

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | THURSDAY 1 | APRIL 2021

WEATHER



Max: 38°C
Min: 22°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Panguni 19
Tithi: Chaturthi/ Panchami
Star: Visagam/ Anusham
Rahukalam:
1.30 pm to 3 pm
Yamagandam:
6 am to 7.30 am
PRAYERS
Fajar: 4.55 am
Zohar: 12.18 pm
Asar: 3.29 pm
Maghrib: 6.20 pm
Isha: 7.32 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.21 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.06 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 10.07 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 9.52 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+72,021)	(+457)
1,22,20,620	1,62,959

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+2,579)
TN: 8,86,673 12,719

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

12,91,94,446

DEATHS

28,21,498

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

Gujarat: CBI court discharges 3 cops in Ishrat Jahan encounter case

Ahmedabad: A special CBI court here on Wednesday discharged police officers G Singhal, Tarun Barot and Anaju Chaudhary in the 2004 Ishrat Jahan alleged fake encounter case. Special CBI judge V R Raval allowed the discharge applications of Singhal, Barot (now retired) and Chaudhary.

Govt extends deadline for linking PAN-Aadhaar by 3 months till June 30

New Delhi: The government on Wednesday extended the deadline for linking PAN with biometric Aadhaar by three months till June 30. The income tax department said it has received representations from taxpayers that the last date for intimating the Aadhaar number may further be extended in the wake of the on-going Covid-19 pandemic.

COUNTER POINT



Believe me, the elections are not over... still six more phases are there!

Kerala HC dismisses ED plea for stay on police probe against it

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 31

In a major setback to the Enforcement Directorate, Kerala High Court on Wednesday declined to stay an investigation launched by the Kerala police into the allegation that the central agency was fabricating evidence to trap Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in the gold smuggling case. The crime branch of the Kerala police had registered

an FIR against “unnamed officials of the Enforcement Directorate(ED)” for allegedly coercing Swapna Suresh, an accused in the gold smuggling case, to make false statements against Mr Vijayan and other state ministers. The court, however, directed the police not to take coercive steps till the next date of hearing, April 8. It also ordered that no official witnesses will be called till the next hearing of the case.

NATION | 4

Pawar recovering after surgery: Tope



WORLD | 5

Biden to unveil massive \$2 tn infra programme

SPORT | 8

Barty, Medvedev cruise into semis



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Pak to resume trade with India; to buy sugar, cotton

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

In a huge step towards the normalisation of India-Pakistan bilateral relations, Pakistan on Wednesday approved the resumption of bilateral trade between the two countries and decided to import cotton from India at least till June 30 this year, according to reports from Islamabad. Pakistan is also expected to soon import white sugar from India.

Reports from Islamabad said this was decided by the Pakistan Cabinet's Economic Coordination Committee and the note put up before that body by the commerce ministry there included proposals to import cotton and cotton yarn from India as well as white sugar.

Media reports said this is also likely to bring considerable relief to the Pakistani textile industry that wants cheap raw materials and also to ease the supply of sugar and reduce its prices in Pakistan's domestic market.

More importantly, how-



THE COTTON CANDY

THE THAW: Pakistan approves resumption of bilateral trade suspended in August 2019, soon after New Delhi had revoked Article 370 of the Indian Constitution pertaining to Jammu and Kashmir.

THE DEAL: Pak to import cotton and cotton yarn from India at least till June 30 this year. It could also import white sugar.

THE ADVANTAGE: Cheap raw materials for Pakistani textile industry; reduce sugar price in domestic market.



THE TIMELINE

February 25: India, Pakistan decide to strictly implement the ceasefire on the Line of Control.

March 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets Pak PM Imran Khan on Pak National Day. India wanted cordial relations with its neighbour, and an environment of trust devoid of terror and hostility was imperative for it, Modi said.

March 30: Mr Khan replies to Mr Modi, saying he was convinced that “durable peace and stability in South Asia is contingent upon resolving all outstanding issues between India and Pakistan, in particular the Kashmir issue.

ever, the decision will be seen as a demonstration of goodwill by Islamabad towards New Delhi, thereby setting the tone for the rapid improvement of bilateral ties.

It may be recalled that bilateral trade with India was earlier suspended by Pakistan in August 2019, soon after New Delhi had revoked Article 370 of the

Indian Constitution pertaining to Jammu and Kashmir. The developments come in the wake of a sudden perceptible improvement in India-Pakistan ties in the past five weeks following implementation of the ceasefire on the Line of Control by the armies of both countries. These developments further highlight a tangi-

ble thaw in ties between the two nuclear-armed neighbours who have seen ties go from bad to worse in the past five years.

This also comes just a couple of days after Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan told Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a letter that Pakistan is “convinced that durable peace and stability in South Asia is contingent upon resolving all outstanding issues between India and Pakistan”, in particular the Kashmir issue.

He further said Pakistan desires “peaceful, cooperative relations with all neighbours, including India”. The “creation of an enabling environment is imperative for a constructive and result-oriented dialogue”, the Pakistan Prime Minister had added. The letter dated March 29 was a reply to Mr Modi's letter last week to wish Mr Khan on Pakistan National Day on March 23, in which he had said that India wanted cordial relations with its neighbour, but for that an environment of trust devoid of terror and hostility was imperative.

India records 53,480 new Covid cases in 24 hours

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

India recorded 53,480 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, 4.8 per cent lower than the day before, taking the total number of cases to 1,21,49,335 on Wednesday. On Tuesday, the country had recorded 56,211 cases, while on Monday it logged 68,020 cases, the highest single-day spike in daily new cases since October 11 last year. Maharashtra has witnessed a dip in daily novel coronavirus cases as the state reported over 27,000 infections in the last 24 hours as against over 31,000 cases recorded on March 29. With 27,918 Covid-19 cases on Tuesday, the state tally has now reached 2,773,436. With fewer tests conducted on the occasion of Holi, Delhi reported just 992 cases. ■ **P4**

TN gears up for Covid spike, intensifies preventive steps

Section 144 to enforce social distancing in TN

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

The state health department has intensified the containment activities to deal with the second wave of the Covid-19 despite Tamil Nadu is not on the list of worst-hit states, health secretary J. Radhakrishnan said here on Wednesday.

The district administrations and departments concerned are advised to intensify preventive measures, he said after inspecting the Covid Care Centre, Guindy (King Institute of Preventive Medicine and Research).

“Tamil Nadu is not on the list of worst-hit states,” Mr Radhakrishnan said. “However, we are taking steps to control the rising incidence

of infections. We have ensured enough beds for the patients. A total of 29.5 lakh people in the state have been vaccinated.”

Pointing out the test

Act to contain the spread of Covid-19 effectively till April 30.

According to a GO issued on Wednesday, violators of lockdown norms were liable to be proceeded against as per provisions of Section 51 to 60 of Disaster Management Act, besides legal action under Section 188 of the IPC. ■ **P4**

positivity ratio has seen a spike in Chennai of late, the health secretary said more than 600 locations had been declared as restricted areas in the capital.

New Delhi, March 31: As she faces a high-stakes poll battle in West Bengal, TMC supremo and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has said the time has come for a “united and effective” struggle against the BJP's alleged attacks on democracy and the Constitution, and that opposition leaders should try present a “credible alternative: to the people of the country.

In a letter to the non-BJP leaders including Congress chief Sonia Gandhi released by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Wednesday, Banerjee also alleged that the Centre-

State relations were at its worst since independence.

The missive came on the eve of the second phase of the Assembly polls in West Bengal in which Banerjee is locked in a fierce fight in Nandigram constituency against her protegee turned adversary Suwendu Adhikari of the BJP.

Ms Banerjee's letter is being seen as an attempt to portray her as a rallying point for all parties opposed to the BJP, which has mounted an aggressive campaign to dislodge her from power in West Bengal after a 10-year rule. — **PTI** ■ **P4**



Central security forces stand guard at a polling station at Nandigram in East Medinipur district, ahead of the second phase of West Bengal Assembly polls on Wednesday.

— **PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY**

Campaign extended by two hours on April 4

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

Campaign for the April 6 elections to the state assembly and for the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat would come to an end at 7 pm on Sunday, chief electoral officer Satyabrata Sahoo said on Tuesday.

Electioneering would normally end at 5 pm two days ahead of polling but parties had been given an additional two hours in view of representations from them, he said. ■ **P2**

He told the media that the Election Commission of India was vigilant in ensuring that there was no distribution of cash or gifts by political parties to voters and that they had made several seizures.

Also the commission was taking the complaints received very seriously. Of the 139 complaints, 57 had been acted upon, Mr Sahoo said. He said ₹42 crore had been seized in Salem and ₹36 crore in Chennai. ■ **P2**

and will soon enter the list of non-existing political parties.

The Union minister said a new government will create 15 lakh new jobs for Tamil Nadu in the next five years.

Thally has returned three congress leaders to the assembly since 1977 and the BJP won the seat in 2001. The CPI won the seat twice, the Janata Party and the DMK once each. Now, the BJP is taking on the CPI candidate T. Ramachandran.

Mr Ramachandran was first elected from here as independent in 2006 and won the election in 2011 on a CPI ticket. The candidate is C. Nagesh Kumar, a doctor by profession, who is new to politics. ■ **P2**

RAJA REPLIES TO EC NOTICE, DENIES VIOLATING CODE

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

DMK deputy general secretary and MP A. Raja on Wednesday denied having spoken anything that violated the model code of conduct or any other provision of the law with regard to the allegation by the AIADMK that he

insulted Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami. In his interim reply to the notice issued by the Election Commission of India, Mr Raja said he made no derogatory or defamatory speeches against the Chief Minister and did not demean or defame women or motherhood. “As a student of Ambedkar, Periyar and Anna, as a person who was guided by Dr Kalaignar Karunanidhi and as a member of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, I had or have or will never indulge in such activities which will disrepute women,” he said in his reply.

When the AIADMK and BJP started propagating that he had insulted the Chief Minister, he had given his explanation to the media at Perambalur on March 27 and then conveyed his apologies at a press conference at Ooty on March 29. ■ **P2**

SC-appointed panel on farm laws submits report

New Delhi, March 31: The Supreme Court-appointed committee to study the three new controversial agricultural laws has submitted its report to the apex court on March 19 in a sealed cover, one of its members said on Wednesday. Farmers have been protesting seeking repeal of the three contentious farm laws on the borders of New Delhi for the last five months now. The Supreme Court had, on January 11, stayed the implementation of the three laws till further orders and appointed a four-member panel to resolve the impasse.

The committee was given two months to study the laws and consult all stakeholders. “We submitted the report on March 19 in a sealed cover. Now, the court will decide the future course of action,” one of the members of the committee PK Mishra told PTI. As per the committee's official website, the panel held total 12 rounds of consultations with various stakeholders.

After service of 132 yrs, Army closes military farms

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

After supplying milk to Indian Army for 132 years, military farms on Wednesday were officially disbanded.

The flag ceremony of the Military Farms Records Delhi Cantonment was held on Wednesday.

The military farms were set up with sole requirement of supplying hygienic milk to troops in various garrisons across British India. They played an important role before

- The farms were set up by the British to ensure supply of milk to Army units
- The farms were occupying around 20,000 acres of defence land

the white revolution or Operation Flood was launched in 1970s to make India self-dependent in milk production.

In August 2017, the defence ministry had announced a series of reform measures for the Indian Army which included shutting down the military farms. The military farms in

India are spread over more than 20,000 acres of defence land across the country in cities such as Ambala, Kolkata, Srinagar, Agra, Pathankot, Lucknow, Meerut, Allahabad and Guwahati.

First Military farm was raised on 1st February 1889 at Allahabad. After independence, military farms flourished with

30,000 heads of cattle in 130 farms all over India in varied agro-climatic conditions. Military farms were even established in Leh and Kargil in late 1990s, with the role of supplying fresh and hygienic milk to troops at their locations on daily basis.

Another major task was management of large tracts of defence land, production and supply of baled hay to animal holding units.

For more than a century military farms have been credited with pioneering

the technique of artificial insemination of cattle and introduction of organised dairying in India.

During 1971 war, military farms supplied milk at the western and eastern war fronts as well as during Kargil operations to the Northern Command. In collaboration with the ministry of agriculture, they established “Project Freiswal”, credited to be the world's largest cattle cross-breeding program. They also teamed up with DRDO in development of bio-fuel.



Narayanasamy rejects PM's allegations

Senior Congress leader V. Narayanasamy on Wednesday denied as 'baseless' the allegations levelled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi against him and the previous party government he headed in Puducherry. Narayanasamy told reporters that all the charges have been made by Modi without any basis.



MANDATE 2021

TAMIL NADU

DECCAN CHRONICLE | THURSDAY | 1 APRIL 2021 | COIMBATORE

pg 2

OTHER STORIES

Amit Shah to take part in road shows in Pondy today

Puducherry, March 31: Union Home Minister Amit Shah will pay a one day visit to Puducherry on Thursday and participate in a series of road shows to canvass for NDA candidates in the run up to the April 6 assembly polls.

Shah would arrive at airport here at 9.30 AM, leave for the shrine of Sithananda Swamikal in Karuvadiyuppalam and then proceed for campaign, BJP party sources said.

This will be his second visit to the Union Territory to campaign for NDA candidates, his earlier one being in February, when he came to Karaikal.

The AINRC heads the NDA alliance in the union territory and the other constituents are BJP and AIADMK.

AINRC is contesting in 16 of the 30 constituencies, the BJP in nine and AIADMK in five.

The NDA is pitted against the Secular Democratic Alliance, comprising Congress, DMK, CPI and VCK. —PTI

EC transfers three police officers

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 31

The Election Commission on Wednesday issued the transfer of three police officers in Tamil Nadu, less than a week ahead of TN assembly elections.

According to the reports, in a communication to the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary, with a copy marked to the state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), the EC directed the transfer of IG Central HM Jayaram, IG West Dhinakaran, and SP Rural Coimbatore Arul Arasu. The EC directed the transfer of the officers "based on adverse inputs," it said, and also named the replacement for the respective officials.

"Jayaram, Dhinakaran and Arul Arasu will be attached to the DGP Headquarters awaiting posting orders" and their posting cannot be done without its permission, the EC said.

Further, the commission also directed the appointment of A Arun as Police Commissioner of Tiruchirappalli City, a day after it transferred then incumbent J Loganathan.

Collector issues booth slips in Thanjai

DC CORRESPONDENT THANJAVUR, MARCH 31

Distribution of voter's booth slips containing details of the booths where voters have to cast their votes began here, on Tuesday. Collector M. Govinda Rao, distributed voter slips to voters in Ganapathi Nagar area near Anna Sathya stadium. The collector said that voters should use voters photo identity cards (EPIC) to cast their votes, and not the booth slips. The slip is only to guide them to their respective booths.

Other than EPIC, people can use PANcards, passports, etc for casting their votes. He advised voters to follow Corona preventive measures at the time of voting, and come to booths wearing face masks. They also would be provided sanitizers and tested for fever in the booths with thermal scanners.



An awareness marathon on 100 per cent voting, covering five kilometres was held in Katpadi, Vellore district, on Wednesday, in which school students participated. District Collector Shanmugasundaram flagged off the rally which commenced from Chittoor bus stand in Katpadi and concluded in Vellore Green Circle. Participants carried placards which said voting was one's right, and also advised people not to sell their votes for cash or gifts. Three students in the boys and girls category, who reached the destination, were given individual prizes each. Expressing his appreciation, Collector Shanmugasundaram also gave bouquets to children below the age of 10 years, who participated in the marathon. — K. Senthil Nathan

Rousing welcome for Velmurugan in Panruti

A. ARUL PALANI | DC PANRUTI, MARCH 31

People accord warm welcome to Tamilzha Vazh-vurimai Katchi (TVK) founder leader T. Velmurugan at the entry of every hamlet in Panruti assembly constituency in Cuddalore district. People of Panruti, known for cashew and delicious jackfruit, take photos and selfies with the two-time MLA, after offering him shawl and towel to beat the heat.

Velmurugan, contesting on the DMK's 'rising sun' symbol, spends long hours on the campaign trail as residents are eager to listen to the firebrand leader. He is facing Rajendran of AIADMK at the hustings.

The local residents ensure grand welcome to him at the entry of all villages by bursting crackers and garlanding him. The video of his agitation demanding the state government to appoint only Tamils in jobs and against toll collection, sand mining and the Citizenship Amendment Act are circulating on the social media.

Velmurugan, a native of Puliur Kattusagai near Neyveli, was first elected to the assembly in 2001 and in 2006 on Pattali Makkal Katchi ticket. Velmurugan was elected from Panruti twice, defeating former AIADMK minister Panruti Ramachandran.

Velmurugan was the joint general secretary of PMK. After snapping ties with the PMK, Velmurugan launched the TVK in January 2012. The TVK became an instant hit among the youth in many parts of the State, especially in northern districts. He is one of the vibrant voices on Tamil nationalism, against imposition of Hindi and Sanskrit among non-Hindi speaking states, farm laws, Tamil Eelam, jobs for Tamils in the state, anti-toll gate and anti-sand mining.

Velmurugan told Deccan Chronicle that the functionalities of the DMK, VCK, TVK, MDMK and Communist parties are rendering support to his campaign. For the past ten years the state government had sacrificed the

rights of Tamils to safeguard the government, he said.

After the introduction NEET, 3,000 Tamil students have lost the opportunity to study medical course in the state. The state had not witnessed developmental activities. More than 3.5 lakh posts remained vacant in government services. The government did not fill 72,000 vacant posts for reserved categories, he alleged.

He said if the DMK comes to power it will provide Rs 1,000 to every woman each month, free bus pass, Rs 10 lakh revolving fund for women self-help groups and employment opportunities to 5 lakh youth.

He assured the people of setting up a government arts and science college in Panruti. A food processing and research centre would be set up for sugarcane, guava, jackfruit and cashew farmers. Cold storage facilities would be set up in Panruti. Steps would be taken to augment drinking water facilities and road facilities in the rural terrain.

Novel event: Ooty candidates spell future plans for region

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC OOTY, MARCH 31

Thanks to the efforts taken by the Citizens' Forum of Ooty, a common platform event was organized on Tuesday evening at Hotel Sullivan Court here for poll contesting candidates in Ooty constituency to debate on certain topics and spell out their plans about how to address some long-pending common issues here.

R. Ganesh (incumbent MLA and Congress candidate), Dr. S. Suresh Babu (MNM), Jayakumar (Namam Tamilar Katchi) took part in the event, while Bhojarajan (BJP) and T. Lakshmanan (AMMK), skipped the event.

The candidates answered questions on

three different categories like their future plans, and plan of approach to address the issues, and their own promises to the electorate.

R. Ganesh (Congress) spelled out what he has done as an MLA over the past five years and how he aired his voice in the assembly for establishing a medical college in Ooty, acquiring land for parking facility in the southern corner of the race course in Ooty, and getting more funds to develop tourism infrastructure in the hills.

Dr. Suresh Babu said that his party contests the elections with an aim to root out corruption, since eradication of corruption will pave way for more funds in hand to develop

the constituency. He promised that he would look into ways with modern scientific approach to de-silt the Kodappamund channel that traverses Ooty main town, and then to construct a parking lot above it.

Jayakumar (NTK), said that barring certain limits inside the town, most part of Ooty constituency is lacking basic amenities and infrastructure. He said, he would focus on these issues and try to develop Ooty on par with Singapore, and make Ooty an international tourist spot. All the three candidates promised to work towards resolving the issues related to the tea and tourism industry, and to create avenues for employment generation.

UP CM: DMK-Cong failed to safeguard women

Coimbatore, March 31: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday hit out at both the Congress and DMK alleging that they have failed to safeguard women. Referring to some alleged derogatory remarks made by some political party leaders, including DMK MP A Raja, recently, Adityanath said this has proved that there would be no protection to women if these parties were voted to power.

Addressing a rally here seeking votes for Vanathi Srinivasan, BJP candidate for the Coimbatore south assembly constituency, he said the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was always development of Tamil Nadu, both industrially and economically. If the BJP-AIADMK was voted to power, the state would get more funds for development activities, he said. The BJP-led government has sanctioned to Coimbatore city a defense corridor for manufacturing compo-



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday campaigns for Vanathi Srinivasan, BJP candidate for Coimbatore south assembly constituency. — PTI

nents for the sector, by which it will become self-reliant (Atmanirbhar) and result in generation of large employment, Adityanath added. The chief minister also thanked the people of

Tamil Nadu for contributing nearly Rs 120 crore for the construction of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. Adityanath earlier visited the Puliyaikulam Lord Ganesha temple and offered prayers. From

there he was led to the venue of the public meeting by 1,000 two-wheeler riders in a procession, covering a 7 km distance. Vehicular traffic was paralysed on main roads during the period. —PTI

HC slams unreasonable poll promises by parties

J. STALIN | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 31

Coming down heavily on the political parties for making unreasonable and unworkable promises during elections, the Madras high court has said, "unfortunately, freebies are not connected with job creation, development or agriculture. Voters are lured to cast votes in their favour by these magical promises. Once in five years, this tamasha is continued for decades together. Promises have always remained as promises. Most of them, except freebies, are not implemented".

A division bench comprising justices N. Kirubakaran and B. Pugalendhi made these observations while dismissing a PIL filed by M. Chandramohan, which sought a direction to the authorities to convert Vasudevanallur assembly constituency as a general constituency.

Writing the judgment for the bench, Justice Kirubakaran said ("We will cook food for you in your residence" - Party. "We will not only cook, but also feed you - Opposite party). Time is not too far to hear the aforesaid promises from competing political parties. It is raining freebies during Tamil Nadu assembly elections.

Each party tries to undo others with populist promises. If one party promises a monthly assistance of ₹1,000 to women-



headed households, there is a counter freebie of Rs 1,500.

The result is people started having a mindset that they could make a living out of freebies. A trend has been created that whoever avails loan from banks does not repay it, expecting waiver of loans during election. In this way, people get corrupted by political parties, the bench added.

The bench said every political party was bound to make promises to voters giving their social policies and plans for improving the standard of living of the people by providing clean governance, infrastructure, especially basic amenities like water, transportation and health, which are expected in every democracy.

But, these promises are aimed at clinching power. If the basic amenities are promised and provided, there cannot be any objection and in fact, it has to be welcomed and appreciated.

In the name of social security all the basic needs of the people have been provided by giving colour televisions, laptops, mixers, fans and grinders etc.,

Moreover, in Tamil Nadu every family card holder was given free rice of 20 kg every month. That apart, during festival seasons like Pongal and Diwali, public money is drained by way of providing expenses for celebrations of festivals. These kinds of freebies and money given during festivals are making the people lazy and dampening the work culture. In the process, the honest taxpayer is made a mute spectator of these expenditures and Tamil Nadu has to depend on the migrant workers from northeast and northern states", the bench added.

The bench said it was aware that the judgment of the Supreme Court in case of S. Subramaniam Balaji Vs State of Tamil Nadu and others held that promises in the election manifesto cannot be construed as a 'corrupt practice and these measures relate to implementation of Directive Principles of State Policy.

However, the apex court directed the Election Commission to verify election manifestos to weed out the unreasonable and unexecutable promises. Definitely, that will go a long way to curtail the political parties from making promises of moon or star.

DMK with Congress will only see 'Sunset', says Rajnath

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC OOTY, MARCH 31

Union defense minister Rajnath Singh who led a large BJP rally here on Wednesday to garner support for BJP candidate, Bhojarajan, in Ooty constituency, said that by joining hands with the Congress, the DMK will only see the 'sunset'.

He said that both the DMK and the Congress were involved in communal politics to appease certain sections of the communities, and added that the Congress which has lost the faith of the people, is now being even considered as a burden by many political parties. The DMK and the Congress with different ideologies joined hands only with an eye on power. They have no interest in the development or welfare of the people of Tamil Nadu.

Taking potshots on the DMK, Rajnath said that



DMK has no respect for women. It is a shame on the DMK that its frontline leader A. Raja went to the extent of making unpalatable comments on the mother of Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami. The DMK and Congress leaders do not have the courage to condemn it, which shows the scant respect they have for women. People should teach a lesson to the DMK in the elections, he added.

TAMIL IS 'AMMA' OF ALL INDIAN LANGUAGES: RAJNATH

Rajnath Singh, at the outset said that Tamil is one of the oldest and beautiful languages in the world. Tamil is the 'Amma' of all Indian languages

Praising Prime Minister Modi for his effective handling of the pandemic, Rajnath said that through his inspiration, Indian scientists not only developed effective vaccines for Covid-19, but also have

exported them to 72 countries. The economy which was worst affected during the Corona crisis, has now begun to bounce back, and the IMF has predicted double digit growth for the Indian economy in the coming year.

The BJP and AIADMK are working with the same vision and mission that is to work for development and

welfare for the people. Touching upon local issues, Singh said that the BJP government would take steps to fix Rs.30 as minimum support price for a kilogram of green tea leaf, the major plantation crop in the Nilgiris, and take steps to include the Badaga community under the ST list. He said that the defunct Hindustan Photo Films manufacturing company in

Ooty would also be converted into an IT-park to generate employment opportunities, and assured that steps would be taken to make Ooty an international tourist destination.

Now, DMK wantonly skirts Sethu project issue

ARULOLI M | DC THOOTHUKUDI, MARCH 31

Though the DMK expressed commitment for implementation of the Sethusamudram canal project (SSCP) in its election manifesto, is has not touched the subject in its campaigns.

The 112th promise given in page number 43 of the DMK manifesto for the assembly election 2021, states that the DMK once in power, would strive for the implementation of the Sethusamudram ship canal project (SSCP) that was formally inaugurated by then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who headed the UP-1 government on July 2, 2005.

The ₹2,427 crore worth SSCP was however stayed

The 112th promise given in page number 43 of the DMK manifesto for the assembly election 2021, states that the DMK once in power, would strive for the implementation of the Sethusamudram ship canal project (SSCP)

by the Supreme Court as the fishermen community in almost all the seven coastal districts of the state, opposed it as they feared that the SSCP would deprive their livelihood. But, before it was stayed in 2009 by the Apex court, five years after its inauguration, around Rs 837 crore was reported to have been wasted on the scheme.

The Narendra Modi-led NDA government at the Centre that assumed office in 2014, showed no interest

in the SSCP, as the BJP and Hindutva organisations are against the project. Further, the Sethusamudram Corporation Limited (SCL), an organisation created under the companies act in 2005 for the implementation of the SSCP a few months before, had passed a resolution recommending the Union government to wind up the company created for the implementation of the SSCP.

This move was applauded by coastal community leaders like Anton Gomez of the ILO affiliated, National Union of Fishermen (NUF), who however alleged that the then Union minister for shipping and ports, T.R. Baalu of the DMK, should be made accountable for the wasteful spending of ₹837 crore on an unviable project.

The fishermen in the southern coastal district of R a m a n a t h a p u r a m, Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari are even now against the project. But, the DMK had mentioned it in its election manifesto, when no other party including its ally, the Congress, is silent on the issue.

The DMK, according to Anton Gomez, seems to lack guts to show its real face with regard to the implementation of SSCP, and hence, Gomez added, "Though it promised the corporate companies through its manifesto to implement the SSCP, it is trying to cheat the coastal community by not speaking out in public during it in their campaigns."

IN BRIEF



Min of state for home affairs calls on Prince of Arcot

Chennai, March 31 : Union minister of state for home affairs G. Kishan Reddy made a courtesy call on the Prince of Arcot, Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali, at his ancestral official residence, Amir Mahal, in the city on Wednesday.

The minister expressed his happiness for having called on the Prince and they exchanged pleasantries. With his dynamic vision and a strong mission for the development of the nation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government should involve the minority communities in nation-building, along with the majority community, which would go a long way for the stability and progress of the country in an atmosphere of peace and harmony for all citizens, irrespective of caste, creed or religion, the Prince said. The Prince offered a shawl and a memento to the visiting dignitary, according to a press release.

Sharp rise in active cases, TPR in Chennai

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

Chennai, which is witnessing a second wave of Covid-19, has recorded a sharp increase in active cases and test positivity rate adding 3,980 active cases and 10,315 fresh cases in the last 20 days.

As per the data provided by the state health department, the number of active cases recorded a surge from 247 in the previous 20 days.

The test positivity rate has seen a sharp rise in the last 20 days compared to the previous 20 days. A total of 10,315 (515 per day) persons tested positive in the same period, a jump from 3,508 (175 per day) from the previous 20 days. The test positivity rate is spiralling now after a five-month-long downward trend. The data of daily positivity rate shows as 1,692 (June 24 and July 14), 1,166 (July 15 and August 3), 1,120 (August 3 and 23), 1,110 (August 23 and September 12), 1,121 (September 12 and October 2), 1,163 (October 2 and October 22), 564 (October 22 and November 9), 458 (November 9 and 28), 350 (November 28 and December 18), 270 (December 19 and January 8), 162 (January 9 and 28), 139 (January 29 and February 17), 175 (February 18 and March 9) and 515 (March 10 and 30).

The death toll has also recorded an upward trend after a long time registering 65 cases in the last 20

Health secretary J. Radhakrishnan during an inspection at Guindy King Institute on Wednesday. —DC



127 new cases of coronavirus in Pondy

Puducherry, March 31 : Puducherry added 127 fresh cases of Covid-19 during the last 24 hours ending 10 am on Wednesday, pushing up the gross to 41,468.

The toll remained 682 as no death was reported.

The new cases were identified at the end of examination of 2,132 people, the Director of the Department of Health and Family Welfare Services S Mohan Kumar said.

days, a rise from 38 in the previous 20 days. The daily death rate had increased from 26 (June 3 - June 24) to 31 (June 24 - July 14) to 44 (July 14 - August 3). The daily mortality rate had declined to 20 between August 3 and 23 and then to

The fresh cases were spread over Puducherry 76, Karaikal 43, Yanam one and Mahe 7.

The Director said fatality and recovery rates were 1.64 percent and 95.77 per cent respectively.

He said 94 patients have been discharged during last twenty-four hours.

Puducherry and its outlying regions had 1074 active cases which include 780 home quarantined patients.

The Director said 39,712 people have been treated and discharged so far.

He further said 26,368 health care workers and 11,958 front workers have been vaccinated so far while 30,136 people coming under the category of either senior citizens (those above sixty years) or those coming under 45 years and above with comorbidities have been covered so far. —PTI

19 in between August 23 to September 12. The rate touched 14 in September. It went up to 16 in between October 2 and October 22. It came down to four between November 28-December 18 and December 19- January 8.

The death toll mounted from 17 cases on May 3 to 4,236 as of March 30.

On recovery rate, the data says, 6,270 patients were discharged from hospitals in the last 20 days, which is a rise from 3,223 in the previous 20 days.

Big ammo, drugs haul from Lankan fishing boat

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

In a joint operation, the Indian Coast Guard and the Narcotics Control Bureau have seized a Sri Lankan fishing vessel Ravihansi off the coast of Vizhinjam in Kerala and recovered a huge quantity of ammunition and 300 kg of drugs.

According to sources, acting on a tip-off, the Sri Lankan fishing vessel was intercepted by the Coast Guard and brought to Vizhinjam harbour. The NCB Chennai zonal unit took custody of the boat and seized 300.323 kg of heroin along with five AK 47 rifles and 1,000 rounds of 9mm ammunition. A number of incriminating documents were also seized from the occupants of the vessel.

Heroin was found concealed inside the water tank of the vessel in 301 packets. An image of a flying horse was found on all the heroin packets, which is a usual practice of drug trafficking syndicates to brand their drugs. Preliminary investigations indicate that an unknown vessel carried the heroin and arms consignment from Chabahar Port in Iran and handed over the same to the Lankan fishing boat in the high seas near Lakshadweep.

The boat was trafficking the consignment to Sri Lanka when the Indian authorities intercepted it. All the six Sri Lankan crew members - L. Y. Nandana, HKGB Dassapriya, AHS Gunasekara, SA Senarath, T. Ranasingha and D. Nissanka were arrested by the NCB and remanded

in judicial custody.

The investigations indicate that a Pakistan-based drug trafficking network was involved in the operation. There have been seizures of huge quantities of heroin in the Arabian Sea by both Indian as well as other enforcement agencies which are believed to have been trafficked by the same network. This seizure also unveils the nexus between narcotics trafficking and extremist elements.

NCB Chennai zonal director Amit Ghawate, superintendents M. Suresh Kumar, Ashish Kumar Ojha, and intelligence officers Shaiju Varghese, Mathew Varghese, Samson, D. Pramila, Shanmugam of NCB Chennai zonal unit were involved in the seizure.



A Covid-19 awareness rally held at Mattuthavani bus stand in Madurai on Wednesday. —DC

HC: Schools expected to handle different segments of students

J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

Observing that the schools of learning are expected to handle and manage different segments of students and strive to mould them into a good citizen, the Madras high court has directed the Banadurai Higher Secondary School at Kumbakonam in Thanjavur District, to admit a student, who was sent out by the school for his alleged misconduct after completing his 10th standard, in 11th standard within one week.

Justice V.Parthiban gave the directive while allowing the petition filed by V.Lakshmi, the mother of the student V.Ezhilarasan.

The judge said it is easier for any institution to send a student away on the ground of indiscipline. But such an easier way out for the school would amount to shirking its ultimate responsibility cast upon it and reflect on its inability to address so called

errant behaviour of the student concerned, which is not uncommon in any school, for that matter. It takes a broad mind and a large head to understand the teenage proclivities of rebellious streak and address the so called waywardness of the student, as integral part of the school's bounden duty, instead of sending out the student from the school as a quick fix reaction or solution, the judge added.

The judge said coming to the case on hand, the complaints given against the student were quite normal and in fact, many students may attract such type of complaints constituting common place juvenile transgression and deviance. But, this court was of the considered view that the school authorities may well be advised to accept the affidavit of undertaking of the mother ensuring her son's good behaviour for the next two years in the school. An odd behaviour of a

teenage student may not be taken to ruffle or provoke the collective conscience of the school management to the point of shunting the school doors on him. The school needs to be reminded of the great words of Abraham Lincoln "mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice", the judge added.

The judge said, "In the context of the above discourse, the writ petition is allowed and the fourth respondent school is directed to admit the student, V.Ezhilarasan in the 11th standard on taking into consideration of the affidavit of undertaking dated March 23, 2021, filed by his mother, the petitioner herein and also taking note of the observations of this court". The school was directed to comply with the aforesaid direction within a period of one week as the present academic year has already commenced and it was under way, the judge added.

IMD: Heat wave will prevail in isolated pockets for 5 days

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

Heat wave conditions are likely to prevail over isolated pockets in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry for the next five days, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) said Wednesday.

As per the forecast, since the dry land breeze from the north-west is moving towards Tamil Nadu, the temperature may increase 3-5 degree Celsius between March 31 - April 4.

The temperature rise will be felt in Chennai, Kancheepuram, Chengalpet, Vellore, Ranipet, Tirupathur, Thiruvallur, Tiruvannamalai, Villupuram, Cuddalore, Salem, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Kallakurichi, Namakkal, Karur, Tiruchirappalli, Perambalur, Ariyalur, Mayiladuthurai, Puducherry and Karaikal, according to the weather department.

Further, public, party candidates, farmers, traffic police have been requested to avoid working, conducting rallies out in the open between 12-4 pm.

In Chennai, Meenambakkam in the city recorded 41.3 degree Celsius, breaking the record for the highest-ever temperature for the month of March.

Chennai airport employees protest against privatisation

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

Hundreds of AAI employees, officers on Wednesday held a dharna on Chennai airport premises against privatisation of Indian airports.

In 2018, the government has decided to privatise airports in Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Mangaluru, Thiruvananthapuram and Guwahati for operation, management and development through a public-private partnership model. The employees alleged that the government has unilaterally decided to privatise dozens of profit-making airports, which is neither in the public interest nor for better management of these aerodromes.

The AAI employees across India have been protesting against the move since the Government attempted to hand over the airports to

private in the year 2013. Despite several protests, the government handed over six of its airports to the Adani group in February 2019.

In addition to six airports, six more airports - Bhubaneswar, Varanasi, Indore, Trichy, Amritsar and Raipur - are also reportedly going to be put on the block in the second phase. Since then the employees have been protesting against the move.

According to the airport sources, on Wednesday morning, hundreds of AAI employees staged a dharna outside the Airport Director's office at the Chennai airport. Earlier too, various airport employees unions and associations has held various demonstrations against the privatization. The employees protesting at the Chennai airport said that they will continue their protest against privatisation.

IIT-M startup, AICTE organise workshop

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

The Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M)-incubated start-up GUVI has collaborated with the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to upskill 10 lakh Indians in coding through a one-day free workshop called 'AI-For-India 1.0'.

Dr Buddha Chandrasekhar, chief co-ordinating officer, AICTE, said that anyone in the 8-80 age group interested in coding would be able to attend the event to be held on April 24. Registrations have already begun and can be done on the GUVI's AI-for-India website: https://www.guvi.in/AI-for-India?utm_source=online&utm_medium=articles&utm_campaign=aiforindia

It was initiated as a part of the start-up's mission to provide training in artificial intelligence to one billion Indians.

The participants can learn to build a face recognition app using Python from industry experts.

All participants will gain free access to GUVI's Python course that helps them understand the concepts of the Python programming language. Further, participation certificates and unlimited access to 'CodeKata', a coding skill-building platform, will be given to all participants.



HEIGHT OF DIVINITY

Devotees witness the consecration of Arulmigu Balamurugan Adimai of Rathanagiri and Dr Veeraiyan, founder and chancellor, SIMATS, Dr Tamilisai Sondararajan, Governor of Telangana and Puducherry who witnessed the kumbhabhishekam and chaired the ceremony said she was fortunate to be part of the holy event.

Negligence of election duty: Collector suspends municipal commissioner

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARUR, MARCH 31

S.Malarvizhi, Karur district collector, ordered the suspension of Kulithalai municipal commissioner Muthukumar for his negligence of election duties.

Official sources said, Malarvizhi passed the order based on the recommendations of the Regional Director of Municipal Administration Salem, who asked six



S.Malarvizhi, Karur district collector.

queries on administrative point of view from Muthukumar who however failed to provide the reply, sources added.

Gold worth ₹28.26 lakh seized by Chennai customs

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

The customs officers at the Chennai airport seized gold worth ₹28.26 lakh recently and arrested a person in connection with the case.

According to the sources, based on a tip-off, Mohammed Shegil, of Thrissur who arrived from Dubai by Emirates flight EK-544 was intercepted at the exit.

On personal search, three bundles of gold paste weighing 709 grams were recovered from the rectum. On extraction 621

● According to the sources, based on a tip-off, Mohammed Shegil, of Thrissur who arrived from Dubai by Emirates flight EK-544 was intercepted at the exit.

● On personal search, three bundles of gold paste weighing 709 grams were recovered from the rectum. Gold was recovered under Customs Act.

grams of gold worth ₹28.26 lakh was recovered and seized under Customs Act and he was arrested. Further investigation is in progress.

186 illegal brick kilns near elephant corridors shut, HC told

Chennai, March 31: As many as 186 illegal brick kilns located close to elephant corridors in the Western Ghats have been shut down, the Madras High Court was told on Wednesday.

The government counsel informed this when a PIL petition from animal activist Muralidharan came up before the First Bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy today. According to the petitioner, the illegal mining oper-



ation in the Thadagam region in Coimbatore was the sole reason behind the

rising number of man-animal conflicts. "The brick kilns and the mining of the red sand for bricks have destroyed important corridors used by the elephants to migrate to contiguous forest areas. This is resulting in elephants moving into human settlements and damaging crops and lives," he said. Earlier, the Bench had directed the State to take immediate measures to ensure that the brick kilns functioned within the prescribed parameters after obtaining licence from the

appropriate authority. When the matter came up again today, the counsel representing the Chief Secretary, submitted that a detailed audit was conducted across S o m a y a m p a l a y a m , Nanjundapuram and Pannimadai villages in Coimbatore north taluk where it was found that several erring units were in operation. Recording the submission, the Bench directed the State to file a detailed report and adjourned the matter till April 6. —PTI



Coimbatore District Collector S. Nagarajan inspects installation of ballot sheets in EVMs on Wednesday.

—DC

SHORT TAKES

ARE YOU ABOVE LAW?: HC ASKS PARAM BIR SINGH

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 31

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday reprimanded Param Bir Singh the former Commissioner of Police, Mumbai for approaching the court without registering an FIR against state home minister Anil Deshmukh. Singh has approached the HC seeking CBI probe against Deshmukh for his alleged criminal malpractices.

The court asked Singh if he thought himself above the law. The court also directed the police to bring a station diary to verify what action they took on a complaint filed by one Jayshree Patil. The chief justice praised Patil for showing the courage to file a police complaint against the home minister and police commissioner.

Interestingly, another HC bench had dismissed Patil's petition on Tuesday calling it a "publicity stunt". There are three PILs and two writ petitions before the HC.

Chief Justice Dipankar Datta reserved order on the maintainability of the PIL filed by Singh and other petitions after hearing senior lawyer Vikram Nankani for Param Bir Singh, Advocate General (AG) Ashutosh Kumbhakoni on behalf of the State and Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Anil Singh for CBI.

During the hearing, the petitioner's lawyer Nankani pressed for an investigation by an independent agency like CBI. However, Chief Justice (CJ) repeatedly asked him how the court could issue directions for a probe when there is no FIR.

DELHI TO HIKE TESTING TO 80,000 PER DAY

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Amid the recent spike in Coronavirus cases, Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain on Wednesday informed that Covid-19 testing will be increased to 80,000 per day in the national capital, adding that the Delhi government has ordered an increase of 220 ICU beds and 838 normal beds in the wards of 33 private hospitals.

Delhi has been witnessing a surge in cases in the past few days, reporting 992 new infections on Tuesday. "Delhi recorded 992 positive cases on Tuesday. The positivity rate was 2.7. The testing has been increased. The testing rate had dropped for the last two days, from today onwards 80,000 tests will be done...30 contacts each of every Covid-19 positive patients are being traced," Jain said.

"An ample number of beds is available in government hospitals. The overall occupancy in private and government hospitals in Delhi is 25 per cent. A shortage of ICU beds has been reported at three to four private hospitals, so we have ordered an increase in ICU beds," he added.

Ishrat Jahan case: CBI court discharges 3 cops

Ahmedabad, March 31: A special CBI court here on Wednesday discharged police officers G.L. Singhal, Tarun Barot and Anaju Chaudhary in the 2004 Ishrat Jahan alleged fake encounter case.

Special CBI judge V.R. Raval allowed the discharge applications of Singhal, Barot (now retired) and Chaudhary. "The CBI has not mentioned anything specific against the sanction order (in which the Gujarat government declined sanction to prosecute the three accused) which also leads to believe the act of applicants/accused was in discharge of official duties," the court observed.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on March 20 conveyed to the court that the state government had declined sanction for prosecution of the three accused.

The court in its October 2020 order observed that they had "acted in their official duties," so the probe agency was required to obtain sanction for prosecution.

Under section 197 of the Criminal Procedure Code, sanction is required for prosecuting government servants for anything done in the discharge of official duty.

Ishrat Jahan, a 19-year-old woman from Mumbra near



RAHUL GANDHI ATTACKS PM MODI, ACCUSES HIM OF LYING

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MARCH 31

Launching a frontal attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday accused him of lying and said that if you want to listen to lies — about Assam, farmers, about anything — then switch on your TV, look at Narendra Modi's face and listen to him as much as you want.

Gandhi on Wednesday started his two-days visit to the poll-bound Assam by visiting Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati where he interacted with devotees around the temple and also addressed three public rallies.

Addressing a public rally in Kamrup district he said, "I have not come here to lie to you. My name isn't Narendra Modi. If you want to listen to lies — about Assam, farmers, about anything — then switch on your TV, look at Narendra Modi's face and listen to him as much as you want. He lies to India 24 hours."

Pointing out that Congress has given five guarantees to voters of Assam that will be fulfilled, Gandhi said, "I want to give you sixth guarantee that the government of grand alliance will not be run on dictates from Nagpur or New Delhi. Our government will be receiving orders from the people of Assam."

"We are not BJP, we fulfill our promises. Tea garden workers must remember our guarantee of ₹365 per day as minimum wage," Gandhi said.

The Congress has promised in its 'guarantees' that it will not allow the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to be implemented in Assam, provide employment to five lakh youths, provide 200 units of free electricity per month to every households, give monthly assistance of ₹2,000 to every housewife, besides raising the minimum daily wages of tea garden workers.



Poll officials leave for their poll duties, ahead of the second phase of Assembly elections, in Haldia, on Wednesday.

— PTI

Didi slams EC as Nandigram comes under aerial vigilance

Already 22 companies of Central paramilitary forces deployed in N'gram alone

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 31

Labelling the Election Commission as a "spokesperson" and "broker" of the BJP for meeting the demands of the saffron party, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday wondered if the President's Rule has been imposed in the state for the ongoing Assembly election.

The Trinamul Congress supremo spewed venom against the EC after the

central poll panel, anticipating violence, enforced prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, also a demand of the BJP, and switched on aerial surveillance from choppers across Nandigram, where the two-time CM is contesting from this time against her nemesis Shuvendu Adhikari of the BJP, a day before the hot seat and 29 others go to the polls in the second phase.

Already 22 companies of central paramilitary

forces have been deployed in Nandigram alone. The 30 poll-bound Assembly constituencies include nine each from East Midnapore and West Midnapore, eight from Bankura and four from South 24 Parganas where 171 candidates are in the fray. The seats in West Midnapore and Bankura witnessed growth in the BJP votebank in the last Lok Sabha election.

In a virulent speech, Banerjee told a TMC rally at Uleberia East in

Howrah, "The EC scheduled the poll dates going by the Mandals of the BJP. I discovered it. It is true. I was surprised. In the EC each looks like Mandal committee president. I respect the EC as much as it needs. With humble regards, I request the EC, Be impartial. Is it a must to pay heed to whatever the BJP says? Even yesterday BJP workers attacked me and pushed my car in Nandigram. But the EC did not take any action. My personal security per-

sonnel tried their best. But the way the EC is giving its instructions, people see it as for the BJP only."

She alleged, "All TMC flags and hoardings have been removed because Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address a rally. This is the main job of the BJP. It only acts as a broker of BJP. Listen, this is Bengal. If I ask some boys and girls just once, they will throw them out by slapping in a second. But I do not indulge in it. I am a peace loving individual."

Over 12 die in Bihar under mysterious circumstances

NAYEAR AZAD | DC PATNA, MARCH 31

Over a dozen people across the state have lost their lives under mysterious circumstances in the last 24 hours.

While the administration has not yet confirmed the reason, a section in the Bihar political circle doesn't rule out consumption of illicit liquor as a reason behind these deaths.

Deaths have been reported from Nawada, Begusarai and Rohas districts. Reports suggest that the incident took place after some of these people consumed spurious liquor during Holi on Monday evening. The incident has exposed administrative failure in controlling the illegal liquor trade in dry Bihar.

Sources from Nawada and Begusarai said that victims were cremated by the families fearing police

● A SECTION in the Bihar political circle doesn't rule out consumption of illicit liquor as a reason behind these deaths.

investigation into the case after they died after consuming adulterated liquor.

After the incident, people have expressed anger and blamed the local police for allowing the rampant illegal liquor trade in villages. According to local political leaders in Nawada, "officials are trying to hide facts. Senior administrative officials have not said anything about these deaths. People have been raising the issue of liquor trade but the police didn't take any action".

Talking about the incident ADG headquarter Jitendra Kumar said that "The police were informed that four people have lost their lives under mysterious circumstances in Nawada. A probe has been

ordered and anything regarding the issue can only be said after the police receive medical reports of the deceased persons".

Liquor prohibition was the first major announcement by Nitish Kumar after he was sworn in as Chief Minister in 2015 following an emphatic election victory.

The complete ban was imposed on April 5, 2016, but the stringent excise law was brought into force in October 2016. Prohibition, consumption and dealing and conniving to sell liquor was made a criminal offence under Bihar's prohibition law which provides for imprisonment up to 10 years and fine of more than ₹1 lakh.

According to RJD leaders, "liquor is easily available despite stringent prohibition law in the state. The state government has failed to check and control illegal liquor trade in Bihar".

Pawar recovering after surgery: Tope

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 31

NCP president Sharad Pawar is doing well after undergoing a surgery for removal of a gallbladder stone at a private hospital in Mumbai on Tuesday night, Maharashtra health minister Tope informed. The minister said that Pawar will get relief from abdominal pain as the stone has been removed successfully. "The decision for gallbladder surgery would be taken by the doctors after a few days. Pawar is stable and there is no reason to worry," Tope said.

The NCP chief was supposed to be admitted on Wednesday, but since he had experienced pain in his abdomen, he was admitted on Tuesday afternoon itself.

Tope said that after conducting all diagnosis, the doctors concluded that the main reason behind



Sharad Pawar

the abdominal pain was the stone developed in gallbladder.

"The stone was removed through endoscopy. He is now feeling relief from night and pain has also been reduced. Doctors have planned to remove the gallbladder, which contains more stones, after eight to 10 days once all the parameters would be stabilised," he added.

"A surgery was necessitated on him following some complications. We will decide on surgery on the gallbladder later. Currently, Pawar is under observation. He is doing well," Dr Amit Maydeo said.

FESTIVE FIRE Officials suspect Holi festival revellers may have caused fire

Fire breaks out in MP tiger reserve

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 31

A massive wildfire has broken out in Bandhavgarh tiger reserve (BTR) in Madhya Pradesh, causing huge damages to flora in some forest ranges under the national park.

However, wildlife animals including tigers have remained unaffected by the forest fire, BTR field director Wincent Rahim told this newspaper on Wednesday. "No animals including the tigers and

avian species have been affected by the fire", he added.

"The fire broke out on Tuesday. It spread to the 'fire points' in three core ranges and three buffer areas of the BTR. The fire has now been extinguished", he said.

He said that bamboo clumps and grasslands in these areas were destroyed in the fire.

However, locals said the wildfire broke out on Monday and spread very fast in the jungle. The fire could be brought under

control on Wednesday afternoon with the help of ground level forest staff, police and local villagers.

"Dry leaves and dry tree branches had helped the wildfire spread fast in the forest", the local villagers said.

Panic button was pressed among the forest officers when the fire started engulfing the Mahaman and Bhadrasila forest patches under the Magadhi range, the core area of tigers in BTR, prompting the forest staff to intensify firefight measures,

sources said. The wildfire had spread to the forest ranges of Tala, Magadhi, Khitauli, Jajagari, Panpatha and Pataur, a senior forest officer said.

"We are yet to make assessment of damages caused by the wildfire. Our priority was to extinguish the fire", Rahim said.

Forest officials suspect the Holi festival revellers may have caused the fire.

Sources said lack of forest staff has hampered protection of forest particularly in BTR. "The post of deputy field director of

BTR has been lying vacant since last four months. Out of 3 posts of Sub-Divisional Officer (forest) sanctioned for BTR, only one SDO has been appointed. Similarly, a number of posts of forest rangers in BTR were yet to be filled", a senior forest officer told this newspaper requesting anonymity.

"Local villagers are invariably behind all the fire incidents. It is a difficult task for forest officers to protect the forest if adequate staff are not available", he added.



SHAH: WILL NOT ALLOW ASSAM TO BECOME HUB OF INFILTRATORS

DC CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI, MARCH 31

Union home minister Amit Shah here on Wednesday said that the BJP will not allow Assam to become a hub for infiltrators once again while claiming that his party had successfully freed the land encroached by them during the last five years.

Intensifying attack against AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal, Shah in chaste Hindi said, "Kaan khol kar sunlo Ajmal, Assam ko ghuspetiyo ke adda phir se nahin banne denge. (Ajmal listen carefully we will not allow Assam to become a hub for infiltrators again)".

Referring to Ajmal at length in his speech in three public rallies that Shah addressed on Wednesday said, "Do you know? Ajmal is claiming that the key of forming the next government is in his hands and he will be deciding who will form the next government in Assam but he doesn't know that the key of forming the next government is into the hands of people."

Shah also accused Congress of failing to stop infiltration. "Hame aur paanch saal de dijiye, aadmi toh kya parinde bhi ghus nahi sakege (give us another five years, and we will ensure that no one not even birds enter illegally)", said Shah.

Reminding as to how late Congress chief minister Tarun Gogoi rejected Ajmal by saying — "Who is Ajmal?" Shah regretted that Rahul Gandhi is saying that Ajmal is Assam's identity.

Asserting that BJP will not allow this to happen, Shah said, "Assam's identity is Vaishnav saint Srimanta Sankaradeva, Bharat Ratnas Gopinath Bordoloi and Bhupen Hazarika who represent Assam's identity and the Congress and Ajmal will not be allowed to change it at any cost." He reiterated that it is the BJP's double-engine government at the Centre and the state which successfully ended violence and agitation in the state.

SECTION 144 TO ENFORCE SOCIAL DISTANCING

FROM PAGE 1

Though restrictions and relaxations to the lockdown has been announced from time to time, the latest emphasis will be on test-track-treat, creation of containment zones where more than three persons were found to be infected, ensuring Covid-appropriate behaviour, strict adherence to SOPs and vaccination.

The GO recommended local restrictions to be imposed based on the ground reality even up to the ward level. It emphasised protection of vulnerable persons, above 65 years and those below 10 years.

Meanwhile, 2,579 fresh Coronavirus infections were reported in the state on Wednesday, which took the total number of cases to 8,86,673. Total number of deaths in the state was 19.

FROM PAGE 1

According to the ICMR, 24,36,72,940 samples have been tested up to March 30 with 10,22,915 samples being tested on

Tuesday. On Monday, only 7,85,864 samples were tested, while on Sunday, 9.13 lakh samples were

tested, compared to over 10 lakh samples the previous days, according to data by the apex research body.

Prior to March 30, India registered a steady increase for 19 days in a row. Active cases have now increased to 5,52,566 comprising 4.55 per cent of the total infections, while the

recovery rate has dropped to 94.11 per cent.

The death toll increased to 1,62,468 with 354 daily new fatalities on Wednesday. The number of people who have recovered from the disease surged to 1,14,34,301, while the case fatality rate stood at 1.34 per cent, data stated.

India fought the first wave of infection six months ago and recorded the highest single-day spike of 93,617 cases on September 16. The highest number of deaths recorded in a day were 1,169 on September 15.

Six states -- Maharashtra, Punjab,

Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat -- are logging the high number of Covid-19 daily new cases, the health ministry said. The Centre has advised high-burden states and Union territories to take stringent measures for containment of the surge.

So far, 6.30 crore doses of corona vaccine have been administered in the country since the drive began on January 16 after approval for Covishield and Covaxin.

Meanwhile, a day before India opens up its vaccination drive to everyone above the age of 45.

SHORT TAKES

ATTEMPT TO
HARM QUEEN: 5
THAIS INDICTED

Bangkok, March 31: Prosecutors in Thailand indicted five pro-democracy activists on Wednesday for attempting to harm the queen during a street demonstration last October. Queen Suthida, the wife of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, was not in any evident danger in the incident, which occurred when a limousine carrying the queen and the king's son, Prince Dipangkorn Rasmijoti, passed through a small crowd of protesters mixed with supporters of the royal family.

'99 MASSACRE:
ACCUSED SERB
ARRESTED

Pristina (Kosovo), March 31: Kosovo's police on Wednesday arrested a Serb, identified only as M.A., suspected of taking part in the massacre at Izbice on March 28, 1999, when Serb police, military and paramilitary forces found thousands of ethnic Albanian refugees in a meadow outside a village. They stole money and other valuables before separating the men from the women and children. The 130 men were then shot dead.

SECOND BITING
INCIDENT BY
BIDEN DOG

Washington, March 31: US President Joe Biden's dog, Major, has been involved in another biting incident at the White House, his second in less than a month, according to a media report.

Major, one of President Biden's two German shepherds, attacked on Monday just days after returning from training in Delaware. The incident involved a National Park Service employee on the South Lawn on Monday afternoon, according to CNN.

The employee was working at the time and needed to stop in order to receive treatment from the White House medical unit, the report said.

Major, a three-year-old German Shepherd is the younger of the Bidens' two dogs and the White House's first ever rescue dog.

BBC SCRIBE
LEAVES CHINA
AMID SAFETY

Beijing, March 31: A veteran BBC correspondent whose coverage angered China has left the country amid concerns for his safety, the BBC and a journalist organisation said.

The BBC said John Sudworth had relocated to Taiwan and would continue to be the British public broadcaster's China correspondent. The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China said that Sudworth had left last week "amid concerns for his safety and that of his family."

The organisation said that Sudworth's wife, Yvonne Murray, a correspondent for Irish broadcaster RTE, had left with him. "John's work has exposed truths the Chinese authorities did not want the world to know," the BBC said.

SPYING: ITALY
EXPELS TWO
RUSSIANS

Rome, March 31: Italy on Wednesday ordered two Russian Embassy officials expelled and arrested an Italian Navy captain on spying charges after police caught the Italian allegedly giving classified documents to one of the Russians in exchange for money.

Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio told a joint session of the Italian Parliament's foreign relations committees that the alleged incident was a "hostile act of extreme gravity". The Italian Foreign Ministry said it summoned Russian Ambassador Sergey Razov to protest the "grave incident" after a sting operation on the outskirts of Rome allegedly caught the Italian and one of the Russians in a "clandestine operation" to exchange the documents late Tuesday.

Italy's Carabinieri paramilitary police said in a statement that the Italian naval officer, who is a frigate captain, had been arrested. The Russian observed with him, a member of the Russian armed forces stationed at the Russian Embassy in Italy, was initially detained but not immediately placed under arrest given his diplomatic status. He was ordered expelled along with another Russian Embassy official allegedly involved

Biden to unveil
massive \$2 tn
infra programme

Washington, March 31: President Joe Biden will on Wednesday unveil a \$2 trillion infrastructure plan aimed at modernizing the United States' crumbling transport network, creating millions of jobs and enabling the country to "out-compete" China. The first phase of Biden's "Build Back Better" programme, which he will unveil in a speech in Pittsburgh, will detail massive investment spread over eight years.

It is designed to inject \$620 billion into transport, including upgrading 20,000 miles (32,000 kilometres) of roads and highways, repairing thousands of bridges and doubling funding for public transit. The president, whom Donald Trump tried to caricature as "Sleepy Joe" and a man without strong ideas or motivation, intends to make infrastructure investment one of his flagship policies. "He views his role as laying out... a broad vision, a bold vision for how we can invest in America, American workers, our communities," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said.

The cost would be partly paid for by raising corporate tax from 21 percent to 28 percent. "The president is proposing to fundamentally reform the corporate tax code so that it... ensures that large corporations are paying their fair share," a senior administration official said ahead of the speech.

The new spending offensive comes soon after the United States passed a nearly \$2 trillion Covid-19 economic stimulus plan. And Biden's speech is set to open a bitter battle in Congress, where the Democrats hold only a narrow majority and will face strong opposition

from the Republicans. The first criticisms came before Biden even gave his speech, some of it from the progressive wing of his party.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said the package "needs to be way bigger." At the other end of the spectrum Republican Senator John Barasso dismissed the plan as "a Trojan horse for more liberal spending & higher taxes." The coming months will test the negotiating skills of the Democratic president, a veteran of Washington deal-making, and the chances of his infrastructure plan passing into law remain uncertain.

"It's an important initiative to start the process with the president being very clear that he's got a plan, and that he's open to hearing what others think," the administration official said.

"But what he is uncompromising about is the urgency of the moment and the need to really deliver for the American people and make good on building back better in this moment." The plan also vows to "spark the electric vehicle revolution" by building a network of 500,000 EV chargers, replacing 50,000 diesel transit vehicles and electrifying 20 percent of the famous yellow school buses.

Described by the White House as a "once-in-a-century capital investment," the plan aims to accelerate the move towards a greener economy. — *AFP*

H-1B electronic
registration
selection done

Washington, March 31: The US has received enough electronic applications during the initial registration period to reach the 2022 fiscal year cap for the H-1B foreign workers visa, the most sought-after work visa among Indian professionals.

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services, the federal agency which screens and allocates H-1B applications, said it was randomly selected from among the registrations properly submitted to reach the cap.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows the US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. The USCIS has notified all prospective petitioners with selected registrations that they are eligible to file an H-1B cap-subject petition for the beneficiary named in the applicable selected registration. The federal agency said

that H-1B cap-subject petitions for fiscal 2022, including those petitions eligible for the advanced degree exemption, may be filed with the USCIS beginning April 1, if based on a valid, selected registration.

Last month, the USCIS said it received a sufficient number of petitions needed to reach the Congressionally mandated 65,000 H-1B visa regular cap and the 20,000 H-1B visa US advanced degree exemption, known as the master's cap, for fiscal year (FY) 2021.

The Biden administration in Feb. announced that it was delaying the H-1B policy of the previous Trump administration on the allocation of the popular foreign work visas by continuing with the lottery system until Dec. 31, 2021, to give the immigration agency more time to develop, test and implement the modifications to the registration system.

On January 7, the USCIS announced to do away with the traditional lottery system in deciding the successful applicants for the H-1B visas. — *PTI*

● **THIS LIMITED** exchange of info is consistent with customary good practices used to ensure effective communication among satellite operators.

reported, quoting a NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) statement as saying.

To assure the safety of our respective missions, NASA is coordinating with the UAE, European Space Agency, Indian Space Rese-

Pfizer says its Coronavirus
vax protects younger teens

Vaccinating children will help schools look normal after months of disruption

Washington, March 31: Pfizer announced Wednesday that its Covid-19 vaccine is safe and strongly protective in kids as young as 12, a step toward possibly beginning shots in this age group before they head back to school in the fall.

Most Covid-19 vaccines being rolled out worldwide are for adults, who are at higher risk from the coronavirus. Pfizer's vaccine is authorised for ages 16 and older. But vaccinating children of all ages will be critical to stopping the pandemic — and helping schools, at least the upper grades, start to look a little more normal after months of disruption.

In a study of 2,260 US volunteers ages 12 to 15, preliminary data showed there were no cases of Covid-19 among fully vaccinated adolescents compared to 18 among those given dummy shots, Pfizer reported. It's a small study, that hasn't yet been published, so another important piece of evidence is how well the shots revved up the kids' immune systems.

Researchers reported high levels of virus-fighting antibodies, somewhat higher than were seen in studies of young adults. Kids had side effects similar to young adults, the company said. The main side effects are pain, fever, chills and fatigue, particularly after the second dose.

The study will continue to track participants for two years for more information about long-term protection and safety. Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech in the coming weeks plan to ask the US Food and Drug Administration and European regulators to allow emergency use of the shots starting at age 12.

"We share the urgency to expand the use of our vaccine," Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said in a statement. He expressed "the hope of starting to vaccinate this age group before the start of the next school year" in the United States. Pfizer isn't the only company seeking to lower the age limit for its vaccine.

Results also are expected soon from a US study of Moderna's vaccine in 12- to 17-year-olds. But in a sign



People receive a dose of the BioNTech/Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine at a vaccination clinic set up inside the Derby Arena at Pride Park in Derby, Derbyshire on Wednesday. — *AFP*

Chinese jabs show 'safety'
but data lacking: WHO

Geneva, March 31: WHO vaccine experts said Wednesday that an interim analysis of clinical trial data from two Chinese Covid-19 vaccines showed they demonstrated "safety and good efficacy", but that more data was needed. The Chinese firms Sinovac and Sinopharm, whose Covid jabs are already being used in several countries, have submitted data in applications for the World Health Organisation's emergency use listing (EUL) green light.

The UN health agency's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation

(SAGE) said it had reviewed the data provided so far, and that both vaccines "demonstrated safety and good efficacy against symptomatic Covid-19 disease". However, it warned, "both vaccines lacked data in older age groups and in persons with co-morbidities," meaning other medical conditions.

"Post-introduction vaccine effectiveness and safety studies will be needed to address the impact on those sub-populations," SAGE said in a list of highlights published after a meeting last week to discuss developments on vac-

cines against a range of diseases. The two vaccines are among four homegrown jabs that have been approved by Chinese regulators so far, but SAGE pointed out that neither had yet received authorisation by what the WHO considers "a stringent regulatory authority".

SAGE, which advises the WHO on immunisation policies, said it would hold off on issuing recommendations for how the two Chinese vaccines should best be used until after another expert panel rules on their EUL applications. — *AFP*

that the findings were promising, the FDA already allowed both companies to begin US studies in children 11 and younger, working their way to as young as 6-month-olds.

AstraZeneca last month began a study of its vaccine among 6- to 17-year-olds

in Britain. Johnson & Johnson is planning its own pediatric studies. And in China, Sinovac recently announced it has submitted preliminary data to Chinese regulators showing its vaccine is safe in children as young as 3. While most Covid-19 vaccines be-

ing used globally were first tested in tens of thousands of adults, pediatric studies won't need to be nearly as large.

Scientists have safety information from those studies and from subsequent vaccinations in millions more adults. — *AP*

Experts examine ship bottom
Egypt leader says Nile
water is 'untouchable'

Cairo, March 31: Experts dived under a colossal container ship that had been stuck for nearly a week in the Suez Canal before it was freed, to examine the vessel's underside, officials said Wednesday. The dives were part of a continuing investigation into what caused the grounding of the Ever Given, now anchored in the Great Bitter Lake, a wide stretch of water halfway between the north and south ends of the canal.

Salvage teams succeeded in finally freeing the skyscraper-size vessel on Monday afternoon. The ship got stuck sideways in a narrow stretch of the canal, shaking the global shipping industry when it halted billions of dollars a day in maritime commerce for around a week.

Two senior canal officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to talk to reporters, said "slight to medium" damage was found at the ves-

Ismailia, March 31: Egypt's president has said his country's share of the Nile River's waters are "untouchable" in a stark warning to Ethiopia, which is building a giant dam on the Nile's main tributary.

The comment from President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi comes amid a deadlock in the years-long talks over the dam between the Nile Basin countries, which also includes Sud-

an. In a news conference on Tuesday, el-Sissi warned of "instability that no one can imagine" in the region if the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is filled and operated without a legally binding agreement. "No one can take a single drop of water from Egypt, and whoever wants to try it, let him try," he said. "No one imagines that it will be far from our capabilities."

A media officer at the

the Ethiopian Embassy in Cairo declined to comment on el-Sissi's remarks. El-Sissi was firm while discussing the dam dispute at a news conference in the Suez Canal city of Ismailia. He visited the crucial, east-west waterway following its reopening on Monday. "I repeat that the waters of Egypt are untouchable, and touching them is a red line," he said. — *AP*

AVOIDING | COLLISION

Previously the US, Russia, EU, India have succeeded in sending spacecraft to Mars

Nasa shares Mars mission data with India, China, UAE, ESA

Beijing, March 31: The US space agency Nasa has exchanged data of its current Mars mission with its counterparts in China, India, the UAE and the European Space Agency to lower the risk of a collision as their spacecraft were also currently hovering the red planet, a media report said on Wednesday.

The purpose of exchanges was to lower the risk of a collision, as their spacecraft are orbiting the red planet, Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post*

arch Organisation and the China National Space Administration, all of which have spacecraft in orbit around Mars, to exchange information on our respective Mars missions to ensure the safety of our respective spacecraft, Nasa's statement said.

This limited exchange of information is consistent with customary good practices used to ensure effective communication among satellite operators and spacecraft safety in orbit, the report said.

Isro's Mars Orbiter Mission, Mangalyaan, spacecraft remained in Mars orbit since it entered there in 2014. India is the first Asian country to successfully send a spacecraft to Mars.

Nasa's Perseverance has landed on Mars last month and its rover is currently exploring its surface, while China's Tianwen-1 consisting of an orbiter, a lander and a rover, entered the parking lot of orbit around Mars on February 24 and expected to land there in the next few months.

United Arab Emirates (UAE) spacecraft, Hope, is also orbiting the Mars planet. There are two spacecraft from the European Space Agency in the Martian orbit, the report said.

For information exchange cooperation with China Nasa had sought approval from US Congress and spoke to CNSA, the US space agency confirmed on Monday, the *Post* report said.

Previously the US, Russia, EU besides India have succeeded in sending spacecraft to Mars. — *PTI*

SpaceX rocket breaks
apart before landing

Cape Canaveral, March 31: SpaceX chalked up another failed landing Tuesday for its futuristic, bullet-shaped Starship, as the prototype Mars rocket broke apart right before touchdown.

A camera on the rocket froze not quite six minutes into the test flight, and

dense fog in South Texas obscured views of the ruptured rocket. Other video showed debris raining down and explosions could be heard.

"At least the crater is in the right place!" SpaceX chief executive Elon Musk tweeted. — *AP*

DECCAN Chronicle

1 APRIL 2021

Not all gloom, but clearly complacency will be fatal

A recent surge in coronavirus cases across India has triggered concerns over the growth trajectory of the economy. A free hand given by the Union home ministry to state governments to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and threats to impose lockdown by states like Maharashtra have given rise to concerns about the fragile economic recovery.

Nevertheless, Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das believes that the economy will move only upwards from now on. Though the benchmark market indices Sensex and the Nifty were in jitters over the rising viral infections, Mr Das does not see a need for a revision in the central bank's growth estimate, which was pegged at 10.5 per cent for the financial year 2021-22.

The RBI's assessment of the economy appears to be based on three factors — first, an unlikely prospect of a complete lockdown as India had witnessed between April and May 2020; second, Covid is not as unknown to Indians as it was in 2020; third, an improved ability of the Indian health-care system to handle the Covid-19 disease, though the vaccination programme is going on at a rather slow pace.

Compared to 2020, the Indian industry, too, has adapted itself to working in a new normal created by the Covid-19 pandemic. People are not as unsure about their future as they were in April 2020, which will not force them to sit tight on their spending. As a result, there won't be any drastic fall in demand and, therefore, the production.

Some economists, however, expressed concerns about the Maharashtra government's threat to impose localised lockdown in the state, which has been contributing around half of the total cases in the country. The western state contributes 14.5 per cent of the Indian GDP and is one of the powerhouses of the country in manufacturing. If the lockdown was imposed in the state, they argue that it would disrupt the supply chain and cause great harm to the economic recovery. After witnessing the economic and social consequences of the 2020 lockdown, no government would ever repeat it again.

The downside of the people's confidence in the government's ability to deal with the pandemic would be complacency, as could be seen across India. People stopped following Covid-appropriate behaviour because of a lower number of cases in January. Politicians should also be blamed for complacency as many of them began to write off Covid by moving around without masks, which inspired people to dodge social distance norms.

After the second wave of cases, governments and people have woken up to reality and have begun to take quick steps to slow down the spread of infection. The reports of healthcare infrastructure being overwhelmed in bigger cities like Delhi and Mumbai would trigger a course-correction in people's behaviour. As a result, an SBI research report claims that the second wave could peak in mid-April and ebb in May. It means the second wave would last for 100 days, which is not a period long enough to push the Indian economic growth into negative territory once again.

Wrong signal in Valley

Former J&K chief minister and PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti was recently informed that her application for passport extension has been rejected. The state CID has given an "adverse" report. If this should cause surprise, no less surprising is the ground for rejection given by the CID. It appears issuing a passport to the former CM — who is a key mainstream politician of Kashmir — will be detrimental to national security.

This is Kafkaesque. Until not long ago, Ms Mufti's party ran a coalition government in J&K with the BJP, the party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Wholly unlike one another in ideology, these parties had come together on account of the unusual Assembly election result of 2014. Many thought that if a Valley-based party got together with a national entity which had a pronounced Hindu community tilt and was well-grounded in the Hindu-majority Jammu region, many of the (then) state's woes will be over.

These were lofty reasons intended to serve the national interest in a troubled part of the country. But BJP and PDP have since split. Ms Mufti was thrown into prison along with hundreds of other Kashmir politicians, not excluding all the leading lights. And Ms Mufti has suddenly become a threat to national security, no less.

Even if the Government of India, to which the state CID reports since J&K is no longer a state but a UT, is being petty since Ms Mufti is an ally-turned political adversary of the ruling party BJP, what about the former CM's old mother, Gulshan Nazir, widow of the PDP founder Mufti Mohammed Sayeed who had brought his party and BJP together? It appears the old lady, too, has been denied a passport for the same reason as her politician-daughter.

This is beyond petty and smells of vendetta. Perhaps all senior mainline Kashmir politicians, not just the separatists, will share the Mufti family's fate if they applied for a passport. Naturally this makes India laughing stock in the world and in the region. It also makes the ordinary people of Kashmir wonder about the Centre's intention about them. For the Modi government, an anxious and dissatisfied populace in the border regions when fresh talks with Pakistan are envisaged cannot be a good sign.

Subhani



Being politically correct in times of Covid & polls

Devi Kar

Through most of 2020, as the fearsome Covid-19 pandemic engulfed the whole world, the stormy American presidential elections took up much of our attention. No matter where you are, you simply can't get away from the tumult of politics. Perhaps I feel this all the more because West Bengal, where I live, is in the midst of the eight-phase Assembly elections while we teachers are struggling to run our schools with full Covid-19 protocols in place. The spectre of the board exams is looming before us; they have to be administered after the election results are out.

Meanwhile, politics began interfering with the distribution of vaccines, and sadly with children's books as well. At the beginning of this month, it was announced that six of Dr Seuss' titles would be recalled because of the "racist tropes" that people had been talking about. It is well known that banned or unattainable objects are always the most attractive. Therefore, I promptly ordered a copy of the delightful Dr Seuss book *And to Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street* before it became unavailable. Maybe it is a good thing that the United States is finally becoming sensitive to the feelings of non-whites. But removing stereotypical line drawings from books does not really get to the heart of racism. I don't know about others, but if an Indian woman was depicted as a brown caricature figure eating out of a thali with her fingers, I would not mind at all. It is only if we believe that white is the only acceptable complexion, or that eating with one's hands is unacceptable, that we would feel upset by such illustrations. Come to think of it, there are no "racist tropes" around white people — and it is

not difficult to fathom the reason. Dr Seuss himself explained how he went about changing his original yellow-skinned, pig-tailed "Chinaman" whom he had drawn wearing a conical hat and eating out of a bowl with sticks. He changed "a Chinaman" to "a Chinese man", but after deleting his conical hat and pig-tail and removing the yellow from his skin, Dr Seuss thought that his Chinese man looked more like an Irishman!

Politics dominates society so powerfully that everywhere and at all times we are required to be "politically correct". This has reached such ridiculous lengths that very often the replaced "correct" expression can't be comprehended. These "correct" terms have been especially coined to protect people from feeling hurt. In this context, it has to be mentioned that people seem to have very thin skins these days and get hurt far too easily. So, we have to look out for racist innuendos, references to skin colour, remarks on religion which may be deemed hurtful or even sacrilegious by some group or the other. We must remember not to call short people "short" though it is fine to call tall people "tall". You had better not refer to a person who is hard of hearing "deaf" or for that matter a visually impaired person "blind". You will be called all kinds of names if you use an "incorrect" term — racist, sexist,

Maybe it is a good thing that the US is becoming sensitive to the feelings of non-whites. But removing stereotypical line drawings from books does not really get to the heart of racism.

An ad for 'reliable and hardworking applicants' was seen as offensive! The current euphemism for 'old people' is 'senior citizens', but I suspect that this too will in time offend people of an advanced age.

insensitive to alternative sexual orientation (in some places the term "homosexual" is taboo, you must say "same gender loving"), intolerant of other religions, and so on. A few decades ago, Americans became so self-conscious about being Christian-centric that to be perceived as inclusive, they began to call the Christmas season "the holiday season" and wishing each other "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas". But surely, calling a Christmas tree a "holiday tree" seems a bit too much.

This sort of political correctness without bringing about a radical change in attitudes is quite meaningless. It is true that certain words genuinely acquire connotations which are insulting to groups. For instance, the word "Negro" — although if it merely referred to the Negroid "type", it would be taken as just a scientific fact. Today the term cannot be dissociated with the history of slavery. Unfortunately, "black" has also taken on a similar meaning. But then if you truly believe that "black is beautiful", you wouldn't mind being described as a black-skinned or dark-skinned person. The trouble is that ethnicity is a loaded concept, and simple words have become complex. In India, where colour matters a great deal, people use the word "maila", or dirty, to describe someone's dark complexion.

I hope it was a joke, but I have read that an advertisement for "reliable and hardworking applicants" was rejected as it could offend unreliable and lazy people. The current euphemism for "old people" is "senior citizens", but I suspect that this too will in time offend people of an advanced age.

Recently, I named a virtual classroom "Brainstorming Room", and soon after that I read that the term "brainstorming" could threaten epileptic people. The suggested alternative term was "Thought Showers". It is nerve-racking to even speak these days.

Going back to children's books, it is not only the allegations of racism or "hurtful" religious references that have generated trouble but also certain references to political ideology. "I know up on top you are seeing great sights, but down here on the bottom we too should have rights" — in Dr Seuss' *Cat in the Hat* was found to be "too political" for children. In West Bengal, the withdrawal from the primary curriculum of Tagore's *Sahaj Path* by the former Left Front government had caused a furore. One of the reasons for withdrawing these beloved books, some alleged, were a couple of lines that showed a *zamindar* to be benevolent. This was certainly not in alignment with the CPI(M)'s principles. I know that the now condemned Enid Blyton books were read innocently and with great enjoyment by generations of children without a thought about racism or classism. However, I do believe today that stereotyping the stepmother as evil in children's stories could have a detrimental effect on children's minds. Such stereotypes must be avoided.

In conclusion, it can be stated that a balance must be sought between a genuine need to change terminology and the rush to appease thin-skinned groups.

The writer is a veteran school educator based in Kolkata

However, I do believe today that stereotyping the stepmother as evil in children's stories could have a detrimental effect on children's minds. Such stereotypes must be avoided.

LETTERS

COVID SECOND WAVE

The editorial *Let not Covid 2nd wave destroy economy again* (March 31) clinically and justifiably echoes the aftermath of Covid's second innings which has inexorably recommended smiting people by scores, despite the advent and administering the indigenous vaccination drive across the country. Of all the attributable reasons for its spreading the tentacles, it is people who remain lax by throwing all the safety measures as advocated by the Health Advisory Bureau, leave alone political campaigns by the leaders going haywire sans any protective face masks and social distancing. As opined, another total lockdown will result in massive loss to the economy on one side and job loss on another and the nation's survival of the fittest would be in jeopardy.

E.S.Chandrasekaran, Chennai

THE COVID-19 situation in India has gone from bad to worse over the last few weeks. Trends show the virus is still very active and breaches our defences just when we think we can control it. We cannot deny that the mutated strains have a role in Covid cases. We must stick to the use of masks. Social distancing is part and parcel of our living culture for the future. Delhi, taken as one district, is among the top 10 Covid-19 high-burden districts. Eight such districts are from Maharashtra and that is alarming. We have taken pride that fatality has been low. But the death rate is now at four times rising to 271 from 73. The virus needs to be eliminated. We want to emphasise that without contact tracing, quarantining, and isolation, we cannot contain the virus. It is time for redressal of active cases and increase the vaccination drive most effective to prevent further spread of virus.

C.K. Subramaniam, Chennai

POLL PROMISES

THIS REFERS to the Counter Point regarding poll promises (March 31). Unfortunately it is only before the elections that our politicians become down-to-earth. They wake up from their sleep and start visiting their constituencies. Subsequently along with their poll campaigns the tall empty promises crowns it all. Each party has an agenda where it promises infrastructure, health centres, housing, household appliances and so on if voted to power. Sadly, most of the promises are not fulfilled and eventually keeping to their word remains an unrealistic hope. It is better the politicians try to win the hearts of people by just being genuine instead of capturing the public with their fake promises.

Jacqueline Netto, Chennai

The Goa government's move to place a serving IAS officer in the State Election Commission has backfired badly for not just chief minister Pramod Sawant but also the state chief secretary Parimal Rai. The Supreme Court has cancelled the appointment of state law secretary Chokha Ram Garg in the post.

er, within babu circles in Panjim, it is chief secretary Rai who has become the most visible face to take the blame for this harsh indictment by the court.

Share a babu experience! Follow [dilipthecherian@Twitter.com](#). Let's multiply the effect.

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

R. MOHAN
Resident Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:
Chennai: SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254747, 22254748.
Coimbatore: 77 Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore 641009. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256
Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256.
Bengaluru: 5th Floor, BMTC Commercial Complex, 80 Ft. Road, Koramangala, Bangalore-560095. Ph: 08043460500; Fax: 080-22960551/52/55
Visakhapatnam: Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax: (0891) 2755285
Vijayawada: No. C 3 & 4, Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 2555284/ 2555287, Fax: (0866) 2555234
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618
Anantapur: Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904
Nellore: Survey No. 527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatchalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348581/ 22. Telefax (0861) 2348580
Karimnagar: Survey No. 1341, Vavilalapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar 505 001. Phone: (0878) 2228908; Telefax (0878) 2220433
Kochi: No. 3-B, 3rd Floor, DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloor-Kadavanthara Road, Ernakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408
Kozhikode: No 6/1002 E, First Floor City Mall, Opp. YMCA Kannur Road, Kozhikode - 673 001 Fax : 0495 4019018
Thiruvananthapuram: St Joseph Press Thycad post, Cotton Hills, Thiruvananthapuram-14, Ph: 0471-2735105/67, Fax: 0471-4016112 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08ss



Dilip Cherian

Dilli Ka Babu

High court pulls up Punjab govt for tainted cops in IPS positions

The Amarinder Singh-led Congress government in Punjab is getting flak from the Punjab and Haryana high court and the issue has had ramifications across the country. The court has directed the state government to explain how and why it has chosen to appoint Punjab Police Service (PPS) officers to IPS-cadre posts of SSPs in the state. The court has held that these appointments are in violation of the IPS cadre rules and has also impleaded the Centre as a party to look into these "apparent violations".

The court noted the instance of PPS officer Rajinder Singh Sohail who was convicted in a criminal case but has been posted as the SSP of Gurdaspur, a post meant for the IPS cadre.

Further, the court has issued a show-cause notice to additional chief secretary (home) Anurag

Aggarwal for "filing of false affidavit" in the matter. Mr Aggarwal may face perjury proceedings if the court is not satisfied with his response. The court has directed the state government to remove tainted or convicted police officers from duty until a policy is framed on action to be taken against these officers. Future proceedings in the court will be watched with great interest. Watch this space for updates.

BIHAR STRUGGLES TO FILL IAS VACANCIES

The Nitish Kumar-led NDA government in Bihar is increasingly re-employing retired officers. Its latest appointment is of retired IAS officer Deepak Kumar as the principal secretary to the chief minister. Mr Kumar, a 1984-batch officer, retired in February and was promptly rehired.

Sources say the government has

little choice when it comes to appointments due to the acute paucity of IAS officers in Bihar. Bihar apparently has only 202 IAS officers against a sanctioned strength of 359 officers. Not surprisingly, the deficit has impacted the quality of administration. It is not unusual for senior officers to be burdened with three or four departments each, apart from their principal task.

It is learnt that Nitish Kumar has requested the Centre to allot 54 IAS officers based on the civil service exam last year. It is reportedly also facilitating appointments to 22 posts from the 2018 batch, 15 posts from the 2019 batch and 16 posts from the 2020 batch under the promotion quota.

GOA CHIEF SECY IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

The Goa government's move to place a serving IAS officer in the

State Election Commission (SEC) has backfired badly for not just chief minister Pramod Sawant but also the state chief secretary Parimal Rai. The Supreme Court has cancelled the recent appointment of state law secretary Chokha Ram Garg as the state election commissioner. In its stinging order, the apex court noted that the move was "a mockery" of constitutional mandate.

The court has further issued directions to all states and Union territories to cancel similar appointments and to appoint only "independent persons to this high constitutional office", nipping in the bud any similar approaches that other states may have been contemplating. Mr Sawant's "innovative" approach is now unlikely to "inspire" other states to attempt something along similar lines.

While political reactions to the decision have been muted, howev-

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	49509.15 -1.25
Nifty 50	14690.70 -1.04
S&P 500*	3,986.92 0.72
Dollar (₹)	73.11 0.38
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.76 0.22
Euro (₹)	85.77 0.42
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	43,925.49 0.11
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	63.89 -0.39
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.177 0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.723 -0.003

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Pakistan set to import sugar, cotton from India



Pakistan will import sugar and cotton from India, newly appointed finance minister Hammad Azhar announced, lifting a nearly two-year old ban on the commodities' import from the neighbour. The economic coordination committee allowed the private sector to import five lakh tonnes of white sugar from India, Azhar said. He also said that Pakistan will import cotton from India starting June this year.

Govt to offer \$1 bn each to chip units

SANKALP PHARTIYAL & ADITI SHAH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

India is offering more than \$1 billion in cash to each semiconductor company that sets up manufacturing units in the country as it seeks to build on its smartphone assembly industry and strengthen its electronics supply chain, two officials said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' drive has helped to turn India into the world's second-biggest mobile manufacturer after China. New Delhi believes it is time for chip companies to set up in the country.

"The government will give cash incentives of more than \$1 billion to each company which will set up chip fabrication units," a senior government official told Reuters, declining to be named as he was not authorised to speak with the media.

"We're assuring them that the government will be a buyer and there will also be mandates in the private market (for companies to buy locally made chips)."

How to disburse the cash incentives has yet to be decided and the government has asked the industry for feedback, said a second government source.

Governments across the world are subsidising the construction of semiconductor plants as chip shortages hobble the auto and electronics industries and highlight the world's dependence on Taiwan for

CHINESE FIRMS JOIN SEMICONDUCTOR RUSH

JOSH HORWITZ
SHANGHAI, MARCH 31

Xiaomi has joined a rush of Chinese tech companies venturing into the semiconductor sector, announcing on Wednesday a new chip to help smartphone cameras process images.

Xiaomi's Surge C1 chip was developed after an earlier unsuccessful attempt at producing a smartphone processor and comes as Chinese internet giants, automakers, and even home appli-

supplies. India also wants to establish reliable suppliers for its electronics and telecom industry to cut dependence on China.

Chips made locally will be designated as "trusted sources" and can be used in electronic equipment, the first source said.

But the sources did not say whether particular semiconductor companies have shown interest in setting up units in India.

India has previously tried to woo semiconductor players but the firms were deterred by India's wobbly infrastructure, unstable power supply, bureaucracy and poor planning.

The renewed government push to lure chipmakers is more likely to succeed, after the success of the smartphone industry, industry insiders say. Moreover, Indian con-

glomerates, such as the Tata Group, have also expressed interest in moving into electronics and high-tech manufacturing.

India in December invited an "expression of interest" from chipmakers for setting up fabrication units in the country or for the acquisition of such manufacturing units overseas by an Indian company or consortium.

The government estimates it would cost roughly \$5-\$7 billion to set up a chip fabrication unit in India and take two-three years after all the approvals are in place, one of the auto industry sources said.

The source added that New Delhi is willing to offer companies concessions, including waivers on customs duty, R&D expenses and interest free loans.

Marine products will get Rs 993 crore and mozzarella cheese Rs 283 crore, which adds up to a total of Rs 9,039 crore. Innovative and organic products of SMEs, including free range eggs, poultry meat, egg products, also are covered under the scheme.

Further, Rs 9,040 crore will be provided as an incentive for sales and Rs 1,500 crore for branding and marketing.

PLI scheme for food processing cleared

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

The Union Cabinet has approved the Rs 10,900 crore production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for the food processing sector, which is expected to increase output of the industry by around Rs 33,500 crore and create employment for 2.5 lakh persons by 2026-27.

The scheme will support food manufacturing entities which have stipulated minimum sales and willingness to make stipulated investment for expansion of processing capacity and branding abroad.

The scheme will provide incentives for six years from 2021-22 till 2026-27. As per the segment-wise incentive data provided by the government, ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat brands will receive a total incentive of Rs 4,181 crore in these six years and processed fruit and vegetables will get a total of Rs 3,582 crore.

Further, Rs 9,040 crore will be provided as an incentive for sales and Rs 1,500 crore for branding and marketing.

Implementation of labour codes deferred

New Delhi, March 31: The four labour codes will not come into effect from April 1 as states are yet to finalise the relevant rules, which means that there will be no change in take home pay of employees and provident fund liability of companies for now.

Once the wages code comes into force, there will be significant changes in the way basic pay and provident fund of employees are calculated.

The labour ministry had envisaged implementing the four codes on industrial relations, wages, social security and occupational health safety & working conditions from April 1, 2021. The ministry had even finalised the rules under the four codes.

"Since the states have not finalised the rules under four codes, the implementation of these laws are deferred for the time being," an official source told PTI.

According to the source, only a few states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Uttarakhand had circulated the draft rules.

Since labour is a concurrent subject under the Constitution of India, both the Centre and the states would have to notify rules under the codes to bring those into force in their respective jurisdictions.

Under the new wages code, allowances are capped at 50 per cent. This means half of the gross pay of an employee would be basic wages.

PF contribution is calculated as a percentage of basic wage, which includes basic pay and dearness allowance.

—PTI

EMERGENCY CREDIT LINE TILL JUNE 30

New Delhi, March 31: The government on Wednesday extended the Rs 3-lakh-crore emergency credit line guarantee scheme by another three months till June 30 and also widened its scope to new sectors, including hospitality, travel and tourism. ECLGS 3.0 would involve extending credit of up to 40 per cent of total credit outstanding across all lending institutions as on February 29, 2020, the finance ministry said. The tenor of loans granted under ECLGS 3.0 would be six years, including a moratorium period of two years.

QR CODE ON B2C INVOICE MUST ONLY FROM JULY

New Delhi, March 31: The government has deferred by three months till July 1 the requirement of printing dynamic QR code on B2C invoices generated by businesses. In a notification, the CBIC waived the amount of penalty payable by a registered person for non-compliance of provisions of dynamic QR code in B2C invoices till June 30.

—PTI

6-DIGIT HSN CODE MUST FOR ₹5 CR TURNOVER

New Delhi, March 31: Businesses with turnover of more than Rs 5 crore will have to furnish six-digit HSN or tariff code on the invoices issued for supplies of taxable goods and services from April 1. Those with turnover of up to Rs 5 crore in the preceding financial year would be required to furnish four-digit HSN code on B2B invoices.

—PTI

FTP to run till Sept. end

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

The government has further extended the Foreign Trade Policy by six months till September 30, 2021. The basic customs duty and IGST exemption for export units also have been extended for one year.

The foreign trade policy for 2015-20, which was due to expire on March 31, 2020 was earlier extended by one year till March 31, 2021 in the event of the

pandemic. Now the policy has been further extended till September 30, 2021, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade said on Wednesday, without providing any reason.

The government has also extended the basic customs duty and IGST exemption benefit for Export Oriented Units till March 31, 2022.

The government said in Parliament that it is in the process of preparing Foreign Trade Policy 2021-26.

COFFEE-BREAK

Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



Aries: Some of you may pay taxes or other penalties be very successful today. You'll earn good reputation and seek government support at the start of the day.



Taurus: Watch out for your business partners. Disputes among partners could dissolve your partnership. Your business expansion plans are fruitful today.



Gemini: Unexpected events might trouble you at work. Stay prepared for examinations to score good results. You're prone to joint, chest and lung ailments.



Cancer: Plan well to avoid unforeseen obstacles during short trips. Emotional disputes might affect the geniality at home; handle the delicate situations carefully.



Leo: Your well-wishers' suggestions will be favourable to you. Your children might cause you disappointments and troubles; watch their behaviour.



Virgo: Parents, siblings and children's health ailments bother you. Care for your father's health. Your spiritual interests awaken today. Remain cordial with elders and friends.

You share your b'day with

Mackenzie Davis is a Canadian actress. She is known for her roles in the films like *Smashed*, *What If*, *The F Word*, *Happiest Season*, amongst others. In 2019, she starred as the augmented super-soldier Grace in *Terminator: Dark Fate*.



Libra: Expenses neutralise gains. Careful about spends! Younger siblings bring gains. Today's not good for love. You'll work hard to get things done professionally.



Scorpio: Partnership business profits. You'll spend some money on romance. Boldness brings work success. Younger siblings might turn rivals.



Sagittarius: Expect expenses towards parents. You may not keep your promises. Today's profitable. Spouse and friends bring comforts.



Capricorn: Professional matters might suffer from communication flaw. Expect litigation expenses. Your father brings wealth. Spiritual activities bring peace. Your ideas find familial acceptance.

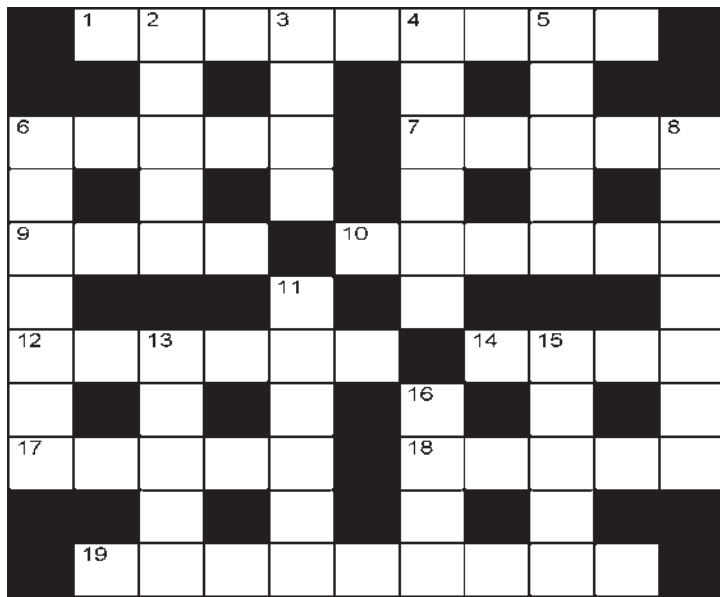


Aquarius: Today's for high profile, high performance. Friends provide good information that eases your worries. Get permission from your seniors before altering your plans. Handle sensitive situation tactfully.



Pisces: Don't neglect familial responsibilities. Work pressure increases. Take care of health. Some employees can expect transfers. Worrying has ruined your thinking power.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across

- Sand-filled timer (9)
- Fruit from palms (5)
- Prevaricate (5)
- Arm bone (4)
- Shared (6)
- Linger idly (6)
- Roman cloak (4)
- Male duck (5)
- Deportee (5)
- 100th anniversary (9)

Down

- Repeatedly (5)
- Plant disease (4)
- Allied, 10. Ship, 12. Tube, 14. Sarong, 17. Gruel, 18. Arena, 19. Champion.
- Convulsion (5)
- Twofold (7)
- Ancestry (7)
- Duplicity (6)
- Mental representation (5)
- Basketry willow (5)
- Enthusiastic (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

Across: 1. Hydrogen, 7. Dated, 8. Stoic, 9. Allied, 10. Ship, 12. Tube, 14. Sarong, 17. Gruel, 18. Arena, 19. Champion.

Down: 1. Hotel, 2. Dodged, 3. Oast, 4. Epoch, 5. Advantage, 6. Scapegoat, 11. Salami, 13. Brush, 15. Ocean, 16. Slim.

Word Mine

W
S S T
H N E E I

TODAY'S RATINGS: 24 AVERAGE; 26 GOOD; 28 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used only once.

Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid.

There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

Answers tomorrow

jumble

GSTIH
EHDA
WORT
ANBTET

Answers tomorrow

Yesterday's Jumbles: IRONY WAIVE PURSUE HUMANE

Answer: When the rider showed down the galloping horse, the lioness thought — 'WHOA' IS ME

and the spade king to defeat the contract.

South should have counted his tricks. He had nine sure winners, and the 10th could come from either a 3-3 club division — which would happen about one-third of the time — or a club ruff in the dummy. The correct play is to win the first trick in hand and immediately cash three diamond tricks, discarding a club from the dummy. Next, play the ace and another club.

East will return a trump, but South wins in hand and ruffs a club in the dummy with the heart king for his 10th trick. Anytime you can ruff in the shorter-trump hand, it is almost certain to be the right play. Always ruff high if you can afford to.

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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



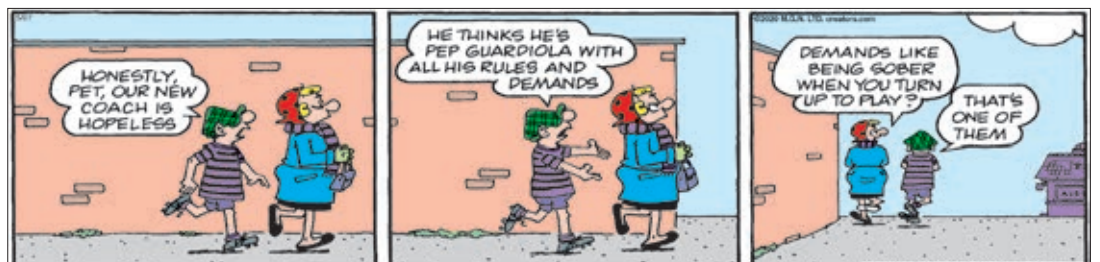
ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



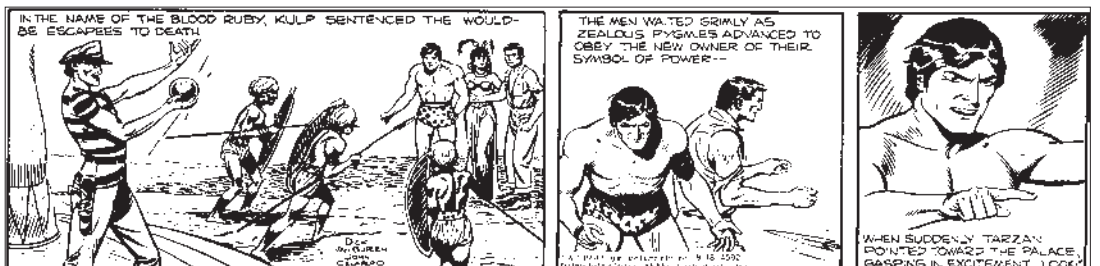
BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



bridge
PHILLIP ALDER
A GHOST OF A DEAL ON AN ANNIVERSARY

The first of these columns that appeared under my byline was published on April 1, 1991 — exactly 30 years ago today. Nearly 10,000 columns later and counting...

My predecessor, Jim Jacoby, died unexpectedly from lung cancer. I spoke with his editor, Linda Bosson, and she told me that Jacoby was behind schedule. So, 18 columns that I wrote appeared under his byline.

Today's deal was the first of those. How should South have played in four hearts after West led a trump?

If every player counted his tricks correctly, there would be no average players — everyone would be an expert. The count-free declarer charged into the play. He drew trumps and continued with the ace and another club. He was hoping for an even club split, but East gratefully cashed three tricks in the suit

SHORT TAKES

Virat retains No.1 ranking in ODIs

Dubai: India captain Virat Kohli retained his top spot in the ICC rankings for ODI batsmen, while pacer Jasprit Bumrah slipped a place to fourth position in the bowler's list released on Wednesday. Kohli, who had scores of 56 and 66 in the first and second ODIs against England, has 870 points in his kitty. Bumrah, who was rested from white-ball series against England, slipped a place to fourth among bowlers and has 690 points. India limited overs vice-captain Rohit Sharma is ranked third, behind Pakistan's Babar Azam, while KL Rahul has moved up from 31st to 27th spot. All-rounder Hardik Pandya has achieved a career-best 42nd position among batsmen after scores of 35 and 64, and Rishabh Pant has entered the top 100. Seam bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who took three for 42 in the final match, has gained nine slots to reach the 11th position, which is his best since being 10th in September 2017. Shardul Thakur's haul of four for 67 in the same match has enabled him to move up to 80th spot from 93rd. For England, all-rounder Ben Stokes has advanced four places. — *PTI*

Junior hockey nationals put off

New Delhi: The upcoming 11th junior women's hockey nationals has been postponed until further notice due to a surge in COVID-19 cases, the sport's governing body said on Wednesday. The tournament was scheduled to be held from April 3 to 12 in Simdega, Jharkhand. Following instructions and protocols from the district commissioner, Simdega and state authorities, the decision to postpone the championship was taken by Hockey India. "In light of the rising number of COVID-19 cases and after advice from the local state authorities, Hockey India in consultation with the host Hockey Jharkhand arrived at the decision to postpone the 11th Hockey India Junior Women National Championship 2021..." HI President Gyanendra Ningombam said in a statement. "Hockey Jharkhand received tremendous support from the state government to host the recently concluded Sub Junior Women National Championship 2021..." — *PTI*

Karate champ 'bullied' by coach

Tokyo: A Japanese karate champion who will compete at the Tokyo Olympics testified before an ethics commission on Wednesday, alleging that a federation official hit her in the face with a bamboo sword. Ayumi Uekusa, who will compete in the women's over 61kg kumite category as karate makes its Olympic debut this summer, said she was the victim of a bullying campaign by Masao Kagawa, the technical director of the Japan Karatedo Federation. It is the latest "power harassment" scandal to hit Japanese sport, with the country's wrestling federation apologising to four-time Olympic champion Kaori Icho in 2018 over bullying claims. Uekusa, a world champion in 2016, claimed in a blog post on Sunday that Kagawa began using a bamboo sword as part of forcing her to dodge his swings and thrusts. But Uekusa says she and other athletes suffered bruised eyes after Kagawa hit them in the face with the sword while training without protective headgear. Kagawa has denied the allegations. — *AFP*

Nuggets too hot for sluggish 76ers

Los Angeles: Jamal Murray scored 30 points as the Denver Nuggets put on a show for returning fans on Tuesday with a 104-95 defeat of the Eastern Conference-leading Philadelphia 76ers. Murray's haul included five-of-11 three-pointers in a one-sided victory for the Nuggets, who roared into a 44-22 first quarter lead at Denver's Ball Arena and never looked back.

PUNTER'S POINT

Ponting says captaincy will make Pant a better player

Mumbai, March 31: Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting is convinced that leading the side in the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League will make swash-buckling wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant an even better player.

Pant was named the captain of Delhi Capitals for the upcoming IPL after regular skipper Shreyas Iyer was ruled out of the tournament after he injured his left shoulder during the recently-concluded England's tour of India.

"Unfortunately that Shreyas will miss the tournament, but looking forward to seeing @RishabhPant17 grab his opportunity. It's well deserved for his recent performances and he's coming in with a lot of confidence. I'm convinced captaincy will make him an even better player," Ponting tweeted.

The highly-rated Pant has been in sensational form across formats this year. He played match-winning knocks of 97 and unbeaten 89 in the third and the fourth Test against Australia to help India clinch the Border Gavaskar Trophy Down Under.

This season will mark the wicketkeeper-batsman's debut as IPL captain. Pant has led Delhi's state team in the past.

Mishra works on his batting

Delhi Capitals' seasoned leg-spinner Amit Mishra on Wednesday said he is working on improving his batting ahead of the upcoming IPL, preparing himself for situations where he might be required to use the willow to good effect.

The 38-year-old says that apart from honing his bowling prowess, he is focussing on improving his batting as well.

"I am working on my batting. The coaches have also told me to keep practicing my batting as there might be situations in matches when I will have to string partnerships of 25-30 runs." — *PTI*



A file photo of Delhi Capitals coach Ricky Ponting (right) with Rishabh Pant.

Moeen in awe of MS captaincy

I've spoken to players who have played under MS and they tell me how he improves their game. I believe a great captain does that.

— MOEEN ALI
CSK allrounder

Chennai, March 31: Chennai Super Kings all-rounder Moeen Ali on Wednesday vouched for Mahendra Singh Dhoni's captaincy and said most cricketers look forward to play under him as he helps them improve their game.

Dhoni is gearing up to lead the CSK franchise in the upcoming edition of the IPL starting April 9.

"I've spoken to players who have played under MS and they tell me how he improves their game. I believe a great captain does that," the England

all-rounder was quoted as saying by the CSK website.

"I think it's something on every player's wish list to play under MS. I think it's the confidence and the clarity he gives people. It's exciting," he added.

Moeen, who said he was looking forward to playing under Dhoni, said it is

very important to have strong leadership and coaches who stay calm.

"It's very important to have strong leadership and coaches who stay calm, who take the pressure off the players as much as they can and are consistent. We are very lucky we have that," he added.

"At CSK I feel the reality is there for us to win the competition. I'm excited about playing with the players we have here," the 33-year-old left-hand batsman cum off-spinner, who was picked up at the IPL auction in February, further said.

Moeen, who previously turned out for Royal Challengers Bangalore, said, "I think what differentiates CSK from other teams is actually how they structure everything, from the squad they have to the way they do things." — *PTI*

SHAMI PRAISES INDIA'S STRONG SUPPLY CHAIN

New Delhi, March 31: Senior India pacer Mohammad Shami says the performance of the team's "net" bowlers in the historic triumph in Australia has shown that the transition will be smooth when the current attack walks into the sunset. The pace quartet of Shami, Ishant Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah and Umesh Yadav, arguably India's best ever, has been instrumental in the team's success overseas.

"The youngsters will be ready to take over from us when our time to retire comes. The more they play, the better they will get. I think the transition will be very smooth," Shamisaid.

"The team won't suffer even if one big name retires. The bench is ready. Experience is always required and the youngsters will have that in due time. The trend of carrying net bowlers in the bubble has helped them massively and given them valuable exposure," he added. — *PTI*

Barty, Medvedev cruise into semis

Miami, March 31: World number one Ashleigh Barty advanced to the semi-finals of the Miami Open on Tuesday as Russian top seed Daniil Medvedev booked his place in the quarter-finals of the men's tournament.

Barty battled through her third three-setter of the fortnight to oust seventh seeded Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus in 2hr 16min on the Grandstand Court.

The Australian will face Elna Svitolina of Ukraine in the semi-finals following her gruelling 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 win.

Fifth seed Svitolina advanced to the last four after defeating Latvia's Anastasija Sevastova 6-3, 6-2 later Tuesday.

After taking a close first set, Barty appeared to be on the brink of victory after grabbing a 3-1 lead in the second set tie-break.

Sabalenka staged a superb recovery however to snatch the tie-break 7-5, forcing a decisive third set.

Barty regrouped in the third though and with Sabalenka clearly in pain clutching her stomach, rammed home her advantage to complete a deserved win.

The victory leaves Barty one semi-final win away

from retaining her world number one ranking, though the Australian insisted she was not preoccupied with holding on to top spot.

"It's an amazing thing to be No. 1 in the world at the moment, but I promise you that's not what makes me happy," Barty said afterwards.

"It's a focus of course. I want to try to do the best that I can, but it's not a distraction or a pressure in any way."

Medvedev, meanwhile, had an easier ride in the men's tournament, easing past Frances Tiafoe of the United States in straight sets, 6-4, 6-3.

Medvedev hammered down 11 aces in the win, breaking Tiafoe three times en route to victory.

Medvedev will face Roberto Bautista Agut in the last eight after the Spaniard eliminated John Isner in three sets to avenge his 2019 quarter-final loss in Miami.

Bautista Agut saved a match point at 5-6 down in the third set tie-break to claim a 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7) win. "I think I played a brilliant set the first set, and then with John you feel always under pressure," Agut said. — *AFP*

26 SPORTSPERSONS TEST POSITIVE AT NIS-PATIALA

New Delhi, March 31: Twenty six sportspersons and support staff across disciplines were found to be COVID-19 positive after around 380 campers were subjected to tests for the dreaded infection at the National Institute of Sports in Patiala, a Sports Authority of India source said on Wednesday.

However, the 26 positive results do not include any Tokyo Olympic-bound athlete. India's men's boxing chief coach CA Kuttappa and shot put coach Mohinder Singh Dhillon are among those who have tested positive for the virus in the recent drive, the SAI source confirmed.

"Around 380 athletes at the NIS Patiala were tested for COVID recently. The tests were conducted across the board and were not random," the SAI source said. It is learnt that 10 of the 26 positive cases are from the track and field group training at the institute.

"Out of 380, 26 athletes have tested positive for the virus but the good thing is that they are not Olympic-bound athletes. The positive athletes have been isolated and the entire campus has been sanitised."

However, all weightlifters housed at the institute have returned negative for the virus. — *PTI*



Action during the quarterfinal between Malak Kamal (left) and Sunayna Kuruvilla in the HCL-SRFI Indian tour.

Unseeded Malak surprises Sunayna

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 31

Unseeded Malak Kamal of Egypt defeated top seed Sunayna Kuruvilla in a five-game thriller in the quarterfinal of the women's event in the second HCL SRFI Indian Tour – Chennai Leg 1 at the Indian Squash Academy here on Wednesday.

Kamal prevailed over the Chennai player in a 42-minute encounter which saw fortunes fluctuate before the Egyptian sneaked through. The Egyptian took a close first game 13-11 and stamped her authority in the second to go 2-0 up before Kuruvilla hit back to take the next two games. Kamal held her nerve to win the decider 11-8 to send the world no 69 packing.

The men's top seed Mahesh Manganonkar moved into the semifinals without much trouble, getting the better of Mazen

Gamal of Egypt, the fifth seed, in straight sets. Abhay Singh joined Indian compatriot Manganonkar in the last four, with a five-game win over Yahya Elnaswasny, the seventh seed from Egypt.

Results: Women: Rana Ismail (EGY) bt Sachika Balvani (IND) 11-9, 11-4, 12-10; Tanvi Khanna (IND) bt Aparajitha Balamurukan (IND) 11-8, 11-9, 11-6; Hana Moataz (EGY) bt Sanika Choudhari (IND) 11-3, 12-10, 11-3; Malak Kamal (EGY) bt Sunayna Kuruvilla (IND) 13-11, 11-4, 9-11, 15-17, 11-8.

Men: Abhay Singh (IND) bt Yahya Elnaswasny (EGY) 11-6, 11-2, 6-11, 7-11, 11-7; Karim El Hammamy (EGY) bt Moustafa El Sirty (EGY) 15-13, 11-4, 7-11, 13-11; Todd Harriy (USA) bt Aly Hussein (EGY) 11-9, 11-8, 12-10; Mahesh Manganonkar (IND) bt Mazen Gamal (EGY) 11-6, 11-5, 11-8.

Mumbai Indians eye encore

Mumbai, March 31: A batting line-up dotted with power-hitters coupled with a solid pack of death bowlers make five-time champions Mumbai Indians a formidable unit in the upcoming IPL.

But the absence of quality spinners could hurt them in pursuit of a hat-trick of title wins.

Here is a look at what works and what doesn't for the outfit led by Rohit Sharma, which opens its campaign by taking on Royal Challengers Bangalore in Chennai on April 9.

Strengths

After lifting the trophy in 2019, Mumbai once again won in 2020 when the lucrative league was shifted to UAE due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The win was built on the team's strength — their core has remained the same over the years and this is one of the biggest reasons for the side's dominant run.

MI's batting is their biggest strength and they possess a solid opening duo in the form of skipper Rohit Sharma and South



Mumbai Indians have won a record five IPL titles.

African Quinton De Kock, and if needed, have an option in Australian hard-hitting batsman Chris Lynn.

The ever-improving Suryakumar Yadav, young Ishan Kishan, both of whom starred on their India debuts, the Pandya brothers — all-rounders Hardik and Krunal — and West Indian Kieron Pollard, make for a very strong middle-order.

On the fast bowling

front, the team possesses one of the finest in Jasprit Bumrah, and the India pacer would be raring to go once again after a break from the game.

Weaknesses

Their problems could lie in the spin department, which is a bit light, especially on Chennai's Chepauk track. Lack of a wicket-taking spinner could hurt the Mumbai Indians' prospects.

With Lasith Malinga

bidding adieu to franchise cricket, MI have been left to fill up a huge void.

Left-arm spinner Krunal, who was taken to the cleaners by the visiting England side in the ODI series, is more of a restrictive option and there is Rahul Chahar, one of the finds of the IPL.

Mumbai have a strong A side but don't have enough replacements for each slot and have relatively young players as their bench strength.

Opportunity

Given that all of Mumbai middle-order batters are big-hitters, this could give the side an advantage over others, especially while chasing big totals at places like Chennai and Bengaluru.

Threat

All this might ensure that Pollard will have to contribute with the ball too, and play the role of the fifth or the sixth bowler, depending on the playing XI that is fielded.

Pollard is their second highest run-scorer (3,023 runs) after Rohit Sharma (5,230 runs). — *PTI*

MADRAS CRICKET CLUB EMERGE 'A' ZONE CHAMPIONS

Chennai: The Madras Cricket Club 'A' defeated eight-time champions Besant Nagar Club in the 'A' zone (45+ category) final of the SANMAR-TNTA Chennai city club tennis league championship.

Results: Madras Cricket Club 'A' bt Besant Nagar Club 2-0 (Rajeev Vijaykumar/RVRK Ranga Rao bt C. Rameez Samad/Rama Prasada Reddy 6-1, 6-3; Rajesh Ganapathy/Manoj Chandani bt Karthik Kailash/Kishna Kumar 6-4, 6-1).

Suresh scores a brace

Suresh Kumar scored a brace as Southern Railway defeated Loyola College, Chennai in the Shri N.P.V. Ramasamy Udayar Hockey Cup.

Results: Southern Railway 3 (Suresh Kumar 2, Verma) bt Loyola College, Chennai; Integral Coach Factory 3 (Sanjay Xalco, Deepak, Suraj Minz) bt Indian Bank Chennai 1 (Vinodhan).



Madras Cricket Club 'A', winners of the 'A' zone (45+ category) title in the Sanmar-TNTA inter-club tennis tournament.