

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

ANANTAPUR | THURSDAY | 25 MARCH 2021

WEATHER



Max: 39.0°C
Min: 17°C
RH: 23%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 39/17 °C

NATION | 5

BJP promises law against love jihad



WORLD | 6

No clear winner in Israel exit poll



SPORTS | 8

Delhi captain Shreyas hurt, in doubt for IPL



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ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalgun Shuddha Ekadasi till 9.43 am
Star: Ashlesha till 10.43 am
Variyam: 11.42 am to 1.16 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.21 am to 11.10 am; 3.11 pm to 3.59 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HJRI CALENDAR
Sha'ban 11,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.32 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.28 PM
MOONSET 2.39 AM
MOONRISE 3.14 PM

COUNTER POINT



Don't panic! Not extortion. I am only collecting party fund!

SHORT TAKES

Adani wins highway contract

New Delhi: Adani Road Transport Ltd (ARTL) on Wednesday said it has won a ₹1,039.90 crore highway project from NHAI in Telangana. "We are pleased to inform you that ARTL has received a letter of award (LOA) for ...four laning of NH-365A from Kodad to Khammam in the State of Telangana under Bharatmala Pariyojana on Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM)," the company said in a BSE filing.

Haryana bans Holi in public

Chandigarh: The Haryana government on Wednesday banned public celebrations of upcoming Holi festival in the wake of the rise in the number of coronavirus cases in the recent weeks. "The Haryana government has banned public celebrations of Holi in view of (rise in number of cases of) corona..." home and health minister Anil Vij said in a tweet.

Cargo ship blocks Suez Canal

Dubai: A cargo container ship that's among the largest in the world has turned sideways and blocked all traffic in Egypt's Suez Canal, officials said, threatening to disrupt a global shipping system strained by the Coronavirus pandemic. The *MV Ever Given*, a Panama-flagged container ship that carries trade between Asia and Europe, was grounded.

Sensex plunges 871 points

Mumbai: The Sensex plunged 871 points to mark its worst single-session fall in nearly a month on Wednesday as investors moved to the sidelines amid rising coronavirus cases in the country. At the closing bell, the BSE Sensex was quoted at 49,180.31, a drop of 871.13 points — its biggest one-day fall since February 26. The NSE Nifty dived 265.35 points or 1.79 per cent to settle at 14,549.40.

No Indian is outsider, BJP's 'son of soil' to be CM: Modi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 24

Hammering at West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's slogan of "bohiragoto" (outsiders) against the BJP on a nationalistic pitch, Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the Trinamul supremo on Wednesday of "defaming" Nandigram, the hot seat of the Assembly election where she is contesting from. With her nemesis Suvendu Adhikari on the dais at his mega rally at Contai in East Midnapore, Mr Modi also promised the crowd that the BJP will pick a "son of this soil" as the Chief Minister if it comes to power in the state.

In a virulent speech, Mr Modi said: "Didi is now talking of bohiragoto in Bengal, which stitched the whole of India with *Vande Mataram! Amra Sobai Ei Bharatbhumi Nonton. Ei Bhumi te Kono Bharatbasi Bohiragoto Noy. Bolun Bharat Mata Ki Jai, Vande Mataram! Ekhane Kono Bharatbasi Bohiragoto Noy. Sob Bharatmatar Nonton* (All of us are the children of the land of India. No Indian is an outsider on this land. Hail Mother India, we worship Mother India. No Indian is an outsider here. All are the children of Mother India)."

Invoking the national anthem, Mr Modi asked Ms Banerjee: "How dare you to talk of bohiragoto in that very Bengal from where Gurudev stitched all Indians in one bond and said from this soil what we repeat daily? How can you? While labels of 'tourist' are made, fun is made and insults are hurled. The people from the soil of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore do not see anyone as bohi-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi exchanges greetings with party candidate for Nandigram seat Subhendu Adhikari during an election campaign rally for the upcoming West Bengal assembly polls, at Kanthi in East Midnapore district on Wednesday.

— PTI

All of us are the children of the land of India. No Indian is an outsider on this land. Hail Mother India, we worship Mother India. No Indian is an outsider here. All are the children of Mother India."

NARENDRA MODI, Prime Minister

ragoto here. This is the call of the soil. In Bengal, the CM of the state government of the BJP that you are going to build will be a son of this soil. After all, the land is Bengal." He continued: "Didi, *Apni Khela Korben. Amra Seva Korbo. Khela Noy Seva Hobe* (Didi, you will play while we will serve

the masses. Service, not a game, will take place.) Didi is nervous because her game has been exposed. The TMC is resorting to lies and fake allegations on Nandigram. Didi, Nandigram gave you so much dignity and honour. But you are defaming Nandigram before the whole country by making false claims! The people of Nandigram will not tolerate it. Aware of their dignity, they will punish you certainly for your insult in this election."

Mocking Ms Banerjee's tour, he alleged: "Visiting Midnapore time and again nowadays, Didi is giving excuses. She couldn't explain to those families which were first affected by Cyclone Amphan and then looted by tolajaj (extortionists) of the TMC."

ANCIENT QUARRY SITES FOUND IN SRISAILAM

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL, MARCH 24

Archeologist Dr E. Sivanagireddy located ancient quarry sites in Srisaillam on Tuesday.

During his extensive survey conducted in and around Srisaillam as part of 'Preserve Heritage for Posterity' programme, launched by CCVA, he noticed the quarries lying on the left side along the road opposite Alluri Sitaramaraju Choultry, from where the stone was extracted to build the main and subsidiary temples and the compound wall of Bhramaramba Sametha Mallikarjuna Swamy temple.

He said the cut marks used to insert iron wedges to split the stone blocks are distinctly visible and he had noticed Kannada inscriptions belonging to the 16th century.

SEC: No MPTC, ZPTC elections

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

Andhra Pradesh State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar on Wednesday ruled out any chance to resume the adjourned elections for MPTC or ZPTC as his tenure will end by March 31.

In an order issued here on Wednesday, Mr Ramesh Kumar stated that the State Election Commission lost the opportunity to hold MPTC and ZPTC elections as it faced several unexpected legal challenges.

Moreover, the outgoing SEC said that as it was a prerequisite to follow four weeks of model code of conduct and also to accord top priority for safety of polling staff and taking up Covid-19 vaccination programme, as per

observations of Election Commission of India, he ruled out conduct of immediate elections.

The state election commissioner wished that his successor would take up that responsibility in earnest.

However, the SEC said that in cases where there was only a single valid nomination after the withdrawal deadline and Form-10 had already been issued, it was final under existing election law and terminated all further inquiries forthwith.

Moreover, the State Election Commissioner said that the contestants and political parties were open to approach the collector and district election authority and submit in writing about their legitimate grievance so that the authorities would inquire into them.

CJI Bobde recommends Ramana as his successor

New CJI to take charge on April 24 for 1-yr 4-month tenure

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

The Chief Justice of India, Justice Sharad A. Bobde, on Tuesday recommended Justice N.V. Ramana — the senior most judge after him — to be appointed as the next Chief Justice of India when he demits office on April 23, 2021.

Justice Ramana will be the 48th Chief Justice of India and will have a tenure of one year, four months and five days. He was elevated as a judge of the top court on February 17, 2014.

Justice Ramana will take over as Chief Justice of India on April 24, a day after incumbent CJI Bobde demits office.

While recommending the appointment of Justice Ramana as next CJI, the Supreme Court also rejected a complaint by Andhra Pradesh chief minister Y.S. Jagan



Justice N.V. Ramana

Mohan Reddy against him relating to the Amaravati land scam.

A statement issued by the top court said, "A complaint dated 6th October, 2020, sent by the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh to the Supreme Court was dealt with under the 'in-house procedure' and the same, on due consideration, stands dismissed. It be noted that all the matters dealt with under the 'in-house procedure' being strictly confidential in nature, are not liable to be

● Justice Ramana was born in a farmer's family in undivided AP on August 27, 1957, in Ponnayaram village, Krishna district.

● He got enrolled as an advocate on February 10, 1983. He appointed the judge of the AP High Court in 2000.

11, 1967. Justice Subba Rao did his graduation from Govt. College, Rajahmundry, B.L. from Law College, Madras, and had practised in Madras High Court, 1926 onward. Though initially Justice Subba Rao was appointed as a judge of Madras High Court, he went on to become the Chief Justice of AP High Court.

CJI Bobde recommended Justice Ramana as next Chief Justice of India going by the principle of seniority — the senior-most judge after the CJI succeeding the incumbent CJI upon his retirement. He was appointed as a permanent judge of the Andhra Pradesh high court on June 27, 2000. He functioned as acting Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh high court from March 10, 2013, to May 20, 2013. He was appointed Chief Justice of Delhi High Court in September 2013.

made public."

Justice Ramana will be the second Telugu speaking Chief Justice of India.

Born in an agricultural family in undivided Andhra Pradesh on August 27, 1957, in Ponnayaram village, Krishna District, Justice Ramana did his B.Sc., B.L. and was enrolled as an advocate on February 10, 1983. Prior to him Justice Koka Subba Rao, the 9th Chief Justice of India, was from AP and was in office from June 30, 1966, to April

Covid double mutant surfaces

CCMB to study how two variants are able to live together

KANIZA GARARI | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 24

A new double mutant variant of the coronavirus has been found in India along with several other "variants of concern" that have already been found in 18 states.

So far, some 771 variants of concern have been detected from 10,787 samples collected from different states and Union Territories, the Union Health Ministry said on Wednesday. It said among these were 736 samples of the UK variant, 34 of the South African variant and a single sample of the Brazilian variant.

The ministry, however, stressed that no sufficient link has been established between the recent surge of Covid-19 cases in India and the new Indian variant with E484Q and L452R mutations. "The double mutant coronavirus and other variants of concern were identified in a few samples but the numbers are not sufficient to establish a relationship to explain the rapid increase in cases in some states," the ministry said.

Maharashtra also has this variant and the tested samples revealed that, compared to December 2020, there is an increase in infection rates by 15 to 20 per cent.

Stated the director of CSIR-CCMB, Dr Rakesh Mishra: "Both these mutations were found together, in these samples. The L452R mutation was detected in US in November 2020.

The other, E484Q, was detected in Brazil and South Africa. We need to

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

The Andhra Pradesh government would administer Covid-19 vaccination to one crore people in the coming month to contain pandemic's spread.

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy said on Wednesday that as the election process has been completed in urban areas, the vaccination drive would start from Monday.

During a review meeting held on vaccination, the Chief Minister asked officials to start the process in urban areas from March 29 and take up a pilot project in rural areas, limiting it to two villages a day in each mandal for four days a week.

The Chief Minister said only six days are left for the election process for MPTC and ZPTC polls to

complete. Thereafter, the full attention of officials should be on vaccination. Officials must involve village and ward secretaries, volunteers, as also Asha and health workers.

Officials must ensure all people are vaccinated in their respective regions, the Chief Minister said.

Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy also emphasised on the Village Doctor concept. They must make sure there is no shortage of doctors in PHCs. Each mandal should have two PHCs. Each of these should have two physicians.

Similarly, each mandal should have two 104 vehicles with one doctor in each vehicle and there should be six doctors in every mandal who should visit every village thrice every month.

The CM told officials to hire the doctors as per

requirement and directed the financial department officials not to be negligent in disbursing the required funds.

The officials said 3.97 lakh health and frontline workers, 59.08 lakh people who are either over the age of 60, or above 45 with comorbidity, are yet to be vaccinated.

As for vaccination, the CM told the officials to select two villages in every mandal each day and cover eight villages per week. Thus, one crore people could be vaccinated in four weeks, covering a population of 25 lakh each week. Covid tests should be conducted through RTPCR method and all existing facilities to treat Covid-19 patients should be continued. He said the medical services to the people who call 104 should be effective.

take more samples, study and understand how these two variants are living together."

In the other coronavirus variant of concern, a virus with N440K mutation, having high transmission rate, was detected in 123 of the 2,032 samples collected in Kerala, 53 of the 104 samples in Telangana and in 33 per cent of the samples in Andhra Pradesh.

This variant emerged in Andhra Pradesh in December 2020. CCMB, in

its study, cautioned that this variant would spread to other southern states. The variant is found also in 16 other countries including the UK, Denmark, Singapore, Japan and Australia. In a study published in the journal of the Indian Academy of Sciences, CCMB had identified the E484Q mutation for further surveillance because of its propensity to having high transmission rates.

Increased testing, com-

prehensive tracking of close contacts, prompt isolation of positive cases and contacts as well as treatment according to the protocols must be carried out, the ministry said.

It said genome sequencing by Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (Insacog) has identified variants of concerns in several states and a new double mutant variant.

■ Page 2: What is Insacog

NAME | PLAY

Defence ministry's decision to ease discontent among officers

Retd SSC officers can use military ranks

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

The Union ministry of defence has decided to allow the retired Short Service Commission officers of the Indian Army to use military ranks.

The Short Service Commission (SSC) officers, after completion of their mandated terms and conditions of service, were not authorised to use the military ranks. This had been causing dissatisfaction and dis-

● The Union defence ministry said that this decision will act as morale booster for the existing Short Service Commission officers.

● The demand for use of military ranks by SSC officers after release from service has been pending since 1983.

contentment among the SSC officers who serve under the same service conditions and face similar hardships as Permanent Commission officers with similar Service profile.

"This decision of the gov-

ernment will not only remove dissatisfaction and discontentment among the retired SSC officers, but will serve as a big boost to the young aspirants," said defence ministry in a statement on Wednesday.

The defence ministry said that this decision will act as morale booster for the existing SSC officers.

The demand for use of military ranks by SSC officers after release from service has been pending since 1983. The SSC officers form the backbone of the support cadre of the Army. They serve for a period of 10-14 years to make up the deficiency of young officers in units.

There have been several attempts of making the

SSC attractive. Permission to allow use of military ranks by these officers has been one of their major demands.

Unlike in the past when SSC officers used to serve for a period of five years, now they serve for a tenure of 10 years, further extendable by four years. The SSC officers provide a support cadre to the officers' cadre of the Army and has been created primarily to provide young officers to the units.

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 24

Former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh will move the Bombay High Court against state home minister Anil Deshmukh after the SC termed his allegations against the minister "very serious" and told him to approach the HC first.

A division bench of justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Justice Subhash

Reddy of the Apex Court on Wednesday asked former Mumbai Police chief Param Bir Singh to approach the Bombay HC with his plea seeking CBI investigation in the alleged corrupt malpractices of Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh.

The court, however, asked him as to why Anil Deshmukh, the person against whom they have made allegations hasn't even been impleaded.

IN BRIEF BHAGIRATH, SUNITHA SWEAR-IN AS MLCs

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

Two newly-elected members of the AP Legislative Council were sworn-in on Wednesday in the Council. Pothula Sunitha and Challa Bhagirath Reddy were elected as MLCs from the ruling YSRC and the Council chairman M.A. Sharif gave the oath to the duo.

Sharif congratulated the two new MLCs and presented booklets regarding the norms and rules of Legislative Council.

Meanwhile, Corona vaccination camp was conducted to legislators and staff of the Assembly on the premises on Wednesday. Sharif took the Corona vaccine shot along with Assembly secretary P. Balakrishnamacharyalu and others.

Guntur district medical and health officer Dr J. Yasmin said the Corona vaccination process to the legislators and staff will be continued till the administering of the vaccine to all.

CANCELLATION OF SERVICE CHARGES DEMANDED

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

The Andhra Pradesh Urban Citizens Forum (APUCF) demanded that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy cancel the collection of service charges for collecting waste from houses in cities and towns of the state.

APUCF convenor Ch. Babu Rao on Wednesday alleged that the government has decided to collect garbage collection fee of ₹365 in grade 1, 2 and 3 municipalities from every house, ₹730 per annum in special grade municipalities and ₹1,100 per annum from every house under municipal corporations.

He welcomed the decision of using 8,000 vehicles for the collection of waste from every house but lamented over the imposing of service charges for collection of waste.

Babu Rao said the people in municipalities and corporations gave a mammoth majority to YSRC in the recent elections but the YSRC government has forgotten their support and decided to impose an extra financial burden on the masses through service charges.

He said service charge was never collected in the past for collection of waste from houses but now the YSRC government started a new tradition which is severely objectionable.

Babu Rao demanded Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy to withdraw the decision of service charge and give relief to people who are already facing severe financial crises due to pandemic Corona and lockdown impact.

● **APUCF CONVENOR Ch. Babu Rao on Wednesday alleged that the government has decided to collect garbage collection fee of ₹365 in grade 1, 2 and 3 municipalities from every house, ₹730 per annum in special grade municipalities and ₹1,100 per annum from every house under municipal corporations.**

SHARMILA TO HOLD RALLY IN KHAMMAM ON APRIL 9

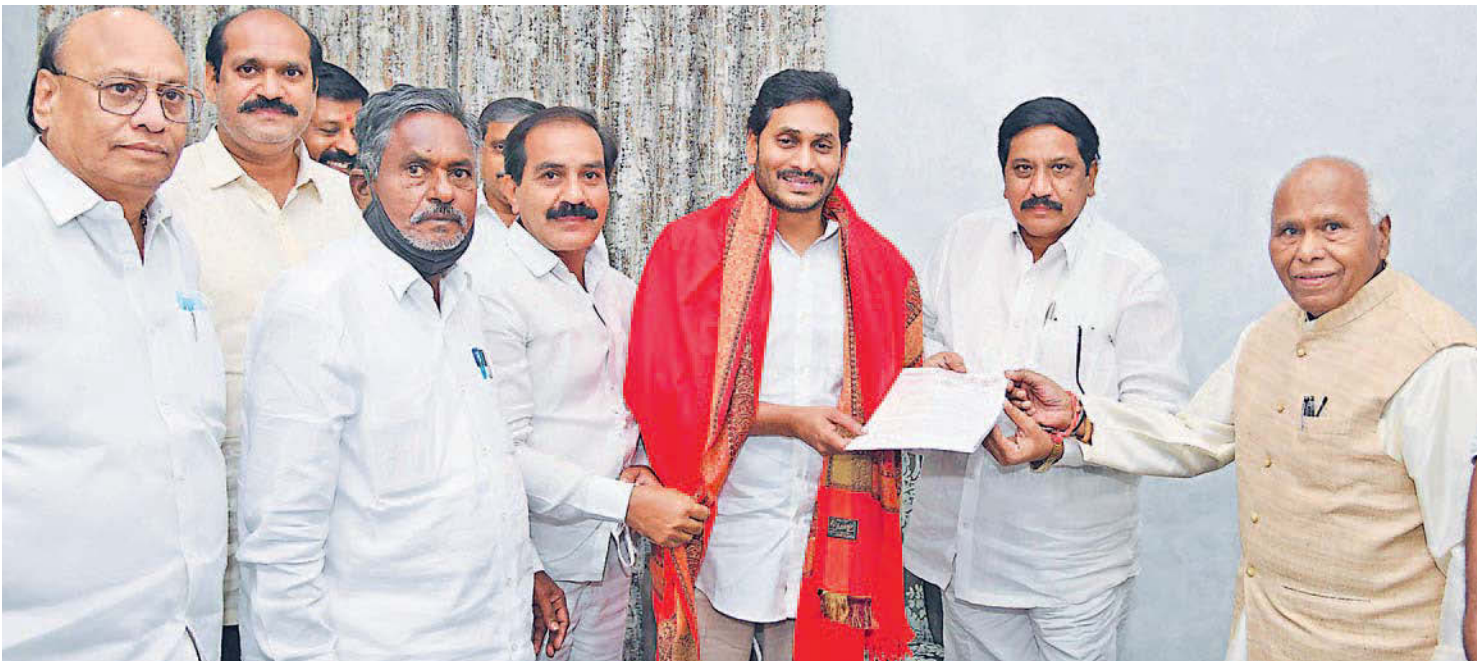
DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 24

Y. S. Sharmila, daughter of former chief minister Rajasekhara Reddy and sister of AP Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, has on Wednesday announced that she will contest the next assembly elections in Telangana from Paleru constituency in Khammam district.

Addressing a press conference here, Sharmila, who is proposing to launch her party in Telangana, said her new party will work for development of people in Telangana.

“Like the way late Rajasekhara Reddy developed Pulivendula constituency, I hope to ensure all-round growth in Paleru constituency,” she maintained.

Sharmila said prior to launch of her party, they will be holding a huge public meeting in Khammam on April 9.



All India INTUC president G. Sanjeeva Reddy (right) and other leaders give a representation to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy against the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant privatisation, at the CM's Camp Office in Tadepalli on Wednesday. — DC

YSRC DEMANDS ALLOCATION OF CAPTIVE MINE TO VIZAG STEEL

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

Narasaraopet MP of the YSRC Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu opposed the privatisation of Vizag Steel Plant in Parliament. He highlighted that the plant came after many sacrifices of the Telugu people. He also highlighted the nation-building work that Vizag Steel Plant has done. He stated that the government should take steps to turn it around rather than privatise it. He sought that the Central government bring in a captive mine, continue operations for monthly profits and restructure debt as equity. He deplored that as many as 20,000 employees directly and thousands of people indirectly dependent on Vizag Steel and these people with their families would be deprived of their food. He recalled that in December 2020, the Vizag steel started efforts to earn ₹200 crore revenue per month but all those efforts were hampered by the VSP's privatisation decision.

Devarayalu demanded that the Union government withdraw the VSP privatisation decision and further allot captive mine for restructuring of Vizag steel.

FORMER MLA PERFORMS PRAYERS FOR YSRC PROSPERITY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

Former MLA and YSRC leader Jyeshtha Ramesh Babu performed special prayers and presented religious Chadar in the Shah Bukhari Baba Dargah at Kondapalli on Wednesday seeking peace and prosperity in AP and blessings to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Sufi mentor Altaf Ali Raza Baba welcomed Ramesh Babu and conducted special prayers for the well-being of people and state. Ramesh Babu said CM Jagan Mohan Reddy was arduously working for the welfare of people and the development of the state but several hurdles are coming in the way and disturbing the government. Ramesh Babu said he came to the Dargah to pray for the well-being of the state, people and the YSRC government and sought blessings of Bukhari Baba.

He recalled that he was an ardent devotee of Shah Bukhari Baba as he used to visit Dargah frequently.

Ramesh Babu said that religions would not teach enmity and hatred but some political parties and leaders spreading hatred in the name of religion which is severely objectionable.

Sufi mentor Altaf Ali Raza Baba felicitated Ramesh Babu in Islamic tradition in which YSRC leaders participated.

INTUC delegation meets Jagan

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

A delegation of All India INTUC, led by its president G. Sanjeeva Reddy, has called on Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at the CM's Camp Office in Tadepalli on Wednesday and urged him to make his best

● **INTUC SAID** the workers of the steel plant will lose their job security and appealed to the CM to save the steel plant from being privatised.

efforts to prevent the privatisation of Vizag Steel Plant at any cost. They said the workers of

the steel plant will lose their job security and appealed to the Chief Minister to save the steel plant from being privatised for state's interests. They said that 20,000 people are directly and thousands of people are indirectly dependent on the Vizag Steel Plant. They deplored that the future of

the families of these employees has turned bleak with the privatisation proposal by the Union government. They hailed the efforts of the YSRC government towards the protection of Vizag Steel and extended their support to the government in the fight against privatisation.

Lakshmi files papers for Tirupati LS bypoll

Subba Reddy: Promote govt's schemes

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 24

Panabaka Lakshmi, the Telugu Desam nominee for the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat - scheduled to go for polls on April 17, filed her nomination papers before the district collector and returning officer K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu at Nellore collectorate on Wednesday.

The three-time MP, accompanied by her husband P. Krishnaiah and TD senior leaders K. Atchannaidu, Yanamala Ramakrishna, S. Omireddy Chandramohan Reddy, Devineni Uma and K. Ramakrishna, came in a procession after garlanding the statue of B.R. Ambedkar at the VRC Centre to the collectorate and filed two sets of nomination papers.

Addressing the media-persons after filing nomination, Lakshmi said their party's aim was to get the Special Category Status to the state and ensure implementation of the assurances made at the time of bifurcation.

“If elected, I'll work hard to develop the region on all fronts. Setting up the Dugarajapatnam port, implementation of NTPC-BHEL Power Projects Limited at Mannavaram and creation of separate railway division with Tirupati as headquarters would be my top priority”, she said.

She appealed to the public to question the BJP leaders on Special Category Status to the state when they come to seek votes. She also charged at the ruling YSRC and said that AP people had already observed what the YSRC had done in the recently held Gram Panchayat and civic body elections. “The YSRC leaders have threatened their rival candidates before and after filing the nominations; forcing them to withdraw their nominations. The result of the

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MARCH 24

The YSRC's Chittoor district in-charge and TTD chairman, Y.V. Subba Reddy, instructed their party leaders to promote government's development and welfare activities by visiting every nook and corner in Tirupati parliamentary segment to ensure the party win the Lok Sabha by-election with a record majority.

Subba Reddy, accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister K. Narayana Swamy, minister P. Reddy Ramachandra Reddy and MLAs, have introduced Dr M. Gurumurthy - YSRC's nominee for the Tirupati LS by-election, at a private convention centre here in the city on Wednesday.

Addressing the party workers, Subba Reddy instructed them to highlight the achievements of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in the last 21 months and to take the campaign to the door steps of voters across all the 7 segments of Tirupati parliamentary constituency.

He called upon the party cadre to follow the directions of the CM and ensure that the Tirupati by-poll result create a huge impact that the whole country should

● **ADDRESSING** THE party workers, Subba Reddy instructed them to highlight the achievements of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

make note of it.

Meanwhile, YSRC candidate Dr Gurumurthy told the media he will be filing his nominations to contest the Tirupati LS by-election on March 29. He exuded confidence that Jagan Mohan Reddy's image and the development and numerous welfare schemes launched by him will ensure a huge majority for him in the by-election.

“I have been a staunch follower of former chief minister Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy and his son and our Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy. I have involved myself in various party-related activities in the past but I never imagined that I would be given an opportunity to contest as an MP candidate”, he said while thanking the YSRC chief for giving him the opportunity to contest the Tirupati LS by-poll. YSRC MLAs B. Karunakar Reddy, C. Bhaskar Reddy, B. Madhusudhan Reddy, K. Govardhan Reddy, K. Sanjeevaiah, Vara Prasad and others were also present.

Tirupati LS by-election will become a lesson for the ruling party in the state,” Lakshmi added.

Taking a dig over the ruling party MPs, Atchannaidu said they are not doing anything in Parliament to get the Special Category Status

to the state. “They (YSRC MPs) haven't even raised their voices in the house on the Special Category Status issue. They also miserably failed to get the funds from the Centre for Polavaram project”, he said.

TD AGAINST SAMUEL NAME IN THE LIST OF NEXT SEC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

The short-listing of three persons for the post of State Election Commissioner has drawn flak from Telugu Desam Party.

The State government sent a list of three probabilities to the Governor for the SEC post, which will fall vacant after the incumbent SEC Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar retires by the end of the month.

The names that have been recommended include former chief secretary Nilam Sawhney, retired bureaucrat M. Samuel and another retired officer L. Premchandra Reddy.

The TD has objected to the name of Samuel alleging that he was co-accused in two CBI cases along with YS Jagan Mohan Reddy in CBI cases. The opposition sought Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan to reject the name of Samuel as the new SEC due to his involvement in cases.

TD politburo member Varla Ramaiah on Wednesday strongly objected to Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's bid to get his co-accused as the next State Election Commissioner. He appealed to the Governor to reject the candidature of Samuel considering his dubious and questionable background.

He claimed that Samuel was accused number 8 in the notorious Vanpic case in which Jagan Mohan Reddy was accused number 1 and MP Vijay Sai Reddy accused number 2. He further claimed that Samuel was accused number 10 in the Indu Tech case and he was named as an accused in the CBI charge-sheets in these two cases.

He wanted to know why the YSRC regime had set aside the candidature of a retired judge and a Dalit like Justice Kanagaraju for the SEC post after illegally appointing him to the post while removing Ramesh Kumar.

● **TD POLITBURO** member Varla Ramaiah on Wednesday strongly objected to Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's bid to get his co-accused as the next State Election Commissioner.

Plea to name Orvakal airport on Uyyalavada

CM to launch newly-established Orvakal airport today

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MARCH 24

Demands have been growing to name Kurnool airport at Orvakal as Uyyalawada Narasimha Reddy airport as he had brought valour and name to the city while fighting the British. The flight services at the newly established Orvakal airport will be officially launched on Thursday by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

K. Venkatarami Reddy, President, Uyyalawadq Narasimha Reddy Seva Samiti, said it was a befitting salutation to the

Kurnool brave-heart, who laid down his life for the cause and has inspired generations of leaders across Andhra Pradesh.

Commercial flights are likely to commence on March 28. At present IndiGo Airlines is set to start its services from here and cover Visakhapatnam, Bengaluru and Chennai, officials said.

Finance Minister Bugana Rajendranath Reddy along with district collector G. Veera Pandian visited the airport on Wednesday and reviewed the arrangements.

YSRC has no right to seek votes: TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

Telugu Desam official spokesman Pilli Manikya Rao on Wednesday asserted that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and his party leaders have no right to seek votes in the Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll since they had totally betrayed Andhra Pradesh on the promise of Special Category Status.

He said it was after Jagan Mohan Reddy promised to bring Special Category Status from the Centre that the AP voters gave 22 of the 25 MP seats in 2019 elections to the YSRC. He stated that once in the CM's chair, Jagan Mohan Reddy forgot about his promise and betrayed the aspirations of the people altogether.

Manikya Rao asked with what face the YSRC leaders will go to the AP voters and seek their support for party's victory in the Tirupati LS bypoll. He said that though the Central government was repeatedly rejecting the demand for Special Category Status, the CM was maintaining an enigmatic silence. He further deplored that if Jagan Mohan Reddy continued his indifference in this regard without questioning the Centre, the people would have to think that

● **MANIKYA RAO** asked with what face the YSRC leaders will go to the AP voters and seek their support for party's victory in the Tirupati LS bypoll.

he was more worried about saving himself from his cases.

The TD leader demanded that the YSRC leaders explain to the voters why their MPs had failed to bring justice to the state by putting pressure on the Centre. He recalled that Jagan Mohan Reddy would often talk about his strong fighting nature for the sake of the people but he was not displaying this non-compromising attitude in Delhi.

He demanded that now, the CM should tell the people what he would achieve from the central government, if his party would win the Tirupati bypoll.

Manikya Rao said it was Jagan Mohan Reddy who raised a lot of hopes among the AP people saying that industries and jobs would come if the state would get Special Category Status but now, the Chief Minister has become silent on the promises made to AP and thus pushing the state into a historic crisis.

What is Insacog

From Page 1

The Ministry of Health had established on December 25 the Insacog, a grouping of 10 national laboratories, for carrying out genomic sequencing and analysis of circulating Covid-19 viruses, and correlating epidemiological trends with genomic variants.

Genomic variants of various viruses are a natural phenomenon and are found in almost all countries, the ministry said and added: “Since INSACOG initiated its work, 771 variants of concerns (VOCs) have been detected in a total of 10,787 positive samples shared by states and UTs.”

“The analysis of samples from Maharashtra has revealed that, com-

pared to December 2020, there has been an increase in the fraction of samples with the E484Q and L452R mutations,” the ministry said.

Such mutations confer immune escape and increased infectivity. These mutations have been found in about 15-20 per cent of samples and do not match any previously catalogued VOCs, the ministry pointed out.

Added the ministry: “These have been categorized as VOCs but require the same epidemiological and public health response of increased testing, comprehensive tracking of close contacts, prompt isolation of positive cases and contacts as well as treatment as per National Treatment Protocol by the states and UTs.”

SCHEMES | IMPLEMENTATION NCPCR member appreciates operations for safeguarding child rights

Anantapur admin lauded in women, kids protection

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 24

Member of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) Dr R.G. Anand appreciated the steps taken up by the Anantapur district administration in protecting the rights of women and children through successful implementation of various innovative schemes.

Dr Anand who is on a

three-day tour of Rayalaseema region visited Anantapur district on Wednesday. He convened a meeting with officials of the district child protection unit and integrated child protection scheme at Revenue Bhavan here.

Accompanied by collector Gandham Chandrudu and SP Satya Esubabu, other officials and also representatives of NGOs, Dr Anand reviewed the steps being implemented

in the district.

Speaking to the media, he appreciated the methods of implementation of different schemes and operations to protect child rights in Anantapur which is said were more effective than many other districts in the country.

“The system of implementation of schemes in the district appears totally child friendly,” the NCPCR member observed. He went on to add that the

steps initiated by the district administration to bring back 28,000 children from private schools to government schools were successful. The member stressed the need to care more for child by successful implementation of steps.

Referring to steps taken up by collector Gandham Chandrudu for girls empowerment, Dr Anand congratulated him for the quick response to repre-

sentations, introduction of ‘Girls Future’, ‘Know & Rise; for the empowerment of girls.

Joint Collector (Revenue) Nishant Kumar, CWC Chairperson Nallani Rajeswari, ICDS PD Vijayalakshmi, District Child Protection Official Subramanyam, DM&HO Kameswara Prasad, Social Welfare DD Vishwamohan Reddy, Disha DSP A. Srinivasulu, NGO representatives and others were present.

● **DR ANAND** went on to add that the steps initiated by the district administration to bring back 28,000 children from private schools to government schools were successful.

● **HE CONGRATULATED** him for the quick response to representations, introduction of ‘Girls Future’, ‘Know & Rise; for the empowerment of girls.

SHORT TAKES

THREE HELD ON CHARGES OF GOLD SMUGGLING

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

Three men were taken into custody on charges of smuggling of gold by the customs authorities at Vijayawada International Airport on Wednesday.

One hailing from Uttar Pradesh and two from Karnataka arrived at Vijayawada from Dubai on a flight. Upon suspicion on their movement, the customs authorities found that gold was concealed in mouth, stomach and anus by each one of them respectively and they are yet to confirm the quantum of gold as efforts are on to extract it from them.

TWO KILLED IN ROAD ACCIDENT IN NANDYAL

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL MARCH 24

In a sad incident, a mother and her son died in a road accident when their motorbike was hit by a lorry on the bypass road in Nandyal town on Wednesday. The deceased were identified as Suvarana (40), agriculture labor and her son Anil (20), native of Kowluru village in Panyam mandal.

According to police, accident occurred after a tipper had hit their motor bike on the national highway- 45 bypass road in Nandyal town while it tried to overtake a lorry which was going on the same side. The deceased were going to Nandyal from their village by motorbike and incident happened when they reaching Nandyal town. Police registered a case and investigation is on.

MURDER ACCUSED GETS LIFE TERM, ₹5,000 FINE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIZIANAGARAM, MARCH 24

The second additional judge of Parvathipuram in Vizianagaram district on Wednesday convicted murder accused Vakada Tirupati of Kottakki village of Ramabhadrapuram to life imprisonment and slapped a fine of ₹5,000. Another accused Kosulu Ramlu was acquitted.

According to prosecution, the accused Vakada Tirupati and his friend Kosulu Ramalu exchanged blows with the dead victim Vakada Satyanarayana during immersion of Ganesha idol near Kottakki pond. Both the accused accosted Satyanarayana at the same pond on September 11, 2017 and beat him to death. Based on the complaint lodged by Satyanarayana's mother lodged a complaint with Ramabhadrapuram police that her son was missing. The then circle inspector Sanjeeva Rao investigated the case and filed the charge sheet in the court. The judge after hearing the arguments from both the sides, announced the judgment convicting Tirupati.

KADIRI TEMPLE DECKED UP FOR CAR FESTIVAL

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 24

The ancient Lord Narasimha Swamy temple at Kadiri is celebrating the annual brahmotsavam with religious fervour. The 15-day festivities formally began on Magha Sudda Navami on Tuesday with ankurarpanam and dwajarahnam.

It may be recalled that last year, the fete was over just before the outbreak of Covid-19. This year, the administration is extra vigilant and all precautionary measures are in place and the car festival attracts large crowds from Telangana State, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

The big chariot is taken out in a procession with the devotees pulling the long ropes that are especially made by skilled workers from the coastal region.

Local Muslims offer pepper to the deity as part of a centuries old tradition and also participate in the Lord Narasimha Swamy rathotsavam.

Uthsava vigrahas of Vasantha Vallabha with Sridevi Bhodevi are colorfully decorated and taken out in a procession on vahana sevas.

CALL FOR TIMELY TREATMENT TO ERADICATE TB

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

National Tuberculosis Eradication Programme joint-director in Andhra Pradesh, T. Rama Rao, called for proper identification of TB and its timely treatment to realise India's target to eradicate it by 2025.

Rama Rao felt the need on the part all the private practitioners and the professional medical associations who are the major stakeholders in the private sector, to play a key role in collaboration with the state government, to achieve the country's TB goals.

Public health NGO SAATHI's state programme and technical manager Dr Karun Sandeep said that a joint virtual meeting was held on the roadmap of primary medical associations' partnership with NTEP to achieve the goal of TB free India.

World Tuberculosis Day is observed on March 24 and this year's theme is 'The Clock is Ticking,' indicating that the world is racing against the clock to act to eliminate tuberculosis.

SRIKANTH: WILL MAKE RAYACHOTI IDEAL MUNICIPALITY

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MARCH 24

Government chief whip Srikanth Reddy declared that Rayachoti will emerge as an ideal municipality in AP by ensuring all-round development of the town.

Addressing the first meeting of the new governing body of the municipality on Wednesday, over which municipal chairman Fayaz Basha presided, Srikanth Reddy urged both officials and people's representatives to work together in a transparent manner.

Participating in the meeting, councillors Madan Mohan Reddy and Fayazur Rehman sought that collections at toll gates should be stopped during times of drought. They complained that toll operators aggressively collect Rs. 200 for a gunny bag, putting a heavy burden on farmers. Over this, municipal commissioner Rambabu was instructed to inform his superiors about the issue and suspend collection of the toll.

The chief whip was furious with officials and contractors that multi-crore development works in the municipality have not been completed for months though tenders have been sanctioned. He accused municipal officials of being lax in performing their duties in this regard.

On the occasion of the first meeting, the newly elected Rayachoti council unanimously decided to name the council building as YSR Building after late chief minister Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy. MLC Zakia Khanam was among those present at the meeting.

AGRI | SOPs

Small, marginal farmers to get special facilities

Dragon fruit under NREGS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MARCH 24

As the climate in Kadapa district is favorable for dragon fruit cultivation, state Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Department has stepped in with support to encourage farmers.

Officials said they have readied plans on this under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). To this extent the state level authorities directed the district authorities.

Under NREGS, cultivation of sapota, guava, mango, sweet orange, lemon and other orchards are already being promoted in the district. Interested farmers can now apply for dragon fruit cultivation, officials said.

TB awareness drive



Students from various colleges display placards while they take part in a rally to create awareness on TB to mark World Tuberculosis Day in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— DC

Panel to probe lapses in payment to Jr. docs.

Students allege surgeons get ₹19,000, they only ₹2,000

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

Following irregularities in payment of monthly stipend to junior doctors studying at Guntur-based Katuri Medical College, NTR University of Health Sciences has appointed a fact-finding committee to inquire into the lapses.

Junior doctors of the private medical college point out that though they are supposed to be paid monthly stipend on par with students of government medical colleges, they are being given only paltry sums despite working for long hours, sometimes stretching up to even 36 hours at a time. The students charged that though house surgeons are to be paid ₹19,000,

● **WHEN STUDENTS** exposed these matters, management of Katuri Medical College claimed that biometric attendance of each student was short by 60-70 days.

they were being given only ₹2,000. Similar discrepancy was there in payments to even PG students.

A PG student was paid ₹16,000 at the rate of ₹2,000 per month for eight months, though the student had worked for 12 months.

When the students exposed to public these matters, management of Katuri Medical College claimed that biometric attendance of each student was short by 60-70 days against the mandatory period. To further

target the students, the management extended their internship to May end, though it is to end in March. Students say this would not give them sufficient time to prepare for PG NEET likely to be held in August.

Students of Katuri Medical College then took the issue to the notice of state government. At this stage, the management backtracked and relieved junior doctors who had the mandatory attendance for their internship.

Students have brought to notice of authorities that some private medical colleges credit full stipend amounts in the bank accounts, but take back some amount in cash as charges for providing coaching or some additional facility.

College parents' committee president Dr. Ala Venkateswarlu said, "We have submitted a representation to NTR Health University authorities seeking a probe into the lapses being committed by private medical college managements in payment of stipend to junior doctors. We have also sought release of their Covid-19 incentive."

NTR University of Health Sciences vice chancellor Dr. P. Syama Prasad said, "We have constituted a fact finding committee based on these complaints. Based on the report, we will initiate necessary action. We want students from other private medical colleges in the state to also come forward in case they are facing similar or other issues."

TRANSGENDERS TO GET I-CARDS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
SRIKAKULAM, MARCH 24

Identity cards were distributed to the transgenders in Srikakulam, a first exercise in Andhra Pradesh, carried out to render social, political and economical identity to these persons. A simple function was organised in Srikakulam in which district collector J. Niwas distributed the cards.

Their applications were uploaded by a voluntary organisation Bejjipuram Youth Club.

Addressing the meeting, collector said these transgenders were entitled to all the rights and benefits sanctioned by the Indian Constitution.

He said due to imbalance of hormones these persons were identifying themselves under a different category but that should not prevent them enjoying their rights on par with others. Some people who have achieved big in society were not hesitating to identify themselves under this category.

The collector assured that they would get house sites and other benefits on par with other deprived classes in the society. Under Jagananna Thodu, these transgenders would get small shops to eke out decent living. He cautioned them not to sell away their house sites and other benefits to others.

Advising them to form groups to get the benefits, the collector asked them to approach ward and village secretariats to get the schemes.

Bejjipuram Youth Club president M. Prasada Rao said 93 transgenders had registered their names and all of them got the identity cards and have been getting the monthly pension.

● **THE COLLECTOR** assured that they would get house sites and other benefits on par with other deprived classes in the society.

AP records single day spike of Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

Andhra Pradesh registered a single day spike of 585 fresh Coronavirus cases and four deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported here on Wednesday that out of 35,066 samples tested, 585 persons were found infected with confirmed Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,48,40,401 samples tested so far in the state, 8,95,121 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,84,978 were recovered while 2,946 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus infections, Chittoor recorded the highest at 128 followed by 99 in Guntur, 81 in Visakhapatnam, 63 in Krishna, 42 in East Godavari, 36 in Anantapur, 35 in Kurnool, 23 in Nellore, 22 in Srikakulam, 20 in West

Godavari, 16 in Prakasam, 12 in Vizianagaram and eight in Kadapa.

Chittoor topped the state with 544 total Coronavirus active cases followed by 490 in East Godavari, 360 in Krishna, 293 in Visakhapatnam, 275 in Guntur, 252 in Kurnool, 186 in Anantapur, 127 in Nellore, 125 in Prakasam, 121 in Srikakulam, 60 in Kadapa, 59 in West Godavari and 54 in Vizianagaram.

Among daily cases of death of Coronavirus infected patients, four were reported, with one each at Chittoor, Guntur, Kurnool and Visakhapatnam, rising toll to 7,197.

The state health authorities discharged 251 Coronavirus infected patients after recovery in the course of treatment in the last 24 hours in the state. AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 2,77,910 samples per one million population and registered positive rate at 6.03.

STUDENTS OF PRIVATE COLLEGES IN KURNOOL WORST HIT BY COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

Seven students from Sri Chaitanya Junior College and six from Narayana Junior College in Kurnool tested positive during the last 24 hours, said DEO Sai Ram.

He said these 13 are among the 21 students tested positive as on Wednesday. The surge in Covid-19 cases is continuing as 35 fresh cases reported across the district in the last 24 hours.

The District Medical and Health Officer Dr Rama Guddiah said Vaccination drive is going on and people are voluntarily coming forward to get the jab done as

the virus envelops.

With the age limit now being slashed to 45 years, a sense of deja vu seen among the middle aged who were holed up in fear psychosis, said Sheikh Mahabub Basha, a lecturer in a private college.

However it is of concern to note that even frontline workers are hesitating to get the vaccination, said a Process or of Kurnool Medical College.

Only 53 percent of the front line workers targeted to get vaccinated had complied with. He said instances of reactions to vaccination reported during the first dose cycle is pulling them back.

DURGA NAME TO AN EXPRESS TRAIN SOUGHT, ₹178 CR BUDGET APPROVED

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 24

The Kanaka Durga temple trust board committee approved this year's budget of ₹178 crore and decided to construct arches at the main centre of the city.

The meeting of the Durga temple trust board committee was held at Vijayawada on Wednesday. The meeting passed a resolution seeking to give the name of Goddess to a train passing through Vijayawada railway station as Kanaka Durga Express.

Durga temple trust board committee chairman Pyla

Somi Naidu said it was decided to conduct the meeting of the committee every month on the third week to discuss and resolve issues of the temple. He said the meeting passed ₹178 crore budget for this year. He stated that the total estimated expenditure for Annadanam is ₹14.93 crore and it has decided to conduct Annadanam for 5,000 devotees per day in view of Corona in the temple.

He said the meeting has also decided to develop facilities to devotees on the hill-top for the hassle-free darshan.

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DECCAN
Chronicle

25 MARCH 2021

Shot eligibility expansion
route out of return wave

The decision of the Union government to open up the vaccination programme against pandemic Covid-19 further and include all those who are aged 45 years and above is a welcome move as it comes in the nick of time. India is on the verge of a second wave of the pandemic with more than 47,000 people contracting the virus on Tuesday alone. The daily caseload has been hovering above 40,000 for the last couple of weeks. Several states have already gone back to or are contemplating re-introducing lockdown in varying intensities to check the spread of the virus.

The government decision comes amid demands made by several state governments to include more categories of the population under it. The Delhi government has demanded that everyone above 18 years be given the jab while Punjab wanted the norms for the second phase where only those above 60 years were eligible for the vaccine be done away with. Its chief minister is particularly worried as 81 per cent samples that under-

The US has vaccinated 37.83 of every hundred people while China's number stands at 5.21 against India's 3.54

went genome sequencing from the state showed B117 virus, the UK strain of Covid-19. The government has of late ratcheted up the daily numbers in the inoculation programme, and the number of people who got a dose of the vaccine touched 33 lakhs on Tuesday. This is a commendable achievement compared with the slow progress the programme made in the initial phase. The total number of people who have got at least one dose of the vaccine has become 4.5 crores

now but only less than 80 lakhs have got both their doses. The percentage of people who have got the vaccine is far too low compared with that in the US and Britain: the US has vaccinated 37.83 of every hundred people while China's number stands at 5.21 against India's 3.54. At this rate, India will take months on end to get a sizeable share of the population inoculated. This would mean some region or the other being under lockdown or debilitating restrictions. But the nation cannot afford to keep its economic activity in chains for long.

It has been one year since Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a national lockdown to tame the virus and flatten the curve. One year on, India has suffered immensely at the hand of the microorganism. Crores of people found it difficult to make ends meet but the governments at the Centre and in most states offered very little in the form of immediate relief. Lakhs of people were made to flee their temporary abodes in the towns and trek thousands of miles on their way back home, creating one of the most heartrending and shameful episodes of Independent India. One year down the line, India is still the country with the third largest number of Covid cases and deaths after the United States and Brazil.

There cannot be a repeat of the same this year. The government must further strengthen the inoculation programme and at the same time strictly impose Covid-appropriate protocol across the country. Any laxity on these counts will cost the nation heavily.

Lanka: A lost opportunity

In abstaining from the vote on the United Nations Human Right Council resolution against Sri Lanka, India may have been attempting to find a pragmatic balance. But, in not claiming the moral high ground on the issue of human rights violations against Sri Lankan Tamils, the country lost an opportunity to be the conscience keeping leader of the region. There may have been inhibiting reasons in voting for the resolution like respect for the territorial integrity of the island nation, but none was so compelling as to impose an ambivalent position on how Sri Lanka tamed LTTE's secessionist movement towards the end of the civil war when it brazenly carried out executions, including that of the minor son of LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran.

It is clear that India chose the path of lesser resistance in joining the abstainers rather than the 22 nations who voted for the resolution and 11, including Pakistan and China, voting against.

What the Sri Lankan Army did in the guise of winning a war was morally reprehensible. Considering the head of the defence forces in the war against the rebels that ended in May 2009 is now the president of Sri Lanka, it is unlikely that the probe, financed with the UN's US \$2.8 million, will get very far. It is clear that India chose the path of lesser resistance in joining the abstainers rather than the 22 nations who voted for the resolution and 11, including Pakistan and China, voting against. India's two fundamental considerations of "supporting the Tamils for equality, justice, dignity and peace and ensuring the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka",

are in the realm of the pedantic.

There is no doubt the nearness of April 6 elections in Tamil Nadu influenced the decision to abstain. The perception of New Delhi varies vastly from that of Tamil Nadu, obviously influenced by the romanticism of a Tamil Eelam, or homeland. The fact remains that New Delhi voted thus only with an eye on the Tamil Nadu voter rather than the empathetic first principles in favour of a people residing in northern Sri Lanka who are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity. No Indian on Tamil can influence the court of post-war events in Sri Lanka. But to remain a silent spectator to human rights abuses reflects moral bankruptcy.

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Subhani

Halt Covid complacency:
Be vigilant, keep all safePatralekha
Chatterjee

Dev 360

Around this time last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a nationwide lockdown to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Indians were given four hours' notice before the order took effect. "From 12 midnight tonight, the entire country will go under a complete lockdown," Mr Modi said. "To save India and every Indian, there will be a total ban on venturing out of your homes." The initial clampdown was for 21 days.

A year on, where are we? That question is the big story in our lives.

Many of us have lost loved ones, jobs, watched our savings evaporate, been sick ourselves. Most of us have no choice but to tap our inner strengths as we cope with everyday challenges in the time of a pandemic.

It is not a totally bleak picture. Vaccines are available now and we are likely to see a huge scale-up in the government's immunisation drive in the coming weeks.

But alongside, worryingly, we are also seeing a big surge in Covid-19 cases in many parts of the country and a disconcerting general disregard for safety protocols. India's new Covid-19 cases had peaked at nearly 100,000 a day in September and had been declining steadily until late last month.

Two recent surveys give us a sense of just how bad the economic situation is. The first one relates to the situation in New Delhi, the nation's capital.

According to a recent survey by the Delhi government, the unemployment rate in Delhi was 11.1 per cent before the onset of the pandemic and it shot up to 28.5 per cent during October-November 2020, an increase of 17.4 per cent. The male unemployment rate was 8.7 per cent before the pandem-

ic; it increased to 23.2 per cent, an increase of 14.5 per cent. The female unemployment rate was 25.6 per cent before the pandemic and went up to 54.7 per cent, an increase of 29.1 per cent, in the same period. The average monthly income of employed persons in the city before the pandemic was ₹16,511. It dipped to ₹15,383, a reduction of 6.8 per cent in the average monthly income during October-November last year.

In the past year, on the whole, the worst-affected sectors have been construction, food and beverages, service activities, education, wholesale and retail trade, services to buildings and landscape activities, information service activities, land transport, security and investigation activities, human health activities and wearing apparel manufacturing.

The survey was conducted last year, and arguably things have improved since then.

But here is the catch, signs of economic activity do not necessarily mean that workers are getting their due wages. From my personal conversations with scores of people in the informal service sector, I know that many are still getting a fraction of their former wages and many who are without work.

In January this year, I met Naresh Kumar, 55, in one of the "pagoda" style temporary refugees in winter in the Bangla Sahib shelter run by an NGO. Mr Kumar told me

Let's face it — we are in the middle of two crises — the coronavirus pandemic and the one impacting the economy. Both intersect. We have the vaccine. But as scientists keep reminding us, it doesn't herald a full stop to the pandemic just yet.

A spike in coronavirus cases in India would dent the green shoots of the economic recovery as fresh curbs will kick in to prevent a new wave from gaining momentum. We must do everything we can to ensure that does not happen.

he used to earn his living as a waiter, mostly at weddings. For the last one and half months, he had been at the shelter. He had no work for the past year. He was picked up by a rescue van and brought to the shelter. He had no identity documents. Naresh Kumar feared going back to sleeping in the streets once the temporary shelter closed down. I wonder where he is today...

Even in tony South Delhi enclaves, it is not uncommon to find people in the beauty, wellness and hospitality industry complaining of getting less than their salary. They can't quit their jobs because there are few new opportunities in the market.

Though the unemployment rate is gradually decreasing in the city, the implementation of a job guarantee scheme is very much needed to revive the national capital's economy scarred by the coronavirus pandemic.

The survey tells us that people at the bottom of the income hierarchy were among the worst affected. Those with no or minimal education lost jobs in far greater numbers than those with a simple diploma.

This is not just in Delhi or India's big cities. Across the country, not only have the number of the poor increased, leading to a sharp spike in the global increase in poverty, a new Pew Research Centre analysis talks about the retreat of India's middle class in 2020. The middle class in India is estimated to have shrunk by 32 million last year as a direct fallout of the economic downturn, compared with the number it may have reached without the pandemic, it says.

Understandably, people are tired and craving for normalcy and economic recovery.

But let's face it — we are in the middle of two crises — the coronavirus pandemic and the one impacting the economy. Both intersect. We have the vaccine. But as scientists keep reminding us, the vaccine doesn't herald a full stop to the pandemic just yet.

Nicholas Christakis, a physician, epidemiologist, and sociologist at Yale University, says the coronavirus pandemic will continue to affect our lives through 2021 and beyond. He talks about it in detail his new book *Apollo's Arrow: The Profound and Enduring Impact of Coronavirus on the Way We Live*.

When the virus is surrounded by people who are vaccinated, it has nowhere to go and thus outbreaks are suppressed, he says. Until such a state of herd immunity is reached, mask wearing, hand washing with soap and social distancing will have to necessarily remain.

A lot has changed since 2020. For many, hugging a loved one is a fantasy with restrictions on mobility still in place. New protocols for health safety have drastically changed our everyday lives in the past year. No one knows just how long it will take us to bounce back psychologically, socially and economically in the long term. There are still many uncertainties about the virus and variants are popping up.

But we know that a spike in coronavirus cases in India would dent the green shoots of the economic recovery as fresh curbs will kick in to prevent a new wave from gaining momentum. We must do everything we can to ensure that does not happen.

We must beat the virus, but that can happen only if everyone sees it as a shared interest and shared fate. If we become complacent, and drop our guard, infections can rise. That affects us all.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com

LETTERS

HEALTHY PLAN

This is one of the best steps taken by the state Government in recent times (₹5,800 crore for 12 new med colleges, DC, March 24). Had the predecessor governments visualised the health needs of people and took steps to improve healthcare facilities, the situation in AP would have been much better and people all over the state would have been happier and healthier. In fact, AP would have become a health tourism hub for people from other states and countries as well. The young and dynamic Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy must be lauded.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

MAHA STINK

The happenings in Maharashtra show how deep the rot has set in (*Optics key, Uddhav must act fast to kill racket stink, DC, March 24*). The situation is getting murkier daily. The ignominious saga has put the spotlight on nexus between the political class and the police. Politics must not be played in this whole game. Let there be transparent, free and fair investigation in the entire episode at the earliest.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

Yes, Uddhav has no option but to bare-all. A can of worms was already opened by his adversary Devendra Fadnavis. BJP is a Goliath and its juggernaut may trample him unless he does something to survive.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN
ChronicleDefence spending
hiked

NEW DELHI, MARCH. 24

The Finance Minister, Mr. Y.B. Chavan, presenting his first though interim budget to Lok Sabha today, announced a provision of Rs. 50 crores to support a country-wide programme of creating more employment opportunities with a productive bias.

There are no new tax proposals in the budget for 1971/72 drawn up at existing levels of taxation, but Mr. Chavan gave unmistakable indication of additional resource mobilisation measures in the Budget proper to be presented in May next.

Defence expenditure met from revenue next year is estimated at Rs. 1094 crores, an increase of Rs. 54 crores over the current year mainly due to larger expenditure on stores.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka BabuWill J&K-AGMUT
cadre merger solve
Valley's problem of
sparse governance?

The merger of the Jammu and Kashmir cadre into the UT cadre, among other things, is meant to address the old problem of the acute shortage of IAS officers in the Union territory. The erstwhile J&K cadre had a stipulated strength of 137 IAS officers but currently has merely 58, of which nine are on Central deputation. The result is that practically every IAS officer in the UT is handling several portfolios, which is not exactly great news for good governance.

The problem has lingered for several years, with the result that officers of the Kashmir Administrative Service have long been handling posts reserved for IAS officers, without being promoted to the IAS. For instance, the post of district magistrate (DM) can only be filled by an IAS officer, but in

Kashmir, nine out of 20 district magistrates are from the state administrative service.

Apparently, no state administrative service officer has been inducted into the IAS since 2012, which has only accentuated the problem. While in other parts of the country there is a 37 per cent reserved quota for state service officers, in Kashmir it has become 50 per cent! The cadre merger, the Centre hopes, will allow officers in the AGMUT cadre to be posted in J&K and Ladakh, and vice-versa. Until that happens it is the state service babus who will continue to hold most of the administrative positions in the Union territory.

A HIGH-PROFILE EXIT

P.K. Sinha, senior advisor to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, quietly put in his papers but cannot stop

P.K. Sinha, senior advisor to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, quietly put in his papers but cannot stop tongues from wagging. It is being said that Mr Sinha could be the next lieutenant governor of either Delhi or Puducherry.

tongues from wagging. It is being said that the former Cabinet secretary is being primed for another role by Mr Modi. Among the theories doing the rounds, it is being speculated that Mr Sinha could be the next lieutenant governor of either Delhi or Puducherry.

This may not be without precedent. Recall 2019 when Nripendra Misra, the then principal secretary

to the PMO, similarly resigned "for personal reasons" but was soon named chairman of the prestigious Ram temple construction committee.

BABU'S MIXED LEGACY

Economic affairs secretary Tarun Bajaj has been given an additional charge of revenue secretary after the retirement of A.B.P. Pandey last month. However, Mr Pandey's exit hasn't been as quiet as he may have expected. As soon as he retired, media reports appeared around the lack of progress in filling more than 400 vacancies of income tax commissioners and others, some of which have been hanging fire since 2019. It was somehow hinted that Mr Pandey did not do enough during his stint as revenue secretary to fill these vacancies. Further,

sources say, Mr Pandey drew the ire of Odisha-based IT chief commissioner D.P. Kar, who reportedly wrote to the Prime Minister demanding an inquiry against Pandey.

Yet, others point out that the same Mr Pandey was among the few babus who successfully led three crucial institutions of the Modi sarkar — department of revenue, goods and services tax network and the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). As revenue secretary, Mr Pandey led significant tax reforms undertaken by the government. The detractors waited for the man to retire before raising issues that troubled them during his tenure.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

SHORT TAKES

EC FILES FIR AGAINST BJP CANDIDATE

DC CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI, MARCH 24

The Election Commission (EC) has filed an FIR against BJP candidate in Assam for his remarks on beef during an election meeting. The FIR has been lodged in the Gauripur police station in Western Assam's Dhubri district.

BJP candidate Banendra Kumar Mushahary, who is contesting from Gauripur, claimed that beef is the "national dish of India". In an obvious bid to appease the minority voters he made this remark at an election meeting in a Muslim-dominated area of the district.

"How can anyone ban beef? It is the national dish of India," he said at the meeting.

Contrary to frequent campaigns of the saffron party to ban beef across the country, he went on saying, "The beef is an international dish and 'educated Muslims in the rural areas of Assam should understand that no one can ban the sale of beef in Assam or anywhere in India.'"

Mushahary, a veteran politician, joined the BJP in December 2020. He was first elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1996 as an independent candidate from Gauripur in Dhubri district.

In 2011, he was elected as an AGP candidate from Gauripur. Later, he joined the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and was elected as an MLA for the third time.

Meanwhile, BJP workers in the districts have expressed deep anguish over Mushahary's remarks and demanded an unconditional apology for his remark.

BJP WORKER FOUND DEAD IN COOCHBEHAR

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, MARCH 24

Close on the heels of a boy's death in a crude bomb blast pre poll violence claimed another life in West Bengal as a BJP worker was found dead under mysterious circumstances at Dinhat in Coochbehar of North Bengal.

The deceased, Amit Sarkar, was the Dinhat Town Mandal president of the party. He was found hanging by a rope tied around his neck at the verandah of a state-run veterinary hospital and his feet almost touching the ground on Wednesday morning.

Angry BJP workers initially stopped the police from taking away the body for post-mortem.

BJP MP Nishith Pramanik, contesting from Dinhat, alleged that the TMC goons first killed Sarkar and then hanged the body to pass it as a case of suicide.

Pointing fingers at TMC MLA and his rival candidate Udayan Guha, he demanded a CBI probe into the case.

ORDER ON ELECTORAL BONDS RESERVED

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 24

The Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved its order on a plea by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) seeking stay of the opening any further window for sale of fresh electoral bonds from April 1 ahead of the ongoing Assembly elections in five states.

Reserving the order, a bench headed by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde and also comprising Justice A.S. Bopanna and Justice V. Ramsubramanian, however, expressed concerns over the possible misuse of bonds and asked the Centre to examine it. "If a political party gets ₹100 crore worth bonds what is the control over the use of these bonds for illegal activities or purposes outside political agenda," the court asked in a poser to the government.

The court asked Attorney General K.K. Venugopal that they would like the government to look into the angle of misuse of the funds coming through electoral bonds.

The Attorney General however, said after the electoral bonds scheme was launched in 2018, black money in election funding has been kept under check as no cash is collected. These bonds can be purchased only through cheque or Demand Draft, he said.

The court was hearing a petition by the ADR seeking to stall the sale of fresh electoral bonds starting from April 1.

EC TRANSFERS COIMBATORE COLLECTOR, TOP POLICE OFFICER

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 24

Cracking the whip, the Election Commission of India suddenly transferred the Coimbatore District Election Officer and Collector, K. Rajamani, and Coimbatore Commissioner of Police Sumit Sharan to non-election posts on Wednesday and ordered the Chief Secretary to report compliance by noon.

S. Nagarajan would take over as the Collector and Davidson Devasirvatham as the Commissioner, the ECI order said, adding that the decision was taken 'on the basis of various input received.'

It is alleged that the two officers were close to a State Minister that gave rise to many complaints of partiality that were forwarded to the Election Commission.

In another crackdown, authorities seized ₹1 crore cash hidden in the Toyota-Innova MUV displaying a MLA sticker on the windscreen. The sticker had been issued for Musiri AIADMK MLA M Selavaraj.

The vehicle, when it was stopped at the Petavaithalai check post near Trichy, had three occupants other than the driver.

All the three men, said to be AIADMK party functionaries, reportedly told the police that they were not aware of the currency bundles inside the car.

The seized cash was taken to the office of the returning officer in Srirangam at midnight and it took two hours for the officials to count the ₹500 bundles using cash counting machines. The money was handed over to the Income-Tax department, which would take up the investigation of the case since the seized currency exceeded ₹50 lakh.

Another Income-Tax raid in Chennai on Wednesday made tongues wag about the possibility of the authorities trying to figure out a possible money distribution channel for a political party. The raids were at the houses and offices of a railway union leader and his son.

When the I-T sleuths tried to storm into the house of Prakash, son of Southern Railway Mazdoor Union long time general secretary, N. Kanniah, in the morning they faced resistance. Police reinforcements were requisitioned and the officials gained entry into the house. Soon, I-T officials were at the house of Kanniah and offices of the SRMU and that of Prakash, who own IT companies. Kanniah is also the head of Railway Employees Urban Bank. Though a union leader, he is known for his ostentatious lifestyle.

VITAL | PROBE

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MARCH 24

National Investigation Agency on Wednesday invoked Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act against suspended Mumbai Police officer Sachin Waze. The Maharashtra ATS also handed over the two accused and the case papers of Mansukh Hiran murder case to the NIA after a court order. The NIA had approached the court saying that despite Central government transferring Hiran murder case to NIA the ATS is not handing over the case documents to them.

Under this stringent UAPA law, the investigating agency can avail police custody of an accused up to 30 days and also the probe agency can get an extension of 90 days to file a charge sheet (additional to the usual 90 days). Securing bail will also be much more



A BJP supporter holds party flag during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's election campaign rally ahead of the Assam Assembly polls at Sipajhar in Darrang district on Wednesday. - PTI

Cong's Mahajut is a 'Maha jhooth': PM

Says Cong did nothing for tea workers during their rule

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, MARCH 24

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday accused the Congress of making false promises to the people of Assam.

Coming down heavily on the Congress-led grand alliance - Mahajut (grand alliance), Prime Minister while addressing a public meeting at Bihpuria said that it's not Congress' Mahajut but it's Congress party's 'Maha jhooth' (Biggest lie).

"A Maha jhooth that guarantees illegal immigrants in Satras, Namghar, National Parks, a mahajhooth which guarantees poaching and corruption. It is a mahajhooth, who for their own sake, can defame Assam's pride and even tea in the whole world," said Mr Modi.

Speaking about the promises made by the Congress to improve the condition of tea workers, Mr Modi said that the Congress did nothing for those working in the tea gardens when the party was in power. "In 15 years regime, they could not hike the tea workers wages above ₹100," he said. He alleged that Congress never worked for the uplift of tea garden workers while the NDA government has increased and doubled their wages.

"Immediately after coming to power, we will work extensively to make their life better. The NDA government is committed to providing a dignified life to the women of tea gardens," said Mr Modi. The BJP leader said that Congress can do anything for votes. "Today, Congress' hand is with those who are set to destroy the identity of Assam. Congress can do

New Delhi, March 24:

Trinamool Congress MP Derek O'Brien on Wednesday condemned as "distasteful" BJP leader Dilip Ghosh's purported remarks against the West Bengal chief minister suggesting that she should wear Bermuda shorts to display her injured leg, and said such comments were "not acceptable" in politics.

Participating in a debate on the Finance Bill in Rajya Sabha, O'Brien said his party condemns this kind of remarks against anyone. "There is decency, there is courtesy which we always try to extend. Doesn't matter man, woman... So I am little disturbed...most distasteful statement was made about a woman saying that she should not wear a saree anymore but she should wear Bermuda shorts," the Trinamool MP said. He said the statement was made by a parliamentarian who is a state president of the BJP.

"This is not acceptable in politics. This was said by an MP and state pres-

anything for votes. They can stand with anyone and can even betray anyone," he alleged.

"The Congress, which has been a symbol of discrimination against indigenous people of Assam, is asking people to hand over Assam to them again. I have come to wake you up. Congress has its hands with such people, whose objective is to destroy the identity of Assam. Will you let

● A VIDEO clip of Ghosh apparently suggesting Mamata should wear Bermuda shorts to display her injured leg has triggered a controversy. While no one was named in the purported speech by Ghosh, known for his controversial comments, most commentators took the comments to be directed at Banerjee. In the video, the veracity of which could not be confirmed by PTI, Ghosh was seen stating at an election meeting in Purulia on Monday that after the cast was taken off and the foot was bandaged, she is displaying the leg to everyone.

ident of the BJP. We condemn this kind of remarks against anyone," the leader said.

He said there may be political differences among parties but that does not mean that they are political enemies. "...so what if there are political differences...we have major differences on ideology. I respect Ma'am and every other MP. They are our political rivals. We are not political enemies..." he said referring to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

A video clip of Ghosh apparently suggesting West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee should wear Bermuda shorts to dis-

play her injured leg has triggered a controversy.

While no one was named in the purported speech by Ghosh, known for his controversial comments, most commentators took the comments to be directed at Banerjee. In the video, the veracity of which could not be confirmed by PTI, Ghosh was seen stating at an election meeting in Purulia on Monday that after the cast was taken off and the foot was bandaged, she is displaying the leg to everyone.

"...she is wearing saree with one leg covered but kept another open for viewing. Haven't seen anyone draping a saree in such a way.... If she has to display her leg for viewing, she can very well wear Bermuda shorts. That will help to have a better view," the BJP MP was purportedly heard stating.

O'Brien targeted the Centre over the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme. "It is bad, poor and pathetic governance when 60 per cent funds of the scheme are spent on advertising," he said.

illegal migrants, he said, "Indo-Bangla Border in Dhubri is now sealed, to tackle illegal infiltrators." He said that Lakhimpur is famous for Bao Dhan (Red Rice) and under 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan', the BJP government is working to take this rice to the world. He also claimed that the BJP has built eight medical colleges in the last five years.

Kerala: BJP promises law against love jihad

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 24

The BJP which is making an all out effort to improve its electoral prospects in Kerala, got a boost on Wednesday with the participation of union home minister Amit Shah in road shows and election meetings.

The BJP which had just a lone member in the 140 assembly in Kerala is hopeful of doing better this time though various opinion polls have predicted just one to three seats for the party. "We will perform in a much better way in Kerala in the coming elections. The people of Kerala are fed up with the corruption of LDF and UDP. They are desperately looking for an alternative. The BJP will provide them the alternative," union home minister Mr Amit Shah told mediapersons on the sidelines of his roadshow in Tripunithura in Ernakulam district.

Mr Shah put five questions to the chief minister in connection with the gold smuggling case which included: was your principal secretary not involved in gold smuggling and money laundering? Didn't you pay 3.5 lakh salary to the accused? Didn't the main accused travel on government expense? Didn't

the principal secretary call up to save the accused? Didn't you apply pressure on Customs?

In the last elections the BJP-led NDA had secured nearly 15 percent of the votes. It managed to retain the same percentage of vote even in the local bodies poll held in December.

In a bid to improve its vote share and convert the votes into seats, the BJP had made an attempt to reach out to the Christian community. The party has even given tickets to Christians this time hoping to make some dent in the Christian belt of Central Travancore. However, the attempts to woo the Christian community received a setback following an attack on the nuns in Jhansi who were travelling by train.

Meanwhile, Union minister Prakash Javadekar on Wednesday released the NDA manifesto for Kerala elections.

The BJP promised to bring in a law to curb love Jihad, an exclusive law for protecting the rituals and customs of Sabarimala temple, six free LPG cylinders to the BPL families every year, social welfare pensions to be raised to ₹3,500.

It may be noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to address five public meetings in Kerala next week.

RAJYA SABHA CLEARS DELHI L-G BILL

New Delhi, March 24:

The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday approved the Bill giving primacy to Delhi's Lieutenant Governor (L-G) over the elected government after high drama in the House that saw uproar by the Opposition and a walkout by MPs of parties like the BJD, SP, Congress and the YSR Congress.

The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 that seeks to make it clear that the "government" in Delhi means the "Lieutenant Governor" was passed

by Lok Sabha on March 22.

The legislation was passed in Rajya Sabha by a voice vote on Wednesday. However, a division was sought by the Opposition when the government moved the bill for consideration. During voting, 83 members were in favour while 45 opposed the Bill. Just before the passage of the bill, the Congress too walked out. Earlier, RS witnessed uproar by Opposition members who termed the Bill as "unconstitutional" and demanded that it be sent to a Select Committee for scrutiny. —PTI

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SHORT TAKES

DUBAI'S DY RULER PASSES AWAY AT 75

Dubai: Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum, deputy ruler of Dubai and the finance minister of the United Arab Emirates, has died, his brother said on Wednesday. He was 75.

Sheikh Hamdan served as deputy leader of Dubai under his brother, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the hereditary ruler of the city-state who also serves as prime minister and vice president of the UAE. Emirati officials announced his death without specifying the cause. Sheikh Hamdan had been in poor health for several months.

VIRGINIA GOV. TO SIGN LAW ENDING DEATH PENALTY

Jarratt (US): Governor Ralph Northam is set to sign historic legislation that will put an end to the death penalty in Virginia, a state with a long and prolific history of carrying out executions.

Northam scheduled a tour on Wednesday of the death chamber at the Greensville Correction Center, then planned to sign the landmark legislation abolishing the death penalty.

The legislation marks a dramatic shift in a state that has executed more people than any other. Virginia has put to death nearly 1,400 people since its days as a colony. In modern times, Virginia is second only to Texas in the number of executions it has carried out, with 113 since the US Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976.

GILANI'S POLL RESULT PLEA DISMISSED

Islamabad: A Pakistani court on Wednesday dismissed former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani's petition challenging the results of the Senate chairman election which he lost in a keenly-fought contest.

Gilani filed the petition on Monday in the Islamabad High Court which was accepted for hearing by Chief Justice Athar Minallah. During the hearing, Minallah noted that the proceedings of the upper house of parliament were "immune from the interference" of the high court.



AP journalist Thein Zaw waves inside Insein prison after his release Wednesday, in Yangon, Myanmar.

— AP/PTI

Hundreds set free in Myanmar

It is first gesture by the military to try to placate the protest movement

Yangon, March 24: Hundreds of people imprisoned for protesting last month's coup were released Wednesday in the first apparent gesture by the military to try to placate the protest movement.

Witnesses outside Insein Prison in Yangon saw busloads of mostly young people, looking happy with some flashing the three-finger gesture of defiance adopted by the protest movement. State-run TV said a total of 628 were freed.

The prisoners appear to be the hundreds of students detained in early March while demonstrating against the Feb. 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

One lawyer, speaking on condition of anonymity because she doesn't want attention from the authorities, said all those released were arrested on March 3. She said only 55 people detained in connection with the protests remained in the prison, and it is likely they will all face charges under Section 505(A) of the Penal Code, which car-

ries a penalty of up to three years in prison. Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners says it has confirmed the killings of 275 people in connection with the post-coup crackdown, with additional deaths still unverified.

It also says that as of Tuesday, it had verified arrest or charges against 2,812 people, of whom 2,418 remain in custody or with outstanding charges. Demonstrators on Wednesday tried a new tactic that they dubbed a silence strike, calling on people to stay home and businesses to close for the day.

The extent of the strike was difficult to gauge, but social media users posted photos from cities and towns showing streets empty of activity save for the occasional stray dog. The online meme posted to publicise the action called silence "the loudest scream" and explained its purpose was to honour the movement's fallen heroes, to recharge protesters' energy and to contradict the junta's claims that "everything is back to normal."

The new tactic was employed after an extended onslaught of violence from security forces. Local media reported that a seven-year-old girl in Mandalay, was among the latest victims on Tuesday.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners included her in its list of fatalities. "Khin Myo Chit was shot in the abdomen by a soldier while she sat in her father's lap inside her home in Aung Pin Le ward," the online news service *Myanmar Now* reported, quoting her sister, Aye Chan San.

The report said the shooting took place when soldiers were raiding homes in her family's neighborhood. The sister said a soldier shot at their father when he denied that any people were hiding in their home, and hit the girl. Aye Chan San said the soldiers then beat her 19-year-old brother with their rifle butts and took him away.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners recorded three killings in Mandalay on Tuesday, though some other reports said there were five.

— AP

Cargo ship turns sideways, blocks Suez

Dubai, March 24: A cargo container ship that's among the largest in the world has turned sideways and blocked all traffic in Egypt's Suez Canal, officials said Wednesday, threatening to disrupt a global shipping system already strained by the coronavirus pandemic.

The MV Evergreen, a Panama-flagged container ship that carries trade between Asia and Europe, became grounded Tuesday in the narrow, man-made waterway dividing continental Africa from the

Sinai Peninsula. It wasn't immediately clear what caused it to turn sideways in the canal. GAC, a global shipping and logistics company, described the ship as suffering "a blackout while transiting in a northerly direction," without elaborating. Evergreen Marine Corp., a major Taiwan-based shipping company that operates the ship, said in a statement provided to *The Associated Press* that the ship had been overcome by strong winds as it entered the Suez Canal

from the Red Sea but none of its containers had sunk.

A Egyptian official, who spoke to the *AP* on condition of anonymity as he wasn't authorised to brief journalists similarly blamed a strong wind in the area for the incident. Egyptian forecasters said high winds and a sandstorm plagued the area Tuesday, with winds gusting as much as 31 mph. "All crew are safe and accounted for," said Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, which manages the ship.

"There have been no reports of injuries or pollution." The Evergreen's bow was touching the canal's eastern wall, while its stern looked lodged against its western wall, according to satellite data from MarineTraffic.com. Several tug boats surrounded the ship, likely attempting to push it the right way, the data showed.

An image in Instagram by a user on another waiting cargo ship appeared to show it wedged across the canal.

— AP



No winner in Israel exit election

Jerusalem, March 24: Israeli parliamentary elections have resulted in a virtual deadlock for a fourth time in the past two years, exit polls indicated, leaving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with an uncertain future and the country facing the prospect of continued political gridlock.

The exit polls on Israel's three main TV stations indi-

cated that both Netanyahu and his religious and nationalist allies, along with a group of anti-Netanyahu parties, fell short of the parliamentary majority required to form a new government. That raised the possibility of an unprecedented fifth consecutive election later this year.

The poll was seen as a referendum on Netanyahu's po-

larising leadership, and the initial results showed the country remains as deeply divided as ever, with an array of small sectarian parties dominating the parliament. The results also signalled a continuing shift of the Israeli electorate toward the right wing, which supports West Bank settlements and opposes concessions in peace talks with the Palestinians.

That trend was highlighted by the strong showing of an ultranationalist anti-Arab religious party. After three previous inconclusive elections, Netanyahu had been hoping for a decisive victory that would allow him to form a government with his traditional ultra-Orthodox and hard-line nationalist allies and seek immunity from corruption charges.

— AP

Surgeon General: Senate okays Murthy

Washington, March 24: Indian-American physician Vivek Murthy has been confirmed by the Senate as President Joe Biden's surgeon general, a role in which his top priority would be responding to the coronavirus pandemic that has severely hit the country. Dr Murthy, 43, would occupy the position of America's Surgeon General for the second time. In 2011, president Barack Obama tapped him to serve on the advisory group on prevention, health promotion, and integrative and public health.

I'm deeply grateful to be confirmed by the Senate to serve once again as your Surgeon General. We've endured great hardship as a nation over the past year, and I look forward to working with you to help our nation heal and create a better future for our children, Murthy said on Tuesday soon after the Senate confirmed his nomination by 57-43 votes.

In 2013, Obama nominated Dr. Murthy to be the surgeon general. He was the youngest ever to hold the office at the age of 37. However, he had to abruptly leave the position during the Trump administration. As US Surgeon General, Dr.

Murthy will advise President Biden on the coronavirus pandemic and will be the federal government's leading voice on public health.

Seven senators from the opposition Republican Party voted in support of Dr Murthy. He was an adviser to the Biden campaign and transition.

Senator Joe Manchin said that during his previous tenure as Surgeon General, Dr. Murthy worked to create a culture of public health promotion grounded in nutrition, physical activity and emotional well-being to help prevent conditions like obesity and diabetes.

Dr. Murthy also released a report outlining plans to reduce opioid prescriptions and expand access to treatment for those suffering from a substance use disorder, he said. He understands the issues facing this nation including the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the drug epidemic and protecting rural healthcare.

Covid-19 has taken the lives of several members of Murthy's extended family. During his confirmation hearing in February, he said that seven of his family members in India and America have died due to Covid-19.

— PTI



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SHORT TAKES

Ind shuttler forced out of Orleans tour

Paris: An unnamed Indian woman shuttler was on Tuesday forced to withdraw from the Orleans Masters after a team entourage member tested positive for Covid-19 and she was identified as a close contact. In a statement, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) said that a total of three players have been withdrawn from the event which began with the qualifiers here.

"An Indonesian women's doubles pair has been withdrawn after one player tested positive to the mandatory PCR test conducted on Monday," the BWF stated.

"An Indian women's singles player has been withdrawn after a team entourage member tested positive to the mandatory PCR test. The singles player was identified as a close contact of the entourage member and as a result the player has been withdrawn from the tournament," it added.

— PTI

SAI asks PCI to submit report

Bengaluru: Sports Authority of India on Wednesday sought a report from the Paralympic Committee of India after it emerged that facilities here at the National Para Athletics championship are not wheelchair-friendly and Covid-19 protocols are also "not being adhered to".

A qualification event for the Tokyo Paralympics, the tournament to be held from March 24 to 27 was shifted here from Chennai at a short notice on March 20, leading to discrepancies in the conduct of the event.

SAI has asked the national federation to immediately sort out the issues.

"It has been brought to the notice of Sports Authority of India that the facility in Bengaluru at which the Para Athletics National Championships is not wheelchair-friendly and that Standard Operating Procedures for prevention of Covid-19 are not being adhered to," SAI said in a statement.

— PTI

Blatter banned by FIFA again

Zurich: Sepp Blatter was banned for a second time by FIFA on Wednesday for financial wrongdoing, seven months before the 85-year-old former president's first ban expires. Blatter has recently been in poor health and was put in an induced coma for one week after undergoing heart surgery in December.

FIFA said its ethics committee banned both Blatter and former secretary general Jerome Valcke for six years and eight months for financial wrongdoing linked to awarding themselves contractual bonuses worth millions of dollars.

Both men, who also face criminal proceedings in Switzerland, will start serving the new bans when their current ones expire. Blatter and Valcke were previously banned for six years and 10 years, respectively, in separate cases.

Blatter's first ban expires in October and Valcke's initial ban will be served in October 2025. — AP

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SHOULDER SLIPS

Shreyas out of England ODIs, likely to miss IPL 1st half

Pune, March 24: India batsman Shreyas Iyer was on Wednesday ruled out of the ongoing ODI series against England and left in serious doubt for the first half of the IPL starting next month after dislocating his left shoulder in the opening game here.

The incident happened in the eighth over of the England innings when Shreyas dived on a drive hit by Jonny Bairstow off pacer Shardul Thakur.

He looked in tremendous pain as he left the field clutching his shoulder.

"It is unlikely he will play first part of IPL," a BCCI source said.

On Tuesday, the BCCI had stated, "Shreyas Iyer subluxated (partially dislocated) his left shoulder in the 8th over while fielding. He has been taken for further scans," the source added.

He captains Delhi Capitals in the IPL, which begins on April 9.

The Mumbaikar had perished for just 6 while batting.

Shreyas had led Delhi Capitals to the final in the previous edition of the league. It could take as much as six weeks to recover from shoulder dislocation and much longer in case a surgery is required.

In his absence, the DC captaincy could be handed to either Rishabh Pant, Australian Steve Smith or



India's Shreyas Iyer (left) walks off the field after injuring himself while fielding during the first One-Day International against England at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Tuesday.

Ravichandran Ashwin.

EOIN, SAM INJURED TOO

Meanwhile, England skipper Eoin Morgan and Sam Billings are doubtful for the second ODI against India here on Friday after

sustaining injuries in the series-opener, dealing a fresh blow to the side's floundering campaign.

The visitors suffered the setbacks in their 66-run defeat after the skipper split the webbing between

his right thumb and index finger that required four stitches. In another incident, Billings injured his collarbone following an awkward dive to stop a boundary.

— AP

— PTI

NUMBERS GAME

PRASIDH KRISHNA - 1st INDIAN TO TAKE FOUR WICKETS IN DEBUT MATCH

● Prasidh Krishna became the first Indian and 55th bowler overall to take four wickets on debut in one day internationals.

● The right-arm medium-fast bowler achieved this feat by taking four for 54 in the first one day international match against England at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, Pune on Tuesday (March 23).

● Off-break bowler Noel David who took three wickets for 21 runs against West Indies at Port of Spain on April 27, 1997 held the previous record of best bowling on debut for Indian in one day internationals.

BEST BOWLING ON DEBUT FOR INDIA IN ONE DAYERS

● 4-54 — Prasidh Krishna against England in Ahmedabad on March 23, 2021.

● 3-21 — Noel David against West Indies in Port of Spain on April 27, 1997.

● 3-24 — Varun Aaron against England in Mumbai on October 23, 2011.

● 3-30 — Subroto Banerjee vs West Indies in Port of Spain on December 6, 1991.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER



Chinky Yadav poses with her gold medal in the Women's 25m Pistol event at the Shooting World Cup in New Delhi on Wednesday.

Chinky, Aishwary dazzle with gold

New Delhi, March 24: Chinky Yadav upstaged the experienced Rahi Sarnobat and the fancied Manu Bhaker to win gold as India swept the women's 25m pistol event of the ISSF shooting World Cup here on Wednesday, highlighting the country's depth of talent in the sport.

The 23-year-old Yadav prevailed over Sarnobat, 30, 4-3 in a shoot-off after their scores were tied at 32, taking India's gold tally to nine in the event.

Bhaker, aged only 19, shot 28 to settle for the bronze medal before being eliminated, leaving her two other compatriots to fight for the top prize at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range.

Yadav led the pack after first 20 targets with a score of 14.

She was followed by Bhaker at second with 13.

Then, the shooter from Bhopal led with a score of 21 and pulled away from the rest, even as the seasoned Sarnobat clawed her way back into the finals after struggling in bottom half. In the finals, Yadav

shot all the five targets twice — in the first competition stage's second series and the sixth series of the elimination stage — after beginning with two.

Meanwhile, young Indian shooter Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar claimed the gold medal in the men's 50m rifle 3 positions event, consolidating the host nation's top standing in the ISSF World Cup here on Wednesday.

The 20-year-old from Bhopal shot 462.5 to win the top prize ahead of Hungary's star rifleman Istvan Peni (461.6) and Denmark's Steffen Olsen (450.9) at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range. This was India's eighth gold medal at the ongoing marquee event.

The other Indians in the final, veteran Sanjeev Rajput and Niraj Kumar, finished sixth and eighth respectively. After an impressive start following which he led for a while, Tomar slipped in the standings but fought back strongly with a 10.4, 10.5 and 10.3 in the standing elimination stage. — PTI

Super Kings pay tribute to armed forces in new jersey

Chennai, March 24: Three-time IPL champions Chennai Super Kings on Wednesday unveiled a new-look jersey that features camouflage as a tribute to the country's armed forces.

Unveiled ahead of the 2021 IPL season, the jersey also has three stars atop the franchise's logo to denote the three titles won in 2010, 2011 and 2018, besides the camouflage as a tribute to India's armed forces.

It has been on our mind for some time now to find ways to raise awareness about the significant and

selfless role of the armed forces. The camouflage is an appreciation of their service...they are the true heroes, CSK CEO K. S. Viswanathan said in a release.

The IPL team also released a short video of talismanic skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni, launching the new jersey on its Twitter feed.

CSK hold the armed forces close to the heart and showed their appreciation by presenting a cheque of ₹2 crore at the start of the 2019 IPL season, the release said.

That's not all, the cele-

brated Mahendra Singh Dhoni is an honorary Lieutenant Colonel in the Territorial Army and also trained with the Parachute Regiment in 2019.

The jersey has been redesigned for the first time since the inaugural edition in 2008, the release said.

The camouflage on the shoulders is bordered with gold bands that signify the high standards set by the team both in terms of consistency and fair play. CSK have won the IPL fair play award six times in 11 seasons. — PTI



Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni holds up the team's redesigned T-shirt for the new IPL season. The camouflage on the shoulders is a tribute to India's armed forces.

— Twitter

Krunal remembers late Dad after India victory

Pune, March 24: Krunal Pandya had his late father Himanshu's travel bag in the dressing room as he tried to keep him close ahead of his outstanding ODI debut in which he smashed the fastest 50 by a debutant.

Celebrating his 30th birthday on Wednesday, Krunal and his younger brother Hardik Pandya spoke about the close relationship they shared with the Senior Pandya, who died of a heart attack in January.

"So basically the thing is, he passed away on 16th morning and I was playing Syed Mushtaq Ali on that day. He had a habit of

keeping his clothes ready in the night, his shoes, his pant, his shirt, hat as well.

"So what I did was just before the game, I got his bag from Baroda here, and I thought, I know he is not with us, but those clothes, which he was supposed to wear in that game, I thought I'll bring that and keep in the dressing room," Krunal said.

Apart from his 58-run knock, Krunal also picked up a wicket in the game, against England. He broke down while speaking to the host broadcaster after the match.

"Obviously, I worked so hard to be here...not just in cricket, but in terms of

everything, taking care of my diet to fitness, to everything and again this is all dedicated to the old man...his blessings are there with us and obviously it was very emotional for you and me, both of us, and again getting a cap from you," Krunal added.

"...my focus has always been about how I can be the best version of myself, how I can improve, not just as a cricketer, but how can I improve as a human being as well.

"...again somewhere down the line, I just feel his (late father's) blessings are there, just feel more secure...this is for him," said Krunal. — PTI



India's Hardik Pandya (left) greets teammate Krunal Pandya before the start of the first One-Day international (ODI) match against England at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Tuesday. — AFP

PT USHA, GURBACHAN NAMED SELECTION COMMITTEE HEADS

New Delhi, March 24: Sprint legend P. T. Usha has been given charge of the junior selection committee, while hurdling great Gurbachan Singh Randhawa will head the senior panel in the latest appointments announced by the Athletics Federation of India.

The 56-year-old Usha won multiple medals in the Asian Games in 100m, 200m, 400m and 4x400m besides finishing fourth in 400m hurdles in 1984 Olympics.

Other members of the junior committee are Soma Biswas, Anand Menzes, Satbir Singh, Sandeep Sarkaria, Sunita Rani, Rama Chandran, Joseph Abraham, Harwant Kaur, M. D. Valsama and Kamal Ali Khan.

The senior selection committee, to be chaired by Randhawa, will have former chief coach Bahadur Singh, Bahadur Singh Saggi, Krishna Poonia, Jyotirmoyee Sikdar, Uday Prabhu, Praveen Jolly and Gopal Saini as other members. Randhawa had won a gold in decathlon in 1962 Asian Games and finished fifth in 110m hurdles in the 1964 Olympics.

"The role of each and every member of selection committee is very important and hence, we have included former athletes who have plenty of experience for this important role," AFI President Adille Sumariwalla said.

— PTI



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