


DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | TUESDAY | 16 MARCH 2021

WEATHER

 **Max:** 37.0°C
Min: 21.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
37/21 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Titthi: Phalguna Shuddha Tadiya till 9 pm
Star: Ashwini whole day
Variyam: 3.02 am to 4.49 am (Wednesday)
Durmuhurtam: 8.50 am to 9.38 am; 11.12 pm to 12 am
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
HJRI CALENDAR
Jumada al-Sani 13,1441 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 6.09 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.13 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 8.00 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 9.28 PM

COUNTER POINT



Not only giving you a washing machine, we will also wash and iron your clothes....

SHORT TAKES

Delhi L-G to get more powers

New Delhi: With the objective of giving a proper “interpretation” of an apex court ruling, the home ministry on Monday introduced in Bill in the Lok Sabha that gives overarching powers to the lieutenant governor in day-to-day functioning of the national capital, a move which is set to revive the tussle between the AAP government and the Centre. The Bill makes it mandatory for the Delhi government to take the opinion of the L-G before any executive action in the national capital.

FM DEFENDS PRIVATISATION OF GOVT FIRMS

New Delhi: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said efficient management and use of the latest technology by the private sector will help unlock the real value of CPSEs undergoing strategic sale and bring much higher dividends for the economy. She said Niti Aayog had been mandated to identify and recommend CPSEs — which are not in the “priority sector”—for strategic disinvestment, based on the criteria of national security, sovereign functions at arm’s length, and market imperfections and public purpose.

■ Full report on Page 7



NATION | 4

Shivraj accuses Cong of following Jinnah



WORLD | 5

Beyonce, Swift win big at Grammys

SPORTS | 8

India vs England third T20 today



Honoured



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy felicitates Union Bank of India managing director and chief executive officer Rajkiran Rai G. at the camp office on Monday as minister Velampalli Srinivas looks on. — DC

Ariz Khan gets death for 2008 inspector’s murder

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

A Delhi court on Monday awarded death sentence to Ariz Khan, convicted for the murder of police inspector Mohan Chand Sharma and other offences in connection with the 2008 Batla House encounter. The court also imposed a fine of ₹11 lakh on Khan and directed ₹10 lakh be immediately released to deceased inspector Sharma’s family. During the hearing, the police sought the death penalty for Khan, a suspected member of the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen (IM), saying it was not just any killing but a murder of a law enforcement officer who was a defender of justice. On March 8, the Additi-

onal Sessions Judge Sandeep Yadav had convicted Khan stating that the evidence produced by the prosecution duly proved the case beyond reasonable doubt. The judge had said that it was “duly proved that Ariz Khan and his associates caused murder of police official and fired gunshot on the police official.”

“The evidence adduced on record, including ocular, documentary and scientific, prosecution has proved beyond reasonable doubt that Khan along with accomplices with common intention obstructed inspector Sharma in discharging public function,” the court had said. “Khan, along with his accomplices, also fired gunshots at head constables

Balwant and Balvir Singh,” it had said.

During the encounter in Batla House at Jamia Nagar in south Delhi on September 19, 2008, two suspected terrorists, identified as Atif Amin and Mohammed Sajid, were killed while Inspector Sharma of Special Cell received gun shot during the encounter and later died. Three other terrorists identified as Ariz Khan and Shahzad escaped while Mohammad Saif surrendered to the police.

The encounter had taken place within a week of 2008 Delhi serial blasts. Later, Shahzad Ahmed was also arrested in 2010 and a trial court in July 2013 had sentenced him to life imprisonment in connection with the case.

TD slips to third slot in Hindupur

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 15

The Telugu Desam with a long history of dominance in Hindupur, the home turf for party founder N.T. Rama Rao, suffered major shock as the party was relegated to the fourth place in two wards and to the third place in eight wards in the present municipal polls there.

A further jolt was that the MIM won a seat and occupied the second place in 5 municipal wards where Telugu Desam has registered a steep fall in its performance graph.

The week-long serious efforts by film star and MLA Nandamuri Balakrishna too was of no help to the TD. His campaign failed as the

party found itself winning only six wards against a total of 38 wards in the special grade municipality.

Balakrishna had stayed at his residence for a week and held road shows through all wards and connecting villages of the municipality, seeking votes for the TD. The YSRC party especially aimed to grab Hindupur municipality also as it falls in Balakrishna’s constituency segment.

MIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi had also campaigned in Hindupur and fielded strong candidates and proved he could get substantial support from the Muslim segment of the electorate.

YSRC JUBILANT, TD DEMORALISED BY MUNICIPAL RESULT

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 15

The YSRC sweep of the civic polls has left the ruling party jubilant and the Telugu Desam activists demoralised.

The TD had hoped that the urban voter would be put off by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy but that was not to be. All urban local bodies in East and West Godavari districts went to the YSRC.

“The people in both rural and urban areas are not believing the Telugu Desam and Chandrababu Naidu. The people have shown trust in Jagan, as they did in 2019,” said Rajamahendravaram MP Margani Bharat.

Estheramma wins from where party had little hope

SHEER | LUCK

Brick kiln worker heads Addanki

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 15

Luck favoured a woman from a Schedule Caste family and working as labourer in a brick kiln to become chairperson of the Addanki Nagar Panchayat in Prakasam district. The seat is reserved for SC woman.

Lakkaboina Estheramma contested as YSR Congress nominee from the 18th ward in Addanki reserved for SC general candidate and she won with a 266-vote majority. Notably, her win came even as the YSRC

leaders paid little attention to the ward. The party nominated Estheramma as it could not find a suitable male candidate, and the ward was generally a sure seat for the TD.

The ruling party leaders, instead, worked hard to ensure the victory of YSRC nominees M. Lakshmi Rajyam and Jallipogu Maneemma in 6th and 15th wards respectively, which were reserved for SC women. Their aim was to nominate one of them to the chairperson post. But both the women lost the elections.

Then, the YSRC leaders decided to consider an ST woman candidate they had nominated for the 7th ward reserved for ST woman, for the chairperson post in view of a provision to nominate an ST candidate if a suitable SC candidate is not available. Unfortunately, she too lost with 10 votes. Though a recounting was taken up following the YSRC demand for it, the results remained the same. The leaders dropped their demand for another round of recounting and heaved a sigh of relief when some

party workers reminded them about Estheramma’s victory from the 18th ward. YSRC leaders rushed to Ongole to seek the approval of energy minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy for the nomination of Estheramma for the chairperson post.

A resident of Addanki, Hanumanth Reddy, said YSRC leaders hardly had any hope on winning 12 seats out of the 20 in Addanki. The town was a stronghold for the TD, which won 7 seats, the highest for the party in the civic bodies of Prakasam district.

YSRC gets 53% vote, BJP, Jana Sena gain at TD cost

Margin between YSRC, TD doubled in about two years

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 15

The opposition Telugu Desam is rubbing its wounds after its disastrous performance in the urban local body polls in Andhra Pradesh. Its vote share fell substantially, compared with the last Assembly polls while the ruling YSR Congress has gained a bit. Curiously, whatever was lost by the TD has been gained by the Jana Sena and the BJP.

The YSRC secured a vote share of 52.63 per cent in the ULB polls against its 49.95 per cent in the 2019 assembly polls. The TD share fell to 30.73 per cent against 39.17 per cent in 2019, while the Jana Sena secured 4.67 per cent share against 5.53 per cent, and the BJP got 2.41 per cent vote share against 0.84 per cent in the last polls.

Though the margin of vote share between the ruling YSRC and the TD in the last Assembly polls was just about 10 per cent, it has gone up by more than 20 per cent in the recent ULB polls, indicating that the vote base of the YSRC is expanding. The reason for this could be the implementation of

Jagan launches temple info site

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 15

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Monday launched a Temple Management System, which provides a series of services, including e-hundi facility for the benefit of devotees. The CM said the system will be effective for all temples in AP under the purview of the endowments department in the state.

The system would provide information about temples, a series of online services for devotees, maintenance of assets, calendar, conduct of rituals, income and expenditure, details of staff and a dashboard. The system has an e-hundi for devotees to make their offerings through a QR code. Incidentally, the first online payment of ₹10,116

● The system would provide information about temples, a series of online services for devotees, maintenance of assets, calendar, conduct of rituals, income and expenditure, details of staff and a dashboard.

was made to the e-hundi of Annavaram temple in East Godavari district through scanning of its QR code. He said by the end of March, 11 major temples of the state will get online e-hundi facility. The CM said the objective of launching the Temple Management System is to ensure that governance of temples is free from graft, with transparency in providing a series of services to devotees.

several welfare schemes and developmental works by the Jagan-led govern-

ment in the past nearly two years. The loss of vote share by



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

CENTRE: NO EARLY JAB FOR JUDICIAL STAFF, LAWYERS

New Delhi, March 15:

The Centre told the Supreme Court on Monday that it may not be desirable to create a separate class of judges, lawyers and court staff below the age of 45 for administering the Covid-19 vaccine on priority basis.

It said the vaccine, which is already being produced beyond the manpower and infrastructural capacity, is also being exported in view of the global pandemic.

A bench of Chief Justice Bobde and Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian said that the court would consider the plea, seeking inclusion of judges, judicial staff and lawyers in the priority category for the Covid-19 vaccine, on March 18. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the government reply has been filed.

Senior advocates Harish Salve, appearing for Serum Institute of India, and Mukul Rohatgi, representing Bharat Biotech, said that different High Courts are seeking data as how many vaccines are being produced and when will it be given. — PTI

Vande Bharat was the world’s largest repatriation effort

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

The Vande Bharat Mission ordered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last year was the “largest repatriation exercise in the history of the world” carried out by India and saw the return home of over 45 lakh people from 98 countries, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar informed both Houses of Parliament on Monday.

In a statement “pertaining to the welfare abroad of Indians, non-resident Indians and Persons of Indian Origin in the Covid situation”, he said that among the states, Kerala received the maximum returnees, followed by Delhi, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

He also said that the United Arab Emirates was the country from where the maximum number of stranded Indians returned, followed by Saudi Arabia, the United States of America and Qatar. The minister also said

that India has “reason to expect” that “partner governments in the Gulf would be helpful in facilitating the early return of many who were compelled to go back because of the pandemic”.

Dr Jaishankar said this huge exercise “could not have happened without the goodwill and cooperation of partner governments. And if that was so forthcoming, it is because of the enormous efforts of this Government’s diplomacy, starting from the Prime Minister personally. Whether it was in reaching out, invoking relationships, using our networking or engaging in direct contacts, we really went all out to ensure the welfare of our brothers and sisters abroad.”

He added, “At the end of the day, the sympathetic response of others reflected their positive image of us. Indeed, this was a real testimony of India’s enhanced global standing. Besides, over 10 lakh passengers were moved out in the bilateral air bubble agreements.

the TD has turned out to be a gain for both the Jana Sena and the BJP. Though Jana Sena lost nearly one per cent of its vote share as compared to its share in the assembly polls, the BJP improved its vote share in the ULB polls by 1.57 per cent.

The anti-incumbency factor against the ruling YSRC has gone in favour of the Jana Sena and the BJP, while the Telugu Desam, could not gain from this.

The state election commission had notified polls to 12 municipal corporations and 75 municipalities. However, in one instance, the counting of votes and declaration of results at Eluru municipal corporation was withheld by the AP High Court.

So, based on the number of votes polled in all 11 municipal corporations and 71 municipalities with four municipalities including Punaganur, Pulivendula, Macherala and Piduguralla, getting elected unanimously, the authorities have calculated the vote share, party-wise, on the basis of the number of votes polled for each party.

■ Page 2: Nota gets more votes than Congress

INDIA TO RAISE ‘RACISM’ ISSUE WITH BRITAIN

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

Just days after India strongly objected to a discussion on the farmers’ protests in the British Parliament and issued a demarche to Britain, a BJP MP in the Rajya Sabha raised the issue of alleged racism and harassment of an Indian lady-student in that country following which External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Monday informed Parliament that it would raise issues of racism with Britain, when required and that as the country of Mahatma Gandhi, India “can never turn our eyes away from racism wherever it is”. New Delhi also said that a friend of the UK, it also had “concerns about its reputational impact”.

The developments are being seen as a strong message to Britain, particularly after the BJP MP Ashwini Vaishnav on Monday raised the issue of the recent resignation of an Indian student from Karnataka Rashmi Samant who resigned from the post of President of the Oxford Students’ Union following some of her earlier social media posts that were reportedly deemed controversial. The BJP MP also alleged that the Indian lady-student had been “cyber-bullied” into resigning from her post, adding that even the Hindu religious beliefs of her parents was attacked by a faculty member which had gone “unpunished”.

Vaishnav, a BJP Rajya Sabha member from Odisha, also raised the allegations of racism levelled recently by Prince Harry’s wife Meghan Markle (against a member of the British Royal family) and wondered what would be the state of affairs if such attitudes existed at the “highest levels” in a society. The BJP MP alleged that there appeared to be a “continuation of attitudes and prejudices from the colonial era especially in the UK”, while asking the Indian government to take up the issue of racism with the UK.

SHORT TAKES

SEC MEETS GOV.,
BRIEFS HIM ON
CIVIC BODY POLLSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 15

The state election commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar met the Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan and briefed him about the recent urban local body polls.

The election commissioner arrived at Raj Bhavan here on Monday and met the Governor for some time. He is learnt to have briefed the Governor about the conduct of urban local body polls and the results. He informed about the special meetings scheduled to be held on March 18 to elect the mayor, deputy mayor for municipal corporations and chairperson and vice chairperson to municipalities and nagar panchayats.

POLLS TO PENDING
GPs IN NELLORE,
PRAKASM HELDDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 15

Elections are being held for 19 ward member posts and 3 Sarpanch posts in Marripadu, Chejerla and Udayagiri mandals in Nellore district and 169 vice Sarpanch posts in Prakasam district on Monday.

The elections were postponed in the past due to various reasons including court cases and withdrawal of all nominations.

According to the district collector of SPSR Nellore district, KVN Chakradhar Babu, 82.6 percent of polling was recorded till 3.30 pm.

Chejarla Mandal recorded 90 pc polling among the three Mandals. Collector visited the polling booths at Vavileru, Mypativari Kandriga of Chejarla Mandal, and asked the officials to complete the counting process by 8 pm.

Collector said they had conducted polls that were postponed due to court disputes and other issues. They had deployed Police, Red Cross, and others for smooth conduct of the polls.

In the case of Prakasam district, Vice Sarpanch elections are being conducted in 119 Gram Panchayats on Monday as the election could not be held due to lack of quorum in the past. Similarly, polling being conducted for 3 wards.

ANAM WRITE-OFF
TD IN NELLORE
DISTRICTDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 15

Venkatagiri legislator Anam Ramanarayana Reddy said that the Telugu Desam chapter is closed in SPSR Nellore district while pointing to the spectacular victory in all the civic bodies of Nellore district.

Speaking to media persons at his residence on Monday, he claimed they had created history in Venkatagiri by bagging all the 25 ward member posts in the municipal election.

He attributed the outstanding performance of YSRC in the municipal elections to their welfare schemes, the confidence of people in YSRC and the leadership of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Sarvepalli legislator Kakani Govardhan Reddy and former Chairman of Central Cooperative Bank Mettukuri Dhanunjaya Reddy were also present.

NAIDU SHOULD TAKE
POLITICAL SANYAS:
MLA AMARNATHDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 15

The official spokesperson and Anakapalli MLA Gudivada Amarnath said the former chief minister and TD national president Chandrababu Naidu and his son Lokesh should take political sanyas owing to his defeat in the municipal elections.

Addressing a press conference in the party office in Visakhapatnam on Monday, Amarnath said Naidu has no face to meet the people of Andhra Pradesh for the kind of defeat he faced in the elections.

He said the people realised that TD did nothing for the state under the leadership of Chandrababu Naidu and hence put immense faith in chief minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. They have seen what Jagan Mohan Reddy did in the last 21 months, he said.

"During his two-day campaign, he only mentioned about the service he did to the people in Visakhapatnam after the Hudhud super cyclone but failed to mention about his efforts to develop the city," Amarnath said.

Congratulations and celebrations



Minister Perni Venkateswara Rao offers a bouquet to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to celebrate YSRC's victory in the Municipal Corporations and Municipalities as APIIC chairman and MLA R.K. Roja looks on at the CM's Camp Office in Tadepalli on Monday.

— DC

Tadipatri civic body poll
heads for photo-finish

MLCs' appeal to vote in chairman election rejected

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 15

Tadipatri politics took several twists and turns on Monday following the rejection of a representation of TD MLC Deepak Reddy and three YSRC MLCs — Shamanthakamani, Md. Iqbal and V. Gopal Reddy to avail the ex officio votes in the chairman and vice chairman polls.

Tadipatri municipal commissioner Narasimha Reddy said they were rejected as they did not have local votes when they were elected as MLCs. The ex-officio votes will play a key role for YSRC in Tadipatri municipality where Telugu Desam won the maximum number of

● Of total 36 wards, Telugu Desam won 18 and YSRC clinched 16 wards while CPI and independent candidates won a ward each.

● CPI had an alliance with TD, which also had supported the independent candidate. With support of these two, Telugu Desam will have a total of 20 voters while YSRC has only 18 votes including that of the local MLA and MP.

wards. However, Tadipatri MLA K. Pedda Reddy and Anantapur MP T. Rangalaiah of YSRC have votes as ex-officio members.

Of total 36 wards, Telugu Desam won 18 and YSRC clinched 16 wards while CPI and independent candidates won a ward each. CPI had an alliance with TD, which also had supported the independent candidate. With support of these two, Telugu Desam

sioner rejected the four after reviewing Section 4 (A), Subsection (2), (5) of the Act of municipal elections.

Meanwhile, suspecting that pressure was likely to be mounted by YSRC on the newly elected ward councilors, TD leaders, J.C. Prabhakar Reddy and Anantapur Lok Sabha TD in-charge J.C. Pavan Reddy took all party councillors and the independent to other states. They will return on March 18 when elections for the chairman and vice-chairman are slated to be held, TD sources said.

YSRC leadership is making efforts to ensure that Prabhakar Reddy would not become municipal chairman of Tadipatri.

JS councillor goes missing
from TD camp in MydukurDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MARCH 15

Politics is on an overdrive following declaration of results for Mydukur municipality in Kadapa district.

While Telugu Desam won 12 of total 24 civic body seats, its ally Jana Sena emerged victorious from one ward. Ruling YSR Congress won 11 seats.

The hairline majority has led to TD and YSRC holding their councillors in separate camps. Opposition TD camp, however, suffered a jolt after the Jana Sena winner Vadanapalli Babu went missing after collecting his winning certificate from the 19th Ward on Sunday.

With his vote becoming crucial for the election of municipal chairperson, there is large-scale speculation about his whereabouts. But none knows where he is at the moment.

While this is so, Mahaboob Bee, who has been elected from the 6th Ward, left the TD camp on Sunday evening, reportedly after being permitted to do so by the party leadership.

However, Mydukur Telugu Desam in-charge Putta Sudhakar Yadav went on to allege that police had taken her away from their camp. Following this, her son complained to police

WILL RESPECT
VERDICT GIVEN
BY PEOPLE: TDDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MARCH 15

Telugu Desam politburo member Reddeppagari Srinivasareddy (Vasu) said that they respected the verdict given by the people.

Speaking to the media in Kadapa on Monday, he alleged that the ruling party leaders arbitrarily intimidated TD candidates and voters.

He said the YSRC got only a technological victory, not a moral one.

He questioned why the voting percentage had not increased if all the people were satisfied with the YSRC rule.

That his mother is missing ever since she got elected as councillor. Police then tracked Mahaboob Bee and handed her over to her family. Since then, she is reported to be at the home of a senior ruling YSR Congress leader.

With this development, the number of elected members belonging to TD has reached 11, the same as YSRC. Under the circumstances, if Mahaboob Bee is not present during the chairmanship election on March 18 and the JS

winner too remains missing, the number of members of both YSRC and TD will be 11.

Then, ruling party's Kadapa MP Y. S. Avinash Reddy and Mydukur MLA S h e t t y p a l l i Raghuramireddy can cast their ex-officio votes and YSRC can take over the chairmanship with a two-vote lead.

It is learnt, the ruling party leaders are making efforts to attract additional TD councillors to their side.

It remains to be seen to what extent Telugu Desam is able to keep its flock together. If Jana Sena councillor supports the ruling party, then YSRC number will reach 14 and the latter's candidate will win the chairperson post. Even if Vadanapalli Babu supports TD, the opposition party will have only 12 members as Mahaboob Bee is still missing. Yet, if she too, along with Jana Sena candidate supports Telugu Desam, the opposition party's tally will be 13, equivalent to that of YSRC, inclusive of the latter's two ex-officio votes. The municipal chairperson will then be elected with a toss.

However, it appears the ruling party will not let the situation slip away from it. It has announced that Machanur Chandra will their candidate for the chairperson's post.

Roja attributes poll victory
credit to good governanceDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 15

The AP Industrial and Infrastructure Corporation Limited (APIIC) chairperson and Nagari MLA R.K. Roja attributed credit to the welfare schemes initiated by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for the YSR Congress registering thumping victory in the urban local body polls in the state.

The legislator took part in a programme held at the APIIC office at Mangalagiri on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, APIIC chairman said that as the CM was initiating and implementing several welfare schemes irrespective of caste, religion and region, a large number of people supported their party nominees to get elected in the urban polls.

She turned critical on the Telugu Desam for making false allegations on their party for its victory.

The APIIC chairman said that the YSR Congress rebels were taught a bitter lesson by the voters by rejecting them.

Balineni slams
TD allegations on
poll irregularitiesDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 15

Energy minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy slammed the opposition for allegations against the ruling party over winning the municipal elections through manipulations.

Speaking to media persons at Ongole on Monday, he said that the gimmicks of TD, Jana Sena, and BJP, who joined hands and defeat the YSR Congress, failed to have any impact on the ruling party.

The minister said that people rallied behind the YSRC, impressed with the welfare schemes and development programmes of the state government besides services when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the state.

Srinivasa Reddy said they are taking up various

● Energy minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy said the gimmicks of TD, Jana Sena, and BJP, who joined hands and defeat the YSR Congress, failed to have any impact on the ruling party.

development works in the civic bodies across the state. He claimed credit to YSRC government for establishing IIIT in Prakasam district and for the proposals to set up a Medical College at Markapuram and University in the district. He said they had saved ₹17 crore through reverse tendering of the Pothuraju Kaluva works.

He said Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy would decide the candidate for the Mayor post of Ongole Municipal Corporation.

ANIL SAYS GOOD GOVERNANCE HELPED
YSRC FARE WELL IN URBAN POLLSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 15

Minister for water resources P. Anil Kumar Yadav said the good governance by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy helped their party register the resounding victory in the urban local body polls in the state.

The minister told media

persons here on Monday that the opposition Telugu Desam fared badly in the recent polls when compared with last Assembly polls held in 2019. He said that the welfare schemes, transparency in governance and reforms helped the Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy to win the faith of the people.

YSR CONGRESS COMES UP WITH LIST
OF PROBABLES FOR MAYOR POSTSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 15

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy held a meeting with the ministers and party senior leaders to finalise the names of mayors for several municipal corporations here on Monday.

The list of probable nominees for several municipal corporations include: Greater V i s a k h a p a t n a m Municipal Corporation-Vamsi Krishna Srinivas, Guntur municipal corporation-Manohar Naidu, Kurnool municipal corporation-B.Y. Ramaiah,

Kadapa municipal corporation-K.Suresh Babu, Ongole municipal corporation-Sujatha, Tirupati municipal corporation-Sirisha and Vizianagaram municipal corporation-Y. Krishnaveni.

As the State Election Commission has scheduled for conduct of special meetings for election of mayors and deputy mayors several municipal corporations on March 18, the YSRC leadership is working on finalising the names. The party leadership is likely to announce the names officially shortly.

YSRC TO NOMINATE
SUJATHA AS ONGOLE
MAYOR CANDIDATEDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 15

YSR Congress bigwigs are likely to nominate Gangada Sujatha as Mayor candidate for the Corporation, which is reserved for women from SC Community, and Vemuri Suryanarayana alias Bujji for Deputy Mayor post.

Sources in the party said both the names are under active consideration of the party leaders.

A former government teacher, Gangada Sujatha won from 18th ward while Suryanarayana won from 25th ward in Ongole.

Sujatha had resigned to her job and contested as Praja Rajyam nominee from Kondepudi constituency in Prakasam district unsuccessfully during 2009 assembly elections.

Meanwhile, arrangements are being made for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor election at Ongole Municipal Corporation on March 18.

After inspecting the arrangements for the election, district collector Pola Bhaskar said the State Election Commission has nominated him as Presiding Officer for Mayor election.

He said deputy collectors have been posted as presiding officers to hold Chairperson elections in other Civic bodies in the district and the elections are scheduled for 11 am on March 18.

Bhaskar said that they have served notices to all the elected members of Ongole Corporation and other municipalities to attend the election of Chairpersons and Vice-Chairmen without fail.

He said Ongole MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy, Ongole MLA and Energy Minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy and Santanuthalapadu legislator TJR Sudhakar Babu gave their options to become ex-officio members of Ongole Civic body.

Collector said that Bapatla MP Nandigam Suresh opted to become an ex-officio member of Addanki Nagar Panchayat.

WATER | MANAGEMENT

APIIC told to initiate step to set up desalination plants along coast to tap sea water

Supply desalinated water to industrial units: CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 15

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy felt the need to ensure the supply of desalinated water from the sea to the industries and save surface water from reservoirs and canals to be used for drinking and cultivation of crops in Andhra Pradesh.

The Chief Minister held a review meet at his camp

office on Monday and directed the AP Industrial Infrastructure Corporation to initiate all necessary measures to set up desalination plants along the coastline to tap the sea water and desalinate it and supply to the industrial units to use such water.

He instructed the officials to come up with an action plan on how to set up desalination plants

CM TO VISIT TIRUMALA TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 15

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to visit Tirumala on March 16. The CM will stay put for the

night. He will take a darshan of lord Venkateswara on March 17 and inaugurate an additional facility meant to prepare boondi for making laddus.

along the coast line and lay pipelines to supply desalinated water to the

industrial units and also the units located in industrial estates so that it

would help avoid usage of water from reservoirs and canals to be used for industrial needs.

The CM has asked the officials to find out the location and the number of industrial units and the sources of water they were using at present so that they could come up with alternative plans to set up desalination plants and supply desalinated water to them.

He asked the APIIC to take the responsibility to ensure the supply of desalinated water ensuring quality to the industrial units so that it could help save drinking water from getting used for industrial needs.

Minister of municipal administration Botsa Satyanarayana, minister for industries M. Goutham Reddy and others were present.

IN BRIEF

AP REPORTS 147 COVID CASES, ONE DEATH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 15

Andhra Pradesh registered 147 fresh Covid-19 cases and one death in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported here on Monday that out of 22,604 samples tested, 147 persons were infected with the confirmed Covid-19 cases. Out of a total number of 1,45,57,366 samples tested so far in the state, 8,92,008 persons were infected with the virus and of them, 8,83,380 were recovered while undergoing treatment while 1,443 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 infections, Chittoor recorded the highest at 35 followed by 31 in East Godavari, 21 in Guntur, 10 in Srikakulam, nine each in Anantapur, Kadapa, Krishna and Nellore, seven in Visakhapatnam, four in Kurnool and one each in Prakasam, Vizianagara and West Godavari.

With regard to the cumulative active cases, Chittoor continues to lead the state with 476 followed by 198 in Krishna, 185 in East Godavari, 120 in Guntur, 99 in Visakhapatnam, 70 in Prakasam, 57 in Srikakulam, 51 in Anantapur, 50 in Kadapa, 48 in Kurnool, 45 in Nellore, 26 in West Godavari and 18 in Vizianagara.

Among daily cases of death of Coronavirus infected patients, one death was reported at Kurnool district, rising the toll to 7,185.

The state health authorities discharged 103 Covid-19 patients after recovery in the last 24 hours in the state.

NGT PANEL TO VISIT POLAVARAM FROM MARCH 30

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 15:

West Godavari district collector Revu Muthyala Raju said that National Green Tribunal Committee, headed by the former AP High Court Judge B. Sesha Sayana Reddy, would visit Polavaram Project from March 30 to April 1, and a public hearing would be held on March 31 at the site.

He said that the committee would review the soil digging during the Polavaram project construction time, dumping, environmental issues, land acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement packages and others. He said that the officials should make a massive campaign on the visit of the committee in the villages through tom-toms.

MASTER PLAN FOR VISAKHA, KAKINADA PCPIR

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 15

East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that prepare plans to master plan basing on the infrastructure facilities to the industries under Visakhapatnam-Kakinada Petro Chemical Investment Region and the master plan will be drawn basing on necessary infrastructure facilities to the industries, set up under PCPIR.

He said that zone system, already existing industrial units and its infrastructure facilities and others will be included in the master plan. He instructed the Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation officials to prepare the draft to submit it in state level meeting on PCPIR at Visakhapatnam on March 19.

BENGAL GRAM MSP IS ₹5,100 PER QUINTAL

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MARCH 15

As per directions given by the state government, the AP MarkFed has opened Bengal Gram purchasing Centres in Rythu Bharosa Kendras at Vadisaleru and Pedarayavaram in Rangampeta mandal, Buruguudi in Korukonda Mandal and Z.Ragampet in Gandepalli Mandal.

The AP MarkFed District Manager Ms.Manjula said that the farmers will be given Rs.5100 per quintal for Bengal Gram and the farmers can enrol their crop in CM APP through village VAAs. The crop would be purchased from the farmers as per their time slot, she said and added that the farmers can use the opportunity and get MSP for their crop.

Bank employees against privatisation



Bank employees stage protest raise slogans against Banks privatisation at Indian Bank branch near Satyanarayanapuram in Vijayawada on Monday.

MPEOs unpaid for months

Treasury department maintains there are no clear orders from govt

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MARCH 14

Multi-Purpose Extension Officers (MPEOs), who are working with agriculture and horticulture departments of Kadapa district to assist farmers in rural areas, have not been getting their salaries since October 2020.

There are 103 MPEOs in the district, whom the state government pays a consolidated salary of

₹12,000 per month for assisting and advising farmers about their crops. If their performance is satisfactory, they are paid another ₹3,000 as an incentive as per the recommendation of their senior officers.

The district treasury department maintains they are unable to pay the salaries as there are no clear orders from the government in this regard. Though agriculture and horticulture officials of

the district are sending the salary files to their superiors, apparently

they are being returned. MPEOs complain that they have not been paid salaries since past few months despite performing their various duties. They maintain that their counterparts in other districts are getting their salaries regularly. Within Kadapa district, village agricultural and horticultural assistants too are being paid their monthly salaries. Only MPEOs are being denied their pay.

When *Deccan Chronicle*

contacted district agricultural department joint director Juttiga Muralikrishna, he conceded that salaries to multi-purpose extension officers had not been paid. He maintained that they are all working on contract, which has to be renewed every time. He said they have informed state authorities about the issue. It is only a technical matter and MPEOs will be paid their salaries “very shortly”, he stated.

THREE ARRESTED FOR MURDER IN NELLORE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH. 15

Balaji Nagar police arrested three persons on Monday for their involvement in the ghastly murder of a habitual offender, Pavan Kumar in Nellore. The accused have been identified as T. Venkaiah, 23, M. Sravan Kumar, 22, and K. Bhanu Vishnu Vardhan, 21.

According to Nellore city DSP J. Srinivasulu Reddy, there are several theft cases against the deceased Pavan Kumar, and the accused had an old rivalry with one of the accused Venkaiah of Nawabpet.

Venkaiah devised a plan to eliminate Pavan with the assistance of the other two accused, Sravan and Bhanu.

The accused kept a tab on Pavan Kumar, attacked him with lethal weapons on March 6, and fled from the scene after confirming that he was dead.

Balaji Police investigated the crime after registering case Cr. No.34/2021 u/s 302, 379 r/w 34 IPC at Balaji Nagar Police Station on the incident.

They arrested the accused at Narayana college junction near Haranathapuram in Nellore city on Monday. DSP Srinivasa Reddy appreciated the Sub-



Mangalagiri MLA A. Rama Krishna Reddy administered Covid-19 vaccine at Mangalagiri Government hospital in Mangalagiri town of Guntur district on Monday.

— DC

Free, regular bus to Maoist area launched

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 15

The Chintapally subdivision of the Visakhapatnam district rural police on Monday launched a free and regular bus service to the Maoist-dominated area Korukonda from Annavaram village in Chintapally mandal.

For the first time, the Korukonda area, a heavily Maoist-dominated area, is getting a mode of public transport.

The police department has repaired the entire

road stretch of 9 km by its own initiative and filled up all the potholes, due to which the road wasn't suitable for bus travel till now. Similarly, road repair was taken up for Cheruvuru, which is also a heavily Maoist dominated area.

The area got an ambulance for the first time.

Visakhapatnam rural police took up a similar road repair challenge and got the 9 km stretch of the road till Rallagadda was repaired. ASP Chintapally Vidhya Sagar Naidu inaugurated the bus from

Annavaram in the presence of an enthusiastic crowd and termed the moment as historical and one of the first steps in developing Balapam Panchayati and Korukonda area in particular.

He also reminded that Balapam Panchayati, which did not participate in elections for the last 15 years, had chosen its representative for the first time in recently concluded panchayat elections defying Maoists' call to boycott the elections and this indicated their clamour for development.

MIM DID BETTER THAN TD IN FEW WARDS

From Page 1

In the 15th municipal ward, the Telugu Desam candidate got just 140 votes and took the humiliating fourth place while the YSRC candidate got 874 votes, MIM 722 votes and the CPI 312 votes to take third place.

Interestingly, BJP candidate A. Anjali won from the 11th ward where she got 915 votes while the nearest rival, the YSRC candidate, got 783 votes, the MIM 255 votes and TD just 184 votes to take the fourth place. The TD had ruled the municipality in the last five years as also previously. The MIM proved its presence in all wards where candidates were fielded and won the 16th ward. There, the MIM candidate got 883 votes and the YSRC candidate 760 votes while TD got 143 votes to stay in the 3rd place and the CPI got 122 to remain at the 4th position in 16th ward.

Further, an independent candidate took second place in the first ward where the Telugu Desam was satisfied with the third place. The YSRC won the seat.

Similarly, TD stayed at the 3rd position with 244 votes in Ward 3 where the YSRC got 1145 votes and the MIM 303 votes. In the 5th ward, the Telugu Desam candidate couldn't compete with the YSRC. The YSRC got 1,160 votes and the MIM stood in second place with 716 votes.

Analyst L. Prasad observed the MIM has succeeded to poll for it the votes of TD dissidents. “We noticed a competition between YSRC and MIM in many wards, while TD fell below the mark,” he said.

YSRC leader Naveen Nischal claimed that his party's victory was due to the people's appreciation of the welfare schemes initiated by the CM.

English dictionary to school students

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 15

In a bid to enhance English language skills among the students, the state government to offer an English dictionary to each student pursuing studies in English medium government schools in under Jagananna Vidya Kanuka scheme soon in the state.

The state government authorities said on Monday that the state government, in a first of its kind in the entire country, would include an English dictionary in the student kit to be supplied to the students so that it would help in language skills and also promote self-confidence among the students.

The inclusion of an

● The inclusion of an English dictionary in the student kit is expected to help the students mainly from below the poverty line to have an opportunity to improve their knowledge in English.

English dictionary in the student kit is expected to help the students mainly from below the poverty line to have an opportunity to improve their knowledge in English.

It may be mentioned that nearly four lakh new admissions were received in the state government schools in the current academic year as the state government has come up with a series of initiatives to promote school education.

OPIUM POPPY CULTIVATION UNEARTHED BY SEB INMADANAPALLE, TWO ARRESTED

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 15

Opium poppy cultivation was unearthed by the sleuths of the Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) in the Madanapalle division in Chittoor district on Monday, leading to the seizure of plants and the arrest of two persons.

A natural substance taken from the seed pod of various opium poppy plants was used in production of heroin.

SEB SI Sridhar told the media persons that the accused B. Nagaraju of Kathavipalle village was

arrested for cultivating illicit opium poppy in his mango garden, situated between Kathavipalle and Devalampalle villages in Madanapalli division.

Acting on a tip-off about the illegal cultivation of opium poppy, the SEB sleuths conducted surprise raids on the mango gardens belonging to Nagaraju. On seeing the sleuths, the owner of the crop deployed his men to destroy the crop with a tractor.

However, the sleuths prevented them. Later, the SEB sleuths seized four bags full of opium poppy and destroyed the entire crop.

E-bikes for Vizag zoo visitors today

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 15

Indira Gandhi Zoological Park is launching e-bikes from Tuesday. Initially, 30 bikes would be available for the visitors who can hire them for ₹50 per hour. People can move around visiting various places of interest and return them at the gate. All the roads were repaired in November last year.

Principal chief conservator of forests N. Prateep Kumar would formally launch the project. He said the e-bikes would reduce the pollution in the zoo premises and be good for people's health.

Earlier, Prateep Kumar launched National Zoo

Keepers' Training on Captive Management of Reptiles conducted at the Indira Gandhi Zoological Park, which is being organised in collaboration with the Central Zoo Authority. It is the first of its kind that reptile captive management and conservation training event is being conducted in the country, he added. He said that reptiles are always around people, so there was a need to know about them.

Around 80 people from 40 different Indian zoos participated in this inaugural event. In the first day session, Dr Gowri Mallapur explained how to identify males and females in turtles, mark them easily to remember, and the basic biology of turtles.

TD admits it has lost people's trust

From Page 1

“They gave a fitting lesson to the TD and Chandrababu Naidu,” the MP said.

The party cadre burst crackers and cut cakes to celebrate the YSRC victory at Rajamahendravaram on Monday. Bharat said that the people believed Jagan Mohan Reddy as he would fulfil his promises and do justice to the people.

Bhimavaram MLA Grandhi Srinivas said that Naidu and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan can lock their offices as the people denied the leaderships and it is better to both leaders and the both parties to leave politics.

He said that Kalyan was playing cheap tricks in politics and misleading the youth through his speeches. He reprimanded Kalyan to put an end such speeches, after seeing the municipal results.

Ayithabathula Ananda Rao, TD former MLA of Amalapuram, said that owing to allowing previous nominations for contesting candidates by the State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh

Kumar is the main reason for defeating TD.

He said that the candidates filed nominations one year back and the ruling party threatened Opposition candidates and their followers.

He admitted that the TD should change its attitude and reach out to the people by highlighting general problems like rising prices, non-availability of liquor and others and should lure the Schedule Castes and Backward Classes and the party should provide trust on the party on those sections.

He said that the priority should be given to SCs and BCs in their respective constituencies without major involvement of other people.

Many TD leaders repeated the claim that YSRC leaders had threatened Opposition activists but admitted that the TD had lost confidence among the people.

Though there was tacit alliance between Jana Sena and Telugu Desam, Jana Sena had not withdrawn its candidates in some of the wards and it has led to defeat of both TD and Jana

VISAKHA SARADA PEETHAM SEER LAUNCHES DHARMA YATRA

DC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, MARCH 15

Visakha Sri Sarada Peetham Uttarahdikari Sri Sri Sri Swathmanandanda Saraswathi Swamy said that he took up Dharma Prachara Yatra to protect Hyndava Culture and Tradition and

observe the conditions of Hindu temples. He started Hindu Dharma Prachara Yatra from Rajamahendravaram on Monday. He told the media that he started this yatra in the year 2019 from Telangana, but, due to covid-19 lockdown, he temporarily stopped it and now

it has again started and will continue till March 31. He said that he would visit Vedic Schools and explain the vedic principles and its significance and spiritual philosophy to the people.

Rajamahendravaram MP Margani Bharat welcomed him with traditional vedic chants and felicitated him.

SHORT TAKES

ANTI-KAMAL NATH LEADER EXPELLED FROM CONGRESS

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 15

AICC member Manak Agrawal who has recently criticised head of Madhya Pradesh Congress Kamal Nath for inducting a “supporter” of Mahatma Gandhi’s assassin Nathuram Godse in the party, was on Monday expelled from Congress on charges of ‘anti-party activities’ and indiscipline.

The development has brought to the fore ‘growing rift’ between Nath and Congress veteran Digvijay Singh since Agrawal was considered staunch loyalist of the latter.

The disciplinary committee of Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) which met here on Monday decided to expel Agrawal from the primary membership of the party for six years, a statement issued by PCC vice-president Chandrabhas Sekhar said.

Agrawal, however, cried foul saying that PCC was not empowered to take action against him since he was an AICC member.

He said he has done nothing wrong in disapproving party leadership’s decision to induct Godse’s supporter Babulal Chourasia, a leader of Hindu Mahasabha, in Congress.

Congress spokesman here Narendra Singh Saluja however indicated that Agrawal was removed from the party for indulging in anti-party activities in the 2018 Assembly elections in MP.

BSP TO CONTEST ASSEMBLY POLLS IN 3 STATES, UT

Lucknow, March 15: Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati on Monday asserted that her party will contest the Assembly elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry on its own, saying the BSP has had a bitter experience of aligning with other parties in the past.

She also stated that her party will go alone in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections next year.

“We are working internally on the elections. We do not reveal our strategy. The BSP will contest on all the 403 Assembly seats in UP, and will perform well. The performance of the party will be good in the panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh,” she told reporters at an event to pay tributes to BSP founder Kanshi Ram on his 87th birth anniversary.

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said her party has had a bitter experience of aligning with other parties in the past.

“The experience of our party forging an alliance with others has not been good. Our party leaders, workers and voters are highly disciplined. This is not the case with other parties of the country. In an alliance, our votes are transferred to the other party, but the votes of the other party are not transferred to us,” she said.

DHINAKARAN MOVES COURT IN AIADMK CASE

Chennai, March 15: AMMK leader T.T.V. Dhinakaran on Monday filed a memorandum before a city court, where a case challenging the resolutions adopted at the general council meeting of the AIADMK in September 2017 was pending, to detach him from the case.

Recording the same, the judge A.R.V. Ravi adjourned the matter to April 9 with a direction to the original petitioner, late chief minister J. Jayalalithaa’s confidante V.K. Sasikala, to inform the court of her stand on the issue.

The 2017 general council had expelled Sasikala and Dhinakaran as the party’s interim general secretary and deputy general secretary, months after she was convicted in a disproportionate assets case and then rival leaders, Chief Minister K. Palaniswami and his current deputy O. Panneerselvam, merging their led respective factions.

Originally, Sasikala moved the Madras High Court to declare the resolutions adopted at the general council meeting as null and void.

She also sought the court to declare Palaniswami, Panneerselvam, minister Dindigul C. Srinivasan and senior leaders S. Semmalai and E. Madhusudhanan as not members of the AIADMK.

‘Titans’ of TN politics file nominations

Palaniswami, Stalin, Dhinakaran, Kamal Haasan were among the many candidates who filed papers

Pinarayi to contest from Dharmadom

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 15

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

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

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

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

While the Congress-led UDF is yet to finalise its candidate, the BJP has fielded its former state president C.K. Padmanabhan this time with the objective of putting up a better show. Earlier the UDF had planned to field Forward Bloc national secretary G. Devarajan against the Chief Minister.

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



DMK president M.K. Stalin arrives to file his nomination papers for the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections in Chennai on Monday.

Udhayanidhi Stalin, BJP national women’s wing president Vanathi Seenivasan also did not miss on the auspicious day. Soon after filing his nomination to contest from

Kolathur constituency in Chennai, Stalin left for Thiruvavur to launch his campaign from the birth place of his father the late M. Karunanidhi. He took a chartered flight to Trichy

to reach Thiruvavur.

Kamal Haasan, too, took a chartered flight to Coimbatore from Chennai, where he landed in the morning by a helicopter. He had boarded the helicopter fr-

om Kanchipuram, where he had stayed overnight after a campaign drive. Haasan’s helicopter landed at 11.30 am in Chennai and the flight to Coimbatore took off at 12.00 noon.

— PTI

Shah mocks Didi’s campaign in wheelchair

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 15

Rubbing salt into the wounds of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Union home minister Amit Shah on Monday raised doubts on her claim that she was attacked as part of a conspiracy and teased the injured Trinamul supremo for resuming her poll campaign in a wheelchair and then wished her a quick recovery.

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

Mocking the CM in his second rally at Ranibandh in Bankura he said, “I apologise to you for my delay in reaching here. My helicopter developed a glitch. But I am not going to complain that there was a conspiracy in it. The helicopter malfunctions sometimes.”

He added, “I have seen Mamata suffered leg injuries. Didn’t you see it? How she got injured is yet to be ascertained. A probe is underway. TMC is crying of a ‘big conspiracy’ to leave her injured. But the EC has already called it an accident, not an attack. God knows who is speaking the truth.”

He also wondered, “Didi, you have got hurt and sad and you have started roaming around in a wheelchair. I want to ask her if she knows the pain of our 130 party workers who were killed in her politics of violence or not while she feels the pain of her leg injury? Weren’t the victims someone’s father or son or brother or husband? Didn’t they feel pain while dying? People of Bengal will give her their reply in votes this time. I pray to God for your quick recovery. But it would have been better if you felt pain for the 130 slain.”



Union home minister Amit Shah being felicitated during a programme Agragami Assam, ahead of Assam Assembly elections, at the Srimanta Sankaradeva International Auditorium in Guwahati on Monday.

— PTI

Didi calls PM ‘incompetent’

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 15

Calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi “total incompetent” in running the country, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday, in a veiled threat to the BJP, declared from her wheelchair with a plaster on her left leg for ankle fracture and feet injury that she would see how the saffron party’s workers could walk on their legs around in the state after the Assembly Election.

“Except defaming, BJP can not do anything. Their PM is total incompetent. He can not even run the country. An autocratic government is run at the Centre. It allows no one to speak out. There is neither any democracy nor justice to the people. Media is raided while civil society face atrocities if they speak against it. There are attempts to throttle politicians like us who raise our voice,” she told a TMC rally in Baghmundi in Purulia, one of the Jangalmahal districts going to the polls

in the first phase on March 27.

Targeting the BJP over her leg injuries the Trinamul Congress supremo said, “Please wait for a few more days. How long can you leave me with a broken leg? Both of my legs will survive. But I will see in the coming days how your legs can walk on the soil of Bengal.” Countering Amit Shah’s doubt on her claim of an “attack in a conspiracy” behind her injury and his mockery of her poll campaign in a wheelchair, Ms Banerjee thanked her luck for her survival during the incident she had faced in Nandigram on March 10 to swing the public mood to her favour.

“I survived somehow fortunately that day. Many thought while I would not be able to step out of home with a broken leg, they would go on looting votes in the polls. During an election I decided to go out because I feel though I have pain across my body, people suffer from a greater pain than mine,” she added.

HM OFFERS TEAM OF SPECIALISED COMMANDOS TO PROTECT MAMATA

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 15

Home ministry has offered a team of specialised commandos from central forces for protecting Mamata Banerjee. Sources said Election Commission and home ministry discussed the issue of alleged attack on Mamata in a meeting last week during which the Ministry made the offer.

Mamata Banerjee was injured during a roadshow in Nandigram last Wednesday but she had alleged that a group of some unidentified men had attacked her. However, the Election Commission had ruled out this in a detailed report on Sunday saying this was a mere accident.

Sources said during the discussion home ministry offered that in case Election Commission wants to deploy a team of “specialised and professional commandos from central para-military forces” can be deployed to protect the Chief Minister of West Bengal.

Central forces like CRPF, CISF and ITBP were providing Z and Y category security cover to a number of BJP leaders in Bengal. The same facility, sources added, was offered by the home ministry to Mamata Banerjee if Election Commission gives the directions.

Following the incident involving Mamata Banerjee the Election Commission of India had transferred three senior IPS officers, including one involved with managing her security.



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

CONGRESS WILL DESTROY INDIA, SAYS SHIVRAJ

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MARCH 15

Bogged down by growing polarisation of Muslim votes, the BJP leaders have launched a frontal attack on Congress party accusing them of following the “footsteps of Jinnah” instead of Mahatma Gandhi in the ensuing Assam Assembly polls.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan who addressed three rallies in Upper Assam on Monday said, “Congress is not following in Mahatma Gandhi’s footsteps, Congress and Rahul Gandhi are following in Jinnah’s footsteps. And Jinnah’s steps will destroy Assam and India.”

Referring to the Congress alliance with AIUDD in Assam, Chauhan while addressing a public rally at Naharkatia in Dibrugarh district said, “Congress has allied with Badruddin Ajmal, who has filled Assam with infiltration... He has a perfume business, but is spreading poison in the society... If ‘naagraj’ and ‘saapraj’ ally, then Assam cannot be developed.”

LATHIKA MAY CONTEST AS INDEPENDENT

Thiruvananthapuram, March 15: Former Mahila Congress president in Kerala Lathika Subhash, who resigned from the post and tanned her head hurt over the denial of election ticket, on Monday said she would take a “decisive decision” about her political future this evening.

Her statement comes amidst widespread speculation that she would contest as an independent candidate from Ettumanoor, her hometown, in the April 6 Assembly polls.

“I will make a decisive decision about my future plan this evening. I am discussing it with my supporters and well-wishers. I cannot say anything about it right now,” Subhash said.

— PTI

MLA Debashree Roy quits TMC

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 15

The Trinamul Congress continues to bleed with desertions as another heavyweight MLA, Debashree Roy, on Monday quit the party while keeping the door ajar for her switch to the BJP at a time the saffron party is also hit by a revolt within over distribution of tickets to TMC turncoats.

Sending her resignation letter to TMC president Subrata Bakshi, the two-time legislator from

● THE ACTOR-TURNED-POLITICIAN’S exit from the TMC came a day after former Kolkata Mayor and TMC turncoat Sovan Chatterjee quit the BJP.

Raidighi in South 24 Parganas later alleged, “I had many complaints which were ignored. So I quit. If the BJP approach me, I will look into the possibility.”

The actor-turned-politician’s exit from the TMC came a day after former Kolkata Mayor and TMC turncoat Sovan

Chatterjee, whom she was earlier very close to, quit the BJP alongside with his close friend Baishakhi Banerjee for not getting a ticket.

In fact, Roy tried to enter the BJP when Chatterjee and Baishakhi went to join it in August of 2019. But her chance diminished as Chatterjee, prompted by Baishakhi, strongly objected to her induction to the BJP and made it clear to the saffron party that they would not join if Roy was inducted.

During the day the BJP

workers laid a siege at their election office in Hastings of South Kolkata protesting against the distribution of tickets to TMC turncoats Rajib Banerjee at Domjur and his aide Mohit Ghatai at Panchla. They broke barricades and demonstrated in front of BJP vice-president Mukul Roy and Barrackpore MP Arjun Singh.

At Uttarpara in Hooghly where another TMC turncoat Prabir Ghoshal got a ticket, BJP supporters circulated posters against him.

SOCIAL | MEDIA Twitter to bring back #HerPoliticalJourney video series for women leaders

Twitter reveals plan to tackle poll-related ‘talk’

New Delhi, March 15: Ahead of Assembly elections, Twitter on Monday announced a slew of initiatives in a bid to protect public conversation and tackle poll-related misinformation.

Announcing the multi-lingual initiatives, the microblogging platform pledged its commitment to “facilitating meaningful political debate, driving civic participation during elections”, in real-time.

“With the #AssemblyElections2021 taking place in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Puducherry, Twitter announced a

custom emoji to encourage participation, a series of pre-bunks and debunks to tackle election-related misinformation, and a youth discussion series titled #DemocracyAdda aimed at voter literacy and civic participation among young Indians for the upcoming elections.

These will be activated across six languages including English, Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Assamese and Malayalam, in order to cater to audiences across India.

Additionally, to put a focus on women in Indian politics, the service would be bringing back

#HerPoliticalJourney, a video series where women political leaders share their personal stories with leading women news journalists.

It is pertinent to mention here that voting for five Assembly elections will begin on March 27, with West Bengal hosting eight phases over a month. Counting of votes in the four states and one union territory will take place on May 2.

Twitter India public policy and government manager Payal Kamat said that public conversation is critical during elections, and “Twitter is where this

unfolds”.

“With digital penetration accelerating in India, more people now have access to credible, authoritative and timely information — crucial tools for exercising their civic rights. By leveraging the power of the open Internet, we are encouraging people across India to be a part of the #AssemblyElections2021 conversation,” Kamat said.

Kamat thanked the Election Commission of India, the State Election Commissions for their support, and hoped that the platform’s efforts would “contribute to

healthy and vibrant civic dialogue”.

Elaborating on the initiatives, Twitter said the information search prompt would make it easy to find credible and authoritative information about candidate lists, voting dates, polling booths, and EVM voter registration, among other election-related topics.

The custom emoji is aimed at stimulating participation in election-related discussions. Featuring an inked finger to represent a citizen who has exercised their right to vote, the emoji is available till May 10, 2021. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

JUSTICE FOR WOMEN: AUSSIES RALLY AT PARL

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

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

ASTRAZENECA VAX: FRANCE STOPS USING IT

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

WOMAN REJECTS MASK AT BANK, TO BE NABBED

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

SANDSTORM IN CHINA: FLIGHTS CANCELLED

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

PRACHANDA TO DROP PARTY'S 'MAOIST CENTRE'

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

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

Martial law in 6 Yangon townships

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

several weeks, with no official explanation.

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

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

supporters believe are politically motivated to keep them locked up.

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

The announcement said

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

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

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

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

— AP

OVER 383 MYANMARESE HAVE CROSSED

Aizawl, Mar 15 At least 383 Myanmar nationals, including women and children, have so far sneaked into Mizoram seeking refuge since late February following military coup and subsequent crackdown on pro-democracy movement in the neighbouring country, a state home department official said on Monday.

He said about 98 per cent of the Myanmar nationals entering Mizoram claimed that they belonged to police force and fire service. But, they don't have documentary proofs in support of the claim, the official said.

Of the 383 foreign nationals, 297 have been already verified while 86 are yet to be verified or confirmed, the official said. "As per the state home department record as on Monday, 383 people from Myanmar have already entered five Mizoram districts and 86 of them are yet to be confirmed," the official told PTI on condition of anonymity. Six Mizoram districts—Champhai, Lawngtlai, Saiha, Saitual, Hnahthial and Serchhip—share a 510 km long porous international border with Myanmar's Chin state.

— AP

China on Quad: No need to form 'exclusive cliques'

Beijing, March 15: China on Monday criticised the Quad, saying no "small cliques" should be formed, as it accused some countries of trying to "sow discord" among regional nations by "hyping" the 'China threat' and asserted that they will not succeed. Quad countries involving the US, India, Australia and Japan held their first virtual summit on Friday during which President Joe Biden told leaders of the coalition that a "free and open" Indo-Pacific is essential to their countries and vowed that his country was committed to working with its partners and allies in the region to achieve stability.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the virtual summit alongside Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. "Certain countries should shake off their Cold-War mentality and ideological prejudice, refrain from forming closed and exclusive small circles, and do more things that are conducive to solidarity and cooperation among regional countries and regional peace and stability," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a media briefing here.

He was answering a question about the first Leaders' Summit of the Quad countries and the reported remarks by US National Security Secretary Jake Sullivan that the four leaders discussed the

challenge posed by China and said all four believed the democracies could help compete with autocracy. "For quite some time, certain countries have been so keen to exaggerate and hype up the so-called 'China threat' to sow discord among regional countries, especially to disrupt their relations with China," Zhao said. "However, their actions, running counter to the trend of the times of peace, development and cooperation and the common aspirations of the countries and peoples in the region, will not be welcomed or succeed," he said.

"Exchanges and cooperation between countries should help expand mutual understanding and trust, instead of targeting or harming the interests of third parties," he added. Zhao also reacted angrily to reported remarks by US Defence Secretary Lloyd J. Austin that the goal of the US and its key allies is to ensure that they have the capabilities, operational plans and concepts to offer credible deterrence to China or anybody else who wants to take on America.

"In the era of globalisation, forming enclosed small cliques with ideology as the yardstick is the sure way to destroy the international order and after all, is unpopular and will end in total failure," Zhao said. "The United States should treat China and China-US relations in a right mentality," he said. —PTI

Women power at Grammys as Beyonce, Swift win big

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

US, Japan in China-centric talks

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

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

Donald Trump's more confrontational approach.

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

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

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

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

opportunities of our time," Blinken and Austin wrote.

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

IRAN OPENS UNDERGROUND MISSILE FACILITY

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

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

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

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

— AP



Andrew Cuomo

BIDEN DECLINES TO CALL FOR CUOMO TO QUIT

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

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

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

FORMAL | RESPONSE

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

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

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

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

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

"The presence in such relationships of positive

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

16 MARCH 2021

Why does SC need relook at Places of Worship Act?

The Supreme Court's decision to seek the opinion of the Union government on a public interest litigation petition (PIL) challenging the validity of certain provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991 appears to be a legitimate legal procedure but one that calls for meticulous handling by all stakeholders. The petition contends that Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the Act create an "arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date" for retaining the character of the places of worship or pilgrimage. Section 3 of the Act bars conversion of any place of worship of any religious denomination into a place of worship of a different section of the same religious denomination or of a different religious denomination; Section 4(e) says any legal proceeding with respect to the conversion of the religious character of a place of worship shall abate and that no such proceedings shall lie on or after such commencement in any court, tribunal or other authority. In effect, the religious character of all religious places in India is fixed as per their character on the day of Independence and no person can alter it, nor can a court entertain a petition seeking an alteration. The Ram Jannabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute was the only exception the law mentions. Going by the petitioner, the law has closed the legal options of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs against illegal encroachment on their places of worship and pilgrimage. Interestingly, the petitioner, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, raises the point that the law is ultra vires several key Articles of the Constitution which deal with equality, discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, protection of life and personal liberty, freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion, freedom to manage religious affairs and protection of interests of minorities. Moreover, the PIL argues, it violates the principles of secularism, which is an integral part of the Preamble and the basic structure of the Constitution. From the looks of it, the PIL is an innocent demand for justice but in fact it stands logic and the Constitution on their heads. Parliament had passed the law in the backdrop of the demolition of the Babri Masjid...

argues, it violates the principles of secularism, which is an integral part of the Preamble and the basic structure of the Constitution. From the looks of it, the PIL is an innocent demand for justice but in fact it stands logic and the Constitution on their heads. Parliament had passed the law in the backdrop of the demolition of the Babri Masjid by a group of religious fundamentalists and vandals (who were last year absolved of their crime by the trial court). The P.V. Narasimha Rao government, that was accused of being a silent spectator to one of the most barbaric acts Independent India has witnessed, enacted the law to prevent a repeat of the same. This was because the same elements which brought down the Babri Masjid, showing scant regard for the basic concepts of democracy such as respect for the rule of law and the sanctity of judicial orders were targeting other such structures as well. Civilisations survive and thrive not by going back to history and righting everything that went wrong. After all, the scale changes with time. India definitely doesn't have the luxury to engage its several future generations on issues religious with a scale that surpasses time, ignoring poverty, ignorance and disease. The Supreme Court will do justice to itself, and to the people, by remembering this simple point.

Jagan is South's big star

From being a political upstart who intrepidly challenged the mighty Sonia Gandhi at the height of the United Progressive Alliance's stint in power at the Centre to the latest founder of a powerful regional party in the South, to one of India's youngest chief ministers, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has traversed an exciting and peerless journey, lickety-split, with remarkable ease. With a sweeping win even before his first term as chief minister reaches its mid-point, reducing the Opposition Telugu Desam led by an experienced political giant of another era, N. Chandrababu Naidu, to rubble, Mr Reddy is now the undisputed political czar of Andhra Pradesh. But is he actually more than just that? A cursory scan of South India's political map — read hot in parts because of the ongoing Assembly election campaigns — will find the answer is yes. At a time when several incumbent CMs and their challengers are fighting to etch the next episode of their career and destiny, Mr Reddy is sitting pretty on his people-gifted throne. Karnataka's B.S. Yediyurappa is past his prime and Telangana chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao is battling intense anti-incumbency and an exceptional political challenge from the BJP. Kerala's incumbent chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan may be on the verge of making history as a rare instance of a front retaining power in that state, but as part of a political party and ideology without any larger national salience or relevance, he will remain a state-level leader. In Tamil Nadu, M.K. Stalin's long wait may finally be over and his trust with power may bring upon him the status of being a new icon in national politics from the south. But a big "if" stands between Mr Stalin and the results on May 2. In the context, Mr Reddy is now bigger and more than just the chief of the YSR Congress or the CM of Andhra Pradesh; he is the most powerful political leader in South India. He's also the creator of a new brand of politics whose best times may still be ahead: far, far ahead.

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Subhani



As Afghan mess grows, India must be cautious



Anand Sahay Far & Near

It is becoming apparent that the Americans are finding it hard to orchestrate their plan to get out of the Afghan quagmire. The way things are going, an outcome satisfactory to all is unlikely from the set of ideas that Washington has lately advanced. In these circumstances, India must learn to do its own sums even as it seeks to be collegial. Its abiding interests in the Afghan theatre are self-evident. Its best bet is to align with the people of Afghanistan at a crucial juncture, and to develop working relations with key constituencies, banking on the goodwill it has earned. The Biden administration's ideas were projected in a letter by secretary of state Antony Blinken to President Ashraf Ghani, and the so-called draft peace proposals canvassed by Zalmay Khalilzad, the US special envoy for Afghan Reconciliation, to enable constitution-making afresh (in a new order), shape post-US governance through an interim government to start with and pave the way for a comprehensive ceasefire. Practically rejecting this line, President Ghani declared on March 6: "Transfer of power through elections is a non-negotiable principle for us." He said that he was ready to discuss free and fair elections "under the auspices of the international community". "We can also talk about the date of elections and reach a conclusion," the Afghan President added, showing readiness to forgo more than half his term. His words were pitifully reaffirmed by vice-president Amrullah Saleh, a redoubtable former intelligence chief, suggesting that this is a deliberated position — indeed, the articulation of an alternative formulation to America's. While the response of the key Afghan political elites like former President Hamid Karzai, chairman of the country's reconciliation process Abdullah Abdullah, and others to the US proposals isn't developed yet, President Ghani's interjection can leave little doubt that the US plan is facing rough weather inside Afghanistan. There are indications that the Karzai group gives little credence to guarantees for peace the regional powers may offer at America's behest at the proposed UN-led conference in Turkey. Also, it is not enamoured of the idea of an unelected "guidance council", or shura of theologians, to exist alongside government structures in the US scheme — virtually a vetoing authority that may give the Taliban a further edge. After Mr Ghani's public stance, taken in the Afghan Parliament, on March 8, a US state department spokesman was quoted as saying that it was "too early to say how the peace process is going". This seemed a dose of realism after Mr Blinken's hectoring letter. President Ghani is neither widely popular, nor known to be a consensus-builder, but he does represent the current Afghan Constitution which the US had helped fashion (along with then interim President Hamid Karzai) in 2004, and which New Delhi had gone to considerable lengths to back. The gains arising from this Constitution at the popular level are backed by the new generation of Afghans, the largest constituency. The Blinken epistle favours a UN-routed conference in Turkey (a "Bonn 2" of sorts) of leading countries that ring Afghanistan (India included, though it doesn't have a border with that coun-

try), presumably to get them to agree to a "unified approach" on Afghanistan's future. This is not only wispy, it is self-serving. Does the US seriously believe that Pakistan, China, Russia, Iran and India, besides America itself (the six countries Mr Blinken envisages will be at the table), can project a "unified approach" as "these countries share an abiding common interest in a stable Afghanistan"? While Pakistan and China may be expected to be favourable to the Taliban outright, what the US is perhaps really saying is that Iran, India (and Russia) should lump it and accept the Taliban's hegemony in Afghanistan once the remaining American troops have exited. Even if India or Iran can develop a functional relationship with the Taliban in time, how realistic is this prospect in the immediate future? The US of course already accepts the Taliban as the hegemon. That indeed was the basis for the earlier Trump administration to reach the Doha agreement with this Pakistan-nurtured politico-military outfit in February 2020, and the reason why the Biden administration is being openly solicitous of the group which continues to rain violence on the Afghan people. In the American scheme, half of all official positions will go to the Taliban in the envisaged interim government. Not to put too fine a point on it, the logic of things suggests that so long as the last US soldier exits unharmed, it will matter little to Washington if the Taliban (with Pakistan's and China's support this time) seeks to

bludgeon the country into submission yet again. Disregarding the promises it had given the US of a negotiated peace with the Afghan government, as a condition for the final withdrawal of American troops under the Doha agreement, the Taliban went on a spree of violence, killing thousands in the course of the past year, along with targeted assassinations. This was to project its military prowess to strengthen its negotiating stance vis-a-vis fellow Afghans, and to suitably impress the Americans further. And yet, astonishingly, Mr Blinken's letter to President Ghani speaks of a "revised proposal" for a 90-day "reduction in violence" — not "ceasefire" — to pre-empt the Taliban's "spring offensive", an annual feature, presumably so that peace parleys (to aid the US) are not prejudiced. The question to ask is whether the Doha accord survives as an instrument of any merit after a year of bloody Taliban violence. If not, are there lessons in this for the future? But uninterested, the US is headed for "Bonn 2", probably on March 27. Besides, with the participation of the US, Russia, China and Pakistan, and invitations to senior Afghan figures, including government leaders, an earlier "peace" conference is due on March 18, hosted by Moscow. There is unseemly hurry. Negotiated settlement or not, a May 1 withdrawal agreed by the former US President is not off the table. On the first anniversary of the Doha accord, the Taliban threatened that "any attempt against the agreement" will end in "failure of talks". The thought must terrify the Americans. Equally, Afghan national security adviser Hamdullah Mohib has said that Kabul was against "imposing" the Doha accord on the people. Completely split perspectives. Afghanistan is said to be the graveyard of empires, but it is also proving to be the breeding ground of ironies. Trophies are sought to be handed out to the most violent.

LETTERS

THREE CAPITALS' WIN

The landslide victory of the ruling YSRC in urban local body elections of AP is complete. The handsome victory in all three regions has given the ruling party the assent of people over its idea of three capitals. The able stewardship of Jagan, the welfare schemes and good team efforts of the cadre are seemingly main contributing factors for the victory. It's a positive vote for the ruling party. Dr D.V.G. Sankararao Vizianagaram

The verdict was indeed an endorsement of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's policies and rule during the past 20 months. It also includes the 'three capitals' issue. The stupendous, resounding and landslide victory of YSRC in both gram panchayats and the urban local bodies proved it beyond any doubt. The rural as well as the urban electorate voted for good governance and the innovative socio-economic welfare schemes of the state government covering almost all sections of the people in the state. The three capitals issue got an emphatic nod from the people. In addition, the people have apparently and truly believed in the prowess of the Chief Minister in getting things done. For Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu this is his Waterloo. The less we speak or write about the other parties, or call them outfits, it is better for society as a whole. Govardhana Myneedu Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Directive issued to police, administrators

NEW DELHI, MARCH 15. Bangla Desh, as East Pakistanis have been calling their troubled land was on the verge of unilateral independence today with Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announcing that he was taking over control from the military authorities. Mr. Rehman made the announcement just a the ultimatum given by the Marial Law authorities to employees of defence undertaking, who had been staying away from work in response to his call for non-cooperation was about to expire. He had earlier asked the employees to defy the ultimatum which threatened them with dismissal and imprisonment.

Aakar Patel



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

In 2019, the BJP won 18 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal. It is hard to see why it will not win the Assembly elections now because it has so much more resources than the rest (more than 90 per cent of electoral bond money, which is the anonymous but legal funding by corporates to political parties, according to RTI reports) and also the power of the Central administration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised he will bring real change to West Bengal. Perhaps he will. The interesting thing to me is that his party has never defined what this "change" is. Formed in 1951, the Jan Sangh/BJP manifestos move effortlessly back and forth from grand and formless expression like "national rejuvenation yagna" directly to things like running more trains with third-class compartments as opposed to air-conditioned ones, pushing the benefits of cow manure and asking linguists to introduce technical and scientific terms based on Sanskrit to replace English. The party's ideologue, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, did not want the states to exist. In his Integral Humanism lectures, he had said: "According to the

first para of the Constitution: 'India that is Bharat will be a federation of states', that is Bihar Mata, Banga Mata, Punjab Mata, Kannada Mata, Tamil Mata, all put together make Bharat Mata. This is ridiculous." He did not tell us that if we removed the states, what mechanism of administration would come between the Union government and the village. In the first manifesto, the party identified blackmarketing, profiteering and nepotism as the country's key problems. Over time, the Jan Sangh dropped all references to these problems without saying whether they had been solved or had become less relevant to the party. On agriculture, the party was for "encouragement of the use of mechanical appliances in agriculture". However, later it said that "tractors will be used only to break virgin soil. Their use for normal ploughing purposes will be discouraged". (1954). This was because it was trying to protect oxen from slaughter. In 1971, the Jan Sangh resolved to limit the maximum income of all citizens to ₹2,000 per month and the minimum to ₹100, maintaining a 20:1 ratio. It would continue working on reduc-

ing this gap till it reached 10:1, which was the ideal gap and all Indians could only have incomes inside this range based on their position. Additional income earned by individuals over this limit would be taken by the government. Residential houses in cities would be on plots that did not exceed 1,000 square yards. In 1954, the party said that it would repeal the Constitution's first amendment that curbed freedom of speech by imposing "reasonable restrictions". However, after 1954, this demand disappeared from the manifestos. Interestingly, the Jan Sangh also said that it would repeal preventive detention laws which it said were absolutely in contradiction to individual liberty. This promise was made repeatedly in the 1950s. In time, both the Jan Sangh and the BJP became the most enthusiastic champions of preventive detention and laws like UAPA. Even though the idols were smuggled into the mosque in December 1949, there was no reference to Ayodhya or a Ram temple there in any manifesto from 1951 to 1980. In defence policy, it wanted compulsory military training for all boys and girls, removal of licences for possess-

ing muzzle-loading guns (an eighteenth century weapon) and expansion of the National Cadet Corps. Like "Atma Nirbhar Bharat", the Jan Sangh's swadeshi meant giving subsidies to local industries and tariff protection. Import of consumer goods and luxury goods would be discouraged. Labour rights, including strikes and lockouts, would be discouraged. Culturally, the party was against alcohol consumption and called for nationwide prohibition. It wanted English to be abolished and replaced in all spheres by local languages, and especially Hindi. There is no comment whether positive or negative on the Constitution, which was adopted months before the first Jan Sangh manifesto, or even about the ideals it represents. Dr B.R. Ambedkar had proposed modest changes to Hindu personal law, especially on the question of inheritance for women. He identified two dominant forms of traditional inheritance law and modified one of them to make inheritance fairer for women. In its 1951 manifesto, the Jan Sangh opposed this reform. While it signals anti-Muslim intent, the Jan Sangh did not have the trans-

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

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	50395.08 -0.78
Nifty 50	14929.50 -0.68
S&P 500*	3,940.39 -0.07
Dollar (₹)	72.47 0.45
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.11 0.14
Euro (₹)	86.68 0.05
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,364▲61 0.13
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.56 -0.95
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.201 0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.607 -0.028

* As of 8:30 PM IST

WPI inflation rises to 4.17% on costlier food, fuel

The wholesale price-based inflation rose for the second consecutive month to a 27-month high of 4.17 per cent in February, as food, fuel and power prices spiked. The WPI inflation was 2.03 per cent in January and 2.26 per cent in February last year. After witnessing months of softening of prices, the food articles in February saw 1.36 per cent inflation. In January it was (-) 2.80 per cent.

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



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

Kia Motors names Hardeep Singh Brar as sale head

Kia Motors India said it has appointed Hardeep Singh Brar (48) as national head of sales and marketing, with immediate effect. Prior to joining Kia, Brar had served at Great Wall Motors, Maruti Suzuki, Volkswagen, General Motors and Nissan. He is a mechanical engineer.



Hardeep Singh

UAE-listed firms must have one female director

Listed companies in the United Arab Emirates must have at least one woman on their board of directors, the Securities and Commodities Authority said. The move, an amendment of a previous decision by the authority's board, is "in the context of keenness to empower Emirati women and encourage them to play a greater role in the boards of directors of listed companies," the SCA said.



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

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MARCH 15

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

MTAR TECH IPO INVESTORS STRIKE GOLD ON DAY 1

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 15

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

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

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

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

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

Market trims losses after sinking 1000 pts

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 15

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

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

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

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



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

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

Before the US Federal Reserve's Federal Open

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

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

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

Govt to sell up to 16.12% in Tata Comm

New Delhi, March 15:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No proposal to bring petrol, ATF under GST: FM

New Delhi, March 15:

Amid record-high fuel prices, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said there is no proposal before the government as of now to bring crude oil, petrol, diesel, jet fuel (ATF) and natural gas under the goods and services tax (GST).

When the GST was introduced on July 1, 2017, amalgamating over a dozen central and state levies, five commodities, crude oil, natural gas, petrol, diesel, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF) were kept out of its purview given the revenue dependence of the central and state governments on this sector.

This meant that the central government continued to levy excise duty on them while state governments charged VAT. These taxes, with excise duty, in particular, have been raised periodically.

While the taxes haven't come down, a spike in global oil prices on demand recovery has pushed petrol and diesel to an all-time high, leading to demand for them being brought under the GST.

"At present, there is no

PRIVATISATION TO UNLOCK REAL VALUE OF PSUs: SITHARAMAN

New Delhi, March 15:

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said efficient management and use of the latest technology by the private sector will help unlock the real value of CPSEs undergoing strategic sale and bring much higher dividends for the economy.

She said Niti Aayog had been mandated to identify and recommend CPSEs — which are not in the 'priority sector' — for strategic disinvestment, based on the criteria of national security, sovereign functions at arm's length, and market imperfections and public purpose.

These CPSEs are reckoned as 'low priority' for the government notwithstanding that they may be



Nirmala Sitharaman

profit-making companies.

"The unlocking of real value through better/efficient management and use of latest technology by the private sector may bring much higher dividends for the economy as a whole in terms of growth, productivity and employment," Sitharaman said in the Lok Sabha.

—PTI

proposal to bring crude petroleum, petrol, diesel, ATF and natural gas under GST," Sitharaman said in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha.

She said the law prescribes that the GST Council shall recommend the date on which the GST be levied on petroleum crude, high-speed diesel, motor spirit (com-

monly known as petrol), natural gas and ATF.

"So far, the GST Council, in which the states are also represented, has not made any recommendation for inclusion of these goods under GST," she said.

The Council may consider the issue of inclusion of these five petroleum products at a time it considers appropriate keeping in view all the relevant factors, including revenue implication, she added.

Including oil products in GST will not just help companies set off tax that they paid on input but will also bring about uniformity in taxation on the fuels in the country.

Sitharaman has in recent weeks talked of inclusion of fuel under GST as well as Centre and states taking a joint call on cutting taxes to cushion consumers against the spike in retail prices.

To a separate question, her junior in the finance ministry, Anurag Singh Thakur said excise duty on petrol was Rs 19.98 per litre a year back and is Rs 32.9 now. Similarly, on diesel, the excise duty has been raised from Rs 15.83 to Rs 31.8.

—PTI

New Delhi, March 15:

The government is not considering any proposal to bifurcate state-owned gas utility Gail (India) Ltd, and the PSU is focused on building pipelines to connect gas sources to consumers to accelerate gas usage, oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Monday.

Gail is India's biggest natural gas marketing and trading firm and owns 60 per cent of the country's 26,284-km gas pipeline network.

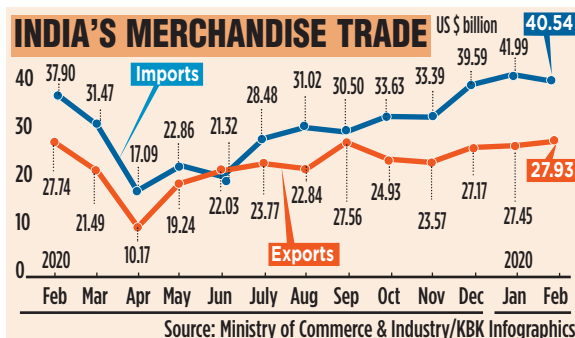
To resolve the conflict of a transporter also being the marketer, it was proposed that Gail's pipeline business should be hived

off into a separate entity. But the proposal has been dropped for now.

"There is no such proposal under consideration at present," Pradhan said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha. He said the share of natural gas in India's primary energy basket is targeted to be increased to 15 per cent by 2030 from the current 6.3 per cent.

For this, the government is promoting the expansion of natural gas infrastructure—pipelines, LNG import terminals and city gas distribution network.

"GAIL is executing projects related to the expansion of gas infrastructure," he said. —PTI



Source: Ministry of Commerce & Industry/KBK Infographics

CAUGHT IN CROSSFIRE

US whiskey industry faces 50% duties in EU from June

Jack Daniel's feels trade war hangover

ERIC MARTIN
MARCH 15

American rum distillers and French winemakers celebrated this month when the US and European Union suspended tariffs on billions of dollars of each other's exports.

But for US whiskey producers, the detente brought no relief.

The products getting a reprieve on duties were part of a dispute over subsidies to the world's two biggest aircraft makers, Boeing Co. and Airbus SE.

The whiskey industry still faces 25 per cent duties that are the result of a still-unresolved, separate front in former President Donald Trump's transatlantic trade war. The tar-

iffs are set to double to 50 per cent on June 1.

The duties are hitting American distillers from Brown-Forman Corp— the maker of the iconic Jack Daniel's brand and Woodford Reserve bourbon—to hundreds of small craft producers. The pain is compounded by a plunge in demand from restaurants and bars due to the pandemic, and closures of tasting rooms due to social-distancing measures.

The duties show how unrelated industries get caught up in trade wars when countries look to maximise the political impact of reciprocal duties. The whiskey tariffs particularly hit Kentucky, the biggest bourbon-producing state and home of



then senate majority leader and Trump ally Mitch McConnell.

The whiskey tariffs are the EU's response to Trump's June 2018 steel and aluminum duties that are still in place. The UK, which came to its own reprieve in the aircraft-subsidy dispute with the US, has also kept the whiskey duties.

European alcohol and American spirits includ-

ing rum and vodka that saw tariffs suspended this month were part of \$11.5 billion in EU and US industrial, agricultural and consumer goods that got a temporary respite related to the Boeing-Airbus case. But whiskey is the largest US spirits export globally.

When the whiskey tariffs went into effect almost three years ago, Brown-Forman decided to absorb the cost, thinking that the duties wouldn't remain in place more than a few months, said Lawson E. Whiting, president and CEO of Louisville, Kentucky-based Brown-Forman. That has resulted in annual expenses of \$80 million, squeezing the company's profit margins and restraining hiring and

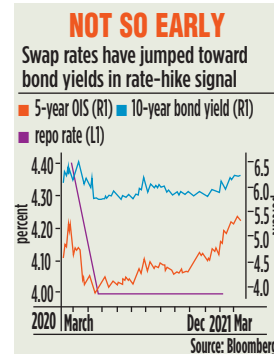
expansion, he said.

Brown-Forman—a global business with famous brands and more than \$3 billion in annual revenue —has been able to mostly maintain sales. But many smaller distillers have seen exports to Europe tumble.

Since the tariffs took effect in mid-2018, exports to Europe have fallen by about 60 per cent. While the company sells to 55 markets globally from Australia to Russia, and has continued to grow in the US, it put off plans to expand into eastern Europe. American whiskey sales to the EU, the US's largest export market, plunged 37 per cent to \$440 million since the tariffs went into effect in 2018.

—Bloomberg

Market wrong on RBI rate-hike bets: Birla Sun

RAHUL SATIJA
MARCH 15

The growing market wagers about the most aggressive interest-rate tightening in India of any nation in Asia are wrong, according to Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC.

Five-year interest-rate swaps jumped to 5.42 per cent on March 8, the highest in more than a year, reflecting surging expectations of a tighter monetary policy, and were at 5.32 per cent on Monday. "Markets are mispricing quick rate hikes," said Maneesh Dangi, co-chief investment officer at Aditya Birla.

Dangi, who oversees Rs 1.8 lakh crore of debt assets (\$25 billion), expects the policy rates to remain low for longer as the central bank prioritises a nascent economic recovery over signs of perking inflation.

He also expects the Reserve Bank of India to keep the banking system awashed with liquidity to support the government's record borrowing programme.

The RBI's "compulsion is its inability to normalise its policy as markets have not adjusted to higher levels of government borrowings and are naturally demanding much higher term-premium than before," said Mumbai-based Dangi.

Rate-hike wagers are building around the world as expectations for growth and inflation gain ground. Swap rates are signalling India will see the most rapid tightening of any nation in Asia, according to Standard Chartered Plc.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Kapil is now PGTI board member

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

Dev, who captained India to World Cup glory in 1983, said he would work for the development of golf in the country. "I thank PGTI for allowing me to be a part of their board. I am extremely happy to be a part of PGTI and will do my best to promote golf as a sport that is doing well and has the potential to become one of the most coveted tours in sports," Dev said in a PGTI release.

"...It is up to all of us to promote other sports including golf. I wish PGTI good luck for the upcoming events." Meanwhile, the Delhi-NCR Open Golf Championship 2021, to be jointly organised by the TATA Steel PGTI and Prometheus School, Noida, will begin at the Golden Greens Golf Club in Gurugram on Tuesday. The Pro-Am event will be staged on March 20. — PTI

Police hunt for Angel's robbers

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

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

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

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

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

No fans at Oly torch relay start

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

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

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

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

B'day boy Curry lifts Warriors

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

He finished 10-of-20 from the field with six three-pointers. "It's like that ageing wine, right?" Curry said. — AFP

Live on TV

CRICKET

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

FOOTBALL

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

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ACTION REPLAY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

India exposed our weakness: Eoin

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

— AP

IPL stint made Kishan fearless

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chase master Kohli (73 not out off 49 balls) took charge after Kishan's dismissal to power India to victory with 13 balls to spare. "It was proud feeling for me because I had just seen him (Kohli) on TV, his attitude on the ground, but to see it from the other end is totally different. I think it is something which I can change in myself, his energy, his appearance on the ground, there is a lot to learn from him."

"The way he talks in the ground it takes pressure from you. I just want to make sure that I learn a lot from him in this series," Kishan said. — PTI

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NO SPECTATORS AS COVID CASES RISE IN GUJARAT

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

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

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

Nathwani said the GCA will form policy for refund of money to the spectators who have already purchased tickets for these three T20Is.

"Those who have received complimentary tickets are requested not to visit the stadium," he added. The BCCI and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) also issued their respective statements after the development.

"The BCCI will continue to comply with all the regulations put in place to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus and will always put the health and safety of its fans and stakeholders at the top," BCCI secretary Jay Shah said. — PTI

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Escape to victory, MP archers' style

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

With less than an hour to reach Dehradun on Saturday, the eight-member recurve men's and women's team experienced the horror of being chased by black thick smoke and fire as they jumped to safety to the adjacent bogey.

But they lost all their belongings, right from their equipment to original documents including Aadhaar Card and birth certificates after their coach C5 was charred near Kansrao.

Starting from scratch with a new set of equipment that arrived in the wee hours of Sunday, the archers without any pre-match day practice concluded their campaign with two silver and one bronze in the recurve category and a team silver in the compound category earlier.

Class X student Sonia Thakur, who won two silver medals in the ranking round, went one step up advancing into the Olympic round on Monday as she nearly bagged a third but only to go down to her Haryana rival in a tightly-contested bronze playoff that was decided in a tiebreaker.

Class X student Sonia Thakur, who won two silver medals in the ranking round, went one step up advancing into the Olympic round on Monday as she nearly bagged a third but only to go down to her Haryana rival in a tightly-contested bronze playoff that was decided in a tiebreaker.

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● **Madhya Pradesh archers miraculously escaped the Shatabdi Express train fire on their way to the national championships and, without any pre-match day practice, won three silvers and one bronze medal at the event.**

"They have achieved something impossible. Miracles like this do happen in sport," MP head coach Richpal Singh said from Dehradun.

Singh, who had reached with the compound team ahead of the recurve archers, remembers Saturday's ordeal vividly when he first learnt about the horrific incident.

"They were slated to reach in Dehradun at 12.55pm and we were to go for practice after grabbing a quick bite. But there was no phone calls as I dropped a message in our WhatsApp group and learnt about the trauma."

"The first thing I asked them was 'Are you all safe?' After hearing that they all are safe, our first job was to boost their morale and ensure that they stay focus on the competition the next day."

With a combined support from the MP state administration and Archery Association of India, they managed to get a new set of equipment ordered from Patiala. — PTI

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ARSENAL EDGE SPURS, MAN UNITED ALSO WIN

London, March 15: Arsenal bounced back from Erik Lamela's stunning Rabona to open the scoring in the north London derby to beat Tottenham 2-1 on Sunday, as Manchester United and Leicester tightened their grip on a top-four finish in the Premier League.

United edged out fifth-placed West Ham 1-0 thanks to Craig Dawson's own goal to remain a point ahead of Leicester, who thrashed bottom-of-the-table Sheffield United 5-0. On a costly afternoon for Spurs' hopes of a top-four finish, Tottenham also lost Son Heung-min to a hamstring injury, while Lamela went from hero to villain for the visitors with a needless second-half red card.

Arsenal's afternoon did not start well with captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang dropped to the bench for a breach of discipline, reportedly after turning up late for the squad's pre-match meeting.

West Ham missed the chance to move into the top four as former Man Utd boss David Moyes remains winless in 15 visits to Old Trafford as the opposition manager.

The Hammers' conservative approach was punished by one moment of misfortune eight minutes into the second half as Dawson turned a Bruno Fernandes corner into his own net.

Mason Greenwood also hit the post either side of half-time for United, who close the gap on league leaders Manchester City to 14 points. — AFP

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