

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | TUESDAY | 30 MARCH 2021

**WEATHER**

Max: 39.0°C  
Min: 23.0°C  
RH: 73%  
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Humid and Partly Cloudy .  
Max/Min temp. 39/23 °C

**ASTROGUIDE**

Sarvari: Uttarayana  
Titthi: Phalguna Bahula Vidiya till 5.28 pm  
Star: Chitta till 12.21 pm  
Variyam: 5.21 pm to 6.46 pm  
Durmuhurtam: 8.42 am to 9.30 am; 11.09 pm to 11.56 pm  
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm

**HILIRI CALENDAR**

Sha'ban 16,1442 AH

**PRAYERS**  
(ROYAL MOSQUE)

Fajar: 5.40 am  
Zohar: 1.30 pm  
Asar: 4.30 pm  
Maghrib: 5.48 pm  
Isha: 8.30 pm

**SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.58 AM**  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.15 PM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 20.01 AM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 7.56 PM**

**COUNTER POINT**

**Sure win! Our party colours are dominating Holi celebrations in all poll-bound states!**

**SHORT TAKES**

**Suez reopens, megaship freed**

**Suez, Egypt:** The *MV Ever Given* was refloated and the Suez Canal reopened to traffic, sparking relief almost a week after the huge container ship got stuck and blocked a major artery for global trade. Tugboat crews sounded their foghorns in celebration after the megaship was fully dislodged from the sandy banks. Oil prices eased on the news. Before the ship was dislodged, the tailbacks reached 425 vessels.

■ Full report on Page 6

**Pak Prez, def minister test +ve**

**Islamabad:** Pakistan President Dr Arif Alvi and Defence Minister Perviz Khattak have tested positive for COVID-19, it emerged on Monday, nearly a week after Prime Minister Imran Khan had contracted the disease. "I have tested positive for COVID-19. May Allah have mercy on all COVID-affected. Had first dose of the vaccine but antibodies start developing after second dose that was due in a week. Please continue to be careful," the president tweeted on Monday.



**WORLD | 6**

**WHO report gives little new insight**



**SPORTS | 8**

**Kohli says players affected in bubble life**

**TABLOID**

**Cricketers cannot look for longer playing stints**



## YSRC shows off power in Tirupati LS seat as Gurumurthy files papers

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MARCH 29

Dr M. Gurumurthy, YSR Congress nominee for the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection, filed his nomination before the returning officer and district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu at the Collectorate here on Monday.

Amid fanfare, thousands of party men, leaders and ministers took part in the rally, which seemed like a display of the party strength both in Nellore district and the state.

Those who joined in the event included deputy chief minister Narayana Swamy, ministers Peddreddy Ramachandra Reddy, Balineni Srinivasa Reddy, Adimulapu Suresh, Mekapati Goutham Reddy, Dr Anilkumar Yadav, Perni Nani and Kodali Nani.

TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy, MLAs Anam Ramanarayana Reddy and Kakani Govardhan Reddy, MPs Adala Prabhakar Reddy and Vemireddy Prabhakar Reddy, chief whips Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy and G. Srikanth Reddy, and Tirupati legislator Bhumana Karunakar Reddy also took part in the rally.

Speaking on the occasion, Ramachandra Reddy



YSRC's Tirupati nominee Dr M. Gurumurthy with senior party leaders in a rally to file the nomination papers in Nellore on Monday.

## Jana Sena men skip BJP event

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MARCH 29

Jana Sena leaders and cadres remained conspicuous by their absence from the event organised by the BJP on Monday to file nomination papers of its nominee K. Ratna Prabha from the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat. Sources in the Jana Sena, an ally of BJP,

and Subba Reddy said people were waiting to endorse the welfare programmes of party president and Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

said they had no information about the event. Jana Sena nominee from Nellore city constituency for 2019 election, K. Vinod Reddy, also denied information about it.

He said they had also not received any instructions even from Jana Sena headquarters.

Tony, an ardent fan of Jana Sena chief Pawan

in a big way and the entire country will look up to Tirupati because of the huge victory margin the ruling party candidate is to record. Govardhan

Kalyan, who also heads the Pawan's fans association, said they had not received any message from the party. BJP MPs G. V. L. Narasimha Rao and C.M. Ramesh accompanied Ratna Prabha when she submitted her papers to Nellore district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu, the returning officer.

Reddy said that TD is frustrated following a series of defeats and the Tirupati by-election verdict would be the final nail in the TDP coffin.

## ₹125 crore wall to stop inundation

Jagan to lay foundation for 1.5 km long wall

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 29

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will lay the foundation stone for construction of a 1.5-km retaining wall at Krishna Lanka in the city on Wednesday, March 31. The estimated cost of the retaining wall is ₹125 crore.

Endowments minister Vellampalli Srinivas, along with officials, on Monday inspected the site from where work on the retaining wall is to start. Speaking on the occasion, he said the retaining wall will help solve the long-pending problem of inundation along the Krishna River banks in Vijayawada city.

Srinivas accused the earlier Telugu Desam regime of inordinately delaying construction of retaining wall. He vowed that YSRC government will complete this project whatever the odds.

Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu said the Chief Minister is keen on solving all development issues pending within the city, including the retaining wall to control floods in the city

## CM to take vaccine in Guntur on April 1

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 29

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to undergo Covid-19 vaccination at the Ward Secretariat, Bharatpeta in Guntur on April 1.

Later in the day, the Chief Minister will arrive at a convention centre in Vijayawada and take part in the orientation programme for the newly elected mayors, deputy mayors of municipal corporations and also chair-



Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

persons and vice chairpersons of municipalities.

tor Md. Imtiaz said the upcoming retaining wall, once completed, will benefit nearly 3,000 families from impact of floods in the city.

Earlier, people living in Krishnalanka, Yanamalakuduru and Ramalingeswar Nagar used to fear possible flood as heavy amounts of water was being discharged from Prakasam barrage.

## 3 killed as RTC buses collide

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIZIANAGARAM, MARCH 29

Three persons died and 43 others were injured, nine seriously, when two APSRTC buses collided head-on near Sunkarapeta in Vizianagaram district on Monday morning.

According to initial investigations, lack of visibility due to smog while overtaking led to the collision around 8 am. The deceased have been identified as Ashirwadham and

Devudu, both RTC drivers from Visakhapatnam district, and Sanyasi Naidu a passenger from Palakonda.

Nine of the seriously injured have been shifted to King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam. Six others with major injuries have been moved to hospitals in Vizianagaram for treatment. Rest of them were treated as outpatients at Maharajah District Hospital, Vizianagaram.

■ Page 2: Visibility low due to waste dumps



People at the accident spot after two RTC buses collided with each other leaving three people dead near Sunkaripeta in Vizianagaram district on Monday.

## PAWAR TO BE OPERATED FOR ABDOMEN PAIN

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC  
MUMBAI, MARCH 29

National Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar has been hospitalised due to the pain in his abdomen. The 80-year old veteran is likely to undergo a gallbladder surgery at the Breach Candy Hospital.

According to the NCP sources, Mr Pawar started feeling pain in his abdomen on Sunday evening and he was taken to the Breach Candy Hospital.

"Our party president Sharad Pawar *saheb* was feeling a little uneasy due to a pain in his abdomen last evening and was therefore taken to Breach Candy Hospital for a check up. Upon diagnosis it came to light that he has a problem in his Gall Bladder," NCP leader Nawab Malik tweeted.

"He is on blood-thinning medication which is now being stopped due to this issue. He will be admitted to the hospital on March 31 and an endoscopy and surgery will be conducted," he further added.

## UNINTERRUPTED | SUPPLY No money spent for water from out of Kadapa Water officials set new record

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, MARCH 29

The Kadapa district rural water supply department (RWS) has set a record that is unprecedented. This year, it has been providing uninterrupted supply of drinking water without spending a single rupee for transporting water to rural areas. For the corresponding three-month period last year, they spent almost ₹8 lakh for 1,370 trips.

In 2019, it was ₹22 lakh for 3,767 trips. The unique aspect of this year is that there was no need for even a single trip as the water schemes are running to more than satisfactory levels and even the interiors are getting their require-

● **THERE WAS** no need for even a single trip as the water schemes are running satisfactorily and even the interiors are getting their requirements.

ments. RWS was able to achieve the record as all reservoirs in the district are full. There has been no drinking water problem this year, thanks to the special initiatives taken up by the district administration, especially collector Chevuru Harikiran, who ensured that reservoirs were full, and appropriate management of water schemes in rural areas.

Agricultural boreholes are being rented out as and when required and linked

to nearby water schemes.

Every summer, women head to agricultural borewells or tankers to collect water. The district administration has prepared a plan to do away with this tiresome process this summer. Special attention is being paid in advance to villages that are prone to drinking water crisis like Porumamilla, Badvel, Rayachoti, Chinamandem, Lakkireddipalli, Sambepalle, Obulavaripalle, Kashinayana, Gopavaram and Railway koduru mandals.

However, it is expected that tankers would be required for some villages as the summer intensity is likely to increase from April. Plans are afoot to

supply drinking water to 562 villages in 37 mandals. Proposals have been sent to the government that Rs 1008.15 lakh would be required for this purpose. Already 99 agricultural bore wells belonging to farmers in 98 villages are being rented and drinking water is being pumped through them to the water schemes of nearby villages. It is estimated that Rs 20.33 lakh will be required for this. Also, it is estimated that Rs 89.93 lakh will be required to fill water pits set up in 90 villages for live-stock and proposals to that extent have been sent to the authorities.

■ Page 2: No water needed by vehicle till March-end

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## SHORT TAKES

## ESI WILL PROVIDE ONLINE REGISTRATION

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 29

AP to provide online registration to avail healthcare at 78 ESI dispensaries to benefit 2.5 crore workers and their families in the state soon.

Minister for labour and employment G. Jayaram inaugurated the online healthcare facility at ESI dispensary in Gunadala on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister said that the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was according top priority for welfare, education and health in the state and added that under the Aarogyasri scheme, 2,434 medical procedures were being provided. He said that for the first time, the ESI dispensary in Gunadala was provided with online facility ensuring healthcare to all and vowed efforts to make all 78 ESI dispensaries to have the a similar facility shortly.

The minister stated that in ESI hospitals, medical tests would be held and medicines would be provided free of cost in addition to providing healthcare at a cost of ₹5 lakh to the patients under the Aarogyasri scheme.

Labour principal secretary B. Udaya Lakshmi said that 43,000 workers and their 1.5 lakh dependent family members were availing healthcare facility under the ESI scheme in the city and called upon them to register their names online to avail healthcare at the dispensary to save their time.

She said that Centre's Dhanwantari scheme, was being implemented in 78 ESI dispensaries and four ESI super speciality hospitals in the state.

## POLICE II TEAM WINS OVER REVENUE II TEAM

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 29

The Police Eleven team won the friendly cricket match over the Revenue Eleven team. The final cricket match was held on Monday.

The Revenue Eleven team won the toss and chose batting and took 161 runs by losing 7 wickets in 20 overs.

The Police Eleven Team crossed the target score with 18 overs by losing five wickets. Appa Rao stood best batsman from the Police Eleven team and Rajamahendravaram Municipal Commissioner, Abhishikth Kishore bagged Best Bowler, the Special Enforcement Bureau Superintendent of Police, Sumit Garud secured Best Fielder and Ravi (Police Eleven team) bagged Man of the Match title. East Godavari District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy's wife Hema Muralidhar Reddy, Kakinada Municipal Commissioner Swapnil Dinkar Pundkar, Joint Collectors G. Lakshmi, Keerthi Chekuri and others watched the match.

Hema Muralidhar Reddy, Joint Collector G. Lakshmi, the district Superintendent of Police Nayeem Adnan Asmi, Kakinada RDO A.G. Chinni Krishna and others participated in the programme.

## NO WATER NEEDED BY TANKER TILL MARCH-END

From page 1

RWS superintendent engineer Akula Mallikarjunappa told *Deccan Chronicle* that till the end of March, no village in the district was in need of water supply by vehicles. He said that there is a possibility of providing more drinking water schemes in the next few days.

He explained that if the intensity of summer increases further, drinking water will be supplied by tankers as required.

He said proposals have been sent to the higher authorities that ₹1.315.55 lakh would be required to address the drinking water problem in the district.

He also said that a dedicated phone was set up at the RWS office. He said that if the public from any part of the district calls 08562-244145 and informs them about the drinking water problem, immediate steps will be taken to resolve the problem.



Large number of YSR Congress cadres seen taking part in a rally organised at Nellore on the occasion of the filing of nomination by party nominee for Tirupati Lok Sabha seat Dr Gurumoorthy at Nellore on Monday.

## BJP urges EC to keep YSRC under check

Ramesh said YSRC resorted to irregularities during polls

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MARCH 29

Rajya Sabha MP and BJP leader C.M. Ramesh appealed to the Election Commission to keep a tab on the ruling party during the ensuing by-election to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat. He alleged that YSRC resorted to irregularities during the recent polls to local bodies.

He was speaking to mediapersons after BJP nominee K. Rathna Prabha filed her nomination here on Monday. He said the Election Commission must ensure that the Tirupati by-election is held in a free and fair manner.

He added that they would be lodging a complaint to the EC on the atrocities of YSRC leaders on candidates of other parties in the recent civic and gram panchayat elections.

In her address, former bureaucrat Ratna Prabha, while appealing to people to vote for BJP, maintained that development was possible only with BJP-JSP.

Referring to her 40-year public service, she said people have to decide the right candidate to represent them in Parliament.

Finding fault with Congress for promising Special Category status without studying the feasibility, she said BJP had announced a special package for the benefit of the

## Modi likes Pawan Kalyan a lot, says Somu Veerraju

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 29

The BJP leaders in Andhra Pradesh appear keen on pleasing Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan and getting him to campaign for their candidate for the Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection.

State BJP president Somu Veerraju heaped praise on the actor-turned politician and recalled Prime Minister Narendra Modi's affection towards him and their bonhomie during the run-up to the 2014 general elections.

Addressing the coordination committee meeting of the BJP-Janaseena, Veerraju said Modi liked Pawan Kalyan and hence BJP leaders in the state must treat the JS chief with respect.

"Before the 2014 general

state.

She defended the Union government's decision to privatise Visakha Steel plant (VSP) as it would 'help the development of the unit'.

The BJP contender also explained that VSP employees

expressed confidence that the irrigation department can supply water to full capacity.

East Godavari collector D. Muralidhar Reddy recently convened a meeting with officials of agriculture, municipalities and irrigation departments and suggested to the irrigation officials to consider ways to release water from River Godavari till April 10 for filling up the drinking water ponds and reservoirs to meet the summer needs.

The officials are confident that the general flow in River Godavari can help fill the drinking water ponds and reservoirs.

The Polavaram project officials also have supported the plan to provide water for ten days without hurdles in the context of the project works.

KMC commissioner Swapnil Dinkar Pundkar said KMC will be able to supply drinking water once a day instead of twice a day from March 30. This step has been taken as the canals are being closed for two months. He appealed to the people to avoid using or wasting drinking water for other purposes and economise on use of water.

According to sources, the Sambamurthy reservoir gets water to only half of its full capacity. KMC officials

we should keep good company with Pawan Kalyan," he recalled.

He went on to say that the BJP always had in its mind a plan to make Pawan the leader of Andhra Pradesh. "Home minister Amit Shah also likes the Jana Sena chief," the BJP chief said. Veerraju's comments assume significance in the wake of Jana Sena avoiding contesting the Tirupati seat to help the BJP, even as this has dampened the spirits of Pawan Kalyan supporters.

parties remained silent then.

C.M. Ramesh assured them that they would safeguard VSP and the interests of its employees.

MLC Vakati Narayana Reddy and senior leaders of BJP were present on the occasion.

## Naidu asks Jagan why he failed to get special AP tag

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 29

Telugu Desam Party national president N. Chandrababu Naidu demanded the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to explain why he was unable to get special category status to AP.

Referring to the CM Jagan Reddy's earlier remarks that he wanted 25 MPs to mount pressure on the Centre to get the special status to AP, the former chief minister Naidu asked as to why he was unable to get

CASE CRACKED

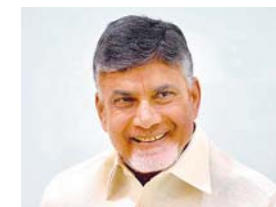
3 held taken to Vijayawada for recovery of stolen jewellery

## CID achieves breakthrough in temple theft

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 29

Crime wing of Visakhapatnam police has on Monday achieved a breakthrough in the theft case at the famous Karaka Chettu Polamamba temple with the arrest of three persons. The three have been taken to Vijayawada for recovery of the stolen gold and silver ornaments, apart from cash, sources said.

In the theft, four kg silver, 35 tolas gold orna-



N. Chandrababu Naidu

such status despite having over 27 MPs in the Parliament.

He turned critical on the YSR Congress regime on the Polavaram project issue, saying that it failed to provide water to the farmers.

Earlier, Naidu unfurled

ments; in addition to cash of the temple had been stolen.

Post their investigations, police had shown pictures of three persons to temple staff. The staff recalled that they had seen them during *Annadanam* a week before the crime. Some said they had seen the three sanitising their hands before lunch.

According to police, these three were the very people who came to Polamamba temple a few hours before the theft on March 21. They had

## EX-MP CHINTA MOHAN FILES NOMINATION

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MARCH 29

Senior Congress leader Dr Chinta Mohan filed his nomination for the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat without any fanfare in Nellore on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Chinta Mohan termed the bypoll as a historic election and said that only Congress can offer good governance against the rule of BJP. He appealed the electorate to vote for Congress to protect democracy and natural resources in the country.

Meanwhile, Communist Party of India (Marxist) nominee Yadagiri also filed his nomination accompanied by CPM State Secretary Mr Madhu.

## 47 WINNERS IN YOUTH FESTIVAL

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 29

As many as 47 artists in classical music won in the District Youth Festival, held from December 9 to 11 in 22 different cultural events.

Twenty two artists bagged first place, 22 bagged second and 11 bagged the third place. In the Classical Hindustani vocal wing, S.S.S. Vaishnavi bagged first prize and V.V. Lavanya Lakshmi Nibhanaa got second prize and Neelapu Sudhir stood third.

● CHANDRABABU NAIDU turned critical on the YSRC regime on the Polavaram project issue, saying that it failed to provide water to the farmers.

the party flag and cut a cake at the party office to mark the 40th foundation day celebrations of the party.

Speaking on the occasion, he called upon the party cadre to rededicate themselves to save the state from the misrule of the YSR Congress party.

● CID sleuths want to know whether or not the same group had been involved in decapitation of Lord Rama's idol at Ramaswamy temple in Ramateertham of Vizianagaram district.

requested for permission from the watchman to sleep on temple premises. When the watchman refused, they left on their motorcycles.

The three were arrested after the temple staff identified them. Post their

## Madanapalle couple to shift to sub-jail

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 29

The couple from Madanapalle in Chittoor district, V. Purushottam Naidu and his wife Padmaja, who have been accused of killing their daughters, have been discharged from the Government Hospital for Mental Care (GHMC) in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

The duo will be shifted to the Madanapalle sub-jail. Purushottam Naidu and Padmaja used dumbbells and a trident to kill their two young daughters - Alekhyia (27) and Divya Sai (22) on January 24 this year at their house in Madanapalle. The double murder had sent shock waves in entire Andhra Pradesh.

As investigators found that the couple had not been in good mental health, the two accused had been shifted to

● THE COUPLE has been discharged from GHMC on Monday. Purushottam Naidu and Padmaja used dumbbells and a trident to kill their two young daughters - Alekhyia (27) and Divya Sai (22) on January 24 this year at their house in Madanapalle. The double murder had sent shock waves in entire Andhra Pradesh.

GHMC, Vizag, on February 3 for treatment. Doctors at the mental institute say the couple has responded well to treatment and recovered. They are in remorse for committing the murder of their daughters.

A police team including sub-inspector and five police constables from Madanapalle have come to Vizag city and taken Purushottam Naidu and Padmaja into their custody. They will be taken to Madanapalle by road.



M.L.A. Gadde Rammoan pays tributes to party founder N.T. Rama Rao on the occasion of 40th foundation day celebrations in Vijayawada on Monday.

## TD marks party foundation day

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, MARCH 29

Telugu Desam leaders of Kadapa celebrated their party foundation day all over the district on Monday. TD Kadapa parliament constituency president Mallela Lingareddy, former MLA, and Kadapa assembly constituency in-charge V. S. Ameer Babu garlanded the statue of party founder N. T. Rama Rao at NTR Circle in Kadapa.

Later they hoisted the party flag at the district party office and cut a cake. Speaking on the occasion, Lingareddy pointed out that TDP was formed on March 29, 1982, in joint Andhra Pradesh after Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao bid good bye to his film career for taking up the cause of underprivileged and Dalits in AP. Within just nine months, he brought the party to power cross crossing the entire state and overthrowing Congress party, which was well established till then, Lingareddy pointed out.

## OFFICIALS: VISIBILITY WAS LOW AS WASTE DUMPS WERE SET ON FIRE

From page 1

As per information provided by police and RTC officials, visibility was low, as waste dumps on either side of the road had been set on fire in Sunkarapeta. After the two buses collided with one another, they got hit by another lorry laden with gas cylinders.

Soon after receiving information, Vizianagaram superintendent of

police B. Rajakumari rushed to the spot. Police engaged a crane to detach the mangled busses.

CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has expressed grief over the deaths and conveyed his condolences to the bereaved families. DIG L. K. V. Ranga Rao, Vizianagaram joint collector G. C. Kishore, and DSPs K. Anil Kumar and P. Seshadri are among those involved in rescue operations.

Polamamba temple had demanded that the gold and silver stolen must be recovered within a week's time, failing which they would launch a dharna. The leaders told reporters that a major festival of Goddess Polamamba is slated for April 27. They wanted all the ornaments retrieved by then, which include the gold crown of the Goddess.

They leaders also sought a permanent executive officer and additional security at the temple to prevent thefts in future.



## SHORT TAKES

TTD GUIDELINES  
FOR TIRUMALA  
DEVOTEES ISSUEDDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 29

Following the increase of Covid-19 cases in the last few days, the TTD has taken some precautionary measures in view of the health security of devotees coming for darshan of Lord Venkateswara from across the country to Tirumala.

From now onwards, pilgrims having a darshan slot will be allowed by road through Alipiri, only after 1 pm on the previous day of darshan. Similarly, pilgrims having darshan slots will be allowed through Alipiri/Srivari Mettu footpaths, only after 9 am on the previous day of darshan.

The TTD has appealed to the devotees to make note of these guidelines and co-operate with the temple body, following all the Covid-19 measures without deviation.

IIIT NUZVID  
GIRL STUDENT  
ENDS LIFEDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 29

A 20-year-old girl studying at IIIT in Nuzvid committed suicide at about 1 pm in Krishna district on Monday.

According to the police, M. Madhuri, hailing from Kakinada in East Godavari district, hanged herself to death with her chunni from the ceiling fan in her hostel room. The police are yet to establish the motive behind the suicide.

A case was booked under Section 174 CrPC dealing with suspicious death and an investigation is underway.

PETTY DISPUTE  
CLAIMS LIFE OF  
CLASS X STUDENTDC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 29

A 14-year-old boy, Singu Siva, studying Class X, lost his life due to a dispute at a road-side 'pakoda' pushcart at Veeravaram village in Kirlampudi mandal of East Godavari district Sunday night.

One Kovvuri Veerababu hit the pushcart with his car and beat Siva to death.

According to Kirlampudi police, Singu Yesu runs a pakoda centre with his pushcart and his son Siva used to help him in the evenings. Veerababu reportedly consumed liquor and had a quarrel with Yesu. Veerababu drove a car and hit the pushcart.

He attacked Siva with an iron rod and injured both Yesu and Siva. They were rushed to the Government General Hospital at Kakinada, where Siva succumbed. Kirlampudi police registered case.

However, relatives of the victims demanded that the government pay a compensation of ₹1 crore.

COP SAVES  
MAN STABBED  
13 TIMESDC CORRESPONDENT  
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 29

Showing presence of mind, a duty-conscious special party constable, who was in plain clothes, saved a person who was being grievously stabbed near Erranala Kottala under Three Town police station limits in Anantapur late Sunday night.

The victim suffered at least 13 stab wounds before the constable could intervene.

The special party constable Shafiulla, who was on duty for Yadiki Brahmotsavalu celebrations, was on his way to his house.

Apparently, two locals Sheikshavali and Hazivali were quarrelling over repayment of a hand loan of ₹1,000 at a deserted place between Erranala Kottala and Rajiv Colony. The quarrel took a violent turn when Sheikshavali attacked Hazivali with a sharp knife and injured him. On noticing the tiff, Shafiulla rushed to the spot and caught the accused.

The constable further alerted the Three Town police and sub-inspector Rambhoopal rushed there. They shifted the victim to Kurnool hospital.

The accused has been detained and a case was registered based on complaint by the victim's family members.

Anantapur SP Satya Esubabu appreciated Shafiulla and the Three Town police for saving a person's life.

## Festival of colours



Children in joyful mood with colours on the occasion of Holi celebrations in Vijayawada on Monday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

Property tax collection up  
by 24.20% at ₹1,174.43-cr

Ranging from a minimum of 6.5 per cent to a maximum of 52.1 per cent

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 29

With just two days left for the current fiscal's end, Andhra Pradesh's property tax collections for the year totalled ₹1,174.43 crore, up by 24.20 per cent as against the last fiscal's collection of ₹945.85 crore.

The state government fixed a proportional figure for property tax at ₹2,950.66 crore from April 1, 2020, to March 29, 2021, and collected ₹1,174.42 crore so far, registering a 39.8 per cent of the target collection. Yet, compared with the corresponding period last fiscal, the present tax collection is up by 24.2 per cent.

As for daily tax collection, AP registered a figure of ₹10.66 crore on

March 29, against a meagre ₹0.22 crore the same day last year. This was an improvement in tax collections the current fiscal.

All the 13 districts showed better performance in tax collections as compared to last fiscal, ranging from a minimum of 6.5 per cent to a maximum of 52.1 per cent. Krishna fared badly by collecting ₹130.04 crore out of proportional demand of ₹353.74 crore the current fiscal.

It collected ₹122.16 crore in the last fiscal, registering just 6.50 per cent rise in tax collection. However, Vizianagaram registered a rise in tax collections by 52.1 per cent as it collected ₹28.77 crore against the demand of ₹69.2 crore the current

● Krishna fared badly by collecting ₹130.04 crore out of proportional demand of ₹353.74 crore the current fiscal.

● The municipal authorities say that improvement in property tax collections the current fiscal is due to continuous persuasion by the newly formed ward secretariats in the state

fiscal. In the last fiscal, it collected only ₹18.91 crore.

The municipal authorities say that improvement in property tax collections the current fiscal is due to continuous persuasion by the newly formed ward secretariats in the state. As the task of property tax collection is entrusted to the administrative secretary in the ward secretariat, he or she started closely monitoring payment of taxes by property owners.

They maintain that earlier, there used to be bill collectors working in the civic bodies and their task was to serve property tax demand notices in two spells covering two and a half-years in the current fiscal to the property owners and they used to hardly find either time or interest to persuade the owners to clear their tax dues in time.

Moreover, the officials say that as they are keeping a close tab on under-assessed and un-assessed

properties and revising taxes, it is helping them get a good collection of revenue and admit that the two to three per cent of long-pending tax dues remain unchanged.

Extension of a five per cent rebate for those who clear tax dues for the entire fiscal under the 'early bird' scheme from one month to four months from April to July also helped realise some tax payments.

A senior municipal official said, "Despite the negative impact of Covid-19 in terms of earnings by property owners, they paid taxes promptly, showing a rise tax in collections. We should have got more if we were not preoccupied with arrangements for the civic body polls."

## State reports 997 Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 29

Andhra Pradesh registered 997 fresh Covid-19 cases and five deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported on Monday that out of 31,325 samples tested, 997 persons were infected with Covid-19.

Out of a total number of 1,50,21,364 samples tested so far in the state, 8,99,812 persons were infected with the virus and of them, 8,86,498 were recovered while undergoing treatment while 6,104 are still active with the virus.

Among daily Covid-19 cases, Chittoor topped the state with 181 followed by 152 in Guntur; 139 in Visakhapatnam, 110 in Krishna, 84 in Nellore, 82 in Kurnool, 61 in Srikakulam, 57 in Anantapur, 45 in Kadapa, 41 in Prakasam, 28 in East Godavari, 13 in West Godavari and four in Vizianagaram.

Chittoor district has the highest number of Coronavirus cumulative active cases at 1,183 fol-



People from different age groups wait for their turn to get vaccinated as a protection from Covid-19 at a Public Health Centre at Chinna Waltair in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

— DC

CI FINED FOR  
NOT WEARING  
FACE MASKDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 29

A police inspector was slapped fine for not wearing the face mask at Guntur on Sunday.

Guntur Urban SP Ammi Reddy had taken up a special drive to see whether the commuters were wearing face masks while moving publicly in the wake of steady rise in Coronavirus cases all over the state.

The SP arrived at Lodge Centre and was personally supervising the implementation of the special drive on wearing the face masks.

He noticed Tullur traffic CI Mallikharjuna Rao not wearing the mask while proceeding on his duty.

He called him and asked as to why he was not wearing the mask.

NGT panel to visit  
Polavaram todayDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 29

A six-member committee headed by former judge justice B. Seshasayana Reddy to visit Polavaram irrigation project site at Polavaram in West Godavari for two days from March 30 to 31.

The National Green Tribunal constituted committee will arrive at the Polavaram project site at 11 am, on March 30 and inspect

the Moola Lanka dump yard and visit the right side of the spill channel.

On March 31, the committee will arrive at Polavaram village and conduct the public hearing at government high school grounds from 10 am to 2 pm. Later, they will discuss the developments with the concerned officials.

On April 1, the committee members will meet in Rajamahendravaram for preparation of the report.

2 Nellore farmers  
electrocutedDC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MARCH 29

Two farmers succumbed to electric shocks in different parts of SPSR Nellore district on Monday.

A young farmer, Tumati Manoj Kumar, 30, of Kakivaya village in Chejarla mandal was electrocuted while he was tak-

ing up minor repairs to the agriculture motor at his farm.

In a similar incident, a farmer, Ramana Reddy from Nagendra Puram village in Atmakur mandal also breathed his last after he came into contact with a power cable close to a transformer. The police have booked cases.

Tuesdays for blood  
donation campsDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 29

State health authorities directed the blood bank medical officers to conduct voluntary blood donation camps in their respective jurisdictions every Tuesday in the state.

Health and family welfare commissioner K. Bhaskar directed the authorities to conduct VBD camps and ensure collection of more than 100-150 blood units without fail at each camp and maintain a minimum of 20 blood units for positive groups and five units for negative groups in all blood

storage centres to supply blood to maternal and other emergency cases.

APSACS project director Dr T. Geetha Prasadini in a communication sent to all the blood banks, blood storage centres and blood collection and transportation vans in the state, instructed the medical officers to arrange a voluntary blood donation camp in their respective areas by mobilising donors in coordination with the attached blood banks to enable the mother blood banks to supply blood stocks to all the blood storage centres continuously.

## 142 RED SANDERS LOGS SEIZED

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, MARCH 29

Proddatur Division forest officials seized a large quantity of red sander logs. The forest officials recovered 142 red sander logs hidden in a bend near Brahmangarimatham mandal Chaudharyvaripalle village.

Poddatur Division Forest Officer Nagarjuna Reddy said that according to reliable sources, their Badvel

Forest Officer Madhubabu, Muddanur Forest Officer Ramanareddy, Deputy Forest Officer Gurrappa, Poddatur and Badvel Forest staff seized the red sander logs in Chaudharyvaripalle village. He said that they shifted these logs to Badvel Forest Department office, valued at Rs 10 lakh. He said that an inquiry is going on to find out the accused, who brought these logs from the forest. He said that soon they will catch the accused.



Prakasam SP Siddharth Kaushal offers a flower to a child for wearing a mask during a special drive to impose Covid norms at Ongole Monday.

— DC

SP offers flowers  
for wearing maskDC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MARCH 29

Prakasam District SP Siddharth Kaushal conducted a special drive at Addanki Bus stand in Ongole and personally imposed e-challans to those who failed to wear masks as per Covid control norms on Monday.

In a token of appreciation, the SP gave flowers to motorists wearing masks and thanked them. Mr Siddharth Kaushal warned that cases would be registered against those who ignore the face masks across the district and a special drive would be conducted in the evenings within all the police stations in the district to impose fines.

Earlier in the day, the SP inaugurated the Police Highway Rest House at Martur Police Station on Monday. He has also laid the foundation stone for the new police station building in Yaddanapudi.

After inspecting the rest

house rooms, he appreciated the officers and staff for setting up the rest house in a very beautiful manner and multi-purpose use.

The SP reminded that police worked very hard and carried out their duties whether it is rain or shine, night or day, cyclones or elections and even when corona pandemic causing terror to the humanity.

The SP said the guest house is a good place to hold meetings in the Mandals on the way to Guntur and Nellore. The SP appreciated the people for their full support in the construction of the guest house and described it as a public rest house. He then felicitated the donors and thanked them.

Later, Prakasam District SP Siddharth Kaushal participated in the Bhoomi Pooja and laid the foundation stone for the new police station building to be constructed with the help of local people, leaders and donors at Yaddanapudi.

SAD | END

Three of the victims were from UP and came a few weeks ago

## 4 Holi revellers drown in N. Andhra

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 29

Despite second wave Covid threat, people came out of their homes in hordes to celebrate the Holi festival on Monday. But the festival ended in a tragedy when three youngsters drowned at sea at Kalingapatnam Beach in Srikakulam district and one youth in waterfalls in Jami village in Vizianagaram district.

In Visakhapatnam City, thousands of youngsters

were seen on the beach road, main thoroughfares on fancy bikes double and triple riding and wishing people on the way. The traffic police closed the RK Beach from Park Hotel junction to NTR statue to prevent people from swimming in the beach. The five kilometre stretch was deserted for the entire day till 6 pm. But the revellers swam at Coast Battery, Tenneti Park, Sagaraganagar, Rushkonda and Bhimili.

Much of the activity was seen in apartments,

townships and gated communities. People never wore masks or used sanitisers. They were jostling all along the day rubbing colours on each other.

In Srikakulam, a group of eight persons-all hailing from Uttar Pradesh, went to swim in the sea at Kalingapatnam under Gara mandal of Srikakulam and of them three drowned.

They were identified as Sandeep, Ajiz and Chotu. Local police and the group came to the beach to splash after celebrat-

ing the Holi festival. Though they refused to allow the youngsters to the beach citing that the beach is dangerous, the youngsters entered the beach in another route by evading the police.

While two were caught in a strong current which took them deep inside the sea, another youngster jumped into the water to rescue them. He too was dragged inside.

The police said that all the youngsters are native of Uttar Pradesh and they came to Srikakulam

district a few weeks ago in search of employment in the construction sector.

Reports from Vizianagaram said a group of nine youngsters went to Jami village to swim under waterfalls after holi celebrations. Of them 24-year-old M. Madhukumar slipped into the stream and washed away. His friends tried to save him but in vain. Madhu belongs to Boggula Dibba area of Vizianagaram city and works with a mobile shop.



DECCAN Chronicle

30 MARCH 2021

Team India's triple triumph in tough times

In sporting parlance it is said that “when the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Team India did that and perhaps more in the toughest of times when a more transmissible but probably less virulent form of the Coronavirus is rampaging across India. Staying in a bubble for months on end seemed to harden the cricketers even more as the team stood the test across formats and hemispheres against the two most competitive opponents to win all but one series of the six they played against, Australia away and England at home. The manner in which they came back to stand up and be counted each time they were floored added to the narrative of team performance in the face of odds.

The heartwarming feature of the serial triumphs was the sight of new players stepping up to the big stage and performing straightaway without fear of failure — Ishan Kishan, Suryakumar Yadav, Krunal Pandya and Prasidh Krishna in white ball cricket and Washington Sundar in Tests — to name just a few who impressed. A conveyor belt of talent with guts and gumption seemed to supply match winners in all formats. And when T. Natarajan delivered the climactic over, he nailed it six times with yorkers to stifle England's brave chase revived by an inspired Sam Curran. Ranked first in Tests and second behind England in T20s and ODIs seemed to reflect Team India's abilities accurately in the ladder of merits and Kohli's men raised their game in time to seal a triple triumph.

The impression that Team India was playing a somewhat old-fashioned game in building a platform into the middle overs to set it up for bashing the ball with uninhibited aggression in the “death” overs was dispelled when the big hitters got more space early on in the decider. The aggressive displays of Rishabh Pant and the Pandya brothers were illustrative of a team prepared to change its strategy to suit the times in which the ruling philosophy is that the cricket ball, of any colour, is there to be hit. To be able to live up to this definition of modern cricket while displaying the suppleness of wrist at the batting crease and tactical nous through variations pace with the ball is what marks this team as the one with the most potential to shine on in world cricket.

The average fan's jingoistic support of Team India may occasionally lead to excesses as in the national team being written up and talked up in the media. The equalising of ODI scores through the striking genius of Jason Roy, Jonny Bairstow and Ben Stokes demonstrated how explosive batting can be gripingly entertaining even when India's bowlers were being taken to the cleaners.

To go in without a single specialist spinner in the decider was Team India's tactical answer and this threw light on the depth of talent available now in fast bowling in a country once reputed only for the curving and twisting web of spin by slow bowlers. The cricket of the national team, often seen as a bell-wether of national aspirations, has now risen to reflect the need for resilience in challenging times. A brave new team has also been seen to adapt well to shine and offer hope in the worst of Coronavirus times.

Find a just NRC solution

The mess created by the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam does not seem to settle, what with the Union government rejecting the state government's latest demand for additional resources for completing the project. The Centre has pointed out that the state government has not even started issuing the rejection slips to those who have been excluded from the list of citizens and demanded that the exercise be completed on a ‘mission mode’.

The Assam NRC, mandated by the Assam Accord of 1985, monitored by the Supreme Court and published on August 31, 2019 had excluded more than 19 lakh people who made about 6 per cent of the total population of the state.

The BJP-led state government has already made it clear that it will not accept the register in its present form as a lot of people it considers eligible to be included in it have been left out. It has also called for a re-verification of 30 per cent of names from areas bordering Bangladesh alleging that the entire exercise was rigged with doubtful exclusions and inclusions.

Those who have failed to find their names in the register should be issued a rejection slip assigning the reason why they have been left out so that they can approach the Foreigners Tribunal and present their case.

With little movement in the process, the lives of those 19 lakh people have been in limbo ever since the register was published as they are out of the list but cannot seek legal remedy.

It's nobody's case that people who are not eligible for citizenship should be granted it; but the process to determine whether a resident is a citizen or not has to be precise, time-bound, transparent and definite.

The Assam NRC process qualifies for anything but these. The government must find a speedy, just and transparent solution to the vexed issue instead of allowing it to linger on.

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Subhani



NRIs a ‘master race’? It’s not they who are special



Mohan Guruswamy

I am sitting in a roomful of white people and NRIs bleached white by their green cards and PIO cards. They have made quite an art of telling us what's wrong with our country. True, much is. But I don't buy their story (that's also the RSS story) that Indians are God's chosen people.

How we fare in India or anywhere depends on the socio-economic ecosystem. We have all kinds of NRIs. The British NRI usually has a brown collar lowbrow job or is a small trader. Some are NHS doctors. The American NRI is often a highly paid, qualified professional. But despite the differences, they have one thing in common. They think they are a special people who have earned the right to lecture us. They must thank us we've kept India a free country with the patience to listen to them.

I recently received an email on the lines of: “We're flourishing in the US and Britain. But those who stay in India are pulled down by an outrageous system that fails to reward merit or talent, fails to allow people, businesses to grow... Once Indians go to white-ruled countries, they soar and conquer sum- mits once occupied only by whites.” There is an essential truth in this.

Typically, such self-laudatory messages, which list people like Indira Nooyi, Sunder Pichai, Satya Nadella and others who are lauded on their fleeting visits to India, don't mention S. Chandrasekar, Hargobind Khurana, V. Ramakrishnan and Amartya Sen, all Nobel laureates who have brought India much honour.

Other nationalities too do well in America.

George Soros is Hungarian. Steve Jobs was the son of Lebanese immigrants. Then there is Barack Obama, son of a Luo tribesman from Kenya, arguably the best POTUS in recent times. Now we also have Kamala Harris, a heart-beat away from the US presidency.

Boris Johnson is the grandson of a Turk and Ireland's Leo Varadkar is the son of a Mumbai doctor married to an Irishwoman. People of Chinese origin have won the Nobel eight times. US scientists of Japanese origin have won five science Nobels. Even Pakistan has a couple of Nobels. It's not just Indians who are special. What is special are the societies and systems that allow talent and genius to flourish.

This success of some Indians overseas has led to a certain NRI mentality that makes them believe they have answers to all our myriad problems just because they have done “well” overseas. They forget they are not as special as the societies that give them a better shake in life. They think they are successful as they have realised a Western lifestyle and Western incomes. Our political and bureaucratic leaders too seem to be considerably impressed by these “achievements” and the annual fests hosted by the government to laud our NRIs is typical of this mentality. We don't seem to realise that NRIs and PIOs can't do much and actually do very little to benefit India. They have few investments in India and our investment in them is still far greater.

Most of the MNC FDI in India is by resident Indians who round trip illegally ferreted out wealth from foreign havens. The biggest investment some NRIs

make in India is by investing in high interest-bearing NRI deposits in Indian banks. Most simply borrow from US banks at low rates and make a good pile each year on the interest differentials. The problem is such funds now constitute a huge Damocles sword that by being able to take flight fast is a constant threat to our house of cards — Aadhaar, PAN, debit and PIO included.

Of the \$450 billion-odd foreign exchange reserves now, over \$150 billion are reckoned to be the combined contribution from the Indian diaspora via deposits. Remittances are about \$70 billion — mostly from our less privileged NRI brethren who toil in the most adverse conditions in the Middle East, Africa and other hard places to support their families in India. The NRIs who talk at our Pravasi Bharatiya melas hardly remit any money back home, but they talk a lot telling us what we should do.

Some of them forget India adds a dozen billion-dollar companies each year and at last count we had over 250 of them. Indians head almost all of them. An Indian today is the head and major owner of the world's second biggest mobile telephony company here in India.

Indians can do well and do well in India. They send up rockets to the moon and Mars, perform heart transplants, design satellites, splice genes, write code and so many things considered at the edge of the new frontiers of technology. And they can do this far more frugally than anyone else. The Mars orbiter cost us just ₹450 crore, or about

\$73 million, and Isro succeeded in its very first attempt. There is one thing that gives the NRI a leg up.

The educated NRI, some of them, are mostly better educated. The Western university system, particularly the American, is the foundation of their collective superiority and achievement. The emphasis on self-learning and research makes them special. I would even say that an average US state university offers a better quality of education than our elite institutions like IITs and IIMs, and the *koi hai* colleges of our big cities. The quality of faculty, libraries and research facilities are far superior. What makes our elite institutions elite is the quality of the student population. They are winnowed from millions by the world's most ruthlessly competitive system. Even the beneficiaries of reservation are better than the general average. Rightly, we take the foreign educated a bit more seriously. Once, former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar exasperatedly asked me what I had learnt at Harvard? And what did I learn that I didn't know before? I told him that I learned a foreign degree makes big people like him take me seriously. To that he replied: “*Wo tho sahi hai!*”

There's a lot that is wrong with India. We can and should be doing much better. Nevertheless, India's per capita GDP has grown six times over in the past two decades. It has grown annually at about seven per cent since 2000. Its GDP in PPP terms is the third largest in the world, and many Western financial institutions, like Citibank and Standard Chartered Bank, forecast it to be the world's largest by 2050. That's just thirty years from now.

*The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.*

LETTERS

CAPITAL SHIFT

This is perhaps the “first” confident statement from the YSRC leaders on the executive capital (*Capital shift to Vizag on cards: Botsa, DC, March 29*). The assertion apparently discloses certain developments to come on account of shifting to Vizag. Bot-sa's confidence on legal hurdles getting sorted out means the “reports” making rounds in the media that the CM is going to set up his camp office in Vizag and would start functioning there from May 6, 2021 are anything but true.

Govardhana Myneedu  
Vijayawada

ELECTORAL BONDS

The Electoral Bonds do not help in improving our democracy as it favours the ruling party. There is no level-playing field among parties. If the voter is empowered to know the criminal antecedents and income of the contestant, why shouldn't he know his party's funding patterns and details?

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao  
Vizianagaram

MILITARY RANKS

The defence ministry allowed retired Short Service Commission officials of the Indian Army to use military ranks (*Retd SSC officers can use military ranks, DC, March 24*). The officers form the backbone of the Army cadre. So this decision will virtually act as morale booster for the SSC officers.

Mahesh Kumar Kachhawah  
Anantpur

3 lakhs killed in Bangla Desh

NEW DELHI, March. 29 In a desperate attempt to recapture some of the territories liberated by Bangla Desh freedom-fighters in four days of fighting, the Pakistan Army today drew in paratroopers for the first time, even as casualties rose to an estimated 300,000 people killed, mostly unarmed civilians.

The armed forces continued indiscriminate bombings and held out threats of more aerial action to terrorise the followers of Bangla Bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rehman into submissions. Troops were landed by helicopters in Dacca.

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Aakar Patel



India headed in wrong direction: Is it too late to correct course?

I wrote a book that was published a few months ago. The problem with writing books in India, especially non-fiction and related to history, is that not many people read such books. The quality of the book and the fame of the author is not important for the most part. The print run, meaning the number of copies of such books printed, is limited to a few thousand. Usually that print run lasts for years and it is not uncommon to see books that were published years ago still on the shelves.

I wrote a book translating the Urdu non-fiction writing of Saadat Hasan Manto in 2014. Manto is a very famous name in literature, but even that book is still in its first print run. The new book is called *Our Hindu Rashtra*, and it examines where India stands today with respect to its constitutional promise of being a secular and democratic state.

We are a democracy if you consider democracy simply to be free and fair elections. The rest of the world does not. In the Freedom House

rankings, which recently demoted India to “partly free”, only 40 per cent weightage was given to the political rights of citizens, where full marks were given to India for free and fair elections. It was on civil liberties and fundamental rights that India scored so badly that the good work done by free elections was negated.

My book examines this same, process but over a longer time-frame. The book is called *Our Hindu Rashtra* because in my opinion we have already become one. No constitutional or other major change is required for India to continue doing what it has been doing since 2014. In Pakistan, the exclusion of minorities has been done by law, and in India it has been done by practice. That is the only difference between the two nations. We have become as much of a religious state as Pakistan and this is a fact. Pakistan has no Hindu chief minister in its four provinces and India has no Muslim chief minister in its 28 states. Of India's ruling party's 303 Lok Sabha members, there is no

Muslim, and in 15 Indian states there is no Muslim minister. In 10 other states there is only one, who is usually given the minority affairs portfolio. Laws that specifically gave rights to religious minorities, such as propagation and occupation, have been undone by India. The various, deviously named “freedom of religion” laws that Indian states have passed actually take freedom away from us. The bans on cattle slaughter go against the right to occupation, which is a fundamental right only in name.

As a nation we do not have a problem with these things and this is why they are not a political issue (only some columnists keep whining about them all the time). This is why I say we are already a Hindu Rashtra structurally.

The other thing is that this marginalising of India's minorities and the writing of laws and policies that inconvenience them appears to be a very large part of why Indians vote the way they do. India is an economy that is in its fourth year of slow-

ing in terms of GDP growth. But there is not much media around this fact. India is the only economy in South Asia to be in recession, but we don't seem concerned by this either or it would be an election issue and a subject for the media. Similarly, unemployment, which is at historic highs and has been since 2017, is not apparently as important as laws that stop women from marrying outside their religion, or who is allowed to enter temples and such things.

We are told we are being led by a nationalist party but we are also informed that the situation in Ladakh is no different today than it was last year. The fact that newspaper reports have claimed that about 1,000 sq km of land that we could patrol earlier we cannot today has not led to any questioning of the idea that this is a nationalist government. Its nationalist credentials have been established and bolstered by the actions it has taken against its own citizens, including the minorities, and not externally. This is the other reason I believe

that we are already living in a form of Hindu Rashtra.

The question is what comes after this. My view is that it will be more of the same. It appears that many Indians are not primarily voting on the basis of issues like the economy and their own well-being as measured by data provided by the government. They seem to be as concerned and perhaps more concerned about other things, especially those that have to do with the harassment of India's minorities. Much of the media has joined them in this and avoids issues like jobs and economic decline even if a leader of Rahul Gandhi's stature raises them. This is quite remarkable in a nation that is democratic and gets offended by the world saying that it is headed in the wrong way. But every fact on the ground shows that we are, in fact, headed in the wrong way and that there is no mechanism we appear to have to correct our course.

*The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist*



SHORT TAKES

BJP NAMES CANDIDATE FOR U'KHAND BY POLL

Dehradun, March 29: The BJP on Monday named Mahesh Jeena as its candidate for the Salt Assembly constituency in Almora district of Uttarakhand, where a bypoll is scheduled to be held on April 17.

The bypoll to the seat was necessitated after the untimely death of MLA Surendra Singh Jeena due to Covid-19 in November last year.

Mahesh Jeena is the elder brother of Surendra Singh Jeena, who enjoyed the reputation of being an energetic and farsighted leader dedicated to the development of his constituency.

By fielding Mahesh Jeena from the seat, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) hopes to reap the advantage of his late brother's good work in his constituency and the sympathy factor.

Mahesh Jeena will file his nomination on Tuesday, the last date for the filing of nominations for the bypoll, state BJP media in-charge Manveer Singh Chauhan said.

According to the voters' list prepared in January, there are 95,241 voters in the Salt Assembly constituency - 48,682 men and 46,559 women.

NO TO CAA IF DMK VOTED TO POWER, SAYS STALIN

Jolarpet (TN), March 29: DMK president M.K. Stalin on Monday promised that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act will not be allowed in Tamil Nadu if his party was voted to power in the April 6 Assembly elections and slammed the ruling AIADMK for 'supporting' the BJP in Parliament on the issue.

Had the AIADMK and lone PMK member in the Rajya Sabha voted against the Bill, CAA would not have seen the light of day and the two parties should be blamed for the 'plight' of minorities all over the country, he said.

Protests had broken out against the contentious Act earlier in various parts of the country, including in Shaheen Bagh in Delhi.

Addressing an election meeting here, Stalin charged the ruling AIADMK with "enacting a drama" on the matter ahead of the polls and recalled that his party had earlier staged protests against the CAA and also launched a massive signature campaign against it.

"I assure. We are going to come to power; there is no doubt about that. So after we come to power, we will not allow this CAA (to be implemented) in Tamil Nadu. This is an assurance given by Stalin," he said. The DMK shared an "umbilical chord" with minorities and will always back them, Stalin added. He also recalled that his party had opposed the bill in Parliament.

WOMAN COP SUSPENDED FOR MISCONDUCT

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 29

A lady police inspector in Odisha was on Monday suspended after she allegedly made a pregnant woman walk for three kilometers. The cop made the woman walk for not wearing a helmet while riding pillion on a bike. Mayurbhanj superintendent of police (SP) Smit P. Parmar suspended inspector of Sarat police station Reena Baxala for gross misconduct and dereliction of duty.

As per reports, one Bikram Biruli of Matkani Sahi under Sarat police limits was on Sunday morning riding a motorcycle with his wife Gurubari Biruli, who is eight months pregnant, to a hospital in Uda-la for regular health check. The police officer Baxala allegedly stopped him during patrolling around three kilometres away from Sarat Police Station and fined him since his wife, who was riding pillion on the motorbike, was not wearing a helmet.

Bikram, as per reports, said he would pay the penalty online as he did not have cash on him but Baxala forced him to pay offline. When he could not pay up the fine amount, Baxala allegedly took him to the police station in a van while Gurubari was left stranded on the road.

When her husband did not turn up for a couple of hours, a helpless Gurubari had to walk for about three kilometres under scorching sun to reach the police station to know the whereabouts of Bikram.

Festival of colours



People play with dry colors during Holi festival in Nadia district of West Bengal on Monday, as Coronavirus cases spike across the country. A large number of people, most of them without masks, gathered on a road in Mahim area of Mumbai also on Monday morning and celebrated Holi while dancing to loud music, in violation of the guidelines. — PTI

Shuvendu pushing BJP men dressed as cops, says Didi

CM slams Shah for his attack over the death of a BJP worker's mother

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 29

A day before Union home minister Amit Shah's mega campaign rally in Nandigram, the hot seat of the West Bengal Assembly election, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee accused her nemesis Shuvendu Adhikari of flooding the constituency with BJP cadres, dressed in police uniform, to intimidate the voters the way he did it with the CPI(M) cadres for the 14 villagers' killings during her fierce movement against forcible land acquisition in 2007 during the Left rule.

The Trinamul Congress supremo made the startling revelation, which however, boomerangs on her only since Shuvendu was in her party then, after leading an eight-km long roadshow in wheel-chair on the narrow country roads in Nandigram amid a sweltering heat on Monday.

Targeting Shuvendu, Banerjee told a TMC rally in Thakurchak of Nandigram, "The CPI(M) implicated all, who had participated in the land movement, in cases but spared this is *Gaddar Babu* (a man of betrayal). Why did they? Because he was not present there. He did not take part in the movement also. He instead called in the CPI(M) and the police. It was however not the cops but the CPI(M) cadres, dressed in police uniform and wearing slippers, who had opened fire then."

She wondered, "Except me, who were else with you then? The father-son duo was not in sight for

CPM ally forced to retract its stand on 'love jihad'

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 29

A day after Kerala Congress (Mani), an important ally of the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) called for examining the veracity of love jihad complaints, the party retracted from its stand saying that it stood by Pinarayi Vijayan government's position on the issue.

During a TV programme on polls on Sunday, Kerala Congress (M) chairman Jose K. Mani took the Left camp by surprise when he expressed apprehensions over the Love Jihad issue. "The Love Jihad issue has cropped up again. There are apprehensions about the issue and the doubts related to it should be cleared," he said.

● LEFT LEADERS said love jihad was a term coined by the BJP, Sangh Parivar outfits to create communal polarisation and target minorities.

With Mani taking a stand that was diametrically opposite to the CPM led LDF's position, the Left camp came out with strong disapproval. The Left leaders including CPI state secretary Kanam Rajendran said Love Jihad was a term coined by the BJP and Sangh Parivar outfits to create communal polarisation and target minorities. "The LDF constituents should stick to the manifesto which has categorically stated the Left's stand on the issue," he said. The CPM leadership also stated that it does not

take Love Jihad theory at face value.

Jose K Mani's Christian dominated Kerala Congress (M) had joined the ruling LDF ahead of the assembly polls. The party chairman's criticism of Love Jihad is also seen in political circles as an attempt to woo the Christian votes in central Travancore particularly in Pala assembly constituency where he is pitted against the sitting MLA Mani C. Kapan.

Kerala Catholic Bishops Council (KCBC) backed Mani's statement on Love Jihad. KCBC spokesperson Fr Jacob Palackappilly told media-persons that Mani's response was "practical". He said the Church wanted principal political parties including CPM to clarify their stand.

the first 10-15 days. They came to the picture later. By then everything became normal."

Banerjee then alleged, "Same thing is happening this time also. I have information that the BJP cadres have been dressed up in police uniforms which were bought from the market. They have been put up at some guest houses. Posing as the Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Delhi police personnel, they will visit the villages

and intimidate people and ask them to vote for BJP. Remember they are not cops. They are all fake."

The CM also slammed Shah for his salvo on the TMC over the death of a BJP worker's mother after she was allegedly assaulted at Nimta in North 24 Parganas.

"I do not know why and how someone died. I condemn any death. I do not support it. In Bengal we do not like atrocities on women. But today Shah

asked in a tweet about the situation here. What is the situation in your Uttar Pradesh, say Hathras or Delhi or Rajasthan? Does he keep his mouth shut with a leukoplast when incidents happen there? Or does he keep biting his lips like Thunjo Jagannath so that words do not come out of mouth? Whenever he finds something in Bengal, he tweets which he was not aware of even earlier," Banerjee claimed.

FACING ANGER, RAJA APOLOGISES TO EDAPPADI

DC CORRESPONDENTS OOTY / CHENNAI, MARCH 29

Facing the wrath of women after his distasteful speech on TN Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami went viral in the social media, the Nilgiris MP A. Raja expressed regret for hurting the sentiments of the Chief Minister.

Tendering the apology in an obvious damage control exercise, Raja apologised while still maintaining that "the distorted version of it that was taken out of context and misunderstood by many had really hurt the Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami beyond political reasons."

Referring to an observation made by Judge Om Prakash Saini in the 2G case verdict — "misreading, selective reading, non-reading and out of context reading of files" — Raja said in a statement on Monday that those who would listen to the complete 40 minute speech of his would also give the same judgment in the present controversy.

Raja said at a media conference in Ooty that he was pained to learn from media reports that the Chief Minister was hurt even after he had clarified that at meetings in Perambalur and Cuddalore.

Rape survivor, accused paraded, video goes viral

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 29

In an outrageous incident, a minor rape survivor was tied along with the accused and paraded in a Madhya Pradesh village by her family members to 'shame' her, police said on Monday.

A video showing them being thrashed while being paraded in the village by some locals amid slogans, "Bharat Mata Ki Jai", chanted by the frenzied mob has gone viral.

The shocking incident took place in Jobat in Alirajpur district on Saturday night and the video went viral late on Sunday, leading to arrest of six people including the accused. "Two FIRs were filed in the case" Alirajpur district superintendent of police Vijay Bhagwani told this newspaper.

An FIR was filed against the 21-year-old man on charges rape of the 16-year-old girl and another FIR was filed against six family members of the rape survivor for parading and beating her, police said.

While the rape accused was booked under section 376 (sexual assault) of Indian Penal Code (IPC), five others were booked under section 294 (obscene acts in public), 355 (assault or criminal force with intent to dishonour person), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), and 342 (wrongfully confinement) of IPC. All the six accused including the alleged rapist were arrested, police said.

According to the police, the accused who is married met the rape survivor in Gujarat. They have returned to their respective villages under Jobat police station recently. Both of them were caught by the local youths on Saturday night and beaten. They were later paraded in the village.

Woman writes to CJ of K'taka HC, alleges threat from Jarkiholi

Bengaluru, March 29: In yet other twist to the sex scandal allegedly involving former minister Ramesh Jarkiholi, an unauthenticated letter said to have been written by the woman in the purported video to the Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court requesting to personally supervise the investigation, has surfaced.

In a three-page letter dated March 28, the woman has requested the court to take note of the threat she is facing in this matter and to take up the case and direct the state government to provide her protection and render her justice.

She has alleged that the SIT, which is probing the case, is completely acting to the tunes of Jarkiholi and that the government is also protecting him, and hence she has not gained confidence in the

SC GRANTS BAIL TO ACCUSED IN RAPE CASE

New Delhi, March 29: The Supreme Court on Monday granted anticipatory bail to a Goa-based man, who is the accused in a rape case lodged in Delhi last year. A vacation bench of justices Ashok Bhushan and S. Abdul Nazeer, which heard the matter on the day of Holi, said petitioner Jude Lobo has made out a "prima facie case" for the grant of anticipatory bail.

The apex court is on Holi break this week. The top court was hearing a petition filed by the accused against a March 26 order of the Delhi High Court, which rejected his anticipatory bail plea in the case.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, who appeared for Lobo, told the court that the petitioner owns a restaurant in Goa. He referred to the WhatsApp chat record of December last year between the petitioner and the alleged victim.

"We are satisfied that the petitioner has made out a prima facie case for grant of anticipatory bail. We direct that in event the petitioner is arrested, he shall be released on submitting a personal bond of ₹10,000. The petitioner shall cooperate with the investigation," the bench said in its order.

"We have perused the first information report as well as the statement recorded by the prosecutrix under section 164 CrPC," it said, adding, "The petitioner is permitted to implead the complainant as respondent no. 2. Amended memo be filed today itself and notice issued."

— PTI

HIGH | RISK India records steady increase for 19th day in a row, active cases stand at 5,36,536

Rise in Covid cases, tally now above 1.20 crore

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

India saw 54,834 new Coronavirus cases in a span of 24 hours taking the country's Covid-19 tally above 1.20 crore, according to Union health ministry data updated on Monday.

Registering a steady increase for the 19th day in a row, the active cases have increased to 5,36,536, which comprise 4.33 per cent of the total infections, while the recovery rate has further dropped to 94.32 per cent, the data stated.

A total of 54,834 new cases were reported in a day taking the country's tally of cases to 1,20,94,044, while the death toll

increased to 1,62,143 with 263 fatalities, the data showed.

As many as 74,383 new cases were recorded in a span of 24 hours on October 11. The active caseload was at its lowest at 1,35,926 on February 12 comprising 1.25 per cent of the total infections. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,13,55,993, while the case fatality rate has further has dropped to 1.34 per cent, the data stated.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed 20 lakh mark on August 7 last year, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16.

It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on

October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19 last year.

According to the Indian Council for Medical Research, 24,18,64,161 samples have been tested up to March 28 with 9,13,319 samples being tested on Saturday.

A total of 1,61,843 deaths have been reported so far in the country, including 54,181 from Maharashtra, 12,670 from Tamil Nadu, 12,504 from Karnataka, 11,006 from Delhi, 10,324 from West Bengal, 8,786 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,205 from Andhra Pradesh and 6,690 from Punjab.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths

occurred due to comorbidities. "Our figures are being reconciled with the ICMR," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh on Monday recorded the highest single-day spike in cases in the last four months, forcing the government to impose fresh curbs.

The state reported 2,323 fresh positive cases on Monday taking the tally of cases in MP to 2,91,006. The state has so far recorded 3,967 deaths.

The government has extended Sunday lockdown from eight cities to 12 cities.

14 STAFF MEMBERS OF A SHIP ANCHORED AT PARADIP TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 29

Fourteen staff members of a ship anchored at Odisha's Paradip port tested positive for Covid-19 on Sunday, reports said on Monday. All of the infected persons were shifted from Paradip to a Covid hospital in Bhubaneswar.

Reports said a total of 25 people had reached the port in the ship which had last anchored at Tuticorin Port in Tamil Nadu following a voyage across several countries in the coastal shipping range.

According to the protocol, all the staff of the ship submitted a self declaration form following which 14 of them were found symptomatic. A special team of doctors conducted a RT-PCR test of all the staff and reports of 14 of them turned out to be positive.

According to port sources, the remaining staff members of the ship have been kept in isolation and a strong vigil has been kept on them. The ship has been sanitised. Also on Sunday morning, as many as 10 students had tested positive at IIT Bhubaneswar, the reports added.



## SHORT TAKES

RAINS, FLOODING  
IN TENNESSEE:  
FOUR DEAD

Nashville (US), March 29: Heavy rains across Tennessee flooded homes and roads, prompting officials to rescue dozens of people from houses, apartments and vehicles. Authorities said four bodies were found Sunday in the flood's aftermath. A flash flood emergency was declared overnight by the National Weather Service in Nashville for the city, as well as Brentwood, Franklin and Mt. Juliet.

Major flash flooding is occurring with numerous roads, interstates, and homes flooded with water rescues ongoing.

SYRIAN FORCES  
RAID I.S. CAMP,  
ARREST NINE

Beirut, March 29: Thousands of Kurdish-led forces, with assistance from the US-led coalition, have launched a military operation at a sprawling camp in northeast Syria, in a new effort to identify and arrest Islamic State militants and tamp down escalating killings and violence in the camp.

The security sweep at the al-Hol camp will continue over time and is being conducted with "indirect" intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support provided by the coalition, US officials said Sunday.

The Kurdish-led forces said they have nearly 5,000 fighters participating in the operation and on Sunday they arrested nine people, including an Iraqi IS member who worked in recruitment.

TEMPLE IN  
RAWALPINDI  
ATTACKED

Islamabad, March 29: An over 100-year-old Hindu temple undergoing renovation in Pakistan's garrison city of Rawalpindi has been attacked by a group of unidentified people, according to a complaint registered by the police.

The incident occurred at Purana Qila area of the city on Saturday when 10 to 15 people stormed the temple at about 7.30 pm and damaged the main door and another door at the upper storey as well as the staircase.

*Dawn* reported that the security officer of the Evacuee Trust Property Board, Northern Zone, Syed Raza Abbas Zaidi, lodged an FIR at Banni police station of Rawalpindi, saying that the construction and renovation work on the temple had been going on for the last one month.

VIDEO OF FLOYD  
ARREST MAY  
APPEAR AT TRIAL

Minneapolis, March 29: A former Minneapolis police officer goes on trial on Monday in George Floyd's death, and jurors may not wait long to see parts of the bystander video that caught Derek Chauvin's knee on Floyd's neck, sparking waves of outrage and activism across the US and beyond.

Prosecutors have not said when they will play the video, but legal experts expect it to be early — maybe even in the prosecution's opening statement — as they seek to remind jurors of what is at the heart of their case. "If you're a prosecutor you want to start off strong. You want to frame the argument — and nothing frames the argument in this case as much as that video," said Jeffrey Cramer, a former federal prosecutor and managing director of Berkeley Research Group in Chicago.

Floyd was declared dead after Chauvin, who is white, pressed his knee against Floyd's neck for about nine minutes. He held his position even as Floyd's "I can't breathe" cries faded and he went limp as he was handcuffed and lying on his stomach. Chauvin is charged with unintentional second-degree murder, third-degree murder and manslaughter.

Almost all of the jurors selected during more than two weeks of questioning said they had seen at least parts of the video, and several acknowledged it gave them at least a somewhat negative view of Chauvin. But they said they could set that aside.

The trial is expected to last about four weeks at the courthouse in downtown Minneapolis, which has been fortified with concrete barriers, fencing, and barbed and razor wire. Leaders are determined to prevent a repeat of riots that followed Floyd's death, and National Guard troops have already been mobilised.

WHO report gives  
little new insight

## Covid spread from bat to animal to human

Beijing, March 29: A joint WHO-China study on the origins of Covid-19 says that transmission of the virus from bats to humans through another animal is the most likely scenario and that a lab leak is "extremely unlikely," according to a draft copy obtained by *The Associated Press*.

The findings offer little new insight into how the virus first emerged and leave many questions unanswered, though that was as expected. But the report does provide more detail on the reasoning behind the researchers' conclusions. The team proposed further research in every area except the lab leak hypothesis. The report, which is expected to be made public Tuesday, is being closely watched since discovering the origins of the virus could help scientists prevent future pandemics — but it's also extremely sensitive since China bristles at any suggestion that it is to blame for the current one.

Repeated delays in the report's release have raised questions about whether the Chinese side was trying to skew its conclusions. "We've got real concerns about the methodology and the process that went into that report, including the fact that the government in Beijing apparently helped to write it," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a recent *CNN* interview.

The report is based largely on a visit by a WHO team of international

China refutes  
Blinken charge

Beijing, March 29: China on Monday questioned US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's charge that Beijing has helped the WHO scientists to write the released report on the origins of the Coronavirus, saying that Washington is making such allegations to put pressure on the experts team. Blinken in an interview to *CNN* on Sunday expressed concern about the "methodology and the process" followed by the forthcoming WHO report on the origin of the Coronavirus.

"There is a report coming out shortly by the World Health Organisation. There are real concerns about methodology and the process that went into that report including that fact that the government in Beijing has helped to write it. But let us see

what comes out of that report," Blinken said.

He said there needs to be "accountability for the past" and "focus needs to be on building a stronger system for the future."

"I think the issue for us is to make sure that we do everything possible to prevent another pandemic even as we're working through this one or at the very least to make sure that we can mitigate in much more effective ways any damage done if something happens in the future," he said.

Asked for his reaction to Blinken's comments, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a media briefing here that, "China will never accept the groundless accusations and smearing on the epidemic related issues".

— PTI

al experts to Wuhan, the Chinese city where Covid-19 was first detected, from mid-Jan. to mid-Feb. In the draft obtained by the *AP*, the researchers listed four scenarios in order of likelihood for the emergence of the coronavirus named SARS-CoV-2.

Topping the list was

transmission from bats through another animal, which they said was likely to very likely. They evaluated direct spread from bats to humans as likely, and said that spread through "cold-chain" food products was possible but not likely.

— AP

Happy Monday:  
England embarks  
on easing curbs

London, March 29: It's being dubbed Happy Monday. England is embarking on a major easing of its latest Coronavirus lockdown that came into force at the start of the year, with families and friends able to meet up in outdoor spaces and many sports permitted once again.

And, as if right on cue, the weather is turning, with temperatures rising to levels more akin to southern Spain at this time of year. Under Monday's easing, groups of up to six, or two households, can socialise in parks and gardens once more, while outdoor sports facilities can reopen after the stark stay-at-home order, which has seen new Coronavirus cases fall dramatically over the past three months, officially ended.

After months of being cooped up at home, many people are relishing the prospect of being able to to enjoy their outdoor sport of choice, from tennis to open-air swimming. Organised team sports, such as children's football clubs, can start up again too. One of the first — if not the first — to re-open its doors on Monday was the Morley Hayes Golf Club, near Derby in central England, with players teeing off at 12:01 a.m. for a seven-hole floodlit charity tournament.

MERKEL BLAMES  
'PERFECTIONISM'  
FOR VIRUS WOES

Berlin, March 29: German Chancellor Angela Merkel has blamed her country's difficulties during the Coronavirus pandemic — from the slow vaccine rollout to the back-and-forth over lockdown rules — on "a tendency toward perfectionism" and called for greater flexibility to tackle the latest surge in cases.

In a television interview with public broadcaster *ARD* late Sunday, Merkel acknowledged that mistakes were made by her government, including on plans for an Easter lockdown. The long-time leader also expressed frustration over the actions of some of Germany's state governors, including members of her own party, who have resisted tougher restrictions they had previously agreed to. — AP

The other parts of the UK — Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — are taking broadly similar steps. In Wales, thousands of people poured onto beaches and mountain spots on Saturday, after the authorities lifted travel restrictions that have been in place since December. — AP

Thousands flee into Thailand  
after Myanmar air strikes

Yangon, March 29: Thai authorities along the country's border with Myanmar are bracing on Monday for a possible influx of more ethnic Karen villagers fleeing new airstrikes by the Myanmar military. Myanmar aircraft carried out three strikes overnight Sunday, according to Free Burma Rangers, a humanitarian relief agency that delivers medical and other assistance to villagers. The strikes severely injured one child but

caused no apparent fatalities, a member of the agency said.

Thai PM Prayut Chan-ocha on Monday acknowledged the problems across his country's western border and said his government is preparing for a possible influx of people. "We don't want to have mass migration into our territory, but we will consider human rights, too," Prayut said.

Asked about people who have already fled into Thailand, Prayut

said, "We have prepared some places, but we don't want to talk about the preparation of refugee centers at the moment. We won't go that far." About 2,500 people have crossed the Salween River into northern Thailand's Mae Hong Son province, according to Burma Free Rangers. An estimated 10,000 people are believed to be displaced in Myanmar's northern Karen state, the agency said. — AP

**SRESHTH MOVIES**

**RAJKUMAR AKELLA**  
PRESENTS

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**  
**NITHIN**

**SUDHAKAR REDDY NIKITHA REDDY MERLAPAKA GANDHI**  
**MAHATI SWARA SAGAR J YUVRAJ SR SHEKHAR SAHI SURESH**  
**SHEIK DAWOOD MURALI VAMSI-SEKHAR**



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,008.50	--
Nifty 50	14,507.30	--
S&P 500*	3,975.65	--
Dollar (₹)	72.75	0.34
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.28	0.28
Euro (₹)	85.67	0.20
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,081.147	0.33
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.69	4.42
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.123	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.641	0.027

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

CSIR-IICT in deal with industry to develop tech

In an attempt to create a public-private partnership in the scientific field, premier Indian research institute CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (CSIR-IICT) on Monday has signed a joint collaborative agreement with biotech companies to develop new technologies for biotherapeutics and vaccines to support indigenous and affordable health care solutions for humans and animals.

Ascendas India to buy 1.65 mn sq ft in Bengaluru



Ascendas India Trust (a-iTrust) will acquire 1.65 million sq ft area at an IT park in Bengaluru for an estimated deal value of ₹1,441 crore, according to a statement. Ascendas Property Fund Trustee Pte Ltd has entered into a forward purchase agreement with Gardencity Realty to acquire two buildings in an IT Park with a total net leasable area of up to 1.65 million sq ft located at Hebbal, Bengaluru.

Biocon ties up with Libbs Farma for generic drugs

Biotechnology major Biocon on Monday said its subsidiary has joined hands with Libbs Farmaceutica to launch generic drugs in Brazil. Biocon Pharma has tied up with Brazil-based Libbs Farmaceutica to introduce generic formulations in the Latin American country. This partnership, which marks the entry of Biocon's generic formulations into Brazil, builds upon a successful association with Libbs, which began in 2017 to launch Trastuzumab.

Govt gets Eols for privatisation of Neelachal Ispat

The government has received multiple expressions of interest from bidders for privatisation of Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd (NINL), DIPAM secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said. The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) had in January invited preliminary bids for strategic sale of NINL, which is a joint venture of Central and Odisha PSUs. The last date for bid submission was March 29.



Rupee unscathed in Covid year

Indian currency appreciates 4% in FY21 despite virus-induced headwinds

- Experts said sustained foreign fund inflows into India's listed stocks ensured a strong year for the Indian currency.
- For the current financial year, foreign investors have poured in \$35.22 billion, the biggest inflows after 2014-15.
- India has attracted the highest-ever foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows at \$67.54 billion during the first nine months of the financial year 2020-21.

Mumbai, March 29: The Indian rupee has logged over four per cent gain so far this fiscal, as sustained foreign fund inflows and the RBI's deft policy manoeuvring ensured a strong year for the Indian currency despite headwinds on the economic front, according to experts. The local unit is likely to average around 73.50-74 in the financial year 2021-22, as despite a vaccine, the coronavirus hysteria still persists and may continue to grapple the foreign exchange market, experts said. The financial year 2020-21 has been a roller-coaster ride for the rupee due to Covid-19. The pandemic-induced massive sell-off in the equity market led the rupee breach record

low of 76.90. However, the optimism over vaccines, easing of lockdown restrictions, infusion of stimulus by governments and central banks all over the world enthused investors with a general sense of optimism, and the rupee vaulted back to the 72 zone. HDFC Securities deputy

head (retail research) Dev-arsh Vakil said, "Despite headwinds on the economic front and larger-than-anticipated fiscal deficit, the RBI's deft manoeuvring ensured lower yields for the G-secs and substantial accretion to forex (foreign exchange) reserves this year." He added that the rupee

is up by 4 per cent against the US dollar for FY21 despite having much higher interest rates and inflation than the US. Experts said sustained foreign fund inflows into India's listed stocks ensured a strong year for the Indian currency. For the current financial year, foreign investors have poured in \$35.22 billion, the biggest inflows after 2014-15. India has attracted the highest-ever foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows at \$67.54 billion during the first nine months of the financial year 2020-21. Reliance Securities Senior Research Analyst Sriram Iyer, "The rupee movements were not surprising as Indian central bank took steps to stem

the depreciation bias of the currency through monetary policy and intervening in the forex markets." The rupee was also supported amid huge inflows into the domestic equity markets, he added. Rising COVID-19 cases in India and across the world is a major cause of concern for the rupee. But, along with that, the factor that will dictate the trend for the rupee is taper tantrum, experts said. "The Federal Reserve interest rate hike and US tax hike are the major challenges. In our view, Fed won't hike rates this year but it will indicate a slow and steady tapering of asset purchases before the end of the year," Gupta said. —PTI

OTT time cut as normalcy is back in India

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 29

With normalcy returning, the time spent by users on OTT platforms has dropped below lockdown levels in February 2021. However, subscriptions of OTT platforms remain higher by 35 per cent compared to April 2020 levels. The user time spent on OTT platforms have dropped in February compared to April levels. In April 2020, the time spent on platforms stood at 200 billion minutes and this had gone up to a high of 239 billion minutes in October 2020. Since then, there has been a gradual decline in the time spent by users, but had still remained higher compared to April levels. However, compared to April 2020, there has been a drop of 6 per cent in February 2021 when users spent 188 billion minutes monthly, finds RedSeer Consulting. The decline in time is mostly because of the drop in engagement as users have started moving out with normalcy returning and their favourite TV soaps starting again. However, with more OTT releases in the pipeline and efforts by the players to improve the product, the engagement is likely to increase in the coming months. Overall, video streaming platforms have been seeing significant growth after the pandemic. As offline entertainment shut down, there has been

- The user time spent on OTT platforms have dropped in February compared to April levels, which the country was under lockdown.
- In April 2020, the time spent on platforms stood at 200 billion minutes and this had gone up to a high of 239 billion minutes in October 2020.

a complete shift to online streaming. With users not willing to step out of their houses, production houses of mainstream movies and OTT platforms started releasing new content online while producing more originals. This saw the subscriber base going up from 23 million in April 2020 to 31 million in February 2021. As a result, subscription revenues grew 42 per cent from \$49 million to \$68 million during the period. Among the reasons that accelerated the shift to OTT platforms, the number of new launches increased and several new platforms like Hotstar+ Disney, Voot Select and multiple regional SVD platforms like HoiChoi, SunNXT were launched. Rise in smart TV users and online users too helped the growth. The telecom industry and broadband players have begun promoting OTT platforms with bundling plans.

DRL expects approval for Sputnik very soon

Hyderabad, March 28: Pharma major Dr Reddy's Laboratories expects the Russian coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V to get approval from the Indian regulator in the next few weeks, a company official has said. "We expect to get the approval in the next few weeks. It is a two dose vaccine. You take the first dose on day zero and the second one on day 21. The peak immunity develops somewhere between day 28 to day 42. So, it is a two-dose vaccine and we expect it to be available in the next few weeks," Deepak Sapra, the company CEO, APIs and

Services, said. Sapra, who was speaking in a webinar on Sunday evening, was asked as to how soon Sputnik would be available and whether it is a one dose or two doses vaccine. Dr Reddy's has partnered with the Russia Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) to bring the Sputnik V vaccine to India and other countries, he said. Observing that trials of the vaccine have been conducted in Russia, India, the UAE and others, he said the vaccine demonstrated an efficacy of 91.6 per cent as published in journal Lancet. —PTI

Micro lenders adopt new tech to turn future ready

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MARCH 29

Micro finance institutions (MFIs) or micro lenders are fast embracing emerging technologies. Fintech alliance is now a part of their IT roadmap. MFIs have realised that the future landscape of microfinance will be driven by digital technologies. Half of MFIs are leveraging emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning for credit assessment. While around 40 per cent of MFIs are using emerging technologies for customer onboarding, one out

of four MFIs are utilizing robotic process automation for this, finds a study by KPMG. While some of the MFIs are advancing with emerging technologies, only half the MFIs have both core banking system and customer relationship management implemented. Almost 9 out of 10 MFIs disburse loans through cashless channels like NEFT/RTGS/IMPS followed by AePS. According to Manoj Nambiar, chairperson of MFNI, top 10 to 15 NBFC-MFIs, which account for almost 60 to 70 per cent of the loan portfolio, have

fairly high adoption of technology. "In our business customer and transaction is huge, while the pricing is crucial. Hence everything has to be managed within small margins. Technology helps us bring down operating cost and optimize manpower. The use of data helps us manage the business more efficiently," he said. Further, MFIs are using fintech alliances as a part of their IT roadmap. Nearly 75 per cent of the surveyed MFIs have alliances with fintech companies while the remaining MFIs are planning to explore such alliances.

Risks of depopulation loom large on world

TYLER COWEN

How worried should we be about global depopulation? Some East Asian countries have fertility rates near or even below 1.0, while much of the core population of Europe is shrinking. In the US, fertility rates have fallen below replacement rates, hitting a historic low of 1.7 in 2019, and will likely fall even further in 2020 in part due to Covid. Many of the world's poorer countries are seeing their birth rates plunge at unprecedented rates. By the year 2100, according to one projection, world population growth will be practically zero. If you think the world is overpopulated and has

serious environmental problems, you might welcome this news. But as my colleague Robin Hanson has pointed out, dwindling populations create their own inexorable logic. If the Japanese population shrinks by half, to 65 million or so, what's to stop it from declining to 30 million? Or 20 million? There is some evidence that shrinking populations are bad for the global economy. To me, however, the greater tragedy would be a failure to take full advantage of the planet's capacity to sustain human life. No kind of family policy should be mandatory. But there should be policies that make larger families a more appealing option,

- If you think the world is overpopulated and has serious environmental problems, you might welcome this news.
- There is some evidence that shrinking populations are bad for the global economy.

both economically and otherwise. One possibility is that a shrinking population itself will bring self-reversing mechanisms. For instance, a Japanese population half its current size would make Japan an emptier place, presumably lowering land prices. Some families would find

it easier to afford a larger apartment in central Tokyo and perhaps decide to have more children. But that mechanism seems more likely to reduce population decline than to reverse it. Living space is only one of many factors behind decisions about family size. And as population declines, the stock of houses and apartments will decline too, so in the longer run the amount of space per family may not increase by very much. Population trends depend on how permanent are the causes of fertility decline. In many cases women prefer to pursue careers, or to start having children later, and that means lower birth

rates. This same logic would apply in a much less populous Japan. Another factor in declining fertility, especially in the US, is single parenthood. If a potential mother is facing a fertility decision without another full-time parent on the scene, she is more likely to choose to have fewer children. As population falls, will single-parent families become less common? It is hard to see why. Whether the issue is a lack of marriageable men, unstable family norms or women who prefer to go it alone, there is no particular reason to think those factors will disappear in an era of population decline. If anything, the impetus toward smaller family

size might continue or even accelerate. Job opportunities for women may keep improving in quality, which increases the opportunity costs of having a large family. Furthermore, many countries around the world are becoming wealthier. Depopulation is a major problem that the world in general, and its wealthier countries in particular, are failing even to discuss, much less address. In any given year, in any given country, a shrinking population may not be much of an issue, and it may even be welcomed. But make no mistake: Over time, collectively, we are choosing a very different future for humanity. —Bloomberg

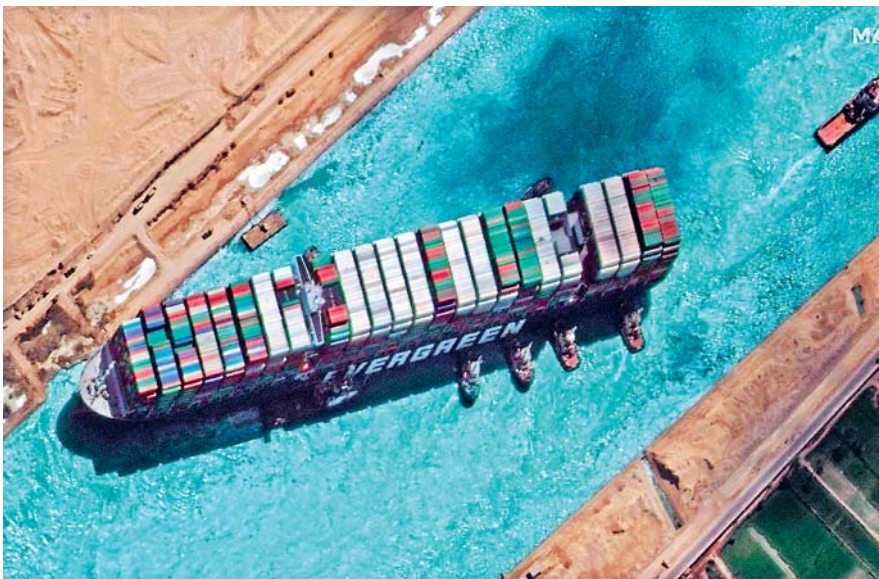
VISA TO ALLOW CUSTOMERS TO PAY USING CRYPTO COINS



Mumbai, March 29: Visa Inc said on Monday it will allow the use of the cryptocurrency USD Coin to settle transactions on its payment network, the latest sign of growing acceptance of digital currencies by the mainstream financial industry. Visa has launched the pilot program with payment and crypto platform Crypto.com and plans to offer the option to more partners later this year, it said. The USD Coin (USDC) is a stablecoin cryptocurrency whose value is pegged directly to the US dollar. Visa's move comes as major finance firms including BNY Mellon, BlackRock Inc and Mastercard Inc have embraced some digital coins, sparking predictions that cryptocurrencies will become a regular part of investment portfolios. Tesla Inc boss Elon Musk said last week that customers can buy its electric vehicles with bitcoin, marking a significant step forward for the cryptocurrency's use in commerce. "We see increasing demand from consumers across the world to be able to access, hold and use digital currencies and we're seeing demand from our clients to be able to build products that provide that access for consumers," Cuy Sheffield, head of crypto at Visa, said. Traditionally, if a customer chooses to use a Crypto.com Visa card to pay for a coffee, the digital currency held in a cryptocurrency wallet needs to be converted into traditional money. The cryptocurrency wallet will deposit fiat currency in a bank account, to be wired to Visa at the end of the day. —Reuters

Stranded giant ship refloated, Suez opens up

Ship queue may take long to clear



This satellite imagery shows a close up overview of the MV Ever Given container ship and tugboats in the Suez Canal on Monday.

Suez, Egypt, March 29: Salvage teams on Monday freed a colossal container ship stuck for nearly a week in the Suez Canal, ending a crisis that had clogged one of the world's most vital waterways and halted billions of dollars a day in maritime commerce. Helped by high tide, a flotilla of tugboats wrenched the bulbous bow of the skyscraper-sized Ever Given from the canal's sandy bank, where it had been firmly lodged since March 23. The tugs blared their horns blared in jubilation as they guided the Ever Given through the water after days of futility that had captivated the world, drawing scrutiny and social media mockery. The giant vessel headed toward the Great Bitter Lake, a wide stretch of water halfway between the north and south ends of the canal, where it will be inspected, said Evergreen Marine Corp., a major Taiwan-based shipping company that operates the ship. "We pulled it off!" said Peter Berdowski, CEO of Boskalis, the salvage firm hired to extract the Ever Given, in a statement. "I am excited to announce that our team of experts, working in close collabo-

ration with the Suez Canal Authority, successfully refloated the Ever Given, thereby making free passage through the Suez Canal possible again." Buffeted by a sandstorm, the Ever Given had crashed into a bank of a single-lane stretch of the canal, about 6 kilometres (3.7 miles) north of the southern entrance, near the city of Suez. That created a massive traffic jam that held up \$9 billion a

day in global trade and strained supply chains already burdened by the coronavirus pandemic. At least 367 vessels, carrying everything from crude oil to cattle, are backed up as they wait to traverse the canal. Dozens of others have taken the long, alternate route around the Cape of Good Hope at Africa's southern tip — a 5,000-km detour that costs ships hundreds of thousands of dollars in fuel and other costs.

Egypt, which considers the canal a source of national pride and crucial revenue, already has lost over \$95 million in tolls, according to the data firm Refinitiv. Even as salvage work continued, President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi, who for days was silent about the crisis, praised Monday's events. "Egyptians have succeeded in ending the crisis," he wrote on Facebook, "despite the massive technical complexity." —AP

Copenhagen/London, March 29: The stranding of a container ship in the Suez Canal has created disruptions in the global shipping industry that could take weeks and possibly months to clear, top container shipping lines said. Around 30 per cent of the world's shipping container volume — including goods like sofas, consumer electronics, apparel and shoes — moves through the 193 km (120 miles) Suez Canal daily. Empty containers, which Asian factories need to ship goods, are also caught up in the backlog. "Even when the canal gets reopened, the ripple effects on global capacity and equipment are significant," the world's largest container shipping company Maersk said in a customer advisory. Maersk has three vessels stuck in the canal and another 29 waiting to enter, it said, adding that it had so far rerouted 15 vessels to sail south of Africa instead. "Assessing

the current backlog of vessels, it could take six days or more for the complete queue to pass," it said. Switzerland's MSC, the world's number 2 line, said the situation was "going to result in one of the biggest disruptions to global trade in recent years". "Unfortunately, even when the canal reopens for the huge backlog of ships waiting at anchorage this will lead to a surge in arrivals at certain ports and we may experience fresh congestion problems," Caroline Becquart, Senior Vice President with MSC said in a statement. "We envisage the second quarter of 2021 being more disrupted than the first three months, and perhaps even more challenging than it was at the end of last year." Container shipping companies have been struggling for months with disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic that led to wider logistical bottlenecks. —Reuters



## SHORT TAKES

## Thisara hits six sixes in an over

**Colombo:** Allrounder Thisara Perera became the first Sri Lankan to hit six sixes in an over in any form of professional cricket during a domestic tournament near here.

The 31-year-old achieved the feat during his unbeaten 13-ball 52 while captaining Sri Lanka Army in a group match against Bloomfield Cricket and Athletic Club in the Major Clubs Limited Over List 'A' tournament at the Army Ground in Panagoda town on Sunday. His knock, which had eight sixes in it, was also the second-fastest half-century by a Sri Lankan in List 'A' cricket, after former Sri Lanka all-rounder Kaushalya Weeraratne's 12-ball fifty in 2005. Perera came in to bat at No. 5 with 20 balls remaining in their innings that was truncated to 41-overs-a-side. Part-time off-spinner Dilhan Cooray was the bowler at the receiving end of Perera's onslaught.

Perera is the ninth cricketer in the world to have achieved this feat in professional cricket, after Garfield Sobers, Ravi Shastri, Herschelle Gibbs, Yuvraj Singh, Ross Whiteley, Hazratullah Zazai, Leo Carter and recently Kieron Pollard. — PTI

## Medvedev limps into fourth round

**Miami:** Top-seeded Daniil Medvedev hobbled into the fourth round of the Miami Open on Sunday, defying crippling leg cramps to beat Australian Alexei Popyrin 7-6 (7/3), 6-7 (7/9), 6-4.

World No. 2 Medvedev, increasingly hampered as the third set wore on in the heat and humidity of South Florida, nevertheless mustered the only service break of the third set on the way to a dramatic victory over 86th-ranked Popyrin.

"It's probably one of the sweetest victories in my career, because I was cramping like hell in the third set," Medvedev said on court as he limped in circles seeking relief.

Medvedev had certainly appeared to be cruising to the finish line when he seized a 5-2 lead in the second set. Popyrin held serve for 5-3, but since Medvedev hadn't faced a break point in the match another hold seemed a mere formality.

Instead, Medvedev was shockingly broken at love in a game that featured a double fault and three superb forehand winners from Popyrin. — AFP

## Partial refunds for overseas Oly fans

**Tokyo:** Many fans living outside Japan who bought tickets for the Tokyo Olympics from brokers known as Authorised Ticket Resellers will not get full refunds. And they may have a long wait to get any refunds at all.

The question of refunds came into play a week ago when local organisers and the Japanese government decided to bar most fans from abroad because of the pandemic. There are dozens of Authorised Tickets Resellers. They are typically appointed by national Olympic committees and are allowed to charge a 20 per cent handling fee on tickets. For \$2,000 worth of tickets, for instance, the reseller can charge \$2,400. CoSport, the ATR for the United States and other territories and countries, said in a letter over the weekend to ticket holders that it would not refund the handling fee. It said it would refund the face value of the ticket and the shipping fees. — AP

## Lakers eke out magical victory

**Los Angeles:** Dennis Schroder scored 24 points Sunday as the injury-depleted Los Angeles Lakers held on late for a much-needed 96-93 NBA victory over the Orlando Magic.

Lakers won their second straight game after dropping four in a row since superstar LeBron James suffered a high right ankle sprain, joining star big man Anthony Davis on the sidelines. Kyle Kuzma added 21 points for the Lakers, who rallied from five points down with 7:19 remaining in the fourth quarter against the second-worst team in the Eastern Conference. — AFP

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## ON THE BUBBLE

## Kohli warns players 'cooked' in bubble life ahead of IPL

**Pune, March 29:** Virat Kohli says cricketers are suffering after months of bio-secure "bubble" life during the coronavirus pandemic as they head into the high-stress environment of the Indian Premier League.

Kohli, one of the game's most disciplined captains, raised his concerns after his India side edged England by seven runs in a thrilling decider to clinch the one-day series 2-1 in Pune on Sunday.

Players from both the sides moved on immediately to join their squads for the world's richest franchise Twenty20 tournament, which starts on April 9, and all will have to go through restrictions again in the IPL "bubble".

"Scheduling needs to be looked at in future, because playing in 'bubbles' for so long, two to three months, is going to be very, very difficult going forward," Kohli said.

"You can't expect everyone to be at the same level of mental strength. Some times you do get cooked and you do feel like a bit of a change. I am sure things will be discussed and will change in the future as well. But a different tournament, it brings fresh challenges heading into the IPL," he added.

Most international players have been restricted to staying inside bio-secure "bubbles" since August, with only small breaks.

From September until January, India's players went through similar quarantine and isolation regimes in the delayed 2020 IPL in the UAE and their tour of Australia before having a short break ahead of the home England series which comprised four Tests, five Twenty20 matches and three ODIs.

Virat also said he was surprised that Shardul Thakur was not adjudged man-of-the-match for the third and final ODI against England and Bhuvneshwar Kumar missed the man-of-the-series honours despite strong performances.

Sam Curran was handed the man-of-the-match award for his heroic 83-ball 95 not out in a lost cause. — PTI



Delhi Capitals' Sam Billings (from left), Rishabh Pant and Tom Curran pose after reaching the team hotel in Mumbai on Monday ahead of the upcoming edition of Indian Premier League.

— Twitter

## IPL players arrive in Mumbai

**Mumbai, March 29:** Members of the Delhi Capitals squad, including India star Rishabh Pant, senior off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, allrounder Axar Patel as well as head coach Ricky Ponting on Monday assembled at their team hotel here ahead of the upcoming edition of the league.

The group also included West Indian batsman Shimron Hetmyer, England players Sam Billings, Chris Woakes

and Tom Curran, as well as bowling coach James Hopes.

Both Ashwin and Axar had an incredible outing in the recent Test series against England at home, accounting for most of the visiting wickets with their guile.

With regular skipper Shreyas Iyer ruled out of the entire IPL due to the shoulder injury he sustained against England in the limited overs series recently, these players will be required to be at the

their best when the event starts.

The players will be in quarantine for one week. The franchise issued images of the players arriving at the team hotel.

The Delhi Capitals will take on Chennai Super Kings in their first match of the IPL 2021 season, at the Wankhede Stadium, on April 10.

India limited overs vice-captain Rohit Sharma, all-rounder Hardik Pandya, his brother Krunal and Suryakumar Yadav on

Monday joined the Mumbai Indians squad here ahead of the upcoming Indian Premier League, starting on April 9. The franchise posted a video of its skipper Rohit arriving in Mumbai on its official Twitter handle.

Earlier in the day, Hardik, Krunal and Suryakumar had linked up with the MI squad.

While Krunal made his ODI debut in the series, Suryakumar failed to make the playing XI in all three matches. — PTI

## Harry on a high as England win

**Tirana (Albania), March 29:** Gareth Southgate admitted England have room for improvement after Harry Kane ended his six-game goal drought to inspire a 2-0 win against Albania in Sunday's World Cup qualifier.

Southgate's side struggled to break down the well-organised underdogs until the Tottenham striker netted late in the first half in Tirana.

It was the England captain's first international goal since he scored against Kosovo 500 days ago in November 2019.

Kane now has 33 goals in 52 England appearances.

Kane also set up Mason Mount's second half goal as England made it two successive Group I victories on the road to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

## OLMO RESCUES SPAIN

Dani Olmo's injury-time strike saved Spain in a 2-1 win against Georgia on Sunday, while France also rebounded from an opening draw in World Cup qualifying by beating Kazakhstan.

Spain fell behind to a goal by Khvicha Kvaratskhelia just before half-time.

Ferran Torres of Manchester City levelled in the 56th minute with his fifth goal from just six starts. Spain's second-half pressure finally paid off in injury time.

Elsewhere, Italy kept

their World Cup qualifying campaign on track with a hard-fought 2-0 Group 'C' win over Bulgaria who fell to their second consecutive defeat in Sofia on Sunday.

## SERGE STARS FOR GERMANY

A first-half goal by Serge Gnabry was enough to seal a tight 1-0 away win for Germany against Romania on Sunday in their World Cup qualifier as the Germans again protested in support of human rights.

Also, Ousmane Dembele scored the opening goal as holders France won 2-0 in Kazakhstan to claim their first victory in Group 'D' after drawing at home to Ukraine in their opener.

Sergei Maliy put through his own net for France's second goal before half-time but Kylian Mbappe had a second-half penalty saved after coming off the bench.

## SWISS WIN DELAYED GAME

Kick-off in Switzerland's home game against Lithuania in St. Gallen was delayed by 15 minutes on Sunday because one of the goals was too big. When played started, Xherdan Shaqiri scored after just two minutes as the hosts won 1-0.

Meanwhile, Scotland rescued a 1-1 draw against Israel as Ryan Fraser netted in the second half of World Cup qualifier in Tel Aviv. — Agencies

## Mabkhout hat-trick hands India 0-6 rout

**Dubai, March 29:** India suffered an embarrassing 0-6 rout at the hands of formidable United Arab Emirates — their heaviest defeat against the Gulf side — in the second international football friendly here on Monday.

Such was their performance that Igor Stimac's side did not even get a single shot on target in one of the most forgettable encounters in recent times.

Striker Ali Mabkhout scored hat-trick with goals in the 12th, 32nd and 60th minutes while Khalil Ibrahim (64th) and Fabio Lima (71st and 84th) added the other three. — PTI

India gave a good account of themselves in their first friendly match against fancied Oman on March 25 with an impressive 1-1 draw but against the UAE, they were clueless how to hold the ball, stitch the passes and create chances.

The gulf in the class and technical superiority was all too apparent, though India were without their talismanic skipper Sunil Chhetri, recovering from Covid-19 infection.

Key defender Sandesh Jhingan was also rested as Stimac experimented with new players in his big 27-member squad.

— PTI

## Sunny smiles, chokes in tribute to hero Jaisimha

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 29

Batting legend Sunil Gavaskar paid glowing tributes to his cricketing hero and Hyderabad's shining star M. L. Jaisimha here on Monday.

The former Indian captain started off fluently, motoring along the way before choking while delivering the inaugural M. L. Jaisimha Lecture at the M. L. Jaisimha Sports Foundation, which aims to provide free coaching to talented underprivileged cricketers in Telangana.

"Jai was my hero," Gavaskar said, adding "It is not only a great privilege but a huge honour to speak about him."

"I first saw him in a black and white photograph of the Indian team back in 1959 and got to see him in person when he came to the boundary line to fetch a ball while the Indian team was practising at the Cricket Club of India's Brabourne Stadium in Mumbai. 'Don't worry, don't worry boys, I'll take that' he told me and my friend Milind Rege as we were eager to hand the ball to him," Gavaskar said.

"I was bowled over when he achieved the rare distinction of batting on all five days of a Test match, against Australia in Kolkata, the following year. Always wanted to emulate his feat, and to suit my superstition, would carry five new things to wear on each day of a Test," he said amid laughter.

Speaking about Jai's steel, Gavaskar said: "Sent in as a replacement for B. S. Chandrasekhar, he took several connecting flights to Brisbane on the 1967-68 tour and beat jet lag to score 74 and 101 to get India close to winning the Test against Australia."

Gavaskar also recollected his over-the-moon moment at being on the same team as his hero, during his debut tour of the West Indies in 1971. "We were involved in a couple of 50-plus partnerships too while batting together. How many people get



Sunil Gavaskar (centre) poses with late M. L. Jaisimha's family members — wife Ms Jayanthi Jaisimha (second from right), son Vidyuth (second from left), daughter-in-law Ritika (right) — and Jayesh Ranjan (left), Principal Secretary of Information Technology and president of Telangana Olympic Association, before delivering the inaugural M. L. Jaisimha lecture in Secunderabad on Monday. — DC

an opportunity to do that with their heroes? I was fortunate in my debut series itself," he beamed.

"And off the field, I have gained incredible experience talking to Jai not only about cricket, but life in general."

Gavaskar attributed Jai's fade to being pushed up the batting order. "He was averaging 50-plus in the middle order when he was asked to open the batting, that's when things began to get a bit up and down for him," he said, adding, "Jai has actually opened the batting as well as bowling for India, in 13 Tests."

However, "Jai was an all-rounder who had 431 first class wickets (which included 13 five-fors and three 10-in-a-match) too. He could bowl medium-pace, off-spin, just about everything."

Gavaskar said he sees a bit of

Jai in former Indian captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Arsene Wenger, former manager of the Arsenal football club in England. "Everytime I see Dhoni, something about Jai comes to me, good looks of course. And he was born on July 7, the day Jai passed away. Wenger has Jai's looks too, which makes me feel that my hero is still with us," he said.

In the same vein, Gavaskar added "with so many dashing players on it, the team from 1960s was the most glamorous in Indian cricket. According to cricketing grapevine, they used to date models, film stars and air-hostesses, and we used to be in awe."

He picked out Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi as the best. "No Indian cricketer will have charisma of Tiger Pataudi. Jai was another and they were such good friends."

Gavaskar's deep affection for his hero is evident when he reveals: "Every 3rd of March when I wake up, I say 'Happy Birthday Jai.' Every 7th of July (Jaisimha's death anniversary), when I wake up, I just don't want to get out of bed..."

The Little Master choked while speaking about Jai's last days and also recalled his final meeting in 1999. "I had come down here and met him at his home when he was very sick... spoke to him, he did not open his eyes but I could feel his hand pressing against mine... he was sedated. While I was on my way back home got the news that my hero is no more," he said.

"We know you are with us. Shower Indian cricket with your blessings Jai so that it will be the tremendous force that it has been over the years," Gavaskar said looking up.



Above: Sunil Gavaskar meets former Hyderabad cricket administrator P. R. Man Singh (left), who was manager of the Indian cricket team that won the 1983 World Cup, at the inaugural M. L. Jaisimha lecture in Secunderabad on Monday.

Below: Former chairman of BCCI's junior selection committee V. Chamundeswaranath (right) presents Sunil Gavaskar a painting of his portrait from the recent Ahmedabad Test match where BCCI felicitated him on the 50th anniversary of his Test debut.

