they are betting on pent-up demand, sweltering summer and continuance of work from home, which will create demand for additional cooling products.

This season, several makers have introduced health and hygiene fea-



tures in their range of ACs, claiming to protect their customers from the virus amid the pandemic. They are also providing no-cost EMI, cashback and easy accessibility to boost sales.

Daikin is going to increase the prices by 3 to 5 per cent this month as prices of metals and compressor, which are largely

imported, have gone up.

"It will have some impact on the sales but the pent-up demand is there and summers would be hot this year. We are expecting that even if there is some price increase, demand would be there," Daikin Airconditioning India MD & CEO Kanwal Jeet Jawa said.

Panasonic, which is having "robust sales" across regions, primarily helped by the pent-up demand from last year, is also going for a price increase and expects a high double-digit growth this season.

"We are looking at market trends and plan to raise prices of ACs in the range of 6-8 per cent while refrigerators will see an

increase in the range of 3 to 4 per cent," said Panasonic India and South Asia president and CEO Manish Sharma.

Voltas has already increased the prices. "We have already implemented a price hike in the AC category...we remain optimistic about consumer sentiments," said Voltas MD & CEO Pradeep Bakshi.

Blue Star, which has increased prices from 5 to 8 per cent in January, would again increase prices by around 3 per cent from April. Despite that, the company expects around 30 per cent growth this season in comparison to 2019, said Blue Star MD B. Thiagarajan. —PTI

36 MF schemes have over 10% exposure in AT1, AT2 bonds

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 14

Mutual fund portfolios in February show none of the fund houses have crossed the threshold of 10 per cent of additional tier I and II (AT1 and AT2) bonds at the asset management company (AMC) level. However, 36 schemes spread across 13 fund houses breach the cap of 10 per cent per scheme in securities, according to an analysis done by rating agency Crisil.

The analysis also finds that the banking and public sector undertaking (PSU) fund category has the highest number of



schemes (seven) exceeding the 10 per cent cap in such securities. It is followed by the credit risk fund (five), medium duration fund (four), medium to long duration fund (four), and dynamic bond fund (three) categories.

Says Piyush Gupta, director, Crisil Funds Research, "The regula-

tor's move to 'grandfather' limits previously held is a positive move. In the medium to long term, with the restrictions in place, it could reduce appetite among MFs for these securities, thus, limiting the risk for investors.

This is prudent given the advent of hordes of individual investors into debt funds. They may not have the ability to understand MF portfolios and gauge risk, especially in such types of bonds—we saw how they were caught unaware by the recent write-offs," said Piyush Gupta, director, Crisil Funds Research.

SHORT TAKES

Bhavani to be first Indian fencer at Oly

Chennai: Tamil Nadu's C.A. Bhavani Devi has become the first ever Indian fencer to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics. The sabre fencer secured a spot in the World Cup in Hungary after the hosts lost in the quarterfinals of the team event, allowing South Korea to progress to the semifinal. Bhavani Devi qualifies through the Adjusted Official Ranking (AOR) Method. Two individual spots were up for grabs for the Asia and Oceania region based on the World Rankings as of April 5, 2021. She is ranked 45th and occupies one of the two available slots based on the ranking. Her qualification will be confirmed when the rankings are made official on the aforementioned date. However, she stepped up efforts to secure qualification for the Tokyo Games and continued to train abroad in Italy before the pandemic halted the qualification process. — PTI

Mithali 1st woman in 7k ODI runs list

Lucknow: Veteran batter Mithali Raj on Sunday added another feather to her cap by becoming the first player to complete 7,000 runs in women's ODI cricket. The Indian skipper reached the 7,000-run milestone in her 213th match, which was the fourth ODI of the ongoing five-match series against South Africa here. "Magnificent Mithali! #TeamIndia ODI skipper becomes the first woman cricketer to score 7000 ODI runs. What a performer she has been!" the BCCI tweeted. The 38-year-old, who made her international debut in 1999, was also the first player to score 6,000 runs in women's ODIs. — PTI

Giannis stars in Bucks victory

Los Angeles: Giannis Antetokounmpo's triple-double of 33 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists propelled the Milwaukee Bucks to a 125-119 NBA victory over Washington on Saturday, despite Russell Westbrook's 42-point triple-double for the Wizards. It was part of an explosion of five triple-doubles on the day — an NBA single-day record. Westbrook added 10 rebounds and 12 assists for Washington, but even with his league-leading 11th triple-double of the season the Wizards missed the production of NBA leading scorer Bradley Beal. Jrue Holiday added 18 points Milwaukee Bucks. — AFP

MAN CITY SEE OFF FULHAM TO STRETCH LEAD

London, March 14: Manchester City showed their strength in depth as a much-changed side by Pep Guardiola won 3-0 at Fulham on Saturday to stretch their lead at the top of the Premier League to 17 points. All three goals came in the first 15 minutes of the second-half as John Stones, Gabriel Jesus and Sergio Agüero struck to take City ever closer to a third league title in four years. Manchester United have two games in hand on the runaway leaders, but City need a maximum of just 14 points from their final eight games to claim the title. "The dynamic of the season is good," said Guardiola. "The second-half was so important. It is an important victory for us and we are closer," he added. Guardiola's men are still on course for a historic quadruple of trophies this season. Ahead of their return to Champions League action against Borussia Mönchengladbach in Budapest on Tuesday, the Catalan coach made seven changes with Kevin De Bruyne, İlkay Gündoğan and Riyad Mahrez among those left on the bench for the full 90 minutes. Despite still sitting in the bottom three, Fulham had been on an impressive run to haul themselves back into contention for survival, including a stunning 1-0 win away to Liverpool last weekend. — AFP

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FOOTBALL

English Premier League: West Ham vs Leeds United from 1.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1

JAI KISHAN

Ishan hits half-century on debut, powers India to series-levelling win

Ahmedabad, March 14: Ishan Kishan's fearless half-century on debut and skipper Virat Kohli's perfectly paced knock set up a series-levelling seven-wicket win for India in the second T20 International against England here on Sunday.

Kishan smashed 56 off 32 balls at the top of the order and felt completely at home on the big stage, having played enough IPL cricket in a similar environment. Chase master Kohli (73 not out off 49 balls) took charge after Kishan's dismissal to power India to victory with 13 balls to spare.

The Indian bowlers put up a disciplined effort to restrict England to 164 for six in 20 overs after Kohli opted to bowl.

India did not have the best of starts in the chase as they lost K.L. Rahul in the opening over for naught, caught by Jos Buttler behind the stumps off left-arm pacer Sam Curran.

Kishan, known for his attacking batting, made a formidable England attack look ordinary with his disdainful hitting. His sensational knock comprised five fours and four sixes.

Kishan and Kohli took the attack to the opposition to stitch a quickfire 95-run stand for the second wicket. Kishan was caught plumb in front of the wicket by Adil Rashid in the 10th over but he had done his job by then.

Kohli and Rishabh Pant (26 off 13) then shared 36 runs for the third wicket before the latter gave a simple catch to Jonny Bairstow off Chris Jordan in the 14th over to raise England's hopes. But it was not to be as Kohli



India's Ishan Kishan en route to his 56 off 32 balls against England in their second Twenty20 at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Sunday. — AFP

SCORECARD

England: Jason Roy c Kumar b Washington Sundar 46, Jos Buttler lbw b Kumar O, Dawid Malan lbw b Chahal 24, Jonny Bairstow c Yadav b Washington Sundar 20, Eoin Morgan c Pant b Thakur 28, Ben Stokes c Pandya b Thakur 24, Sam Curran not out 6, Chris Jordan not out 0. Extras (b-1, lb-10, w-5) 16. **Total (for 6 wks in 20 overs) 164.**

FoW: 1-1, 2-64, 3-91, 4-119, 5-142, 6-160. **Bowling:** Bhuvneshwar Kumar 4-0-28-1, Washington Sundar 4-0-29-2, Shardul Thakur 4-0-29-2, Hardik Pandya 4-0-33-0,

Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-34-1. **India:** K.L. Rahul c Buttler b S. Curran O, Ishan Kishan lbw b Rashid 56, Virat Kohli (c) not out 73, Rishabh Pant c Bairstow b Jordan 26, Shreyas Iyer not out 8. Extras (lb-1, nb-1, w-1) 3. **Total (for 3 wks in 17.5 overs) 166.**

FoW: 1-0, 2-94, 3-130. **Bowling:** Sam Curran 4-1-22-1, Jofra Archer 4-0-24-0, Chris Jordan 2.5-0-38-1, Tom Curran 2-0-26-0, Ben Stokes 1-0-17-0, Adil Rashid 4-0-38-1.

Shaw, Tare guide Mumbai to title

New Delhi, March 14: Skipper Prithvi Shaw's marauding 73 off 39 balls followed by former skipper Aditya Tare's unbeaten hundred guided Mumbai to their most deserving Vijay Hazare title triumph with a crushing six-wicket victory over Uttar Pradesh in one of most lopsided final on Sunday.

Opting to bat, UP rode on opener Madhav Kaushik's unbeaten 158 to post 312/4, but it was overshadowed by the Shaw blitzkrieg which set the platform for Tare to finish off the chase in style with as many as 51 balls remaining.

This is Mumbai's fourth Hazare title and the one to remember for Shaw (827 runs), who now holds the record for highest runs scored in single edition of this competition.

Shaw (73 off 39 balls; 10x4, 4x6) and fellow opener Yashasvi Jaiswal (29) gave the side an aggressive

start by conjuring 89 runs in 9.1 overs.

Shaw continued his onslaught and notched up his 50 in only 30 balls, with a six, another pull shot, but then holed in the deep off Shivam Mavi when another hundred looked imminent.

Jaiswal and Tare added 38-run stand but the left handed opener gave Shivam Sharma his first wicket, after being caught by Mavi but Mumbai were already on course with a run-rate of 8.5 runs per over.

Veteran Tare anchored the innings and found an able ally in Shams Mulani (36), as the duo took the game deep, as Mumbai cruised to the target, with 174/2 after 25 overs. — PTI

Brief Scores: Uttar Pradesh 312/4 (Madhav Kaushik 158 n.o., Akshdeep Nath 55; Tanush Kotian 2/54) lost to **Mumbai 315/4** (Aditya Tare 118 n.o., Prithvi Shaw 73).



Members of the Mumbai team pose with the Vijay Hazare Trophy in New Delhi on Sunday. — BCCI

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PROTEAS BEAT INDIA WOMEN AGAIN

Lucknow, March 14: The South African women's team's top-order batters fired in unison and helped their team clinch the five-match series against India with a seven-wicket victory in the fourth ODI here on Sunday.

Chasing 267, Lizelle Lee (69), Laura Wolvaardt (53), Mignon du Preez (61) and Lara Goodall (59 not out) shone as the visitors completed the task in 48.4 overs for an unassailable 3-1 lead in the rubber. A poor squad selection by new committee under Neetu David cost India dearly as the hosts paid the price for ignoring Shafali Verma's flair in batting and Shikha Pandey's experience in bowling. The win meant seasoned Punam Raut's third ODI hundred and veteran Harmanpreet Kaur's scintillating 35-ball 54 went in vain. — PTI

Brief scores: India 266/4 in 50 overs (Punam Raut 104, H. Kaur 54; T. Sekhukhune 2/63) lost to **South Africa 269/3** in 48.4 overs (L. Lee 69, M. du Preez 61, L. Goodall 59).

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