





## SHORT TAKES

## OPPN BLAMES YSRC OF THREATENING ITS CANDIDATES

From Page 1

Further, 126 ZPTC seats were switched as unanimous, which formed 19.32 per cent of the total seats. The ruling YSRC won 2,217 MPPTC seats unanimously, TD won 101 seats, Jana Sena 4 and others 49 seats, all unanimously.

TD and other parties levelled allegations of YSRC forcing unanimous elections by threatening their candidates and demanded a fresh start for the election process. This halted issuing of winner certificates to the unanimous candidates.

The unopposed-elected candidates knocked on the doors of the high court, which directed the SEC to issue winner certificates while affirming SEC has no right to halt the election process.

Adviser to the government (public affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, ministers Botsa Satyanarayana and other leaders said there were no illegalities in the filing of nominations and in the withdrawal of nominations in the ZPTC/MPPTC elections.

They argued that six days are enough to conduct MPPTC and ZPTC elections as all the processes were complete.

## CALL TO JOIN BHARAT BANDH ON MARCH 26

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 21

The CPI called people to voluntarily join the Bharath Bandh protest on March 26 protesting the anti-people policies of BJP led union government. CPI State secretary K. Ramakrishna lamented that nearly 300 farmers died during the protests against the three black agriculture laws but there is no response from the union government. The CPI leaders, along with activists, conducted a campaign rally in support of bandh in Guntur on Sunday.

Mr Ramakrishna alleged that the BJP government closing 100 Public Sector Units and giving them to private industrialists under privatization scheme, which is severely objectionable as lakhs of people dependent on these PSUs would come onto the roads, reservations would be annulled and further, the government would lose revenue including profits from PSUs. He alleged that the BJP government is trying to privatise ₹1.25 lakh crore worth Vizag Steel lands for only Rs 32,000 crore to private companies and soon the BJP government would give all government companies to private individuals. He lamented that the whole country is against the three black agriculture laws and conducting protests for months but Prime Minister Narendra Modi is indifferent to the agitating farmers.

Ramakrishna demanding the cancellation of three black agriculture laws and stop the privatisation process appealed to people to make the bandh a grand success on March 26.

## CM JAGAN PROMOTING GOONDAISM: TD

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 21

Telugu Desam MLA Anagani Satya Prasad from Repalle on Sunday expressed concern that people of Andhra Pradesh are suffering due to lawless YSRC leaders. He accused Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy of preserving his regime through rowdiness and goondaism, without bothering to improve the living conditions of people.

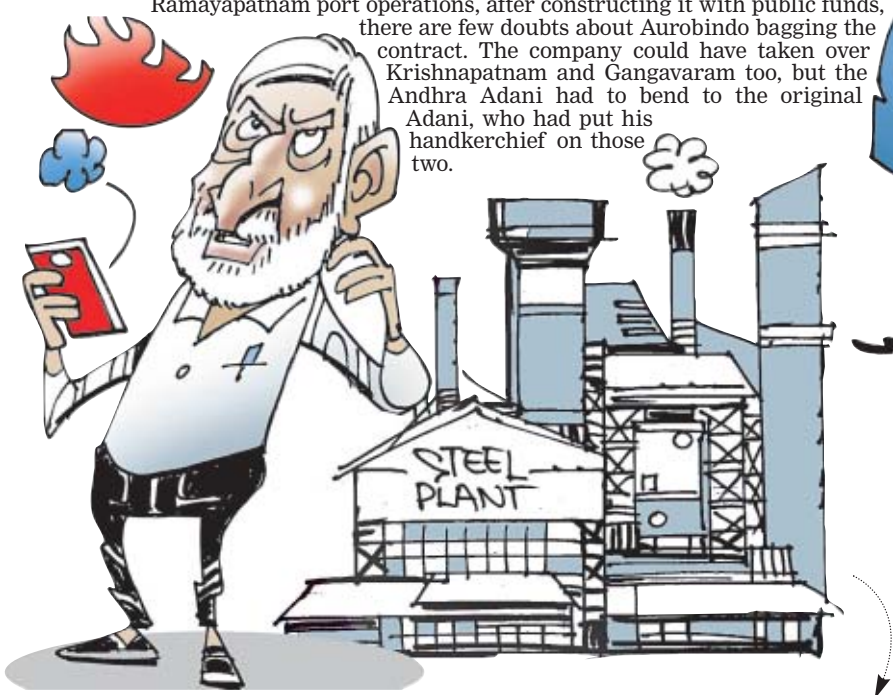
The MLA said no YSRC MP is raising issues of Special Category Status and Railway Zone for AP at the national level. He asked why ruling party MPs are bowing their heads in front of the centre instead of “wringing the necks” of Delhi rulers for special status. He pointed out that the Chief Minister, who raised a hue and cry over Special Category Status for AP before 2019 elections, is now silent about this demand after getting the chief ministership.

Satya Prasad alleged that Jagan Mohan Reddy has betrayed youth of the state by not fulfilling his promise of bringing in industries to AP and creating job opportunities for them.

Further, he said the CM had promised to turn every village in AP into Hyderabad. But Jagan has remained mum on these matters fearing CBI and ED cases against himself, the MLA stated.

Neta's Natter  
GROWING POWER OF 'ANDHRA ADANI'

In the corridors of power and influence in Andhra Pradesh, where political power and money fuse, a new magic passcode does wonders - 'AA'. No, it is not of a model of a battery or even a credit rating but a nickname. 'Andhra Adani' is coded as a reference to a pharma and reality company in power circles of AP these days. The company, Aurobindo Reality and Infrastructure, has been moving aggressively to capture the Andhra coast, one of the longest in the country. The journey began when it first acquired the Kakinada SEZ and a greenfield port, passes through the existing Kakinada deep water port and will soon reach the proposed Ramayapatnam port. That this AA company will bag the engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contract for Ramayapatnam is a foregone conclusion, because the only other bidder, Megha Engineering & Infrastructures Limited (MEIL), quoted a higher amount, as expected. All the other eligible infra companies “stayed away” from the bid, for reasons best known and understood by all in the game. With the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government deciding to privatise the Ramayapatnam port operations, after constructing it with public funds, there are few doubts about Aurobindo bagging the contract. The company could have taken over Krishnapatnam and Gangavaram too, but the Andhra Adani had to bend to the original Adani, who had put his handkerchief on those two.



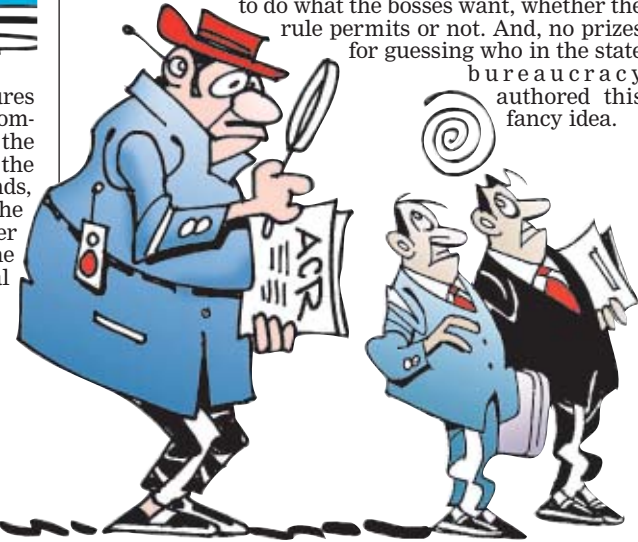
## YSRC VIZAG UNIT HAS NO THANKS TO VIJAYASAI

No one in the ruling YSR Congress, as expected by people keeping a close eye on the inner power dynamics of the party, gave credit to Parliamentarian V. Vijayasai Reddy for the party's victory in the Visakhapatnam civic polls. But it is well understood that the same party won't hesitate blaming his 'foot in mouth' disease, wrong timing of moves and bad strategies in case it faced a debacle. Vijayasai Reddy assumed responsibility of the party in north coastal Andhra but has little work to do in the Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts, given the party being managed by stalwarts like Botsa, Dharmana and Tammineni in those two districts. As there is no strong leader in the party in Visakhapatnam, and minister Avanti Srinivas known to obediently follow all decisions of the party high command or

leave party affairs to Vijayasai Reddy, the latter is having a field day. Electioneering coincided with the agitation to protest against the move to privatise the Vizag Steel Plant, the atmosphere in the city was emotionally surcharged. At this juncture, the ruling party received a shock when Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in a reply to a question in Parliament, made the Centre's resolve to sell 100 per cent stake in VSP loud and clear. This irked the ruling YSRC, which is already under attack for “soft peddling” on the issue. Bizarrely, it was Vijayasai Reddy's question, raised in the Rajya Sabha, that landed the ruling party in an embarrassing situation at the peak of a poll campaign.

## ACRS A NIGHTMARE FOR AIS OFFICERS

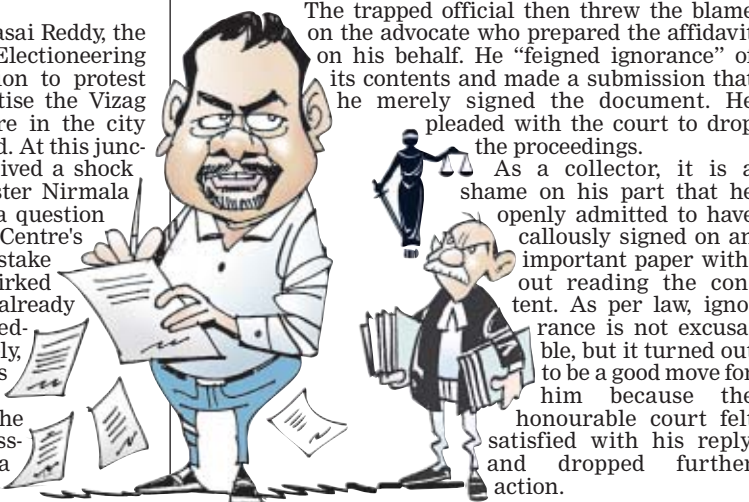
The Andhra Pradesh government is actively considering a new administrative reform that would become the scary stuff of nightmares for officers. It pertains to a crucial document that pervades the careers of All India Services (AIS) officers, known as Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs). Since time immemorial, the ACRs are dealt at different levels based on seniority of the official. While the ACRs of junior officers' are reviewed and accepted by their immediate superiors and the respective heads of departments, reports of officers at the mid-level officers are processed by the HoDs and the Chief Secretary. Only the ACRs of senior officers are sent to the Chief Minister for a final approval. The scuttlebutt is that the Jagan Mohan Reddy government is considering bringing a proposal, according to which, the Chief Minister will be the accepting authority for all the ACRs of all the officers of the IAS, IPS and IFS, irrespective of cadre or seniority. The move could be a double-edged weapon. On the one hand, officers will be more careful in performing their duties or they would be threatened to do what the bosses want, whether the rule permits or not. And, no prizes for guessing who in the state bureaucracy authored this fancy idea.



## 'IGNORANT' COLLECTOR SAVES HIS NECK

The Telangana High Court is continuing to keep babudom in jitters these days, thanks to its proactive approach to resolving long pending issues and using the contempt weapon against recalcitrant and erring officials. The High Court is calling officials to appear personally and grilling them on their inaction in implementing its earlier judgments and decisions, leaving applicants with no option but to knock the doors of the judiciary. In one such recent case, the court summoned Khammam collector R.V. Karnan suo motu in a contempt case. The court took serious objection to the collector for casting aspersions against a judge, in an affidavit filed by him. The collector, however, filed another affidavit, which is as damaging as his earlier act of casting aspersions against a judge.

The trapped official then threw the blame on the advocate who prepared the affidavit on his behalf. He “feigned ignorance” of its contents and made a submission that he merely signed the document. He pleaded with the court to drop the proceedings. As a collector, it is a shame on his part that he openly admitted to have callously signed on an important paper without reading the content. As per law, ignorance is not excusable, but it turned out to be a good move for him because the honourable court felt satisfied with his reply, and dropped further action.



## TCA pitches for BCCI affiliation

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

The Telangana Cricket Association is pushing for the BCCI's affiliation, stating that the Hyderabad Cricket Association does not have a reach in the rural areas of the state.

Proposing a concept of 'rural cricket in global wicket' at a press meet on Sunday, TCA secretary Dharam Guruvu Reddy contended that his association was involved in catering to and nurturing young talent in the districts.

“The reason why we stepped up and started the Telangana Cricket Association is because there was a big gap between the talent available in the districts and the opportunities our players are deprived of in BCCI tournaments,” Guruvu Reddy said. “TCA also gains significance as the structure of HCA is flawed. It is limited to the capital region

and ignores talented players from other parts of the state. There is a need to have BCCI-affiliated presence throughout the state,” he said.

“In terms of membership, conducting tournaments outside Hyderabad, geographical reach, talent search, selection system, infrastructure and transparency, there have been lapses in the HCA,” Reddy alleged. “The TCA has been successful in its ultimate purpose of taking the cricket to the rural areas, in which HCA has miserably failed to deliver. So 85 per cent of the population of the Telangana state requires an association which can cater to the entire state,” he said.

It would be interesting to see how BCCI would act to the TCA's affiliation plea given the state already has a cricket body (HCA) which has jurisdiction over every district of Telangana.

## Azhar flouted many rules as HCA chief

From Page 1

The HCA, under Azhar's corrupt regime, flouted crucial norms relating to the audit of accounts and selection of players and coaches for different levels and tournaments, they alleged.

“Azharuddin has never been acquitted of any of the charges relating to betting by any court in the country,” Guruvu Reddy said, adding that the only “relief he got” from the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh High Court was the scrapping of a life-term ban imposed on him by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

“The HC order remained unchallenged. We will also urge the BCCI to renew the legal battle against Azhar,” Mr Guruvu Reddy said.

The CBI's report on cricket match-fixing and related malpractices, available on the apex bureau's official website, gives detailed confessions of bookies, players and supporting staff, including Azharuddin, who admitted to having met the gang of bookies led by M. K. Gupta and received money and expensive gifts from the latter.

“On further questioning, he (Azhar) accepted

that Ajay Gupta and his associates had approached him sometime to fix matches. Azhar says he does not remember how much money he had received from them. The Pepsi Cup match between India and Pakistan at Jaipur in 1999 was fixed through them. Jadeja and Nayan Mongia were also involved with him in the deal. He was paid around ₹10 lakh after that match by some unknown person on behalf of the Guptas. Azhar admitted that Ameesh Gupta had given him a mobile phone, number 98111-50860, through which he used to contact him during matches,” the CBI report states.

With regard to maintaining transparency in financial matters, Guruvu Reddy alleged that the HCA had been constantly flouting the recommendation of the Lodha Committee on getting the audit done by empanelled auditors of the BCCI and making it public.

The HCA website does not have details of annual financial statements after 2015-2016. On the appointment of coaches and selecting players also, there is gross violation of rules, which we will expose, he added.

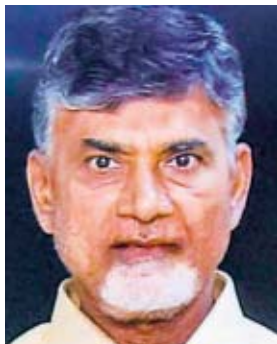
## TD to strengthen party following drubbing

Party's main focus will be on SC, ST, BC cells, women, students

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 21

After receiving a severe drubbing in grama panchayat and municipal elections, Telugu Desam Party has begun the exercise to strengthen its frontal organisations in the 25 parliamentary segments ahead of the ZPTC and MPPTC elections.

The party's main focus will be on SC, ST, BC cells, Telugu Mahila, Telugu Nadu Trade Union Congress and Telugu Nadu Students Federation, said general secretary of Vizag district unit of the party Pasarla Prasad.



N. Chandrababu Naidu

“We have already begun the exercise of selecting leaders for these organisations,” Prasad said.

A coordination committee has been formed with

● A COORDINATION committee has been formed with MLAs and former MLAs as members. The committee will have its first sitting in a day or two to choose persons who would lead the various party organisations.

● THEY WILL also work on removing the deficiencies witnessed in the previous two elections.

MLAs and former MLAs as members. The committee will have its first sitting in a day or two to choose persons who would lead the various party

organisations. These committees will be given a major role in campaigning at various levels in coordination with the state leadership. They will also work on removing the deficiencies witnessed in the previous two elections.

Prasad said subsequently, these organisations will gear up for TDP's Maha Nadu, slated to be held from May 27 to May 29. It could not be physically held in 2019 due to Covid-19. Only a virtual meeting was organised.

“Whether this year's Maha Nadu will be physical or virtual will depend on severity of the second phase of Covid-19,” Prasad stated.

## APPA invites entries for photo contest

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 21

The Andhra Pradesh Photography Akademi (APPA) is conducting *Mana Tri-arnapathaakam-Mana Atmagouravam* (our tricolour-our self-respect) photo competition in memory of the national flag inventor Pingali Venkayya on March 31 in Vijayawada.

APPA general secretary T. Srinivas Reddy said that freedom fighter Pingali Venkayya made the national tricolour flag and presented it to Mahatma Gandhi on 31 May 1921 Victoria Jubilee Museum at Vijayawada during Gandhi's visit to the city.

He said that remembering the 100th anniversary of the tricolour invention, APPA is conducting a

photo competition on March 31 in which old and new photos related to the national flag would be displayed. He stated that Andhra Pradesh Photography Akademi would present certificates to every participant.

He added that interested persons can visit [www.apphotographyakademi.org](http://www.apphotographyakademi.org) or contact 9848074688 for registrations.

● ANDHRA PRADESH Photography Akademi (APPA) is conducting a photo competition on March 31 in which old and new photos related to the national flag would be displayed.

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## With farmers



Actor R. Narayana Murthy watches the photo and cartoon exhibition against the Visakhapatnam steel plant privatisation and farmers protest over farm laws at MBVK Bhavan in Vijayawada on Sunday.

## Kakani extends support to sugarcane farmers

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, MARCH 21

Sarvepalli legislator Kakani Govardhan Reddy promised his support to the sugarcane farmers who have been waging war with the private Sugar Factory in Prabhagiriapatnam of Podalakur mandal for not clearing the outstanding dues to the extent of ₹12 crore. He joined the farmers, staging a demonstration before the factory on

● GOVARDHAN REDDY urged the Collector and other officers to pressure the factory's management to clear the outstanding dues of the farmers, farmhands, and lorry owners.

Sunday. The legislator lambasted the factory management for cheating the farmers while pointing to a

bounced cheque for ₹8.5 crore given to the farmers through the district Collector sometime back.

Govardhan Reddy urged the Collector and other officers to pressure the factory's management to clear the outstanding dues of the farmers, farmhands, and lorry owners.

He alleged that the management has shifted costly equipment from the factory even before repaying the bank loans.



## SHORT TAKES

3 STUDENTS  
DROWN IN BAY  
OF BENGALDC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MARCH 21

In a tragic incident, three students drowned in the Bay of Bengal in Kataripalem beach in Vetapalem mandal in Prakasam district on Sunday evening.

According to the police, five students from Guntur came to the beach around 4.30 pm on Sunday. A tidal wave pulled them into the sea when they were playing in the water. While two among them managed to rush out of the water, three students were washed away in the waves.

The police said that the bodies of one Madduri Bharat Surya Reddy of AT Agrapharam in Guntur and Mogili Usha, 20, of Chuttugunta in Guntur washed ashore after a while. The police launched a search for another person's body, Gattu Mahesh, with the help of fishermen. The Vetapalem police have registered a case and are investigating.

ONE PERSON  
DROWNS IN  
SOMASILA CANALDC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MARCH 21

One person died and three others had a narrow escape when they ventured into the Somasila North Canal for swimming at Chilikamarri village in Anantasagaram mandal of Nellore district.

Jr colleges warned against  
migrations as Covid surges

Since November, over 200 students tested positive, 4,000 Covid tests conducted

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC  
KURNOOL, MARCH 21

As the number of Covid-positive cases is rising among high school and college students, District Educational Officer Santiram has said this was largely due to 'student migrations' affected by private junior colleges.

Chaitanya group of educational institutions has been asked to explain why they were shifting students from Vijayawada, Guntur and other centres to Kurnool, as "most of the corona positive cases were reported from such migration," the DEO said.

Since Saturday, at least five students tested positive from these institutions, said Kurnool DEO Sai Ram. Since November, over 200 students tested positive as also 39 teachers.

The district has 136 private junior colleges and 52 government junior colleges. Besides, there are 143 degree colleges, 11 engineering colleges, 36 ITIs, 13 polytechnic colleges, 44 B.Ed colleges, and Rayalaseema University, Dr Abdul Haq Urud University, Cluster University etc.

Expressing concern over the movement of students in auto-rickshaws mainly by private technical schools, the DEO said schools have been asked to maintain physical distance norm for students in classrooms.

Sai Teja, a Class VIII student at a private technical school, said students in his class were packed like sardines as the school has reduced the number of sections and clubbed more students in a few divisions.

The DEO appealed to parents and students to follow the Covid-19 guidelines. Students should wear face masks and keep sanitiser in their pockets for safety purpose. He also told students particularly those travelling in autos to maintain the physical distance norm once they reached their schools.

District medical and health officer Dr Rama Giddaiah said almost all schools, particularly private ones, were not following the Covid-19 guidelines that caused spread of virus in the district. Large numbers of positive cases were reported in schools in the

recent weeks, he said.

As per records, 29 students including Saturday's 15 cases were tested positive for the virus in the district in the past 72 hours. The DM&HO said 4,000 Covid testings were conducting in a day in the district. Some 6,500 people were taking Covid vaccine every day across the district.

The district collector sought details from every school on Covid status including on the number of tests and the positive cases. If any educational institution fails to maintain Covid guidelines, it will be prosecuted, he warned.

A total of 4,389 schools including 2,438 primary, 941 upper primary and 1,010 high schools functioned in the district. A total of 6,77,122 children have been enrolled in these schools, including 2,65,912 in primary schools, 1,20,644 in upper primary schools and 2,90,566 in high schools.

A total of 24,211 teachers are working in these schools.

All the teachers and students have been advised to go for tests.

1.45 lakh Covid vaccines  
given in Krishna districtDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 21

Krishna collector A. Md. Imtiaz on Sunday said 1.45 lakh Covid vaccine doses have so far been administered in the district. He was speaking after distributing pulse-oximeters to health staff at the new Government General Hospital.

The collector said the increasing number of Covid cases in the district is a matter of great concern. He asked everyone within the district to strictly adhere to Covid guidelines to contain the spread of virus.

Imtiaz said slackness in observing the Covid norms in the recent past have led to increase in Covid positive cases. He urged people to wear masks, ensure social distancing, and use sanitisers. The collector said a study has revealed that people are not following

Imtiaz said slackness in observing the Covid norms in the recent past have led to increase in Covid positive cases. He urged people to wear masks, ensure social distancing, and use sanitisers.

The collector said a study has revealed that people are not following Covid guidelines while attending functions and family gatherings. He appealed to all people in the district to take their Corona vaccine shots without fail as a precautionary measure.

Imtiaz appealed to people above 60 years, apart from people above 45 years and below 59 years with chronic diseases to take the vaccination straightaway.

Covid guidelines while attending functions and family gatherings. He appealed to all people in the district to take their Corona vaccine shots without fail as a precautionary measure.

The collector said that as a pilot project, vaccination is being carried out in Mylavaram and Jaggaipattanam mandals. In Chennamapalem, 708 people have been vaccinated, while in Chilikunta 528 persons received their

shots so far. He said of 1.45 lakh people, 1.06 lakh have taken their first dose of vaccination while 39,000 people have received both the shots.

Imtiaz appealed to people above 60 years, apart from people above 45 years and below 59 years with chronic diseases to take the vaccination straightaway. The collector distributed pulse-oximeters and N-95 masks sponsored by Nestle to the health staff.

Naidu obtained 16 stays in  
cases against him, says AnilDC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MARCH 21

Minister for water resources Dr P. Anil Kumar took a dig at TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu for securing a stay order in the case filed against him related to the acquisition of assigned lands in the Amaravati capital city.

Claiming that Naidu had obtained 16 stays in various cases, Dr Kumar described the former chief minister as 'Babu of Stays' while daring him to face trial if he is not guilty.

The minister expressed the confidence that the YSRC nominee will set a record by securing 4 lakh majority in the ensuing byelection to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat.

He reminded that the YSRC had bagged a majority of seats in the panchayat and municipal elections and history will be repeated in the Tirupati



bypolls.

Dr Kumar cautioned the people to be wary of the possible campaign of Opposition leaders to misguide them in the backdrop of elections in Nellore.

He said that the government would construct a retaining wall at an estimated cost of ₹100 crore to strengthen the banks of Pennar river and protect the people living on the banks.

Dr Kumar said that the flyover being built at Ramalingapuram junction would be completed by Dasara. He said work on a

● The minister expressed the confidence that the YSRC nominee will set a record by securing 4 lakh majority in the ensuing byelection to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat. He reminded that the YSRC had won many seats

four-way road close to Penna Barrage will begin soon, and the Mypadu road will be widened for free flow of traffic.

He said the administration was collecting the opinion of people living on the banks of Sarvepalli canal as 1,200 houses are likely to be affected in view of plans to construct a retaining wall from April. He promised to relocate the families in the nearby areas.

YSR Congress leaders V. Srikanth Reddy, D. Venkateswarlu, K. Pratap Reddy and others were present.

## AP reports 368 Covid positive cases

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 21

AP registered 368 new Covid-19 cases in the past 24 hours ending Sunday morning. The Covid-19 tally increased to 8,93,734 and the number of active cases increased to 2,188. As many as 263 patients have

recovered and the number of recoveries reached 8,84,357 with a recovery rate of 98.95 per cent. The death toll remains at 7,189.

The daily positivity rate was more than 1 per cent. In the past day, 31,138 samples were tested, and 1.18 per cent of them turned positive. The overall posi-

tivity rate of 1.47,36,326 samples tested in AP was 6.06 per cent.

After Chittoor, Guntur has been witnessing a continuous surge in the daily Covid-19 infections. Chittoor district registered 79 new Covid-19 infections in the past 24 hours. It was followed by Kurnool with

49 new Covid-19 infections, Anantapur with 40, Chittoor with 40, Visakhapatnam registered 39, Krishna reported 37, East Godavari 20, Nellore 20, Kadapa 10, Srikakulam 10, Vizianagaram 9, West Godavari 9 and Prakasam district registered 6 new Covid-19 cases.

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## SHORT TAKES

YOUNG ENGINEERS  
MUST FOLLOW  
PASSION: PREZAKSHAYA KUMAR  
SAHOO | DC  
ROURKELA, MARCH 21

President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday exhorted budding engineers of the country to ardently follow their passions to be more productive and innovative in their career.

Addressing the 18th annual convocation ceremony of National Institute of Technology (NIT) in Odisha's Rourkela, the President said, "I advise you to never judge your success only in terms of material gains. You don't have to limit yourself by the pressures of conventional notions of success and societal pressures. You need to figure out what you really want to do in your life. Choose to do what gives you satisfaction and meaningfulness. Do what takes you closer to your aspirations. Do what makes your families proud of you. Plan for yourself a fruitful and productive path ahead."

The President praised the institute for its achievements and also advised the students to undertake more research-oriented and innovative initiatives.

"As the second largest government-run Technology Institute in Eastern India, NIT Rourkela has made significant contributions to the field of engineering and technology. For over six decades, this engineering college has been enriching the pool of technical professionals in the country," the President said.

"I am pleased to know that NIT Rourkela has students from 33 out of the total 36 states and Union Territories of India. I am told that students of 17 different countries are also enrolled in various academic disciplines," the President said.

WHAT KIND OF RAM  
RAJYA IS THIS,  
RAUT ON U.P. CASE

**Mumbai, March 21:** Expressing disappointment over the incident of a Muslim boy being beaten up mercilessly for drinking water at a temple in Uttar Pradesh, Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday asked what kind of 'Ram rajya' is this.

He said the incident showed that some people belittle India's image by indulging in communal polarisation.

"This incident happened in a land where a temple dedicated to Lord Ram is coming up. What kind of Ram rajya is this?" he asked in his weekly column "Rokhthok" in Sena mouthpiece *Saamana*.

"What kind of Hindu religion are we representing?" he further asked.

In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee is called anti-Hindu because she refuses to chant 'Jai Shri Ram'. But denial of water to a young boy and mercilessly thrashing him is also anti-Hindu, Raut said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi touches upon different issues in his 'Mann ki Baat' radio programme.

"Hope he speaks on this issue too," he added.

"We are against Pakistan and not against Muslims. Communal polarisation is done to win elections in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal," he alleged.

Pawar hints at Deshmukh's  
exit over Bir's allegations

Final call will likely be taken today after meet with Jayant Patil, Ajit Pawar

SONU  
SHRIVASTAVA | DC  
with agency inputs  
MUMBAI, MARCH 21

Nationalist Congress Party supremo Sharad Pawar on Sunday indicated that Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh could be asked to step down in the wake of extortion allegations against him. Former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh has alleged that Deshmukh had given a collection target of ₹100 crore per month to some Mumbai police officers, including Sachin Waze.

"Serious allegations have been made against the home minister by the police authority. Also, there are a series of lapses which are brought to the notice of the media... It also affects the reputation of the Mumbai police. I honestly feel there has to be an in-depth inquiry. The inquiry should be made by such a person who enjoys full respect in the police administration and the public at large. I have spoken to chief minister Uddhav Thackeray about the developments," Pawar said.

Asked about Deshmukh's ouster from the Cabinet, Pawar said it was the CM's prerogative. "The final decision on Deshmukh will be taken by Monday," he said.

Pawar suggested the name of former Mumbai police commissioner Julio Ribeiro to probe the charges levelled by Singh. The MVA constituents don't want the Centre to step in, therefore Ribeiro's name has been suggested to counter the claims of unfair investigation by state agencies.

When asked if the CBI would probe this case, Pawar said that Julio Ribeiro's name was above the CBI or any other agency.

The decision regarding



BJP workers protest against Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh in Pune on Sunday, following the allegations levelled by former Mumbai police commissioner Parambir Singh.

Raut says Bir's letter, Waze  
case tainted MVA's image

**Mumbai, March 21:** Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday admitted that the allegations made by former Mumbai police chief Param Bir Singh against minister Anil Deshmukh, and the Sachin Waze case have tainted the image of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in the state, and said all allies need to introspect if their feet are on the ground.

Talking to reporters, he also said that "something needs to be rectified" and the ruling allies should come together to discuss how these stains can be washed off.

"Such allegations against the government or ministers are unfortunate and shocking. The contents (of Singh's letter) are sensational," he said. "The veracity of the letter's contents will be do-

ne by the CM and Sharad Pawar. The MVA government has completed a year-and-a-half now and all allies need to introspect if their feet are on the ground," he said.

Raut said police administration is the backbone of any government. The backbone is symbol of pride and self-respect and the government should always strengthen it, he added.

— PTI

PAWAR TRYING  
TO SAVE MAHA  
GOVT: FADNAVIS

**Nagpur, March 21:** Senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said NCP chief Sharad Pawar was trying to save the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in view of allegations of corruption levelled by former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh against state home minister Anil Deshmukh.

Speaking to reporters here, Fadnavis contested Pawar's assertion that neither Uddhav Thackeray nor Deshmukh was responsible for reinstating controversial police officer Sachin Waze in the Mumbai police force last year.

— PTI

## BJP earmarks ₹10K for refugees in WB manifesto

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC  
KOLKATA, MARCH 21

Using its manifesto "Sonar Bangla Sonkolpo Potro 2021" to end the TMC's rule in West Bengal, the BJP on Sunday promised to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act in its first Cabinet meeting if it comes to power in the state.

Amit Shah, releasing the manifesto in Kolkata on Sunday, with an eye on the votebank of Hindu migrants, also said the BJP would earmark ₹10,000 as annual financial aid to each refugee family for five years and a monthly pension of ₹3,000 to Matuas and Dalpatis, while wooing Gorkha communities with recognition to 11 sub-tribes under the Scheduled Caste category.

Free public transport for women, a hike in widow pension from

₹1,000 to ₹3,000 and a 33 per cent quota for women also found a place in the BJP's manifesto.

Other key sops include an end to infiltration, official language status of Bengali, implementation of the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi and Ayushman Bharat, building three new AIIMS in Bengal (North Bengal, Jangal Mahal and Sunderbans), award of the Seventh Pay Commission hikes for state government staff, no fee for girls from KG to PG in government schools, Bengali to be made mandatory in school education till Class 10. The BJP will also probe corruption in Central funds allocated for Cyclone Amphan and other calamities and compensation, apart from providing compensation of ₹25 lakh for each family which lost a member in political violence.

Congress plays local cards  
in its Assam manifestoMANOJ ANAND | DC  
GUWAHATI, MARCH 21

Congress, which released its manifestos for Assam on Saturday, played strong local cards — promising to stop the implementation of CAA and safeguard indigenous identity of people in Assam while promising a "gaushalas"— shelter for cows in every district.

The Congress manifesto has also promised 5 lakh government jobs, a monthly income of ₹2,000 to housewives and 200 units of free electricity.

For tea garden workers, the Congress has prom-

ised a daily wage of ₹365.

Releasing the Congress manifesto at the party's office in Guwahati, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi while concluding his two-days long visit to Assam said that his party will protect the idea of Assam that is being "attacked" by the BJP and RSS.

"We are aware that the RSS and BJP are attacking diverse cultures of this nation. Attacking our languages, history, our way to thinking, and our way of being. So this manifesto provides a guarantee that we will defend the idea of

the state of Assam," he said.

Terming his party's manifesto as the "people's manifesto", Gandhi said that the manifesto contains the "aspirations of the people of Assam".

The Congress has also promised to waive off debt for women who have taken loans from microfinance banks, to provide free of cost of yarn, loom and other equipment to weavers, free of cost state transport for all women, agricultural debt will be waived-off for farmers, to revive two paper mills again among other sops.

Raj. imposes night  
curfew in 8 towns  
as Covid cases riseDC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

India on Sunday saw biggest rise in daily cases in four months as 43,846 fresh Covid-19 cases and 197 more deaths were reported in the last 24 hours. Among those to test positive was Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, who has been admitted to the AIIMS Covid-19 centre for observation. His parameters are normal.

In view of the rising numbers, Rajasthan has imposed night curfew in eight towns — Ajmer, Bhilwara, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kota, Udaipur, Sagwara and Kushalgarh — while markets will remain closed after 10 pm from March 22 in areas under all city municipal corporations. The Gujarat government has announced that Holi celebrations in the state will be restricted and no permission will be granted due to the surge in Covid-19 cases though "Holika Dahan" can take place with crowd restrictions.

Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh account for 77.7 per cent of the new cases in the last 24 hours. Maharashtra continues to report the highest daily new cases at 27,126, followed by Punjab with 2,578 while Kerala reported 2,078 new cases. AIIMS director Randeep Guleria blamed large crowds, carelessness on the part of people and mutant virus strains for the latest Covid-19 surge.

"There is a loss of Covid-appropriate behaviour. Now people feel that the pandemic is over because vaccines are here. They fail to wear masks. We see large crowds gathering — again without masks. Many crowded events have become super-spreader events. The other issue is we are become lax in the basic principle of testing, tracking, and isolating than we were six months ago. The third point is that the virus itself is mutating and some of the variants are more infectious," Dr Guleria told a TV channel.

MP BRACES FOR 2nd  
WAVE, GOVT MULLS  
OVER STRICT CURBSRABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY | DC  
BHOPAL, MARCH 21

Madhya Pradesh is gearing up to prevent the second Coronavirus wave with the state government mulling several measures including weekend lockdowns and deferment of opening of primary schools.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday indicated that the state may revert to old restrictions if pandemic situation showed sign of strong resurgence.

"Strong measures may be undertaken to prevent a second Coronavirus wave in the state", he said.

Chouhan, however, said the state government would try to avoid taking any steps that would cause economic disruption for the people as well as the state.

Chouhan on Sunday hit the road to enforce Covid guidelines such as wearing of mask and social distancing by the people. He was seen moving around the city appealing people to strictly follow the guidelines.

Meanwhile, with several people testing positive daily at the Kumbh Mela, the Centre on Sunday directed the Uttarakhand government to follow stringent measures and increase testing to control the spread of Covid-19 at the religious gathering.

In his letter to the Uttarakhand chief secretary Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan, highlighting the concerns raised by the high-level Central team after its visit to the state and about the need of stringent measures to control the spread of Covid-19 during ongoing Kumbh Mela in Haridwar.



The ill-fated ambulance that met with the accident. — DC

IF AIADMK WINS,  
IT WILL BE BJP'S  
VICTORY: STALIN

**Kancheepuram (TN):** Even if the AIADMK emerged victorious in a single seat, the victor would be a 'BJP MLA' and hence people should vote for his party and its allies in the April 6 Assembly polls, DMK president M.K. Stalin appealed to the electorate here on Sunday.

In his campaign at Uthiramerur, Stalin said he had been saying that his party-led combine would win 200 out of 234 segments in TN. However, considering the feedback from the people to his continuous campaign across the state, he said, "only we are going to win in all 234 constituencies."

— PTI

PM TO LAUNCH  
'CATCH THE RAIN'  
CAMPAIGN TODAY

**New Delhi, March 21:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the "Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain" campaign on the World Water Day on Monday. The historic MoU to implement the Ken Betwa Link Project, the first project of the national perspective plan for interlinking of rivers, will also be signed by UP and MP Chief Ministers at the event.

The PMO said in a statement that the campaign will be undertaken across the country in both rural and urban areas with the theme "catch the rain, where it falls, when it falls". It will be implemented from March 22 to November 30 — the pre-monsoon and monsoon period in the country. It will be launched as a 'Jan Andolan' (public movement).

— PTI

## POLL | VOW

Rahul Gandhi congratulated Baghel and his govt for keeping up the party's promise

## C'garh CM fulfils ₹5,600 cr promise to farmers

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

The Chhattisgarh state government on Saturday fulfilled its promise of providing ₹5,600 crore to farmers in the state under the Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana, a scheme to provide financial support to farmers.

Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Saturday, during a programme at his residence-cum-office in Raipur, digitally transferred ₹1,104.27 crore as the fourth and last installment of Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana (RGKNY) into the bank accounts of more than 19 lakh farmers of the state, keeping the promise of financial aid to farmers under the scheme.

Also transferred was ₹7.55 crore as the 15th and 16th instalments of the Godhan Nyay Yojana into the accounts of cattle rearers. So far, ₹80.42 crore have been paid to the cattle rear-



Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel chairs a meeting for the digital transfer of the fourth and last installment of RGKNY at his residence-cum-office in Raipur.

ers. Lok Sabha MP Rahul Gandhi in his virtual message congratulated the Chief Minister and his government for keeping up the party's promise.

"Today, we have fulfilled the promise of providing

₹5,600 crore to the farmers of Chhattisgarh. At a time when the Central government has brought three laws which are against the farmers, I am happy that Chhattisgarh government has taken up the path of helping the farmers, small

businessmen, youths and poor people. This has resulted in strengthening the rural economy of the state by putting money in it. As a result, Chhattisgarh is not facing the problems that other states are witnessing. I congratulate the

people of the state and the government for this achievement," Gandhi said.

The Chief Minister in his address said that after coming to power, his government had promised that farmers will get the actual price of their produce. Under the RGKNY, 19 lakh farmers were provided ₹5,627 crore as agricultural input assistance.

"Today I am satisfied that we have fulfilled the promise made to the farmers. We have proved that we do not make false promises," he said.

Appreciating the schemes, Congress leader and Chhattisgarh in-charge P.L. Punia said that the Parliament standing committee on agriculture has also suggested the implementation of these schemes in all states.

The Chief Minister added that farmers have been paid ₹4,500 crore in three installments under the

scheme before Saturday. The RGKNY was implemented from May 21, 2020, to provide agricultural input assistance to farmers and to increase production and productivity of major crops of the state.

Under the RGKNY, farmers reaping paddy in Kharif 2019 were paid in installments directly into their bank account at the rate of ₹10,000 per acre on the basis of the acreage obtained through cooperative society.

In all, under this scheme, 18.38 lakh farmers including 9.54 lakh marginal farmers, 5.60 lakh small farmers, and 3.21 lakh large farmers, have been paid ₹4,500 crore in three installments as input assistance and 4,777 certified seed growers have been paid ₹23.62 crore in three installments. In this way, ₹4,523.62 crore has been paid to a total of 18.43 lakh farmers in three instalments.



SHORT TAKES

METEOR STREAKS OVER CUBA, CAUSES BLAST

**Havana, March 21:** What is believed to be a meteor lit the sky over eastern Cuba and caused an explosion, scientists on the island said on Saturday. There were no reports of damage or injury.

The head of the National Seismological Service, Enrique Arango Arias, told the official Cubadebate news site that the phenomenon was noticed in the towns of Moa, Sagua de Tanamo and Maisi.

He said the service's instruments "registered the expansive wave" of the explosion. Social media users reported seeing red and white light followed by an explosion at about 10:06 pm local time Friday.

PHILADELPHIA GUNFIRE KILLS 1, INJURES 5

**Philadelphia (US), March 21:** Gunfire at an illegal large gathering in Philadelphia killed one person, wounded five others and sent scores of people fleeing, authorities said.

The gunfire erupted around 3:45 am on Saturday inside and outside a rental hall adjacent to Hot Pot Cuisine in north Philadelphia's Nicetown neighborhood, police officials said.

A 29-year-old man was shot 14 times and was pronounced dead minutes later at Temple University Hospital, police said. Three men ages 33, 38, and 41 and a 30-year-old woman were also shot; all were stable at hospitals, police said.

Police Commissioner Daniel Le Outlaw told reporters that at least 150 people fled for their lives. She said that such large gatherings are illegal under Covid-19 orders.

EXPLOSION IN IRAN KILLS 1, WOUNDS 3

**Iran, March 21:** An explosion Sunday killed one person and wounded three others in the Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchistan, state TV reported, as details about the incident remained scarce.

The TV report described the explosion that struck a public square in the city of Saravan as a blind terrorist act that killed a pedestrian. It wasn't immediately clear who was behind the apparent attack.

Sistan and Baluchistan province is a well-worn trafficking route for drugs and petrol and has been the scene of occasional clashes between Iranian government forces and militant groups. The province is also where a Sunni separatist group affiliated with al-Qaeda and known as Jeish al-Adl, or Army of Justice, operates.

TURKISH POLICE DETAIN LEADER STAGING SIT-IN

**Istanbul, March 21:** Turkish police have detained a prominent pro-Kurdish party politician who was staging a days-long protest in parliament.

Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu, from the Peoples' Democratic Party, or HDP, refused to leave parliament after he was stripped of his status and immunity as lawmaker on Wednesday. The party said around 100 police officers entered parliament to detain him Sunday.

Video of his detention showed police officers dragging him away. The party, which is in the throes of a government crackdown, said Gergerlioglu was detained as he was performing his ablutions for morning prayers. "The police took him away in his pajamas and slippers," the HDP said.

PHILIPPINES: 200 CHINA VESSELS AT REEF IN SCS

**Manila, March 21:** The Philippine government expressed concern after spotting more than 200 Chinese fishing vessels it believed were crewed by militias at a reef claimed by both countries in the South China Sea, but it did not immediately lodge a protest.

A government body overseeing the disputed region said late Saturday that about 220 Chinese vessels were seen moored at Whitsun Reef on March 7. It released pictures of the vessels in one of the most hotly contested areas of the waterway. The reef, which Manila calls Julian Felipe, is a boomerang-shaped and shallow coral region about 175 nautical miles west of Bataraza town in the western Philippine province of Palawan.

US ups base security after Iran threat



A District of Columbia Fire Boat checks buoys in the waterway next to Fort McNair, seen in background in Washington. Iran has made threats against Fort McNair, a US army base in Washington DC, and against the Army's vice chief of staff. The threats are one reason the Army has been pushing for more security around the base, which sits alongside the bustling Waterfront district of Washington DC.

US def chief arrives in Kabul

**Kabul, March 21:** US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived Sunday in Kabul on his first trip to Afghanistan as Pentagon chief, amid swirling questions about how long American troops will remain in the country.

State-owned Radio and Television Afghanistan and popular TOLO Television reported Austin's arrival in Kabul from India. He met with senior Afghan government officials, including President Ashraf Ghani.

According to the *Washington Post*, which was among the small group of US media travelling with him, Austin said senior US officials want to see "a responsible end to this conflict" and "a transition to something else".

I think there is a lot of energy focused on doing what is necessary to bring about a responsible end and a negotiated settlement to the war.

— LLOYD AUSTIN  
US Defence Secretary

President Joe Biden said last week in an *ABC News* interview that it will be "tough" for the US to meet a May 1 deadline to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. But he said that if the deadline, which is laid out in an agreement between former President Donald Trump's administration and the Taliban, is extended, it wouldn't be by a "lot longer."

In response, the Taliban on Friday warned of consequences if the US doesn't meet the deadline. Suhail Shaheen, a member of the Taliban negotiation team, told reporters that if US troops stay beyond

May 1, "it will be a kind of violation of the agreement. That violation would not be from our side. ... Their violation will have a reaction."

Austin met with Ghani and according to a statement released by the presidential palace both sides condemned the increase in violence in Afghanistan. There was no mention of the May 1 deadline. Washington is reviewing the agreement the Trump administration signed with the Taliban last year and has been stepping up pressure on both sides in the protracted conflict to find a swift route to a peace agreement.

TIES SEVERED: N. KOREANS LEAVE MALAYSIA

**Kuala Lumpur, March 21:** North Korean diplomats vacated their embassy in Malaysia and prepared to leave the country Sunday, after the two nations cut diplomatic ties over the extradition of a North Korean criminal suspect to the US.

The North Korean flag and embassy signage have been removed from the premise. Two buses ferried the diplomats and their families to the airport, where they were seen checking in for a flight to Shanghai. Ties have been virtually frozen since the 2017 assassination of the estranged half brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Kuala Lumpur.

Man accused of 1 murder says he really killed 16

**Woodbury (US), March 21:** A man charged with beating to death a New Jersey resident he says sexually abused him as a child now claims he has killed a total of 16 people, including his ex-wife and three others in New Mexico, officials said.

Authorities have not corroborated that claim. Sean Lannon, 47, said he killed the four whose remains were found in a vehicle at an airport and "11 other individuals" in New Mexico, Alec Gutierrez, an assistant prosecutor in Gloucester County, New Jersey, said during a detention hearing Friday, NJ.com reported. Authorities said in court documents that Lannon made the admission

in a phone call to a relative, who told investigators he expressed remorse. Lannon had been sought after the discovery of the four bodies but has been charged only with the death in New Jersey. His lawyer says Lannon was provoked.

Police Lt David Chavez in Lannon's hometown of Grants, New Mexico, said authorities have no indication that his claims

about 11 other killings are true and that they aren't aware of any missing-person or homicide reports that would fit his narrative. "Is it possible? Sure, it's possible. Is it probable? No, probably not," Chavez told the *Albuquerque Journal*, saying authorities would investigate.

It was a twist in a case that spans the country. A search for Lannon ended with his arrest in St Louis on March 10.

He was driving a car stolen from New Jersey victim Michael Dabkowski, who mentored Lannon and his twin brother through a Big Brothers programme in the 1980s, *NJ.com* reported.

Migrant surge: Biden on his heels

**Washington, March 21:** Somehow, they didn't see it coming. Within weeks of Inauguration Day on Jan. 20, the Biden administration had reversed many of the most maligned Trump-era immigration policies, including deporting children seeking asylum who arrived alone at the US-Mexico border and forcing migrants to wait in Mexico as they made their case

to stay in the US.

While the administration was working on immigration legislation to address long-term problems, it didn't have an on-the-ground plan to manage a surge of migrants. Career immigration officials had warned there could be a surge after the presidential election and the news that the Trump policies were being reversed.

Now, officials are scrambling to build up capacity to care for some 14,000 migrants now in federal custody — and more likely on the way — and the administration finds itself on its heels in the face of criticism that it should have been better prepared to deal with a predictable predicament.

"They should have forecasted for space (for young

migrants) more quickly," said Ronald Vitiello, a former acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and chief of Border Patrol who has served in Republican and Democratic administrations. "And I think in hindsight, maybe they should have waited until they had additional shelter space before they changed the policies."

TRUE | STORIES Book tracks alleged offenders wanted in India to stand trial

Indian fugitives who escaped to the UK

**London, March 21:** A new book on some high-profile as well as lesser-known Indian extradition cases attempts to decode why the UK is considered a safe haven for those wanting to escape the law in India. 'Escaped: True stories of Indian fugitives in London', released worldwide, tracks 12 cases involving alleged offenders wanted in India to stand trial for offences ranging from loan defaults to murder. The book, by London-based journalists and researchers Danish and Ruhi Khan, includes a recap of the more recent cases involving former Kingfisher

Airlines boss Vijay Mallya and diamond merchant Nirav Modi, wanted in India on fraud and money laundering charges, as well as some historic ones including those of former Indian Naval officer Ravi Shankaran and musician Nadeem Saifi.

"These 12 cases were chosen as much for the significance of the allegations against them as for the interesting arguments raised during their hearings and the observations made in their judgments," said Danish Khan. "We have studied in much detail many other extradition cases, have had long inter-

views with experts and pored over case laws and parliamentary reports to understand the principles underlying the extradition process that we explore in our last chapter," he said.

As journalists covering the recent court cases in London, the couple said they drew on their own observations and reporting and also dug into British archives, old newspaper records and parliamentary reports to review cases dating back to the 1950s that have had a significant impact on the India-UK extradition policy.

"We have used investigative reporting and eye-wit-

ness accounts to bring to life the stories of the flamboyant billionaire Vijay Mallya and diamond czar Nirav Modi. We have also made extensive use of the British archives and historical newspapers reports to bring into focus the less heard but extremely important and intriguing stories of other fugitives that throw a spotlight on India over the past seven decades — whether it is the underworld-cricket-Bollywood nexus or the Indo-Pak diplomatic wars," said Ruhi.

Among some of the past extradition cases is that of a key lieutenant of Dawood

Myanmar docs' march peaceful

One person shot dead at a rally elsewhere

**Mandalay, March 21:** A peaceful march at dawn on Sunday by medical professionals in Myanmar's second biggest city kicked off another day of protests around the country against last month's coup. Security forces shot dead at least one person at a rally elsewhere.

With public protests getting ever more dangerous, anti-coup demonstrators in Mandalay acted early to minimize the risk of confrontation with security forces. The independent Assistance Association for Political Prisoners had verified 247 deaths nationwide linked to the post-coup crackdown.

The actual total, including cases where verification has been difficult, is probably much higher, it said. It also has confirmed that 2,345 people have been arrested or charged, with 1,994 still detained or sought for arrest. About 100 doctors, nurses, medical students and pharmacists, wearing the long white coats, lined up on a main road in Mandalay to chant slogans and proclaim their opposition to the Feb. 1 coup that toppled the elected civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The army takeover reversed the slow progress towards democracy that began when Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won a 2015 election after five decades

Cops use tear gas to end Thai protest

**Bangkok, March 21:** Scores of people were injured and arrested in the Thai capital after police used water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets Saturday night to break up a rally by pro-democracy protesters calling for the release of detained activists, constitutional changes and reform of the nation's monarchy.

The rally outside Bangkok's Grand Palace was a continuation of student-led protests that began last year and have rattled Thailand's traditional establishment, which is fiercely opposed to change, especially with regard to the monarchy.

The rally organisers had said they planned to have demonstrators throw paper planes with messages over the palace walls.

The demonstrators, who numbered close to 1,000, managed to break through a barrier made of shipping containers outside the ceremonial palace stacked two high.

Police behind the containers responded first with warnings and then by shooting water cannons and rubber bullets.

Police drove the crowd back and while skirmishes continued, the crowds appeared to have dissipated by 10 PM.

NEW SOUTH WALES HIT BY RAINS, FLOODS

**Sydney, March 21:** Australia's most populous state of New South Wales on Sunday issued more evacuation orders following the worst flooding in decades.

The New South Wales State Emergency Services responded to 640 calls for help on Saturday night, including 66 for flood rescues.

New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said that hundreds of people have been rescued from the waters.

Evacuation orders have been issued at multiple locations on the Mid North Coast in the northeast of the state, which Berejiklian said was experiencing a one-in-a-100-year event, and whilst we don't think things will worsen on the Mid North Coast, definitely conditions will continue, so the rainfall will continue across the parts that have already been affected. Berejiklian also said that parts of Western Sydney are being hit by a one-in-50-year weather event, with some locations recorded more than 11.8 inches of rain since Friday morning, breaking records.

The Warragamba dam, west of Sydney, started overflowing on Sunday and so far, 13 evacuation centres have been opened across the state. More evacuations are expected as the bad weather is forecast to last into the middle of the week. Local authorities are urging people not to drive.

Pak bans travel from 12 countries

**Islamabad, March 21:** Pakistan imposed a complete ban on travel from 12 countries, including South Africa, Rwanda and Tanzania, in a bid to curb the spike of Coronavirus cases as the country on Sunday recorded 3,667 new cases, taking the national tally to 626,802.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) notified a fresh list of countries categorised into A, B and C after emergence of South African and Brazilian strain of the virus and imposed a complete ban on travel from 12 countries, categorised as C.

The travel restrictions and a ban on inbound passengers from 12 countries will remain effective from March 23 to April 5. Botswana, Brazil, Columbia, Comoros, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Peru, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia have been placed in category C. The CAA in its notification said there will be a complete travel ban on inbound travel to

IMRAN, FIRST LADY HAVE MILD SYMPTOMS

**Islamabad, March 21:** Prime Minister Imran Khan and First Lady Bushra Bibi are feeling "comfortable with mild symptoms", his top communication aide said on Sunday, a day after they tested positive for the Covid-19. Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Political Communication Dr Shahbaz Gill, in a tweet in Urdu, said that the prime minister and the first lady are thankful to their well-wishers for their good wishes.

Rallies against Atlanta shootings

**Atlanta, March 21:** A diverse crowd gathered Saturday near the Georgia state Capitol to demand justice for the victims of recent shootings at mass-age businesses and to denounce racism, xenophobia and misogyny. Hundreds of people of all ages and varied racial and ethnic backgrounds gathered in Liberty Plaza in Atlanta, and in similar rallies across the country, waving signs and chanting slogans.

In Atlanta, they cheered US Sens. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, and Georgia state Rep Bee Nguyen, the first Vietnamese American to serve in the Georgia House.

Another person was shot but survived. Investigators have said Long confessed to the slayings but said they weren't racially motivated. He claimed to have a sex addiction, which caused him to lash out at what he saw as sources of temptation, according to authorities. Police have said they're still working to establish a motive, including looking into whether the attacks can be classified as hate crimes.

Georgia lawmakers last year passed a hate crimes law allowing additional penalties for certain offences when motivated by a victim's race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender or disability. A hate crime is not a standalone crime under Georgia law, but can be used to add time to a sentence of someone convicted of another crime.

● IN ATLANTA, they cheered US Senators Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, and Georgia state Rep Bee Nguyen, the first Vietnamese American to serve in the Georgia House.

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quick  
BITES

## INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	49,858.24	1.30
Nifty 50	14,744.00	1.28
S&P 500*	3,913.10	-0.06
Dollar (₹)	72.48	0.25
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.99	0.25
Euro (₹)	86.47	0.16
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,580▼168	0.37
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.04	1.20
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.193	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.730	0.001

\* As of Friday/Saturday

BioNTech sees  
lockdowns going  
by late summer

The US and many European countries will probably be in a position to end Covid-19 lockdowns at the end of summer, said BioNTech SE CEO chief Ugur Sahin. Overall, though, "it will take at least a year to get the situation under control worldwide," Sahin, whose company is Pfizer Inc's vaccine-making partner, told *Welt am Sonntag*. While virus mutations will emerge, "we are already preparing for that today."

Airtel adds 6.9 mn  
active users in  
Jan, extends gain

Bharti Airtel added 6.9 million active users in January, extending its market lead on this count even as Jio's active subscribers tally declined by about 3.4 million, Trai data shows. With this, Bharti's active subscribers rose to 336 mn, most of which was driven by total net adds, ICICI Securities said. Active subscribers declined for Jio after rising in the previous two months by 3.2 mn in Dec. and 5.4 mn in Nov, said JM Financial.

ITC can be used  
to discharge GST  
dues for March

The finance ministry said GST taxpayers can utilise the Input Tax Credit available in their credit ledger to discharge their GST dues for the month of March. Taxpayers are free to utilise the ICT available in their credit ledger, as permissible in law, to discharge their GST dues for March, the last month of this financial year, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) said in a statement.

Future moves  
division bench  
of Delhi HC

The Future Group has moved the division bench of the Delhi High Court against the order passed by the single-member bench, which has directed to stay its Rs 24,713 crore deal with Reliance Industries to sell its retail and wholesale business. Future Retail Ltd has now filed an appeal before the higher bench of the same High Court against the orders passed by a single-member bench of Justice J. R. Midha.

■ Year of Covid swells capital flow, investor numbers  
Pandemic boost for marketRAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MARCH 21

One year of pandemic and lockdown seemed to have unlocked Indian Capital market's hidden potential in many ways, as the market grew to a far bigger size in these 12 months, thanks to the bull run in the global market.

Working from home and in search of little extra income, a new breed of retail investors joined the capital market in hordes last year, with their numbers swelling by more than 1.51 crore to over 6.36 crore, as per BSE data.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies crossed Rs 200 crore for the first time during this period.

The NSE average daily turnover in the capital market segment has been rising consistently month over month from Rs 47,917 crore in March 2020 to Rs 81,373 crore in February 2021.

The largest-ever foreign investment in a financial year has also taken place in FY21 with foreign portfolio investors investing Rs 2,77,752 crore in the equity market so far.

Retail investors' matured approach has led to some profit taking from equity mutual funds but due to consistent inflows from the foreign portfolio investors, it has not led to any negative impact on the market.

"SIP asset under management (AUM) as also retail equity folios, are at an all-time high at Rs 4.21 lakh crore and 8.07 crore, respectively, and overall net average AUMs is at all time high at Rs 32.29 lakh crore," as per the Association of Mutual



## At \$36 bn, FPI inflows highest since FY13

FC BANKING BUREAU  
WITH AGENCY INPUTS  
MUMBAI, MARCH 21

Foreign portfolio investors have pumped in a record \$36 billion into equities so far this fiscal up to March 10, the highest since FY13, shows the latest data from the Reserve Bank.

According to analysts, the major factors driving the FPI flows are the abundant global liquidity, abysmally low interest rates in the developed world and the ultra-loose monetary policy being followed by the leading central banks.

There is a gush of liquidity in the global financial markets after the US this month announced a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package.

"Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) made net pur-

chases in the equity segment so far this fiscal, while have been net sellers in the debt market during the period. Cumulatively, FPIs have pumped in a record \$36 billion into equities so far this fiscal up to March 10, which is the highest since FY13," said an RBI bulletin.

The report further notes that the quality of FPI inflows improved during the period, as category-I foreign investors—comprising central banks, sovereign wealth funds, pension funds, regulated entities and multilateral organisation—increased their stake to a high 95 per cent of total equity assets at end-February compared with 87 per cent at end-December 2019.

Khsitij Purohit, product manager currency & commodity, CapitalVia Global

Research, said, higher oil prices are taking Indian economy down due to reduced household disposable income, which is trimming corporate margins, putting pressure on the USD-INR pair. On the other hand, higher US yields are raising the cost of financing in US dollars, which is increasing the cost of trades in the emerging markets..If US bond yields continue to rise along with rising oil prices, it can trigger outflows from Indian debt and even Indian equity.

Net FDI inflows jumped to \$44 billion, till end January, up from \$36.3 billion a year ago, driven by the massive inflows in November and December, with the last month of the year getting a record \$6.3 billion. But the inflows moderated in January.

like Telangana (75.69 per cent), Assam (73.32 per cent) and Mizoram (73.12 per cent) new investors were added at a faster rate during the past one year. New investors have been added from all states at the rate of 20 per cent to 75 per cent.

Negative-yield quote causes  
flutter in Indian bond marketSUBHADIP SIRCAR  
MARCH 21

A negative yield was quoted for the first time ever on India's sovereign bond trading platform on Friday, traders said, triggering intense speculation about the motive.

The 6.17 per cent bond maturing in 2021 was offered at a negative yield of around 1.5 per cent, according to traders who saw the quote on the Clearing Corporation of India's Negotiated Dealing System-Order Matching, or NDS-OM, platform. They asked not to be identified as they aren't authorised to speak to the media.

While there's a total \$13.30 trillion of negative-yielding assets in the world, the phenomenon had been unheard of in an emerging market like India where the benchmark 10-year note trades at above 6 per cent.

Banks and financial institutions typically

have internal risk management systems that prevent occurrences like negative yields caused by manual errors. Traders therefore speculated that the system was manually overridden, which caused a negative yield quote.

The Clearing Corporation later in the day emailed traders to clarify that there was no change on its end to the way the system operates on inputting prices and the calculation of yields. Bloomberg News has seen a copy of the email.

Traders are concerned that if negative rates begin to show up in the Clearcorp Repo Order Matching System, or CROMS platform, it could make it costlier to short Indian bonds.

The strategy -- where traders bet against an asset and borrow it to cover their bets -- has been increasingly used in India after a record government borrowing plan caused a glut of paper. An

economist at State Bank of India—among the biggest holders of these notes -- last month exhorted the Reserve Bank of India to make short-selling costlier.

Currently, traders who wish to short Indian bonds need to use the CROMS platform to borrow the paper from banks against a short-tenor loan paying them as low as 0.01 per cent at times of high demand.

If the rate dips into negative territory, it would become costlier for traders to borrow bonds -- effectively imposing a penalty on short-sellers.

An email to CCIL on Saturday wasn't immediately answered. An email to an RBI representative outside of business hours Friday wasn't immediately answered.

The bond that was offered at a negative yield of around 1.5 per cent closed trading at 3.57 per cent on Friday.

— Bloomberg

Trade deficit in engg goods  
narrows to seven-year lowSANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 21

Trade deficit in engineering goods in the current fiscal till February is the lowest in seven years. While narrowing of trade deficit is good news generally, this time the trend has not been quite healthy for the manufacturing sector.

With \$64.3 billion exports and \$72.9 billion imports, the trade deficit has come down to 8.62 per cent till February in FY21. The deficit was 24.6 per cent last fiscal till February. In fact for the past seven years, engineering trade has been witnessing double-digit deficit. The lowest deficit was recorded in 2014-15, at 6.6 per cent, as per the data from the Engineering Export Promotion Council.

However, the flip side to the low trade deficit is that most of the categories that recorded exports growth have been raw materials. Iron and steel exports grew 20.5 per cent between April and February against the previous fiscal. Similarly exports of copper and products rose 34.42 per cent, zinc and products 31.86 per cent and aluminium and products 8.74 per cent during the period.

Most of the categories of value-added engineering products, including industrial machinery, automobiles, auto components and parts and other products like railway transport goods, medical and scientific instruments, electrodes accumulators, bicycles and parts, cranes and lifts have recorded negative growth during the period.



The higher exports of basic metals and decline in value-added products have not been good for the manufacturing sector. While iron and steel exports were going up, manufacturers of value-added products were worried about the increase in steel prices and shortage of the metal throughout the year.

"It has not been an ordinary year. The trend is a reflection of the economic activity, which was marred by the lockdown during the initial months. Manufacturing activity is picking up and March could be a good month, as exporters try to push the shipments as much as possible at the end of the fiscal for the sake of their balance sheets and better credit availability," said Suranjan Gupta, executive director of EEPIC India.

## LG may close down mobile phone business

KYUNGJI CHO  
MARCH 21

LG Electronics Inc may shutter its mobile communication business rather than sell it, DongA Ilbo reports, citing an unidentified person in the electronics industry.

Negotiations with Germany's Volkswagen

AG and Vietnam's Vingroup JSC on possible sale of the smartphone business seemed to have failed, according to the report.

LG Electronics' CEO said in January that all options were on the table for the loss-making operation. The company was said to have halted devel-

opment last month of phones with a rollable display, and DongA said on Sunday that LG has shelved a planned first-half rollout of all new smartphones.

LG may share its decision on the business' fate with employees as soon as early April, the DongA report said. — Bloomberg

Irdai nudges insurers  
to settle health claimsFALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, MARCH 21

With cases of claim repudiation rising since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the insurance regulator, in a circular, stated that repudiation of claims should not be based on 'presumptions and conjectures'.

"As specified in the IRDAI (Health Insurance) Regulations, 2016, where a claim is denied or repudiated, the communication about the denial or the repudiation shall be made only by the insurer by specifically stating the reasons for the denial or repudiation, while necessarily referring to the corresponding policy conditions," the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India said in a circular.

It also asked insurers to ensure that the policyholder is provided with granular details of the payments made, amounts disallowed and the reasons for the amount disallowed.

According to the General Insurance Council, the total registered claims dur-

ing the financial year is at Rs 14,287 crore, out of which claims worth Rs 7,561 crore, or just half of them, have been settled by the general and standalone health insurers. Disagreement between insurers and hospitals over billing the patients, overcharging insured patients, what is paid and what will not be paid has led to policyholders paying a significant portion of the claim amount from their pockets.

Insurers have largely misused the 'reasonable and customary charges' clause in the guidelines.

The circular on 'Health Insurance Claims Settlement' addressed to life, general and health insurance companies, including their third party administrators (TPAs), said, "All the insurers shall ensure putting in place systems to enable policyholders track the status of cashless requests/ claims filed with the insurer/TPA through the website/portal/app or any other authorised electronic means on an ongoing basis."

POTATO PRICES  
CRASH 50% TO  
₹5-6 PER KGLAXMI DEVI  
NET DELHI, MARCH 21

Potato prices in both producing and consuming areas across India have crashed 50 per cent to Rs 5-6 per kg this year on account of good rabi (winter) crop, as per the government data.

While consumers are getting the key kitchen staple at very low prices now, farmers are struggling to even recover their production cost.

As per a food processing ministry analysis, the wholesale rates in 25 out of 60-odd key potato producing areas, spread over UP, West Bengal, Punjab, Karnataka, HP, MP, Gujarat and Bihar, were ruling 50 per cent lower on March 20 compared to the year-age period.

In fact, wholesale prices of potato on March 20 were ruling below three years' average at Rs 6 per kg in Sambhal, UP, and Deesha, Gujarat.

In the year-age period, wholesale potato prices were at Rs 8-9 per kg on a lower side. — PTI

## DOUBLE | TROUBLE Japan's Renesas aims to resume production at damaged plant in a month

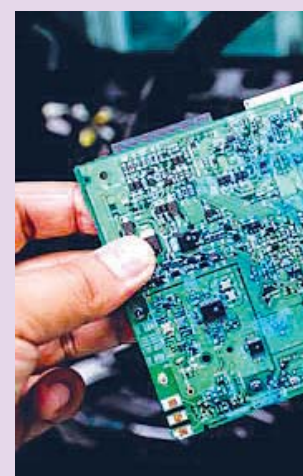
## Automotive chip supplies to be hurt by factory fire

CHIKAFUMI HODO &  
YUKI FURUKAWA  
MARCH 21

A fire at one of Renesas Electronics Corp's semiconductor facilities will probably have a big impact on the supply of chips for the automobile industry, chief executive officer Hidetoshi Shibata said during an online news conference on Sunday.

One of the biggest suppliers of automotive chips, Renesas had to halt production at a Japanese plant on Friday after a fire broke out in one of its clean rooms, critical areas designed to keep impurities from contaminating semiconductors.

Shibata, speaking to reporters, said on Sunday that Renesas aims to resume production at the



plant within a month. The facility being offline for a month could result in a 17 billion yen (\$156 million) revenue loss, he said.

Global automakers were already struggling to keep

assembly lines operating amid a shortage of chips caused by booming demand for laptops, tablets and home electronics in the wake of the pandemic. The Renesas

fire will probably exacerbate an already-difficult supply situation.

Renesas has production facilities at six sites in Japan. The N3 building where the fire broke out is

home to 300-millimetre wafer production, which would make it one of the company's more advanced lines.

In 2019, Renesas was the third-largest maker of

automotive silicon. Toyota Motor Corp. is one of its biggest customers, according to Bloomberg supply chain analysis.

— Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

Para shooter  
Singhraj bags gold

**AI Ain, UAE:** India's Singhraj displayed his skills to win a gold medal at the AI Ain 2021 World Shooting Para Sport World Cup here. He bagged the top honours in P1 men's 10m air pistol SH1 finals.

Singhraj, the Sydney 2019 World Championships medalist, pipped Rio 2016 bronze medalist Server Ibragimov by 2.8 points. The final score read 236.8-234.

In fact, after the penultimate final series, Ibragimov was leading by just 0.1 point. In the final series, the Indian had better control as he shot a 9.9 and 10.4, while the Uzbekistan shooter managed 9.5 and 7.9 to settle for the silver. Turkey's former Paralympic champion Muharem Korhan Yama took the bronze with 214.4 points.

Singhraj's gold also pushed India (one gold, one bronze) to the third place in the medals table behind Ukraine (three gold, three silver and a bronze) and the hosts United Arab Emirates (two gold). — PTI

Lee, Okuhara win  
All England titles

**Birmingham:** Lee Zii Jia put up an incredible show to emerge as the All England badminton men's singles champion, while Nozomi Okuhara secured her second All England crown after beating the Thai shuttler Pornpawee Chochuwong 21-12, 21-16 at BWF World Tour 1000 event on Sunday.

The 22-year-old Lee toiled for one hour and 14 minutes to dethrone Viktor Axelsen of Denmark 30-29, 20-22, 21-9 in a pulsating final at the Arena Birmingham on Sunday.

With the win, Zii Jia ended a four-year title drought for Malaysia to show that he is indeed the worthy successor of his senior Lee Chong Wei.

Chong Wei was the last Malaysian to win the title in 2017.

Lee shocked world number one Kento Momota to reach the last four and the 22-year-old suffered no dip in form as he comfortably saw off the unseeded Dutchman Mark Caljouw. — Agencies

Man City, Saints  
in FA Cup semis

**London:** Manchester City's quest for an unprecedented quadruple of trophies remains intact after seeing off Everton 2-0 to reach the FA Cup semi-finals on Saturday as Southampton also booked their place in the last four. City were far from their flowing best at Goodison Park, but goals in the final six minutes from Ilkay Gundogan and Kevin De Bruyne booked City's place in the semi-finals for the fourth time in five seasons.

Pep Guardiola described the clash as the toughest his side have had since November as they recorded a 25th win in 26 matches in all competitions.

"It was the toughest game since the last international break we had," said Guardiola. City won the domestic treble of Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup for the first time in English football history two seasons ago and are firm favourites to repeat that feat. Saints cast aside their Premier League struggles to ease past Bournemouth 3-0 to reach the semi-finals. — AFP

James injury  
rocks LA in loss

**Los Angeles:** LeBron James faces an indefinite layoff after suffering an ankle injury as the Los Angeles Lakers slumped to defeat against the Atlanta Hawks on Saturday. Lakers superstar James collapsed to the Staples Center court in agony after a collision with Atlanta's Solomon Hill in the second quarter of the Hawks' 99-94 win.

After writhing on the floor clutching his right ankle, the 36-year-old returned briefly to hit a three-pointer before limping back to the locker room, knocking over a chair in frustration. ESPN later reported that an MRI scan revealed a high ankle sprain and that James faced an "indefinite" injury layoff. Depending on the severity, high ankle sprains can take anywhere from a few weeks up to several months to recover from. James did not speak to reporters afterwards but later vowed to return as soon as possible. — AFP

## Live on TV

**SHOOTING**  
World Cup: 10m Air Rifle Mix Final from 10 am on Sony Six, HD



Members of the Indian cricket team and the support staff are jubilant as they pose after winning the T20 series against England in Ahmedabad.

## WORK IN PROGRESS

## Rohit says it's early to talk about batting line-up for World Cup

**Ahmedabad, March 21:** India vice-captain Rohit Sharma feels it is still too early to finalise the team's batting line-up for the upcoming T20 World Cup and Virat Kohli opening alongside him in the series decider against England was only a tactical move. Before Rohit's media interaction, Kohli said that he will open in the upcoming IPL and would also like to bat at the top of the order in the T20 World Cup.

"It is still long time to go for the (T20) World Cup, so early days to talk about how our batting will look like. We have to sit and analyse what suits the team the most," said Rohit.

"Today was a tactical move because we wanted to play an extra bowler and wanted to leave one batsman out. Unfortunately it was KL (Rahul) which was very tough," he added.

India replaced KL with pacer T. Natarajan to have an extra bowling option for the crucial game.

"KL has been one of our key players in limited overs, especially in this format. Looking at current form, the team management decided to go with the best 11. Having said that, it doesn't send any signal that KL will not be considered or anything like that."

"This was just for one particular game. Things might change as we go closer to World Cup," he added. Before the series, Kohli had said that Rohit and Rahul were India's first-choice opening pair. — PTI



Rohit Sharma in action against England during the fifth Twenty20 in Ahmedabad on Saturday. — AP

KOHLI & CO.  
REACH PUNE  
FOR ODI LEG

**Pune, March 21:** The Indian cricket team arrived here for the final leg of the ongoing series against England, which comprises three ODIs, beginning with the first game on Tuesday.

After claiming the four-Test series 3-1, India on Saturday clinched the five-match T20 series by 3-2 margin at the refurbished Narendra Modi Stadium.

It is reliably learnt that the Indian team, led by skipper Virat Kohli, arrived here by a Chartered Flight from Ahmedabad at around 4.45 pm.

The three ODI matches are to be played at the MCA stadium in Gahunje, on the outskirts of the city, on March 23, 26 and 28, sans spectators.

Karnataka pacer Prasidh Krishna, all-rounder Krunal Pandya and Suryakumar Yadav were included in India's 18-member squad which was announced on Friday.

Apart from Kohli, the Indian squad also comprises Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan, Shubman Gill, Shreyas Iyer, Hardik Pandya, Rishabh Pant and bowlers led by Bhuvneshwar Kumar.

India had suffered a 1-2 loss in the ODI series in Australia last year. — PTI

INJURED ARCHER RULED OUT  
OF ODI SERIES, MAY MISS IPL

**Ahmedabad, March 21:** An injured Jofra Archer was on Sunday omitted from a 14-member England squad for the three-match ODI series against India starting in Pune on Tuesday.

Archer will also miss the beginning part of this year's Indian Premier League, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said on Sunday.

England captain Eoin Morgan on Saturday had revealed that Archer was likely to pull out of the ODI series and the ensuing IPL as the star pacer's elbow injury has worsened.

A statement from the

ECB said that "Archer is returning to the UK for further management and investigation of his right elbow injury."

"He has been deemed unfit for selection for the ODI series that features matches on 23, 26 and 28 March," the ECB said.

Three additional players — Jake Ball, Chris Jordan and Dawid Malan — who were a part of the T20I series. — PTI

**ENGLAND ODI SQUAD**  
Eoin Morgan (captain), Moeen Ali, Jonathan Bairstow, Sam Billings, Jos Buttler, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Liam Livingstone, Matt Parkinson, Adil Rashid, Jason Roy, Ben Stokes, Reece Topley, Mark Wood.

Morgan urges Eng players  
to take advantage of IPL

**Ahmedabad, March 21:** Captain Eoin Morgan wants England's IPL-bound players to make the most of the opportunities in the upcoming T20 league as they prepare themselves for the T20 World Cup to be held in India later this year.

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to be hosted by India in October-November this year and Morgan expects English cricketers to take full advantage of the IPL, starting April 10.

"Taking advantage of the upcoming IPL is going to be huge,"



Eoin Morgan

Morgan said after their 36-run defeat to India here on Saturday night.

"As a team and individuals we don't want to stand still, we want to continue to move forward. Any opportunity

guys get at the IPL, you want to try to make the most of it," said IPL's KKR captain Morgan. England will be at home all summer, taking on New Zealand (two) and India (five) in seven Tests between June and September before they get to play white ball cricket in Bangladesh and Pakistan in the build up to the T20 World Cup in India later this year.

"So I think the experience over the next couple of months is probably the most valuable, and then having the time to work on your game after that," he said. — PTI



India's Yashaswini Singh Deswal (from left), Shri Nivetha and Manu Bhaker pose with their gold medals after winning the women's team 10m air pistol event at the ISSF World Cup in New Delhi on Sunday.

India shooters shimmer in  
10m air pistol team events

**New Delhi, March 21:** Skeet shooter Ganemat Sekhon won her maiden senior ISSF World Cup medal after a dominant India claimed both the gold on offer by some distance in the men's and women's 10m air pistol team events respectively here on Sunday.

Sekhon bagged the women's skeet bronze on the third competition day of the tournament.

Before that, the terrific trio of Yashaswini Singh Deswal, Manu Bhaker and Shri Nivetha won the top prize in the women's team 10m air pistol event.

Then, the team of Youth Olympics and Asian Games gold medalist Saurabh Chaudhary, Abhishek Verma and

Shahzar Rizvi bagged the yellow metal in the men's event, comfortably beating Vietnam 17-11 in the final.

Away from the sporting action, the number of Covid-19 cases rose to six after two more Indian shooters tested positive for the highly contagious virus.

The Indian women shot 16 in the gold medal round to finish way ahead of Poland's Julita Borek, Joanna Iwona Wawrzonowska and Agnieszka Korejwo, who managed 8 at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range.

The home team topped the second qualification with a total score of 576 while the Polish women

shot 567.

In the first qualification, the Indians aggregated 1731, following scores of 290, 287, 288, 287, 293 and 287 over six series.

Poland's sequence of scores read 286, 283, 286, 286, 286 and 287 for a total of 1701.

In the men's final, Vietnam were represented by Dinh Thanh Nguyen, Quoc Cuong Tran and Xuan Chuyen Phan.

Chaudhary and Co. led the qualification part two with a total score of 579 while the Vietnamese managed 565. The Indian men aggregated 1750 in the first qualification while Vietnam scored 1708. — PTI

IND FAVOURITE  
TO WIN T20 WC,  
SAYS ATHERTON

**London, March 21:** Depth in the team and playing in home conditions make India the favourites to win this year's T20 World Cup, believes former England skipper Mike Atherton.

Even without the services of all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja and fast bowlers Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami, India beat World No. 1 side England in the five-match T20I series 3-2 on Saturday.

"They probably have more strength in depth because of the IPL and the T20 cricket they play and the fact that they have just beaten England without probably three main bowlers," Atherton said on Sky Sports.

"Put all those things together, and the fact that they are playing at home, they are the team to beat."

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to be held in India in October and November this year.

Atherton however, said it won't be a cakewalk for India.

"England are a very good side and the West Indies and other sides are dangerous as well but if you price it up, you would say India are the favourites," he said.

Another former England skipper Michael Vaughan lauded India for the series win and said the addition of Jadeja and Bumrah will only strengthen the side in the T20 World Cup.

"India have adapted brilliantly in this series ... the better team have won ... Add @JaspritBumrah93 & @Imjadeja to this team in Indian conditions & they are favourites to win the T20 World Cup ... Great series to watch ... #INDvsENG," Vaughan tweeted. — PTI

**England are a very good side and the West Indies and other sides are dangerous as well but if you price it up, you would say India are the favourites.**

— MIKE  
ATHERTON  
former England captain

INDIA WOMEN  
SLUMP TO T20  
SERIES DEFEAT

**Lucknow, March 21:** Indian women dished out a superb batting effort but their bowling colleagues failed to step up as South Africa women registered a series-clinching six-wicket win in a last ball thriller in the second T20 International here on Sunday.

Shafali Verma (47) blasted six fours and two sixes in her 31-ball innings and forged a 79-run stand with Harleen Deol (31) to set the foundation while Richa Ghosh provided the late charge with a 26-ball 44 not out to help India post a competitive 158 for 4 after being put in to bat.

Chasing the target, Lizelle Lee smashed a 45-ball 70 studded with 11 fours and a six, while Laura Wolvaardt slammed an unbeaten 39-ball 53 as South Africa romped home in the last ball.

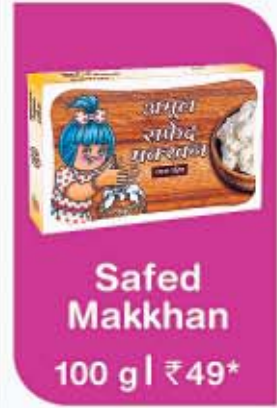
Defending the total, left-arm spinner Rajeshwari Gayakwad got rid of Anne Bosch (2) early but Lee starred in two crucial partnerships, adding 58 with skipper Sune Luus (20) and then 50 with Laura to keep them in the hunt.

Once Luus was run out by Deepti Sharma (0/31) and Lee was caught and bowled by Radha Yadav (1/25), Laura took the onus on herself to take the team home. — PTI

**Brief scores: India 158/4 in 20 overs (Shafali 47, Richa 44) lost to South Africa 159/4 in 20 overs (Lizelle 70, Lura 53).**

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