

CHENNAI | SUNDAY 21 | MARCH 2021

Issued in public interest by
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CM targets DMK over dynasty politics

Villupuram, March 20: AIADMK top leader and Chief Minister K Palaniswami on Saturday slammed the DMK over 'dynasty politics' and took pride in saying that even an ordinary party worker would get the top position in his party.

The DMK has not reformed itself though it was out of power for a decade, Palaniswami said, canvassing votes for Law Minister C Ve Shanmugam who has been fielded from Villupuram constituency for the April 6 Assembly polls.

Dynasty politics was all about a particular family holding the top position in the party again and again and while even an ordinary worker could get the top position in the AIADMK, it was not the case with DMK, he claimed.

"It was previously Karunanidhi, and then (his son) Stalin and now Udhayanidhi Stalin (DMK youth wing secretary and candidate from Triplicane-Chepauk segment in Chennai) has emerged. This election is all about putting a fullstop to dynasty politics," he said.

Replying to Stalin who alleged a scam in award of tenders by highways department at a poll meeting today in southern Tamil Nadu, Palaniswami said the allegation was a bundle of lies. During the DMK regime, it was only Stalin, who awarded tenders to his relatives, the CM alleged.

In his campaign at multiple locations in this district



CM Edappadi campaigns for BJP candidate VAT.Kalivaradhan at Thirukovilur in Villupuram district on Saturday.

—DC

and nearby Kallakurichi, Palaniswami targeted the DMK and its chief Stalin over several issues.

Lashing out at Stalin for a wanton, false campaign that AIADMK was subservient towards the BJP, he said it was a false and defamatory propaganda.

Cohesion between the state and central governments alone could ensure addressing issues faced by the people and it would also help fulfill their aspirations and that is why the AIADMK is friendly towards the BJP, he said.

Recalling DMK's alliance with the BJP in 1999, he said during those days the DMK lauded the saffron party as good since they enjoyed power at the Centre.

"If we align with the BJP,

they say that it is wrong and if they join hands with them it is right. How is this correct?" he asked and described Stalin as a 'chameleon'.

The DMK is a party without any policy or ideology and it only hankered after power for 'family', he claimed.

The DMK is an 'unruly' party which threatened officials even when it was not in power, he alleged, adding the AIADMK regime is governed by the rule of law.

Hitting back at Stalin for claiming that he became the Chief Minister in 2017 by 'crawling' in front of V K Sasikala, the confidante of late CM J Jayalalithaa, Palaniswami said the DMK chief "does not know decorum."

"Am I a snake or

lizard to crawl," he asked.

"I walked and assumed office," Palaniswami said.

Over the past about four years, DMK fancied that the AIADMK would split and the government would be dislodged, Palaniswami said and described Stalin as a man with "bad thoughts."

Only a man with good thoughts could aspire to grow in life, the CM said and asked Stalin to retain the position of the Leader of Opposition at the very least.

In his campaign in Chennai, Deputy Chief Minister and AIADMK coordinator O Panneerselvam credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for facilitating conduct of bull taming sport 'Jallikattu' in Tamil Nadu.

—PTI



Thondamuthur constituency independent candidate actor Mansoor Ali Khan campaigns with a street dog in Perur in Coimbatore on Saturday.

—DC

Centre keen on TN uplift: Min

DC CORRESPONDENT
THANJAVUR, MARCH 20

Union minister of state for road transport and highways, V.K. Singh, has said that the Central government is committed to ensure the development of Tamil Nadu.

He was here to discuss the poll preparations of the AIADMK-BJP alliance, and campaign for Poondi and Venkatesan, BJP candidate for Thiruvaiyaru assembly constituency.

He told presspersons that in the past six years, the Central government had allotted 6.5 lakh crores for the development of the state. A sum of ₹1.5 lakh crore have been allotted for infrastructure development alone.

"We are in alliance with the AIADMK here, and in the past two years, the state government has taken the state to number one position in the country in many parameters like Covid control, business and infrastructure development. People know that we are the parties committed for their welfare, and hence, would support us," Singh added.

Regarding Thiruvaiyaru constituency, Singh said that many projects like forming a a bypass road around Thiruvaiyaru were pending, which would be taken up when AIADMK-BJP alliance is voted back to power. Many more BJP leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi would come to Tamil Nadu for campaigning, he added.

Poll observers reach Thanjavur

G. SRINIVASAN | DC
THANJAVUR, MARCH 20

The observers (general, expenditure and police) appointed by Election Commission of India (ECI) for Thanjavur district have arrived, said Collector M. Govinda Rao, in a press release. General observers (IAS officers) A.M. Sharma, for Thiruvaiyaru and Papanasam (mobile - 8 0 1 5 4 1 6 2 6 0), Suryamani, for Orathanadu (mobile - 7904181278), Ashok Kumar Chowhan for Pattukottai and Peravurani (mobile - 9345363227), Akram Pandey for Thanjavur (mobile - 6382714861),

Sahab Singh for Thiruvaidaimaruthur and Kumbakonam (mobile - 8072451996), Udal Raj Singh has been appointed poll observer (expenditure) for Thanjavur, Thiruvaiyaru, Orathanadu and Papanasam constituencies (mobile - 9345569860), Sameer Pandey (expenditure) for Pattukottai and Peravurani assembly constituencies (mobile - 9345010081) and S.V. Siva Prasad (expenditure) for Thiruvaidaimaruthur and Kumbakonam constituencies.

For the whole district, Govinda Pratap Singh, has been appointed as election observer (police).

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Tiruvannamalai district collector Sandeep Nanduri creates awareness on hundred per cent voting through a mega balloon at the collectorate premises on Saturday.

—K.Senthil Nathan

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SHORT TAKES

Coolie attempts suicide protesting police inaction

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC
TIRUCHY, MARCH 20

A 50-year-old coolie attempted to commit suicide at the Uppiliapuram police station premises near Thuraiyur in Tiruchy district on Saturday in protest against police inaction on his petition seeking to trace his wife and two sons, who are missing since December 22, 2019.

Police said the coolie, Selvaraj, hailing from Vairichettipalayam near Thuraiyur submitted a petition before the Uppiliapuram police station to find his wife Solai Easwari and sons Durgesh and Nithish.

Despite his repeated requests, the police did not act on his petition. Selvaraj went to the Uppiliapuram police station on Saturday morning, but did not get a favourable reply from the policemen there. Following this, Selvaraj poured petrol on him and set himself on fire in the backyard of the police station.

Heard his cry, the nearby people defused the fire and rushed him to the government hospital at Thuraiyur and after providing first aid, referred him to the Mahatma Gandhi memorial government hospital, where Selvaraj is undergoing treatment with 50 percent of burns.

Crackdown on Covid violations

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 20

Intensifying the crack-down on those violating Covid appropriate behaviour and not following standard operating procedures, a fine of Rs 52.64 lakh was collected from 24,700 individuals and companies during the past three days even as the number of fresh cases shot up to 1,243 across the state on Saturday.

By ramping up vaccination and the conduct of RT PCR tests the government is all set to bring down the spread of coronavirus in the state, a press release from Chief Secretary Rajiv Ranjan said, adding that the tests have been increased from 50,000 a day to 75,000 and 3,217 vaccination centres have been set up.

He attributed the rise in infections to the conduct



Greater Chennai Corporation commissioner G. Prakash inaugurates mega Covid vaccination camp for around 2,000 people at Nehru stadium on Saturday.

—DC

of events, functions and meetings in some districts with people not following the rule to wear masks in public and offices not following Covid related protocols.

Now, the increased and aggressive testing is followed up by contact tracing, isolating of suspected persons, providing treatment to the infected and creating micro contain-

ment zones in streets and colonies, Rajan said.

In Chennai, a free vaccination camp was held at the Nehru Indoor Stadium, which would become a weekly affair. All

1,243 fresh Covid cases in state

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 20

As electioneering is gaining momentum across the state, the number of daily Covid-19 cases continues to rise with over 1,000 cases reported for the second straight day. On Saturday, the state recorded 1,243 cases. On Friday the number was 1,083. On December 30, 2020 the state had last registered below 1,000 cases.

According to the data of the state health department, Chennai continues to top the table with 458 cases, an increase from 421 on Friday.

Chengalpattu, which registered 105 cases on Friday, added 134 more cases on Saturday. Coimbatore, which also registered more than 100 cases for a few days, has reported 103 fresh cases on Saturday.

Four districts - Chennai, Coimbatore, Chengalpattu and Tiruvallur (87) - form the major share of cases, totalling 782.

The total active case across the state also recorded a steady rise on Saturday with 7,291, which is a surge compared to Friday (6,690) and Thursday (6,222). Chennai is the main contributor with 2,747 cases, which is a spike from 2,552 on Friday.

At least eight death cases, six of them with co-morbidities, were reported on Saturday. Two people died in Chennai while Chengalpattu, Cuddalore, Kancheepuram, Thanjavur, Trichy and Villupuram districts recorded one death each.

The active cases continued to drop till the second week of February since May last year. But new outbreaks through the family clusters in Chennai and neighbouring districts and Coimbatore led to the fresh surge in the state.

Meanwhile, the state was able to test 74,954 persons on Saturday; an increase from 72,998 on Friday, taking the total to 1,83,86,249.

60 Covid cases reported in Pondy

Puducherry, March 20: Covid tally in the Union Territory of Puducherry rose to 40,322 on Saturday with the addition of 60 new cases, the health department said.

The toll remained at 674 as no fatalities were reported.

A total of 1,345 samples were tested in the last 24 hours ending at 10 AM and the cumulative

number of specimens examined so far was 6.52 lakh. Health and Family Welfare Services Director S Mohan Kumar said in a release.

There were 353 active cases after the recovery of 24 patients during this period. In all, 39,295 people have recovered from the disease so far in the union territory

Puducherry region accounted for 39 of the new cases, Karaikal had 19 and Mahe reported two. No case was reported from Yanam, the Director said.

Kumar said 18,085 health care personnel and 6,633 front line workers have been vaccinated in the Union Territory since the launch of the drive in February.

—PTI



Tambaram fire and rescue department personnel conduct an awareness rally and distribute pamphlets warning people against burning of garbage to prevent fire mishaps at Tambaram West on Saturday.

—DC

Strictly comply with rules in providing connections: High Court to Tangedco

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 20

The Madras high court has directed the Tangedco to comply strictly with the Tamil Nadu Combined Building Development Rules, 2019 with regard to the grant of all electricity service connections.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy gave the directive while disposing of a petition filed by Coimbatore Consumer Cause represented by its secretary K. Kathirimaithiyon.

The 2019 Rules specify that service connections such as electricity supply connections, water supply connections and

sewerage connections should not be provided for the classes of buildings specified in Rule 20 thereof, unless a completion certificate was obtained from the development authority.

Petitioner's counsel S. Sathianandaram submitted that the 2019 Rules were framed pursuant to orders passed by this court. The said rules were intended to prevent unauthorized constructions, which were subsequently regularized. Under the guise of the impugned memorandum, the Tangedco was enabling persons who put up unauthorized constructions to obtain electricity supply connections. The petitioner was not opposed to the grant of electricity connections for temporary structures or small portions of buildings, he added.

public services. A detailed study and audit in these aspects are required, in order to meet the constitutional goal and mandate. The government of the day is mandated to provide an efficient public administration. Thus, a study and action are highly warranted, the judge added.

Pointing out that the present criminal case was registered in 2007 and the examination of witnesses not yet completed, the judge said attachment of the properties were made in 2007 and the same was confirmed in 2009 itself. However, the trial has not been concluded.

Urban forest cover key to fight climate change

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 20

Chennai, for the last few years, has seen a lot of initiatives from various quarters including the state government, non-governmental organisations and corporate companies in improving its green cover through the Miyawaki model pioneered by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki.

On the occasion of World Forest Day which falls on March 21, environmentalists stressed upon the maintenance of urban forests cover as the key to fight the toughening climate change.

So far, the GCC administration, which is pushing the Miyawaki model, has been quite successful in galvanising the residents to take up green initiatives.

According to GCC commissioner G. Prakash, their aim is to create urban forests in 1,000 places across city. These forests will prevent encroachments and anti-social activities. In total, around 60,000 saplings have been planted in 30 places, Prakash added.

City-based NGO Thuvakkam has taken up maintenance of at least six Miyawaki forests introduced by the GCC for two years. They have also set up as many as 13 forests including over

WORLD FOREST DAY

5,000-odd trees across the city since 2018. Krishna Kumar Suresh, the founder of Thuvakkam, said that maintenance works were being done very well in all areas with the support of GCC. The corporation bears electricity bills, water charges and maintenance equipment. The corporations also help us with their Corporate Social Responsibilities fund. So, the maintenance work is not a challenge, he said.

Aditi Madhusudhanan, trustee of 'Born to Win', who is also involved in setting up two Miyawaki forests in the city, said the corporation was maintaining both projects well. The success of the project is the participation of local communities which are aware of the importance of urban forests, she adds.

The advantage of the method is that as the saplings grow into tall canopy trees, they block the sunlight entirely, preventing weeds and shorter plants from growing. The resulting dense forest makes it difficult for even humans and animals to enter. The greater variety of native trees in lesser space can be realised with this method, making it ideal for urban areas.

Amit Banka, founder,

Wenaturalists, observed that application of Miyawaki afforestation techniques and protecting the existing forests are key to restoring green habitats that have been lost due to rampant urbanisation. It's critical for all stakeholders to discuss ideas and implement the ideas to make life easier. Restoring and protecting our forests will lead us towards a sustainable future with better livelihood opportunities. 'World Forest Day' is every day and we must never forget that, he said.

Apart from people, according to him, country's diversity comes from its flora and fauna as 21.67 percent of our geographical area is enriched with forest cover. "We are home to the most diverse wildlife in our four large biodiversity hotspots. We have preserved our wildlife in more than 120 national parks, 515 wildlife sanctuaries, 26 wetlands, and 18 bio-reserves. But with climate change and other environmental threats, we need to do a lot more to protect the different species and their habitats. Germany, New Zealand, USA, Indonesia, Mexico and many other countries are recognising the importance of reforestation as a path to the socio-economic recovery of the world," he pointed out.

A poignant tale effectively portrayed

Movie review

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

Amidst loads of mindless masala flicks, here comes a rare gem -Thaen, a hard-hitting film that depicts the troubles faced by the people living in the hills of Tamil Nadu. The movie with relatively new faces has already made it to international festivals.

Set in the hilly terrain of Kurunjikudi village in the Western Ghats, Velu (Tharun Kumar) is a bee-keeper. He is also known for providing honey-based medicines to cure illnesses. Poongodi (Abarnathi) from the neighboring village approaches Velu for the treatment of her ailing father (Devaraj). The duo is attracted to each other and get married much against the warning of the village honchos, who say they could not get consent from the village deity for their matrimony. Soon, the couple is blessed with a baby girl.

All goes well until one day Poongodi falls severely sick with unbearable stomach pain. Unable to cure her with his local medicine, Velu descends the hill and takes Poongodi to the town hospital, where his emotional roller-coaster begins.

Earlier Velu and other villagers refused to move to the city from their inhabitants when some middlemen approached them on behalf of the government. Now, it is the turn of the government officials who make Velu



THAEN
CAST: Tharun Kumar, Abarnathi
Direction: Ganesh Vinayakan
RATING: 3.5/5

run from pillar to post to get the necessary documents like Aadhar, Voters ID to prove his citizenship which are needed to avail free insurance scheme.

What is the cause of Poongodi's rare disease? Was Velu able to save his wife? The impeccable performances of the lead pair -Tharun Kumar and debutant Abarnathi is the highlight of the movie. Post intermission Tharun scores highly in emotional scenes. Abarnathi sans makeup shines every bit. Bava Lakshmanan, whose spoof on the system, evokes

laughter: Baby Anushree as the mute girl, Aruldas as the scheming middleman, Devaraj as Poonkodi's dad do their part adequately.

Director Ganesh Vinayakan has taken up a tough subject and portrays efficiently the difficulties, pain, and negligence shown by the government towards the people living in the hills. He also takes a dig at the corrupt system, greedy corporate houses, media that just wants to sensationalize the news, selfish netizens on social media among others.

The film drags a bit in the second half giving a documentary feel. However, the director manages to move the audience with a tear-jerking climax inspired by a real-life poignant incident.

Technically, Sukumar's cinematography elevates the film top notch and Sanath Bharadwaj's background score adds strength in emotional

No thrill, no chill

ANUPAMA
SUBRAMANIAN

With the season of ghost horror genre still a trend in Ktown, the latest to join is debutant Arul's Kadampari.

Arul (Arul) along with his girlfriend Lincy (Kashima Rafi), sister Rudhra (Akila Narayanan) and her lover Victor (Sarjun) goes to a forest area to film a documentary. While it rains heavily, the car in which they travel meets with an accident. Fortunately, the inmates of the car escape with small cuts and bruises. They chance upon an abandoned bungalow and take refuge in it. A mute old man (Maharajan) in the house helps them although they found his activities strange.

Meanwhile, they hear the noise of a baby crying from inside a room. When Rudhra enters the room, she is shocked to find out that a small girl is being confined to a wooden box. No sooner does she try to rescue the girl, eerie supernatural events occur around them. With the impending danger, whether they manage to escape from the bungalow or not is the remainder of the film.

Arul as an actor is just about adequate. But as a director, he has steered clear of the comedy and songs that are usually associated with such genres and attempted a pure horror story, which is appreciable. But it is in the screenplay and execution where he errs. Having said that, though it is scary in parts, the thrills and chills are largely missing. The slow pacing is another problem.



KADAMPARI

CAST: Arul, Kashima Rafi, Akila Narayanan
Direction: Arul
RATING: 1.75/5

Others in the cast like Kashima, Akila, Sarjun and Baby Pooshitha contribute their bit. The camera work and rere-

1.5 tonnes of gutka seized, three held

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 20

The Tambaram police have arrested three persons and seized close to 1,500 kg of banned gutka and tobacco products, during raids at two premises in Perungalathur and Peerankaranai on Saturday morning.

According to police, based on a tip-off that a huge quantity of drugs is being transported by a drug kingpin's men near Tambaram, the special team formed to curb the transportation and sales of drugs, on Friday intercepted a mini-van on suspicion on Tambaram-Mudichur service road junction.

Three persons identified as, Ilayaraja (36) of Urappakkam, Rajendran (47) of Peerankaranai and Muthukumar (44) of Mudichur who came in the van gave contradictory statements on being questioned about the contents of the van. A search by the officials led to the seizure of banned gutka and tobacco products.

Based on the inputs from the arrested, police raided two premises belonging to one Nizamuddin, located in Perumal kovil street in Perungalathur and Kannadasan Street in Peerankaranai on Saturday.

During the searches, gutka and banned tobacco close to 1,500 kilograms were seized. The team also made a seizure of Rs 4 lakhs in cash, Six mobile phones, three motorbikes and a minivan. The three men revealed that the contraband belonged to Nizamuddin of Perungukathur. He used to store the gutka in those places and supply it to shops across the city.

SHORT TAKES

WOMAN CUTS OFF
HER MOLESTER'S
GENITALS IN MPRABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, MARCH 20

A woman in a Madhya Pradesh village chopped off a man's genitals for attempting to rape her at Amilia under Rampura police station in Sidhi district late on Friday. Both of them were arrested after they lodged cases against each other.

According to the police, the accused, Ramesh Saket (45), barged into the house of the 45-year-old victim late on Friday night. The woman was at home with her 13-year-old son; her husband was out of town. The son ran to safety, thinking that the intruder was a thief.

The accused then attempted to rape the woman who resisted him for around 20 minutes. During the course of the struggle, she picked up a sickle from under the bed and cut off the man's genitals.

"The woman lodged a complaint with the police following which the accused was booked for criminal force on woman with intent to outrage her modesty, house trespass, obscene acts and criminal intimidation", said Khaddi police outpost sub-inspector Dharmendra Singh Rajput.

The accused was admitted to the district hospital in Sidhi and later shifted to Sanjay Gandhi Medical College and Hospital in Rewa. Ramesh also lodged a complaint against the woman alleging attack on him by her. The woman was arrested after being booked for voluntarily causing hurt, Rajput said.

JAN. 26 VIOLENCE
IN DELHI WAS
GOVT PLAN: TIKAIT

Shahjahanpur: Bharatiya Kisan Union chairman Naresh Tikait on Saturday alleged the BJP government was behind the January 26 violence in Delhi, and it is "insulting" farmers.

Addressing a mahapanchayat at Puwaya, Tikait said, "The BJP government itself engineered the violence in Delhi, and insulted the farmers."

"The BJP government is the biggest enemy of the farmers. There still is time for all farmers to unite, otherwise they will reach to the brink of destruction."

He also claimed that whatever happened in Delhi during farmers' tractor march on January 26, "was a plan of the government, and the accused were also people of the government."

"The farmers have been called terrorists, Khalistanis, members of tukde-tukde gang and parasites. But we are anti-government, we are against the policies of the government," he said.

He also said, "We will not allow the farmers to get deceived, and all the talks will be held with Samyukt Kisan Morcha. Hence, one person from every family of a farmer, should be ready to go to the Ghazipur border (protest site)."

Tikait alleged the BJP is seeking votes in West Bengal in the name of Lord Ram. "In Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, it worked out, but it will not work in future, because Lord Ram was from our clan," he said.

During their January 26 parade, many of the protesters, driving tractors, had stormed the Red Fort, with some of them hoisting religious flags on its domes and on the flagstaff at the ramparts.

SRIDHAR
KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 20

US defence secretary Lloyd Austin on Saturday told external affairs minister S. Jaishankar in an hour-long meeting that "as the two largest democracies in the world, human rights and values are important to us and we will lead with these values," government sources confirmed on Saturday.

Jaishankar "agreed and emphasised that a strong relationship between the two democracies was not only important for both countries but for the rest of

the world", sources added. The Indo-Pacific and Afghanistan were two important issues discussed during the meeting.

Observers point out that the Biden administration has been under pressure from prominent Democrats at home to strongly raise various human rights issues and "concerns" with India including over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the Kashmir issue.

On Saturday, sources said, "Discussions focused on the strategic situation in the Indo-Pacific. The US side briefed about the recent visits in East Asia. EAM spoke

● JAISHANKAR "AGREED and emphasised that a strong relationship between the two democracies was not only important for both countries but for the rest of the world", sources added.

about India's current security challenges and our long term strategic outlook. The conversation also covered the changing global scenario, including Europe and West Asia."

Sources further said, "Afghanistan was addressed in some detail. Assessments were exchanged on the

peace process and the ground situation, as also the concerns and interests of regional powers and neighbours. The EAM appreciated the Biden administration's engagement with India on this issue."

Sources said, "The steady growth of bilateral cooperation was recognised by both sides. EAM apprised (the US) defence secretary of the progress and potential of various aspects of the leadership. Highlighting the commonalities and convergence, the EAM said that the relationship was unique for the breadth and intensity of cooperation that covered so many domains."



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar along with US defence secretary Lloyd Austin during a meeting, in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

Modi, Mamata clash over extortion

PM accuses Didi's nephew over creating single window for industries in West Bengal

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MARCH 20

Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives a portrait of Rabindranath Tagore from a local party leader during an election campaign rally in support of BJP candidates, ahead of State Assembly polls, at BNR Ground, Kharagpur in West Midnapore district, on Saturday.

— PTI

Didi calls TMC deserters 'Mir Jafars'

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, MARCH 20

West Bengal Chief

Minister Mamata

Banerjee has called

Trinamul deserters as

'Mir Jafars' for joining the

BJP and mocked the saffron

party over its failure

to find candidates for the

Assembly elections. Her

MP-nephew Abhishek

Banerjee linked Prime

Minister Narendra Modi's

theme of "double engine"

government to a future of

"bigger corruption."

Banerjee told a TMC

rally at Panskura in East

Midnapore on Saturday,

"Some Mir Jafars (traitors)

made an exit from our

party. This has made us.

Those who left were

bought by the BJP for a

huge amount of money.

We know that. They are

working for BJP in

exchange of crores. We

have the information," she

said.

"The gang of harmad

(mercenaries) of the

CPI(M), who earlier unleashed

atrocities, created

unrest in Jangalmahal

and Midnapore and built a

factory of human skeletons,

have become the

biggest ringmasters of the

BJP now," she said.

She expressed regret for

"bringing up some traitors

in Midnapore in an

oblique reference to

Shuvendu Adhikari, once

her top aide and now her

BJP rival in Nandigram

and his father Sisir

Adhikari who is all set to

join the saffron party.

The TMC chief then

wondered, "Which BJP is

this? This is not the BJP of

Atal Behari Vajpayee. This

is of the goons, riotists,

torturers, autocrats, monsters,

Ravanas and

Dushasanas."

Referring to the candidates

of five BJP MPs —

Union minister Babul

Supriyo, Nishith Pram-

anik, Locket Chatterjee,

Swapan Dasgupta and

Jagannath Sarkar — for

the Assembly polls, the

TMC chief said, "Don't

you see they are failing to

find candidates? Even

MPs are being made candidates.

We have made only one MP (read Manas

Bhuniya), that too from

the Rajya Sabha, a candidate.

No one else among

our party MPs was made a

candidate. We have plenty

of people."

Slamming Modi for making

big promises during the

polls, the two-time CM

argued that he could not

deposit ₹15 lakh, one of

his key assurances, to

every citizen's account

till date.

The Congress-led UDF

on Saturday promised

that if its government

came to power in

Kerala it would imple-

ment party leader

Rahul Gandhi's pet

minimum income

guarantee scheme

Nyuntam Aay Yojana

(NYAY).

The NYAY was one of

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UDF manifesto which

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Congress leadership

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in Kerala extensively

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During his meetings

and interaction, the

Congress MP from

Wayanad is likely to

highlight the impor-

tance of the scheme.

Under the scheme

which is aimed at bene-

fitting the poorer sec-

tions, a minimum

monthly income of

₹6,000 would be en-

sured for each family

and ₹71,284 annually.

The manifesto also

promised Rs 2,000 'pen-

sion' for homemakers

and five lakh homes for

the underprivileged.

It also assured cre-

ation of a peace and

harmony department

akin to that run by the

Rajasthan government

and five kg free rice for

white ration cardhold-

ers.

The UDF, if voted to

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kits free of cost to all,

as also 100 units of

electricity every

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Rs 2,000 monthly pen-

sion to homemakers

between the age of 40-

60, while those work-

ing in the unorganised

sector would be enti-

tled to six months ma-

ternity leave.

Free power,
'2K for house-
wives in Cong
manifesto

Guwahati, March 20: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday released his party's election manifesto for Assam, making "five guarantees" that included ₹2,000 per month for every housewife and law to nullify the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Releasing the document here, Gandhi said his party will protect the idea of Assam that is being "attacked" by the BJP and RSS.

"Though Congress symbol is there in the document, actually it is the people's manifesto. It contains the aspirations of the people of Assam," he said.

In its manifesto, the Congress also promised five lakh government jobs and 200 units of free electricity per month for all, besides hiking the minimum wages of tea garden workers to ₹365.

Gandhi said Congress guarantees to defend the idea of Assam that contains culture, language, tradition, history and the way of thinking.

"This is our commitment. You are aware that BJP and RSS are attacking the diverse culture of India and Assam. We will defend that," he told reporters.

— PTI

UDF VOWS TO
INTRODUCE
NYAY SCHEME
IN KERALAGILVESTER ASSARY I
DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 20

The Congress-led UDF on Saturday promised that if its government came to power in Kerala it would implement party leader Rahul Gandhi's pet minimum income guarantee scheme Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY).

The NYAY was one of the highlights in the UDF manifesto which was released here on Saturday. The Congress leadership wants to focus on NYAY since Rahul Gandhi will campaign in Kerala extensively from next week.

During his meetings and interaction, the Congress MP from Wayanad is likely to highlight the importance of the scheme.

Under the scheme which is aimed at benefiting the poorer sections, a minimum monthly income of ₹6,000 would be ensured for each family and ₹71,284 annually.

The manifesto also promised Rs 2,000 'pension' for homemakers and five lakh homes for the underprivileged.

It also assured creation of a peace and harmony department akin to that run by the Rajasthan government and five kg free rice for white ration cardholders.

The UDF, if voted to power, would give food kits free of cost to all, as also 100 units of electricity every month, it said. Wooing women voters, the manifesto guaranteed Rs 2,000 monthly pension to homemakers between the age of 40-60, while those working in the unorganised sector would be entitled to six months maternity leave.

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*MRP (incl. of all taxes). Conditions apply.

DECCAN Chronicle

21 MARCH 2021



Ranjona Banerji

Off the beaten track

What cooking teaches, how tastes are learned

The cooking revolution was perhaps one of the upsides of the pandemic. Entitled people who employed cooks suddenly found themselves staring at unprepossessing bunches of bottle gourd and cabbages and tried to imagine how to make them appetising. I shared with great enthusiasm some 10 “one-pot” recipes with family and friends until I ran out of steam and they ran out of ingredients.

Early in the lockdown of 2020, a friend started a recipe-sharing online group. It was brilliant. A bunch of similarly middle class but otherwise disparate people tried to make each other’s lives easier with tips and recipes and answers.

It was a very happy experience for a short while. And then as the group grew, it became a cesspit of gender, ethnic, caste, caste biases. (There would have been race if we had enough varied races in the group.) Anger and accusations, offence and defence, and suddenly we weren’t talking about how to best temper a daal but oh, in my high caste family we never eat X, Y and so on.

That something so beautiful in its conception and its early days could descend so quickly into fractious lines of othering and hatred is testament to the human ability to destroy anything worthwhile with our inherent stupidity.

That said, I learnt a lot in my first few weeks and top of the list is an onion chutney for idlis and dosas. With due apologies to our esteemed Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and anyone else who doesn’t eat onions or care how much they cost. It is delicious so the loss is not mine.

My journey as a cook started somewhat before the online world governed our lives. Like many of my sort, I tried a little baking. At 10 I proudly made a hard as rock cake that wasn’t supposed to be a rock cake and watched in awe as a visiting family friend munched through it saying “delicious” after every long torturous chewing expedition. I haven’t forgotten his kindness and he still claims it was delicious!

This story is my Mother’s. When I was about 16, my grandparents were horrified that she hadn’t taught me how to make proper “Indian” food. Baking did not count in the marriage mart scheme of things. (This turned out to be correct. During one of my parents’ many short-lived disasters into the murky world of arranged marriages for me, one grandmother said all her grandson wanted from a bride was the ability to make fried brinjal wheels. The conversation did not go any further nor did the fancy cake I had baked.) My Mother told me that her honour was at stake and it was up to me to uphold it.

I cooked whatever I did. At the end of the meal, my Mother informed the grandparents of the reality. They blustered “but, but you never taught her”. My Mother, a teacher, had the last word: “I taught her how to gather knowledge.” No answer to that.

But I really learnt how to cook by experimentation. And by eating. To replicate tastes and memories. To try new things and ideas that were floating about in my head. And all that means stepping out of your comfort zone. For instance, when I was in my late teens all I wanted to eat at a Chinese restaurant was chilli chicken. I know, right. Even if “Indian Chinese” in the early 1980s was not as resplendent in choice as it is now, that was a pretty dumb choice to have set in stone.

I also experimented with vegetarianism in my early 20s. Until I got tempted by taste. O dear. Crabs at Kamling and chicken at Baghdadi. I got done in by Bombay, you might argue and that set me on my culinary journey. Underlying that of course is childhood. Bengalis have a terrible phrase inflicted on children and on us by our grandmother: “khete shekho”. Learn to eat.

Attached to this phrase were some pretty gruesome vegetables like chichinge or snake gourd and boboti or yardlong or asparagus beans. There is no taste connection between this bean and an asparagus, it has to be made clear. To this day, I cannot and will not eat these. Add to this cluster beans aka gawar ka phalli, which is not a Bengali staple but which I won’t eat anyway.

Conversely my Mother hated arbi or taro root or Colocasia corms. So we never ate that at home. I love it. My paternal grandfather hated pumpkin of all kinds so that was banned, but now we find we love it. What sense does it make? None at all. The Chinese ability to get over food taboos may be unpalatable for some, but shows a remarkable ability to adapt. There is no moral high ground in proclaiming that you are too superior to eat onions. It only means that your mind is consumed by taught rigidities.

Food taboos however are a topic of great sensitivity and resultant anger, so let’s not go there! To each her own.

But I made two fabulous new finds recently: buds of the *Bombax ceiba* and Bauhinia flowers. In both cases, the vegetable vendors were pleasantly amazed that I wanted to buy these local delicacies, having stereotyped me as a “broccoli and salad patta” buyer. One asked me to look up the Internet for recipes, the other explained how to cook the kachnar. The look of his joy when I came back to buy more was delightful.

I realise I have left the door open for the great controversy of “veg biryani”. Maybe for another time?

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on media affairs, politics and social trends. She tweets at @ranjona.



Kachnar, in the raw and curry (right) forms

Subhani



Let it rip! Stop us turning into the Republic of Hurt



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya’s View

In a land which has valued creativity and creative freedom since time immemorial, there are new glass ceilings — and sometimes steel ones — coming up all around. This sense of creative claustrophobia is the direct result not of “reasonable restrictions”, but subjective biases in those who either have the power to decide, or think they have the right to do so because of their proximity to power. The cumulative result is a sense of trepidation and apprehension, even fear, among the artistic fraternity about what they can depict, and what is likely to cause offence, and render them liable to arbitrary legal and punitive action.

The area of morality, religion and societal behaviour is the most contested area. We have new custodians of morality who are easily outraged by anything that does not fit into their conservative, upper-caste, patriarchal and outdated notions of “correct” behavior. Newly appointed CM of Uttarakhand, Tirath Singh Rawat, waxed eloquent on this gem of wisdom just a few days ago. Ladies who wear ripped jeans, he said, “pave the way for societal breakdown leading to substance abuse”. He was outraged that this “kainchi ka sanskaar” actually enables females “to reveal their knees” (what sacrilege!), when “the most important thing for women is to look after their family and children”.

So much then for women’s liberation, and the decades of struggle that has gone into

empowering women rather than confining them only to the home and the perpetuation of progeny. It could be argued, of course, that these are the personal views of a certain Mr. Rawat. In a free Republic anyone has the right to their opinion, and if Rawatji is an unapologetic male chauvinist. So be it. Alas, it is not that simple. People like Rawatji are in power today. They live in a time warp, and the greater their misogyny the more they their conviction that they are right. More worrisome, is the fact that they quote sanskaar or culture as the reason for their indignation. The corollary to this appropriation is only logical: anyone violating sanskaar must be reined in, brought to book, dealt with, and Bharat that is India must remain unsullied from all these evil progressive tendencies.

But sanskaar becomes even more lethal when it is coupled with religion. So, the religious sentiments of two BJP leaders were outraged by the fact that a serial was named *Tandav*, which they interpreted to be an insult to Lord Shiva. Such an allegation needs to be laughed out of the room, simply because the word *Tandav* is both an adjective and a proper noun, and when used as the title of a serial, the content of the story itself makes it obvious that there is not even a remote connection to the dance of destruction of Mahadeva. But a case was filed against Amazon Prime Video, and such is the fear, that the production house issued an abject apology,

deeply regretting the unintended “hurt” that may have been caused, and agreeing to cut out any “objectionable” scenes. What is even more inexplicable is that the Allahabad high court, instead of providing protection to the serial makers, proclaimed that no one has the right to hurt religious sentiments.

The real reason for the ire against *Tandav* may be quite different. In the serial, there is a university suspiciously sounding like ‘JNU’, whose students “subversively” shout slogans of “*azaadi*”, and politicians are depicted as having no compunctions in fueling religious divides for political dividends. The whole script sound strangely familiar, and what better way to put this impudence in its place than to file an FIR against the impertinent producers on grounds of hurt religious sentiments?

We are fast becoming the Republic of Hurt. Some people were hurt by a Muslim boy kissing a Hindu girl with a temple in the background in the Netflix adaptation of *A Suitable Boy*. The iconic Marathi playwright, Vijay Tendulkar, recently faced a posthumous storm of protest because his play, *Jaat hi Poocho Sadhu ki*, used the Hindu word “sadhu”, and thus hurt Hindu religious sentiments. The fact is the play is not about faith at all, but about the ills of casteism. But obviously the Bajrang Dal, which raised objections, does not read beyond the title of the plays they want

What is even more inexplicable is that the Allahabad high court, instead of providing protection to the makers of *Tandav*, proclaimed that no one has the right to hurt religious sentiments

banned. In any case, it succeeded. The staging of the play was cancelled in Madhya Pradesh.

The real problem in our Republic of Hurt is that one doesn’t know what will next cause someone to be hurt. For instance, just the other day, the BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh government decided to remove eggs from the midday meals given to anganwadi centres. The decision to provide high-protein eggs was taken by the previous Congress government. At the time the BJP had protested, seeing in this “nefarious” move the attempt to change the dietary habits of Hindus. But this begs the question: don’t Hindu children eat eggs too? Those who don’t are welcome not to, but the decision to replace eggs by milk has been questioned by child health experts. Such experts would, of course, then be called anti-national. The dilemma before filmmakers is that if their next production shows people eating eggs, or eating non-vegetarian food, would they have an FIR filed against them for “hurting religious sentiments”. One never knows.

A highly unwarranted subjectivity driven by medieval cultural notions and political hubris is seriously threatening creative freedoms in India. It is in this light that we need to see the government’s latest guidelines to control social media and OTT platforms. These guidelines may talk about self-regulatory mechanisms, but the final decision in the three-tier process lies with the ministry of information and broadcasting. If Tirath Singh Rawat becomes the minister of I&B, ladies in ripped jeans exposing their knees, and eating eggs to boot, must watch out.

The writer, an author and former diplomat, is in politics

LETTERS

MNM’S MANIFESTO

The election manifesto released by Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) promising to convert Tamil Nadu economy into a trillion dollar one, linking of water bodies, training deserving journalists in IIMs with accident and life insurance for `10 lakhs, monthly dole for women family heads, daily loan for traders etc., is different from those released by other political parties. But the idea of change in liquor policy where part of Tasmac would be privatised and the additional revenue generated by increasing the price of liquor would be shared by the private partners and Tasmac is not welfare oriented. Secondly it is impractical (and will not be accepted by the owners of distilleries) as most of the distilleries in Tamil Nadu are owned by the DMK and AIADMK bigwigs.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

MARRIAGE LOST ITS SANCTITY

APROPPOS REPORT *Woman’s intimate pic with man is cruelty on husband* (March 20). It is nothing but gutsy adultery. Such cases are increasing since there is no fear of law or punishment. The marriage, once treated as sacrosanct, has today lost its sanctity and holy-bondage turned into a mere physical union. The reason for extra-marital affairs, cheating on spouses, throwing morality and loyalty to the winds is due to the influence of Western culture, corrupting movies and pornography on the internet. How many families are breaking-up and how many spouses are being murdered due to adultery no one knows. Added to this the Supreme Court, in a landmark judgment, nullified CrPC 497 calling it anti-women and freely allowed adultery sans punishment. Since our BJP ‘neats’ are busy, politicking to establish their governments in every state, it is hoped the learned Madras high court judges, in the societal interest, to save the marriages, prevent adultery related killings, will prevail upon their Apex Court brother-judges to revisit CrPC 497, restore the status quo ante taking it up as a suo motu case.

A. Seshagiri Rao, Chennai

REWARD FOR HARD WORK

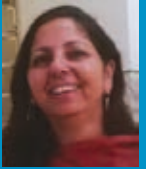
IT IS exhilarating to see that Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav have made a telling impact in the Indian T20 side with their brilliant performances against England at Ahmedabad. Representing MI in IPL, both batsmen have plenty of experience playing in the shortest version of the game. Suryakumar Yadav’s six off Jofra Archer, to the very delivery he faced in international cricket, was astonishing indeed. SKY’s career is as much a testament to what the IPL means for Indian cricket, as it is a reward for the hard work he has put in for years. Both these exciting players gave a peek into what the Indian batting line-up could look like for the upcoming T20 World Cup.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

Mail your letters to editor@deccanmail.com

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



Mithun made to wait after biting bait; Mamata’s game of drones

It has been two weeks since actor Mithun Chakraborty was inducted into the BJP with great fanfare in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a rally in Kolkata. However, there is still no clarity about his exact role in the upcoming Assembly polls. No one knows if he will only campaign for the BJP or whether he will contest these elections and be projected as the party’s chief ministerial candidate. In his initial interviews, Chakraborty had been circumspect when asked if he was the BJP’s face for the top job but has subsequently warmed up to this suggestion, saying he will not mind taking on this responsibility if directed by the BJP leadership. However, the actor is still awaiting his turn as he has yet to participate in any major party programme. According to the buzz in Kolkata, BJP leaders Kailash Vijayvargiya and Dilip Ghosh are avoiding Chakraborty. Apparently, they are not confident about including him in the poll campaign as the actor is reputed to be an “unguided missile.”

Here’s more on the high-voltage West Bengal Assembly poll. The battle between the

Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamul Congress and its main challenger, the BJP, is intensifying with both sides pulling no punches in showing the other one down. As the campaign picks up momentum, several photographs have appeared in the local press showing the sparse crowds at the public rallies addressed by BJP leaders, including its president J.P.Nadda and home minister Amit Shah. It appears the Trinamul Congress has been using a drone to take aerial shots of the BJP’s election rallies, which are then brandished by it to mock its chief political rival.

Rahul Gandhi may have stepped down as Congress president close to two years ago but he continues to have a major say in the party’s internal matters. For instance, the Nehru-Gandhi scion was involved in the selection of candidates for the upcoming Assam and Kerala Assembly polls. The Wayanad MP is learnt to have asked the Youth Congress to provide a list of potential candidates for both states, preferably who do not belong to political dynasties,

come from humble backgrounds and have been working at the grassroots. As a result, 15 Youth Congress office bearers made it to the Kerala list. Most of them are in the 25-50 years age group. Another 10 tickets have gone to those who moved from the Youth Congress to the party’s district and state units in the last 10 years. In Assam, six members of the Youth Congress non-dynast candidates have been fielded. The only exception here is Angkita Dutta. Rahul Gandhi has also told the Youth Congress leaders that this experiment will be replicated at the national level if these candidates perform well in the Assembly polls, provided they intensify their agitations and protests against the government.

There appears to be no end to the Ashok Gehlot-Sachin Pilot saga. After their brief show of solidarity when the Rajasthan chief minister and his former deputy held joint public rallies for the forthcoming four by-elections, their cold war has resurfaced once again. Mr Pilot apparently saw red when he heard that Mr Gehlot planned to

field his son Vaibhav Gehlot from the Rajsamand Assembly seat. There was also talk that Rajasthan Assembly Speaker C.P. Joshi’s son Himanshu would be fielded from the Sahada Assembly segment. Mr Gehlot is keen on rehabilitating his son ever since he lost the 2019 Lok Sabha poll from Jodhpur. However, the two veteran leaders hit a hurdle when Mr Pilot and his camp followers objected to their choices. Meanwhile, Mr Pilot is getting impatient and has been petitioning the Congress leadership in Delhi to meet his long pending demands. Though he has been reassured that he will be adequately compensated for the loss of the deputy chief minister’s post, nothing concrete has emerged so far.

The Modi government is extremely sensitive to criticism, especially when it comes from civil society groups or politicians in the West. Recently, the government reacted sharply when US-based non-governmental organisation Freedom House and Sweden-based Varieties of Democracy Institute

downgraded India on the democracy ratings with the Swedish institute describing India as an “electoral autocracy”. And yet the Modi government’s actions speak louder than its words. For instance, the ruling dispensation has gradually restricted the entry of media persons to several ministries and the Parliament House. It was helped in this exercise by the year-long pandemic as the fear of infection was used to keep out journalists. These restrictions remain in place even though the government never fails to point out how it succeeded in containing the coronavirus pandemic. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has been proactive in denying access to journalists to Parliament. Not only has entry to Parliament been severely restricted but now even the routine exercise of renewing a journalist’s annual pass has become problematic. Apparently, the applications for the renewal of passes has been sent to the Speaker’s office for further scrutiny.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

IN BRIEF

Lankan bus crash kills 13, injures 31

Colombo: A passenger bus plunged off a road in central Sri Lanka on Saturday, killing 13 people and injuring more than 30. Police said the bus fell into a precipice near the town of Passara, about 240 kilometres east of Colombo, its stated destination. Police spokesman Ajith Rohana said an initial investigation showed the negligence of the driver caused the accident. It wasn't immediately clear if the driver survived. Local media reported over 70 passengers were on the bus.

Saudi coalition attacks Huthi rebels

Riyadh: The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said on Saturday it had launched air strikes in support of pro-government forces battling a quickening Huthi rebel advance on the northern city of Marib. The move came after a drone strike set a Riyadh oil refinery ablaze on Friday, in an attack claimed by the Huthis, as the rebels made major advances on Marib, seizing a strategic mountain. The dawn strike on the refinery was the second major assault this month on Saudi energy installations.

Bangla Hindu home attacker arrested

Dhaka: Police in Bangladesh on Saturday arrested the alleged prime accused and instigator in connection with the attack on about 80 houses of Hindus by a hardline Islamist group in the country's northeastern Sylhet division following a social media post reportedly by a youth from the minority community. Shahidul Islam Swadhin, a Union Parishad member who is also the president of the local ward Jubo League, was arrested by the Police Bureau of Investigation (PIB) from Moulvibazar district, bdnews24.com reported. A total of 23 people, including Swadhin, have been arrested so far, the police said.

Eruption of Iceland volcano easing

Reykjavik (Iceland): The eruption of a long-dormant volcano that sent streams of lava flowing across a small valley in southwestern Iceland is easing and shouldn't interfere with air travel, the Icelandic Meteorological Office said on Saturday. The fissure eruption began at around 8.45 pm on Friday in the Geldinga Valley, about 32 kilometres (20 miles) southwest of the capital, Reykjavik, the Met Office said. The eruption is "minor" and there were no signs of ash or dust that could disrupt aviation, the agency said. "The more we see, the smaller this eruption gets," geophysicist Pall Einarsson said on Saturday after monitoring the volcano throughout the night.

JUDGE NOT TO MOVE TRIAL IN FLOYD'S DEATH

Minneapolis, March 20: A judge said on Friday he won't delay or move the trial of a former Minneapolis police officer charged in George Floyd's death over concerns that a USD 27 million settlement for Floyd's family could taint the jury pool, but he'll allow limited evidence from a 2019 arrest. Jury selection in the trial of Derek Chauvin will stretch into a third week after attorneys seated just one additional juror Friday. The 13th juror picked is a woman who said she'd seen only clips of the video of Floyd's arrest and needs to learn more about what happened beforehand. Late on Friday, the court said up to 16 jurors would be chosen. An earlier court order in November had said as many as four alternates would be picked, but once Chauvin's trial was separated from the trial of three other former officers charged in Floyd's death, the court had said only two alternates would be chosen for this case. Seven jurors had been picked last week when the Minneapolis City Council announced it had unanimously approved the massive payout to settle a civil rights lawsuit over Floyd's death. Chauvin's attorney, Eric Nelson, subsequently sought to halt or move the trial, saying the settlement timing was deeply disturbing and jeopardized Chauvin's chance for a fair trial.

EU threatens Astra with ban on export

Commission has sent a formal reminder to pharma company on supply of vaccine

Berlin, March 20: The European Union's executive arm is increasing its pressure on pharmaceutical companies to speed up their vaccine delivery to the continent as virus numbers are rising again in many member countries. The European Commission said on Saturday that AstraZeneca in particular could face export bans to countries outside the EU if it didn't quickly deliver the promised amount of vaccines to the 27-nation bloc. "We have the possibility to ban planned exports," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Saturday. "This is a message to AstraZeneca: You fulfill your part of the deal toward Europe before you start to deliver to other countries," von der Leyen said in an interview with a German media group. Von der Leyen said the contract between the EU and AstraZeneca clearly regulates how much vaccines the EU gets from

AstraZeneca's plants inside the EU and in Britain. However, von der Leyen added, "We didn't get anything from the Brits while we are delivering vaccines to them." She said the commission had sent a "formal reminder" to AstraZeneca regarding this issue. AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine is one of three vaccines that's approved in the EU. However, its usage has been overshadowed by several problems, including a slow start, recurring delivery problems and a temporary ban for several days earlier this week in many of the bloc's member countries after reports of blood clots in some recipients of the vaccine. Most countries in the EU resumed giving shots of AstraZeneca again on Friday as infection numbers were spiking again across the continent and AstraZeneca's vaccine, too, is seen as critical to ending the coronavirus pandemic. —AP

PAK PM TESTS POSITIVE FOR CORONAVIRUS

Islamabad, March 20: Pakistan Prime minister Imran Khan on Saturday tested positive for the Covid-19 and is self-isolating at home, his top aide on health said, two days after he got the first shot of vaccination. Khan, 67, was vaccinated on Thursday as part of the nationwide anti-Coronavirus vaccination campaign which is underway in its first phase. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Dr Faisal Sultan took to Twitter to confirm that Khan has contracted the coronavirus. "PM Imran Khan has tested positive for Covid-19 and is self-isolating at home," he said in a tweet. Khan's spokesman Dr Shehbaz Gill said that the prime minister has just a slight fever and cough. —PTI

HONDURAS PREZ TOOK BRIBES IN 2019, SAYS U.S.

New York, March 20: Honduras President Juan Orlando Hernández accepted bribes from a drug trafficker as recently as 2019 — not just while running for office years earlier — a US prosecutor said. In the closing arguments of the trial on Friday of accused Honduran drug trafficker Geovanny Fuentes Ramirez in New York, Assistant US Attorney Michael Lockard said the defendant had met with and paid bribes to Hernández twice in 2019. The repeated allegations against Hernández, who has been president since January 2014, have overshadowed the allegations against Fuentes Ramirez, even though Hernández has not been charged with any crime. Hernández has repeatedly denied any connection to drug trafficking, though one of his brothers faces the possibility of a life sentence for drug trafficking in the same court later this month. Lockard said Fuentes Ramirez spoke of these meetings to Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga, former leader of the Cachiros cartel, while both were locked up in New York. "As recently as 2019, the year before his arrest, the defendant continued to meet with and pay bribes to President Hernandez," Lockard said. —AP

U.N. MEET: U.S., CHINA CLASH ON TACKLING RACISM

United Nations, March 20: The United States accused China on Friday of committing "genocide and crimes against humanity" against Uighur Muslims and other minorities, and China accused the US of discrimination, hatred "and even savage murder of people of African and Asian descent." The clash came at the UN General Assembly's commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and was sparked by one line in the speech by US Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield, who talked about being a descendent of slaves, growing up in the segregated South, and surviving racism including being called "an N-word." It came after the top US and Chinese diplomats wrapped up two days of contentious talks in Alaska. —AP

Cuomo's current aide accuses him of sexual harassment

Albany (US), March 20: A woman who currently works in the office of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo says he looked down her shirt and made suggestive remarks to her and another aide, according to a newspaper report published on Friday. Alyssa McGrath told The New York Times that Cuomo called her beautiful in Italian, referred to her and her female colleague as "mingle mamas," asked why she wasn't wearing a wedding ring, and inquired about her divorce, McGrath said. McGrath is the first current aide to come forward publicly on the mounting allegations of sexual misconduct against Cuomo, who is the subject of an impeachment investigation by the New York Assembly, the state's lower legislative chamber, presumably over those accusations and questions about the governor's handling of



Andrew Cuomo

data about Covid-19 nursing home deaths. McGrath told The New York Times that her female colleague was the same woman the governor is accused of groping in the Executive Mansion, an allegation that was revealed in a report last week in the Times Union of Albany. That aide hasn't been identified publicly. McGrath did not accuse the governor of inappropriate touching. Cuomo, a Democrat, has repeatedly denied allegations of sexual misconduct. —AP

Strong quake hits northern Japan

Tokyo, March 20: A strong earthquake struck on Saturday off northern Japan, shaking buildings even in Tokyo and triggering a tsunami advisory for a part of the northern coast. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries. The US Geological Survey put the strength at magnitude 7.0 and depth at 54 kilometres (33.5 miles). The shaking started just before 6.10 pm. The quake was centred off the coast of Miyagi prefecture, in the country's rugged northeast, which was heavily damaged during the huge earthquake

and tsunami of 2011 that left more than 18,000 people dead. Japan's Meteorological Agency issued an advisory for a tsunami up to 1 metre (yard) in height for Miyagi prefecture immediately after the quake, but lifted it about 90 minutes later. The tsunami might have reached parts of the Miyagi coast already, Japan's NHK public television said. Officials there said there were no immediate reports of damage. The strong tremor caused a temporary blackout in some areas and suspended bullet train services in the

COMBAT | VIOLENCE

Conservatives claim the charter damages family unity, encourages divorce

Turkey pulls out of treaty protecting women

Istanbul, March 20: Turkey has pulled out of the world's first binding treaty to prevent and combat violence against women by presidential decree, in the latest victory for conservatives in President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling party. The 2011 Istanbul Convention, signed by 45 countries and the European Union, requires governments to adopt legislation prosecuting domestic violence and similar abuse as well as marital rape and female genital mutilation. Conservatives had claimed the charter damages family unity, encourages divorce and that its references to equality were being used by the LGBT community to gain



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

broader acceptance in society. The publication of the decree in the official gazette early on Saturday sparked anger among rights groups and calls for protests in Istanbul. Gokce Gokcen, deputy

'End Covid restrictions'



A protester carries a placard reading 'Human dignity for all' during a demonstration to demand the compliance of basic rights and an end of the restrictive Coronavirus measures in Kassel, central Germany, on Saturday. — AFP

Biden, Harris decry Atlanta attack

President calls on all Americans to stand up to bigotry

Atlanta, March 20: President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris offered solace to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders amid what he called a "skyrocketing spike" of harassment and violence against them. "We have to change our hearts," he said. "Hate can have no safe harbour in America." Biden called on all Americans to stand up to bigotry when they see it, adding: "Our silence is complicity. We cannot be complicit." "They've been attacked, blamed,

scapegoated and harassed; they've been verbally assaulted, physically assaulted, killed," Biden said of Asian Americans during the Coronavirus pandemic. The president also called the shootings an example of a "public health crisis of gun violence in this country," as his administration has come under scrutiny from some in his own party for not moving as swiftly as promised on reforming the nations gun laws. —AP

Striking Myanmar rail staff move out amid stir

Mandalay (Myanmar), March 20: Residents of Myanmar's second-biggest city helped striking railway workers move out of their state-supplied housing on Saturday after the authorities said they would have to leave if they kept supporting the protest movement against last month's military coup. Mandalay residents carried the workers' furniture and other household items to trucks, van and pickup trucks. The state railway workers last month went on strike as key and early supporters of the civil disobedience movement against the Feb. 1 coup that toppled the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The

military regime has sought to force them back to work through intimidation, which included a nighttime, gun-firing patrol last month through their housing area in Mandalay and a raid in the railway workers' housing area in Yangon. Protests against the coup continued on Saturday in cities and town across the country, including in Mandalay and Yangon. The coup reversed years of slow progress toward democracy in Myanmar after five decades of military rule. In the face of persistent strikes and protests against the takeover, the junta has responded with an increasingly violent

crackdown and efforts to severely limit the information reaching the outside world. Internet access has been severely restricted, private newspapers have been barred from publishing, and protesters, journalists and politicians have been arrested in large numbers. The independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners has verified 235 deaths and has said the actual total — including ones where verification has been difficult — "is likely much higher." It said it has confirmed that 2,330 people have been arrested or charged since the coup, with 1,980 still detained or remaining charged. —AP

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SHORT TAKES

Yashaswini pips Manu for gold

New Delhi: India's Yashaswini Singh Deswal personified consistency and calmness on her way to winning the gold medal in the women's 10m air pistol ahead of the more celebrated Manu Bhaker in the ISSF World Cup here on Saturday. Deswal shot 238.8 to comfortably finish on top of the podium in the eight-women final while Bhaker managed 236.7 to settle for the silver medal. Viktoria Chaika of Belarus bagged the bronze medal with 215.9. The other Indian in the final, Shri Nivetha, started well but had to eventually settle for the fourth place with 193.5. Deswal secured her Tokyo Games quota with her gold medal in Rio. Deswal and Bhaker added to the bronze medal won by Divyansh Singh Panwar in the men's 10m air rifle earlier on the second competition day. — PTI

Three shooters test +ve at WC

New Delhi: Three shooters, including two from the Indian pistol men's team, have tested positive for Covid-19, National Rifle Association of India sources said on the second competition day of the ISSF World Cup here on Saturday. The shooters are currently self-isolating in their team hotel. Those who were sharing the rooms with the three shooters as well as their other teammates have also been isolated after undergoing Covid tests. The results of the roommates and other team members, though, have returned negative. A source said two among the three shooters are from the Indian contingent. "The shooters have been sent into isolation as per protocols. Testing is being done on a daily basis and that's their results have come to light," a source close to the federation said. — PTI

Vijender's winning run ends on 'ship'

Lucknow: All-rounder Anneke Bosch first pegged the Indian women with a couple of wickets and then smashed an unbeaten 66 off 48 balls to ensure an easy eight wicket victory for South Africa in the first T20 International here on Saturday. Harleen Deol's (52) confident maiden international fifty was the only silver lining for an otherwise lacklustre display by the Indians who posted a modest 130 for 6 after being invited to bat. The South Africans chased down the target easily with five balls to spare with opener Bosch (66 not out) and captain Sune Luus (43 off 49 balls) sharing 90 runs for the second wicket. SA reached to 133 for 2 in 19.1 overs. — PTI

Brief Scores: India 130/6 in 20 overs (Harleen Deol 52, Jemimah Rodrigues 30) lost South Africa 133/2 in 19.1 overs (Anneke Bosch 66 not out; A Reddy 1/20).

Regd. No.
TNENG/2010/35692

Printed & Published by
K. Sudhakar on behalf of
Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited
and Printed at
Deccan Chronicle Presses situated
at SP 3, Developed Plot, Industrial Estate,
Guindy, Chennai - 600 032.
RNI Registration No: TN ENG/2005/14987
Ph Nos: 22254747, 22254748, 22254750,
22254751
Editor: KAUSHIK MITTER

RAMASAMY UDAYAR HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 20

Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research will conduct the Shri N.P.V. Ramasamy Udayar Hockey Cup tournament at its newly-laid astroturf from March 29 to April 9. As many as 12 teams from Chennai will be participating in the tournament which will be held in a league cum knock-out format with two pools. Top two team from each pool will qualify for the semi-finals.

The grand finale and the award ceremony will be presided over by Narinder Dhruv Batra, president of International Hockey Federation and Indian Olympic Association on April 9.

SRM IST emerge winners

SRM IST beat STC Pollachi to emerge winners in the state-level volleyball tournament for men organised by The American College, Madurai.

Results: Final: SRMIST bt STC Pollachi (25-23, 20-25, 25-19, 26-28, 16-12). Best Player: Guruprakash. Final standing: 1. SRMIST; 2. STC Pollachi; 3. DG Vaisnav College, Chennai; 4. Jamal College, Tiruchy.

Sudharsan, Taarakesh shine

B. Sai Sudharsan (124) and S. Taarakesh (5/24) helped Team-I defeat Team-VI in the TNCA round-robin one-day under-19 tournament at the Magna College 'A' Ground.

Brief scores: At Stag Ground: Team-VI 221 in 49.5 overs (H. Prashid Akash 71, T. Sanjay 46, S. Santhosh Kumar 31; V.P. Diran 4/36) bt Team-IV 217 in 36.1 overs (V. P. Amith Sathvik 90, P. Nirmal Kumar 63; N. Shashantha Rajgopal 4/49, H. Prashid Akash 5/43).

At Magna College 'A' Ground: Team-I 293 in 48.3 overs (B. Sai Sudharsan 124, P.L. Harshavardhan Sai 73) bt Team-VI 230 in 36 overs (M. Boopathi Vaishna Kumar 109 (not out), K. Wafar 41; S. Taarakesh 5/24).

At Magna College 'B' Ground: Team-III 128 in 44.2 overs (S.R. Athish 40; R. Rajagiri 3/19, Akash Dev Kumar 3/23) lost to Team-II 131/1 in 19.3 overs (M. Mithul Raj 49 (not out), R. Vimal Khumar 42, Akash Dev Kumar 32 (not out)).

Mar Gregorious triumph

Mar Gregorious scripted a 49-run win over DRBCCC Hindu College in the final of the 9th Thiruvallur DCA inter-college T20 knockout tournament.

Brief scores: Final: Mar Gregorious 126 in 19.2 overs (S. Tarishwar 48; M. Ravi Mayam 4/23) bt DRBCCC Hindu College 77 in 15.1 overs (U. Santhosh Kumar 4/13, M. Sudershan 3/15).

Cosmopolitan 'A' win

Cosmopolitan Club 'A' beat Presidency Club 'A' 3-0 in the 28th Sanmar-TNTA Chennai city club league championship.

Results: B Zone: Cosmopolitan Club 'A' bt Presidency Club 'A' 3-0 (G.P. Balaji/Jayakumar Jagaveeran bt Prashanth Ganesh/Sriram Raju 6-2, 6-2; C. Rameez Samad/Salman Yasser Firdouse bt Manav Jain/Manu Vergis 6-0, 7-5; Karthik Kailash/Koushik Kailash

Senthilkumar/S.S. Arunadithya 6-2, 6-2); Presidency Club 'A' bt Madras Gymkhana Club 'A' 2-1 (Sriram Raju/Prashanth Ganesh bt M.P. Shankar/Niranjan Kumar 6-0, 2-6, 6-2; Manav Jain/S.S. Arunadithya bt Vignesh Bhasker/Sundeep Bathija 6-2, 6-2; Manu Vergis/S.K. Senthilkumar lost to Ganesh A m a r n a t h / M u r a l i Padmanabhan 1-6, 1-6); Cosmopolitan Club 'A' bt Madras Cricket Club 'B' 3-0 (C. Rameez Samad/Salman Yasser

Firdouse bt Manoj Chandani/Vivek Reddy 6-3, 1-6, 7-5; Karthik Kailash/Koushik Kailash bt Ranga Rao/Karthik Neelakantan 6-4, 6-2; G.P. Balaji/Jayakumar Jagaveeran bt Ashwath Arjun/Karthik Rajasekar 6-2, 6-2.

C Zone: Madras Club 'A' bt Anna Nagar K Block Club 'A' 2-1 (Vikram Seshasayee/Rishabhdev Rajshekar Raman bt Kannan Manickam/Deventher Ram 2-6, 6-1, 6-3; George Alexander/Rithwik Rajasekar lost to Thomas P Joy/J. Oges Theyjo 4-6, 6-3, 6-7 (4); R a m c h a n d e r Sukumar/Harishankar Balaji bt Sushant Chandrasekar/Aman Jhawar 6-3, 2-6, 6-3); Besant Nagar Club 'B' bt Mylapore Club 'A' 2-1 (R. R a m k u m a r / P a r a m a r t h a Lingam Pillai bt N. Keshav/C.S. Raghuram 6-2, 6-1; Abhinav Subramanian/Rama Prasada Reddy bt Vasanth Kumar/Akash Balachander 6-1, 6-2; Arjunram/Akshansh Kumar lost to Vikram Prabhakar/V. Nandakishore 3-6, 7-6(5), 6-7(2)).

LAST LAUGH

India crush England in last T20 to clinch 'see-saw' series



India captain Virat Kohli (right) and Rohit Sharma during their opening stand against England in the fifth Twenty20 at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Saturday. India won by 36 runs.

KIWIS HAMMER BANGLADESH IN FIRST ONE-DAY

Dunedin, March 20: New Zealand needed just over 21 overs Saturday to overtake Bangladesh's total of 131 and win the first of three one-day international by eight wickets.

Bangladesh, recently out of managed isolation, was never comfortable in unfamiliar batting conditions at the University Oval and was bowled out by New Zealand in only 41.5 overs. Mahmudullah's 27 from 54 balls was their highest score.

After Martin Gupthill crashed 38 runs from 19 balls with three fours and four sixes at the top of the order, New Zealand was always on target to win plenty of overs to spare.

Henry Nicholls made an unbeaten 49 in his 50th ODI to steer New Zealand to victory in the 22nd over, combining in a 65-run partnership for the second wicket with Devon Conway (27).

— AP

Brief scores: Bangladesh 131 in 41.5 overs (Mahmudullah 27, Boul 4-27) lost to New Zealand 132/2 in 21.2 overs (Nicholls 49 n.o., Gupthill 38).

SCORECARD

India: Rohit Sharma b Stokes 64, Virat Kohli (not out) 80, Suryakumar Yadav c Roy b Rashid 32, Hardik Pandya (not out) 39. Extras (lb-3, wd-6) 9. **Total (For 2 wickets, in 20 overs) 224.**

FoW: 1-94, 2-143.

Bowling: Adil Rashid 4-0-31-1, Jofra Archer 4-0-43-0, Mark Wood 4-0-53-0, Chris Jordan 4-0-57-0, Sam Curran 1-0-11-0, Ben Stokes 3-0-26-1.

England: Jason Roy b Kumar 0, Jos Buttler c Pandya b Kumar 52, David Malan b Thakur 68, Jonny Bairstow c Yadav b Thakur 7, Eoin Morgan (c) c sub (KL Rahul) b Pandya 1, Ben Stokes c Pant b Natarajan 14, Chris Jordan c Yadav b Thakur 11, Jofra Archer run out (Yadav/Pant) 1, Sam Curran (not out) 14, Adil Rashid (not out) 0. Extras (lb-9, w-11) 20. **Total (for 8 wickets, in 20 over) 188.**

FoW: 1-0, 2-130, 3-140, 4-142, 5-142, 6-165, 7-168, 8-174.

Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 4-0-15-2, Hardik Pandya 4-0-34-1, Washington Sundar 1-0-13-0, Shardul Thakur 4-0-45-3, T. Natarajan 4-0-39-1, Rahul Chahar 3-0-33-0.

NUMBERS GAME

- Virat Kohli sets the record of most runs against England in Twenty-20. The Indian skipper reached this milestone during his unbeaten 80-run knock in the final Twenty-20 in Ahmedabad on Saturday.
- He made 577 runs at an average of 44.38 and a strike rate of 136.72 in 17 innings of as many matches with four fifties till the end of the Indian innings.
- India recorded their highest total against England by making 224 runs for the loss of two wickets in 20 overs.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

Sharath-Manika seal Tokyo spot

Doha, March 20: India got its best shot at a maiden table tennis medal at the Olympics on Saturday when Sharath Kamal and Manika Batra became the first Indian pairing to qualify for the mega event in Tokyo, beating world no. 8 duo of Sang-Su Lee and Jihee Jeon 4-2 in the final of the Asian qualification tournament here.

The 2018 Asian Games bronze medallists staged a remarkable comeback after being two sets down to outwit the top seeded Korean pair 8-11, 6-11, 11-5, 11-6, 13-11, 11-8 in a thrilling final to seal their Tokyo qualification in mixed doubles. Only the winner of the event qualified for the Games.

The Indian pairing had beaten the Koreans en route to a historic medal in Asian Games before losing to them on the pro tour the following year.

"Manika was unstoppable today. It is very important for her to play with flow so that I am able to play my power game. That is the only way we compliment each other.



Manika Batra and Sharath Kamal.

She was outstanding. "I never thought we could win the tournament. Now we are three games for winning an Olympic medal. It will be tough but it is our best

shot," Sharath said referring to the 16-pairing draw at the Tokyo Games. Sharath, who has also qualified for the singles event alongside G. Sathiyam, has now set

sights at reaching at least the mixed doubles quarterfinals at the Games.

"I think if we can reach the quarters, it would be a fantastic result for us at the Games. Anything else from there is a bonus," said the world number 32.

The unprecedented result in mixed doubles means India will now have five entries in Tokyo (two each in men and women singles besides mixed). The delayed Tokyo Games will be held from July 23 to August 8 this year.

"I was really happy with myself to be able to withstand the attack and services of a player like Lee Sang Su and Jion Jihee. Sharath *bhaiya* capitalised well with his attack to keep the pressure on them," Manika said.

On Friday, Sharath and Manika had defeated Singapore's Koen Pang Yew En and Lin Ye 4-2 in the semifinals to get to touching distance of making it to the showpiece event.

— PTI

SPECTATORS FROM ABROAD TO BE BARRED FROM TOKYO OLYMPICS

Tokyo, March 20: At last it's official after countless unsourced news reports and rumors: spectators from abroad will be barred from the postponed Tokyo Olympics when they open in four months.

The decision was announced Saturday after an online meeting of the International Olympic Committee, the Japanese government, the Tokyo government, the International Paralympic Committee, and local organisers. Officials said the risk was too great to admit ticket holders from overseas during a pandemic.

The Japanese public has also opposed fans from abroad. Several surveys have shown that up to 80% oppose holding the Olympics, and a similar percentage opposed fans from overseas attending. Japan has attributed about 8,800 deaths to COVID-19 and has controlled the virus better than most countries.

"In order to give clarity to ticket holders living overseas and to enable them to adjust their travel plans at this stage, the parties on the Japanese side have come to the conclusion that they will not be able to enter into Japan at the time of the Olympic and Paralympic Games," the Tokyo organizing committee said in a statement. Organizers said 600,000 tickets were sold to fans from outside Japan. They have promised refunds, but this will be determined by so-called Authorized Ticket Resellers that handle sales outside Japan.

These dealers charge fees of up to 20% above the ticket price. It is not clear if the fees will be refunded. Toshiro Muto, the CEO of the organizing committee, said organizers were not responsible for money lost on flights or hotel reservations. He said these did not involve any "contract arrangement with Tokyo." — AP

Amul
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