


# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | MONDAY | 8 MARCH 2021

## WEATHER

 **Max:** 37.0°C  
**Min:** 19.0°C  
**RH:** 73%  
**Rainfall:** NIL

**Forecast:** Partly Cloudy.  
Max/Min temp.  
37/19 °C

## ASTROGUIDE

**Sarvari:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Magha Bahula Dasami  
till 3.47 pm  
**Star:** Purvashada till 8.42 pm  
**Varjyam:** Sunrise to 8.04 am;  
4.42 am to 6.18 am (Tuesday)  
**Durmuhurtam:** 12.50 pm to  
1.37 pm; 3.11 pm to 3.59 pm  
**Rahukalam:** 7.30 am to 9 pm  
**HJRI CALENDAR**  
**Rajab** 23,1441 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 6.15 AM**  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.11 PM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 02.19 AM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 02.38 PM**

## COUNTER POINT



What can we do now, sir? They have happily agreed to give whatever number of seats you want!

## SHORT TAKES

### Plaint against Ktk mantri dropped

**Bengaluru:** In a twist to the alleged sex-for-job scandal in Karnataka, social activist Dinesh Kallahalli on Sunday said he would withdraw his police complaint against BJP MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi, which had led to his resignation. Dinesh Kallahalli said he will withdraw the complaint as he was hurt by allegations of a ₹5 crore deal, levelled by JDS leader H.D. Kumaraswamy.

### Congress expels Puducherry unit leader

**Puducherry:** Working president of Congress in Puducherry A.K.D. Arumugham was expelled from the party on Sunday even as he joined the opposition AINRC with just weeks left for the assembly elections in the union territory. The PCC got information that Arumugham had been making efforts to join “some other party” and hence he was expelled from the party.

### Officer held for Army exam leak

**Pune:** An Army officer was arrested on Sunday in connection with the recent Army exam paper leak case, a senior Pune police official said. This Army officer, who is the sixth person to be arrested in the case, will be produced in a Pune court on Monday, he said. Earlier, two Army personnel and three others were already arrested.

## EDU | MATTERS

### 6 lakh students enrolled in govt and aided schools

## Demand spikes for state textbooks

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 7**

The overwhelming response to the government schools due to improvement in standards has resulted in a shortage of textbooks for these schools in Andhra Pradesh, officials said on Sunday.

As many as 6 lakh students enrolled in government and aided schools this year owing to the initiatives undertaken by the YSRC government to improve the facilities and standards there. The text-

books were printed based on the 2019-20 data, with a five per cent buffer, but it still created a shortage, it was stated.

Chief secretary to the school education department, Buditi Rajasekhar, said lakhs of students chose to enroll themselves in government schools this time. Most of these students got transferred during the months of November, December, January and February — i.e., even after the schools reopened.

Printing of textbooks and workbooks concluded by

April, 2020 with a five per cent buffer. The spike in the number of students opting for government institutions this time has surpassed all expectations, the chief secretary said.

Rajasekhar said that on March 4, after discussions attended by representatives of the School Education department and representatives of the government printing section, an additional ₹7 crore was sanctioned for the purpose of printing the required number of text/workbooks. These would be supplied to

the 4,11,427 students who shifted to government/government aided schools post November. The books are expected to be distributed to the students within 15 days, he said.

He said as of September 30, 2019, a total of 38,97,156 students were registered in government or government-aided schools. As the government was expecting the number to rise, books for 40,92,014 students were printed, which is five per cent more than the existing figure of 38,97,156 as on the cut-off date.

## Shah: BJP will share TN power

**ARULOLI M | DC NAGERCOIL, MARCH 7**

Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday expressed optimism about the formation of a coalition government in the state in which the BJP would be a partner with the AIADMK, after the Assembly election.

Addressing Sakthikendra members of the BJP in a hotel in Nagercoil, Kanyakumari district, Amit Shah said he recognised the hurdles the BJP was facing in Tamil Nadu to form government. He hoped that the coming elections would be a game-changer.

Advising the Sakthikendra members to make the people aware of the BJP-led Central government's welfare schemes for Tamil Nadu, especially for the coastal community, Amit Shah said that Tamil Nadu is one of the states which benefited the most through the fisheries department, created by the Centre in 2019. During the first term of the Narendra Modi-led NDA government at the Centre, Tamil Nadu was allotted ₹545 crore for fisheries development schemes.

Appreciating Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy

**HOME MINISTER** Amit Shah said he recognised the hurdles the BJP was facing in Tamil Nadu to form government.

**HE HOPED** that the coming elections would be a game-changer and criticised the DMK and the Congress for the dynastic rule.

Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam for their good work during the pandemic, Shah came down heavily upon the DMK and the Congress for trying to bring in their dynasty rule in the state.

“Stalin has no concern for the people of TN,” the former BJP president said adding, Stalin's prime objective was to make his son Udayanithi Stalin Chief Minister. Earlier, Amit Shah offered prayers at the Thanumalayan Swamy temple at Suchindram and at Neelaveni Amman temple near Hindu College, and participated in the ‘Vetriyadi Velvum’ rally of the party till Veppamoodu junction, Nagercoil, where he garlanded the statue of former chief minister K. Kamaraj.

## NATION | 4

**DMK, Congress seal alliance in TN**



## WORLD | 5

**Twitter founder's tweet sold for \$2m**

## SPORTS | 8

**Sindhu goes down to Marin in Swiss Open final**



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# Modi woos WB with industry

PM says Mamata's fall would usher in investment and jobs to Bengal

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 7**

Mocking West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's recent “scooty ride” from her Kalighat residence in south Kolkata to Nabanna, the state secretariat in Howrah, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asserted that the Trinamul Congress supremo's two-wheeler is destined to fall along with her as she is defeated in Nandigram, the hot seat of the West Bengal Assembly election where she has chosen to contest from after fleeing her winning seat of two terms, Bhowanipore, fearing a loss on her home turf.

“Didi, a few days ago you were managing to handle the scooty. All then were praying for your well-being so that you would not get injured. It was good that you did not fall down, otherwise, you would have made the state, where the scooty was built your enemy. Had the scooty been made in the South, you would have treated it as your enemy. If it was built in the North, you would have turned it into your enemy,” Mr Modi told Ms Banerjee while addressing a massive BJP rally with Bollywood actor Mithun Chakraborty on the dais at Brigade Parade



Prime Minister Narendra Modi talks to yesteryear actor Mithun Chakraborty, who joined the BJP in Kolkata on Sunday.

— DC

Ground in Kolkata.

Emboldened by Mithun's induction into the saffron party at the mega poll campaign event, Mr Modi taunted Ms Banerjee, saying: “It is good that you are fine. But your scooty is headed towards Nandigram instead of moving to Bhowanipore. We are well-wishers of all ways. We

do not want anyone to be injured. But what can we do if her scooty itself has decided to fall in Nandigram?”

His jibe directed at Ms Banerjee with full confidence assumes significance as the BJP has fielded her former Cabinet colleague and ex-TMC heavy-weight Suwendu Adhikari

against her at Nandigram at his wish since it is his home turf. Impressed by the huge turnout at the rally, Mr Modi quipped: “It looks like of May 2 (the date of the poll results).”

Calling the TMC's huge graft as the “Olympics of Corruption” in a speech over an hour, Mr Modi also played the industry card, the BJP's second prime weapon after Hindutva, saying that it would usher in investment and infrastructure expansion which would bring “Asol Poriborton” (real change), replacing the dangerous politics of appeasement and syndicate and extortion nexus of the TMC with trade and business, employment generation and development in all other sectors across the state.

To allay the fears among Bengalis about the saffron party's religious fanaticism, which the TMC has been warning about, the PM further pledged that the local culture and sentiments, including the lifestyle and food habits of Bengalis such as Machh-Bhaat (fish and rice) would be “protected” and that the next government would work for five years, giving priority to popular choices and wishes, to build the foundation of a roadmap for the next 25 years in West Bengal.

## MAMATA SLAMS MODI FOR RISE IN PETROL PRICE

**DC CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, MARCH 7**

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reveal his worth in terms of “price” while branding him the “biggest extortionist”, in her vitriolic retaliation to his blistering attack on her on Sunday.

The angry Trinamul Congress supremo also accused the PM and his deputy, home minister Amit Shah, of being the “only syndicate” in the country.

Ms Banerjee said: “You first have to explain why there has been fuel and LPG price hikes daily. LPG cylinders need to be provided free of cost. People of the state want to know that. Five states are going to the polls in the coming days. You will face defeat everywhere.”

She added: “When you address an empty Brigade, I, being a street-fighter forever, stay on the road which shows me the way.”

■ Full report on Page 4

## Women's Day cheer



Indian Army officers pose during a media interaction, a day before International Women's Day, at South Block lawn in New Delhi on Sunday.

— PTI

## RECRUITMENT TEST LEAK: ARMY OFFICER HELD

**Pune, March 7:** An Army officer was arrested on Sunday in connection with the recent recruitment exam paper leak case, a senior Pune police official said.

The Army officer, who is the sixth person to be arrested in the case, will be produced in a Pune court on Monday, he said.

Earlier, two Army personnel and three others had been arrested after the paper of Army Relation Recruitment exam, scheduled for February 28, was found to have been leaked.

The exam, which was to take place in Pune and 40 other centres across the country, had to be cancelled, police said.

According to police, two cases have been registered in the city in connection with the paper leak, police said.

The one at Wanwadi police station is about the paper leak itself, while a related case of cheating has been registered at Vishrambaug police station.

The Army had said that it had cancelled the test to maintain its integrity, though the leak was not widespread. — PTI

## Saudi jets bomb Yemen's capital

**Cairo, March 7:** The Saudi-led coalition fighting Iran-backed rebels in Yemen said Sunday that it had launched a new air campaign on the country's capital and other provinces, in retaliation for missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia.

The targeting of civilians and civilian facilities is a red line, Col. Turki al-Maliki, a spokesman for the coalition, was quoted as saying by the official Saudi Press Agency. He was referring to the missile and drone strikes on Saudi cities in recent weeks that the Iranian-backed rebels, known as Houthis, had claimed.

The terrorist (Houthi) leaders will be held accountable, he said. Residents in Sanaa, Yemen's rebel-held capital, reported hearing huge explosions as a round of bombs fell on the city on Sunday.

The Houthi-run al-Masirah satellite TV channel reported at least seven airstrikes on Sanaa's districts of Attan and al-Nahda. Al-Masirah did not say what facilities were hit by the coalition,

## US BOMBERS FLY OVER WEST ASIA TO WARN IRAN

**Dubai, March 7:** A pair of B-52 bombers flew over the Mideast on Sunday, the latest such mission in the region aimed at warning Iran amid tensions between Washington and Tehran.

The flight by the two heavy bombers came as a pro-Iran satellite channel based in Beirut broadcast Iranian military drone footage of an Israeli ship hit by a mysterious explosion only days earlier.

While the channel sought to say Iran wasn't involved, Israel has blamed Tehran for what it described as an attack on the vessel.

— AP

but back smoke was seen rising over military camps in the areas. The channel also reported an airstrike in the district of Bajil, in the province of Hodeida. — AP

## MODI TO OPEN 'MAITRI SETU' TO BANGLADESH TOMORROW

**New Delhi, March 7:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Tuesday inaugurate the ‘Maitri Setu’ between India and Bangladesh, a bridge built over the Feni river, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said. The river flows on the Indian boundary between Tripura and Bangladesh.

He will also inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple infrastructure projects in Tripura during the event, it said.

Modi will inaugurate the Maitri Setu at 12 noon via video conferencing, the PMO said in a statement.

The name ‘Maitri Setu’ symbolises growing bilateral relations with Bangladesh, the PMO said. The construction was taken up by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd at a project cost of ₹133 crore, it said.

The 1.9 km long bridge joins Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh.

With this inauguration, Tripura is set to become the Gateway of North East' with access to Chittagong Port of Bangladesh, which is 80 kms from Sabroom.

Modi will also lay the foundation stone for setting up an Integrated Check Post at Sabroom.

It will help ease the movement of goods and passengers between the two countries, provide new market opportunities for products of North East states and assist seamless movement of passengers to and from India and Bangladesh, the PMO said.

The project is being taken up by the Land Ports Authority of India at an estimated cost of about ₹232 crore, the statement said.

The Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone of National Highway (NH)-208 connecting the Unakoti district headquarters at Kailashahar. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

MOBILE SHOPS  
URGED TO GIVE  
10% DISCOUNTDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 7

The Nellore district police wing has requested the management of mobile shops across Nellore city to offer a 10 per cent discount on mobile phones for women and girl students on March 8, International Women's Day.

Disha DSP Nagaraju requested mobile shop owners in the city to arrange flexis, announcing a 10 per cent discount on purchase of mobile phones. He asked the students and women to avail the discounts offered by mobile traders on the occasion of Women's Day.

He was speaking at an awareness camp on Disha app and its uses to women and girl students in Nellore on Sunday. Nagaraju appealed to the women community to make use of the app and avail services of police when they are in distress.

He appealed to the students to create awareness among the women and children in their areas on existing laws that can help the women in distress. He said the state government is according top priority for women's safety, adding that the introduction of Disha Act is for the safety and security of women.

Dargamitta CI G. Nageswaramma and others were present.

SRINIVASA RAO  
CALLS NAIDU  
A PESTDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 7

Minister for endowment Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao has alleged that Telugu Desam leader Chandrababu Naidu is trying to create disturbances in Vijayawada city and said Naidu is a pest that affects life in Andhra Pradesh.

The minister recalled that TD leaders MLC Buddha Venkanna, ex-MLA Bonda Umamaheswara Rao and minority leader Nagul Meera spoke the truth about corruption and illegalities of Naidu, and demanded that Naidu respond to those charges. The TD dumped crores on their leaders to lure voters and win VMC elections, he alleged.

Speaking to the media here on Sunday, Srinivasa Rao said Naidu neglected Vijayawada City during his term and hence "he doesn't have the moral right to campaign in the city".

The minister said Naidu couldn't complete the construction of the Kanaka Durga flyover during his rule and did not even release any fund for development of Vijayawada while chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's government has completed the flyover construction and sanctioned works of ₹600 crore for development of the city.

He asserted that the YSRC would win all the 64 wards in the Vijayawada Corporation. The people of Vijayawada are tired of Naidu's lies, he said, and demanded that Naidu seek an apology from the people for his negligence of the city in the past.

PROTECTION OF  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
OF SURVIVORSDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 7

Survivors of human trafficking sought to protect their human rights. On Sunday, the non-governmental organisations HELP, Vimukti and Indian Leadership Forum Against Trafficking (ILFAT) state chapter conducted a state-level meeting at Vijayawada ahead of International Women's Day. They strongly opposed the Central and state governments for keeping survivors out of policy formulation.

Vimukti state convener Meharunnisa said, "We strongly oppose the Central and state governments that are avoiding the process of formation of new policies and programmes and also in the process of enforcing them as laws without understanding our realistic and pathetic situation and without consulting or involving the survivors of trafficking."

She said that a recent pan-India survey revealed that violence against survivors had increased: 31.9 per cent of sex workers were affected by domestic violence (by temporary husbands or family members) 55.9 per cent by their customers, 14 per cent by pimps and brokers, 5.9 per cent by brothel owners.

## INTERVIEW

Cultivate relationships,  
learn from others: Roja

I was deeply inspired by three persons — Mother Teresa, former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Selvi Jayalalitha and my husband R.K. Selvamani

AVINASH P. SUBRAMANYAM  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 7

Nagari YSR Congress MLA and APIIC chairperson R.K. Roja Selvamani has come a long way since being an actress. Often referred to as "Real Firebrand" of AP politics, who always has the perfect answer for her rivals, the actor-turned-politician has become an inspiration for several women striving to make a space for themselves in politics.

On International Women's Day this year, she speaks to *Deccan Chronicle* about her journey from films to politics. She shares what needs to be done if more women are to enter the political sphere.

Here are some excerpts from her interview.

**Q What does 'feminism' mean to you?**

To me, feminism is women taking control of their own life and

future, doing what they love unlimitedly. Most importantly, it means changing the way women and their roles are assessed by society. We should remember that the current feminism is a gift from our grandmothers and great-grandmothers, who fought for the right to vote. Their fight opened many doors for women in history. We now call that feminism.

**Q Was the driving force behind your decision to enter politics?**

I was deeply inspired by three persons — Mother Teresa, former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Selvi Jayalalitha and my husband R. K. Selvamani. Mother Teresa reached everyone, whether poor or rich, sick or hungry and treated them alike. Her blessings got me into the sphere of social services. Secondly, I did not have any political aspirations. My husband is a follower of Periyar's ideology. Like him, I started believing that oppressed must be helped and empowered. He was the one who convinced me to enter politics. Significantly, Jayalalitha - the enigmatic woman leader in Indian politics, made me realise that a woman can brush aside all turbulences and challenges that life throws.

**Q Do you think about the role of women in politics?**

Over the last two or three decades, representation of women in parliaments has been increasing globally. But it is not so in India. Political parties not fielding them in sufficient numbers is a critical barrier. Higher numbers of women in parliament or assemblies will bring stronger attention on

women's issues. Seeing women politicians helps young girls imagine themselves in leadership roles. This encourages them to enter into politics too.

**Q What is the most important advice you would give to a woman seeking to start a career in politics?**

There are many misconceptions that you have to come from a certain background, political family or movies to succeed in politics. Any woman, who is brave and committed to serve the society, can join politics. I agree that though being a woman politician gives you an edge, but there is also lots of criticism. You have to be tough, sometimes autocratic; yet compassionate to succeed in today's politics.

**Q Are there any assumptions about women that you would like to change?**

Everyone thinks we are too sweet to be a boss, too pretty to be smart, and too emotional to be good leaders. We are weak because we are emotional, though that also what makes us strong. Yes, I cry when I am frustrated. But I never buckle under pressure. Women are stronger than people think. Our intellectual and emotional abilities will take us far beyond a man can go.

**Q What is your message on International Women's Day to women of the world?**

Every woman should keep in mind that there will be blockades and crossroads in their path. Don't let them stop you. Be yourself and not what others want you to be. Cultivate relationships, learn from others. Above all, help others; because if you fall in your journey, they will likely help you get up.

## Dynasty politics won't help women: Yamini

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN I  
DC  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 7

Yamini Sharma Sadineni is a young entrepreneur and secretary of the BJP's women's wing. She is the youngest and only woman of a 15 member international expedition of radio ham operators to Isla del Coco off Costa Rica in 2008 at the age of 22.

She is a holder of Limca Book of Record for being the first Asian and Indian woman to experiment and promote wireless communication to send and receive emails without internet connections.

After joining politics as spokesperson for the Telugu Desam, she gained instant popularity for her vitriolic remarks on Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan.

She was trolled heavily on social media for her remarks on political opponents. She took up the chariot burning issue at Antavadi in East Godavari. She is a trust member of a temple at Varanasi. Excerpts from an interview

**Q What do you say of the phenomenon of women in politics?**

Politics is not a new subject to Indian women. Right from the days of kings ruling their kingdoms till date, several great Indian women leaders ruled provinces, like Jijiyaji, the mother of Shivaji, and we also have

top women politicians of the present generation.

Women have been proving their mettle in every field from kitchen to Space and achieving success despite facing hardships. They have ventured into business and generating employment and they are also helping the Indian economy grow. In politics, there is not enough of women leadership as no reservation is being provided to them. Domination of males and illiteracy among the females are resulting in a denial of due role for women in decision-making fields. Dynasty politics is also not giving enough opportunity to women in general categories. The women having no political family background are being denied a chance to flourish in politics.

**Q A lot of efforts are being put in to ensure gender equality but the goal is still far?**

As a woman leader, I have been facing a series of problems like character assassination, male dominance, internal politics etc. As I do not have a family history of politics, other leaders do not help much. I have seen several of my fellow leaders feeling jealous of my growth in politics and they try to

demotivate me. Social media trolling on some issues is also having its adverse effect on my growth in politics. However, I believe in doing hard work and try to compete with male politicians.

**Q There is a significant difference in the leadership of women and men. Perceptions are that women have more patience, can become a good administrator and even an all-rounder. Men, with a quick or short temper and with less patience, can't manage many things well?**

Yes. It is true. We require more women leaders as they only can attend to the needs of everyone like a mother in a family. They can plan and execute things for the benefit of all.

**Q Feminism is a typical psychological matter for a few women as they developed it due to their family conditions and social environment since their childhood?**

In my view, feminism is not an ideology to fight for equal rights for clothes, drugs, or for blaming the Indian Sanatana dharma or culture and practices. It is not necessary that you get attracted to foreign culture and hate Indian traditions and festivals. Feminism is simply a fight

for socio-political and economic equality between the male and female species. Typical feminists need counseling on feminism. They have wrong notions.

**Q There is no equality and no gender parity in several aspects despite legislation. Why so?**

Yes. We have not achieved equality in terms of rights and opportunities between men and women in several fields despite us having legislation as law is confined only to paper. Law is not being implemented properly and negligence and graft are other reasons why it remains a distant dream.

**Q What are the ways for women to achieve success in a male-dominated society?**

We need change in the education system where girls and women need to be encouraged more to enable them pursue higher studies and upgrade their skills. Literacy rate among women need to be enhanced and a friendly work environment must be provided for women.

**Q How helpful are the present laws for women to get justice?**

Most of our laws are a continuation of the post-British era and they need to be updated to suit the needs of the present-day society. There is need to bring in reforms to uphold our traditions

and culture. I am surprised to see a judge asking a rapist whether he is willing to marry his victim.

**Q What is the source of inspiration in our life?**

My mother is the best source of inspiration to me as she is an expert in managing household expenses and knows how to save money. She knows the needs of the family and plans for future needs also. My mother, like every mother, is the best social activist and taught me the best ethics and morals to follow in my life. My mother is my best teacher as she taught me courage to face challenges. Moreover, nature is my best inspiration and every person who did good for the society is an inspiration to me as well.

GALLA VOWS  
GARBAGE-FREE  
CORPORATIONSDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 7

Telugu Desam Guntur MP Galla Jayadev announced that the Telugu Desam will establish a beautification mission to make municipalities and corporations garbage-free.

He said that the TD would emerge victorious in the urban local body polls to be held on March 10. While the TD was striving to make the cities more liveable, the YSRC government had imposed high tax burdens under different labels. Jayadev alleged that the YSRC government had not installed a single energy-efficient LED streetlight.

Grand events marked the International Women's Day celebrations on Sunday in East and West Godavari districts. Several institutions organised special programmes to mark the occasion.

A candle-light rally was taken out at Rajamahendravaram, starting from Shyamala Centre to Pushkarghat, which was headed by the Rajamahendravaram Urban SP Dr Shemoshi Bajpayee. She said police would aim at protecting women round the clock, all year. She exhorted girl students and women to inform the police without

## WOMAN | POWER

## Candle light rally taken out in E. Godavari

## Grand events mark IWD2021

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 7

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A candle-light rally was taken out at Rajamahendravaram, starting from Shyamala Centre to Pushkarghat, which was headed by the Rajamahendravaram Urban SP Dr Shemoshi Bajpayee. She said police would aim at protecting women round the clock, all year. She exhorted girl students and women to inform the police without

fear, if they faced harassment or teasing and the police would immediately take action.

She said that two DISHA She teams are headed by two women Sub-Inspectors and four She teams are operating to curb harassment of women. Hence, women need not worry over their safety. Additional SP, K Latha Madhuri, Ch Papa Rao, SB DSPs D Rama Varma, D Srinivasa Reddy, Zonal DSPs JVSanthosh, M Srilatha and others were present.

East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said women should participate in various sports to relieve them of the pressure and tension

as they played a key role in family and also do justice to their jobs. Inaugurating the sports meet at Kakinada for women employees, he said women should allocate some time for playing games for their psychological and physical fitness as well.

He said women, more than men, have proven their talents in several sports. The AP NGO women wing chairperson Y Padma Meenakshi, convener N Subrahmanyeswari, state vice president K Anuradha government general hospital superintendent Dr R.Mahalakshmi, BC corporation executive director SVS Subba Lakshmi and others were present.

A candle-light rally was organised at Kakinada on Sunday night. SP Adnan Naveem Asmi, joint collector G Rajakumari, Keerthi Chekuri and others were present.

In Eluru of West Godavari, joint collector Himanshu Sukla said the people could win over Covid-19 only due to the good work done by women as doctors, sanitary workers, anganwadi workers etc. He flagged off the candle-light rally from Indoor Stadium to the fire station. Joint collector Namburi Tej Bharat (welfare) said women have proven their talents in more fields than men and only women can save the society by virtue of their efficiency.

Will turn Vijayawada  
clean and green cityMD ILYAS I DC  
VIJAYAWADA, March 7

Kesineni Swetha, 25, daughter of Telugu Desam's Vijayawada MP Kesineni Srinivas alias Nani, is a debutant contesting the VMC elections as mayoral candidate of TD. She asserts that an empowered woman has the ability to uplift the society and can stand as a beacon light for growth and development. Here below are excerpts from her interview with Deccan Chronicle on Sunday.



**KESINENI SWETHA**  
TD mayoral  
candidate

**Q How are women in the 21 Century?**

I addressed the National Women's Parliament held in 2017 about women being so used to hearing "no" as an answer in many fields and facing questions like "Yeh kar sakti hai kya" (Can she do this) and also the "Ammayi Kadha" comments. This, despite the fact that women are capable of doing things better than men.

Women and girls should not stop fighting against odds. They know better about themselves and what they can do. The attitude of women and girls is changing and they are becoming what they want to be, and even taking up higher political posts. Note the fact that a 21-year-old Arya Rajendran became the youngest Mayor of Trivandrum Corporation in Kerala. The state appreciated her efforts, and this shows the change in Indian politics. Recently, many young women won elections in the gram panchayat elections.

**Q You are new to politics and what are your chances of winning the election?**

I am not new to politics. I had worked as campaigner for a local senator in the US in 2014 while studying there. I had taken up the campaigning responsibility when my father Nani got the MP seat from the TD party for the first time in 2104. I came down all the way from the US and played a vital role in my father's victory. In June 2015, I became a volunteer in the team for Hillary Clinton's poll campaign at the grassroots level. Essentially, I worked as a student leader to mobilize students on college campuses and let people know about Hillary's policies. These political experiences honed my skills to work for my father in the 2019 elections.

**Q Do you know the problems and difficulties of the people of Vijayawada city?**

I am associated with the TD for the past seven years. I had played a key role in bringing Tata Trust to Krishna district to develop villages and rural areas. I wrote the first letter to Tata Trust seeking their cooperation in developing villages under the Vijayawada parliament constituency. I got to know about the difficulties and problems of the people during my associations with Tata Trust. It was Tata Trust founder Ratan Tata who included me in his team. I

had conducted a Padayatra through the city twice during the election campaign and gone to every doorstep to know of the people's difficulties and by now I have a fairly good understanding of the citizens' difficulties.

**Q How did you get a ticket for the Vijayawada Mayor contest from the TD? Any influence?**

As I said, I had been working with the TD for the past few years and TD chief Chandrababu Naidu offered me the ticket in due recognition of my experience in developmental activities and my political awareness. I had worked in seven assembly constituencies under the Vijayawada parliament constituency to ensure the win of my father in the 2014 and 2019 elections. I gained enormously about political strategies and played a key role in the win of my father on both times.

**Q Where did you have your primary education and higher education?**

I completed primary education in Atkinson School and VP Siddhartha School in my home city of Vijayawada and further education in the Lawrence School, Lovedale, Ooty. I completed the Intermediate course from the International School, Bangalore and did my BA degree course in Psychology and Economics from Emory University, Atlanta, USA.

**Q Do you have experience in social service?**

I had worked in the microfinance community service project, Ghana, Africa and also in the 1000 village project of Tata Trust rural development programme in Maharashtra, the Tata Trust cancer care programme in Assam, Odisha, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. My involvement with people from various sections of the society changed my attitude and inspired me to enter politics and do better service to the society.

**Q What would you do for Vijayawada city if you win the election?**

Our Vijayawada Team with the cooperation of the then TD government and legislators initiated development activities leading to the construction of the Durga Flyover and Benz circle flyover, but due to elections those projects slowed down. We started the underground drainage and storm water drains projects and these works were completed by 80 per cent. The present YSRC government stalled these works. I would work on the completion of all projects and turn Vijayawada into a clean and green city.

Naidu obstructing  
development: BotsaDC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 7

Municipal administration minister Botsa Satyanarayana blamed Opposition leader Nara Chandrababu Naidu for obstructing the development of Visakhapatnam and claimed that the TD had moved court to stall the allotment of houses to the poor.

Addressing a press conference in Visakhapatnam on Sunday, the minister said Naidu was blaming the YSRC for lack of development.

"We are planning for Metro Rail from Madhuravada to Gajuwaka and another section from Steel Plant

to Bhogapuram. Naidu is not talking about these projects but raking up Amaravati in the Vizag elections," Satyanarayana said.

Naidu should set his house in order first by resolving the party disputes in Vijayawada rather talking about the YSRC government, he said.

Satyanarayana said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had praised the AP government for implementing housing for poor and the Union minister for urban affairs had announced several awards to the state government for ease of doing business and municipal performance.



## SHORT TAKES

**B'LURU TECHIE DROWNS AT MANTRALAYAM**DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, MARCH 7

One person died and locals and police rescued three others from drowning in Tungabhadra River near Mantralayam.

The deceased was Sunil Kumar, 28, a resident of Bengaluru and a private employee. Mantralayam circle inspector Krishna said that a nine-member group of friends, including the deceased, came to Mantralayam from Bengaluru to have holy darshan of Sri Raghavendra Swamy. On Sunday morning, they arrived at the riverbed to get a river bath in Tungabhadra. Incidentally, four of them were drawn into River while they were having a bath. Locals and police who had noticed their situation immediately tried to save them. But Sunil Kumar died, and Pratap, Prasanth and Lakshmi Narayana were rescued, CI said. The body was handed over to the father after conducting a post-mortem at Mantralayam hospital and a case was registered, he added. He, however, appealed to the pilgrims to be careful while they were having a bath in the River and do not go into deep water levels.

**GIRL DIES IN ACCIDENT NEAR SRISALAM**DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, MARCH 7

A 15-year-old girl died and another person was injured in a road accident at the Srisaillam ghat section near Chintala of Nallamala forest on Sunday. The deceased was identified as Divya, a resident of Nandikotkur town.

According to the police, the incident occurred after an unknown four-wheeler hit an autorickshaw that was going towards Srisaillam. Another girl, Manjula, who also travelling in the same auto, was shifted to Dornala government hospital. The Dornala police registered a case, and an investigation is underway.

**136 NEW COVID CASES, 1 DEATH REPORTED IN AP**DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 7

AP reported 136 new Covid-19 infections and one Covid-19 related death registered in the past 24 hours on Sunday. The total tally increased to 8,90,692, while the death toll was 7,174. The number of recoveries increased to 8,82,520 as 58 more patients recovered and there were 998 active cases in the state in the past 24 hours on Sunday.

As many as 45,702 samples were tested and the total sample tests touched 1,42,36,179 in AP to date.

The Chittoor district is on top with 49 single day new infections followed by Guntur with 15, Anantapur 14, Visakhapatnam 12, Krishna 11, Kadapa 11, Prakasam 9, Nellore 4, East Godavari 3, Srikakulam 3, Kurnool 2, West Godavari 2 and Vizianagaram registered only one new Covid-19 positive case in the past 24 hours on Sunday.

**VSP ISSUE WILL INFLUENCE VOTERS: CPM**DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 7

State committee secretary of CPM P. Madhu said the party candidates contesting in GVMC elections are taking the steel plant privatisation issue to the people.

Talking to the media persons in Visakhapatnam on Sunday, Madhu said that 19 candidates are in the fray, and all of them made the steel plant issue as the main agenda for fighting the elections.

"We are going alone and not having an alliance with any political party. Wherever we are campaigning, people join us and raise slogans against privatisation of the steel plant," Mr Madhu said.

He said that after assuming power for the second time, prime minister Narendra Modi increases his speed to privatise the public sector undertakings. Modi called for a meeting of State governments with Niti Ayog on March 9 to tell the participants to sell the PSUs' unused lands after their takeover was complete. This would harm the interests of the States, he added.

**Guiding stars**

Students take out a candle light rally on the eve of the International Women's Day in Kakinada on Sunday.

— DC

**Naidu lost it after he lost power, says Nani****The minister claims Naidu had destroyed Vijayawada and Guntur cities**DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 7

Transport minister Perni Venkataramaiah alias Nani said Telugu Desam president Chandrababu Naidu was taking revenge against the people for his defeat in the elections through accuses and abuses.

He claimed that Naidu had "gone mad" after losing power hence behaving abnormally.

The minister claimed that Naidu had destroyed Vijayawada and Guntur in the name of the Amaravati capital and never tried to develop the two cities in his tenure.

Mr Venkataramaiah said that Naidu had no moral right to seek votes from the people of Vijayawada and Guntur, whom he had cheated by promising development in the name of Amaravati. Speaking to the media here on Sunday, the minister said that Naidu was in this predicament because "Goddess Kanaka Durga was angered by seeing the plight of farmers and people being deceived in the name of Amravati. That was why TD had suffered such a defeat, leaving Naidu with no party members to back him."

He asked what Naidu had done for Amaravati, apart from grabbing lands, spending around ₹3,000 crore on temporary buildings and "investing the looted money in Heritage."

The minister asked how Naidu had earned hundreds of crores as he had started his career with two acres of land to his name. He alleged that Naidu misused public money during his regime, showing no concern for

**Telugu Desam tacitly supporting Jana Sena**DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 7

Telugu Desam, which had been unable to win general elections without alliance in 2019, is now trying to have a tacit alliance with Jana Sena in the ongoing Eluru municipal elections.

The main opposition knows that it cannot openly support Pawan Kalyan-led Jana Sena, which is already in alliance with BJP. However, some of the Telugu Desam leaders can clearly be seen supporting Jana Sena candidates in civic body polls. For example,

Chintamaneni Prabhakar, former MLA of Denduluru Assembly constituency in West Godavari district, is being seen canvassing on behalf of Jana Sena candidate

Lovar Raju, who is contesting from the 25th Division of Eluru Municipal Corporation. He asserts that Telugu Desam would support Jana Sena candidates in wards where there are no TD nominees.

Prabhakar pointed out that his party did have a candidate Sivannarayana from the 25th Division. But the candidate crossed over to YSRC due to pressure from the local minister, thereby cheating TD. "Only after this, I have started campaigning for Lovar Raju to defeat YSRC," he explained.

It may be recalled that before the 2019 general elections, Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan had termed Chintamaneni Prabhakar a "street rowdy".

**YSRC distributing liquor in bid to win, says BJP**DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 7

State BJP vice president and former MLA P. Vishnu Kumar Raju has accused ruling YSRC of resorting to criminal activities in its desperation to win Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation elections.

Addressing a press conference here along with

former MP K. Haribabu, Vishnu Kumar said YSRC leaders are distributing liquor using official vehicles. When one such vehicle was caught by BJP volunteers, the State Enforcement Bureau registered a case. BJP Enforcement Bureau noticed the incident to the notice of police commissioner too. The former MLA said when they

may in fact prove counter-productive to prospects of Jana Sena. Telugu Desam is contesting from 44 divisions in Eluru Municipal Corporation, while Jana Sena has its nominees in 26 divisions. As per the tacit alliance, Jana Sena will have to campaign in 18 divisions for TD. But this could instead harm interests of 26 candidates belonging to Jana Sena.

"TD leaders are openly supporting Jana Sena candidates in divisions from where their party is not contesting. This has led to criticism that Telugu Desam always wins only in alliance but not on its own. TD's only aim is to defeat ruling YSRC. But we will have to wait for the results to see what actually happens," remarked a TD leader.

**TD CHIEF ALLEGES CORRUPTION IN DURGA TEMPLE**

FROM PAGE 1

One minister is an illegal coconut seller (indirectly referring to minister Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao).

"Corruption is surging in Durga's abode but there is no *rosham* (anger) in people. You need not favour me, but you should protect Durga. Will you not protect Durga even when her silver ornaments have gone missing? You better open your eyes before Goddess Durga open her eyes (in anger)," the TD chief remarked.

He referred to civil supplies minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao alias Nani as *boothula mantri* (vulgar minister), who opens his mouth only to abuse. The minister further operates gambling centres without any fear, he alleged.

enquired, enforcement officials said they are still investigating the case.

Vishnu Kumar said YSRC leaders are so bereft of ideas that they put the ruling party sticker on the pamphlet of BJP candidate Parasuram contesting from Ward No. 14.

The content remained the same. He said the BJP has lodged a complaint.

**TD promises to reduce property taxes by half**DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 7

The Telugu Desam national general secretary Nara Lokesh has promised the people that his party would reduce property taxes by half if it is voted to power in the municipal elections.

Lokesh undertook election campaigns at Gollaprolu Nagara Panchayat and Pithapuram municipality on Sunday. Notably, Lokesh, former Pithapuram MLA SVSN Varma and the TD Kakinada district president Jyothla Naveen Kumar have not worn masks during the election campaign. Many other TD leaders were also seen without masks.

The TD general secretary said the party would usher in real development and improve the living standards of the people. He criticised YSRC by saying that after assuming charge as CM, Jagan hiked prices of power, petrol and other items of daily use and burdened the people. There was massive disruption to people's lives during Jagan's 21 months' rule, Lokesh alleged.

Lokesh said if Jagan really wanted to help the people, he could have given petrol at Rs.65 per litre instead of Rs.100 now. All the welfare schemes introduced by Jagan were bogus, he said, and added that Jagan was giving benefits via the welfare schemes on the one hand and he was robbing people three times more by other means.

He said the government

distributed ₹10,000 each to auto and taxi drivers in the name of the Vahana Mitra scheme, but the government grabbed more than double or triple the amount in the name of fines. "The government cancelled ration cards, pensions and other benefits of the people on one or the other pretext and the village volunteers were made use of for the benefit of YSRC."

Lokesh said ration cards, pensions and other benefits would be restored to the beneficiaries after the Telugu Desam returned to power. "The YSRC leaders are threatening people that they would cancel the benefits of welfare schemes unless they voted for the party. People need not worry about such propaganda as nobody would cancel the benefits of the poor and the TD would take care of such matters."

Speaking about the YSRC MLA Pendem Dorabab of Pithapuram constituency, Lokesh said the MLA bring in any development except selling soil. "There are no roads, drainages and other civic facilities in Pithapuram for the past 21 months. The TD government had sanctioned the funds for drinking water and irrigation projects to the constituency. The MLA could not draw the funds and complete the works and he proved his inefficiency," he said.

Former Pithapuram MLA S.V.S.N. Varma, the TD Kakinada district president Jyothla Naveen Kumar and others were present.

**Naidu cautions voters over cash**DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 7

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu cautioned voters against accepting the cash offers from the YSRC leaders and vote for them in the municipal elections as they would plunder more public wealth if elected. A vote for the YSRC would be like giving licence to rowdies and goondas, he said.

Naidu accused the YSRC regime of provoking regional feelings among the people in order to derive undue electoral and political benefits and alleged that the 3 Capitals idea was just an evil-minded plan that was being used by the YSRC to play a dangerous game with the lives of Andhras. Naidu asserted that a TD victory in Vijayawada Municipal Corporation was needed to stop the YSRC atrocities.

Naidu on Sunday held a roadshows in city for the forthcoming elections and called upon the people to vote for the TD candidates as their victory

was greatly needed to counter the "chaotic and oppressive regime" of Jagan Mohan Reddy. Naidu said that he had the support of the people and alleged that the Chief Minister was "taking the support of rowdies and criminals to perpetrate his jungle rule on the people."

He claimed that the TD constructed Amaravati and the Pattiseema project to improve the living conditions of not just one region but the entire state but the YSRC has destroyed such great projects.

Naidu recalled how thousands of farmers had given their land in response to just one call for the construction of a dream capital. Every person in the state had a duty to strengthen the agitation to save the Capital City.

He slammed the CM and the ministers for using abusive language against the TD leaders without valid reason. He alleged that in just two years, over 10,000 acres of land was encroached.

**FIRE GUTS HUTS AT KIA MOTORS' ANCILLARY**DC CORRESPONDENT  
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 7

At least 20 temporary residences of workers belonging to an ancillary unit of KIA Motors India in Erramanchi near Palasamudram in Gorantla mandal on national highway 44 were gutted in a fire on Sunday.

Workers of Lotus, the ancillary unit located 10 kilometres from the KIA car manufacturing facility, had built huts to accommodate themselves. A fire started in one of these huts on Sunday afternoon, reducing most huts to ashes. Workers alleged that delay in arrival of fire crews led to more of their houses being burnt.

An officer of the District Fire Services, however, maintained that they rushed soon after knowing about the incident. He pointed out that all of houses were temporary and built with material which could easily catch fire.

**BIG FIGHT Civil supplies minister asks former CM to raise price rise in fuel with Modi****YSRC challenges Naidu to contest from Gudivada**DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 7

Civil supplies minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao alias Nani came down heavily on TD chief Chandrababu Naidu for instigating the people of Vijayawada to protest against the government. He said Naidu and TD general secretary Nara Lokesh should be ashamed of themselves staying in Hyderabad for the last eight months during the Covid-19 pandemic and hitting the road only when the cases had come down.

The minister criticised Naidu for his derogatory comments and challenged him to contest from the Gudivada constituency and win.

Speaking to the media here on Sunday, minister Venkateswara Rao said though the state government has borrowed ₹1

lakh crore rupees, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy spent ₹95,000 crore for implementing welfare schemes by providing financial aid to people through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). He claimed that Naidu had borrowed more than ₹3 lakh crore and had involved in largescale corruption. He demanded that Naidu prove that he spent ₹3,000 crore for the Krishna Pushkaralu, and alleged that the TD chief and his team had indulged in huge corruption in the Pushkaralu works.

The minister said the Centre was responsible for the hike in the petrol, diesel and gas prices and for the privatisation of Vizag Steel Plant and dared Naidu to raise his voice against Prime Minister Narendra Modi on these issues. He claimed that Naidu took

● Nani claimed that Naidu took to the occult in the Durga temple which boomeranged.

● The minister said Naidu and his followers were involved in largescale corruption in Amaravati lands and him Naidu to vacate the stays in courts regarding the Amaravati scam.

to the occult in the Durga temple which boomeranged. He said Naidu and his followers were involved in largescale corruption in Amaravati lands and him Naidu to vacate the stays in courts regarding the Amaravati scam. He said that while then Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao had implemented total prohibition it was Naidu who encouraged belt shops.

**YSRC vows to recover graft money from Naidu**DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 7

Taking the election campaign to the peak, YSRC ministers vowed to teach a lesson to TD president N. Chandrababu Naidu and recover ₹5 lakh crore graft money which he had allegedly stashed during his regime.

Ministers Anil Kumar, Kurasa Kannababu and Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao along with Lok Sabha member

M.V.V. Satyanarayana and MLAs addressed packed election meetings across the Visakhapatnam city on Sunday.

The ministers said Naidu had been often throwing challenges at the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and other leaders but they would reply "by recovering the money which he had stacked" in Hyderabad and Karnataka.

"He is not ashamed of getting drubbed in the panchayat elections in his home panchayats and that of his ministerial colleagues," the ministers said and added that all Telugu Desam MLAs were ready to ditch Naidu at an appropriate time.

Showering sops on the Vysya community, with

whose leaders the ministers had a meeting in Gajuwaka, the ministers announced that one eminent person of the community would be incorporated as ex-officio member of the GVMC Council and another as director of the VMRDA.

Apart from Gajuwaka, the ministers addressed meetings in Akkiredypalem, Endada, Sriharipuram and Nadupuru in the industrial suburbs.

Minister Srinivasa Rao announced that people could build houses in 100 square yards without seeking permission from the GVMC town planning division.



## SHORT TAKES

MURDER CASE  
BOOKED INTO SUV  
OWNER'S DEATHSHAHAB ANSARI | DC  
MUMBAI, MARCH 7

Maharashtra ATS has registered a murder case into the mysterious death of Mansukh Hiren, whose SUV laden with gelatin sticks was found abandoned near the house of industrialist Mukesh Ambani in Mumbai.

Earlier, the case was being probed as "accidental death" but has now been converted to one of murder following a complaint by the deceased's wife. The complaint has been lodged against "unidentified persons". The investigation into the abandoned SUV found outside Ambani's house last week was handed over to the Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad. Accordingly, all the documents related to the case have been given to the ATS from the Mumbra police station.

On March 5, Mansukh, whom the Mumbai Police had mentioned to be the owner of the vehicle with explosives was found dead in a creek.

ACTIVIST TO TAKE  
BACK COMPLAINT  
AGAINST BJP MLA

**Bengaluru, March 7:** In a twist to the alleged sex-for-job scandal in Karnataka, social activist Dinesh Kallahalli on Sunday said he would withdraw his police complaint against BJP MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi, which had led to his resignation as Minister.

Dinesh Kallahalli said he will withdraw the complaint as he was hurt by allegations of a ₹5 crore deal, levelled by JDS leader H.D. Kumaraswamy. However, the activist's lawyer said there were some technical problems due to which the decision was taken.

Meanwhile, Balachandra Jarkiholi, brother of Ramesh Jarkiholi, alleged that there was a big conspiracy in the state in which four teams have been working to "malign" Jarkiholi and target the BJP ahead of Assembly elections in five states. He sought a CBI probe into the episode. — PTI

CARCASS OF  
GIANT SHARK  
FOUND IN CANALAKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC  
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 7

Locals of Kantiachera village in Odisha's Balasore district were on Sunday left bewildered after a giant shark weighing about 500 kg was found dead in a newly-dug canal. The carcass was found in the canal which is connected to a nearby sea.

The state forest department personnel suspected that the carcass came floating in the canal from the sea. Soon after the news of the dead shark broke, people in large numbers gathered at the spot to catch a glimpse of the giant fish. The exact cause of death of the shark is yet to be ascertained. Sources said the giant shark was caught in the net of marine fishermen on Friday. They brought it ashore and later released it in the sea.

## Didi: Why hike fuel prices?

Says people want to know answers before they cast their vote in polls

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, MARCH 7

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reveal his worth in terms of "price" while branding him the "biggest extortionist", in her vitriolic retaliation to his blistering attack on her on Sunday.

The angry Trinamul supremo also accused the Prime Minister and his deputy, Union home minister Amit Shah, of being the "only syndicate" in the country before daring Mr Modi to face her in a "one-to-one" on the eve of the Assembly election in the state.

Spewing venom at the Prime Minister at Siliguri, in North Bengal, after leading a protest rally there against the steep hike in fuel prices, Mamata said: "You first have to explain why there has been fuel and LPG price hikes daily. LPG cylinders need to be provided free of cost. People of the state want to know that before they cast their vote. The Bengal government provides rice free of cost while one has to buy LPG cylinders at ₹900 to cook food. Narendra Modi, what is your price? Five states are going to the polls in the coming days. You will face defeat everywhere."

In an oblique reference to Modi, she claimed: "Whenever he visits Bengal, he levels allegations of extortion. You are the biggest extortionist. If a poor man indulges in extortion, it is merely ₹10. What is the amount when you and your cronies do it? What is the amount of extortion in the sale of the Railways, SAIL, Coal India and Air India? What syndicate you talked about? India knows only one syndicate is working — Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. There is no other



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a protest rally against the hike in fuel and LPG prices, in Siliguri, on Sunday. — PTI

syndicate." Throwing a challenge to the Prime Minister, Mamata added: "When you address an empty Brigade, I, being a street-fighter forever, stay on the road which shows me the way I want to continue as a commoner. Face me in a one-to-one if you have the guts."

A day before the International Women's Day celebrations, the Trinamul chief further targeted the Prime Minister over his criticism of her government over the violence against women in the state, pointing out the incidents of rape in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh. She also ridiculed the Prime Minister for being publicity-hungry over the display of his photo on everything — from the Covid-19 vaccine certificates to space programmes.

Mithun in BJP, says he's  
a cobra with deadly biteDC CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA, MARCH 7

Emerging as a Bengali *bhadralok* in white *dhoti-punjabi*, to suit the BJP's dream of a *bhumiputra* CM candidate, Bollywood actor Mithun Chakraborty joined the BJP at its mega-rally on Sunday.

In filmi style, he claimed he was a "true cobra", able to kill anyone with just "one bite", before sharing the dais with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who hailed his "journey as an example to all". Mithun

said his joining the Trinamul earlier was a "bad decision".

Sharing of his "dream coming true to be on the stage with the PM", he described himself as a "pure and proud Bengali" before the crowd. Mithun said, "For me anyone lives in Bengal is a Bengali. If anyone tries to take your rights away, people like me will stand in between. I know you are waiting to listen to my movie dialogue which says: Hit you here, and you will end up in your grave."

Urging people to support

the BJP, he added, "Here is a new dialogue for you before I start my campaign. Remember this. My name is Mithun Chakraborty. I Do what I say and the dialogue goes: Neither I am a Keelback, nor I am a Krait. I am a true Cobra! One Bite and you are gone. That is what it will be from now. Keep faith in me, trust my words. I never shunned you in tough times, I am going to be there always with you." Mithun is going to start campaigning for the BJP in the state from March 12.

## Dravidian parties finalise alliances

R. MOHAN | DC  
CHENNAI, MARCH 7

The battle lines are almost fully drawn.

The two top alliances led by Dravidian majors are ready, with only minor agreements to be sewn. On Sunday, the Congress shook hands with the DMK on a deal that gives the national party 25 Assembly seats — as opposed to 41 (winning eight) in the 2016 elections — and also keeps the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat which the late H. Vasanthakumar had won for it in the 2019 Parliament elections.

The DMK needs to wrap up the issue with the CPM to make the DMK+alliance complete. Similarly, the AIADMK+alliance has to wrap up a deal with DMDK and G.K. Vasan's TMC to complete its line-up for the poll. Both Dravidian majors



Union home minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah greets supporters during his election campaign roadshow at Nagercoil, Kanyakumari, on Sunday. — PTI

have largely stuck to their plan of fighting 170 to 180 seats of 234 and giving their allies a lesser number to fight from but the numbers will keep the alliances going into a crucial election on April 6.

Dinesh Gundu Rao, Congress leader in charge of Tamil Nadu, said on Sunday morning at the

DMK headquarters in Chennai that more than an alliance this was a secular partnership that will oppose the BJP and its "dictatorial ways" and "One Nation, One Leader", idea. "BJP by entering into an alliance with AIADMK, its intention is to finish off AIADMK. They want to

kill all Opposition parties in the country," he declared. The alliance against the saffron party was not confined to ideology alone, but extended to "saving democracy" from its clutches, he pointed out.

The Congress was a shade late in clinching the Tamil Nadu deal but since it had few options it had to depend on word from Delhi to DMK president M.K. Stalin to open up final negotiations for what is a long standing alliance in the State. The local Congress chief K.S. Alagiri found the progress of the alliance talks so painful at one stage as to burst into tears at a media conference. After the agreement was signed on Sunday he said he was "fully satisfied".

Rao said the only aim was to ensure the victory of the secular front led by DMK. "Once we sign an

agreement, we have to be satisfied because this has been done after a lot of deliberations. Our only aim is now to see that the secular front wins. The time for being satisfied or dissatisfied is over. Now we are in the battlefield. We have to take on our opponents," Rao said.

Rao also hinted that the alliance would also be in place for Puducherry soon though the political picture in the Union Territory is not yet clear with the NR Congress of N Ranganasamy dominating the scene but is looking for allies to strengthen its hands.

The second major Tamil Nadu alliance fell in place a day after the ruling AIADMK had sealed a seat deal by allotting 20 seats to the BJP besides the Kanyakumari LS seat to which it has already nominated former Union minister Pon Radhakrishnan.

Rising daily cases  
in Delhi a worry;  
6 states on watchDC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

The daily active cases are on the rise again, with six states reporting high Covid-19 cases. Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu collectively account for 84.71 per cent of the 18,711 new daily cases reported in the past 24 hours.

This rise in cases is now spreading to Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Haryana as well. In Delhi, the daily fresh cases had at one point come down to two-digit figures, but were again over 300 on Saturday, after nearly six weeks, and were 286 on Sunday.

However, in a possible indication of the low virulence of Covid-19 during this wave, despite the surge in cases, the fatality figures continue to remain low and there were 100 deaths reported from all over India in the last 24 hours. In the past two weeks, 10 states didn't report any Covid-19 deaths and 12 reported deaths between 1-10.

Maharashtra continued to report the highest daily new cases, at 10,187, followed by Kerala with 2,791 and Punjab with 1,159.

Concerned with the surge, the Aurangabad district administration is considering a lockdown in the area to check the rise in cases.

According to health ministry data, there are over 90,000 active Coronavirus cases in Maharashtra.

According to a report submitted by a Central team, the laxity in following Covid-19 protocols and restrictions, the lack of fear over the disease, the pandemic fatigue, miss-outs during screening, enhanced aggregations due to the recent gram panchayat elections, the marriage season and the reopening of schools, crowded public transport are some of the reasons for the resurgence in cases in Maharashtra. The Central team has also observed that the virus is now spreading to so far unaffected areas and that most cases are asymptomatic.

Union health ministry officials said the Centre has deputed high-level teams to Maharashtra and Punjab, which are showing a steep increase in the daily new cases. India's total active case-load stands at 1.84 lakhs on Sunday and consists of 1.65 per cent of the total positive cases.

The government hopes that the virus' spread may come under check with the intensified immunisation momentum. Among those who received the anti-Covid vaccine on Sunday was Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama.

Thrash babus, says  
Giriraj, sparks rowNAYEAR AZAD | DC  
PATNA, MARCH 7

Union minister and BJP leader Giriraj Singh who is known for his contentious remarks has landed into controversy again by asking people of his constituency to beat up government officials with the bamboo stick.

While addressing a gathering in his Lok Sabha constituency Begusarai, Singh said, "Don't hesitate to reach out to government officials with your concerns and if they don't listen to your grievances beat them up with bamboo sticks. MP, MLA, DM, SDO, DDC are there for you so go to them and if your rights are violated then you will find Giriraj Singh standing there for you."

His comment has triggered sharp reactions from across the political spectrum in Bihar. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar when asked about the issue said, "You should ask him. Is it appropriate to use words like *pitai* (beating)?"

Kumar's JD(U) is part of the ruling NDA government in Bihar. The sarcastic statement by the

Chief Minister against a senior BJP leader has aroused political temperance in the state.

Apart from Kumar, opposition parties have also strongly condemned Singh's remark. In his tweet, Bihar opposition leader Tejashwi Yadav said, "Union Minister Giriraj says that there is anarchy in Bihar. Officers do not listen to anyone. The Chief Minister is weak, so pick up bamboo sticks and beat officers. Nitish government has been rewarding ministers who promote violence but files FIRs against journalists who expose the truth."

After winning Lok Sabha polls from Nawada in 2014 Singh served as a MoS in the first Modi Cabinet. He was elevated to the Cabinet rank after he defeated CPI's youth leader Kanhaiya Kumar from Begusarai seat by a margin of over four lakh votes in the 2019.

Known for his differences with Kumar, Singh had earlier created a flutter in the state by saying that his Lok Sabha constituency was getting "step brotherly" treatment from the state government.

## INTERNATIONAL | WOMEN'S DAY

Atrocities against women are a stigma on society, injustice towards them cannot be tolerated

## Empowering women key to nation building

BANDARU DATTATREYA

**Y** *naryastu pujyante ramante tatra Devata* (where women are honoured, divinity blossoms). The sloka from *Manu Smrutih* further states where women are dishonoured, all actions, no matter how noble they may be, remain unfruitful.

International Women's Day commemorates the economic, political, social and cultural achievements of women through reiteration of respect, admiration and love for women. On March 8, 1908, over 15,000 women demonstrated on the streets of New York for their rights, demanding better pay and a right to vote. The first International Women's Day event was held in 1911.

After decades of struggle across the world, women are turning patriarchy and other outdated modes of thinking within society on its heads. History is a witness that women have always made a significant contribution in building

society and shaping nations. The role of educated women is crucial in the progress and social freedom of any nation.

Respecting women has been a virtue in Indian civilisation and culture. Ancient texts make it clear that women had more freedom in ancient India. Arundhati (wife of Maharishi Vashistha), Lopamudra (wife of Maharishi Agastya), Anusuya (wife of Maharishi Atri), were worshipped as divine entities. Ancient Indian grammarians like Patanjali and Katyayan say that women were educated in the early Vedic period. Rig Vedic hymns chronicle that women were married after the age of maturation and had the freedom to choose their husband.

Texts like the *Rig Veda* and *Upanishads* mention several female sages, among whom Gargi and Maitreyi's names are notable. Sita in Ramayana and Draupadi in Mahabharata are a symbol of female empowerment. In

ancient traditions, all deities worshipped Durga.

According to research, situation of women began to decline in the medieval period. Women freedoms got reduced and rights of women denied increasingly during the Mughal and British rule. The practice of child marriage is believed to have started around sixth century. Things became worse once the invader's reigns began. During those days, abhorrent practices like *pardah pratha*, child marriage, *sati-pratha*, *jauhar* and *devadasi* came into vogue.

Though the British did not make any efforts to improve status of women, in the middle of the 19th century, many reformist movements such as Brahmo Samaj (Raja Ram Mohan Roy), Arya Samaj (Swami Dayanand Saraswati), Theosophical Society, Ramakrishna Mission (Swami Vivekananda), Female Education (Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar), Education of Dalit Women (Mahatma



Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule etc.), worked for the emancipation of women.

Our times have truly evolved. Old traditions, conservatism and ignorance have come to an end or are in their last days. Outside household work, women are making impact in all walks of life. Space travel to administrative services, education, politics, sports, business, literature, army, media and others have seen women become leaders and make changes for the better. Today, there is a need to understand that women are central to development. In

the absence of a well-organised and dignified life of a woman, a good society can't be created.

The achievements of Hyderabad based International badminton player P.V. Sindhu, Saina Nehwal and tennis player Sania Mirza in the sporting world are in front of us. International women boxer Mary Kom and international women cricketer Mithali Raj are examples for society.

In the last six years, there has been an almost three-fold increase in women in the army and more avenues are being opened at a steady pace. There are currently 9,118 women serving in the Army, Navy and Air Force, giving them more opportunities to march ahead. Excluding the medical wing, the Army has 6,807 women officers, Air Force 1,607 and Navy 704 women officers.

We have not forgotten that a Navika Sagar Parikrama was a circumnavigation of the globe by female officers of Indian Navy. The six-

member all-woman team circumnavigated and managed the entire operation in their first ever global journey, on *INSV Tarini*. The voyage lasted 254 days, from 10 September 2017 to 21 May 2018. The team also included Himachal's daughter Commander Pratibha Jamwal.

Known as the "missile woman" of India, Tessy Thomas is a scientist at Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). She served as project director for Agni IV and V-missiles, making her the first woman to lead missile teams in India.

But there are areas of darkness. Crimes against women are still high. According to a report by National Crime Bureau (NCRB), India recorded an average of 87 rape cases per day in 2019 and a total of 4,05,861 cases of crime against women.

There are 17.9 per cent cases related to abduction of women. This data worries. However, according to the

2011 census, the sex ratio in the country is 943, compared to 974 in Himachal Pradesh. Atrocities against women are a stigma on society. When such atrocities on women escalate, society degenerates. Injustice towards women can't be tolerated. Strong decisions should be taken by the Central and state governments to protect women. Women empowerment is critical to nation building. And education is the key to empowering women.

The Central government is implementing several schemes for women empowerment. Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao Scheme and now Beti Badao, Ujjwala Scheme, Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (Step), Mahila Shakti Kendra, Mahila Helpline Scheme and reservation for women in Panchayati Raj etc.

In 2019, we witnessed independence of Muslim women. India's Parliament approved a Bill that makes

Muslim practice of "instant divorce" a criminal offence. This is a victory of gender justice and will further equality in society.

Serving as minister of labour under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, my ministry gave right of equal pay to women. The benefit of maternity leave, which was legally 12 weeks, was increased to 26 weeks. This was much higher than international standards.

The Modi government legally implemented the protection and transport facility for working women in night shifts. Separate funds were made for Kasturba girls' schools and upgrade the standard to 10 plus 2, for which a provision of separate funds was made. By making educational available to all and ensuring laws are followed, India can be made free of crime against women. And that dream should unite us.

The author is the Governor of Himachal Pradesh



## SHORT TAKES

JUSTICE IN DOCK  
AS SARKOZY  
CRIES 'SCANDAL'

**Paris:** The French justice system has scored a series of major victories in high-profile corruption cases against right-wing politicians, but the successes have sparked claims of bias and verbal attacks on prosecutors and judges.

After the stunning conviction of ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy this week, a debate has raged about whether the sword of justice is getting stronger, or whether its blows are being manipulated.

Sarkozy, who became the first modern president sentenced to jail, has consistently sought to portray the multiple investigations into his affairs since leaving office in 2012 as a witch hunt.

He has called it a "scandal that will remain in the annals of history," has questioned whether France still lives under the rule of law.

SAUDI-LED  
JETS POUND  
YEMEN CAPITAL

**Riyadh, March 7:** A Saudi-led military coalition mounted air strikes on Yemen's Huthi-controlled capital Sanaa on Sunday after it intercepted a string of drones launched by the Iran-backed rebels, state media reported.

The developments mark a new escalation in Yemen's six-year conflict between the coalition-backed Yemeni government and the rebels, despite a renewed US push to end the conflict.

The strikes triggered huge explosions in Sanaa and sent plumes of smoke rising in the sky, according to reports. The rebels reported seven air strikes on the city.

"The military operation targets Huthi military capabilities in Sanaa and a number of other provinces," the coalition was quoted as saying by the official Saudi Press Agency.

The raids come after the coalition said it intercepted a total of 12 drones launched by the rebels on Sunday, in a sharp escalation in cross-border attacks on the kingdom.

ANOTHER AIDE  
ACCUSES CUOMO  
OF MISCONDUCT

**New York:** Another woman who worked for Gov. Andrew Cuomo is describing conduct she felt was inappropriate for the workplace.

Ana Liss, 35, told *The Wall Street Journal* in a story published on Saturday that when she worked as a policy aide to the governor between 2013 and 2015, Cuomo called her "sweetheart," once kissed her hand and asked personal questions, including whether she had a boyfriend.

She said he sometimes greeted her with a hug and a kiss on both cheeks. Liss told the *Journal* she initially thought of Cuomo's behavior as harmless, but it grew to bother her. She felt it was patronising.

"It's not appropriate, really, in any setting," she said. "I wish that he took me seriously." A spokesman for Cuomo didn't immediately return a request for comment, but told the *Journal* that some of the behavior Liss was describing was the kind of innocent glad-handing that politicians often do at public events.

SWITZERLAND  
VOTES ON  
'BURQA BAN'

**Berlin:** Swiss voters delivered their verdict Sunday on a proposal to ban face coverings, both the niqabs and burqas worn by a few Muslim women in the country and the ski masks and bandannas used by protesters. A projection after polls closed pointed to a very close result.

The measure would outlaw covering one's face in public places like restaurants, sports stadiums, public transport or simply walking in the street. There would be exceptions at religious sites and for security or health reasons, such as the face masks people are wearing now to protect against Covid-19, as well as for traditional Carnival celebrations.

Authorities would have two years to draw up detailed legislation. The Swiss government opposes the measure and says that people covering their faces is a "marginal" issue.

It argues the measure could harm tourism — most Muslim women who wear such veils in Switzerland are visitors from well-heeled Persian Gulf states, who are often drawn to Swiss lakeside cities.

Iran up for talks if  
US lifts sanctions

## Prez Rouhani criticises the European signatories of the historic nuclear deal

**Tehran, March 7:** Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday his country was prepared to take steps to live up to measures in the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers as soon as the United States lifts economic sanctions on Iran.

In a meeting with Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney, Rouhani said: "Iran is ready to immediately take compensatory measures based on the nuclear deal and fulfill its commitments just after the US illegal sanctions are lifted and it abandons its policy of threats and pressure."

Rouhani criticised the European signatories of the historic nuclear deal for what he said was their inaction on their commit-

ments to the agreement. He said Iran is the only country that kept its side of the bargain.

Trump in 2018 unilaterally withdrew the US from the Iranian nuclear accord, in which Tehran had agreed to limit its uranium enrichment in exchange for the lifting of

economic sanctions.

When the US then reimposed some sanctions and added others, Iran gradually and publicly abandoned the deal's limits on its nuclear development.

The Republic of Ireland has the role of facilitator in the implementation of the nuclear deal.

Coveney said the withdrawal of former President Donald Trump was a mistake and noted that the new US administration is determined to return to the deal. In December, Iran's parliament approved a bill that calls for the suspension of part of UN inspections of its nuclear facilities if European signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal do not provide relief from oil and banking sanctions. — AP

## Biden's Covid bill cleared

**Washington, March 7:** The US Senate on Saturday voted to approve a \$1.9 trillion relief package in what President Joe Biden called a "giant step" towards reviving the pandemic-stricken American economy, capping frenzied negotiations and a marathon overnight voting session.

Passed by 50 votes to 49 in a strict party line vote, the sweeping legislation now heads back to the Democratic-majority House of Representatives,

where it is expected to be adopted, barring a last-minute setback.

"I promised the American people help was on the way," said Biden in an address from the White House, after the plan was approved along strict party lines.

"Today, I can say we've taken one more giant step forward in delivering on that promise," he said. "It obviously wasn't easy. It wasn't always pretty. But it was so desperately needed." Even without the pro-

gressive priority of a minimum wage increase to \$15 an hour, the stimulus bill marks a victory for Biden's Democrats as they put their stamp on the recovery from a pandemic that has killed more than 5,00,000 people in the United States and hobbled its economy.

Top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer vowed that the bill "will deliver more help to more people than anything the federal government has done in decades." — AFP

## Vaccine rollout 'India's gift' to world: US

**Houston, March 7:** The rollout of Covid-19 vaccine is "India's gift" to the world in combating Coronavirus and will be remembered as a time when the country stepped up in a major way as a global player in innovation, a top American scientist has said.

India is called the pharmacy of the world during the Covid-19 pandemic with its vast experience and deep knowledge in medicine. The country is one of the world's biggest drug-makers and an increasing number of countries have already approached it for procuring Coronavirus vaccines. Dr. Peter Hotez, Dean of the National School of

• **INDIA'S DRUGS** regulator gave emergency use authorisation to Covishield, produced by Pune-based Serum Institute of India after securing licence from British pharma company AstraZeneca, and Covaxin, indigenously developed jointly by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech and Indian Council of Medical Research scientists.

Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) in Houston during a webinar this week said that the two mRNA vaccines may not impact the world's low and

middle income countries, but India's vaccines, made in collaboration with universities across the world such as BCM and Oxford University, have "rescued the world" and its contributions must not be underestimated.

During the webinar, "Covid-19: Vaccination and Potential Return to Normalcy — If and When", Dr Hotez, an internationally-recognised physician-scientist in neglected tropical diseases and vaccine development, said that the Covid-19 vaccine rollout is "India's gift" to the world in combating the virus.

India's drugs regulator gave emergency use aut-

horisation to Covishield, produced by Pune-based Serum Institute of India after securing licence from British pharma company AstraZeneca, and Covaxin, indigenously developed jointly by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech and Indian Council of Medical Research scientists.

The webinar was organised by Indo American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston (IAC-GH). "This is something very special and I see it myself because I'm on weekly teleconferences with our colleagues in India, you make a recommendation, and within days it's done and not only done, but it's done well

and with incredible rigor and thought and creativity," Dr Hotez said, stressing that he felt compelled to make this statement because "India's huge efforts in combating global pandemic is a story that's not really getting out in the world."

Dr Hotez, considered as the authority on vaccinations, is working on an affordable coronavirus vaccine in collaboration with Indian pharmaceutical companies. There is increasing evidence that vaccines not only "interrupt symptomatic illness and keep you out of the hospital" but halts asymptomatic transmission as well. — PTI

China warns Biden to reverse  
'dangerous practice' on Taiwan

**Beijing, March 7:** China's foreign minister warned the Biden administration on Sunday to roll back former President Donald Trump's "dangerous practice" of showing support for Taiwan, the island democracy Beijing claims as its own territory. The Chinese claim to Taiwan, which split with the mainland in 1949, is an "insurmountable red line," Wang Yi said at a news conference during the annual meeting of China's ceremonial legislature.

The United States has no official relations with Taiwan's democratically



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi speaks during a remote video press conference held on the sidelines of the annual meeting of Chinas National Peoples Congress (NPC) in Beijing, on Sunday.

elect government but extensive informal ties. Trump, who left office in January, irked Beijing by

sending Cabinet officials to visit Taiwan in a show of support. "The Chinese govern-

ment has no room for compromise or concessions on the Taiwan issue," Wang said. "We urge the new US administration to fully understand the high sensitivity of the Taiwan issue" and "completely change the previous administration's dangerous practices of crossing the line" and playing with fire," he said.

Wang gave no indication how Beijing might react if US policy isn't changed, but the ruling Communist Party has threatened to invade if Taiwan declares formal independence or delays talks on uniting with the mainland. — AP



Nuns wave flags of Iraq, Kurdistan, and the Holy See as they wait for the arrival of Pope Francis at the Franso Hariri Stadium in Arbil, on Sunday, in the capital of the northern Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region.

## Pope prays for Iraq's victims of war

**Mosul, Iraq, March 7:** Pope Francis prayed on Sunday for "victims of war" outside a centuries-old church in Iraq's Mosul, where the Islamic State group ravaged one of the world's oldest Christian communities until the jihadists' defeat three years ago.

With the crumbling stone walls of the Al-Tahera (Immaculate Conception) Church behind him, Pope Francis made a plea for Christians in Iraq and the Middle East to stay in their homelands.

The 84-year-old pontiff said the "tragic" exodus of

• **THE IS** onslaught forced hundreds of thousands of Christians in northern Iraq's Nineveh province to flee. Iraq's Christian population has shrunk to fewer than 4,00,000 from around 1.5 million before the US-led invasion of 2003.

Christians from war-scarred Iraq and the wider region "does incalculable harm not just to the individuals and communities concerned, but also to the society they leave behind".

The IS onslaught forced hundreds of thousands of

Christians in northern Iraq's Nineveh province to flee. Iraq's Christian population has shrunk to fewer than 4,00,000 from around 1.5 million before the US-led invasion of 2003.

The faithful had gathered on Sunday in the courtyard of the Al-Tahera Church, whose roof collapsed during fighting against IS in 2017.

It is one of the oldest of at least 14 churches in Nineveh province that were destroyed by IS.

Boutros Chito, a Catholic priest in Mosul, said the pope's visit could change the way people think about his city, the ancient

centre of which still lies in ruins.

"Pope Francis will announce to the whole world that we are the people of peace, a civilisation of love," Chito said.

The heaviest deployment of security forces yet has been mobilised to protect Francis on what is perhaps the riskiest day of his historic trip to Iraq, where state forces are still hunting IS sleeper cells.

Pope Francis's trip to Iraq as a "pilgrim of peace" aims to reassure the country's dwindling Christian community and to expand his dialogue with other religions. — AFP

Myanmar protests  
after overnight  
raids in Yangon

**Yangon, March 7:** Thousands of Myanmar anti-coup demonstrators defied a continued military crackdown on Sunday, following overnight raids in Yangon in which an official from Aung San Suu Kyi's party was beaten to death and several others were detained.

Myanmar has been rocked by unrest since a February 1 coup ousted civilian leader Suu Kyi from power and triggered a mass uprising opposed to the new military junta. Wednesday was the deadliest day so far, with the United Nations saying at least 38 people were killed as security forces fired into crowds, shooting some protesters in the head.

The UN rights office also said it has verified at least 54 deaths since the coup — though the actual number could be far higher — and more than 1,700 people have been detained.

National League for Democracy party official Soe Win confirmed some officials were arrested in overnight police operations but the exact number is not known.

At least one community leader connected to the ousted NLD government, 58-year-old Khin Maung Latt, was killed during a raid at Pabedan township in Yangon, Tun Kyi, from the Former Political Prisoners Society, said. "He was beaten and

taken in a raid since last night and it seems he underwent a harsh interrogation," he said.

"The dead body is being taken from Mingaladon military hospital and on the way to Yay Way cemetery," NLD MP Sithu Maung posted on Facebook that security forces last night were also searching for the party's information officer Maung Maung but had been unable to find him.

"Maung Maung's brother was beaten by police and soldiers and his body was held in an upside-down position while he was tortured because there was no one to arrest," the MP said.

State-run media on Sunday warned ousted lawmakers involved in a group called the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw — which is claiming to be the legitimate elected government — that they are committing "high treason" and could be sentenced to death or 22 years jail.

The junta has declared group members personae non-grata and says those who communicate with them could face seven years prison.

Rallies fanned out across the country with more than seven separate demonstrations in Yangon and at least five in other cities and regional towns, according to Facebook live feeds. — AFP

## TOP | AUCTION

## "just setting up my twttr," Jack Dorsey tweeted on 21 March 2006

## World's first ever tweet draws \$2 mn bid

**San Francisco, March 7:** Twitter boss Jack Dorsey is selling his first tweet at auction, with bidding Saturday reaching \$2 million in a sign of the appetite for virtual objects authenticated through blockchain technology.

"Just setting up my twttr," Dorsey tweeted on March 21, 2006. On Friday he posted a link to "Valuables @Cent," an online marketplace for tweets where, the site says, investors or collectors can "buy and sell tweets auto-



Jack Dorsey

ators." The top bid on Saturday for Dorsey's tweet — \$2

• **THE TOP** bid on Saturday for Dorsey's tweet — \$2 million — came from Justin Sun, the founder of TRON, a platform for blockchain, the technology underlying cryptocurrencies.

million — came from Justin Sun, the founder of TRON, a platform for blockchain, the technology underlying cryptocurrencies. He also heads the BitTorrent streaming platform.

"The creator of a tweet decides if they would like to mint it on the blockchain, creating a 1-of-1 autographed version," Valuables explains. Buying a tweet means purchasing "a digital certificate of the tweet, unique because it has been signed and verified by the creator," according to Valuables.

In Dorsey's case, the tweet itself remains visible to all, so long as he and Twitter leave it online.

The approach is much like the online sales of dramatic digital

"moments" from National Basketball Association games; the short video sequences remain visible for free on the internet but a blockchain-backed "Non-Fungible Token" (NFT) is generated to guarantee the identity, authenticity and traceability of the video, confirming its value.

Thus, a 10-second clip showing a spectacular sequence by basketball superstar LeBron James fetched \$208,000 on the NBA Top Shot site late last month.

Top Shot has generated

more than \$200 million in transactions this year, according to Dapper Labs, which partnered with the NBA to create Top Shot.

In 2019, Sun paid \$4.6 million in a winning bid to lunch with iconic billionaire Warren Buffett. Sun reportedly tried but failed to convince the elderly investor of the value of bitcoins.

NFTs have soared in popularity, to the point that prestigious auction house Christie's last month sold an entirely digital artwork. — AFP



DECCAN  
Chronicle

8 MARCH 2021

As BJP raises anti-Didi pitch,  
Bengal is the battle to watch

The BJP of Narendra Modi, Amit Shah and Yogi Adityanath is making a bid to emerge as the hegemonic power across all the territories of India. The looming Assembly elections in Assam and West Bengal in the east/north-east, and Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the south, will be a test of that resolve, which depends not only on highlighting the political weaknesses of opponents and their governance deficits (West Bengal), the normal way to do things.

More crucially, the effort mounted by the saffron party relies on a polarising community-based campaign that seeks to exploit the religious divide and — no less pertinently — on the use of state agencies, such as CBI, Income Tax, Customs, and the NIA, controlled by the Union government. Gone is the era when Mr Modi's campaign depended on recounting the virtues of the so-called "Gujarat model" of development from his days as chief minister. This was a fraudulent rhetoric that was milked in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. Regrettably, the media failed to analyse it when it mattered.

Since then, leading planks of government policy such as demonetisation, faulty GST implementation, response to the coronavirus pandemic that set off the biggest mass migration of the working class in history in pathetic circumstances, the worst unemployment in nearly half a century, the farmers' agitation, and the impression of political caving in before the Chinese army in eastern Ladakh, have caused much anguish among wide swathes of the populace. And yet, the broad impression is that the Prime Minister and his chief lieutenants are sitting pretty and continue to command the affections of the country on account of the weaponised Hindutva factor.

One way or the other, the upcoming state polls, whose results will be known on May 2 (with polling to commence in about three weeks), are likely to either confirm the enormous value of overtly religiosity-centric electoral politics in the BJP's scheme of things — or the repudiation of this principle.

If the pull of religiosity is confirmed, Mr Modi's — and Mr Shah's — the BJP is likely to get even more gung-ho than it is in its preparation for the next Lok Sabha election in 2024.

Interestingly, the BJP's political opponents appear not to fully grasp the meaning of the upcoming state polls. They continue to parse till infinity the inner meaning of secularism in India in order to retain power or influence, and in this process attempt to exclude or restrict the influence of other so-called "secular" parties. Kerala and West Bengal are good examples of this.

In Assam, the BJP took power from the Congress. It is the only state where it will be challenged by the Congress-led front. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the BJP appears to have made some impression among the middle classes, the upwardly mobile groups, and sections of the upper castes and the propertied classes. Even so, the best it may hope to do is to improve its vote-share and win just a few seats (along with ally AIADMK in TN) and register improvements in Kerala in the company of some caste outfits.

It is in West Bengal that the saffron party hopes to eject two-time CM Mamta Banerjee's Trinamul Congress from power, much as Ms Banerjee had torpedoed Left Front rule in 2011. This really is the poll to watch along with Assam where the BJP could face a battle of rough parity with the Congress and its allies.

Team India worthy winners

Team India are in the final of the Word Test championship and that is just the icing on the cake. A comprehensive 3-1 rout of England was completed on a clutch of astounding performances from young members of the team like Rishabh Pant, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel and Mohammed Siraj. As Serena Williams said famously, "Champions are defined not by wins but by how they can recover when they fail." Team India did it twice in the space of two series, first recovering from the lows of 36 all out in the first Test in Australia and then from heavy defeat at the hands of England in the first Test in Chennai.

Remarkable resilience is only one part of the story. Cricketers who were on the fringes of the national team not only stepped into the Test arena with confidence but also shone like seasoned stalwarts. The quality of pitches prepared after losing the first Test may have left a lot to be desired but before the series ended in Ahmedabad, Team India had proved that the playing surface can be made incidental to the plot by professional performances. The players also defied the deleterious effects of seven long months spent in a bio-bubble. There is no doubt Team India will start favourites in the WTC final at Lord's this summer.

The prowess of the younger Indian players was stressed even more as the senior batsmen — Virat Kohli (172), Cheteshwar Pujara (133) and Ajinkya Rahane (112) — had very modest series like most of the England batsmen save Joe Root who made a double hundred in Chennai. The match winners with the bat for India were Rohit Sharma, whose phenomenal home record at an average of 79.52 runs per innings is nearly Bradmanesque, Pant who is fast becoming the world's best wicket-keeper batsman whose willow does all the talking and Washington Sundar. India's spin twins Ravichandran Ashwin (32 wickets at 14.71) and Patel (27 wickets at 10.59) proved irresistible as they spun a web around the visiting batsmen.

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Subhani



Competitive politics &  
competitive economy



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

Elections to the state legislatures of Assam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Kerala have acquired national relevance for more than one reason. The most important one, of course, is that the outcome would determine whether or not the Indian political system would once again be characterised by what political scientist Rajni Kothari once famously termed as "one party dominance".

True, the BJP has already acquired a dominant national presence of the kind that the Indira Congress enjoyed well into the 1980s. But Kothari coined that term to capture the kind of sway across the country that the Indian National Congress enjoyed during the 1950s, when regional parties had not yet made their presence felt even at the provincial level.

Even though the BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has acquired what political scientist Antonio Gramsci defined as "hegemony", using instruments of the State to browbeat the Opposition, the fact is that regional formations like the Trinamul Congress and the Telangana Rashtra Samiti have been able to hold their own against the Hindutva juggernaut. If Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress, the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the Congress in Assam manage to defeat the BJP, these state legislature elections will mark a turning point in national politics. The outcome in Kerala is unlikely to favour the BJP, despite the rapid transit of "Metro Man" E. Sreedharan into provincial politics.

While psephologists and political analysts will analyse the political impli-

cations of the election outcome, investors and economists would want to know what the economic consequences of the outcome are likely to be. Many imagine that a nationwide sweep in favour of the BJP, reinforcing Hindutva dominance from West Bengal to Tamil Nadu, will be good for business and the economy. Single party dominance, they imagine, would further strengthen Prime Minister Modi's hands and that he would then be able to push through the agenda of building an "Atma Nirbhar Bharat", restoring momentum to a sagging economy.

Statistical evidence, however, does not seem to bear this hypothesis out. In India's seven-decade experience with democracy, the interesting fact is that the era of single party dominance has been correlated with a lower rate of economic growth than what former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh famously called the "era of coalitions", with its multi-party governments. Consider the numbers.

Between 1947 and 1977, the era of the Congress Party's dominance, the average annual rate of growth of the economy was around 3.5 per cent. Though the 1980s also saw single party government in New Delhi, it was the decade in which state governments run by regional political parties proliferated. The Indira Congress of the 1980s was no longer as powerful across the country as the Congress under Jawaharlal Nehru was during the 1950s.

Despite the weakening of Congress dominance and the rise of minority and coalition governments in the last two decades of the last century, the rate of economic growth picked up and the average annual

rate of growth of national income was 5.5 per cent during 1980 to 2000. Granted that correlation does not imply causation, but the evidence of the first two decades of the 21st century is convincing. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh led a minority government that had the support of a fractious coalition and yet he delivered historically high rates of economic growth. Between 2003 and 2011 the Indian economy grew at an annual average of close to 8.0 per cent. It slipped a bit below that during the last three years of the Manmohan Singh government, but the average was still around 7.5 per cent.

The last data point seals the argument. After having established a single party government in New Delhi for the first time in three decades and asserting BJP dominance at the national level, Prime Minister Modi has not been able to improve the performance of the economy. After six years in national office, Mr Modi has not been able to push the investment rate above 30 per cent and the average annual rate of economic growth, keeping the Covid-19 year 2020-21 out, is nowhere near the rate of growth attained during the Manmohan Singh years. Even if Covid-19 had not struck the economy, the annual average rate of economic growth during 2014-21 would have been closer to 6.0 per cent rather than the 8.0 per cent recorded during 2003-11.

Economist Surjit Bhalla, now an executive director on the board of the International Monetary

**In India's seven-decade experience with democracy, the interesting fact is that the era of single party dominance has been correlated with a lower rate of economic growth than what former PM V.P. Singh famously called the 'era of coalitions'**

Fund representing India, made an interesting politico-economic forecast in April 2014, writing in the *Financial Times* of London. If the elections of 2014 threw up a single party majority government, he argued, the economy would be able to return to an average annual rate of economic growth of 8.0 per cent, that India had recorded till 2011.

Well, the fact is that the elections did produce a decisive mandate in favour of Prime Minister Modi but he has not been able to pull the rate of economic growth back to the Manmohan Singh average of 8.0 per cent. This has not been for want of trying. So the assumption that a strong, stable single party government would deliver economic performance superior to a weak, unstable, multi-party coalition was yet again disproved.

What this means is that encouraging political competition and ensuring that political parties in government are under the constant pressure of a critical and assertive Opposition is in fact good for governance and the economy. One party dominance delivers sub-optimal performance at least in part because the absence of the pressure of competition ends up in not ensuring performance.

To cut a longer story short, an outright victory for the BJP in the coming state Assembly elections may not be the best thing that could happen to the economy. Rather, the emergence of a viable and assertive Opposition that exerts competitive pressure on the dominant party, at the centre and in the states, may yield better economic results. Many of the policy mistakes of the Modi government during its second term in office are clearly a consequence of the arrogance of power. A new lease of life for non-BJP parties may be good for the polity and the economy.

*The writer is an economist, a former newspaper editor, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh*

LETTERS

ATTENDANCE APP

The Government of AP introduced the Integrated Mid-day Meal Scheme app and the Students Attendance app to collect information on how many attended and how many had meals during the Covid-19 pandemic and instructed Headmasters of all schools to upload the details every day. But the government did not provide biometric devices with good internet speed. The Internet data charges were also not paid. Teachers and Headmasters had to connect the biometric devices to hotspots of their mobiles. Headmasters are also facing low internet speed as most of the schools are in remote areas thus wasting their teaching time every day to complete these tasks. However, , memos were issued to Headmasters for not completing the work and asking them for explanation in three working days. Teachers and Headmasters are gathering the data by keeping aside their teaching schedule and now the completion of syllabus has become a question mark which is bound to worry parents and create a bad impression on teachers. Morevoer Nadu Nedu works have also been given to Headmasters. I request the government to provide internet facility with good speed in schools. I also request that non-teaching duties should not be given to teaching community.

**Narasimha Charyulu Gomatam**

Markapur

GOOD CRICKET

India's Cricket Team proved their mite in resounding strength against England's Team by clinching the Test Series 3-1. It's to be a proud moment for the debutants — both spinners and batsmen — who steered the country to the World Cup Final. Cricket has long yielded place to gully boys who excelled as many seasoned players.

**K. Nehru Patnaik**

Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN  
Chronicle

Martial Law must  
go, says Rehman

NEW DELHI, MARCH. 7 Awami League Leader Sheikh Mujibar Rehman today asked President Yahya Khan to accept four demands, including lifting of Martial Law, before his party would consider attending the National assembly session called for March 25.

The three other demands made by him were — return of troops to the barracks, — transfer of power to the elected representatives, and — an inquiry into the recent killings in East Pakistan.

Shikha Mukerjee



Mamata's long  
game: Women's  
status in Bengal  
is transformed

It would be easy to list the fights Mamata Banerjee has won; it would be easy to trace her years of grind in the Congress' ranks and then her meteoric rise up the ladder from her 1984 success in defeating Somnath Chatterjee, later Lok Sabha Speaker in the UPA-1 years, and becoming one of the Lok Sabha's youngest parliamentarians up until now, when she is fighting off a challenge from the BJP, this is determined to snatch West Bengal away from her.

As the challenger, the BJP is insistent that Ms Banerjee failed to serve West Bengal's people, regardless of how her rule has been evaluated by some of the Centre's own ministries.

Perception, not data, is how Ms Banerjee is usually rated. In many ways she presents a soft target to patriarchs who arrive at judgments that are contradicted by facts. The reason: she is now India's only woman chief minister and woman of substance. It is axiomatic that patriarchy would consciously and unconsciously react to the idea of power and formidable popularity of this one woman, whose presence prevents the Indian State from being overrun by men.

If Narendra Modi and his 56-inch chest is the epitome of male power, the barely 60-inch frame of Ms Banerjee is the epitome of woman power. It's unlikely that even the least exposed voters in far-flung corners of any part of India would not recognise the names of Mr Modi and Mamata Banerjee. This puts her at par with Indira Gandhi, a name and face that almost everyone in any part of India instantly recognises.

By the time Ms Banerjee became chief minister in 2011, development theory and strategy for guiding decision and policymaking had evolved about why women were systematically left behind and struggled to fulfil their potential. There was also a large and constantly growing body of work that was taking apart the structures, institutions and systems that supported the control exercised by patriarchy. There was a growing body of expert opinion, social choice theory, for which Amartya Sen won the Nobel in Economics, that indicated merely prescribing education as the best way to bring about change and development was not enough to aid the poor or help the girl child escape the systematic incarceration by patriarchy.

In a textbook development strategy to keep the girl child in education and give her the means to negotiate her choices and decisions about her own future, that is a limited autonomy, the Mamata government began the "Kanyashree" programme in 2013. Contrary to the dismissive assessment of the programme as a scholarship, it is really an incentive for families and the girl child to remain in education and complete the process of acquiring a secondary school certificate that would enable her to access undergraduate college education. In other words, "Kanyashree" has created access by arming the girl child-young woman with resources to give her an entry into tertiary level education by giving her a measure of financial autonomy in making decisions and choices.

The idea of a programme for the secondary level girl child was Mamata Banerjee's. Instead of taking the usual route of asking her bureaucrats to design the programme, she got Unicef to develop the design. It makes "Kanyashree" a textbook strategy for empowerment of the girl child and a long game that will effectively transform how gender and women negotiate for their

rights, power and status in the near future, but not the immediate one. The ₹25,000 deposited in her name in a bank is seed capital she can leverage to create her own future.

In a slew of programmes that empower women to make their decisions count, the West Bengal government has initiated a quiet revolution. The Rupashree Prakalpa — a ₹25,000 one-time grant "for economically stressed families at the time of their adult daughters' marriage" — is far more than a dowry. It ensures the daughter is an adult and not a child when she is married off; it ensures the young woman has a voice in decision-making about her marriage, because she has the means, and it ensures she doesn't become Rasika Agarwal, a woman who died as her parents persuaded her to return to her in-laws though she was brutalised by her husband.

With the elder woman named as head of the household under Swasthya Sathi, a universal access to health services scheme of the Mamata Banerjee government, and the elder woman named as head of the household on ration cards, the change is even deeper. Women's access to medical care is neglected

in India; as head of the household, the woman in West Bengal can access the care, worth ₹5 lakhs a year, without asking her family. The same is true of her entitlement to food; as the head of the household, her access to food in terms of quantity and quality is embedded in the ration card.

Between Kanyashree and Swasthya Sathi, the widows' pension available to any woman who is over 18, Ms Banerjee has done what advocates of women's development lobby for when women take control after acquiring power in government. As a role model for how women in power can transform the future, in their own lives, for their families, for the state and the country, Mamata Banerjee is taking up where Jayalalithaa was stopped by her untimely death. The programmes are not original, as the Jayalalithaa government set up the prototype. But by building on example, Mamata Banerjee will go down as a transformer.

*Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata*

*Today is International Women's Day*



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50405.32	-0.87
Nifty 50	14938.10	-0.95
S&P 500*	3,841.94	1.95
Dollar (₹)	73.02	-0.24
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.00	0.44
Euro (₹)	87.00	0.71
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	43,887.522	1.18
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.79	3.07
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.232	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.608	0.058

\* As of Friday/Saturday

## FDI in software, hardware jumps 4-fold to \$24.4 bn

Foreign direct investments in the computer software and hardware sector jumped nearly four-times to \$24.4 billion during April-December, according to the DPIIT against \$6.4 billion in the year-ago period and \$7.7 billion in FY20. The other sectors which recorded significant growth in foreign inflows during the nine-month period include construction (infrastructure) activities (\$7.2 billion), and pharmaceuticals (\$1.24 billion).

## DoT to issue demand notes to telcos this week



The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) will issue demand notes to telcos next week on an upfront payment for spectrum acquired in the just-concluded auctions, which raked in over Rs 77,800 crore, for 855.6 MHz of spectrum, for the government. Reliance Jio spent the most in the auction, picking up 488.35 MHz spectrum in bands such as 800 MHz, 1800 MHz and 2300 MHz for Rs 57,122.65 crore.

## Ranganathan is head of CII-SR, Ella deputy

C. K. Ranganathan, chairman of Chennai-based CavinKare Ltd has been elected chairman of the CII, Southern Region, for 2021-22. Bharat Biotech International co-founder Sutchitra K. Ella was elected as deputy chairperson. Ranganathan has been associated with the CII in various capacities. Ella was the past chairperson of CII Andhra Pradesh and also the national council member and the past national chairwoman of CII IWN.

## FPIs pull out ₹5,156 cr in first week of March

Reversing the two-month buying streak, foreign portfolio investors pulled out Rs 5,156 crore from Indian markets in the first week of March amid profit booking and rising bond yields in the US. According to depositories data, overseas investors pulled out a net Rs 881 crore from equities and Rs 4,275 crore from the debt segment between March 1-5, taking the total net withdrawals to Rs 5,156 crore.



## Covid drives up domestic, export demand Home textile firms raising capacities

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 7

Buoyed by increased demand in both export and domestic markets, home textile companies are expanding their capacities.

The home textile segment is witnessing a strong demand revival. Increased consumption due to hygiene consciousness has improved the demand in both international and domestic markets, said Sidharth Rajagopal, executive director of Texprocil. There is also a surge in demand in the developed markets, including the US.

The Rs 55,000-crore Indian home textile sector, comprising products such as terry towels, bed sheets and spreads, pillow cases, curtains, and rugs and carpets, derives as much as 60-70 per cent of its revenue from exports. The US and the European Union account for over 80 per cent of these exports and large retailers and departmental stores are the major customers.

"Home textiles have taken a centre-stage in our lifestyle as work-from-home makes people spend more time inside their houses. There has been a pent-up demand in the June quarter, but in the September and December quarters the momentum is continuing," said Kailash Lalpuria, executive director and CEO of Indo Count. Most of the major home textile companies reported a cumulative revenue



growth of 22 per cent in the December quarter. Supported by this positive outlook on demand, many of them are expanding their manufacturing capacities, according to Motilal Oswal Institutional Equities.

Welspun India is expanding its capacity for home textile business through debottlenecking facilities at Vapi and Anjar in order to increase capacity of towels, bed linen, rugs and carpets. Its flooring business grew over three-fold in the December quarter. Capacity of its hard flooring plant is being doubled in January. It is being further doubled by Q2 FY22 to cater to growing demand. Soft Flooring has also started gaining traction, with strong inquiries from US, Canada, and other markets.

Himatsingka Seide had recently announced its new licensing agreement with The Walt Disney Company for the European

region. The licence will give it the right to design, develop, manufacture, and distribute a broad range of home textile products inspired by Disney's vast archives and characters from all its franchises including Disney, Marvel, Pixar and Lucas.

Trident has announced its Vision 2025, which includes expansion of existing businesses, diversification into new businesses through organic and inorganic growth.

"The industry is debottlenecking and increasing capacity as well as moving into other product categories within home textiles. We are also drawing plans on increasing capex and capacities. We expect the home textile export market to grow at a CAGR of 15 per cent in the coming years," said Lalpuria.

VText, another major player, is operating at almost full capacity for woven fabric, gray fabric and processed fabric.

## Old cars to get 5% rebate in scrappage policy: Gadkari

New Delhi, March 7: There is good news for consumers who are going to junk their old vehicles



Nitin Gadkari

and buy a new one under the Vehicle Scrapping Policy as automakers will give about 5 per cent rebate on the new purchase, Union minister Nitin Gadkari has said.

The voluntary vehicle scrapping policy announced in the Union Budget for 2021-22 provides for fitness test after 20 years for personal vehicles while commercial vehicles would require it after the completion of 15 years.

"Automobile manufacturers will provide about 5 per cent rebate on new car purchases" to the consumers in lieu of scrapping of the old, road transport, highways and MSMEs minister Gadkari told PTI.

The minister said the policy would lead to a 30 per cent boost to the Indian automobile industry turnover to Rs 10 lakh crore in the years to come from the present about Rs 4.5 lakh crore.

Gadkari said: "Automobile industry turnover which is Rs 4.5 lakh crore at present is likely to swell to Rs 10 lakh crore in years to come with India becoming an automobile hub."

Of this, the export component will go up to Rs 3 lakh crore from Rs 1.45 lakh crore now, he added.

—PTI

## LIC capital base to go up from ₹100 cr to ₹25,000 cr

New Delhi, March 7: The government has proposed to significantly increase the authorised capital of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) to Rs 25,000 crore to facilitate its listing slated for the next fiscal.

Currently, the paid-up capital of the life insurance company with over 29 crore policies is Rs 100 crore. LIC, which started with an initial capital of Rs 5 crore in 1956, has an asset base of close to Rs 32 lakh crore at Rs 31,96,214.81 crore.

The authorised share capital of LIC shall be Rs 25,000 crore divided into 2,500 crore shares of Rs 10 each, as per the amendments proposed in the Life Insurance Corporation Act, 1956.

The amendments proposed as part of the Finance Bill 2021 will lead to the setting up of a board with independent directors in line with list-



LIC

ing obligations.

According to one of the 27 proposed amendments, the central government will hold at least 75 per cent in LIC for the first five years post the IPO, and subsequently hold at least 51 per cent at all times after five years of the listing.

Up to 10 per cent of the LIC IPO issue size would be reserved for policyholders, minister of state for finance Anurag Thakur had said last month.

The government will remain the majority shareholder and will continue to retain manage-

ment control, safeguarding the interest of policyholders, he had said.

In her budget speech, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the initial public offering (IPO) of LIC would be launched in the next financial year, beginning April 1.

Currently, the government owns 100 per cent stake in LIC. Once listed, it is likely to become the country's biggest company by market capitalisation, with an estimated valuation of Rs 8-10 lakh crore.

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (Dipam), which manages the government's equity in state-owned companies, has already selected actuarial firm Milliman Advisors for ascertaining the embedded value of LIC for meeting the government's disinvestment target.

—PTI

## RINL expects ₹1,000 cr from land sale

ABHISHEK SONKAR  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

State-owned RINL expects to garner Rs 1,000 crore from the sale of its 22.19-acre land located in the heart of Visakhapatnam.

Last week, state-run construction company NBCC had announced signing an MoU with Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL) for redevelopment and monetisation of its 22.19 acres of land in the city of Visakhapatnam.

The company expects to

get around Rs 1,000 crore as the market price of land is around Rs 1 lakh per square yard. The amount raised would be used to pay back a portion of the company's debt, a company source told PTI.

According to RINL's website, the company had a net debt of Rs 19,592 crore in financial year 2018-19.

The company, without any captive iron ore mine, produces over 19,000 tonnes of hot metal per day from its three fully operational

blast furnaces at the plant.

The source said RINL's land at Maddilapalem is a prime location, situated about 4 km from the beach and 2 km from NH-16 that connects Howrah in to Chennai.

The value of the project would be ascertained after the preparation and finalisation of a detailed project report. NBCC would make the DPR. The source said the redevelopment and monetisation would be undertaken on a self-sustainable model.—PTI

## Mines ministry seeks provision to auction blocks if states fail

New Delhi, March 7: The mines ministry has proposed a clause to enable the central government to auction mineral blocks in case the states face difficulties in sale of such mines.

The move aims at ensuring continuous supply of minerals in the country with the auction of more number of mineral blocks on a regular basis.

Under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Act, the states conduct auction of mineral concessions.

"To ensure continuous supply of minerals in the country, more number of minerals blocks are required to be brought into auction on regular basis. Any delay in the conduct of auction has substantial impact on the availability as well as prices of minerals."

"Hence, it is proposed to provide the power to

central government to conduct auction in cases where the state governments face challenges in conducting the auction or fail to conduct auction," the mines ministry has said.

In cases, where the Centre would auction the blocks, the revenue from such mines will accrue to state governments only, the ministry said.

Since 2015, central exploration agencies have handed over geological reports of 143 mineral blocks to various state governments which are ready for auction. Out of these, only seven blocks have been auctioned by the states. Further, mining leases of 334 blocks expired on March 31, 2020, out of which 46 were working mines.

The ministry is pursuing with the states since early 2019 for early auction of these blocks.

—PTI

## BIZ CONFIDENCE HIGHEST IN A DECADE: FICCI

FC BUREAU  
CHENNAI, MARCH 7

Corporate India's business confidence was at a decadal high in the December quarter, according to industry body Ficci.

Ficci's Overall Business Confidence Index reached 74.2 in the current round (Q3) on account of improvement in present conditions as well as expectations, the chamber said on Sunday.

The index had stood at 70.9 in the previous survey and at 59 a year ago, noted the survey, based on responses from about 190 companies, with their turnover ranging from Rs 1 crore to Rs 1.37 lakh crore.

The survey revealed recovery of demand conditions, improved capacity utilisation and a promising outlook on various operational parameters.

However, rising raw material costs is emerging as a bothersome factor for members of India Inc. The rise in fuel and other commodity prices is beginning to exert pressure on the input costs of companies.

## Ikea rushes to make up lost time on expansion

CHRIS KAY  
MARCH 7

Furniture giant Ikea is accelerating its India expansion after a nationwide pandemic lockdown last year delayed the construction and opening of new stores in one of its fastest-growing markets.

"If you have a lockdown you can't continue to construct," Peter Betzel, Ikea's chief executive officer for India said in an interview. "But now we are back in full speed."

The company opened its second India store on the outskirts of Mumbai in December and another in Bengaluru is now on course to be completed in 12 months, Betzel said, adding that he was hopeful of meeting the target of rolling out shops in 30 cities within seven years.

Ikea, which opened its first store in Hyderabad in 2018, also has just two years left to raise the ratio of goods and materials sourced from India – currently at 22 per cent – to at least 30 per cent to meet local regulations. Betzel



Peter Betzel

said that was "absolutely" achievable.

"It's increasing as we speak," he said. "But this is not done overnight."

The Swedish furniture giant, known for its minimalist aesthetics, is now making up for lost time as the Indian economy begins to rebound from the pandemic-induced recession and Covid-19 infections slow down in the world's second-worst hit nation.

Ikea's ambitious plans for India, however, face potentially stiff competition after Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani, whose conglomerate bought a local furniture e-tailer, Urban Ladder, recently as part of its large

er plans to dominate India's \$1 trillion consumer retail market.

Betzel, an Ikea veteran who headed the company's Spanish and German operations before moving to India in 2018, said there is ample space for multiple players to plug "a big need in India – we are one part of that."

Ikea recently announced the acquisition of land in Noida, a satellite city adjacent to New Delhi, for a \$753 million multipurpose mall that should be ready in about three-and-a-half years, he said. Development on a second store close to the national capital will begin this year and two smaller centres in Mumbai will open in 2021, in sync with its global expansion spree as it adds stores at a record pace despite worldwide virus restrictions.

India's lockdown helped bolster Ikea's online business, which now accounts for 40 per cent of total sales compared to about 10-15 per cent a year ago, according to Betzel.

—Bloomberg

## AIRASIA PLANS FLYING-TAXI SERVICE NEXT YR

YANTOULTRA NGUI  
MARCH 7

Malaysian budget airline AirAsia Group Bhd said it is seeking to launch a flying-taxi business as soon as next year.

"We are working on that right now," Tony Fernandes, the company's CEO and co-founder, said. "I think we are about a year-and-a-half away from launching."

AirAsia expects to start its own e-hailing services in April, Fernandes said. The flying taxis it hopes to begin providing next year will come with as many as four seats and will be powered by a quadcopter.

Separately on Saturday, the company announced that it's partnering with a state agency called the Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre to develop an urban drone delivery service.

Fernandes is optimistic that air travel will soon rebound with the rollout of vaccination programmes. The group offers low-cost flights linking 22 countries, mostly in the Asia-Pacific.

—Bloomberg

## WOMEN'S DAY | MUSINGS Freedom to do things that bring one happiness is critical

## Financial freedom essential for women

FALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, MARCH 7

Women empowerment is also about achieving financial independence, driving money matters for yourself and family.

Against the theme of International Women's Day on Monday, women can take this opportunity to start taking stock of their or their family's financial situation.

So, what is financial freedom?

Financial freedom is nothing but to create enough wealth so that it can fend for yourself. It is about being able to make choices/achieving goals without being constrained by money. A person or household is financially free if they can make the choices that bring them

happiness without having to worry about money. Your goal can be to send your kids abroad for higher education, upgrading the house or car, retiring in a certain location or getting kids married or a family vacation. Here is a broad road map to help you secure your and your family's future:

■ The first step is to identify and finalise your financial goals, decide the timeframe for achieving the goals and arriving at an estimated cost to achieve each goal. Then comes budgeting, saving, investing and growing the money.

Says Pankaj Maalde, a certified financial planner, "You should know what is your income and how much is the outflow due to expenses. Your



household expenses should not be more than 30-35 per cent of your income. The idea is to set a minimum savings target of 25-30 per cent of one's monthly income to meet your future goals."

■ Buy life and health insurance: A serious injury or a disease can wipe away all your investments and savings and

derail you from the path to financial freedom. Not only your health may get affected but also your ability to work. Therefore, you need to protect your life and health through insurance. Buy a term life insurance with a sum assured that is at least 10 to 12 times your annual income. You should also insure yourself and family for medical emergencies by buying a health cover that covers you and each family member for at least Rs 5 lakh or insure all the members through a family floater scheme of minimum Rs 15 lakh. If you can afford, also buy a critical illness policy.

■ Investment strategy: According to Surya Bhatia, a certified financial planner, "Your investment strategy should

depend on your age, risk profile and the timeframe in meeting your goals.

"Those with short term goals, say one to two years, could invest their money in liquid mutual funds and fixed deposits. Those with medium-term goals say 3 to 5 years could consider debt funds. Those with long-term goals, say 10 years or more, could look at investing in equity mutual funds through the SIP route and also invest in PPF," added Bhatia.

■ Reviewing your portfolio is equally important: As you work towards your goal, review the progress made on a monthly, quarterly, or within a particular timeframe. If you're not making satisfactory progress on a goal, you can change the process to achieving it.

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MARCH 7

More women fund managers are managing mutual fund assets today in the domestic mutual fund industry compared to the past years.

"When we first came out with a report on women fund managers in 2017, there were only 18 women fund managers," said Morningstar, a US-based mutual fund research company.

Currently, there are 30 women fund managers (28 last year) and they manage approximately Rs 4.11 lakh crore of assets, which is about 13.5 per cent of the Indian mutual fund industry.

Domestic mutual fund industry assets are managed by 376 fund managers across all fund houses.

es. With a meagre 8 per cent representation, women still remain drastically under-represented among the ranks of mutual fund managers.

The 30 women fund managers were spread across 19 fund houses, with two fund houses having three or more women fund managers.

Six fund houses had two women fund managers while 11 fund houses had at least one woman fund manager.

When it comes to tenure, 10 female fund managers have managed funds consistently for over five years. 12 fund managers have been managing funds between two and five years, and eight fund managers have a relatively lower experience of managing/co-managing funds below two years.



## SHORT TAKES

## Vinesh bags gold, reclaims top spot

**Rome:** Living up to the expectations, star Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat won her second gold medal in as many weeks with a dominant win in the Matteo Pellicone Ranking Series event and reclaimed the top rank in the her category here. The 26-year-old world bronze medallist and the only Indian woman wrestler to have qualified for the Tokyo Games, Vinesh blanked Canada's Diana Mary Helen Weicker 4-0 in the 53kg title clash. Vinesh scored all her points in the first period and held on to her lead in the second to ensure a top-of-the-podium finish. Vinesh had won a gold medal in Kiev last week and this performance would give her the belief that her preparations for the biggest sporting event are on the right track. The Indian had entered the event as world number three but is back to world number one by jumping 14 points. — PTI

## Guptill leads NZ to T20 series win

**Wellington:** A century opening stand by Martin Guptill and Devon Conway saw New Zealand clinch their Twenty20 series against Australia in Wellington on Sunday after the tourists faltered in the face of an experimental spin attack. Set a target of 143 for victory in the fifth and final match, New Zealand claimed victory by seven wickets and took the series 3-2 with an emphatic 27 balls to spare. After being comprehensively outplayed in games three and four when batting second, New Zealand captain Kane Williamson knew he had to be innovative to win the series after he lost the toss and was told to bowl first. — AFP

**Brief scores:** Australia 142/8 (Wade 44, Finch 36, Sodhi 3-24, Boult 2-26) lost to New Zealand 143/3 (Guptill 71, Conway 36, Phillips 34\*, Meredith 2-39) by 7 wickets.

## Covid hits Indian boxers in Spain

**New Delhi:** The Indian men's boxing team's final campaign at the 35th Boxam International Tournament in Castellon, Spain was derailed by a positive Covid-19 case in the side, resulting in three withdrawals from the summit clashes. Olympic-bound Ashish Kumar (75kg) tested positive for the virus and as a result of being his roommates, Mohammed Hussamuddin (57kg) and Sumit Sangwan (81kg) were forced to withdraw from the finals on Saturday night. All three of them ended with silver medals which could have been gold but for the unforeseen circumstances. Hussamuddin and Sumit have tested negative and are travelling back with the team which will land in Mumbai on Monday. Among the women, Simranjit Kaur (60kg), who is also bound for the Olympics, was forced out of her final after her semifinal opponent — Kiria Tapia of Puerto Rico — tested positive for the virus. — PTI

## Hyd girls, RR boys champs

**Hyderabad:** Hyderabad girls and Ranga Reddy boys emerged winners in the 7th Telangana State Sub-Junior Inter-District Throwball Championship on Sunday. Hyderabad defeated Ranga Reddy 15-10, 15-12 in the girls final while Ranga Reddy beat Nizamabad 15-13, 12-15, 15-13 for the boys title. Medchal girls took the third place with a 15-8, 15-10 win over Vikarabad while the Hyderabad boys outplayed Medchal 15-11, 15-9 to finish third.

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**Vijay Hazare Trophy:** Quarterfinal from 9 am on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

## FOOTBALL

**Indian Super League:** First Semifinal, 2nd leg — Mumbai vs Goa from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, HD

**English Premier League:** Chelsea vs Everton from 11.30 pm; West Ham vs Leeds United from 1.30 am (Tuesday) on Star Sports Select 1

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## BREEZY MARIN DRIVE

## Carolina cruises past Sindhu to win Swiss Open title

**Basel, March 7:** World Champion P.V. Sindhu finished a distant second best in the Swiss Open final after being completely routed by Olympic gold medallist Carolina Marin of Spain in a lop-sided women's singles title clash here on Sunday.

The 25-year-old Indian, who had won the coveted World Championship gold medal here in 2019, couldn't match the speed and accuracy of Marin during her 12-21, 5-21 defeat in the final that lasted only 35 minutes.

It was Sindhu's third successive loss to Marin, who had won both the Super 1000 events in Thailand in January before finishing runners-up at the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals.

Playing her first final in 18 months, Sindhu entered the match with a 5-8 head-to-head record against Marin, having lost her last two matches against the former world no 1.

The world No. 7 Indian, who didn't drop a game in the last four matches this week, however, failed to summon her 'A' game under pressure as Marin came up trumps to claim her third title of the year. Marin, the current world No. 3, had also defeated Sindhu in the final of the Rio Olympics in 2016.



Carolina Marin poses with the Swiss Open trophy after beating P.V. Sindhu in the final. — Twitter

Sindhu seemed completely clueless against a rampaging Marin, who outclassed the Indian with her pace, power and precision during the summit

clash. In the opening game, Marin opened up a 2-0 lead early on, which was quickly erased by Sindhu as she looked to step up the pace.

The Indian moved ahead 6-4 — the only time she had a lead in the match — but Marin again clawed back with Sindhu finding the net more often than

● It was Sindhu's third successive loss to Marin, who had won both the Super 1000 events in Thailand in January before finishing runners-up at the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals.

not.

Sindhu missed a shot at the backline and committed a couple of unforced errors as Marin lead 9-6.

The Spaniard erred twice before winning a video referral. She then entered the mid-game interval with a healthy 11-8 advantage.

It was a one way traffic after the break as Marin continued the momentum, grabbing four straight points to move to 15-8.

Marin didn't take the foot off the pedal and continued to dominate the proceedings, zooming to a 5-0 lead in the second game. A net error gave Sindhu the serve but the Indian just couldn't get going as she again faltered at the net and then mis-cued a forehand return. Marin soon moved to 8-2.

Sindhu will next compete at the All England Championships, a Super 1000 event to be held from March 17 to 21. — PTI

## WOMEN'S | CRICKET

## Toothless India fall flat on return

**Lucknow, March 7:** Lizelle Lee and Laura Wolvaardt shared the highest opening wicket stand against an under-prepared India to give South Africa an emphatic eight-wicket win in the first ODI of the five match series here on Sunday.

Asked to bat, India never got the momentum it needed and could only manage 177 for nine despite sedate fifty from skipper Mithali Raj (50 off 85) and a quick-fire 40 off 41 balls from her deputy Harmanpreet Kaur. Lee (83 not out off 122) and Wolvaardt (90 off 110) helped South Africa chased down the target in 40.1 overs with a record 169-run stand.

India would quickly like to forget their first outing in 12 months and come back much stronger in the next game against a side

which has come into the series with substantial game time.

The South African opening duo did not look any sort of trouble against the India pacers as well as their highly rated spinners. Lee smashed 11 fours and a six while Wolvaardt collected 12 boundaries.

Veteran India pacer Jhulan Goswami (2/38), playing her first game since November 2019, was the most impressive in an otherwise disappointing bowling effort. Debutant pacer Monica Patel got only four overs in which she conceded 20 runs. — PTI

**Brief Scores:** India 177/9 in 50 overs (Mithali Raj 50, Harmanpreet Kaur 40, Deepti Sharma 27, Shabnim Ismail 3/28, N Mlaba 2/40) lost to South Africa 178/2 in 40.1 overs (Lizelle Lee 83 not out, Laura Wolvaardt 80; Jhulan Goswami 2/38).

## HARMANPREET SAYS INDIA LACKED MATCH PRACTICE

**Lucknow, March 7:** Indian women's ODI vice-captain Harmanpreet Kaur on Saturday said the team was lacking match practice and will need time to get back into rhythm after being away from international cricket for a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We didn't get any international cricket for a year. Apart from three IPL games we didn't get much time to work as a unit. As a team you need to spend time and get ready for any series," Kaur said at the post-match press conference.

"Nowadays everybody is looking for a big total, every game we want to score more than 250 but for that you need some time and matches. In the past few years we had built a rhythm but we will need time to create that rhythm and next game we will try to do that as a unit," added Kaur, who was playing her 100th ODI. — PTI

## STATE | SNOOKER

## Himanshu pots a hat-trick of titles

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 7

Himanshu Jain stamped his authority over cue sports in Hyderabad by bagging a hat-trick of titles at the Telangana State Ranking Snooker & Billiards Championship played at the Telangana Cue Sports Association premises at Khajaguda on Sunday.

Himanshu won the senior snooker final with a dominant 5-2 verdict — 70-9, 21-77, 83-16, 89-15, 87-48, 56-96, 63-19 — against Mushtaq Hussain. On top of his game, Himanshu engineered breaks of 69 and 45 in the first and third

frames. Mushtaq got a break of 56 in the second frame but that was not enough.

Himanshu was off the blocks in a flash, racing to take the first frame at 70-9. However, a rattled Mushtaq reorganised himself to draw level by taking the second at 77-21, only for Himanshu to hit back with 83-16, 89-15 and 87-48 in the third fourth and fifth to gain control of the match.

With this, Himanshu got a grand double, having won the billiards event too. Last year too he had won both the snooker as well as billiards titles while taking the snooker title the year before that.



Himanshu Jain (centre) receives the senior snooker winner's trophy from Income Tax Commissioner Peeyush Sonkar as Telangana Cue Sports Association joint secretary K. Appa Rao (left) looks on at the TCSA premises at Khajaguda in Hyderabad on Sunday.

## Golfers on the upswing

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 7

Ajay Bharati, Deepak Singh and V. Chamundeswar Nath emerged winners in various categories of the T Golf tournament held at Boulder Hills Golf & Country Club in Gachibowli, Hyderabad on Sunday.

Ajay won the Under 15 category with a score of 65, pushing Rusheel Reddy (66) to the second place.

Deepak's 64 took him to the first place in the Under 16 section with Sameer Mahendra ending runner-up with 67.

Chamundeswar Nath was the overall winner with a nett score of 62, edging out J. P. Reddy, who was second best with 63. C. Sasidhar won the



K. Kavitha, Member of the Telangana Legislative Council and daughter of Chief Minister KCR, presents the overall winner's prize to V. Chamundeswar Nath, who also got the pink jacket given to the champion, as former Indian cricket captain Md Azharuddin and national badminton coach P. Gopichand look on.

Closest to the Pin prize at 1.3 feet, Ram Mandava took the honours for the Straightest Drive while Jerry Anderson came up with the Longest Drive. Prasad Rao Kotagiri

tallied the best gross score of 82 in the senior category while Vilok Gadwal and Srihita Mandava had the best gross score of 77 each in the junior section.